

# Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 21st October, 1953.

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

## QUESTIONS.

### EDUCATION.

(a) *As to Infants' School for South Guildford.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Works:

(1) Has the Education Department purchased a site for an infants' school to serve Hazelmere, Allawah and South Guildford children?

(2) If not, is it intended to obtain a site in the near future?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No.

(2) The matter was recently considered and it has been decided to postpone selection of the site until the density of population is clearer.

(b) *As to Policy Regarding Married Teachers.*

Mr. HUTCHINSON asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Is it a fact that the future policy of the Education Department regarding teacher married couples is that they should not teach on the same staff?

(2) If this is so, what is the reason?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) This is not an invariable rule, but it is desirable.

(2) Experience has shown that the presence in a school staff of husband and wife, especially when the husband is the head teacher, may create difficulties in harmony amongst staff members and in the control of staff.

### SWAN RIVER.

*As to Algae in Upper Reaches.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Works:

(1) Has any report been received regarding the growth of algae or other weeds in the upper reaches of the Swan river?

(2) If the reply is in the affirmative, will he state the nature of the report and any recommendations made regarding control of algae or other weed growth?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Regular inspections have been made of the Swan river, the last survey being on the 21st September, 1953.

The river was not then clear enough for proper visual examination. There was observed in well-defined areas a heavy growth of water weed which has been tentatively identified as a type other than algae.

(2) Progressive reports will be considered at the next meeting of the Swan River Reference Committee.

### BUS SERVICE.

*As to Extension, Bayswater to Bassendean.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Railways:

Can arrangements be made to extend to Bassendean the tramway bus now running to Newman's nursery, Bayswater, during the period the bus now stands idle in this locality each trip?

The MINISTER replied:

The Bassendean Bus Service is licensed by the W.A. Transport Board to operate a service from Perth to Bassendean, including the section between Newman's nursery, Bayswater, and Bassendean, and it would be contrary to the provisions of the Transport Co-ordination Act to extend the tramway buses over the route of this existing service.

## RAILWAYS.

*(a) As to Rollingstock Orders and Local Work.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Railways:

(1) What is the approximate value of orders unfilled in—

(a) Western Australia, and

(b) overseas

for rollingstock from W.A.G.R.?

(2) What is the approximate estimated cost of work to be performed on—

(a) new rollingstock in the Midland workshops in current year; and

(b) repairs and maintenance for same period?

(3) Is it intended to let further contracts for rollingstock outside the workshops?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) (a) £893,395.

(b) £6,753,177.

(2) (a) £141,246.

(b) £1,966,150.

(3) No, unless the demand for rollingstock exceeds the capacity of the workshops to handle it.

*(b) As to New Siding, Ashfield.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Railways:

When is it anticipated the new siding at Ashfield will be open for passengers likely to use the diesel service?

The MINISTER replied:

A definite date cannot be given until the loan position is clarified.

*(c) As to Amortisation of Debt.*

Hon. C. F. J. NORTH asked the Minister for Railways:

(1) How long will it take to amortise the £12,000,000 removed from the W.A.G.R. debt?

(2) Is a method in force to cover depreciation and eventually to write off locomotives and rollingstock?

(3) Is this related to the general sinking fund on public loans?

(4) How many years will elapse before the steam locomotives ordered as a result of the Royal Commission on Railways and now delivered, will have been written off charge under the present arrangement?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Fifty-three years.

(2) Yes.

(3) Yes. The amounts are paid to loan repayments account.

(4) Thirty years.

*(d) As to Increases in Freight Rates on Superphosphate.*

Mr. HEARMAN (without notice) asked the Minister for Prices:

Referring to his answer to my question yesterday to the effect that the increases in costs to the industry on that portion of the ore which will attract the new rate, averaged over the whole of the superphosphate produced from both pyritic ore and brimstone, would approximate 1s. 2d. per ton of superphosphate, and following on the report in "The West Australian" this morning, which makes his written answer rather ambiguous, will he clarify the point?

The MINISTER replied:

The position is as outlined yesterday and the amount of 1s. 2d. is the correct figure. I have not seen today's issue of "The West Australian"; it is the first time I have missed it for years.

## HOUSING.

*As to Applicants for Homes, Guildford-Midland Electorate.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Housing:

(1) Will he state the approximate number of applicants waiting for houses in the Bassendean, Eden Hill, Guildford, Midland Junction, Hazelmere and Bellevue districts, including those in caravans and camps?

(2) The number of houses in course of construction in the same districts?

(3) Contracts let for housing in the districts referred to?

(4) Contracts being prepared (if any) for Midland Junction, Midvale, Greenmount, Hazelmere and Eden Hill districts?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Applications are not listed separately for these districts except that it is known some 80 applications under the Commonwealth-State Rental Scheme are recorded from those who have specifically asked for housing in Midland Junction. Experience when applicant's turn is reached indicates, however, that not all of the above 80 applicants are likely to accept housing in Midland Junction.

(2) As at the 1st July, 1953, houses under construction were:—Bassendean 17; Midland Junction, 30; Swan View, 21; total, 68.

(3) Contracts let and not commenced at the 1st July, 1953:—Bassendean, 2.

(4) Current programme of new homes for 1953-54:—Bassendean, 44.

In addition to the above figures, the State Housing Commission has completed for the Railway Department during the current financial year 38 houses at Midland Junction and is now erecting 10 houses at Bassendean and 14 at Wexcombe for that department.

**RENT LEGISLATION.***As to Consideration.*

Mr. HEAL asked the Minister representing the Chief Secretary:

(1) Is it the Government's intention to deal with rent legislation this session?

(2) If so, will the Government give consideration to making this legislation more applicable to present-day conditions?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING replied:

(1) and (2) Yes. A Bill is now being drafted.

**LAND AND ESTATE AGENTS.***As to Introducing Legislation.*

Mr. YATES (without notice) asked the Minister for Justice:

Is it the intention of the Government to introduce legislation this session to control the activities of land and estate agents?

The MINISTER replied:

Yes.

**BILL—KWINANA ROAD DISTRICT.**

Introduced by the Minister for Railways and read a first time.

**BILL—DAIRY INDUSTRY ACT AMENDMENT.**

Read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

**BILL—FERTILISERS ACT AMENDMENT.***Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 23rd September.

MR. ACKLAND (Moore) [4.45]: It is my intention to support the Bill introduced by the Leader of the Country Party. I view anything to do with superphosphate as being of particular interest, not only to the primary producing section of our people, but also to every man, woman and child who derives a living no matter from what source. With the exception of minerals and some of the wool that comes from the North-West, every commodity that is exported from Western Australia is tied up with superphosphate.

It is known that our lands are very deficient in phosphates but that by the use of phosphate as a base and with some fertilisers and minor elements added, we have been able to make even the least productive parts in areas of reasonable rainfall to prosper. So I take it that as all our credits overseas are so vitally associated with superphosphate, anything to do with that commodity and particularly having reference to the moisture content is of importance to us all.

A fortnight or three weeks ago I happened to be out of the House for a little while before the suspension for tea and, when I returned and heard the concluding remarks of the member for Blackwood, I could not refrain from interjecting, because I thought that my hearing must be deceiving me when he spoke as an apologist for the superphosphate companies. Those companies operating in this State need nobody to apologise for them. All of us, and particularly those who use superphosphate very extensively, realise that they are trying to do a good job for the country.

When we consider the magnitude of the super industry and that 420,000 tons or more are used in this State annually—a quantity that is increasing each year—we find that more than £6,750,000 worth of super is sold annually. The Minister for Railways is keenly interested in the haulage of super because, basing a suppositious calculation on the quantity hauled for the average distance applying to wheat, freight to the extent of £819,000 has been paid to the Railway Department yearly. If the super contained only 8 per cent. of moisture—and it has been found to have a moisture content above 11 per cent.—the farmer, whether a dairyman, pastoralist or cereal grower would be paying £65,520 a year for the haulage of water contained in the super. I have had those figures checked and they are authentic.

Still dealing with the railway position, the increase in freight of more than 630 per cent. during the last few years on super hauled is tied up very closely with the moisture content. I believe the Minister was sincere when he said in this House, some time ago, that freight rates in Western Australia were lower than those in any other State in the Commonwealth, but I must ask him to check up on the figures he gets from his officials, because the previous Minister for Railways was given the same ill-informed details.

I was on one occasion a member of a committee which inquired into rail freights and that committee received four statements from the Railway Department, all dealing with the same subject but each one a contradiction of that which preceded it. On this occasion the Minister was entirely wrong when he stated that Western Australia had the lowest rail freights in Australia. He said that in South Australia the Railway Department received a subsidy of £4,500,000 so that it could give low freights on wheat and super. There are only 250,000 tons of super carted in South Australia annually and by no means all of it by rail.

The Minister for Railways: Why not listen to what is said?

MR. ACKLAND: I have read what appears in "Hansard." There are only 24,000,000 bushels of wheat transported

annually in South Australia but we are told that the Railway Department there receives a subsidy of £4,500,000 for the cartage of 900,000 tons of freight. There is no wheat or super in South Australia or any other State that costs as much as that, £4 per ton for haulage by rail. I wish to correct one more mistake that has been made, and I repeat that I believe the Minister gave the figures in good faith.

Mr. SPEAKER: I doubt whether there is anything about railway freights in the Bill.

Mr. ACKLAND: I am trying to point out the necessity for decreasing the moisture content of super because of its effect on railrage costs.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: You did not complain about the £250,000 subsidy on road cartage.

Mr. ACKLAND: Super freights in Western Australia over all milages, from 50 miles to 400 miles, are by far the highest of any State in the Commonwealth.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I cannot allow the hon. member to proceed on those lines.

Mr. ACKLAND: Very well. In a few days I will have opportunity to do it under another heading. However, I feel we are entitled to clarify a statement made by the Minister for Railways with regard to cheap freights for superphosphate in this country.

The Minister for Railways: You have a one-track mind—either super or wheat.

Mr. ACKLAND: Possibly I have, but it is not confined to the footplate of a locomotive, as I believe is the case with the Minister for Railways, whose mind never gets beyond that.

The Minister for Railways: The footplate of a locomotive is just as honourable a position as that of the primary producer.

Mr. ACKLAND: I do not suggest that it is not, but the Minister talks about a one-track mind and I say my mind is no less one-track than his.

The Premier: Hear, hear! No less!

Mr. ACKLAND: The moisture content of super is closely bound up with rail freights but we will let that pass for the moment. Superphosphate is costing the farmer in this State, what with the purchase price and freight, between £7,000,000 and £8,000,000 per year and so it is a matter of considerable interest to this House. I am disappointed that the Minister for Agriculture has left the Chamber as I wished to appeal to him to alter his decision, with reference to the speech he made when speaking to the debate. I read his speech with interest.

The Minister for Justice: It is not his fault that he is now absent.

Mr. ACKLAND: I do not suggest that it is. No one could accuse me of being unfriendly towards the Minister for Agriculture, but when we were unable to proceed

with this Bill previously I was glad, because the Minister was then absent, and I trusted that he would alter his attitude towards this most important matter, after hearing the reasons I intended to advance, and decide to agree to the amendment moved by the Leader of the Country Party.

Mr. J. Hegney: Does the moisture in super occur in great quantities?

Mr. ACKLAND: I will answer that question fully a little later.

Mr. Oldfield: Why not tell us now?

Mr. ACKLAND: I would be unhappy if the member for Maylands failed to interject when I was speaking.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: How they love one another!

Mr. ACKLAND: When the member for Blackwood was speaking he said he got his superphosphate from Bicton and that in that area they had nothing to complain of with regard to the moisture content of the super. If that applies at Blackwood it does not apply in other parts of the State. There are thousands of farmers who are experiencing tremendous difficulty every year owing to the moisture content of their super. When introducing the measure, the Leader of the Country Party was particular not to specify any set moisture content. Clause 3 states "to sell any superphosphate having a moisture content in excess of that prescribed."

The moisture content to be prescribed is to be arrived at after consultation between officials of the Department of Agriculture and the superphosphate companies. We know the companies are trying to minimise this trouble but with such an important industry I see no reason why it should not come under a control similar to that applying to butter, where the moisture content by law must not exceed a certain figure. In the case of bread and dried fruits also there is a maximum moisture content laid down by law. A similar control should be exercised with regard to super, and I am convinced that it can be done.

The Minister for Education: Butter does not stand out in the rain as superphosphate does.

Mr. ACKLAND: I am not speaking of superphosphate that has stood in the rain, and the Bill does not refer to it. The moisture content will be taken from samples supplied by the companies. When the Bill is in Committee I propose to move an amendment which I think will be acceptable to the Minister in that regard.

The Minister for Justice: If all the moisture content was taken out of the super, would that have a deleterious effect on it?

Mr. ACKLAND: I do not think so, but that would be for the agricultural experts to ascertain. Samples of super have been taken with a moisture content from as low as 1 per cent. to as high as 12 per cent.

I attended a meeting, at Dalwallinu about 12 months ago, where there were about 150 farmers present. The sales manager of Cuming Smith, representatives of the distributing companies, and some of the heads of the Farmers' Union were present at that meeting, and, when the farmers were asked if they were having trouble with their super, more than two-thirds of them stood up. I will quote an instance of the difficulties that are experienced.

One of the men said that he had received his consignment of 25 per cent. of super in October, which I understand was in the vicinity of 30 or 40 tons. Every fortnight he moved his super from one end of his shearing shed to the other, and continued doing that until April. Each time it was moved it was stacked on end, two bags high. In April, when he wanted to spread it on his paddocks, he had to hit it with a piece of 4 x 2 to break up the lumps. That super was handled at least 12 times, apart from the bashing it received.

Mr. J. Hegney: How long had he had it?

Mr. ACKLAND: From October until the beginning of May, and it was moved regularly every fortnight. I would like to quote an instance regarding my own experience with super. Two years ago, I had to put my super through a corn-crusher before it could be put through a drill, and last year 40 tons taken in October were spread out on a large shearing floor and at no place was it spread more than 2ft. 6in. high. I had to tackle it with a pick to break it into lumps before it was again bashed with a piece of timber to break it into smaller pieces. That sort of thing is quite common and is going on all the time.

Members often complain about the high cost of living, but there is no doubt that when super is received in such condition it must affect the cost of wheat. The member for Blackwood lives in a dairying district and, for his information, I would point out that on perusal of the commissioner's report dealing with the dairying industry, I find that the cost of 1lb. of butter includes 6d. for super, while in the Eastern States it costs only 1d. Therefore, it cannot be said that the moisture content has nothing to do with that cost.

All the Bill seeks is that super shall receive the same treatment as any other manufactured commodity. It will be amazing to me if members of the Labour Party vote as apologists for, and protectors of, a super manufacturing industry which we ask should be treated on all fours with other industries in this State. There are hundreds of people in my district who have shares in a super manufacturing company and who naturally would want to protect it, but every one of them is anxious that his own company shall be brought under the provisions of a measure such as this.

In the interests not only of agriculturists but of the people as a whole, I ask members to reconsider their decision on the Bill which I believe, in the main, to be a preconceived decision. I could understand some of the Liberal members on this side of the House acting as apologists for the industry, but I cannot understand the attitude of members on the other side.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: And I cannot understand you following the Liberals, either.

Mr. ACKLAND: I cannot understand the member for Blackwood, who represents a purely rural constituency, opposing a measure such as this. When I came into the House, he chided me because I had not heard the beginning of his speech, but I would point out that I have read all the speeches in reference to this matter in the meantime. I am quite certain that the electors of Moore would be more happy about my being present at a show in my electorate than the electors of Blackwood will be, if they get the opportunity, to read his speech, which represents an apology for the super manufacturers.

There is another interesting aspect. I am not allowed to mention freights with reference to this matter, but I can talk about costs, and it is extremely interesting to read a report of what the South Australian Premier said with regard to the reduction in the price of super in that State. An article in "The Chronicle," dated the 24th September, 1953, reads as follows:—

#### Superphosphate Price Reduced.

Reductions to farmers of up to 19s. 6d. a ton in the price of this year's superphosphate were announced by the Premier (Mr. Playford) in the Assembly last week.

Further on, the article continues—

The new prices, with the amount of reductions in parentheses, are—

In new cornsacks, £13 5s. a ton . . .

Mr. Playford said these prices were subject to 5s. a ton reduction for payment within 30 days of delivery.

In this State we have to pay for our super months before we receive it, and the price is over £16 per ton. Therefore, we cannot afford to pay for a great deal of moisture contained in the super.

The Bill is of vital interest, not only to the people I represent, but also to the people other members represent, too, because without super there will be very little work for people in this State, as it is of such vital importance to every industry. If we are prepared to bring down legislation to decide how dried fruits and butter shall be marketed, and how electrical appliances shall be manufactured, are we justified, by this Bill, in saying these people are doing the best they can? Are we to let them go on and give them a free hand because we are confident that they will do all that is necessary and practical to reduce the moisture content?

When framing the Bill, the member for Stirling was wise in refraining from being specific. He realised that there were people more competent than he; that there were people in the Department of Agriculture who could arrive at a decision as to what would be a reasonable moisture content. We are told that wet super is only manufactured after Christmas, when the rush is on. I have given three instances of when super was received in October, at which time there is supposed to be a build-up of supplies and when the super is supposed to be completely matured. But I can say that there are times when super in the bottom of a seed drill has the consistency of plasticine. I have seen men, after working for two or three days, having to take out the whole of the internal gear of the super boxes and put them in a fire so that they can scale off the super sticking to the plates.

The Minister for Justice: Would it cost much to reduce the moisture content?

Mr. ACKLAND: I have no idea, but it is costing a great deal of money to use wet super. We are told that the companies need more storage. That may be so, but they do not need more storage for super delivered before Christmas in any year, and they claim that this super is good. I have friends in the super companies and they are men for whom I have a real liking. There is no need for anybody to apologise for them to any member of the Country Party. We are appreciative of what they are doing. We make no distinction with them and consider that they should receive no more favourable treatment than any other section of the industry.

This product should be manufactured under the same conditions as any other, and we should leave it to the Department of Agriculture to decide what the moisture content should be. If the Bill reaches the Committee stage, I intend to move an amendment to Clause 4. I propose to move that after the word "week" in line three of paragraph (1) of proposed new Section 11A all words down to and including the word "week" in the last line be struck out and the following words be inserted in lieu:—

"provide without payment to an officer of the Department of Agriculture appointed for the purpose by the Minister a sample from such superphosphate as such officer may desire as is packed in sacks, bags, or other containers, ready for despatch to purchasers.

That would overcome the difficulty of cost, which the Minister complained about. so I hope he will agree to the amendment and ensure that this commodity is treated in the same way as every other article manufactured in Western Australia.

HON. SIR ROSS McLARTY (Murray) [5.12]: I have listened to this debate with considerable interest and have also read what has been said. I listened particularly to the Leader of the Country Party when he introduced his Bill and also to the Minister for Agriculture giving his views and then to the comments made by the members for Blackwood and Katanning. In doing so, I felt that there was a genuine desire by each of the speakers to try to do something to improve the super supply.

Referring to the Minister's speech first, I thought that he approached this matter with a very practical point of view and I could say that apparently he had given a great deal of thought to the subject. He told us that as far as possible he would do his utmost to ensure that super was sent out to the farmers in a condition in which it could be readily used. I have a full appreciation of what it means to receive lumpy super or a type that, under any conditions, is hard to spread, because for many years, with my family, I have been associated in the purchasing of large quantities of super.

Whilst I am prepared to support the Bill introduced by the Leader of the Country Party, I am wondering what practical effect it will have, if any. However, it is a genuine desire on his part to try to do something, if possible, to make conditions easier for the farmer with regard to the quality of his super. The Minister told us that there was no similar legislation in Australia, and another speaker said that so far as he knew there was none in any other part of the world. I do not know whether that is so or not, but I presume that the difficulties that confront our farmers with regard to the spreading of super also apply in many other countries.

In the course of his speech, the Minister said that his officers were trying to do what they could to overcome this difficulty, but he also complained about the shortage of staff, and I can sympathise with him in that regard. I think his department is suffering from a shortage of staff.

He went on to explain that his officers were co-operating with the technical advisers of the superphosphate companies with the object of solving the problem. That is very wise, and I am sure we all commend the Minister for that action. I have not had a chance of discussing this matter with the manufacturers, but I am prepared to accept what they say about their experts making every possible effort to improve the quality of super, and also to do something about the moisture content.

By way of interjection, I asked the Minister whether, if he prescribed what the maximum moisture content should be that might have some effect upon the distribution of super. He said he thought

that might occur, and I also think there may be a danger in that direction. But I feel that if we give the Minister the power sought, with his practical knowledge he would not prescribe any moisture content which would be such as to prevent super getting out to the farmers.

I would much rather have super distributed to the farmers than have a hold-up over a dispute about the moisture content. After all is said and done, it is very necessary—and I appreciate this point because of my experience of the spreading of super—for farmers to have the fertiliser on their properties when they want to spread it, rather than that there should be a hold-up because of a dispute arising between the department and the super manufacturers. When the Minister answered my interjection by saying that he thought a delay might occur, I was somewhat concerned.

Something was said by the member for Moore about the remarks of the member for Blackwood; and from what the member for Moore said, one would be tempted to think that the member for Blackwood was not concerned as to whether the farmers in his district would receive super of the desired quality. I do not think that any member could possibly put that construction on the remarks of the member for Blackwood.

The Minister for Housing: Except the member for Moore!

Mr. Ackland: You read the speech!

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: I thought the speeches of the Minister and the member for Blackwood were informative. I have had a good deal to do with super in my time, but when I listened to those speeches and then read them in "Hansard" I was much better informed about the manufacture of super. The member for Blackwood must have done a great deal of research into super production because I am certain he gave information to this Chamber of which most of us had not any previous knowledge.

Mr. Ackland: Do you not think he listened very attentively to what he was told by the manufacturers?

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: I think when a member intends to speak to a Bill it is necessary he should make all the research he possibly can, and he cannot undertake complete research unless he gets all sides of the question. If the hon. member did go to the manufacturers, I do not think he thereby committed any offence.

Mr. Brady: That is what the member for Moore should have done.

Mr. Ackland: The member for Moore has done so on more than one occasion.

Mr. Brady: Then you must have had your eyes shut.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: The member for Moore has had a long experience with regard to super and I have no doubt his

practical views are worth while. But I do say again that it is not possible, if one considers the debate impartially, to say that the member for Blackwood was not mindful of the super requirements of his electorate. In fact, to a considerable extent, he followed the line taken by the Minister for Agriculture, and, as one who was trying to learn all he could about this matter, I consider that both the speeches, although they were delivered from opposite sides of the House, were very interesting and informative.

The Bill gives power to the Minister to determine the maximum quantity of moisture that may be contained in super. I cannot agree with the member for Moore that because the moisture in butter can be controlled, it therefore follows that the moisture in super can be equally well controlled. There is a decided difference, and those who followed the debate and listened to the Minister and the member for Blackwood were given reasons why the control of the moisture content of super is by no means easy. The Minister told us about the change of rock from that obtained from Christmas Island to that obtained from Nauru. There is more acid in the one rock than in the other, and more water has to be used to deal with that acid. Then we have the change from sulphur to pyrites, which means that treatment, which I presume includes the use of water, has to be applied to the super. So I am sure the member for Moore will agree that the treatment of butter, or the laying down of regulations in regard to the moisture content of butter, is an entirely different proposition to controlling the moisture content in super.

It is to be made an offence to sell super with a moisture content greater than is prescribed under the Bill. When the Leader of the Country Party replies to the debate, no doubt he will say something about this matter. At the moment, this is the part of the Bill about which I am worried, because I do not want some dispute to arise between the Minister and the companies with regard to the moisture content and have huge quantities of super held up in this country while farmers are clamouring for their quotas.

Mr. Nalder: No quota system operates.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: No; I am sorry. I meant to say that they would be clamouring for their supplies. I am sure that in the event of the Bill being passed, this is one of the matters to which the Minister would give most careful consideration, so that there would not be a hold-up on account of the companies not having been able rigidly to comply with the regulations laid down.

The Minister for Agriculture: What do you mean by that? Still allow the super to go out with too much moisture in it?

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: No; it would be the duty of the Minister or his officers to see that the companies tried to keep within the moisture content that was prescribed. But great care would have to be taken to see that the percentage prescribed was not such that it could have a detrimental effect on super distribution in this State.

The Bill is safe from one point of view, as I think the member for Moore pointed out. The regulations will be issued at the discretion of the Minister; and I take it that if this difficulty of moisture content cannot be overcome, the Minister will not be likely to have any regulations promulgated at a very early date. I think I have already referred to the fact that the chemists or the scientists connected with the super companies in this State are doing all they possibly can to try to overcome the difficulty that is created by moisture. The member for Moore said he thought the companies were making a genuine attempt to solve the problem. That being so, it appears to me that both the Agricultural Department and the companies realise what lumpy super means to the farming community, and are making genuine efforts to meet the difficulty.

According to the Minister, it is considered that a moisture content of 6 per cent. is requisite for super at the time of distribution to the farmers. Then an additional percentage would have to be allowed for evaporation during the storage period. I can see some difficulty there. I do not doubt that what the Minister says is correct, that something above 6 per cent. will have to be allowed. Evidently that is necessary; but a difficulty might arise in waiting for the moisture content to be reduced to 6 per cent. The Minister told us that the president of the Farmers' Union visited the super works and had said there was no doubt the works had made a considerable effort to guard against any caking of superphosphate. I believe the Bill is a genuine attempt to do something to overcome a difficulty that confronts farmers and which, no doubt, causes them additional expense and labour. If it is possible to put into practical effect the proposals in the Bill, some good will result. I conclude by saying that I appreciate the views put forward by the Minister and the member for Blackwood, and I can see the difficulties in carrying out the provisions of the Bill. However, I support the second reading.

MR. BRADY (Guildford-Midland) [5.32]: I feel I can add a little information with respect to the superphosphate industry, because I was associated with it as secretary of the union, for 20 odd years, during which period I was frequently in and out of the works. As members have overlooked some features which are likely to affect the cost of production, I wish to say a few words. Spread over

the State from Albany in the south to Geraldton in the north, we have about five or six superphosphate works. If it is necessary to have a number of inspectors as a result of the Bill, considerable cost will be involved, which, possibly, will be met ultimately by the farmers, if not directly then indirectly.

Mr. Ackland: They are paying plenty in conditioning the super at the present time.

Mr. BRADY: That may be so. As I develop my argument, the hon. member might realise that there are advantages in leaving things as they are for the time being, particularly having regard to a recent inquiry as a result of the matter being raised last year by the member for Geraldton. Consideration was given by the inquiry to moisture in superphosphate, and it agreed, to some extent, that it was causing trouble to the farmers.

It is strange that this matter should be raised at this stage of our history when the people who are complaining were in the Government up to eight or nine months ago. It seems that a difficult problem is to be foisted on the present Minister for Agriculture whereas the previous Government should have tackled it, if it be a practical proposition. The position today is that in the main the companies are using Christmas Island rock, and because of the nature of that rock, the acid processing has to be different compared with what takes place with the Nauru and Ocean Island rocks which were previously dealt with by the companies. I believe that the farmers should not be considering the moisture content so much as the fertiliser as a whole.

The question arises whether even if we get over the moisture difficulty there will not be other complaints in regard to the quality of the superphosphate. The question is largely a technical one, but none of the speakers have, as far as I am concerned, covered the technical side of it adequately so that the average lay person can decide whether the moisture content is the only factor to be considered. Because of the comprehensive survey being made into superphosphate as a whole by practical people with technical knowledge, we should not be tampering with this measure at the moment. As the Leader of the Opposition said, this could cause quite a number of disabilities to the farmers next season.

If the Minister lays down that there must be a maximum of 12 per cent. moisture content, the companies might say, "We cannot guarantee that it is only 12 per cent., and we are not going to put ourselves in the position of being up against the law. Therefore we shall stand our ground." That would cause a lot of concern. For the first five or six years after the war there was a big demand for superphosphate, and quite a lot of it was sold in what is known as



green condition. The companies could not meet the demand, and the farmers were prepared to take green superphosphate rather than the mature article for which they would probably have had to wait three or four months, when they would not have been able to put it in the ground.

The position, however, has been largely overcome because there are now certain factors reducing the demand for superphosphate. There is, for instance, the price factor which has a big influence on farmers deciding to take the minimum possible requirements. Another factor is that some farmers are probably not putting in the wheat crops that they were previously. I am not unmindful, of course, that there are other factors, such as more top dressing, and other considerations which help to increase the demand for superphosphate.

In the main, however, for the time being we have reached our peak, temporarily—not permanently because I think as the years go by and more land comes under cultivation, there will be a bigger demand for the product. But I think there are factors at the moment which are temporarily halting the demand for superphosphate, and as a consequence the companies will have a chance to pick up the leeway and so be able to sell a more mature superphosphate than the green super that they were disposing of in the past.

In case any hon. member feels there has been deliberate shilly-shallying on the part of the companies in regard to moisture content, I can say in all honesty that in 20 years' association with the industry I never heard an employee complain of any sinister activity by the companies in regard to putting in excessive moisture—particularly water—in the superphosphate. In the main, I feel the companies are looking at their responsibilities from a national point of view and are trying to do the right thing by the farmers, and the State generally. I think there are responsible people in the superphosphate companies, and they try to measure up to their obligations to the people with whom they are concerned, whether they be the farmers, the people from whom they get the rock, their employees or the taxpayer.

We should be reluctant to rush in with this legislation. The very fact that the matter has been given ventilation, that members of Parliament have gone to the superphosphate works in the various parts of the State to inquire into the position for themselves, and that the department itself is making a survey, will do a lot of good. I remind the House that under the Act the inspectors have the right to go to the works and get samples, and by the same rule the companies have an obligation to send samples of their fertilisers to the department from time to time. Unless the

companies are looking for trouble, I do not think they will deliberately increase the moisture content.

What is moisture content? When it comes to superphosphate, this question tends to raise a technical argument. Is a farmer going to complain because he has got greater value in his fertiliser than he is paying for? After all, sulphuric acid is costly to make because of the processes it has to go through before it reaches the raw rock. No one here has proved to us that the moisture content is water. Admittedly, a certain amount of water goes in with the sulphur in the manufacturing of superphosphate, but what percentage of the water actually remains in the superphosphate when it ultimately finds its place in the shed, is another question.

It is possible that some farmers are doing themselves a bad turn rather than a good one by raising this matter. Admittedly, there may be some difficulties when it comes to putting the super in the ground, but it is possible that the value of the superphosphate they purchase is, because of the moisture content, greater than what they pay for. If they had crushed raw rock, instead of superphosphate their superphosphate bill would be considerably reduced for a year or two.

There are many questions to be considered here, and I would like to listen to some greater authorities on the matter than we have yet heard. The companies do not dispute that they put a certain amount of water in with the sulphuric acid during the processing of the rock. They say it is necessary to do that in order to get the proper chemical reaction. In all my 20 years' experience, I have not heard an employee of any description complain about the moisture he had to contend with when handling phosphatic rock, but, on the other hand, I have had hundreds of complaints about the dusty nature of the rock.

In the superphosphate workers' award there are clauses which provide for a hammer and gag man to treat the rock, when it is in a consolidated state in various parts of the works, with explosives. The employees complain unanimously that the rock is hard and dusty, and not moist enough. Another feature to be considered is what percentage of the 450,000 tons contains this moisture content? Are we going to upset the whole process of 100 per cent. manufacture because 10 per cent. has an excess moisture content? The whole matter can be so costly to the farmers that I am wondering whether they are well advised to pursue it.

In some cases, due to bad storage on the farmer's own property, a certain amount of moisture might get into the superphosphate—not only directly as a consequence of rain beating on it, but through standing in a damp place or where the moisture can be absorbed from the ground. Another aspect is that

the phosphatic rock, when it comes from the boats, very often—and today this is largely so—is stored out in the open. Therefore it must, of necessity, absorb a considerable amount of water before it goes through the works because it is standing in the open. On the other hand after the superphosphate is manufactured it may be stored out in the open and in that way, too, it would absorb moisture.

I feel that I should mention a few of these aspects so that members can fully understand what they are doing when they vote for or against this measure. I believe that the member for Stirling is on the right track, but at this stage I do not think it is desirable to attempt to overcome the problem by an amendment to the Fertilisers Act. If the farmers' own organisation approached the companies and conferred with the Department of Agriculture and the research laboratories they would overcome the problem to a large extent. If this measure is passed, the companies will be involved in huge costs because they will have to build more storage sheds for the rock as well as for the finished product. All those extra costs as well as the costs of employing inspectors will have to be borne by the industry.

So I think members should exercise a certain amount of caution and they should leave the Act as it stands for the time being. I am certain that the Minister for Agriculture will exercise a good deal of care and try to do the right thing by the farming community. After all we are concerned with the success of the wheatgrowing industry and if the cost of fertilisers gets out of hand it will affect the industry and force farmers to reduce their wheat production. While I do not think that the measure should be passed in its present form, I think the member for Stirling is to be congratulated upon its introduction.

Superphosphate is sold in two or three grades and apparently the standard fluctuates at different times of the season. Sometimes it is sold at 19 per cent., other times 18 per cent. or even as high as 22 per cent. I understand that most of the superphosphate sold is on the 22 per cent. basis. I think that is the water soluble phosphoric acid, but I am not clear about it. If phosphoric acid comprises 22 per cent. of the product, how is the other 78 per cent. made up? It is possible that apart from moisture content, a good deal of the product could be valueless to farmers.

Freight is paid on it and I think some different system could possibly be evolved in an effort to send out the product in a more concentrated form. If that were done, the farmers could mix it with their local soils and so get the benefit of the fertiliser. As I said, I think other factors could be involved and that farmers, as well as the superphosphate companies, should look at all aspects of the question in an endeavour to overcome the problem. We should make

every effort to see that the farmers obtain a real saving instead of the doubtful one involved in the elimination of the moisture content.

**MR. OLDFIELD** (Maylands) [5.50]: I support the Bill, but not for the same reasons as the member for Moore; in fact, my reasons are completely opposite to those he expressed. It is said that the hon. member has a one-track mind and his whole speech was based on the obsession that anybody who does not agree with him on the subject of superphosphate or wheat has no right to voice an opinion.

Mr. Nalder: Or oats.

**MR. OLDFIELD**: The hon member attacked members of the Liberal Party and the Labour Party who had voiced any opposition to the measure. But I would remind him that prior to making that attack only one member of the Liberal Party had spoken on this subject. The member for Blackwood voiced his own opinion and he is a man who represents a farming electorate and is a farmer himself. The member for Blackwood did not apologise for the companies, but pointed out the difficulties with which they are faced.

He is entitled to express his opinion without the party of which he is a member being subjected to an attack by the member for Moore. The member for Moore also said that the Bill should be passed because the farmer was paying for the water content of superphosphate. I cannot agree with that contention. Every bag of vegetables sent to the country areas contains a moisture content far exceeding that contained in superphosphate. There is a moisture content of about 90 per cent. in cabbage, but one cannot blame the Railway Department for charging freight on that water content.

What about the water content in hay which the member for Moore sends to the metropolitan area and elsewhere? The moisture content in that commodity is about 20 odd per cent., but the member for Moore does not squeal about the consumers having to pay for that. It all goes on to the freight charges. The manufacturers of superphosphate are faced with many difficulties and these companies are spending thousands of pounds annually on research in an endeavour to rectify all these troubles. It is in the companies' interests to manufacture the best possible product. Rival companies are engaged in the business and the company that can produce the better commodity is the one which will receive the business. The more superphosphate they can sell the greater will be their profits.

Of course, the companies do not exist for the benefit of farmers; they exist for the benefit of their shareholders. Every private concern, in its own interests, endeavours to turn out the best possible product, give the utmost possible service and

function in the most economical way and that is why these large companies are spending thousands of pounds annually on chemical research. The Government members who have not agreed with the contention of the member for Moore have been accused of being apologists for the superphosphate companies. Members do not need to apologise for these companies; they can stand on their own feet. They spend their own money and employ first-class chemical analysts to investigate all aspects connected with the manufacture of their product.

I am afraid I am a little upset by the attitude adopted by one of my colleagues. I am well aware that no manufacturer can be compelled to carry out what is chemically or industrially impossible. However, I support the measure because I have enough faith in the sincerity of the sponsor of the Bill to believe that he is actuated by a real desire to prevent any inferior product being marketed.

The Premier: We are not voting on the hon. member's motives; we are voting on the merits of the Bill.

Mr. OLDFIELD: Probably the Bill can be altered a little in the Committee stage. The measure is entitled to support because it will prevent any company, at any future time, from foisting on to the consumers an inferior product. We must realise, however, that at the moment every endeavour is being made, and has been made, by these companies to eradicate excessive moisture content, but so far their endeavours have been unsuccessful. Members must bear in mind, too, that these endeavours have been unsuccessful, not only in Western Australia, but also throughout the world. This is a world-wide problem confronting superphosphate manufacturers and possibly 20 years ago the moisture content was a lot higher than the 8 per cent. or the 11 per cent. referred to by the member for Moore.

But as we carry out further research, science will enable us to discover new ways of improving the product. I hope that the measure will be carried if only for the reason that we ought to let people know—those who are manufacturing superphosphate as well as every other product—that members in this House are keeping a careful watch to see that advantage is not being taken of the ignorance of the consuming public: we want to make it quite clear to these people that we intend to see that no advantage is taken of the shortage of any commodity to market an inferior product. I support the Bill.

MR. JAMIESON (Canning) [5.56]: At the risk of annoying the large number of farmers in my electorate I would like to add my comments to the debate. I see no point in supporting the Bill at present because I feel that it can do nothing but embarrass both the Minister and his department in their efforts to carry out the terms of the legislation if it becomes law.

Mr. Oldfield: Your seed needs fertilising.

Mr. JAMIESON: That may well be. I am told by the companies' representatives that over the years complaints have been made, but they were more frequent in the past when the companies had less storage space than they have available today. It would appear that the biggest difficulty in lowering the moisture content is in allowing the fertiliser to stand and mature. It has been possible to do that with only about 50 per cent. of the year's production. One company has used a method of aerating the super in an attempt to cut down the moisture content, while the other companies have used the storage method almost exclusively. Therefore, the only way of supplying super in a better condition is by providing additional storage space.

I doubt whether the passing of this Bill will assist the companies in providing that additional storage space, but rather will it be an embarrassment to the Minister in trying to administer the provisions contained in it. The cost to the department will be great because when the Minister spoke to the second reading he said that at present no man is employed full time on the inspection of superphosphate and it would be necessary to employ such a person if this Bill were passed. I am sure that the cost to the Government and to the companies would increase the price of superphosphate to the farmers and that would possibly cause more complaints than have been received regarding moist super. The Minister intimated that there are other factors, besides the moisture content, which could cause trouble.

We could, I think, compare superphosphate with another commodity of a similar nature, and I refer to cement. Cement absorbs a certain amount of moisture from the atmosphere and, irrespective of where it is stored, after a period of some months, it becomes hard and lumpy. Without going into this question more thoroughly, I think the sponsor of the Bill should be a little wary of continuing with it.

The member for Moore informed the House that he had visited the superphosphate works. From some of his remarks I feel that he must have done so on a very dark night when things were not easy to comprehend. If he had gone to the works he would have seen that those in charge are going to a good deal of trouble to supply the farmer with the commodity in the best possible condition for him to use. The Department of Agriculture is conducting an inquiry to see what can be done, and I feel sure that if it is left to the departmental officers, the Minister, when their report is available, will, if he considers it necessary, amend the parent Act so that the moisture content may be reduced.

Under the Bill the manufacturer is required to send a sample of his previous week's output of super to the department, and that provision leaves itself open to a lot of abuse. I should imagine that a good many milk vendors would readily appreciate the opportunity of supplying the required samples. I can imagine also the number of salesmen there would be around the superphosphate manufacturing firms, demonstrating small electric ovens to ensure that the super samples to be sent to the department would be really "super" samples.

Without the use of inspectors from the department, one would have very little indication of the true moisture content of the commodity being despatched to the farmers. The Bill states that a sample of the commodity manufactured the previous week should be sent. As members know, the greater part of the orders is stored for some time and in all fairness to the company concerned, I consider that if samples have to be taken, they should be taken on the day of delivery to the farmers or on the day on which the commodity is railed. If it is taken any earlier, it would not be giving the companies a fair opportunity.

In moving in this direction, I think the member for Stirling had good intentions and I feel that the only mistake that he—and possibly this applies to others as well—has made is that he did not inquire into the industry sufficiently before going ahead and bringing the Bill before the House. I oppose the second reading.

**MR. O'BRIEN** (Murchison) [6.31: I wish to oppose the Bill. The question is: Is there any water content in super? That is the question. If there is moisture content, what is the cause? Is it due to the cold nights?

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: You are very unfair giving your members two goes on the same Bill?

**MR. O'BRIEN:** I venture to say the super is quite O.K.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Has the hon. member already spoken on this Bill?

**MR. O'BRIEN:** Yes.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Then the hon. member must resume his seat.

**MR. OWEN** (Darling Range) [6.41: I have been interested in the points of view put forward by the various speakers on the Bill. As the subject of moisture content is the main bone of contention, I think some of the speeches could have been dehydrated a bit because they have been dripping with inaccuracies. In order to obtain some idea of the subject, I think it is necessary that we should know exactly what happens in the manufacture of phosphate. I am sure all members realise that to convert phosphatic rock from its acid soluble condition, it is necessary to

treat it with sulphuric acid to bring it to the water soluble condition and thus make it what we call super, which has its phosphate readily available for use by plants. In doing that, of course, it is necessary to wet a mass of phosphatic rock with sulphuric acid so that the chemical action can take place.

Normally it can be predetermined how much sulphuric acid is needed to complete the chemical action on the phosphatic rock. At times I believe it is necessary to add a bit extra in order to get the right consistency because of the different types of rock. But whatever happens—whether it is necessary to add any surplus moisture or not—the mixture is more in the form of a paste and before that can be used by the farmer it is necessary that the super be put into a condition where it is friable and will flow easily through the machines which distribute it on the land.

The Minister for Justice: What would be the least moisture content necessary to make super right and efficient?

**MR. OWEN:** That has not been fully determined as yet, because it depends a great deal on the nature of the rock, that is to say, whether it is soft or hard. But during the process known as maturing, other chemical changes take place.

It has been stated in this House tonight that there is only 22 or 23 per cent. of phosphoric acid and there has been a query as to what is the other part of superphosphate. Generally speaking 50 per cent. of superphosphate is composed of phosphate of lime and the phosphoric acid part of this constitutes a little under 50 per cent. I do not want members to be confused about this. The phosphate of lime consists of lime and phosphoric acid chemically united. In addition, there is approximately 50 per cent. of the super composed of gypsum. When gypsum is dehydrated or dried, it is what we know as plaster of Paris. As members are aware, when it is maturing or drying out and is losing its moisture, plaster of Paris sets like plaster does. That is what happens when super is stored in a heap.

The Minister for Housing: Is gypsum of any value?

**MR. OWEN:** It has certain value but not much as a fertiliser because usually there is sufficient sulphur present in the soil and normally sufficient lime. Gypsum is of some advantage in loosening up a clayey soil, but has very little if any value as a fertiliser. But if there were some method of separating the two elements it would be an advantage. Unfortunately, however, there is no easy method of separating these two and it is easier to send out the super as it exists, namely, round about 50 per cent. phosphate of lime, the other 50 per cent. being made up of sulphate of lime, which is gypsum.

During the process of curing or maturing the gypsum part of the super does take up some of the moisture in what we know as water crystallisation, similar to the process when plaster of Paris is set, but the greater part of the moisture is taken up by the atmosphere; it evaporates from the mass and goes into the air. Normally this process of maturing takes some months, so that in the ordinary manufacture of super at the works, apart from that proportion needed to manufacture the sulphuric acid and that part needed to treat phosphatic rock with sulphuric acid, there is also the need for big storage bins, so that the super as it is manufactured can be set aside in large heaps to mature.

Mr. J. Hegney: Would not those heaps tend to cake hard?

Mr. OWEN: Naturally it sets hard because, as I have already explained, the gypsum part of it tends to set like plaster of Paris. This is the normal process of manufacture of super as it is supplied to the farmer. But after it is allowed to cure and set, it is not an uncommon thing to have to blast it out and to grind it so that it may pass through the machinery for distribution to the soil.

Immediately after the war there was a big increase in the demand for super. Farmers had been called upon to produce more foodstuffs and they were also in a happier position in being able to pay for large quantities of super. That particularly applied to the farmer other than the wheatgrower. Consequently the demand for super went up greatly and the manufacturers were considerably pressed for storage space. They did send out quite a lot of phosphate in a very green state.

Members have told the House the difficulties the farmer has had in spreading superphosphate of that description because it was not in a fit condition to flow freely through the drills and broadcasters. I feel sure that every farmer would be able to tell members that he had had difficulty along these lines, particularly two years ago. The position has been considerably improved over the past year, but complaints are still coming forward. I do think the manufacturers have done their best under prevailing conditions but I feel that this measure has a lot to commend it inasmuch as the manufacturers will have a target at which to aim in reducing the moisture content so that the super will flow freely.

At present there is very little information on what is a desirable moisture content in super, and in framing the measure the member for Stirling has left that matter open, so that when the information is available from the technicians in the department, or from the Government laboratories, the optimum amount of moisture can be determined and incorporated in the Act. The measure will do a lot of good and there should be no great

difficulty in putting it into practice. Mention has been made of the necessity to comply with certain moisture content in many of our foodstuffs.

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

Mr. OWEN: Controls are exercised over food products to ensure that they do not contain more than the regulation amount of moisture. Butter has been mentioned, for which the allowance is 16 per cent., and there have been prosecutions against manufacturers for exceeding that amount. On one or two occasions, there has been malpractice in the form of butter being re churned in water to build up the moisture content so that extra profit could be made, and prosecutions had resulted. Thus, if this measure be passed, we shall not be introducing a new principle.

During the war, when we had food control, the moisture content was stipulated for nearly all food products, and manufacturers had to incur the expense of ensuring that the moisture content of their product was kept to a minimum. Excess moisture in some dehydrated foodstuffs causes them to deteriorate, and of course moisture makes them weigh much more heavily. Moisture control was exercised even over timber used for containers for foodstuffs; here again, it had to be kept to a minimum. Thus, legislation to control the moisture content of fertiliser, although it has not so far been adopted in other States, would be a very desirable innovation to introduce here.

It is easy to estimate the saving that could be made by reducing the moisture content in super. So far, we do not know what would be a desirable maximum content because that is a matter of research and economics. It might cost considerably more to reduce the moisture, say, from 4 per cent. to 3 per cent. than from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent., but these are factors that would have to be investigated, and research work is necessary before a satisfactory moisture content could be determined. If it could be uniformly reduced by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., on the present consumption of 420,000 tons of super, there would be a reduction of 2,300 tons, and that would mean a considerable saving in freight costs.

We were told by the Minister that the passing of the measure would involve the department in quite heavy expenditure. I cannot see why that should be so, because super works are located at the larger centres near the metropolitan area, at Bunbury and at Geraldton, and later on there will be works at Albany and, as there are officers of the department stationed at those centres, not much of their time would need to be spent in grabbing a sample, say, once a week and forwarding it to the laboratory for water analysis. I believe that one officer could more than cope with the work. Thus,

allowing for one officer at a salary of £1,000 a year, it would work out at a shade over ½d. per ton of super to ensure that samples were taken for analysis. A half-penny per ton could not be considered to be a great cost, and if the department could not bear it, I feel sure that the farmers would not object to its being passed on to them.

From the manufacturers' point of view, I have endeavoured to explain that the main problem could be overcome by providing sufficient storage space so that the super, after being manufactured, could be stored for a time and allowed to mature. At present, there is supposed to be storage space for well over 50 per cent. of the season's requirements. I have heard that the quantity that could be stored is 270,000 tons, but I do not know whether that is correct. If extra storage space were provided, the capital cost admittedly would be considerable, but the sheds would be available for a number of years, even though there were some deterioration as a result of acidity from the super, and the actual amount required to meet interest and sinking fund would be very slight indeed when applied to each ton of super.

The storing of super in this way would necessitate an increase in output to overtake the thousands of tons required for storage, but the time has come when sufficient could be manufactured throughout the year to build up a reserve and permit of the super being properly matured before being despatched from the works. This having been done, the super could be sent to the farmers in a sufficiently dry and crumbly state so that it would not only run through the drills and broadcasters, but also would not pack in the bags if held on the farm for quite a few months.

There has been quite a lot of talk about the storing of super in dry places. If the farmer receives his super in a dry state, he will take care to store it in a dry place, and if any were so neglectful as to stack it in the open, they would deserve to incur the extra expense of having to break it up. In the thirties, we did not have any great trouble with super that we stored. During the early part of the war, I kept it for more than 12 months in a shed, and it was still in a very friable condition when I came to use it.

This measure will prove of great advantage to farmers, and will not be of material disadvantage to the manufacturers, once they have overcome the initial cost of providing additional storage space. Some people are apt to take the view that manufacturers are doing their best, and therefore why cause trouble? I think that possibly there is a little of the spirit that, "We are getting along alright so why worry?", but if they had to comply with the requirement of such a measure, there would be less likelihood of carelessness on

their part and, if there were carelessness, action could be taken to ensure that they conformed to the moisture content requirements.

I have discussed this problem with many people in all phases of life, including manufacturers and chemists, and have been told that in extreme cases it is necessary to use artificial driers. Maybe that is so in extreme cases. The member for Toodyay could tell us how for years we dehydrated fruits by putting them out in the atmosphere and allowing the heat of the sun to dry them until they were in a fit condition to be packed but, because of the risk of early rains, some growers installed artificial driers, so that the fruit could be properly dried. This measure would provide for conformance to a maximum moisture content. I believe that after some investigation has been made to arrive at the optimum moisture content at which super can be manufactured cheaply and still ensure that it will not set in the bags but will run freely, the manufacturers will be able to turn out the super to that standard. I support the second reading.

**THE PREMIER** (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [7.43]: I do not intend to oppose the second reading because I believe that, with suitable amendments, we may be able to frame legislation to achieve beneficial results to the farmers. The Bill, as drafted, would need fairly extensive alterations. The principle of the measure appears to be satisfactory, but it is likely to be very difficult to administer. As pointed out by the Minister for Agriculture, a considerable staff might be required, and this would mean that the cost of operating the law could be substantial, and it would not be unfair, I suggest, if some very small levy per ton were imposed on all super sold. The amount might not need to be more than 2d. or 3d. per ton; I cannot say what the figure should be.

However, instead of the Minister's having thrust upon him the responsibility of deciding what the maximum moisture content ought to be, provision should be made in the Bill for the appointment of a competent committee to decide the matter. On such a committee there could be a representative of the farmers, a representative of the super companies and a representative of the Department of Agriculture, with probably one other. If we are going to tackle this problem seriously with the object of achieving worth-while results—I think all members would agree with that objective—it seems to me that the legislation should be more extensive than what is proposed in the present Bill.

The measure is to some extent sketchy. It deals with the principle of trying to control the moisture content of superphos-

phate in order to keep it down to reasonable limits. But there should, in addition to that, be contained in the legislation some additional provision which would enable it to be administered effectively and to ensure the safeguarding of the interests of all those concerned. As the Bill is now worded, it not only puts all the responsibility on the Minister but also leaves him with endless discretion.

If further consideration were given to the Bill as drafted it should be possible to improve it considerably without weakening the principle upon which it is based, and I therefore hope that if the measure passes the second reading, the Committee stage will be postponed until next Wednesday in order that those who desire to improve the Bill along the lines I have suggested may have a reasonable opportunity of doing so.

**HON. A. F. WATTS** (Stirling—in reply) [7.47]: I desire first to thank all members, who have spoken to the Bill, for their contributions to the debate and naturally I would like to thank those who supported it more than those who did not, especially after the observations of the last speaker, the Premier. I think I might safely say that many of the criticisms made about the principle of the Bill, including most of those by the member for Guildford-Midland, were more than effectively disposed of by the member for Darling Range.

That gentleman, of course, from the considerable source of knowledge which he has, not only as a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, but also as one who has been in the Department of Agriculture at various times in his career, showed beyond doubt the depths of ignorance from which the member for Guildford-Midland spoke, and indicated, I think, that it is unnecessary for me even to attempt, from the much more limited knowledge that I have of these matters, to deal with the points that were raised by that member.

I confess that I was a little surprised in the early stages of the debate to find, from the Minister for Agriculture, opposition to the passage of the Bill through the second reading stage. While he admitted in the early part of his speech that no one could complain of the objective of the measure, he nevertheless announced, later, that he proposed to oppose the Bill. I say, as I said when introducing the measure, that its genesis was the report of the departmental committee superimposed upon the complaints which I and others associated with me had received about the condition in which superphosphate was being received over the last few years.

The member for Guildford-Midland made reference to the motion moved in this House last year by the member for Geraldton, seeking the appointment of that de-

partmental committee. In moving that motion the member for Geraldton said this—

At present a lot of extra work and expense are caused to farmers who have to take their super on early orders. I have had complaints from farmers, who have had to take delivery of super before Christmas, that before the following May the super is so hard that it has to be broken up and in some cases re-bagged at great inconvenience and considerable cost. Something should be done to see that the commodity is properly cured and dried before it is sent out to the farmers. An effort should be made by the Government to have the price of super reduced; at the present time I consider it is excessive.

So it will be seen that one of the reasons given by the member for Geraldton in his desire to have this committee appointed was this very matter of excessive moisture content in superphosphate. He indicated that the super delivered in the first half of the manufacturing year, from June to December, was subject to that state of affairs, whereas the Minister for Agriculture took the view that the excessive dampness of superphosphate mainly occurred in the second half of the year, from January to June.

The committee itself, as I said when introducing this measure, admitted it was satisfied that the complaints received from the Farmers' Union with regard to this matter were justified and that the trouble had been caused by excessive moisture in the superphosphate delivered. While it said that it was not easy to remedy the position, the committee ended by indicating that an effort should be made to investigate the situation and the members of that body discussed, in part of their report, the question of the desirability or otherwise of amending the Fertilisers Act.

So, from the person who moved to have the committee appointed, down to the committee itself after its full investigation there has been conclusively demonstrated, in my opinion, the fact that excessive moisture content has been the cause of the troubles that have been complained of, involving the farmer in considerably increased expense, loss of time and damage to machinery, yet the Minister for Agriculture appeared, during his speech, to indicate that he thought that things should jog along as they were until some time or other somebody might find out something and we might perhaps do something about it.

I think that is a not unfair condensation of the essence of the speech that the Minister made to this House about a month ago. I confess that I was not at all satisfied with it and do not think members of this House were satisfied with it, either. I have endeavoured to point out that the Minister appeared to have entirely over-

looked the fact that the Bill does not require him immediately to declare the maximum moisture content to be contained in superphosphate, but it gives him the authority to fix the maximum and prescribe it by regulation. Of course, that would be done only when he was satisfied that a reasonable figure had been arrived at.

The Bill further enables him to alter his determination from time to time if it should be found that varying circumstances and conditions, or raw material or something of that nature, made it impracticable to adhere for all time to the figure which he first stipulated or, alternatively, makes it practicable for him to reduce the figure still further; all of which, I take it, would be governed by the advice he received as the result of the investigations made by his departmental officers.

One other thing that struck me with regard to the Minister's address to the House on this subject was that nowhere in the course of his speech did he attempt to inform members on anything of what might be called the chemistry of this question. He did not appear to have sought the advice of officers of the department, qualified to advise on that subject, so that if there were such intolerable difficulties to be overcome from their point of view, members might be informed of it.

Yet we had on the committee of inquiry to which I have referred no less a person than Dr. Samuel, Deputy Agricultural Chemist of the Department of Agriculture, a person well qualified, not only as a result of his training and experience but also as a result of the inquiries which he made, to enter into the giving of such advice to the Minister and to provide him with all the information that would be requisite if the circumstances were such that the proposal was for some technical reason outrageous—but of course it is not.

As the member for Darling Range has pointed out, in the quiet and effective manner that he follows, it is by no means a difficult matter to deal with the question of moisture content in a substance such as superphosphate, and so I have only to come to the conclusion either that the Minister skimmed lightly over this measure as one of no great importance to the community of Western Australia or that he thought the principle involved in it was not of much importance or, alternatively, that he sought advice from some other quarter which had brought him quickly to the belief that the best thing to do would be to reject the measure. I do not know which it is but if it is the first mentioned, then of course one cannot skim lightly over this proposition.

I would point out that for every 50 tons of super that a farmer may order, if there is but 2 per cent. of moisture in it more than there ought to be, not only does he have the trouble, expense and loss of time, to which I have already referred,

but also he will pay no less a sum than £20 by the time it reaches his farm. Fifty tons is by no means the maximum an individual will buy, and 2 per cent. of moisture represents no less than one ton and the cost of delivering one ton to a farm today from a factory a fair distance away represents a great deal of money.

The Minister for Agriculture: Your Bill will not alter that.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: At least it will present an opportunity of altering it and I am dealing not with the Minister's speech but with that made by the Premier because the Minister did not suggest any machinery by which it could be improved. I would remind the House, too, that private members have restricted rights with regard to legislation especially that which may at any time involve the expenditure of money or may be a burden on the community. So one has to be careful in dealing with these aspects.

What I am complaining about is that the Minister for Agriculture—I admit, very gently and politely; I am not complaining about the language that he used by any means—merely skimmed over the Bill and concluded by observing that he thought he should not support it. I do not think that, in all the circumstances, that was a fair proposition, one of the reasons for which I have just given.

Another argument that the Minister used in the course of his remarks was something to the effect—and this was also repeated, in effect, by the member for Canning a little while ago—that in all probability the manufacturers would overcome the intentions of the Bill by a little private dryer for the samples that the department is supposed to receive. There has been a great deal said about the manufacturing companies during the course of this debate, but they have not been mentioned by me. I have not made any comment about the companies, either good or bad.

I have been well aware of the technical difficulties with which they are confronted and I am also aware that it is their business to conduct their affairs as profitably as possible within reason, but I have not made any complaints about them. However, I certainly would not subscribe to the idea suggested by the Minister and the member for Canning that the managements of these companies are deliberately going to set out to defraud the department by instituting some kind of private drying arrangement for the samples so as to reduce the moisture content before they reach the department. I think that was a most extraordinary suggestion to have made. I do not think any member in this House really thinks that the persons concerned in the management of these companies would do any such thing. I believe that in the main they have endeavoured to comply with the law in the past and I have every reason to think



they will endeavour to comply with it in the future, if it were improved—and I still think that.

At this juncture I might say that when the departmental committee conducted its investigation it received a great deal of information from the Farmers' Union and I have ascertained that it was obtained from approximately 70 branches of that organisation in all parts of the State, from the most northern point in our wheatgrowing areas around Northampton to the most southern point of our dairying and other areas in the vicinity of the south coast. Every one of them, no matter where they were, had the same complaint to make in regard to super and in most cases their belief was that the trouble was due to excessive moisture and, in other cases, they merely stated the degree, but could not think of or suggest the remedy.

So this matter is a widespread one apparently and cannot be treated lightly. Super plays too important a part in the affairs of Western Australia, even more than in those of any other State of the Commonwealth, in association with its primary producing industries. As has been said here before, it is a well-known fact that our soils are deficient in what super can put into them, and the efficiency or otherwise of the super supplied to the farmers in this State is of considerable and, in fact, very great importance to every citizen residing in it.

Thus it is of no use trying to cover up the situation that has arisen. It is of no use trying to indicate that everything is all right in regard to super. It is not all right. The only thing that I want to do is not to pester the manufacturers unnecessarily, or to impose undue costs upon the department, or to increase, even to the slightest degree, the price of super to the farming community. What I want to do is to set somebody about to find what the trouble is and then get to work on what should be done to remedy it.

The Minister for Agriculture: We are investigating that, as I told you.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: Up to date, what is anybody's business is nobody's business and while I was aware, 18 months ago, of some of the complaints, I was not aware—and that is why I said this report was the genesis of this Bill—that the moisture content was likely to be decided by the committee as being the real reason for the major part of the trouble. When we discover that, it is high time to determine means whereby that aspect could be controlled, if not immediately, at least within a reasonable time. So I hope the House will pass the second reading of the Bill. I have no objection to accepting the suggestion made by the Premier after we have gone into Committee and to reporting progress after the first clause, which is the usual method followed, and leave the

Bill over until next week to allow him to submit amendments that he thinks proper and which the Committee can debate.

I have already given some reasons for the introduction of the measure in its present form, but I do not profess to have achieved the maximum in regard to the way the Bill should be drawn. However, I now quite clearly perceive that I have at least brought to a head a subject of considerable importance to the farming community and the people of the State and one which now, presumably—as I take the Premier's remarks at face value—will result in something being achieved to effect a remedy. So, with that I am quite prepared, as I have already said, to postpone the Committee stage in the manner I indicated if the second reading is carried.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*In Committee.*

Mr. Hill in the Chair; Hon. A. F. Watts in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Progress reported.

#### **BILLS (5)—RETURNED.**

- 1, Kalgoorlie and Boulder Racing Clubs Act Amendment (Private).
- 2, Vermin Act Amendment.
- 3, Noxious Weeds Act Amendment.
- 4, Mine Workers' Relief Act Amendment.
- 5, Associations Incorporation Act Amendment.

Without amendment.

#### **BILL—BANK HOLIDAYS ACT AMENDMENT.**

Received from the Council and read a first time.

#### **MOTION—MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS ACT.**

*To Disallow Amendment of Wireless Masts By-law.*

Debate resumed from the 30th September on the following motion by Mr. Heal:—

That the amendment made to by-law No. 39 (Buildings) made by the City of Perth, under the Municipal Corporations Act, 1906-1951, published in the "Government Gazette" on the 28th August, 1953, and laid upon the Table of the House on the 2nd September, 1953, be, and is, hereby disallowed.

**The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS** (Hon. H. H. Styants—Kalgoorlie) [8.15]: This motion contains an objection to a City of Perth by-law, No. 39, which has been in operation since 1929. It is actually the building by-law of the City of Perth, and the third schedule contains the fees that are charged for certain services ren-

dered by the council in inspecting buildings or scaffolding and so forth. The scale of fees has been slightly altered, and it is in connection with that scale that the objection has been raised. The member for West Perth fears that the by-law, as altered in the third schedule, can now be applied to wireless masts on private premises. I believe that, on the actual wording, it would be possible to apply the by-law to wireless masts on private buildings. But I am assured by the Town Clerk of Perth that it is not the intention of the City Council to apply it to wireless masts attached to private houses.

Mr. Yates: This has been in force for some time?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Not with respect to wireless masts on private houses. I think the hon. member is mistaken.

Mr. Yates: You said that earlier; that is what I am trying to clear up.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: No. I referred to building by-law No. 39, which is actually quite a booklet, and governs the whole of the building operations within the city. The third schedule to that by-law, to which objection has been raised, contains only the fees charged for services rendered under the by-law. The Town Clerk assures me it is not the intention of the council to apply it to any wireless masts attached to private dwellings. It is proposed to be applied only to commercial wireless masts, such as we see on the post office and some of the big business establishments.

Prior to the alteration of the fee, the council had been charging a flat rate of 12s. 6d., and had it desired the by-law to apply to wireless masts on private dwellings it could have enforced that from the inception of the by-law; but that was never intended. The council, however, finds that in the supervision of the erection of big wireless masts such as those of the commercial broadcasting stations, a flat rate of 12s. 6d. is entirely inadequate to compensate their officers for the time taken in examining the specifications. It was therefore decided to introduce a new scale of fees and to charge 1s. per foot, so that if a wireless mast was to be 200ft. high on the top of a building, the fee would be £10. The council, however, disclaims any intention of applying that by-law to wireless masts on private buildings.

When the Town Clerk came to my office in connection with this matter, I drew his attention to the fact that I thought the wording of the by-law could have been much more definite and be made to apply only to commercial wireless masts. He replied that he had just then come from the council's solicitors, who had been endeavouring to provide a reasonable definition of a commercial wireless mast, but had found great difficulty in framing any definition that would be unambiguous. I said that, in the circumstances, I thought

the best course would be for the Town Clerk to write me a letter explaining the difficulties of the council, and I would read that letter to the House so that it could be published in "Hansard," indicating that there was no intention whatever of applying the by-law to wireless masts attached to private dwellings. This is the letter I have received from the Town Clerk—

Further to the discussion with you in respect to the new Schedule No. 3 in the City of Perth By-law No. 39 (Buildings) which is now under discussion in the Legislative Assembly, I have to advise as follows:—

1. By-law 39 (Buildings) only applies to the City of Perth.

I think that during the debate the member for Guildford-Midland said the by-law could be applied outside the City of Perth. The letter continues —

2. The amendment now under discussion in Parliament only relates to the Schedule No. 3 prescribing the scale of fees.

3. It should be appreciated that, other than this change, the whole by-law is substantially the same as in 1935 and, in respect to the clauses relating to the submission of plans and obtaining of licenses, the by-law has not been altered.

4. It will therefore be seen that the Council has not, in the past, and does not intend in the by-law now before Parliament, to demand that licenses be obtained for the erection of domestic wireless poles and aerials or domestic television grids.

5. The whole purpose of Clause 10 in Schedule 3, relating to fees for wireless masts, is to prescribe the payment of a fee commensurate with the work that has to be done by the Council to ensure the safety of masts erected on buildings by commercial stations and other interests who may require high structural steel masts which may endanger life and property if not erected in accordance with recognised standards.

6. The Council's administration of the by-law over the last 20 years removes any doubt that the present proposals are designed as revenue producing innovations. There is nothing further from the Council's intentions. I am able to give you a firm assurance that there is also no intention of departing from the previous policy of the Council.

I trust that the by-law, as printed, may be approved.

In view of the assurance from the Town Clerk, who is the principal executive officer of the council the hon. member may be prepared to withdraw his motion for the disallowance of the by-law. After

discussion with the Town Clerk, I feel certain, as is stated in the letter, that it is not the intention of the Council to apply this by-law in any shape or form to wireless masts on private houses. As a matter of fact, had that been the intention, the council could have applied the 12s. 6d. flat rate for years past in connection with the erection of private wireless masts, in exactly the same way as is has been applying it to commercial wireless masts. In the circumstances, I suggest there is no reason for the House to disallow the regulation.

**MR. LAWRENCE** (South Fremantle) [8.26]: I am surprised that the Minister sees fit to agree with the City Council that such a shoddy by-law should be allowed to exist. The Minister openly admits that the words used—

For a license to erect a wireless mast attached to a building, for each foot, 1s.

—enable the provision to be applied to any ordinary dwelling. If that is so, can we consider it fair that they should be retained to be used by the council if it so desires? It is all very well for the council to write letters saying that it will not so apply the by-law, but the position is that it is legally entitled to do so.

When we are considering legislation in this Chamber at the Committee stage and we consider that the wording of a measure may indicate an intention other than what is desired, we do our best to rectify the position by redrafting the faulty provision. Why should that not be done in this instance? The excuse given in the letter to the Minister suggests to me that the Town Clerk agrees that this by-law is wrongly phrased. Otherwise, why should he have gone to the council's solicitors and asked them to use different phraseology, so that ordinary householders would be exempt?

I have no objection to the charge being increased, because I think that it would be asking too much to expect the council to stand the cost in connection with a 200ft. wireless mast; though it does appear to me that a jump in fee from 12s. 6d. to £10 is rather steep. However, if it costs that much to supervise the work that has to be done, I do not object. I also applaud the action of the council in having regard to the danger aspect of big masts erected on city buildings.

Nevertheless, I suggest that the motion should be supported so that the regulation can be sent back to the City Council for its legal advisers to redraft. While I do not for one moment say that the council is not to be trusted, I think that the provision should be made quite clear, and that the council should not be legally entitled to do something which it says it does not wish to do and has no intention of doing. It does not seem right to me

that this by-law should interfere with the rights of amateur operators, people who may in the future have television sets or—

The Minister for Railways: Have you ever seen a mast for a television set? It is only about 5ft. 6in. high.

**MR. LAWRENCE**: If it is attached to a building it still costs 1s. per foot under this by-law. I think it is too ridiculous for the Minister to suggest that the letter should go into "Hansard", because even if it does, it still leaves the provision legal. Therefore I have no alternative other than to support the motion which I trust will be carried. This badly worded by-law can then be sent back to the City Council so that its legal advisers can frame it correctly and thus protect the public, who will be duly thankful.

**MR. JAMIESON** (Canning) [8.32]: I support the motion. The phraseology here could well be tidied up. Very few commercial wireless transmission masts are to be found on high buildings these days, for the simple reason that the practice now is for tests to be conducted in the field to find the optimum position for such masts, and then to erect them. At one time most of the radio stations in Perth had their transmission masts on top of their buildings, but that is not the case these days. There are only two or three such masts left in the city now, so I think the whole matter should be reconsidered by the Perth City Council. I do not see that the provision need be retained.

In his speech, the Minister said that television masts are not very tall. That may be so, but he must realise that the most important part of a television set is the antennae, and whether it be only 5ft. high, or any other height, it will be constructed with due regard to the frequency of the transmission. No harm will be done if the House supports the motion, so that the by-law will be sent back to the Perth City Council for redrafting. We shall then see a more tidy state of affairs, and we shall be assured that in future these fees cannot be applied to other than commercial wireless operators.

On motion by Hon. A. V. R. Abbott, debate adjourned.

### **BILL—STATE TRANSPORT CO-ORDINATION ACT AMENDMENT.**

#### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 30th September.

**THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT** (Hon. H. H. Styants—Kalgoorlie) [8.34]: I think most of the remarks made by the member for Maylands, when moving the second reading of the Bill, were irrelevant to the purpose of the measure. He compared our license fees with those in other

States. I do not know what object he had in doing that unless it was to establish firmly in the minds of members that our license fees for road vehicles are much lower than those in the other States.

The hon. member quoted Queensland where he said that road vehicles carrying cargoes alongside railway lines were compelled to charge rail freights, and to pay 3d. per ton per mile surcharge. That is correct, but the reason why they charge rail freights is that road vehicles there, like road vehicles the world over, cater only for the high-priced freights. An offer was made here to the effect that the road hauliers would take certain classes of goods and pay 20 per cent. of the freight charged to the revenue of the Railway Department.

Of course, that would be a wonderful proposition to them because they would take only the high-priced freights—those from 9d. to 1s. 4d. per ton mile—and they would pay 20 per cent. or one-fifth, of the freight, and would still receive 10d. or 1s. a ton mile, and the railways would be left to haul the other goods at 3d. per ton mile. That is unfair competition which the previous Government would not permit and which this Government will not allow. The hon. member quoted the permit fees for a 5-ton truck and said that up to 20 miles no license fee was payable, which is correct.

The remaining portion of his statement, however, was certainly incorrect because he said that beyond that distance they had to pay, in addition to a vehicle license fee, 6 per cent. of the gross takings as a license fee. Evidently the hon. member does not know the difference between what an omnibus has to pay and what a commercial vehicle has to pay.

Mr. Oldfield: Are you sure I said that?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I do not think "Hansard" would make that mistake, and the hon. member is certainly reported in "Hansard" as having said that. The payment of 6 per cent. of the gross takings applies to passenger omnibuses—or they are supposed to pay it, —but less than 50 per cent. of them pay it at present. Because of the financial position of some of the omnibus companies, they are not paying any license fees at all. They pay anything from 1 to 6 per cent.; and less than half are paying the 6 per cent. because of their financial position. The Act provides that the license fee for goods vehicles—when I say license fee, I do not refer to the vehicle license fee but to the fee paid to the Transport Board—shall be a maximum of 7s. 6d. per power load weight, but there is not one instance where they are paying half of that fee in Western Australia. Considerably less than half is the fee usually levied.

The hon. member compared the license fees levied on goods-carrying vehicles in the Eastern States with those in Western

Australia, and his comparison only establishes the fact that they are considerably less in this State. The goods-carrying vehicle in this State is let off particularly lightly with regard to the fees levied by the Transport Board which fees, of course, are distributed for the purpose of providing additional roads and keeping in order the roads which the vehicles use. I may have erred slightly when I said that in no case did they pay more than 50 per cent. I think there are a few instances where a little more than 50 per cent. of the maximum fee which can be levied is actually paid today.

The substance of the Bill is simply to take away the high-priced traffic from the railways. It is a queer conception of co-ordination of traffic. The hon. member suggests that distances should be lengthened to enable the road vehicle to carry not all classes of goods, but the high-priced freight goods—because that is all they will cater for—in competition with the railways.

Mr. Oldfield: A lot of the farmers prefer their superphosphate to be carted by road.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: Does that make any difference?

Mr. Oldfield: Even at the cost.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: The hon. member may be able to tell some people that, but he cannot tell me that the farmer is such a philanthropist that he is prepared to pay 5½d. per ton mile, as against 2.26d. per ton by rail.

Mr. Oldfield: He has it delivered to his door.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: The Bill does not refer only to superphosphate or the right to cart it. Our experience is that as far as competition with the railways is concerned, these people will only go after the higher-priced freights. Has the hon. member any idea of the actual cost per ton mile, taking all classes of goods, of road transport in Western Australia? The railway charge is approximately 4d. per ton mile, and recently the Government called tenders for the transport of goods by road between Meekatharra and Wiluna in case it decided to close the line. The prices submitted would astonish members.

For anyone to stand up here and say that road transport can compete with rail transport, is just so much nonsense. The tender for the conveyance of all classes of goods from Wiluna to Meekatharra will probably be disclosed to the House to show the rate per ton mile required for the service. It is to be hoped that members will not mislead others into believing that road transport can successfully compete, on level prices, with the railways, because it is just so much nonsense. The Act provides for road vehicles within 20 miles of the G.P.O.,

Perth, to be exempt from any licensing provision, but the Bill proposes to increase the distance to 50 miles.

I may give some consideration to extending the distance beyond 20 miles, because I do not think it pays the railways to transport goods for that distance, mainly because of the time taken in the turn-round of their wagons, and I do not think it is economical from the point of view of the consignee. He has to pay terminal charges, for one thing. Now let me discuss the question of terminal charges, about which the hon. member tried to make some capital when introducing the measure. He said that terminal charges must always be levied. That is not so. There are many firms in the metropolitan area and throughout the State that have their own private sidings. In such circumstances, railway trucks are shunted into the sidings, the goods loaded on to the trucks and taken to their destination. This is exactly the same idea as road transport.

Mr. Oldfield: That would occur in very rare instances. A small number of firms have their own sidings.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: The hon. member may know something about the marketing of potatoes but he knows little of how many private sidings there are in the metropolitan area or country districts. There are hundreds of miles of line in private sidings in this State, and terminal charges do not apply in those instances. I cannot agree that it is uneconomical for the railways to transport goods up to 60 miles. That is beyond the limit, and I think the railways can handle goods economically for lesser distances than that.

Mr. Oldfield: What distance would you say?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I am not going to commit myself at present, but I am not agreeable to 50 miles.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Would you agree to an amendment of this Bill?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: No. I see no reason why it should be passed and I hope members will defeat it at the second reading stage because of the second provision, which is simply dynamite so far as the railways are concerned.

Mr. Oldfield: I am only amending the present Act.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: While I agree that up to a given distance it would be uneconomical to build a railway—even up to 60 miles—for the transport of goods without longer distances being involved as well, I am not prepared to say that the railways cannot make a profit or give good service over lesser distances. It would be uneconomical to build a railway from here to Pinjarra, or from here to Northam only, but we must cater for the other places beyond those points. The roadbed must be maintained, and everything must be kept in order to serve the

localities beyond the two places I mentioned. Any revenue which can be earned from transporting goods up to 60 miles is all extra and goes towards the maintenance costs of the particular sections involved.

The Transport Board, respecting which we hear a good deal of criticism, has readily recognised that for the carriage of certain classes of goods beyond the 20-mile limit, up to 35 and 40 miles from the G.P.O., Perth, road transport is more suitable, and the board has issued licenses accordingly. If we allowed the proposal contained in this Bill to become law, it would be a retrograde step because, as I have previously mentioned, if we were to increase the permissible limit to 50 miles, road transport operators would not carry the low-priced freight.

Mr. Oldfield: They would take whatever was offering.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: They would take the high-priced freight, like they have always done; even during the railway strike, they endeavoured to drive a hard bargain. Some wanted to cart the high-priced freights and let the few locomotives available haul the low-priced freight.

Mr. Oldfield: They would still be restricted to 50 miles.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: Road transport vehicles would be competing with the railways on distances up to 50 miles and they would be competing for 75 per cent. of all the high-priced freight now carried by the railways.

Mr. Oldfield: They can compete on distances up to 20 miles now.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I believe that the first provision would be quite unfair and inequitable as far as the railways are concerned. But the second provision is one to which no Government could agree. The Act now provides that a distance up to 20 miles from a man's place of business in the country shall be regarded in the same way as 20 miles from the G.P.O., Perth; in other words, he would not need a permit or be restricted within that distance. But the hon. member proposes to increase that limit to 50 miles—a 50-mile radius. Just imagine what would happen! A man could set up business a few miles this side of Northam, and a few miles this side of Pinjarra, and he could cart all the high-priced freights between here and Bunbury and between here and Tammin, and to many other places further afield.

Mr. Oldfield: He could have only one place of business.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: He would be able to set up a business and cart within a radius of 50 miles which, in other words, would give him a 100-mile lead. He would be able to set up his business about a mile this side of Pinjarra,

which would be within the 50-mile radius, and a few miles this side of Northam he could set up a garage, and he would be able to have a free rein to bushrange the freight book, as far as the railways were concerned, for a distance of 100 miles from Perth.

Mr. Oldfield: Would you agree to delete that provision in Committee?

The Minister for Housing: Delete the whole Bill!

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: It would mean that if a man set up business at Spencers Brook, which is just inside the 50-mile radius, he would have the right to pick and choose all the high-priced freights he could handle and he could transport the goods as far afield as Brookton, Quairading, Tammin, Konongorring, Calingiri, Toodyay, Gingin and so on.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: From where?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: From here, if his place of business were situated at Spencers Brook because he would have a 50-mile lead on either side of his place of business.

Mr. Oldfield: But the people would still be getting cheaper freights.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: They would not get cheaper freights for all classes of goods.

Mr. Oldfield: Yes.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: Sheer nonsense!

Mr. Oldfield: It is not nonsense at all!

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: After the whole question is finalised, I will disclose to the House the tenders received from road transport operators who wished to operate from Meekatharra to Wiluna for the carriage of all classes of goods. Of course, the hon. member has in mind the selection of some of the 27 per cent. from which the Railway Department is getting profitable returns. He wants to hand over some of that freight to the road transport operators, and then claim that people are getting cheaper freights. They would not get anything of the kind, and no man who has given any study to the question of transport would agree with that contention.

Everyone knows that for the carriage of all classes of commodities road transport is not as cheap as railway transport. Any person who has studied transport costs knows that sea transport has the cheapest rates, even though they have gone up by 600 per cent. since 1939. Then comes railway transport, road transport and, last of all, air transport. It cannot be denied, of course, that by picking out a few high-priced freights—and that is what the road transport people do—the railway rates can be undercut; but, taken by and large, road transport operators cannot successfully compete against the railways in the carriage of all classes of goods.

Mr. Oldfield: They have done it in other countries.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: The hon. member made some remarkable statements which, when analysed, are found to have no foundation in fact. He said there was no loss by damage when goods were transported by road. If he had been with me last week when I travelled along the line from Burakin to Bonnie Rock he would have had a different idea. Those people experienced 5½ months of road transport last year and they implored me to keep the railways in that area going; they would not have a bar of road transport after having experienced 5½ months of it. If the hon. member had seen the photographs that were brought to me, he would have changed his ideas about there being no damage in the road transport of goods.

The hon. member said with road transport there was no delay, but in this area vehicles were bogged down and this resulted in considerable delay. If the hon. member ever reads a newspaper, he will frequently see where £10,000 worth of goods has gone up in flames while being transported from the Eastern States. Not only is the cargo destroyed but also the vehicle, and yet the hon. member tells us that no damage is caused when goods are transported by road!

Mr. Oldfield: That is not an expense to the person consigning the goods. It is at carrier's risk.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: At Greenmount, one can still see the trail left down the side of a hill where a vehicle got out of control and finished up in a gully hundreds of feet below. Yet the hon. member talks about goods being damaged on the railways. There is no justification for the Bill, and there is no semblance of transport co-ordination in it. This country cannot afford two rival transport systems competing against each other because there is insufficient density of population. I do not know if the hon. member has had any experience of American conditions.

Mr. Oldfield: I have been outside Australia.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: We must deal with Australian conditions and to say that there is sufficient room for two rival forms of transport running side by side is entirely incorrect. If we allow one section of transport to carry the low-priced freights and the other one to pick the eyes out of the rate book and carry all the high-priced freights, even with a nominal penalty of 20 per cent., it is entirely wrong. I believe there is room for both road and rail transport in this State so long as they are properly co-ordinated. But the proposals in the measure do not, by any stretch of the imagination, visualise any co-ordination whatever. This is a

straightout proposal to deprive the railways of their high-priced freights. So I am not prepared to support the Bill and I hope it will be defeated on the second reading.

**MR. ACKLAND** (Moore) [9.0]: I support the member for Maylands, not that I am unappreciative of the fact that we need the railways. I am very conscious of that but I rise to speak in protest against the inefficiency of the railway service in Western Australia. I have here an article from the Melbourne "Herald" dated the 13th May. It reads as follows:—

New Zealand Railways get First  
Taste of Road Competition.

Protected by law against competition for many years, New Zealand's state-owned railways have received the sharpest jolt they have felt in a decade. A road transport company has been given the right to carry goods on routes competing directly with the railways. The Petrous Tile Company, of Dunedin, has suffered a long record of breakages of its products in transport by rail.

So, without reading any further, it is clearly an indication that there are other places besides Western Australia where, because it is impossible to control the labour situation, the railway system has so completely got out of hand.

In this House I have been twitted so often for speaking about this matter, but I have not so long ago returned from Canada. There one found the condition of the railway service entirely different from ours with respect to the attitude of labour and management. Although we travelled some 8,000 miles, only on one occasion was the train late and that was because the delegation was so struck with the beauty of some of the sights that it would not get back on to the train so that it could get under way. On that occasion the train was a quarter of an hour late. The railway officials on the train and the employees along the line were in a state of agitation. We can just imagine how complacent the officials and workers on the railways in Australia would be under similar conditions. I feel sure that they would become agitated if the trains ever ran to time.

**Mr. Heal:** How long have you considered the railways inefficient?

**Mr. ACKLAND:** For many years, as was shown by the report of the Royal Commission in 1947. As I said once before, the Royal Commission mentioned the inefficiency of the railway service and the lack of interest taken by the Government over the previous 20 years—14 of which were under the administration of the Government supported by the hon. member.

The Minister for Transport: That does not reflect on the men working on the railways.

**Mr. ACKLAND:** I do not want to see the railways of Western Australia scrapped but I believe that some competition would do them a tremendous lot of good. No matter where one goes in the railway service one finds a lackadaisical and "couldn't-care-less" attitude.

**Mr. May:** You are not justified in saying that.

**Mr. ACKLAND:** I am.

**Mr. May:** You are not.

**Mr. ACKLAND:** I say it and it is a fact, from the management right down to the junior worker in the organisation. I voted for the alteration of the management of that department in 1947 and I think it was one of the biggest mistakes I have made in this House. If Mr. Ellis had been given the same encouragement by previous Governments as this commission of three was given by the McLarty-Watts Government, I believe he would have made a better job of it than we have seen during these last years.

**Mr. O'Brien:** Why blame this Government?

**Mr. ACKLAND:** I am not blaming any Government but merely stating the condition of things as they exist. I do not think there will be any improvement unless there is a realisation both by the management and the people who work under it that the customer has some rights and is not merely to be considered a nuisance.

**Mr. Hutchinson:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. ACKLAND:** At the moment the customer is treated by the staff of the Railway Department as they feel inclined to treat him. There has been one very great exception in the last few years, and I have mentioned it previously. I refer to the appointment of the new traffic manager. From him we have seen a different attitude towards the customer. I would not be complaining about the increase in railway freights if I thought for one moment there was a genuine attempt being made to bring good management and good service into the Railway Department. The members on the other side of the House interject, but they know as well as I do that there is not the service given for the salaries or wages received in the Railway Department, and that applies in most Government and private employment in this State.

The Minister for Lands: I think that is a very unfair thing to say.

**Mr. ACKLAND:** I say it with all sincerity and believe it to be true. So I support the member for Maylands in this legislation he has brought forward. I do know that double handling and treble handling, which is so often necessary when using the railways over short distances, increases the cost. However, I feel sure that the services could be far more efficient and their costs could be less if there

were the will to give service to the public. I did not have the slightest intention of speaking to this Bill, but after listening to part of the Minister's speech I felt it incumbent that somebody should get up and support the measure as a protest against the maladministration and lack of service given from top to bottom by the department to the public of this State.

**MR. HILL (Albany) [9.5]:** I support the Bill under certain conditions. This is just another round in the fight between road and rail transport. A few years ago I had the privilege of serving on a Royal Commission of which the Minister was chairman. I refer to the Outports Royal Commission. On my suggestion our secretary wrote to London and got a copy of the report of the presidential address to the Institute of Transport of Great Britain, by Sir David Owen, general manager of the Port of London Authority. The concluding remarks of Sir David presented one of the best summaries of the situation that I have ever read with respect to transport matters.

The subject of the address was: "The Problem of Port Costs." Sir David said that it was absolutely essential that the problem of transport be treated as a whole and he referred to the need of an authority to continue to study the problems of transport generally. He also referred to the various means of transport, all of which he said were capable of performing useful service for the benefit of the community.

He said that the Golden Age of railways had passed but that railways, under wise control, had still a useful function to perform and he pointed out that the motor vehicle was capable of very useful, but not unlimited, service for the benefit of the community. He referred to canal, coastal and air transport, but he said the trouble was that the workers in the various activities were inclined to look upon their particular jobs as the end rather than part of the complete job. He concluded his remarks by saying that he visualised the time when the various kinds of transport would all be regulated and applied to work where they could serve the community best as a whole.

In this State we never have had, and have not today, an authority to consider the problem of transport as a whole. Our transport system is like an army that has gone into action without a general staff and it has suffered accordingly. Our railways have grown piecemeal. The railways were laid down under no co-ordinated system but by various politicians and those who could pull the most wires. Today the railways are severely handicapped in the fight against motor transport.

Some years ago the Administration in South Africa decided to hold a conference on transport matters and those who at-

tended unanimously agreed that the practice of charging high rates on high-valued goods and low rates on low-valued goods was necessary in the interests of primary production. They decided, and also reported, that that practice could not continue if motor transport was to be permitted to compete unfairly with the railways.

**Mr. Andrews:** Why support the Bill?

**Mr. HILL:** Under certain circumstances motor transport is definitely more economical than rail transport. I have here a letter from one of my constituents which reads as follows:—

Dear Sir,

I am still trying to obtain a permit to cart timber from Kent River but so far have obtained permission to cart two loads by road pending an improvement in the internal organisation of the mill. I realise that you are torn between two ideals—one to keep the railways open and the other to further the interests of Western Australia in general and of Albany in particular, but I would point out that the transport of timber by rail from Kent River is not an economic proposition from the point of view of a builder.

As an example, I would point out that last week I received two truck loads of scantling from Kent River—about 20 tons which included approximately six tons of material not ordered by me—but put in to complete the load by the mill—which will probably remain in the yards for months and months. This loss is in addition to the loss incurred by the increase in freight which, together with the cost of hauling the timber from the rail to yard, brings the cost per ton to 50s. 10d. per ton from Kent River.

This timber could be transported by carrier for 35s. per ton and probably much cheaper if we were allowed to carry for ourselves, and in addition we could get it when we wanted it, in the sizes we want and the lengths best suited to our requirements.

We realise that an attempt must be made to make the railways—if not a paying proposition—at least a less costly one for the taxpayers, but would ask you as our representative to try and bring this about by improvements in working methods rather than by penalising the country people. As a first step we would ask you to relieve this part of the country of some of the burden of costs by giving us an opportunity of doing our own carting.

Your own experience will show you that simply raising freights is not going to make the railways pay: it will tend to have the opposite effect because people will not use the rail-



ways to their fullest extent unless they receive a corresponding benefit in service or efficiency.

Will you do all you can to have these irksome restrictions removed and so assist us to keep our staff fully employed?

Yours, faithfully,

(Sgd.) J. L. Butler.

As far as that particular line is concerned, a Bill was brought before Parliament in 1926 to build a railway from Denmark to Nornalup. It was passed by this House but was thrown out in another place. Two more Bills were introduced, one to complete a railway from Pemberton to Northcliffe and the other from Denmark to Nornalup, thus leaving a gap of 55 miles in the middle. When that railway from Denmark to Nornalup was opened by Mr. Troy, he said it was built with 60-lb. rails because it was intended to complete the section between the South-West and the Great Southern. That gap of 55 miles is still left.

That line has not been completed because of the interests in the ports of Bunbury and Fremantle. It is recognised by the authorities and others that if that railway were completed, Albany and the southern part of the State would benefit. Therefore we are saddled with two white elephants that are not paying axle-grease instead of having one that would benefit the State as a whole. There has never been a proper system of amortisation and the result is that the Railway Department is paying interest on every penny borrowed and spent on the construction of railway lines, and the department has got to face the loss. Let us consider motor transport, which does not pay interest on the expenditure on roads because the roads have been constructed out of revenue. Further, quite a lot of commercial trucks do not even pay the petrol tax.

While I support the second reading, I advocate the need for an overall transport administration. We should recognise that the strong man ought to help the weak man. The man who has only a short haul enjoys many advantages over the man who must use the railways on a long haul. The man more favourably situated should be allowed to use motor transport, but he should have to pay a levy in order to keep the railways open to assist the man further out. This is a well-recognised principle. A man in receipt of a high income has to pay a higher rate of tax than does a man receiving a lower income. So it is with the railways. Goods of high value must pay a higher rate.

I contend that we need to aim at a sound administration, not only for our railways but also for overall transport, so that the various systems of transport would be operating where they could best serve the community as a whole and with the one

object of providing the State with a national and complete system under which our total costs could be kept down to a minimum.

**MR. BRADY** (Guildford-Midland) [9.17]: I oppose the Bill at this stage because I consider that it does not go half far enough having regard to the numerous disabilities with regard to transport generally. The concluding remarks of the member for Albany were very appropriate, and the time is long overdue for us to appoint a board that could co-ordinate all transport in order to obtain the best results. I feel now, as I have done for some time, that we are getting into trouble economically as a consequence of endeavouring to run two systems of transport side by side, both of which are taking a toll of the economics of the State.

We have the railways in which approximately £30,000,000 of public money has been sunk, and now we have running in competition with them, road transport with all the powerful forces of finance and influence that can be brought to bear in their support by the oil and petrol companies, which seek to bolster road transport to serve their particular interests. The Labour Government certainly has a first-class job on its hands. We have only a certain amount of revenue to handle on behalf of the State and we cannot stand up to the influence that the big oil companies will exert with regard to transport in the next year or two.

It is quite evident that the softening-up process is already occurring in quite a big way. We have motor companies extolling the benefits of road transport; the oil companies emphasising the benefits to be derived from having an oil industry, and then a flood of talk of the benefits of manufacturing motor cars and tyres; but we have nobody telling us of the gain that could result to the community by improving the railways. If somebody took the initiative and did something along the lines of the action being taken by the Commonwealth railways, we might get somewhere towards the goal of cutting down railway costs and be in a better position to consider the proposition submitted by the member for Maylands.

Until such time as we have a well-thought-out scheme and a board capable of putting it into effect, we should be wary about any scheme proposed in this House likely to set up road transport as against the railways. We have a responsibility, because of the fact that the railways are the property of the people, to ensure that this form of Government-controlled transport is made to pay, and if those people who are importing motor cars, spare parts, tyres and oil from overseas cannot make profits and dividends, it will be just too bad. We should not tolerate having our railways, our tradesmen and workshops employees sacrificed because of vested interests in road transport.

It is becoming a practice with some members to have a shot at railway employees and question their efficiency. Until recently the men in the Midland workshops have been trying to do a job with machinery 40 or 50 years old. How can men do efficient work with out-of-date machines? Even though modern machinery has been introduced, some of it has not yet been set up in readiness to operate. Then we have locomotives 40 or 50 years of age that should have been scrapped 20 years ago, and so former Governments must take responsibility for much of the inefficiency and laxity in the railways. Members would be well advised, however, to lay off the men. In the eyes of some people, a man can be efficient if he is driving a motor vehicle on the road, but immediately he sets his foot in the Government workshops, according to those people, he becomes inefficient and a worthless worker. To my mind, that does not add up.

The rollingstock is out of date and the men in the workshops have been itching to build new rollingstock. But what do we find? In reply to a question, we have been told that there is rollingstock to a value of £6,000,000 being imported from overseas. Every penny of that money should have been made available to build rollingstock in the Government workshops. It is idle for anybody to claim that this should not be done. Outside firms have been building rollingstock from material fabricated here, and that work, too, could have been done in the Government workshops so that the profits could have gone to benefit the State, but it was not.

Tenders were called overseas and in this State, and the people who should have been doing the job, and the workshops that were built to do it, were overlooked. So we have critics in the House saying that the employees are to blame. About two years ago the British Labour Government and certain people in Australia sent a number of employees to America to have a look at the systems there to see whether something could be gained by way of education.

It is rather strange that although both these committees visited America at different times, and did not confer on what they had seen or the education that had been derived, the reports they submitted were almost identical. The reports stated that after going through America and looking at the various systems they had come to the conclusion that the workers in Australia were just as efficient as those in America, but they gained one impression, namely, that in a good many cases the alleged inefficiency of the workers here was due to the inefficient machines and the out-of-date methods used.

Mr. Yates: What has all this got to do with the Bill?

Mr. BRADY: It has a lot to do with the criticism of the workshops employees. It would be better for the member for South

Perth to endeavour to further the interests of the railways instead of encouraging the member for Maylands to introduce systems which will worsen the railways and the economy of the State. I understood that members of Parliament had a responsibility to see that the interests of the State were looked after, and I say the State's interests are bound up with the railways.

It is of no use criticising the efficiency of the railways and the workers in the workshops if proper machinery is not provided. The men in the workshops are just as efficient as any other workers in Australia. After all, many of those workers have come from overseas, from the Eastern States and from other organisations which are alleged to be 100 per cent. efficient. Any weakness there may be in the workshops at Midland Junction is not with the employees. I do not think the proposal of the member for Maylands to give to certain transport people the right to cart goods within 50 miles of the metropolitan area will help the railways. I oppose the Bill.

MR. MAY (Collie) [1926]: Possibly I would not have taken part in the debate had it not been for the remarks of the member for Moore. I oppose the Bill for the reasons stated by the Minister. I am not prepared to sit here and listen to the member for Moore castigate the workers of the State. It does not matter where workers come from or in what industry they work, the member for Moore has never risen in the Chamber without accusing them, for, in his opinion, not doing a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. I want to refer to the time when I worked for the farmers. I worked from before daylight until after dark.

Mr. Ackland: So did the member for Moore, unfortunately.

Mr. MAY: Had I worked for the member for Moore I probably would have had to work all night.

Mr. Oldfield: How long do your men work on the farm?

Mr. MAY: When I worked for farmers in this State, I had no bed to sleep in.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: That was a long time ago.

Mr. MAY: Whatever sleep I had was within the four walls of the stable with the horses. That is the treatment the farming employees of this State received from the farmers when I was working for them.

Mr. Oldfield: We are speaking on transport.

Mr. MAY: If the member for Moore can justify that, he can justify anything.

Mr. Oldfield: Stick to the Bill.

Mr. MAY: Will the hon. member shut up while I have my say? It is a crying shame that any member should get up in this House and abuse the workers of the State in the way the member for Moore

does. I know that some of the stupid questions asked by the Opposition in the last few weeks have caused certain railway employees to work very late in the night. The boys in the office, in order to compile the information asked for in this Chamber, have worked late at night, and during the day as well. It hurts me to think that a man with the standing that the member for Moore should have, is prepared to come here and abuse the workers of the State on every occasion. There is nothing degrades a man more. The hon. member is not justified in making the statement he did tonight, and those which he has made on many previous occasions.

Mr. Ackland: Unfortunately it is quite true.

Mr. MAY: Unfortunately for the hon. member it is not true.

Mr. Oldfield: Are you speaking to the Bill or attacking the member for Moore?

Mr. MAY: I have already given my opinion of the member for Maylands, and if he wants a repetition he can have it. I rose to safeguard the interests of the workers of this State. Members can imagine the feelings of the employees of the Railway Department. What incentive is there for them to carry on their work when we have a man in a public place abusing them as he has done tonight? I am not going to stand for it.

HON. A. V. R. ABBOTT (Mt. Lawley) [9.30]: I hope the second reading will be agreed to because this measure is worthy of serious consideration.

The Minister for Agriculture: You do not really think that!

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: I do, and so does the Minister for Railways who, if I remember rightly, admitted that there was a distance over which it was not economical for the railways to carry goods under modern conditions. I do not know whether that distance is 50, 40 or 30 miles, but in New South Wales, where this matter has been given serious thought, there is an open permit for a distance of up to 40 miles.

The Minister for Housing: And they pay heavily for it.

The Minister for Transport: It is 50 miles in New South Wales.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: This question should be considered purely from an economic point of view because if we are to raise the standard of living of all in this State, we must take advantage of modern machinery, knowledge and methods. It is no use saying that because in the dim past something was right, it must be right now. At one time there was no such thing as air transport. I do not know how far the air carriage of goods will advance in the future, but it could well develop into the most economic form of transport for some classes of goods over

certain distances. I believe that if the charges are worked out it will be seen that today the transport operations of Air Beef Ltd. are the most economical under the conditions operating here.

The Minister for Native Welfare: Aerial transport keeps beef up.

The Minister for Transport: The air freight from here to Wyndham is about 1s. 2d. per lb.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: That is so, but I am speaking of Air Beef Ltd., as the conditions where that service operates would not warrant the construction of a railway, and roads are extremely expensive to build. This is a quick method of transport for refrigerated cargo. I think the Minister would be well advised to agree to the second reading of the measure and give consideration to what would be a reasonable distance, as I feel some extension is warranted. Each form of transport should be allowed to carry over specified distances the goods for which it is most suited.

Nothing can compete with the railways for heavy traffic over certain distances, but it would not pay to transport any goods by rail over a distance of one mile. The worker today is rightly demanding higher standards of living and therefore his labour is increasing in value. At one time, we had transport by man—by porters in the dim past—and I believe that system is still in use in some countries today. With the increase in the value of labour, advantage must be taken of every bit of modern knowledge and machinery. I do not think it would pay to transport goods by rail over a distance of 40 miles as the freight has to be handled at least twice, and each handling costs money, in addition to which entries have to be made, charges collected and so on, so there must be some distance that could be decided on. The Act already admits that the distance should be 20 miles but, with the increasing efficiency of road transport, I think that should be increased. An amendment could accordingly be made during the Committee stage.

Throughout industrial history there has been resistance to modernisation, and it still continues. There is great resistance on the part of the Railway Commissioners to giving up any business because they are fearful that if they do so, the department will lose revenue. I am not sure that metropolitan traffic should be carried by the railways as I think 12 or 14 miles is the minimum distance that a train should be run with perhaps only one stop.

The Minister for Transport: Road transport has an open license within 20 miles of the G.P.O. Is not that metropolitan transport?

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: That was laid down a few years ago, but road transport has become increasingly efficient and

economical since then. Nothing can compete with the railways for certain heavy classes of traffic over a specified distance, but it requires a long run, because each time one stops a train it costs money, and the overheads rise. I think the Minister should consult—possibly he did—the Railway Commissioners in order to ascertain their views. If it is good enough for New South Wales and Queensland—

The Minister for Transport: New South Wales is the only State with a radius of more than 25 miles, and there it is 50 miles.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: I know a penalty rate is imposed in Queensland, but they are permitted a certain distance.

The Minister for Transport: It is 15 miles, I believe.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: And then there is a certain surcharge.

The Minister for Transport: I think it is 3d. per ton per mile, on the load and weight of the vehicle.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Some such consideration may be necessary here, but I think we are failing to approach this problem in the right way if we say that, because something has never been done, it would not be in the interests of the community. I think the Minister would be well advised to agree to the second reading, particularly when he admits that there is a good deal in the argument that road transport, over certain distances, is most efficient. He should give consideration to what increase could be permitted under existing circumstances and I hope he will reconsider his decision and make a recommendation, after consulting the experts, because he has those experts available to assist him in these matters. He could then give the House a considered opinion of what distance, in excess of 20 miles, was regarded as reasonable. I support the second reading of the measure.

MR. PERKINS (Roe) [9.41]: Notwithstanding the attitude of the Minister for Transport I believe that we have a problem which sooner or later the Government must face.

The Minister for Transport: What did you do, as a Government, over the last six years?

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Altered it to some extent, so far as road traffic in the metropolitan area is concerned.

Mr. PERKINS: I hope the Minister does not think that everything done in the last six years entirely met with my approval. However, be that as it may, the attitude of the Minister towards the Bill is one of blind opposition. He is not prepared to face up to the problem confronting him as Minister for Transport and he seems to regard his job as being solely to preserve the railways. Whether the transport system be rail, road or air or any other

form, surely it should be designed to serve the people of this State in the best possible way and I do not think the Minister will get anywhere if he does not face up to the problem on that basis.

Admittedly the State has a great deal of capital tied up in the railways. The State has to find the interest payments and at present the railway system is not earning enough to meet the working expenses, let alone interest payments. I think that perhaps the Treasurer would be happy if he could be sure that the railway system could meet its working expenses without having to worry about the problem of the interest payments.

The Minister for Transport: We want higher freight rates.

Mr. PERKINS: I hope that the Minister will consider the various problems which confront him and that, as Minister for Transport, he will adopt a different attitude from the one he has adopted in the House this evening. When any suggestions about alternative forms of transport have been made so far this session, the Minister has disagreed violently with those who think that some drastic amendments are necessary in regard to the transport set-up. While this Bill may not be the complete answer to the problem facing us, the member for Maylands is at least making some attempt to bring our approach to the transport problem up to date. Why is a figure of 20 miles used? What particular virtue does the Minister see in that figure which is mentioned in the Act at present?

The Minister for Transport: What did you see in it over the last six years?

Mr. PERKINS: I would like to see it extended beyond that figure.

The Minister for Transport: You could have brought down an amendment.

Mr. PERKINS: It is not as easy as that. When the figure of 20 miles was fixed, the capacity of road transport to provide a service to the public was entirely different from what it is today. Our road system was not as good as it is now and the mechanical improvement in motor vehicles over the last 20 years has been really phenomenal. Therefore motor transport is able to provide a service which could not have been contemplated 20 years ago. For that reason I think the Minister has a problem to consider.

Perhaps, instead of extending the range for all classes of goods, it might be possible to specify particular types of commodities that could be carried by road transport. Obviously, as regards some goods, the actual handling costs into and out of the trucks are high and in many cases those costs are higher than the actual cost of transport. The member for Mt. Lawley referred to that particular phase of the question. But if the transport utility, whether it be rail or road, is best

to serve the interests of the users in Western Australia it must pay some attention to that particular aspect.

It is of no use the Minister flatly refusing to consider the problem and saying, "Well, the railways have to be made to pay and even though it is going to cost the public a considerable sum of money to use the railway system, they will still have to use it so as to make the railways pay." I do not believe that attitude will get us anywhere and of course ways and means are found to get round that particular edict.

As members know, there is a provision in the Act which enables primary producers, under certain circumstances, to cart their own produce on their own trucks in both directions. When that provision was inserted there was considerable discussion about it and already this session the Minister for Transport has accused primary producers of being disloyal to the railway system.

The Minister for Transport: Of course; they are as disloyal as they can possibly be.

Mr. PERKINS: I object to that statement on the part of the Minister and there again I think he should have a different approach to the problem.

The Minister for Transport: You know that you encouraged them in this matter.

Mr. PERKINS: The producers have some reason for the sense of grievance they have against the Railway Department. What has happened over recent years when the railway system has been unable to cope with all the traffic offering? What did the railway people do? Did they attempt to carry a reasonable proportion of each class of produce that was offered to them? Not at all. They carried the produce which best suited them at the particular time, and, because they thought they could get certain lines of produce back to their traffic lists when they wanted them, they decided not to carry those particular lines of goods—as the wheatgrowers in Western Australia know to their cost.

I can quote one particular instance where the railway authorities had informed Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd. that they could not carry more than 50 per cent. of the wheat produced in the State and that the wheat-handling companies would have to make provision for road transport to carry the balance—and yet, at the very same moment, the Transport Board was refusing permits for the carriage of baled hay to Perth. What could be more ridiculous than that? Baled hay is an item on which freight rates are not particularly high although it is impossible to carry the maximum weight of a load of baled hay, on a rail truck.

Surely, if the Transport Board had been at all realistic in its administration of the State Transport Co-ordination Act, it would have permitted that product to be

hailed by road and so allowed rail trucks that would have been used for its carriage to be diverted to the transport of a commodity at the full-rated capacity of the rail truck. Of course, the farmers realised that, on the one hand, the producer was prepared to carry the product at his own cost to Perth and, on the other hand, the extra cost of cartage by road was to be deducted from the gross proceeds of the wheat harvest before the net proceeds were disbursed to the wheat-growers.

It is instances such as that that cause a sense of grievance among the customers using the railway system and I believe the administration of the State Transport Co-ordination Act by the Transport Board could very well be overhauled. I strongly recommend the Minister to investigate the administration of that Act, which comes under his jurisdiction. I am not criticising his administration to date; I am not going to say that his Government has been less sympathetic than the previous Government.

The Minister for Transport: It has been more sympathetic, and you know it.

Mr. PERKINS: I am merely saying that it has not been less sympathetic and I am not criticising the Minister on that score. Nevertheless, I do not think he will get anywhere with the attitude he has adopted on the Bill now before us. I am hoping he will face up to the problem because I believe it could easily become more acute in the future. As I have already said, we have seen a remarkable improvement in the efficiency of road transport over the past 20 or 30 years. The Minister, 20 or 30 years ago, would not have contemplated the problem he now has to consider, which has been brought about by the keen competition from road transport.

It is obvious that the efficiency of road transport is improving at a greater pace than any improvement in the efficiency, if there is such an improvement, of the railway system. By reason of its set-up, I realise that that system is faced with certain peculiar difficulties and that many of its costs are rather difficult for the Railway Commission to reduce or even to hold at their present figure. During this session I asked some questions about the cost of replacing sleepers on the permanent way. Over the last 20 or 30 years that cost has increased about tenfold and, unfortunately, at present, the permanent way of the railways in Western Australia is in very poor order indeed.

As the Minister has told us, there is great need for a high proportion of the sleepers in the existing roadbed to be replaced. That being so, and in view of the high cost that will be involved, the Railway Department is facing an extremely difficult problem. In the construction of roads it would be possible to use mechanised equipment to at least hold road

construction costs at their present level or even to reduce them, but it does not seem possible for the Railway Department to use such equipment similarly for the reconstruction of the permanent way.

That, of course, poses an extremely difficult question for those responsible for the maintenance of the railway system. If, as time goes on, we are to have further development in road building technique as well as in the efficiency of motor transport generally, whilst the technique of maintaining the railway system, both in regard to the maintenance of the road-bed, rollingstock and so forth, remains static, then obviously the road services, as time goes on, will be in a better position to compete with the railways. Although the Minister has stated that the cost of maintaining the railways per ton mile is lower than road haulage costs per ton mile—I am not disputing his statement because I have no evidence on the question either way—

The Minister for Transport: It is about half the cost of road transport.

Mr. PERKINS: I do not think it is half, but it could easily be that any disparity at present could be increased as time goes on and will create further problems for the Minister for Transport. So I hope that while he will not accept the proposition submitted by the member for Maylands in this Bill, he will at least adopt a more constructive attitude towards the problem than he indicated when speaking to the measure.

On motion by the Premier, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 9.58 p.m.*

## Legislative Council

Thursday, 22nd October, 1953.

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

### QUESTIONS.

#### RAILWAYS.

*As to Freightex System, Trans-line.*

Hon. G. BENNETTS asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Is the Minister aware of the proposed new rail freight service, known as the Freightex system operating, between the Eastern States and Western Australia?

(2) What effect will this system have on our local railways and local industry?

(3) Will the Minister have investigations made in this connection, to ascertain whether the same system could be introduced, with advantage, within the State railways?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) No.

(2) Answered by No. (1).

(3) Yes.

#### FORESTS.

*As to Conservator's Transfer of Business Interests.*

Hon. J. MURRAY asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Can the Minister inform the House whether it is a fact that prior to his appointment as Conservator of Forests,