

in sending out prospectors hundreds of miles. Suppose the present Government were to send a prospecting party from Kalgoorlie 200 miles out, and that party found gold. How long would it be before any practical results would accrue, and what must the show be worth before it becomes a payable proposition? To me there seems a better system available, namely, to devote energies to areas lying close to railway lines and develop well-known lodes. If they adopt that course I am satisfied they will get better results. I recall that at the conference of those interested in mining, I advocated the boring system. There are many fine lodes between Yalgoo and Meekatharra; some have shown promise, some have gone down to water level and been abandoned there, and some have petered out. If efforts were confined to boring, better results would be obtained than by sending prospectors out hundreds of miles into the back country. I hope the Minister for Mines will consider this point. The Address-in-reply has now extended into the fourth week of the sitting, and it is one o'clock in the morning and everyone is pleased that the long discussion is nearing an end. Those people who stand for conducting the affairs of the House in a business-like manner are not satisfied with this Address-in-reply farce. That is rather strong language, but I do not think that the time involved and the expense entailed in printing the "Hansard" reports justify the results, namely, the desire of members to have their speeches reported for the benefit of their constituents.

Question put and passed; the Address-in-reply adopted.

BILLS (8)—FIRST READING.

- 1, Legal Practitioners Act Amendment.
Introduced by Mr. Hughes.
- 2, Closer Settlement.
Introduced by the Minister for Lands.
- 3, Arbitration Act Amendment.
- 4, Workers Compensation Act Amendment.
Introduced by the Minister for Works.
- 5, Private Savings Bank.
Introduced by the Premier.
- 6, Inspection of Scaffolding.
- 7, Road Districts Rates.
Introduced by the Minister for Works.
- 8, Jury Act Amendment.
Introduced by the Minister for Justice.

House adjourned at 1.10 a.m. (Thursday.)

Legislative Assembly,

Thursday, 21st August, 1924.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 1.30 p.m., and read prayers.

URGENCY MOTION—GROUP SETTLEMENTS, IMPERIAL AGREEMENT.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have received the following letter from the member for Katanning (Mr. Thomson):—

Dear Sir, I desire to inform you that it is my intention to move for the adjournment of the House as a matter of urgency under Standing Orders 47 and 47A, to call attention to the serious and alarming statements made by the Minister for Lands (Hon. W. C. Angwin) in the metropolitan Press, wherein he states that according to the interpretation of the Crown Law authorities the agreement made between the Imperial and Western Australian Governments if carried out on present conditions would entail the loss of about £4,000,000.

The Standing Orders referred to give the Speaker power to decide whether or not a motion of this kind is in order, and to some extent that includes the question of urgency. It would be obviously unwise and out of order to permit a matter of urgency to be moved when it could be moved and properly dealt with on ordinary notice. However, the Standing Orders provide that the responsibility of urgency shall be divided between the Speaker and the hon. member, and seven other hon. members who must stand in their place. This matter is one of importance—

Mr. Holman: It is not a matter of urgency.

Mr. SPEAKER: And being of importance, it may be one of urgency.

Mr. Holman: It may be used for some flag flapping.

Mr. SPEAKER: I will, therefore, allow this matter to go, upon seven hon. members rising in their places.

Seven members having risen in their places—

Mr. THOMSON (Katanning) [4.35]: I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Mr. Holman: In which hand are you going to wave the flag?

Mr. THOMSON: I approach this matter with a good deal of diffidence, and yet with a feeling of my responsibility as a member of this House regarding the serious position with which we are faced on the question of immigration. I congratulate the Minister for Lands upon the clear and concise statement he made to the House last week. I am convinced that when he made the statement he gave to the Press as well as to the House, the interpretation placed on the agreement by the Crown Law Department led him to believe the position was as outlined by him. I am pleased to see the Leader of the Opposition in his place in the House. I have no desire to indulge in any carping criticism in dealing with a question that is of such vital interest to the State. The Minister for Lands said—

In my opinion due consideration was not given before the agreement was entered into by the British Government and the Commonwealth Government. However, while that might have been so then, Australia, after years of experience, comes dearer to me now than even the Old Land. That has appealed to me on several occasions when we have seen the British Government offering millions of money to foreign countries, not knowing whether it would ever be repaid, yet squabbling over a shilling to their own people until it is hardly worth taking. I think a good deal of the present position of migration and group settlement was brought about through those who make the agreements not coming into touch with the actual position out here. As you are aware, Sir James Mitchell agreed we should take 6,000 settlers and provide for 69,000 other persons including wives and families of the settlers. For taking all those 75,000 people from England the British Government for five years are to assist us by paying one-third of the interest on £5,000,000, and the Commonwealth to pay one-third, while Western Australia is to pay the remaining third.

He also made this pregnant statement—

It has been found from experience that it is impossible to put any settler on the groups for £1,000.

The course I am taking this afternoon offers the only way to members of discussing the position in this Assembly. Statements made in the Press we cannot discuss under ordinary conditions.

Mr. Holman: You can discuss anything on the Address-in-reply.

Mr. THOMSON: The matter we are dealing with is the life-blood of Western Australia. Even if the Minister had made a definite statement upon the subject members would not be able to discuss it.

Mr. Taylor: What is going to be the value of this discussion?

Mr. THOMSON: I have a few suggestions to offer which may assist the Govern-

ment out of their present difficult position.

Mr. Mann: Could you not have given these privately to the Minister?

Mr. Taylor: He would have got no kudos.

Mr. THOMSON: Having had this statement by the Minister, wherein he says he is backed up by the Crown Law Department, it is the duty of Parliament as the custodian of public funds to determine whether the agreement entered into shall be carried out, and whether we shall authorise the Government to continue giving each settler, who come out under the agreement, an additional £700 as a gift.

Mr. Mann: Have the Imperial authorities repudiated the agreement?

Mr. THOMSON: I will not be side-tracked by the hon. member. According to the interpretation that has been placed upon the agreement, and according to the intentions regarding it as revealed by "Hansard," it was understood that the sum advanced to the settlers should not exceed £1,000 in each case. The agreement was drawn in England. I understand it was not considered by the Crown Law Department, and there was some difficulty in the way of that being done. I maintain, however, that it should have been perused by those who are paid to safeguard the interests of the State before it was signed. Clause 6 of the agreement says—

The State Government will provide each settler to whom a farm is allotted with reasonable equipment and stock.

Clause 7 says—

On taking possession of his farm the settler will be required to enter into an undertaking to reimburse the State Government for the amount directly expended on clearing and otherwise preparing the farm for occupation, including statutory survey fees, and providing equipment and stock.

We must take the agreement literally. Repeatedly Parliament, when passing a Bill, intends that it should act in a certain direction. But unfortunately, as you, Mr. Speaker, know from your own experience, in the eyes of the law no note can be taken of what was the intention of Parliament in framing the Act, and the courts must take the Act as it has been passed. The clause, after providing the matters to which I have already alluded, distinctly states that the Western Australian Government can require from the settler repayment

together with such amount of interest as the State Government may have paid in respect of loans raised to defray such expenditure.

There is a point, a highly debatable point, but one that must be cleared up. According to the interpretation of the Crown Law Department of Clause 5, and according to my reading of it—

Mr. Holman: That ought to settle it.

MR. THOMSON:—this State is not in a position to charge the settlers more than 2 per cent. interest for the first five years on the money it is spending on the groups. I sincerely hope, in the interests of Western Australia, that this interpretation by the Crown Law Department, and the meaning of the clause as I read it, are wrong. Unfortunately, however, we are dealing with a contract entered into by the State of Western Australia with the Imperial Government, whereby we as a State have undertaken to place upon the land in Western Australia 6,000 farmers, and according to that interpretation we can charge only 2 per cent. interest on expenditure up to £1,000 per farmer.

MR. GEORGE: I thought these were settlers, not farmers.

The Premier: What is the difference?

MR. THOMSON: Seeing that the member for Murray-Wellington is so anxious to split straws, I will substitute "settlers" for "farmers." But why quibble about words when we are dealing with so important a question? It is a question whether we as a State are going to lose £1,200,000; that is, if we place 6,000 settlers on groups. The ex-Premier stated throughout Western Australia that all losses arising in connection with the settlement scheme would be recouped by the interest the State was saving.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: I still say it.

MR. THOMSON: My sincere hope is that the hon. gentleman is right.

MR. RICHARDSON: There is no doubt about it.

MR. THOMSON: There are many people like the ostrich that puts its head in the sand and refuses to face a critical position.

MR. RICHARDSON: There are people who use common sense in reading an agreement.

MR. THOMSON: We have the opinion of the member for Subiaco, who poses as an authority on legal documents.

MR. RICHARDSON: You posed as an authority yourself just now.

MR. THOMSON: On the other hand we have the opinion of the officers of the Crown Law Department, who are trained lawyers and whose business it is to interpret a document as it stands. Though with reluctance, I feel compelled to say that in my opinion the interpretation of the Crown Law Department is the correct one.

MR. RICHARDSON: You cannot find anything in the agreement to that effect, though.

MR. THOMSON: I ask the hon. member to read the agreement.

MR. RICHARDSON: I have read it and studied it.

MR. THOMSON: Having dealt with the question of rate of interest, we now come to the latter part of Clause 7, reading—

The debt charge, including charge for supervision, shall not in any case exceed £1,000. Subject to the reimbursement of the State Government's expenditure on the foregoing basis, the settler shall not be required to make any payment for the farm allotted to him, either on account of the land in its undeveloped state or of the construction of railways, roads, and other general developmental works, apart from drainage, water conservation, and similar work which directly benefits the farm.

Probably the member for Subiaco will again say that I am wrong and that the Crown Law Department are wrong. He may even say that to discuss the position is an absolute waste of time. I say in sorrow that it appears to me as if the late Government have been guilty of wilfully misleading this Parliament and the people of Western Australia. When the late Administration found themselves unable to keep within the agreed cost of £1,000, they should have taken Parliament into their confidence.

MR. GEORGE: Are you impeaching the late Government?

MR. THOMSON: Yes, as regards that portion of the agreement. There seems to be reasonable ground for my assumption. When the ex-Premier entered into that agreement, no one knew better than he did what was its intention. Furthermore, the ex-Premier administered all affairs connected with group settlement. The present Government are to be commended for their action in preventing the initiation of further groups until the position has been defined by Parliament. If Parliament then gives the Government authority to proceed at the same reckless rate of expenditure, very well, the responsibility will belong to Parliament and will not rest upon the shoulders of the Collier Administration. Were I occupying a seat on the Treasury bench, I would take exactly the same attitude as the present Ministers have adopted.

MR. GEORGE: There is no chance for you.

MR. THOMSON: I do not worry about my chance; but, having a considerable stake in Western Australia, I do worry as to how long the State will be able to carry on at the present rate of expenditure, if the existing condition of affairs with regard to groups under the agreement is permitted to continue. I shall show that the matter was within the knowledge of the previous Government. Some of my friends on this side are quite willing to accept the interpretation of the Crown Law Department when it suits them, but when that interpretation does not suit them they say the Crown Law Department are wrong. Now let me quote what Mr. Colebatch, when Minister for Education and Leader of another place, is reported

by "Hansard" for 1922-23, page 545, to have stated—

When the Premier placed his scheme before the Prime Minister, it was suggested between them that the average cost of settling the newcomers under group settlement conditions would be £750. That was the idea that both of them had. When the agreement came to be finalised, the Premier realised that if we were going to have an average cost of £750, we must not definitely pin ourselves down to £750 as a maximum. So, schedule A which is referred to in the agreement reads, "The debt charge, including charge for supervision, shall not in any case exceed £1,000."

That statement was made by Mr. Colebatch, the previous Government's representative in another place. He proceeds—

It is not a matter of the Commonwealth or of the State Government advancing £750 per settler or £1,000 per settler. Neither of those questions enters into consideration. It is a matter of the State undertaking to settle the 6,000 people on the land, and of setting out in the agreement how we propose to do it and what is to be charged against them. Then he again makes his former statement:—

In no case will we raise a debit charge against any one of these settlers exceeding £1,000.

There are members of this Chamber who say I am doing wrong in drawing attention to this important phase of the group settlement scheme. I consider that I am doing my duty by the electors of Western Australia and am trying to assist the present Government out of the extremely difficult position in which they find themselves.

Mr. Sampson: Do not protest too much.

Mr. THOMSON: It has pleased the hon. member to protest a good deal. I have here the report of the British Overseas Settlement Delegation to Australia. We know that the members of the deputation came out here at the request of the Overseas Committees, and of course at the Imperial Government's request. Dealing with Western Australia, their report states, on page 63—

At the time of our visit no group had yet reached the stage of individual working of the various blocks, and the scheme must therefore be considered as not yet having passed the experimental stage. At present the settlers are working under direction, and receiving a weekly allowance at a fixed rate. The real test for them, and for the whole scheme, will come when the control of their affairs is put into their own hands, and each man's income depends upon his own industry and ability.

The report then says that the Government handed the deputation a statement show-

ing the estimated expenditure for bringing the blocks to the producing stage, and also showing the sources to which settlers may look for their returns. It continues—

It will be seen from this that at the present time the State finds it necessary to import very considerable quantities of farm produce from the Eastern States, and that there is thus a home market for exploitation by the settlers in the first instance, particularly in all kinds of dairy produce.

Now comes a pregnant declaration to which I hope members will lend ear—

Still, the cash returns from a holding of this kind will not be large, and we have no doubt that to be successful the settler will need to farm, in part, for the subsistence of himself and his family, and show some degree of enterprise in discovering the most profitable use to which he can put his cultivated land, and to advance the value of his holding by assiduous improvement.

That is the statement made by the delegation who came out to Western Australia, who had the whole of the facts placed before them and what I have quoted is part of their report to the Imperial Government. On page 115 of the report there appears the basis upon which the British Overseas Delegation reported that it would take the settler all his time to make a living on the land as it is to-day. This is the basis that was supplied to them by the Government—

The aim of the scheme is to keep the expenditure within the following schedule:—Clearing, £350; fencing, £75; house, £230; sheds, £25; stock and improvements, £200; cropping and incidentals, £120; or a total of £1,000.

That is the position with which we are faced to-day. That is the scheme as we entered into it and as the Overseas Delegation understood it. That is the scheme as they reported it to the Imperial Government. They made it clear that the amount was not to exceed £1,000.

Mr. Richardson: Is that their estimate?

Mr. THOMSON: That was the estimate arrived at by the Western Australian Government and I have no doubt the details were handed to the delegates by the ex-Premier himself. Thus we have three separate and distinct statements that the amount would not exceed £1,000. We have it in the agreement itself; we have it in the report of the Overseas Delegation; and we have it in "Hansard" in the statement made by the then Minister for Education in the Upper House. He made the definite statement that on no account could the Government charge the settler more than £1,000. Now we come to the position to-day. We have had a definite statement by the Minister for Lands, a gentleman who, I think, everyone will admit, has never made a statement in this House that he could not prove.

Mr. Taylor: We cannot say that about you, anyhow.

Mr. THOMSON: We will put that aspect aside.

Mr. George interjected.

Mr. THOMSON: You tried your hardest to put me out but you did not succeed.

Mr. Holman: What a pity!

Mr. THOMSON: I agree it was a pity. However, we are faced with the position that the Minister for Lands has made a definite statement as to the estimated cost of placing a settler on the groups to-day. Hon. members should bear in mind that his statement referred to an estimate only, for the figure mentioned was not a definite price. On top of that we have the statement by the member for Collie (Mr. Wilson), who has had years of experience in the South-West, that the cost would exceed £2,000.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: The member for Collie has never farmed in the South-West in his life.

Mr. THOMSON: I am repeating that hon. member's statement.

Mr. Holman: Do you question his veracity?

Mr. THOMSON: Is the State to saddle the general taxpayer with all this expenditure if the scheme is carried out in its entirety and we go on along the old lines? On the estimate supplied to the Minister for Lands, it cannot be done. No one would deny that when the Minister made his statement on the floor of the House it was clear, definite, precise, and without bias or feeling. His statement was a dispassionate one, placed before Parliament and the people generally as an outline of the bare facts. I have no desire to repudiate the contract; we could not do so. If I accept a contract to construct a railway or a building from the Government—

Mr. Taylor: Sometimes buildings fall down.

Mr. THOMSON: It does not matter if I lose all I have, I must carry out my contract.

Mr. George: What are you preaching now? Repudiation?

Mr. THOMSON: No. I desire to know whether we can afford to go on with this settlement scheme. As a State, I claim we cannot afford to go on with the settlement of 6,000 migrants—

Mr. Taylor: What is your remedy?

Mr. THOMSON: I will give it in my own time. I am dealing with this question as I think fit.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: The member for Mount Margaret thinks he is still Speaker.

Mr. THOMSON: Yes, but he is not the Speaker now.

Mr. Taylor: I am glad you said you were "dealing with the question."

Mr. THOMSON: If hon. members have taken the trouble to peruse the migration agreement, they will have found that it distinctly states that only so far as we place a proportion of those 6,000 migrants on the land, will we have money advanced to us.

In the present circumstances, we should have an opportunity of saying that we cannot carry on, unless a more satisfactory bargain is made with us.

Mr. Mann: There is a proviso.

Mr. THOMSON: As it is, we get only a proportion of the money according to the number of settlers we place on the land. (Clause 4 of the agreement reads—

If at the end of five years from the date of this agreement it shall be ascertained that the State Government shall have provided for less than 75,000 new migrants from the United Kingdom, or shall have established less than 6,000 men selected from among such migrants on 6,000 farms—

That shows that the ex-Minister for Works has not read the agreement. It states specifically 'farms' and clearly demonstrates that the interjection of the hon. member was not correct.

Mr. George: Every man who goes into a builder's yard is not a builder.

Mr. THOMSON: But when a man is placed on a farm under this agreement, it is only right to consider that he will be a farmer.

Mr. Taylor: And if he goes into a stable, he is a horse.

Mr. C. C. Maley: Or if he goes into a dairy, he is a cow.

Mr. Holman: Anyhow, I think this bomb is a dud.

Mr. THOMSON: The clause goes on as follows:—

... from among such migrants on 6,000 farms under the said scheme, the contributions by the Secretary of State and the Commonwealth Government, as defined in the preceding clause, shall be abated by the deduction of a percentage thereof equivalent to the percentage reduction in the number of new migrants provided for below 75,000, or in the number of men established on farms below 6,000, whichever percentage reduction shall be the greater.

In spite of interjections from hon. members who are endeavouring to discredit me—

Mr. George: We never try to do impossibilities.

Mr. THOMSON: —I simply assert that if we, as a State, unintentionally repudiated the scheme, as we cannot carry out the whole conditions as laid down in the agreement, we can urge that the Imperial Government have protected themselves in that they only pay on such settlers as we have provided for. It is not an act of repudiation to say that, as the Imperial Government have safeguarded themselves regarding the payment of interest and the money to be made available to the State under the agreement, Western Australia should be able, in view of the extraordinary circumstances confronting us, to have the position reconsidered. I wish to deal with the matter on the figures supplied to us by the Minister for Lands. He told the House that if we carried out the agree-

ment as it stood, we would be practically making a present to the new settlers of £4,500,000.

The Minister for Lands: I did not say that; I said approximately £4,000,000.

Mr. THOMSON: If the estimates are correct, and we multiply the 6,000 settlers by £700, that gives us £4,200,000.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: And if you multiply by £1,400, you will get much more.

Mr. THOMSON: But I have dealt with the position we are actually faced with regarding the settlement of the migrants! On top of that, the State is faced with the necessity for huge expenditure for the construction of railways, roads, hospitals, educational facilities and all manner of other requirements for such a scheme. The estimated cost approaches £10,000,000.

Mr. Mann: You had that consideration extended to the wheat belt.

Mr. THOMSON: It is most remarkable that I am now met with interjections just as when I was sitting on the Government side of the House.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: You have been treated with great consideration.

Mr. THOMSON: I want it to be clearly understood that I and my party are not opposed to group settlement.

Mr. Taylor: That is refreshing to know.

Mr. THOMSON: As to the figures quoted by the Minister for Lands, he stated that we had 2,287 settlers on the groups, of whom 1,375 were migrants. He also said we had 286 on the Peel estate, who do not come under the scheme. It will thus be seen that we have 1,089 on groups under the scheme. On the estimates supplied by the Minister, which I am sure are backed up by sufficient documentary evidence to prove the accuracy of his figures, it will be seen that we are faced with a loss of £762,300 in respect of the present settlers.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: But you have to treat all men on the same basis.

Mr. THOMSON: I admit that is correct if we carry out the strict letter of the scheme. In view of the fact that we have Australians on the groups as well, we cannot morally, even if we can legally, say to the British settler on the groups: "As you came out under the group settlement scheme, we cannot charge you more than £1,000," and, on the other hand, say to the Australian settler: "We must charge you whatever it costs us, and we estimate that it will be £2,000." We must remember that the Australian may be able to work as well as any two of the overseas migrants. I do not say that offensively, but simply because the Australian would know more about the conditions here and the work that had to be carried out. We could not adopt the attitude I have suggested but that is the position we are faced with to-day. I am safe in venturing the assertion that we are legally bound to that position under the agreement, and, therefore, we are faced with a loss exceeding £1,000,000. What is our remedy? Legally, we have none. We have

had the merits and demerits of various agreements made by Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, with the Imperial Government, discussed at length. It is most amazing to know that the Premier of New South Wales and the Premier of Victoria have each said, according to reports in the Press, that the Western Australian land settlement agreement and migration scheme constituted a stumbling block, preventing them from making proper and adequate agreements with the Imperial authorities. Despite that, however, those States are in a much better position than is Western Australia. During the election I was severely chastised by the ex-Premier for my attitude towards group settlement.

Mr. Holman: And you want your revenge.

Mr. THOMSON: My revenge came when I had a glorious victory. At that time I was not aware that the ex-Premier was not justified in boasting that we had £1,200,000 as a safeguard against losses. According to his statement, as I did, I still said that Victoria had a better agreement than ours.

Mr. Mann: We can amend ours, can we not?

Mr. THOMSON: I hope we can, and I hope also to indicate to the Government the way in which it can be amended.

Mr. Mann: Do you think you are going the right way about getting it amended?

Mr. THOMSON: Yes, I think I am doing my duty in moving this motion.

Mr. George: Let us consider Western Australia. The State is of more importance than any of us.

Mr. THOMSON: My motion is devised to help Western Australia. The Victorian Government, under their agreement are protected against loss for 14 years. They have from the Imperial Government a guarantee up to £300 per settler.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: That is not as good as ours.

Mr. THOMSON: Is it not? Our position to-day is that whereas the blocks were estimated to cost £1,000 apiece, they will cost £1,700. If we had the Victorian agreement, we should be guaranteed up to £300 per settler. The average cost per block in Western Australia is going to be £1,700. That is the position.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: No, it is not.

Mr. THOMSON: Then you say the statement made by the Minister for Lands is wrong?

Mr. George: Even so, the Minister would not take it as being offensive.

Mr. THOMSON: There are none so blind as those who will not see.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member must keep to the subject.

Mr. THOMSON: We have been blind to the true position of the group settlements. We are now dealing with the position as it is to-day.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: No, we are not.

Mr. THOMSON: Each block is costing the State £700 more than was estimated.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: No, it is not.

Mr. THOMSON: I leave the Premier and the Minister for Lands to reply to that. We have been told that if any other State secures a more advantageous agreement than our own, we are to be allowed the benefit of it. It is nearly six months since Mr. Colebatch, the Agent General, cabled out that he was endeavouring to get the Imperial Government to agree to Western Australia coming under the terms secured by Victoria. So far as I can gather, no alteration has yet been made in our agreement.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: The Minister for Lands told you he had been advised by the Agent General that our agreement would be brought into line with that of Victoria.

Mr. THOMSON: We can only deal with facts; our agreement has not yet been amended.

Mr. Mann: Are you basing your case on the newspapers?

Mr. THOMSON: In Thursday's paper appeared the following:—

Negotiations are still proceeding between the Australian and the British Governments regarding the migration agreement. Several points have to be cleared up before Mr. Bruce can put the matter before the House of Representatives. Britain is desirous that all loan moneys for the scheme shall be spent by 1927, but the Commonwealth Government want an extension beyond that year. When the matter is finalised the Commonwealth will ask the States to say how many people they can absorb. The fundamental idea is that each million will settle 14,000 people.

That is what the Imperial Government are offering to-day. The Premier will be in a position to say what negotiations he and the Federal Government have entered into.

The Premier: I have not had any negotiations with them at all.

Mr. THOMSON: Ye they tell us it is all right. This report continues—

The allocation of an amount to each State will be based on the capability of the State to settle men. So Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia will be given guarantees for settling a far larger number of migrants than will the other States.

Now what suggestions have we to offer? In view of the seriousness of the position I suggest the Premier should immediately proceed to the Eastern States to discuss with the Federal Government what they propose to do. In the interests of Western Australia our present agreement cannot be continued, but must be scrapped. I hope that whatever agreement be entered into it will be made retrospective.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: It will, of course.

Mr. THOMSON: Also, when the new agreement is being framed, I should like to

see the South-West division cut out. The present agreement handicaps the Government in respect of group settlements.

Mr. Taylor: It merely confines them to an area.

Mr. THOMSON: It handicaps them, because they cannot put group settlers anywhere but in the South-West area. Clause 2 of the agreement says—

The proceeds of such loans shall be used by the State Government for the development of the said South-Western division.

Therefore the position is that no matter how desirous the Government may be of putting in groups outside that area, they cannot do it under the agreement. The Government should be allowed to decide where groups shall be placed. This for two reasons: 1, that they should give an adequate return for the money expended, and 2, to see that the settler shall have a reasonable chance of achieving success. We frequently hear our friends from the North-West expatiating upon the wonderful potentialities of that vast area. Our policy is that of a white Australia. Yet under the agreement we cannot put a group in the North-West. Whatever agreement we may enter into in future, it should provide that the Government, backed by expert advice, should have the right to say where groups shall go. When the Premier visits the Eastern States to discuss the agreement with the Prime Minister, he should lay down conditions. After all, the position is that the Commonwealth Government are giving us a paltry two per cent. of the interest.

Mr. Richardson: We never got that before.

Mr. THOMSON: While they are robbing us right and left in other directions, as I will show—

Mr. Taylor: Not under this motion, surely!

Mr. THOMSON: The object of the Commonwealth Government in paying part of the interest is to encourage migrants to come from overseas. The Commonwealth Government pay two per cent. of the interest, and then more than get their money back through the Customs. If this State, carrying the whole of the financial responsibility for group settlement, wants to build a railway for the settlers, it has to pay Customs duty on the rails and fastenings brought in. If we get the rails from the Eastern States the price is fixed accordingly. The Premier, when dealing with the Prime Minister, should insist that if we are to have a big scheme of settlement, and if we are to open up the North-West, railways and machinery and other things will be required; and that being so, whatever material we require for group settlements, the Commonwealth should admit duty free or make a rebate of the duty.

Mr. Taylor: On a point of order. Under the motion, is the hon. member in order in discussing the Federal tariff?

Mr. SPEAKER: In so far as the Federal tariff affects the group settlements, he is in order in discussing it.

Mr. Taylor: It is pretty wide.

Mr. Richardson: It is the Address-in-reply over again.

Mr. THOMSON: I have dealt with the position.

Mr. Holman: And made a mess of it.

Mr. THOMSON: If the Government so desire, a delegation from this House should proceed to the East to discuss the serious position that has arisen, and get down to a solid basis as to the intentions of the Imperial Government.

Mr. George: How about sending you as a deputy?

Mr. Taylor: He has already been over and failed.

Mr. THOMSON: If the Premier does go to the Eastern States to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister, I do not want him to stop at that.

Mr. Richardson interjected.

Mr. THOMSON: The interjections and talk on my right are typical of the sense of responsibility of some members for their position in the House.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member must not lecture other members.

Mr. THOMSON: The Premier should also proceed to England. In the "United Empire" magazine for July, issued by the Royal Colonial Institute, appear the following remarks by Sir Daniel Morris:—

The question paramount to-day was how to make the best use of the Empire. The population of the Home country and of our possessions abroad has increased in recent years, and we could not well afford to neglect consideration of those problems which sprang from that fact. . . . We are an Imperial estate covering a quarter of the land surface of the globe, the greater part of which is in temperate climes. As yet it is only in the rudiments of its development, and its chief need is for human beings to fill and till its solitudes. Yet here in the Homeland we have a million and a quarter workless people, upon whom we are spending a hundred millions a year in unproductive and demoralising relief. We are overburdened with a population increasing by a thousand souls a day, for a large proportion of which we cannot now, and may never be able to provide work and wages. This condition of things is a reproach not only to professional statesmanship, but to the common sense of the British race. A people which continues to make so little use of such an unexampled heritage does not deserve it, and can scarcely justify any claim to its possession.

Sir Henry Page Croft said—

The late war had its good lessons. Nearly two million men from British possessions overseas came to join in the fight and to help the Mother country.

They came to save liberty and to defend the Crown which they love. Regarding migration, he recalled the time when he was stormed off the platform in Bournemouth for saying that if people could not be employed in this country, then give them the chance to get on overseas. He was profoundly glad that Mr. Clynes and Mr. Thomas had shown courage enough to favour that policy. Four days ago in the House of Commons he listened to a speech which he could only regard as tragic. The Minister for Labour, with all the statistical evidence at his disposal, told the country that for all time 800,000 unemployed was to be the normal figure here. That, surely, was a policy of despair. Give the unemployed a chance. If necessary pay their fares and equip them for a start overseas. It would be a cheap and safe investment, and the interest would be recovered in development.

We have a Labour Premier and England has a Labour Prime Minister, and I have confidence that our Premier, if he went to England, would uphold the dignity of his position. He would be able to discuss the matter with the Imperial authorities and point out to them that on their own statistics 800,000 people have to leave England every year for other parts of the world. As many as possible go to the United States and Canada, and many go to the Argentine. Surely it is in the interests of Great Britain and particularly of Western Australia that our vast unoccupied territory should receive some of this flow of population. The Imperial Government are paying one hundred millions a year to keep men from starvation. Why not give us that money? It is producing no return to-day; it is merely keeping the bodies and souls of people together.

Mr. Taylor: What has that to do with the motion?

Mr. THOMSON: I am making some suggestions that the hon. member does not seem to like. Our Premier could show the Imperial Government that if they advanced the money to us, we could take their people and place them in Western Australia. But we want very much better conditions than we have under the existing agreement. During the two years the agreement has been operating, I have criticised it, together with the general administration of the scheme, and I sincerely regret, for the sake of the State, that my criticism has been more than justified.

Mr. Taylor: That is all right so long as you think so.

Mr. THOMSON: I move this motion without any intention of indulging in earping criticism but with a full realisation of my responsibility as a member of the House and as the leader of a party whose organisation, composed of practical men, voices their fear that all is not well with the administration of the group scheme. I hope

the House will clearly indicate to the Government the course of action they should take. We are faced with a very serious position. The agreement clearly and distinctly lays down that we cannot charge settlers more than £1,000. Therefore the State cannot afford to receive settlers on those terms. I have no desire to prevent migrants from coming into the State. "Hansard" contains no reference showing that I have ever expressed any objection to people coming here. I have always maintained that there is room for thousands. But I contend that we cannot afford to continue an agreement under which we are to supply migrants with properties costing £1,700 each at the price of £1,000, thus making each of them a present of £700. To do that is not right. We have thousands of soldiers who fought for us, and do members think that those diggers, who did so well for us in the firing line, would be content to see migrants coming here and obtaining very much better conditions of settlement? Certainly not. I would not blame them for claiming similar treatment. If I were a soldier, I should do so. I want the House to give the Government an indication of its desires. If the Premier resolves to proceed to the Eastern States immediately, I assure him in behalf of members sitting behind me that the Government will have no factious opposition. I undertake to provide a pair for him during his absence if his party so desire.

Mr. Taylor: Could you give a pair out of that party of yours?

Mr. THOMSON: Even though my party be small, this matter must be carefully considered. I strongly urge the Premier to go to England and make a fresh agreement with the Imperial Government.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. W. G. Angwin—North-East Fremantle) [5.43]: I dealt with this matter in the House on Tuesday week in such a way as not to import into it any political bias.

Mr. Richardson: You were very fair indeed.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Anyone who reads the statement must concede that I gave a fair and concise account of the position as placed before me by the Department, together with my own views on the group settlements. I take exception to the remarks made by the member for Subiaco (Mr. Richardson) by way of interjection. He said that most people use common sense in reading an agreement.

Mr. Richardson: I did not use those words. I said I use common sense.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member said most people use common sense. I wrote down the words. While I admit that the people of Subiaco have common sense, in all probability also there is a little left in other parts of the world.

Mr. Richardson: I spoke about myself; I said I used common sense.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Attention was drawn to the position as it applied to group settlement. The first action I took, and which I think every member will agree was the right one, was to find out the actual position from the Crown Law Department with regard to the agreement. I interviewed the Solicitor General and he carefully scrutinised the agreement. He took it home with him and then discussed the matter with the Crown Solicitor, and when he saw me on the following day he said, "There is not the least doubt that you cannot charge on more than the £1,000." I merely mention that to show that I did not make a statement to the House until I was first aware of the position as it appeared to the legal advisers of the Crown. The question has been raised in respect of cost. I told hon. members the other night that the advisory committee had considered the position carefully, and had taken item by item in connection with the preparation of the farms. The figures were then placed before me and I read them to the House. They were based on the estimated future averages. I pointed out also that the first blocks started cost a little more because there had not been any experience gained, and the figures, on that account, were based on the averages that might be expected in the future. The average estimated by the department works out at £1,700, while on light land the amount is £1,600. Hon. members must be aware that the advisory committee have been dealing with group settlement almost from the inception, and to show that their statement can be borne out I have had a return prepared which on the previous occasion I did not present to the House. As a matter of fact, I did not worry about it very much. The statement was prepared by the accountant in charge of the financial position in respect of the groups, and it sets out what has been the actual cost on some of the groups that have been cleared to the full extent. I said to him, "Give me a few, and do not take the highest right through." For the information of hon. members I will read that statement—

To the Minister for Lands: I am appending hereunder a statement showing the cost on the various group blocks, so far as my books show at 30.6.24. In the monthly statements I show the direct cost against each block, that is to say, the amount paid out on account of sustenance, tractor charges, etc., but outside these direct charges there are various items which, on termination of the group will require to be apportioned to the blocks. Therefore, to give you a good idea of the cost against the blocks,

I have apportioned as far as possible at this stage, indirect charges which are as under—

Temporary camps, fodder, freight, general wages, horse hire, plant, harness, sundries, supervision, tools and equipment, interest and insurance:

Group No. 1—Location 9029, 25 acres cleared, house erected, £1,880 17s. 8d.

Group No. 7—Location 1642, 25 acres cleared, house erected, £1,278 6s. 8d.

Group No. 5—Location 9045, 25 acres cleared, house erected, £1,271 12s. 10d.

Group No. 8—Location 7944, 30 acres cleared, house erected, £1,117 18s. 2d.

Group No. 2—Location 8184, 28 acres cleared, house erected, £1,320 4s. 7d.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: They are not migrants.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, they are. I was down there the other day. I would like to explain that group 32 is the first group that was completed. It is on light land.

Group No. 32—Location 2010, 25 acres cleared, house erected, £621.

Group No. 16—Location 1764, 27½ acres cleared, house erected, £838 5s. 8d.

Group No. 15—Location 1811, 25 acres cleared, house erected, £1,308 1s. 9d.

Group No. 14—Location 1792, 25 acres cleared, house erected, £1,012 7s. 3d.

Charges have still to come to hand showing the total amounts of seed and wire used on these locations, therefore these charges will be increased. I have not taken into consideration the individual requirements of each settler such as horse, cows, spring cart, harness, etc.

This statement bears out almost entirely the estimate prepared by the advisory committee respecting the amounts of £1,700 and £1,600. The cost of equipping the farm has to be added. The question then arose that the agreement provided that, no matter what we spent, we could not charge on more than £1,000. It is set out definitely in the agreement—

The debt charge, including charge for supervision, shall not in any case exceed £1,000.

In other words, we cannot charge a migrant under the agreement on anything above £1,000. Let me put the position this way: if I agreed to build a house for £1,000 and the cost of the erection of that house came to £1,500 the debt charge under my agreement could only be £1,000; the additional £500 would remain my own cost. I drew the Premier's attention to the matter, and it was then that I made inquiries with regard to the interest. I know that some of the discussion, and in all probability the whole of it, will centre around the question of interest. When I raised the question in respect of the interest I was informed by the Solicitor General that all we could charge was the interest paid by the State. I had

pointed out to me, though not by the Solicitor General, these words in the agreement—

... together with such amount of interest as the State Government may have paid in respect of loans raised to defray such expenditure.

So far as this is concerned, the term "State Government" is expressive. If it had read "together with such amount of interest as may have been paid in respect of loans raised," then it would have included the whole of the interest. The terms of the agreement are such that as the agreement stands we cannot charge more than the amount actually paid by the State. Shall I put it this way: I make an arrangement to pay the Leader of the Opposition £1, but before I make that arrangement I approach the Premier and I enter into an agreement with him that he shall pay half, and the Premier arranges to pay 10s. towards that £1, and I pay it to the Leader of the Opposition. How much would I pay?

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: One pound.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Of course. But the hon. gentleman would recoup me 10s. and thereby I actually pay only 10s. I was only the means of conveyance. The term used in the agreement being so expressive, actually we cannot charge more than the two per cent., or one-third of the amount to be contributed by way of interest. That was not the intention of the agreement. Do not make any mistake about it. But the agreement is so worded. What the intention was and what we actually find in the agreement are two different things. In discussing the matter with the officers, I said, "What are you charging these people on the groups?" The reply was that the groups were being charged what the State paid. Then I asked, "The full amount?" and the reply was, "Yes, in accordance with the intentions when the agreement was entered into." There is no doubt the ex-Premier intended that the interest paid by the other parties to the agreement should be used to meet any losses that would probably be incurred under the scheme.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: That was quite clear.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I am informed that the agreement is not clear on that point, but that it is clear we can only charge what we pay. In support of the statement I made I was handed a letter to show how the interest had to be charged. This letter reads—

Financial basis of agreement—The basis of the agreement between the Commonwealth and the State will be (a) The State's responsibilities as set out in this letter; (b) The Commonwealth's responsibilities to borrow money for the State's purposes as set out; (c) The Commonwealth to pay to the State half the cost of such money for the first five years, to be retained by the State to cover any losses which may be sustained; (d) Should

the British Government at any time be induced to provide part of the cost, the amount so provided is to be deducted from the cost referred to in paragraph (c) before determination of the Commonwealth contributions.

There is no doubt that is the intention. When I turned the letter over I found it was dated the 5th December, 1921, whereas the agreement is dated September, 1922. This was not embodied in the agreement, though it was the intention and the basis on which the arrangement should be made. Let us use a little common sense concerning the agreement. In the first place the Government had to clear 25 acres fit for the plough, provide for the erection of a house, outbuildings and fencing, and arrange for a satisfactory water supply; the materials for the house to be provided by the State Government. The agreement goes on to say that the amount of 10s. a day had to be provided during the period the migrant was clearing the land.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Up to 10s.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Not exceeding 10s. It then provided that the man with a family was to have the first preference in the erection of a house. The crux of the agreement is in Clauses 6 and 7. I have been attacked because I used the schedule instead of the agreement itself. The conditions are embodied in the schedule. What would a court say if, after an Act had been passed providing for the payment of certain fees, taxes, wheel licenses or any other amount a man were to plead that he could not pay the fees because they were not contained in the Act but in the schedule? Those who ought to know better, however, say I made a mistake in not reading the agreement, and that what I stated was contained only in the schedule and not in the agreement. The schedule, however, is part of the agreement, and the terms are laid down therein. All through the agreement reference is made to the scheme, details of which are embodied in the schedule. Paragraph 6 of Schedule A states—

The State Government will provide each settler, to whom a farm is allotted, with reasonable equipment and stock.

Some of those who criticised me have endeavoured to import into their criticism a little political spleen.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Who has criticised you?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I will not mention any names, but I do not refer to the hon. member. I raised the question with the Solicitor General as to what "reasonable equipment and stock" meant. I was informed it meant "reasonably adequate."

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: That goes without saying.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I could not give these settlers one or two head of cattle, a horse and a pig, and when they took possession give them extra cattle and charge them with the additional cost. That could not be done under the agreement. We

are to provide reasonable equipment and stock ready for a farming occupation. Then we have to determine what reasonable equipment means.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: That which will enable them to cultivate their land and make a living.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That is so. On this point there must be a difference of opinion. The advisory committee said that a reasonable amount of stock would be 10 cows, one horse and some pigs. Reasonable equipment meant one cart, a set of harness, a single furrow plough, a harrow, tools to the value of £15, and a separator and can to the value of £10. This reasonable equipment and stock had to be provided within the £1,000. No matter when the settlers took possession, I could not tell them to do so until I had provided reasonable equipment and stock, and that anything they required over and above that would have to be charged for. That, at all events, is how I am advised. The schedule in paragraph 7 says—

On taking possession of his farm the settler will be required to enter into an undertaking to reimburse the State Government for the amount directly expended on clearing and otherwise preparing the farm for occupation, including statutory survey fees and providing equipment and stock, together with such amount of interest as the State Government may have paid in respect of loans raised to defray such expenditure. The charge for such supervision shall not exceed 7½ per cent. of the total debt charge to be assumed by the settler. Credit will be given for any sums to which the settler is entitled under Clause 4 above to the extent that at his request they were not actually drawn by him.

If the settler did not draw 10s. a day, this means, he would get an allowance up to 10s a day, and would be credited with the difference. The Leader of the Opposition knows that, in the first instance, a single man was paid 6s. a day, and was charged 6s. a day and not 10s. That is quite right. The paragraph continues—

The debt charge, including charge for supervision, shall not in any case exceed £1,000. Subject to the reimbursement of the State Government's expenditure on the foregoing basis, the settler shall not be required to make any payment for the farm allotted to him, either on account of the land in its undeveloped state or of the construction of railways, roads, and other general development work, apart from drainage, water conservation, and similar works which directly benefit the farm.

That means, I am informed, that whilst drainage can be charged for, subsidiary drainage that actually benefits the farm, the general or main drains cannot be charged to the settler. In a nutshell, we have entered into an agreement with the British and Imperial Governments to provide 6,000 farms

properly equipped and stock for occupation, for £6,000,000. In view of the figures I have given, how can we possibly do it? I have no feeling about this.

Mr. Thomson: Neither have I.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I should be acting unfairly and unjustly to members, and the general public if I did not at the first opportunity draw attention to the position as it stands.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: No one objects to your drawing attention to anything.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: What would members say if I let the session pass knowing full well that we had entered into an agreement to provide equipped farms, but also knowing that the officers of the department have definitely and clearly stated in writing that we cannot charge more than £1,000 for these farms, and that they are going to cost £1,700? I would be wrong if I neglected that duty, and would not be fit to occupy my position. I would rather relinquish the position than withhold this information. I have been criticised because I said this means a charge upon the State of £4,000,000. If we cannot charge more than £1,000 for each farm, and it is going to cost us £1,700, I am not far out in my estimate. This means at least £250,000 a year that the State will have to find for interest and sinking fund for the next 30 or 40 years, and this will be a free gift to the people coming out from England. No one regrets the position more than I do. The Premier agreed with me that until the agreement was amended in the direction promised to the ex-Premier, I would not be justified in bringing any additional persons to the State for group settlement.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Why is the agreement not amended?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I said last Tuesday week that the Leader of the Opposition had made representations as far back as last January for the agreement to be amended as promised. The Agent-General, Mr. Colebatch, cabled to him saying that he had met the chairman of the Overseas Settlement Committee, and it had been agreed that an amendment should be made.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Just before tea I was pointing out that in January last the ex-Premier was endeavouring to obtain alterations made in this State's agreement with the British Government. The Agent-General, Mr. Colebatch, took the matter up with the Home authorities, and got into communication with Mr. McNaghton, the Deputy Chairman of the Overseas Settlement Committee, the object being to include in our agreement the most favourable terms accorded to other States, as had been promised to Sir James Mitchell at the time he was negotiating in London. The Agent-General did very well in the matter, notwithstanding that he was in some anxiety at the time, being afraid that the political oppo-

nents of the Government might make capital out of the agreement. He was desirous that the matter would be settled before the general election, then pending. Mr. McNaghton and Mr. Colebatch got down to terms, and our Agent-General was promised that a draft agreement would be sent out here at an early date. Just after the Collier Ministry took office we were notified, first by the Commonwealth by telegram, and then by the Agent-General by letter, that the Overseas Settlement Committee could not agree to delete the 69,000 migrants included in the agreement, and could not allow any money spent on the wheat belt to be treated as a portion of the £6,000,000 which was to be free of interest. As regards third-class passengers paying their own fares, that would not matter if the condition as to the 69,000 migrants was deleted. I ascertained what amount had been spent on the wheat belt in this connection out of the money made available by the Commonwealth and British Governments for the migration scheme. It is only £3,000, so it matters little whether interest is charged on it or not. We did nothing more regarding our agreement until we saw in the Press that a new agreement was being negotiated between the Commonwealth and British Governments, which new agreement would cancel all previous migration agreements. Since then we have been trying to discover what are the terms of the new agreement, with regard to which document the present Government have not been consulted by the Commonwealth in any way, even up to this day. No communication whatever has been made to us by the Commonwealth regarding the terms of the new agreement. All we know about them is what we have gathered from the published reports of debates in the House of Commons. Only yesterday we received, in reply to a letter of ours, a communication from the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth to the effect that certain clauses of the new agreement were not yet finalised, and that meantime he could not give us any further information. Our Premier telegraphed yesterday to the Prime Minister pointing out our need for some information regarding the new agreement. A few weeks ago we received a letter from the Agent-General stating that he had again interviewed Mr. McNaghton regarding the new terms to be incorporated in our existing agreement. Mr. McNaghton is of opinion that for the moment it is unnecessary to amend our agreement, because the British Government are entering into a new agreement with the Commonwealth Government; but he assures us that the arrangement made previously, with regard to the most favourable terms, still holds. That information, however, does not put us in a position of being able to bring migrants here under the old agreement, until such time as we have an agreement actually signed. I think members will share my view that it is necessary to have a signed agreement, in order that we may know exactly what we are working on before we bring

out further group migrants. If in the new agreement the term as to £1,000 for ten persons is retained, then I, for my part, shall oppose Western Australia entering into an agreement at all. There are two points at issue. One is, can we charge over £1,000 against a group settler? The Crown's legal advisers say we cannot. The other point is of comparatively minor importance: can we charge the settler the full interest? I am advised by the Crown Law Department and by two outside lawyers that we cannot charge the full interest, but can charge only the rate paid by the State Government, plus one per cent.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: That was not intended.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I fully agree that it was not intended. The letter to which I have referred was brought to me in order to show what was intended but was not embodied in the agreement. I regret that these two points in doubt have stopped our group settlement work for the present. I cannot go on providing areas for additional group settlers when I am advised by the officers of the Lands Department and the Crown Law Department that the cost to Western Australia will be about £700 per farm over and above the amount this State is allowed to charge. I could not possibly continue under such conditions. No person regrets more than I do the situation that has arisen. Now I desire to reply to statements made here last night with regard to group settlement officers. A charge was made against those officers, and I think it only fair, seeing they cannot speak for themselves here, that I should quote from the file to show the exact position as regards the officers. With due respect to other people's opinions, I maintain that we have good officers in our State service. I wish to add that there is no man who has the interests of the State more at heart, or who will work harder for the State, than the Managing Trustee of the Agricultural Bank, Mr. McLarty.

Members: Hear, hear!

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Such things as were said last night are rather severe on a man who is doing his very utmost for the State. I have here a minute written by Mr. McLarty, which I desire to read. I presume I shall then have to lay it on the Table of the House. The minute was written a month prior to the agreement being entered into. It is addressed to the Minister for Lands, and reads as follows:—

I note your minute of 9th inst., and beg to inform you that the matter of reducing costs in connection with the development of group settlement blocks has been the main consideration of my officers and myself. Provided the capitalisation can be kept within reasonable limits, other difficulties are, comparatively, of minor importance.

The results achieved to date, especially as regards the work in the lower South-

West, are not such as to lead one to believe that settlement can be effected for anything near £750. As a matter of fact, the clearing costs are so excessive that in all probability the amount stated by you will be required for that work alone. The difficulty is accentuated by the fact that we are placing men on the land who are not only penniless, but inexperienced as well. They have to be financed for every penny of their requirements. The cost of everything is excessive, and it may be accepted that to-day it is costing nearly 100 per cent. more to settle a man than in pre-war times. It is, therefore, quite impossible to fully establish a man for £750 where any clearing has to be done. The heavy capitalisation involved in establishing a man is a very serious matter, but cannot be avoided.

Sustenance.—As you are aware, this matter has been fully discussed. It has not been found necessary to differentiate between married and single men where they are working on the same group. There is, however, no reason why a reduced amount should not be paid to single men if they are placed in separate groups.

Duty.—This is a matter which rests with the Commonwealth Government, and, judging from the difficulty we have had in getting rebates of duty paid on imported tractors, it will not be easy to get them to admit wire, galvanised iron, explosives, etc., free. I will have a list of dutiable articles prepared in order that the matter may be followed up.

Open country.—It would certainly be advisable to operate in this class of country, but I fear there is very little available near existing railways which is suitable for settlement. Practically all our land is more or less heavily timbered, and as a rule the plain country is of inferior quality. It is also invariably water-logged, and useless until drained. In my opinion it would be cheaper to buy partly improved land in the upper South-West than to clear green country in the heavily timbered lower South-West. The limitation of capitalisation all round is a consummation earnestly to be desired, but achievement is not easy unless settlers can be obtained who will do part of the financing. With a capitalisation not exceeding £750, it is possible to see success ahead, but with double the amount it is difficult to do so. Everything possible will be done to keep costs down, and the only way to do this is to leave more timber standing.

Ring-barking.—I agree that this would be a desirable improvement, provided definite areas can be released for settlement. (Signed) E. A. McLarty, General Manager. 23-8-22.

The minute shows that Mr. McLarty pointed out the position very clearly. I draw particular attention to his remark that "the clearing costs are so excessive that in all probability the amount stated by you (£750) will be required for that work alone." The member for Subiaco (Mr. Richardson) will recognise that the departmental officers were fully alive to the position.

Mr. Richardson: That was after the agreement was signed.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No; the agreement was signed in September of 1922, I think.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: It was arranged in London then; I do not think it was signed then.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: These officers have been using every effort to do their best in the matter of group settlers. They realise the difficulty, and Mr. McLarty assures me he has repeatedly drawn attention to the circumstance that the holdings must cost considerably more than the charge authorised. It is only fair that I should make this statement on behalf of the officers who have been accused—

Mr. Richardson: I did not accuse them.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: A statement was made that the officers were responsible for the position. The officers feel that statement keenly. When the proposed Royal Commission is appointed, they will, I think, be able to show that they are not responsible for the position.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: I certainly did not say they were responsible.

The Premier: That statement was made last night.

Mr. Richardson: I did not accuse the officials of that last night. I said that if they did give the advice I referred to they should bear some of the blame. Evidently the officials did not put up the figures.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: In conclusion I can only say that the statement I made to the House was one I felt I was compelled to make, occupying as I do my Ministerial position. I felt it would be wrong if I did not do so. The statement was not made for political purposes of any description. That was never in my mind. Hon. members know that I have supported the group settlement scheme as much as anyone else in this Chamber. When I looked into the conditions obtaining I found they were not what I had expected. As a matter of fact, the letter that I read just now and which referred to the conditions covering interest, particularly the portion regarding the contributions by the Governments that were to go to meet losses, also contained a statement that the charge for preparing the land must be a charge to the farmer. But that provision was not embodied in the agreement. The intention may have been there but we

cannot work upon intentions. Some say that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I have to work under the agreement. I regret the position that has arisen. I wanted to see these groups continued. Sir James Mitchell knows well—I am not committing a breach of confidence when I make the statement—that the Premier gave me strict instructions that the group settlements must continue as they were going on.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Hear, hear!

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Those were the Premier's instructions to me. In fact, the cable despatched to the Agent General and read at the annual Western Australian dinner in London set out that it was our intention to push on with the groups. Of course we knew we might alter some of the details. That, however, was nothing. We may hold different opinions regarding details, but so far as the group system in general was concerned, we intended to proceed. I was not aware, nor was the Premier aware, nor yet do I know that any hon. member of this Chamber was aware, that we could not make a full charge to the settler for the money spent on the development and equipment of his farm. We made no attempt to stop the operation of the scheme until our attention had been drawn to the position. As soon as it was disclosed to me, I discussed it with the Premier. Under his instructions I took up the matter with the Solicitor General who told me there was no doubt about the position under the agreement. The Solicitor General asked me to allow him to take the papers home to further consider the matter and to see if there was any doubt about the agreement, before I discussed the position further with the Premier. He also had the papers dealing with the other States and the next morning the Solicitor General assured me that there was not the least doubt about the position. That being so I think I was justified in giving the House the information as supplied to me, because of the expenditure involved.

Hon. SIR JAMES MITCHELL (Northam) [7.49]: No one will say that the Minister for Lands had not a perfect right or that it was not the Minister's duty to inform the House regarding the position as he found it. As to the speech by the member for Katanning (Mr. Thomson), he produced no new information that would show that this question is by any means a matter of urgency. I do not object to the course he has adopted, because I welcome the discussion. The Votes and Proceedings for 1922 contain a copy of the draft agreement which, therefore, was before every hon. member of the House as then constituted. No doubt hon. members studied it as was their duty. No doubt they read and understood every word of it. Thus the agreement

has been before the House for the past two years and a document that has been before us for so long a period can hardly be regarded as a matter of urgency now. Before replying to the statements that have been made, I would like to remind the House that there is one point to be remembered. In his speech the other night the Minister for Lands made it clear that if any agreement made with another State was better than the one arranged with Western Australia, any advantages gained by that State were to apply to us. The Minister stated that that promise had been made to me by the Imperial authorities and that the Agent General, Mr. Colebatch, had applied for an amendment and that it had been promised to him. Owing to some hitch because of the Federal agreement, the necessary amendments had not been completed. There is no reason why that should not have been done even if the Commonwealth were to ask us to make a fresh agreement. It might not suit us to make a fresh one. The agreement entered into with the Imperial Government on behalf of Western Australia was the first of its kind and I took the precaution to ask the British authorities to grant to us any advantage accorded another State. At the time, the agreement I secured was the best I could get. I thank the Minister for Lands for making that point clear to the House and also for his statement that the promise made to me had been confirmed to the Agent General. Another point to be remembered is that the agreement under discussion is one between Governments and does not extend to the settler.

The Minister for Lands: Schedule "A" extends to the settler.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: But it is an arrangement between Governments.

The Minister for Lands: The agreement is between Governments as to what we shall do for the settlers.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The settlers cannot ask for any conditions under the agreement to be applied to them.

The Minister for Lands: I will not raise that question.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Because you cannot do so.

The Minister for Lands: I can, but I will not.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: That point should be kept in mind. There is another thing I might have done had I been a Minister. After discovering that interest could not be charged under the wording of the agreement, the Minister could have had the matter rectified before saying much about it. It would have been rectified without trouble. I do not know what lawyers would say, but I do know that they can give two opinions. Instances have been known where a lawyer has given a written opinion of one man and a different opinion to another man on the same question, and that the one opinion has conflicted with the other.

The Premier: On top of which the lawyer has given a verbal opinion to still another party.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I am afraid lawyers forget sometimes. I will deal with various matters touched upon as I proceed with my remarks. Two points were made by the member for Katanning. The first was regarding the interest to be charged to the settlers and the second, that the amount that may be recovered from each settler cannot, according to the agreement, exceed £1,000. I contend that even under the agreement, interest must be paid on the money raised by the State. The State must pay for the money raised and the agreement fixes the rate to be paid by the settler during the group stage, when the interest is being capitalised. That is clear to my mind. I admit that when one knows what one desires to get in an agreement, one is apt to imagine it is set out clearly. Despite that, of course, there may be a doubt even though the agreement may have been drawn up by the most skilful lawyer. Instances have been known when such agreements have been torn to shreds by a lawyer who was still more skilful than the one who had drawn up the document. Clearly the intention was that the rate to be charged to the settler was the rate paid by the State for the money raised. It is one thing to pay interest on money and another to get a rebate of two-thirds, one-third from the Commonwealth Government and one-third from the Imperial Government. That represents a rebate to the State and clearly the intention was to help the State to finance the scheme. It would be of no advantage to the State Government to give a lower rate of interest to the settler. There must be losses, but I will deal with that point later on.

The Minister for Lands: According to my reading of the agreement the rebate of interest was not an advance to the State.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I contend that was an advantage and that it was intended we should have the benefit of that rebate. I know that was the intention. I think the agreement is clear on that point too. At any rate, the Minister will find that both Governments realised that that amount was to come to the State and if the Minister had approached the Imperial Government, they would have told him so. It was set out in a letter that we could keep that money. It is clear under the agreement that we shall receive those payments. That arrangement applies during the short period of group working. The Minister states that the rate applying during the group work is to be the rate of 2 per cent. on 6 per cent. money.

The Minister for Lands: For five years.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: No, the Minister is wrong there. Even so, it is clear that it was to apply during the group stage because the interest is capitalised only during the group period.

The Minister for Lands: That does not make any difference.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: But it would not work out at £1,200,000 as he said it would.

The Minister for Lands: Yes, but it is for five years.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The Minister must not be obstinate. When the settler takes possession of his block, he has to sign a mortgage and pay the ordinary rate of interest. During the group period, the supervision has to be paid for as a charge, together with the interest we pay for the money. After the mortgage is provided, the interest to be paid will be at the same rate as that applying to other persons. That is the position regarding interest and I have no doubt we shall have no difficulty on that point. We shall get the other Governments to agree that the interpretation is the one I have submitted to the House, and that is the one the Government here and the other Governments should adopt. It would be ridiculous if we did not get that money.

The Minister for Lands: They are pretty cute about what they have to pay.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: That makes no difference. The Governments will have to pay. I understood the Minister to say he realised we were entitled to the money.

The Minister for Lands: I say it was the intention according to the letter.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: So far as I can read the agreement, it is quite clear. We are to get the rebate of interest and retain it. If the Minister had approached the Imperial Government they would have agreed that that was the intention. This rebate is to cover all losses. The Minister says no, that he is not to have this money. But he is to have it. The agreement is an agreement between Governments, and the settler does not come into it, is no part of it. That is all I can say about the interest. I hope the Minister will agree with me and, if necessary, get the confirmation of the two Governments on that point. I have never had the slightest doubt about it. The Minister says a debit may be made against the settler up to £1,000 but no more. That amount was fixed because it meant 6,000 settlers, and because it was regarded as enough to enable a man to be settled in a group. Of course, we can spend any amount of money if we want to, and if the Minister's figures, produced the other night as an estimate, were to be adopted it would mean £1,700. But it would be easy to question many of the figures used by the Minister.

The Minister for Lands: The expert officers got them up; I did not.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Still, it would be easy to question them.

The Minister for Lands: They said it was the first time an estimate had been given by the board.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: No, we have had many estimates. What the agreement says is that up to the time a man becomes an occupier, the debit must be not more than £1,000. After he becomes an occupier he can do as he pleases. Let the Minister get a legal opinion on that question.

The Minister for Lands: His holding must be reasonably equipped and stocked.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: That is so. But after a man becomes an occupier he can incur further liabilities if he chooses. The amount of £1,000 covers the expenditure up to the time the settler becomes an occupier. I supplied the clearing costs to the House last session. Of course, the early groups were undoubtedly costly. Still, I believe that farms can be made and will be made at a cost much below the Minister's estimate.

The Minister for Lands: The estimate is based on the future.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The cost of many of the items given we know to be erroneous. It is not entirely necessary that a man should have ten cows. Some of the farms may be used for various purposes. My idea was that the settler should have a few cows and a few sows.

The Minister for Mines: Would that be proper equipment?

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Yes, more can be made out of pigs than out of cows.

The Minister for Mines: That proposition is all right on paper.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: That proposition is working all right in many places in my district. The hon. member comes from New South Wales, where farmers are making money out of pigs.

The Minister for Mines: They have been 60 years reaching that stage. It took them ten years to get beyond the bare living stage.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I question the Minister's figures because I know the cost of many of the things included in the list. There is nothing at all to warrant the attitude taken up by the Minister. We must give the settler a chance to make a living on his farm. That is all that was intended. He need not necessarily do it out of cows alone. He can earn his living from the land in several ways. However, there is nothing to prevent the Government making further advances if they wish. The Minister will agree that this £1,000 applies to work done before occupation.

The Minister for Lands: No, I do not agree. More than that has been spent already.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Well, the settlers are required to enter into an undertaking to reimburse the Government the money expended. The State cannot afford to lose any of the expenditure beyond £1,000. If the agreement has to be

altered in that regard, it ought to be altered at once. Except in respect of a few of the early groups, which were undoubtedly expensive, I question whether the cost will exceed the £1,000. The agreement was made as the result of the policy of the party to which I belong. We believe in immigration. We believe that our land should feed our people. To feed our people we must have more people to cultivate the land. Each year we send away £2,000,000 for food. All that ought to be grown in the State. We believe that Australia should be made a safe place, and so we entered actively upon the immigration policy. I do not say, of course, that the Minister for Lands agreed with our policy, but I do know that he approved of group settlement. He knew every detail of group settlement, because I took him frequently to the groups and in his presence freely discussed matters with the officers. I know he had the agreement for two years and that, being very thorough, he would read it.

The Minister for Lands: I understood that the settler would have to pay whatever it cost.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The Minister was told everything. Even so, if the agreement be not right it is the Minister's duty to get it altered.

Mr. Thomson: That is what we want.

Mr. Taylor: You chose a nice way of going about it.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: No, you wanted the discussion, a discussion that would have come better after the agreement had been altered. I want the agreement altered as much as does anybody, if it be necessary. Our arrangements should be altered if better terms are given to anybody else. The Minister has said he intends to get the Victorian agreement. The mover of the motion said the Victorian agreement, insofar as it guaranteed losses up to £300, was better than ours. What nonsense! We are getting £1,200,000 to cover losses, whereas Victoria will get only £300 per settler. The Victorian agreement is ours for the asking, and I hope the Minister will ask for it. The Commonwealth Government, it seems, are now putting up another proposal; but in the meantime let us have the Victorian agreement.

The Minister for Lands: How is it possible for me to get it when the Agent General in London cannot get it?

The Premier: The Agent General has not been able to get anything because of the negotiations between the Imperial Government and the Commonwealth.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The Commonwealth Government ought to get out of the way until we fix it up. Of course I do not mean that the Minister himself should get it; I mean that he should try

for it through the Agent General, who says the Victorian agreement is ours for the asking. If it is better than ours, let us have it. We are entitled to it. Ours was the first agreement, and we were assured that if any later agreement contained better terms than did ours, we should have those improved terms. I am glad Ministers are endeavouring to get the British Government to carry out their promise in that regard. I have no doubt it will be done. In the past the Minister more than once said that in his year a greater number of men came to the State than ever before. Of course, in those days everybody was perfectly willing that the State should bear the full expense of migration.

The Minister for Lands: We are paying it now.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: No, we are not.

The Minister for Lands: Yes, we are.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I do not think we could face immigration at all under the old arrangement. Thanks to Mr. Hughes, the fares are now paid. For 75,000 people the fares would amount to a million of money.

The Minister for Lands: Last year, from the sustenance we gave out, we paid £10,000 at this end.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: But formerly we paid the sustenance and the passages also. On the passages alone we are saving £1,000,000 in respect of 75,000 migrants. That is paid by the British and the Federal Governments. Then the rebate of interest amounting to £1,200,000 will certainly come to us. If in Western Australia the policy of immigration paid for by the State was approved by the people, how could this arrangement be disapproved? There are critics—I am not referring to Ministers, because they support immigration—who never thought of asking for anything. There are people who say we ought to get more, but who never dreamt that we would get anything until the agreement was arranged. Let me say to the Minister for Lands that the 20 per cent. is quite enough to cover losses. The financial position of the State was altogether saved by soldier settlement and immigration. Before we started actively to settle soldiers on the land and bring people to this State five years ago, there was unemployment. There would be unemployment to-day but for the fact that people have been settled on the land.

Mr. Thomson: There is none now judging by the reports in the Press.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Five years ago there were 3,000 people out of work and 11,000 soldiers on their way back to Western Australia. Land settlement has kept the people at work. Unemployment comes when people ease off, when fewer orders are given for work, and when less work is provided by

individuals. Under the soldier settlement scheme the rebate is 2½ per cent. for five years, or 12½ per cent. in all, but a rebate has to be allowed to the soldiers and 5 per cent. was left to the State to cover losses. The rebates on account of the soldier settlement scheme are paid into a special account and, allowing for any ascertained losses up to the time I left office, there was £130,000 to the credit of the fund. This fund should now grow rapidly, and after the losses have been paid there should be a considerable amount in the fund. When the time comes I hope something will be done with that money for the soldiers. Let us compare the 5 per cent. to cover losses under the soldier settlement scheme with the 20 per cent. under this scheme. Surely if the 5 per cent. goes anywhere near to covering losses under the soldier settlement scheme, 20 per cent. will cover the losses under the migration scheme!

Mr. Thomson: Will it?

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: There was a credit in the fund when I left office, but of course losses may have come in later. However, the fund will be a substantial one, and I think all the losses will be covered. The member for Collie (Mr. Wilson) could tell us.

Mr. Thomson: He gave us some startling figures the other night.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: He has told the House that 266 soldiers appeared before the Commission. Therefore the losses are not likely to be great.

The Minister for Lands: A lot of it has gone—£10,000 on the Noombling estate, £8,000 on the Piesse's Brook estate, and £3,000 on another estate.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: We have paid out a tremendous lot of money, but notwithstanding the rebates of interest, after paying the ascertained losses, there was £130,000 in the fund.

The Minister for Lands: There is not that amount in the fund now.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: How much is there?

The Minister for Lands: There is under £100,000 now and a lot of writing-down to be done yet.

The Premier: There is £380,000 owing in interest.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Of course there is. The interest is charged up in June and the people under the Act have two months' grace, which does not expire till the end of August. When they have had time to pay, there will not be much owing. The amount of interest outstanding is not excessive. The amount last year was £180,000, and as the soldiers have to pay interest on it, the State loses nothing except in the case of bad accounts. As regards the interest owing by soldiers, there is nothing to make a song about.

Mr. Thomson: We are not discussing soldiers.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The hon. member seemed very much concerned about the agreement. I rather think that the hand is the hand of Esau and the voice is the voice of Jacob. I think this motion was really moved by someone outside the House.

Mr. Thomson: That is an old gag and is somewhat played out.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: It is a very old quotation. I listened attentively to what the hon. member had to say. He did not seem at all comfortable in moving the motion. There was a time when he approved of group settlement and I hope he approves of it now. I have a letter from him approving of settlement at Nornalup.

Mr. Thomson: I wish you would read it.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I do not know whether I am permitted to read it, but since I am challenged, I hope the House will allow it.

Mr. SPEAKER: Has it any relation to the subject under discussion?

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: It refers to Nornalup.

The Premier: There are groups at Nornalup, or there will be.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I hope I may read the letter.

Mr. Thomson: Read the whole of it, and not what suits you.

Mr. SPEAKER: It will have to be laid on the Table of the House.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I am willing to read it.

Mr. SPEAKER: As there seems some doubt, I think it will require the permission of the House. There being no objection, the hon. member may proceed.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The letter reads—

Katanning, April 11th, 1921. Dear Mitchell, I don't know if the article in the "West" is inspired, and as you know me well enough I don't want to embarrass you, but if the only thing that is going to debar me from realising one of my ambitions, namely, to attain Cabinet rank, is the territorial position of my electorate, it is pretty hard for me. I have had 6½ years experience in Parliament. I had the largest majority of any Country Party candidate at the recent election. Our ideas regarding the development of the Nornalup area are on a par. I have made a success of my own business and believe I could assist you both in administration and in the House. If not too late, I trust because Katanning happens to be where it is, it is not going to penalise me. Yours faithfully, A. Thomson.

Mr. Thomson: I hope it will be laid on the Table.

Mr. SPEAKER: It will be.

Mr. Taylor: It is not a file.

Mr. SPEAKER: It is a document which the House has permitted the hon. member to read. It is not strictly in order; therefore, the House has given permission for it to be read, and I hope the hon. member will lay it on the Table.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I have no further use for the letter. The hon. member said "Our ideas for the development of the Nornalup area are on a par." If he had not challenged me, I would not have read it. I have another letter.

Mr. Thomson: You can read that, too.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: No, I think I will keep it as a souvenir.

Mr. Thomson: I shall give an explanation of the letter later on.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The agreement was before the hon. member and the whole of the circumstances attending group settlement have been known to the hon. member for two years, and yet he has decided to come here to-day and get the matter treated as one of urgency. It is not for the House to instruct Ministers to take action with the Imperial Government. There are no means by which we can instruct them. They will not even be informed by the hon. member's speech. He did not tell them what they ought to do beyond stating that the Premier ought to go Home. I should like him to go Home.

The Minister for Works: I think this is a conspiracy to get rid of him.

Mr. Taylor: Perhaps he wants to get the Premier's job.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The hon. member accused me of wilfully misleading the people of the State. I have never done anything of the sort. All the documents have been before the people, and I have told them all I knew about group settlement. I certainly consider the wording of the agreement to be quite clear. I believe that £1,200,000 will be raised to cover losses.

The Minister for Lands: The wording is clear, but it does not say that.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Yes, it does say that; that is the intention. If the Minister believes we shall not get that rebate—

The Minister for Lands: We shall try to get it.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Then he has a right to stop the work and get the matter cleared up. I am certain the Government will get that money, and will get any alteration in the agreement necessary to make the position clear. I am not a lawyer and I know that lawyers sometimes do give the opinion that is wanted. Perhaps they thought they would be pleasing the Minister if they gave him this opinion. I think the Minister would have been wise if before making his statement he had obtained the Victorian agreement. What we desire is to settle the country with the aid of money that comes to us from the British and Commonwealth Governments. I thought the agreement covered every likelihood of loss, and that all the money expended would be paid by the settler receiving the benefit of it. I believe that the cost will not, except in the case of the early groups, come to anything like the amount set out in the Minister's estimate.

The Minister for Lands: The officer's estimate; not mine.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: In any event the State must not lose and cannot lose by the work that has been done. I have not seen the Victorian agreement, but if it is a better one than ours, then it is ours for the asking.

Mr. Thomson: Do you mean to say that while you were Premier you did not see the Victorian agreement?

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I have never seen it.

Mr. Thomson: Well!

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The Minister has only just received it.

Mr. Thomson: It has been in existence for some time.

The Minister for Lands: There is a typed copy on your file.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I have never seen it.

Mr. Thomson: You ought to have done so; it has been available for 12 months.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I do not know whether it is better than ours, or what provisions are contained in it.

Mr. Thomson: During the elections you said you did not think it was as good as ours.

The Minister for Lands: When the basis of a thing has been laid down, it is not difficult to improve upon it.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: That is what I was told by a better authority than the hon. member. I refer to a representative of the Immigration Department in the Old Country. If it be better than ours, let us have it; we must get the advantage of it. There was no reason for moving the adjournment of the House on a question of this sort. It was not a matter of urgency.

Mr. Thomson: Good God! Millions of pounds are at stake and it is not a matter of urgency.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: There is not a penny at stake just now. The Minister told the House that he had stopped immigration until he got an agreement that satisfied him.

The Minister for Lands: Not immigration, but group settlers.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: We are told the Victorian agreement will satisfy him. What will happen now?

Mr. Thomson: We will still show a loss.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: We will not show a loss. There was no special urgency in the matter. The Minister is quite capable of dealing with it, and having the Victorian agreement applied to us as promised if he thinks it is better than ours. I am sorry so much time has been taken up with this matter.

The Minister for Lands: The Victorian agreement was asked for by your office in January last.

Mr. Thomson: And he says he never saw it.

The Minister for Lands: We received a letter from London in February that it would be agreed to for this State.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I was told what its provisions were. Mr. Colebatch said he would have them embodied in an agreement to be submitted to us.

The Minister for Lands: That is what I say.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The document was to come from the London end. I believe the House realises that under the present agreement we got the first assistance we ever had for immigration. I am sure that £1,200,000 would more than cover any losses on the agreement, and give us something towards railways and other works.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON (Williams-Narrogin) [9.35]: I thank the Minister for Lands for his clear statement of the position of groups settlement under the existing agreement. Seeing that he had the advice of the Crown Law Department that he could charge the group settler only £1,000 for his holding, stock and improvements, and that he possessed the estimates of the officials of the Lands Department that the holdings were to cost £1,700 each, he could do nothing else but suspend further operations under the agreement until he was satisfied that the State would be able to charge the settler the whole cost of the improvements, with interest. That has always been the principle under which land settlement has been conducted in Western Australia. Returned soldiers, our own settlers' sons, all who have come from the goldfields or the Eastern States and settled on the land under the Industries Assistance Board, the Agricultural Bank, or the Soldiers' Settlement Scheme, have always accepted the liability of paying the full debt to the State, with interest. Whilst I am anxious to see an active immigration policy pursued, and that this State plays its part in the great work of transferring the unemployed of the Old Country to our idle acres, I am not prepared to subscribe to the principle of permitting migrants to come here on better terms than are accorded to our own people or to make them a gift of £700 each. It appears to me that the Government have taken the only course open to them in suspending the operations of the present agreement until this matter has been cleared up. The group settler who comes 12,000 miles from England under the agreement would, it appears, have a claim that the conditions under which he travels that long distance should be put into effect when he arrived here. The matter is of serious importance to the State, and the member for Katanning did no less than his duty in bringing it before the House in this way. If the only result of the debate has been to secure the clear, fair, and comprehensive statement made by the Minister for Lands, the hon. mem-

ber was more than justified in his action. We have been told that Senator Wilson, a Federal Minister, inaugurated a new and better agreement for the settlement of migrants in Australia. It is nearly three months since Senator Wilson returned and yet the State Government, in spite of repeated requests, have not so far been made aware of the conditions of the new Federal agreement, the benefits of which we are told, through the Press, are to be shared by this State. This is another example of the general disregard of the Federal authorities for the vital interests of Western Australia. They treat this State with arrant discourtesy, and through their attitude are sacrificing our best interests. It is a shameful thing that after practically three months we should have withheld from us information as to what has transpired, though we are told through the Press that a much better agreement for migration has been the result of Senator Wilson's visit to England, and that its terms may be applied to every State in the Commonwealth. Everyone who has read the newspapers knows that both Victoria and New South Wales have better agreements than ours. It is true our State laid the foundations, but the other States have secured better agreements because they are permitted to charge the migrant for the land he gets, and there is no limitation as to the amount charged to set him up. A migrant going to Victoria or New South Wales under their agreements has to pay the full cost of his farm, improvements, stock and land. So it should be a very easy matter for this sovereign State to negotiate a similar agreement with the Imperial authorities. My object in taking part in the debate is to endorse the suggestion thrown out by the member for Katanning that the Premier should visit England and see that the matter is put upon a proper footing. We have in the past derived considerable benefits from the visits of our Premiers to the Old Country, and I am certain if the Premier went there he would uphold the position as well as it has been upheld by any of his predecessors. If there are any people with whom we are dealing in matters of finance in the old world who have any doubts about our Labour Government, I am sure the visit of the Premier would do a good deal towards allaying such doubts. If the Premier goes to England on this mission, he will carry with him the best wishes of all who stand for the progress of this State. The Leader of the Country Party has stated that if the Premier makes the trip while Parliament is sitting, the Country Party will take no action that will affect the fate of the Government. I take it that if Mr. Collier adopts the suggestion—

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member must not refer to another hon. member by name.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: If the Premier went to England and arranged an agreement on a proper footing, he would be doing a work of great Empire importance. For my part I would deem it my duty to take no part in any attempt to embarrass the Government during his absence. Our party may be small in numbers, but we may be in a position to prevent the Government from suffering embarrassment such as was sought to be meted out to them on the first day of the session. We would adopt the attitude we took up then of giving the Labour Party a fair deal, if its leader went to England as a result of the request made by the member for Katanning. I urge the Government seriously to consider the adoption of the suggestion so that the Premier may place this question of group settlement on a proper basis, and give us a Western Australian agreement instead of one that I regard as mainly a South-Western agreement.

Mr. THOMSON (Katanning — in reply) (8-45): I feel that I need offer no apologies to the House for having given it an opportunity to debate this matter. I cannot congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on the attitude he has adopted.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: I did not expect you to do so.

Mr. THOMSON: I presume, Mr. Speaker, I am permitted on this occasion to state the reasons why the letter I hold in my hand was written.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: It is marked "Confidential."

Mr. THOMSON: Yes, and I desire to draw the attention of the House to that fact. The production of the letter shows the high standard of honour to which the late Premier has attained.

Mr. George: You practically insisted.

Mr. THOMSON: This letter has been held over my head in the sight of all Western Australia during the last 12 or 18 months. Indeed, a paper which the member for Swan (Mr. Sampson) has the privilege of owning did me the honour of publishing a cartoon of me above printed matter stating that I had absolutely insisted and demanded and begged for a portfolio, and that I had shed tears. Let me congratulate the hon. member on the lofty sentiments which he expressed in his paper.

Mr. Sampson: I did not express them.

Mr. THOMSON: As a matter of explanation, I desire to state the reasons why the letter was written. After the 1921 election I was invited by one of the ex-Premier's Ministers to go to Albany. Two of the ex-Premier's Ministers were of the party, as was also a member of this House. We went out fishing on a launch, and then and there I was asked by one of those Ministers what were my views on group settlement. I had been at Normalup Inlet, and I was convinced that that area had vast possibilities for settlement. I told the Minister in question that anyone who had seen the South-West must realise that the only

way to open up and develop that portion of the State was by group settlement. He then used my christian name, saying "Well, Alec, those being your views, I think the probabilities are that a portfolio will come your way if you are willing to accept it." I said, "If it comes my way, I certainly will accept it." I offer no apology to the State of Western Australia for having made that statement.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: No one wants you to offer an apology.

Mr. Griffiths: The ambition is laudable.

Mr. THOMSON: If any member will turn up the files of the "West Australian" of that period he will find an article somewhat on the lines which I shall state, an article inspired, like a great many other things, by the ex-Premier. I regret that I have not the article here. I carried it with me constantly during the general election, because the story had been widely spread that I had begged for a portfolio. The article stated that there were in the Country Party two men whose opportunities for gaining the vacant portfolio were good, and my name was mentioned, as also was that of Mr. H. K. Maley. We were looked upon as two possibilities. But the article went on to say that in view of the territorial position of Katanning, in the South-West, and in view of the fact that the Government already included a Minister sitting for an adjoining constituency, Albany, the probabilities were that the portfolio would go to Greenough. I admit that, in the light of my previous experience of the present Opposition Leader, that article should have been quite enough to let me know where the vacant portfolio was going. But foolishly, and at the request of friends who believed I was quite equal to Ministerial office, I wrote the letter which I had the pleasure of dragging out of the Opposition Leader to-night. I am glad the people of Western Australia can now read that letter. Let them decide whether there is any begging and praying for a portfolio in it.

The Premier: That was the second letter you wrote.

Mr. THOMSON: That remark reflects great credit on the ex-Premier. I leave the people of Western Australia to judge who has acted fairly in the matter. Now I place this confidential document on the Table of the House. One regrets having to deal with personal matters. When moving the adjournment of the House I made up my mind that I for my part would eschew the personal element altogether. I have endeavoured to do so, and I shall endeavour to do so now. In moving this motion I was actuated by a sincere desire to give the Chamber an opportunity of discussing the merits of the statement as to group settlement made by the Minister for Lands. I appeal to any fair-minded man or woman in Western Australia, having before him or her the statement repeated to-night by the Minister for Lands and the statement made to-night by the Leader of the Opposition, the gentleman who entered into this agreement, which of the two has made a correct and truthful statement regarding Western Australia's present position under the migration agreement?

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: The men and women of Western Australia are good judges.

Mr. THOMSON: The argument put up by the Minister is irrefutable.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: We put up the agreement.

Mr. THOMSON: The Opposition Leader has admitted that it was intended the whole of the interest should be charged.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: I say the agreement provides for that.

Mr. THOMSON: The Opposition Leader also said that he certainly thought that was the case. There is the position. The hon. gentleman who has been administering the group settlements from their inception, who is the father of group settlement, says that he honestly thought—

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: I did not say "honestly." I do not use that word.

Mr. THOMSON: The hon. gentleman said he certainly thought that all moneys expended on the groups would be repaid by the settlers. That is the statement he has made to-night. He has said that that was his belief. On the other hand we have the statement of the Minister for Lands, clearly and conclusively showing the opposite. Heaven knows I proved the opposite by documentary evidence, and by quotations from the "Hansard" record of a speech by Mr. Colebatch, who was the ex-Premier's right hand man. Further, I proved the contrary from figures given by the ex-Premier to the Overseas Delegation.

The Premier: We shall have to take a vote on this motion.

Mr. THOMSON: I also proved it by quotations from the agreement into which we have so unfortunately entered. The ex-Premier further stated that he knew nothing about the Victorian agreement. Yet he condemned that agreement.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: I did not condemn it.

Mr. THOMSON: We of this party are sincere in our desire to see Western Australia prosper, and we are convinced that the State cannot continue under the conditions which face it to-day in the matter of group settlement. I commend the Collier Government for placing the true facts of the case before the Western Australian people. Too long have we had the airy wave of the hand and the dictum, "I assure you it's all right." When we come down to cold, hard facts, we have to deal with an agreement into which we have entered. It is all very well for the ex-Premier to say, "This is an agreement which was entered into by Governments." He also says that we can have the Victorian agreement. As to that we have at the present moment only his assurance, so far as I know.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: You have also the assurance of the Minister for Lands.

Mr. THOMSON: The ex-Premier's statement has been confirmed to some extent by Mr. Colebatch, who cabled out certain information; and I think there was no one more angry than the ex-Premier when that information appeared in the Press. I know that that information was of great service to me during my election campaign. Mr. Colebatch cabled

that he was then endeavouring to get the Victorian agreement brought into effect as regards Western Australia. As for the ex-Premier's statement that he had never seen the Victorian agreement, we learned to-night from the Minister for Lands that from his own office the ex-Premier had written to the Imperial Government asking that Western Australia's agreement should be brought into line with Victoria's. What are we to believe? We are faced with an extremely serious problem. I can do no more than I have done. In my opinion the question is of such urgent importance that I back up the suggestion of the member for Williams-Narrogin (Mr. E. B. Johnston). Senator Wilson has been back in Australia for three months, and still our Ministers do not know what is in the new agreement between the Commonwealth and Great Britain. We have the assurance of our Premier to that effect. The seriousness of the position demands that the hon. gentleman should at the earliest possible moment go to Melbourne and get right down to bedrock there. In all humility I say again that if the Premier will go to Great Britain Western Australia will obtain a much better agreement.

The Premier: I do not want to go, but since the Opposition insist on it I suppose I must.

Mr. THOMSON: I am speaking quite seriously. I was never more earnest in my life. I recognise that the hon. gentleman now occupying the position of Premier of Western Australia will, if he goes Home, by personal contact with British Ministers obtain infinitely better terms and conditions for this State than it has under the present agreement. There is no other course open to him.

Mr. George: Of course you will not criticise him when he comes back.

Mr. THOMSON: I believe the present Administration will accord to members of this Chamber the right to criticise any administrative act of the Government. That is what we are sent here for.

Mr. George: You have always had that right.

Mr. THOMSON: No! Members occupying the front Opposition bench would never yield that right to me. In their opinion I hardly had the right to live. Certainly they thought I had no right to be in this House.

Mr. George: You imagine yourself to be of enormous importance.

Mr. Griffiths: He might be an important as you.

Mr. Corboy: He could not be less important.

Mr. THOMSON: In all sorrow I say that all the criticisms which I uttered from the Cross Ministerial Bench have, unfortunately for the State of Western Australia, proved to be only too well justified. I ask leave to withdraw my motion for the adjournment of the House.

Mr. SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion be withdrawn?

Opposition Members: No.

Question put, and negatived on the voices.

Mr. Taylor: Divide!

The House divided.

Mr. Taylor: Before you appoint the tellers, Mr. Speaker, is not the hon. member who moved that the House adjourn compelled to vote for the motion?

Mr. Holman: Cover your head!

Mr. Taylor: No, that Standing Order was repealed long ago.

Mr. SPEAKER: Undoubtedly hon. members who called "Aye" must pass to the right of the Chair.

Member: The new Speaker is too clever for you.

Mr. Thomson: That is the second thud to-night.

Division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	11
Noes	25

Majority against ... 14

Ayes.

Mr. Angelo	Mr. North
Mr. Barnard	Mr. Sampson
Mr. Davy	Mr. Stubbs
Mr. Denton	Mr. Taylor
Mr. George	Mr. Richardson
Sir James Mitchell	(Teller.)

Noes.

Mr. Angwin	Mr. Lutey
Mr. Brown	Mr. McCallum
Mr. Chesson	Mr. Millington
Mr. Collier	Mr. Munste
Mr. Corboy	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. Coverley	Mr. Thomson
Mr. Griffiths	Mr. Troy
Mr. Heron	Mr. A. Wansbrough
Mr. Holman	Mr. C. P. Wansbrough
Mr. E. B. Johnston	Mr. Willcock
Mr. Kennedy	Mr. Withers
Mr. Lamond	Mr. Wilson
Mr. Lindsay	(Teller.)

Question thus negatived.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by Mr. Wilson leave of absence for two weeks granted to the member for Murchison (Mr. Marshall) on the ground of urgent private business.

BILL—NOXIOUS WEEDS.

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

BILL—UNCLAIMED MONEYS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

The PREMIER (Hon. P. Collier—Boulder) [9.7] in moving the second reading said: The Bill is required to amend the provisions of the Government Savings Bank Act, 1906, which relates to the disposal of unclaimed moneys. Under that Act, prior to the passing of the Unclaimed Moneys Act of 1912, by virtue of Sections 32 and 33, it was provided that moneys

lying to the credit of depositors in Government savings banks and not been operated upon by way of deposit or withdrawal, after the lapse of 17 years, became forfeit to the Crown. Under the Unclaimed Moneys Act, 1912, which dealt with the disposal of unclaimed moneys in private banks and other institutions, it was provided that money lying to the credit of depositors in those private institutions and not operated upon for a period of seven years, became forfeit to the Crown and was paid into Consolidated Revenue. Prior to that Act, the money became the property of the banking institutions themselves. The Act of 1912 also amended the Government Savings Bank Act of 1906. That is to say, it brought the provisions of the Government Savings Bank Act into line with the conditions applying to the private banking institutions. That meant that moneys lying to the credit of depositors in the Government savings banks became forfeitable to the Crown after a period of seven years, during which the depositor concerned had not operated upon his account. Sections 32 and 33, to which I have referred, were inadvertently repealed. It was never intended that the Unclaimed Moneys Act, 1912, should apply to the funds affected by the Government Savings Bank Act, although in fact it did do so. The object of the Bill is to amend the Act of 1912 by omitting the references to the Government Savings Bank and so restoring Sections 32 and 33 to the Government Savings Bank Act, 1906. By that means we shall establish the status quo. If the Bill becomes law, any future deposits in the Government Savings Bank will be secure to the depositors for a period of 17 years, as formerly. It is desirable that the rights of depositors shall be established under the Act, because many people deposit money in the Government Savings Bank with the idea of providing for old age, or of making provision for their burial or other expenses. They leave the money in the bank in the belief that it is secure for a long period of years during which interest is accumulated. It will be in the interests of the depositors that their security shall not be weakened.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Of course, the money would be paid on application.

The PREMIER: No doubt in practise the Government would make payment to depositors whose money had been left in the bank over long periods, but the fact remains that as the law stands to-day the depositor would have no statutory claim upon money left in the bank for more than seven years.

Mr. Taylor: You have no record of any such claim being disallowed?

The PREMIER: But the point is that the depositor would have no legal claim to the money. It is as well to place beyond all doubt the rights of the depositors of money in the Government Savings Bank as suggested. This is purely a formal matter, and I think the House will agree to the passage of the Bill. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. Sir James Mitchell debate adjourned.

BILL—CLOSER SETTLEMENT.

Message.

Message from the Governor received and read recommending the Bill.

Second Reading.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. W. C. Angwin—North-East Fremantle) [9-14] in moving the second reading said: The Bill is somewhat similar to those that have been before the Legislative Assembly on former occasions. There are one or two slight alterations in the present measure as compared with previous Bills discussed by hon. members, but it is principally on the lines approved by a large number of members when last the Bill was before us. This Bill embraces all lands, with the exception of pastoral lands. On one occasion when the Bill was in the Council a Royal Commission was appointed. That Commission did not complete its work, but at all events it went so far as to recommend that conditional purchase lands should be included in the Bill. Throughout the State we have large areas of land belonging to one owner, areas portions of which are held in fee simple whilst the balance is still under conditional purchase. Personally I cannot see any difference between conditional purchase and the Crown grant.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: There is, of course.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: With the exception that the man holding the Crown grant has no more to pay to the State on his land—

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: One is a contract for sale, the other an absolute sale.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: While in respect to the conditional purchase land, he has not yet completed the payment for his holding.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: He is holding under contract.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: They are both under contract.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: No!

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: While one holds a grant from the Crown, the other cannot hold a grant from the Crown until full payment has been made. In other words, the Crown has no more right to take the land held under conditional purchase than it has to take the land for which the Crown grant has been issued. But if the Crown had to pay compensation, it would not pay so much for conditional purchase land as for land under Crown grant, because the full purchase money has not been paid for the conditional purchase land. Otherwise I do not see any difference between the two. Compulsory resumption of land is not new in Western Australia. It is provided for in the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act. But under that Act it is almost impossible to resume land, because the owner has the right to retain so large a portion of his holding that it is useless to take the balance. That being so, the provision for the compulsory taking of land under that Act has not been put into effect. Many people ask why it should be necessary to introduce in Western Australia a Bill for the resumption of land for

closer settlement, why it should be necessary to compel people to sell their land. The contention is that there is under offer to the Government sufficient land for all requirements. But it is one thing to have a block of land under offer, and quite another thing to take a block of land the Government consider more suitable to acquire for the advantage of the State; because under compulsory resumption a fair price is fixed by arbitration, whereas if the resumption were not compulsory, probably the Government would have to pay a considerably higher price for the land.

Mr. C. P. Wansbrough: You would not apply that to land on which the conditions are being carried out?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No, this is not dealing with that land. By way of interjection the other night I pointed out that we had large areas of land undeveloped, and that in the interests of the small landowners there should be greater production to enable the railways to run at considerably reduced charges. One can travel scores of miles by railway without seeing any agricultural production whatever. Settlers situated far back have to pay largely increased railway charges owing to the fact that the intervening land is not developed. The total area of land held in fee simple is 10,520,028 acres. The total held under conditional purchase and other contracts with fee simple in view is 17,822,601 acres, or a total area of alienated agricultural land of 28,342,629 acres.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: That is not first-class land.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: First-class and second-class.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: No, it includes grazing leases.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Very few. The area cleared totals 6,236,328 acres.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: That includes grazing leases, all alienated.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The time has arrived when something should be done to bring this land under development and so ensure greater prosperity. We have large areas held by individual owners, whereas a large number of people could be placed on those holdings with great advantage to the State and to the railway system. The area under crop totals 2,323,300 acres, and that under artificially sown grasses 38,022 acres. Newly cleared land prepared for the next crop totals 408,156 acres, while we have under fallow 1,232,030 acres. Land previously cropped but now used for grazing totals 2,234,840 acres, and land ringbarked or partially cleared, 2,660,106 acres, or a total of 8,896,434 acres upon which some attempt at development has been made. Everybody anxious for the development of the State must realise that the time has arrived to bring this land under cultivation. That leaves us 19½ million acres unimproved, or used principally for sheep. Much of it is not even fenced.

Mr. Griffiths: That is apart from light lands altogether.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, I referred to them the other night. I am now dealing with land alienated from the Crown.

Mr. C. P. Wansbrough: It includes first, second, and third-class land.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes. The late Government had a classification made of the Avon Valley.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Not the late Government, but the one before that.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Well it was done in 1918. As the result of that classification it was found to be urgently necessary that a considerable area of the land should be put into cultivation. I am not going to say the population of some of these agricultural districts has been declining, but when it is realised that in the Avon Valley, relatively close to the capital city, we have 2,000,000 acres not cropped, it will be agreed that the time has arrived when we should take steps in the direction of closer settlement.

Mr. C. P. Wansbrough: Much of that land could not be put to better use than its present use.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Much of it is not even cleared.

Mr. C. P. Wansbrough: And is not likely to be.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It is true that sheep pay well to-day. I hope that will continue. But that does not absolve us from the necessity for attempting to bring about closer settlement in the interests of people who want land.

Mr. C. P. Wansbrough: The bulk of that land does not lend itself to closer settlement.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I do not agree with the hon. member. Similar statements have been made throughout Australia.

Mr. C. P. Wansbrough: I am speaking of the Avon Valley land.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It is estimated that in that direction we could settle 4,000 additional farmers.

Mr. Thomson: On what sized areas?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: About 1,000 acres. I am using the arguments that the Leader of the Opposition used here three years ago.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: No fear, you are not.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: My notes were prepared from his remarks.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: I never said there were two million acres in the Avon Valley that could be settled.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member put it clearly that we could settle approximately 4,000 families on the Avon Valley lands, and he added, "What an impetus it would give to settlement!"

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: You must withdraw that; I did not say it.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: In three respects the Bill differs from the measure that was introduced previously. First of all we include all lands except pastoral land. Then we have struck out the taxation clause.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: What is that?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The previous Government provided that if land was not subdivided in accordance with the require-

ments of the board, the owner could retain it on paying three times the amount of the tax. That clause has been struck out. Provision is again made for the appointment of a board consisting of an official of the Lands Department, and an official of the Agricultural Bank. The third member is to be a person acquainted with the district. We realise that no board could be better qualified than one comprising officials of the bank and of the Lands Department, and a resident of the district. We supported the late Government in that proposal. The officers have all the information necessary at their fingers' ends. The bank officials know whether advances could be made on land that might be resumed, and once they took action, there would be no difficulty about settlers getting an advance. The board have to decide whether the land is unutilised and unproductive within the meaning of the Act. No Government can interfere with that. Protection for the owner of the land is provided word for word as before, with one exception. If an owner is notified that his land is unutilised and receives notice to subdivide it, failing which the Government will resume it, he may appeal to a judge of the Supreme Court. Previously the period for appealing was one month. Under this measure we suggest two months. The Bill is simple and its provisions have often been explained to the House.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Not this Bill.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: They were ably explained by the hon. member himself. If a price satisfactory to both parties cannot be agreed upon, the owner may go to arbitration under the Public Works Act. It is provided that land may be resumed at a price equal to 10 per cent. added to the valuation for taxation purposes. The owner can claim the full unimproved value for his land plus the value of the improvements. In the previous Bill was a provision which it was claimed in another place amended the Constitution. That clause does not appear in this Bill.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: That related to land held by a member.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: What about the area an owner may retain?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The Bill is the same as the previous measure with the exceptions I have mentioned. The board will examine the land and report to the Minister whether in their opinion the land is suitable and unutilised. When the report is sent to the Minister the owner can claim to be supplied with a copy of it. Then notification must be given to the owner to subdivide in accordance with the plans laid down by the board, failing which the board may resume the land. The owner will have sufficient time to appeal, but the board cannot take any action without the approval of the Governor-in-Council. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. Sir James Mitchell, debate adjourned.

BILL—INSPECTION OF SCAFFOLDING.

Second Reading.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. A. McCallum—South Fremantle) (9-41) in moving the second reading said: This Bill is almost a machinery measure and one that lends itself to discussion in Committee rather than for enlargement on the second reading. It is drawn mainly on the lines of the Bill which was passed by this Chamber last session, but which was defeated in another place. This is the only State in the Commonwealth and is one of the few countries in the world that is without legislation of this description. Our industrial laws have drifted far behind those of other countries. Parliament has paid very little attention to the industrial laws of the State during the last 12 years.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: A similar Bill to this was before us last year.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: But it did not become law. I am speaking of Parliament, not one branch of it.

Mr. Sampson: You introduced a Bill dealing with the manufacture of white lead.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It was only a small measure, but I hope I shall be able to enlarge upon it before the end of this session. It was only a little step in the direction of the advancement made by other countries. This State has been left a long way behind.

Mr. Sampson: It was a good start and I hope it will be carried further.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: When the Scaffolding Bill was before the House last session I was asked whether there were any statistics available of the number of accidents due to faulty scaffolding. There are no statistics, and the only records that give any indication are the payments made out of the accident funds of trade unions. Since the Bill of last session was before us, however, there have been two serious accidents, one of which resulted fatally. Therefore it cannot be argued that there is no necessity for the Bill.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: I hope it protects the public as well as the men on the scaffolding.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes. There is grave danger to the passing public as well as to the men who are risking their lives on the scaffolding. In the interests of the public as well as the men employed in the building trades, there should be some law governing the erection of scaffolding. Only a week or two ago I saw a man working on the top of a ladder over 30ft. from the ground. Three ladders were lashed together, and were standing in the middle of a right of way. There were two horses and a cart a little further away. If the horses had bolted the man on top of the ladder must have lost his life. Again, if some person had turned quickly around the corner and struck the ladder it would probably have been knocked over. The ladder was merely leaning against the wall, and the man was painting 30ft. from the ground. There would have been no chance for him had the ladder been knocked over. These men take great risks every day. Those who work on swing stages, with simply a rope hanging over the side of a building, have practically no

protection at all. If the rope broke or became frayed they would be dashed to the ground. In practically every other class of industry protection is afforded to the men who risk their lives in following their callings. The building trade is one of the very few in which no such protection is given. I cannot conceive that the House would refuse to give to all men working in the building trade a proper measure of protection. Some argument was raised against the Bill last session that it would apply to outlying portions of the State, and would cost a considerable amount to administer. It was held that such a Bill was not necessary in outback centres. This Bill would only operate in centres prescribed by the Governor-in-Council. It will not operate automatically over the entire State. It is provided that it will have force and effect only under such conditions as the Governor-in-Council shall define. Naturally, it will start in the metropolitan area where the largest buildings are found, and where the greatest building activities exist. It is not necessary under the Bill to have the same class of scaffolding for all types of buildings, or to have scaffolding for a cottage identical with that used for a six or eight storey building. Provision is made for the different class of scaffolds that are erected from time to time. The details, that are too voluminous to embody in a Bill, will be given in regulations. The inspectors who will be appointed under the Bill will examine and supervise all scaffolding and gear, and if in their opinion any scaffolding is dangerous to human life and limb they will have power to order that work shall cease until such time as their instructions have been complied with. If they consider that scaffolding is dangerous and that men should not be permitted to work upon it they can order work to cease until their instructions are carried out. This is subject to an appeal by the owners to the nearest local or police magistrate, who can hear and determine the case. All scaffolding must be kept in conformity with the Act, and be open to inspection by the inspector at all times. When loss of life occurs or serious bodily injury, caused by the scaffolding, the inspector may order work on the building to cease, and the Minister may order an inquiry to be held. No interference with the scaffolding will be permitted unless upon the written consent of the inspector, until such time as the inquiry has been held.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Who will pay the men in the meantime? Are they to be paid whilst standing down?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: No. They have to stand down a good deal now, and no provision is made for paying them. The inspector of machinery will be given charge of all mechanical gear. There is a good deal of mechanical gear, such as cranes, that is used on buildings that the ordinary inspector of scaffolding would not understand. The accident that occurred opposite the post office recently was the result of faulty mechanical gear. The inspection of such gear will not be left to the ordinary scaffolding inspector, but will be placed in the care of the chief inspector of machinery, who is experienced in

that line of business. When an inquiry is held consequent upon a fatal accident, a representative of the employers and of the workers' union will have the right to appear, and call, examine, and cross-examine all witnesses. This provision is made to give all interested in the particular industry some say in the inquiry, and to insure that justice is done to both sides. It will, of course, be prohibitive to contract out of the Act. Most of the provisions of the Bill will be left to regulation. It is impossible in an Act to lay down all the details regarding scaffolding. Permission is given for this to be done by regulation, as is done in the other States. All details as to the size of scaffolding, all particulars as to gear and appliances, and all those things connected with the erection of the gear, will be dealt with by regulation. Authority is given to inspectors to enter upon all buildings being erected, and penalties are prescribed for obstructing an officer in the performance of his duty. The manner in which scaffolding will be set up will also be left to regulations. I have never been keen on leaving so much to regulations, but it is almost impossible to deal in such detail as is required except by regulation. It will frequently happen that certain regulations may have to be altered to meet existing conditions. If to bring this about the Act had to be amended every time, it would be too cumbersome a method, and involve too much work.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: You should not do too much by regulation.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: This is done throughout the States by regulation except in South Australia, where the regulations have recently been embodied as a schedule to the Act. The Bill provides that the provisions of the Act shall be affixed to, and maintained by the owner of the scaffolding, and also lays down penalties for this not being done. The Bill is a simple one, with nothing intricate in it. It merely gives greater protection to the men who risk their lives daily in earning their living.

Mr. Sampson: Where would the abstract from the Act be shown.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: It would be affixed to the structure so that it would be in the full view of the men engaged on the job. Such a provision exists in the Acts of the other States. I have not embodied in this Bill anything that does not exist in some part of Australia. We are very much behind in this matter. In the Eastern States they have had their laws for many years, though Victoria was the last to come into line. In that State the union and the employers drew up their own regulations by arrangement amongst themselves. Those regulations operated for many years, but quite recently an Act was passed bringing the State into line with the rest of Australia.

Mr. Sampson: Will the notice be affixed to one of the scaffolding poles?

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: The inspector will decide that point. It must be open to the view and examination of the men engaged on the job. The Bill is essentially one

for Committee stage and not for second reading speeches. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. Sir James Mitchell, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 9:56 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 26th August, 1924.

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

SWEARING IN OF MEMBER.

Mr. Teesdale (Roebourne) took and subscribed the oath and signed the roll.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY—PRESENTATION.

Mr. SPEAKER [4.32]: I desire to inform the House that I have received the following message from His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor:—

Mr. Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly: I thank you for your Address-in-reply to my Speech with which I opened Parliament, and for your expressions of loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign. (Signed) R. F. McMillan, Lieutenant Governor, Administrator.

I may say that, accompanied by the mover and the seconder of the Address-in-reply and other hon. members, I waited on His Excellency for the purpose of presenting the Address, and that this is His Excellency's reply.

BILL—ROAD DISTRICTS RATES.

Second Reading.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. A. McCallum—South Fremantle [4.36] in moving the second reading said: This is a short Bill to overcome a legal diffi-