

vides that it shall be an offence for a publican or any of his servants to serve a customer with intoxicating liquor after the closing hour. But it is not an offence so far as the man who is served is concerned. It is proposed in clubs that it shall not only be an offence to serve, but the man who takes it and drinks it will also commit an offence. What is flesh for one is flesh for another. If a man in a club is liable to be fined for drinking after hours, a man in an hotel should be in the same position. There is one other matter I desire to touch upon. To the unsophisticated the title of the Bill would lead one to believe that the measure was for war time only, but if we read the Bill through we will find that the intention is that the measure is not to be for war time only. The intention is to keep it as a war time measure, and if possible to continue it. Of course it is provided in the Bill that it may be continued by both Houses passing a resolution. If a piece of legislation is going to be for emergency purposes it should remain as such, and when the time arrives when it is about to expire, and Parliament thinks that it has done good, then the whole course ought to be gone through again. The Bill should either be re-introduced as a permanent piece of legislation, or, if the war should still be in progress, it should be re-enacted as war legislation. I recognise that there is more behind this proposal than we really think, and I will at all times raise my voice to assist the people in deciding matters for themselves. I am not going to be a party to bringing about legislation by subterfuge. My remarks clearly indicate that I reserve to myself the right to do what I like with the Bill in Committee.

On motion by Hon. A. J. H. Saw debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 9.40 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly,

*Tuesday, 28th September, 1915.*

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

### PAPER PRESENTED.

By the Minister for Works: Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage, and Drainage Act, amendment of by-laws.

By the Minister for Mines: Harbour and Light Department, report for year ended 30th June, 1915.

### QUESTION—STATE SINKING FUND.

Hon. FRANK WILSON (without notice) asked the Minister for Mines: Has his attention been drawn to a report in this morning's newspaper, alleged to be a report of the proceedings at the Premiers' conference, and in which it is stated that the Premier of Western Australia, Mr. Scaddan, "explained to the conference that he proposed to divert £260,000 a year from the sinking fund account into the public works account. This amount he stated was paid annually from the general revenue to the sinking fund trustees, and periodically stock was redeemed. Instead of redeeming stock the money would be invested in short-dated Treasury Bills." If so, will he ex-

plain to the House whether that is the policy of the Government; if not will he communicate with the Premier and have this confirmed or otherwise?

The MINISTER FOR MINES replied: I have read the report appearing in this morning's newspaper referred to by the leader of the Opposition and I have wired the text of it to the Premier. So far I have not received a reply. I am inclined to think that there is some mistake in regard to the information which has been published, but in any case I can assure the hon. member that the promise given by the Minister for Lands last week with regard to the sinking fund, that is, that no definite action will be taken until Parliament has had an opportunity of discussing the matter, will be kept.

#### QUESTION—STATE TRADING CONCERNS, AUDITED ACCOUNTS.

Hon. FRANK WILSON (without notice) asked the Minister for Lands: When may we expect the audited accounts of the State enterprises? I have heard indirectly that the implement works annual accounts have already been audited. If that is so, I do not see why they should not be placed on the Table of the House.

The Minister for Works: They have not been audited.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Then what can be the reason for the delay? I notice in several other instances that the accounts have not been received by the Auditor General. It seems to me that action should be taken to enforce the presentation of these accounts for audit at the proper time.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: May I be allowed to answer the question. The implement works accounts have not been audited. I interviewed the Under Treasurer for the express purpose of having special auditors put on so that the audit should be brought about as quickly as possible.

Hon. Frank Wilson: What is the cause of the delay?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: There is no delay. The accountant has just finished making up the balance sheet, but it appears to me that there has been some error which requires to be investigated.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: With regard to the trading accounts generally, the desire was that there should not be a repetition of the delays of last year. The hon. member knows that in the big trading concerns that constant attention is being given to the matter by the Auditor General throughout the year.

Hon. Frank Wilson: May I suggest that the matter be followed up by the Minister himself.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That is being done.

Hon. Frank Wilson: Take the brick works' accounts; they were in two months ago.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: There has been no trading this year.

Mr. SPEAKER: This discussion is irregular.

#### QUESTION—BRAN, POLLARD, AND MAIZE IMPORTED.

Mr. MALE asked the Minister for Agriculture: 1, What quantities of bran, pollard, and maize respectively were offered at auction on the 27th and 28th August? 2, What quantities were sold, and what was the average price obtained for each article? 3, What is the estimated loss on such goods? 4, Did the Industries Assistance Board refuse to quote private firms for purchase of such goods? 5, Did not the board recently receive an offer to purchase such goods, substantially above the price realised at the auction? 6, Who were the members of the board when the goods were purchased by the Government? 7, Was the purchase of such goods made through brokers; if so, through whom?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE replied: The information is conveyed in a return which I will now present to the House.

**QUESTION—ELECTORAL REFORM.**

Mr. MALE (for Mr. Allen) asked the Premier: Is it his intention to place on the Table of the House the report dealing with electoral reform and a copy of any agreement entered into between the Federal and State authorities relative to same?

The MINISTER FOR MINES (for the Premier) replied: The report in question is not a public report, but confidential to the Government, and the question of laying it on the Table of the House will receive consideration when it has been dealt with by Cabinet.

**QUESTION—STATE TRADING CONCERNS, TREASURY FIGURES.**

Mr. MALE (for Mr. Allen) asked the Treasurer: In view of the published monthly Treasury figures not coinciding with the list of trading concerns set forth on pages 7 and 87 of the Estimates submitted to Parliament, will he instruct the Treasury officials to publish receipts and expenditure items to coincide with the trading concerns set forth in the Estimates, to enable the results to be followed?

The MINISTER FOR MINES (for the Treasurer) replied: It is the intention of the Under Treasurer to publish the monthly expenditure figures in the same order as they are shown on the Estimates, as soon as the necessary adjustments can be effected.

**QUESTION—OVERTIME IN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS.**

Mr. MALE (for Mr. Allen) asked the Premier: 1, Is he aware that in certain Government departments some of the officers are compelled to work three hours per night before tea money is allowed, contrary to the Public Service Regulations? 2, Is it considered equitable to deduct the officers' pay for three hours on Saturday and bring them back six hours extra a week for nothing? 3, Is he aware that in one branch of a department some officers have been working overtime for

months each year for years past? If so, will he inform members of the reason why?

The MINISTER FOR MINES (for the Premier) replied: 1, No. 2, Answered by No. 1. 3, No.

**QUESTION—GRISTING AGREEMENT.**

Mr. GEORGE asked the Premier: Has any compensation been paid to Messrs. Ockerby & Co., Ltd., and the Perth Roller Flour Mills, or either of them, in connection with the failure of the Government to bring the country millers' wheat to Perth for gristing purposes?

The MINISTER FOR MINES (for the Premier) replied: No.

**QUESTION—RETURNED SOLDIERS, PREFERENCE IN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT.**

Mr. SMITH asked the Premier: Is it the intention of the Government to instruct the various public departments to give preference to returned good conduct and wounded soldiers when any vacancies occur?

The MINISTER FOR MINES (for the Premier) replied: Yes.

**QUESTION — RAILWAY STEEL TYRES, CONTRACT WITH STRELITZ BROS.**

Mr. SMITH asked the Premier: 1, Is it true that a Government contract for railway steel tyres has recently been placed with an American firm through Strelitz Bros.? 2, Did the Government ascertain if this American firm was free from German influence? 3, Why was not the order placed with a British firm?

The MINISTER FOR MINES (for the Premier), replied: 1, Yes, with the Midvale Steel Company of Philadelphia. Particulars appear in the *Government Gazette* of 24th September, 1915. 2, Careful inquiries have been made, and as far as the Government

could learn the firm mentioned is not under German influence. 3, On account of the price. The price accepted was £1,481 18s. 2d., c.i.f., Fremantle, and the lowest for British make was £1,915.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by Mr. MALE (Kimberley) leave of absence for two weeks granted to the member for Wagin (Mr. S. Stubbs) on the ground of ill-health.)

#### ASSENT TO BILLS.

Message from the Governor received and read notifying assent to the following Bills:—

- 1, Enemy Contracts Annulment.
- 2, Bread Act Amendment.
- 3, Newcastle-Bolgart Railway Extension.

#### BILL — INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE ACT AMENDMENT.

##### *Message.*

Message from the Governor received and read recommending the Bill.

##### *Third Reading.*

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. W. D. Johnson—Guildford) [4.46]: I move—

*That the Bill be now read a third time.*

Hon. J. D. CONNOLLY (Perth) [4.47]: It is not with the idea of delaying the third reading that I rise to speak, but in order to obtain some necessary information from the Minister in charge as to the operations of the Act. A few days ago I asked in connection with the administration of the Act some questions as to whether certain guarantees had been given to the Commonwealth Bank by the State Government. The answer was that guarantees were given in two instances to the amount of £25,000 or a total of £50,000, and also a guarantee was given to the extent of £5 10s. per ton on ore shipped. I would like some information on the working of Part III.

of the Act, which permits the Minister to give assistance to industries other than the agricultural industry for which this Act was principally intended. It is due to the House that an explanation should be given of these big amounts guaranteed by the Government to the Commonwealth Bank.

Hon. Frank Wilson: Whose amounts are they?

Hon. J. D. CONNOLLY: That is what I would like the Minister to tell the House. When we passed the Bill last session, I and I think a majority of members were of opinion that it was not intended to assist, to the extent of these two guarantees, what I presume is one person or one corporation. The answers to my questions were not quite clear. I asked the Minister for Lands—

1, Is it a fact that the Government have guaranteed advances made by the Commonwealth Bank to persons or corporations for large sums? 2, If so, will the Government state the amount and date of each guarantee? 3, Under what authority were guarantees given? The Minister replied—

- 1, Yes. 2, (a) One guarantee of £25,000 approved 29th March, 1915. (b) One guarantee of £25,000 approved 4th May, 1915. (c) Guarantee of £5 10s. per ton on ore shipped. 3, The Industries Assistance Act, 1915.

I would like to know if the Government have guaranteed an unlimited quantity of ore at £5 10s. per ton and if the two guarantees have been given to one and the same person or corporation; if so why were they given? In the absence of any information to the contrary, it is quite opposed to the true intention of the Act that guarantees of this kind should be given. The Minister should be in a position to say why they were given, because Part III. of the existing Act gives the Minister absolute control in advancing and guaranteeing money. He is not trammelled in any way by the recommendations of the board, nor is he bound, under the wording of the Act, to have a mortgage as is provided in the case of advances to settlers in the main portion

of the Act. While it was foreseen that under the Act guarantees might be necessary to others than farmers, I raised the point as to whether that portion of the measure was necessary in relation to mining, and the Minister for Mines said the only reason why this portion of the Act was inserted was that some assistance might be given to mining. I pointed out that all necessary assistance could be given under the Mining Development Act, but the Minister said the object of this was to enable the Government to buy tin or copper ore for shipment, and that it was not for the purpose of assisting gold mining.

Mr. Foley: That was only until the Mining Development vote was cut out.

Hon. J. D. CONNOLLY: The Minister said nothing about it being cut out. As he admitted, so long as money was wanted for legitimate mining development, there was ample provision under the Mining Development Act. The object of this Act, as its name implies, is to assist the mining industry. It was laid down on a proper basis, and any assistance necessary to legitimate mining could be rendered under that Act. In consequence of the war, the question of having to buy ore cropped up, and that was the reason given for inserting Part III. in the Industries Assistance Act. Now the Government are going much beyond that, and, instead of assisting struggling industries, they are assisting in a very doubtful way by guaranteeing £50,000 to one corporation, or perhaps two. It was never intended that persons in a position to obtain an overdraft of £50,000 from a bank should be assisted. If they are in a position to go to a bank and obtain such an advance, there is no need for such a provision in their case. It was intended to assist struggling settlers, and small struggling industries, and not big industries. If it is not good enough for the Government to advance them the money, it is not good enough to guarantee the money, because there is a much greater risk in guaranteeing than in advancing this money. The Government become second mortgagees, but the matter is out of their hands and they would

not control it until the first mortgagee had made some move, so that they have no real control in the matter. Therefore, guaranteeing the money to a third party is much more risky than advancing it. I would like to know whether this guarantee of £50,000, together with the £5 10s. per ton for ore shipped, are the only amounts guaranteed under this portion of the Act. I notice from questions asked in another place that there was a matter of £4,000 granted to the Beria Consols Mine at Laverton. The reason given for the advancing of that amount under the Industries Assistance Act instead of under the Mining Development Act was that it was desired to prevent the mine from closing down. However, that mine was closed down in February, and speaking from memory, the advance was not made until early in March and the bill of sale was not registered until well on towards the end of March, so that reason scarcely holds good.

Hon. Frank Wilson: Has the mine restarted?

Hon. J. D. CONNOLLY: Yes, after it had been taken up by a fresh company. It was reported that the new company had bought the mine, but, in reply to a question asked in another place, it was stated that the new company had not bought the mine but had only leased it. The Government were asked what security they had, and the reply was two 220 h.p. gas producer engines. The Government were asked whether the plant represented value for the money if the mine closed down, and the reply was that the Government were quite satisfied. I have not seen these gas producer plants, but I would like to see two such plants worth £4,000 at Laverton, irrespective of anything else.

Mr. Foley: You can see one at Gwalia worth about £30,000.

Hon. J. D. CONNOLLY: I have not seen it. If the plant cost £4,000, that is as much as it did cost. In passing this amending Bill, I wish to protest that the Act is being misused or used differently from what Parliament intended

when the measure was passed. It was most certainly not intended to advance £4,000 to keep a mine going when the mine had actually closed down within a few days of the advance being made.

Mr. Foley: That was the Lancefield.

Hon. J. D. CONNOLLY: Yes, I think it was then called the Beria Consols. Apart from any point I have raised as to whether the advance was made to the Beria Consols on a sound basis, I contend that no advance should have been made under the Industries Assistance Act for mining, such as has been made to the Beria Consols mine. There is a special Act for that purpose, the Mining Development Act, wherein provision is made for assistance being given for the development of a mine, and under which it is provided that the Minister shall take a mortgage over the plant so far as it is possible to get it. This, however, is going outside of that. The Government have paid £4,000 to a company, and taken a lease over certain gas producers, and I say it is foreign altogether to the Mining Development Act to give such assistance, and therefore the Government had no right to give it under the Industries Assistance Act. Then we come to the other two advances I have named, and I say again such guarantees were never intended by Parliament when the Act was passed. I have spoken on the third reading because it has only come to my knowledge, since the second reading, that these large advances in the way of guarantees and otherwise have been made, and I think it is only just to the House that the Acting Treasurer should make a statement letting members know the amount that has been advanced under Part III. of the Act, and what security the Government hold, and whether it is intended to continue such advances in the future. The two gas producer engines which I have mentioned are a second-rate security.

Mr. Foley: The State Mining Engineer is very careful as to such advances.

Hon. J. D. CONNOLLY: The State Mining Engineer has nothing whatever to do with advances under the Industries

Assistance Act. He must have been opposed to these advances, or why were the advances not made under the Mining Development Act? Therefore, the interjection of the member for Leonora does not apply. Members are entitled to know why the guarantees were made under the Industries Assistance Act amounting to £50,000 and whether it is intended to make such advances in the future. The House is entitled to this information before we give the Minister the power that he will possess under the Bill. I would like to know from the Minister if he can justify these advances in the past and does he intend to make such advances in the future. Whatever reason may have existed in the past does not exist to-day. The season is changed, things are more settled, although the war is not over, and although there may have been justification in the past for making these advances, there can be no justification in the future. I want to know what is the policy of the Government as to advances and guarantees.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. W. D. Johnson—Guildford) [5.4]: The hon. member started by questioning the power of the Government to make these guarantees and he ended by stating that the Government had the power. When the Industries Assistance Bill was being discussed, the Government made it clear that they were not introducing the Bill to assist one industry alone but that all industries that required assistance through the troublesome times should receive it. The hon. member was wrong when he stated that Parliament was given to understand, or a statement was made that no advances would be made to mining companies if the Mining Development Act could not supply the assistance. That is absolutely contrary to what was stated. It was definitely stated that the Government would be no party to a Bill limiting the assistance to any one industry. It was specially mentioned that the mining industry required, and would receive assistance; that the timber industry was in a precarious state—and is to-day—and wanted assistance and would receive it,

and the pearling industry was specially quoted.

Mr. Male: Was it given any assistance?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: We offered assistance to the pearling industry. The position is this. When application is made for assistance to the mining industry that application is received in all cases by the Mines Department. It is reported on by the State Mining Engineer or other officers of the department, and, if the report is favourable, it is submitted to the Colonial Treasurer who makes the advance or guarantee under Part 3 of the Act. In connection with the Beria Consols, that mine was not able to continue, or made representations as to its difficulties, and asked if the Government would make a small advance of £4,000.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: How long did the mine continue after the assistance was made?

The Minister for Mines: It has been going ever since. The mine never stopped.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member is quite wrong; the mine has been going ever since. The security the Government has for the advance is amply covered. There is no question about it. It has been reported on by the State Mining Engineer and the insinuation by the hon. member—and we are getting quite a number of these insinuations from the other side of late—that because the advance was made by the Industries Assistance Board the State Mining Engineer would not recommend it under the Mining Development Act. That is worthy of the hon. member, but it is quite contrary to the facts of the case. The advance was recommended by the Mines Department. In connection with the timber industry, the main difficulty in regard to that is, that they cannot get shipping and they cannot get orders to keep them going. In the case a contract had been obtained but there was great difficulty as to the shipping.

Hon. J. Mitchell: Oh.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member for Northam is rather limited in his view but we have to take a much

broader view than the hon. member is capable of taking. It is quite right that the States and the Commonwealth have come to the rescue of the wheat growers as to the shipment of their wheat, but the hon. members thinks it is a different thing when assistance has to be rendered to some other industry. But the Government have a broad view and will come to the rescue of every industry. The position is this: that a contract was possessed by a timber company and they had some difficulty as to shipment. They said they could carry on the contract and keep their work going if the Government would guarantee against the shipping documents. There is ample security and the Government, in order to keep the industry going, and being satisfied that the security was ample, agreed to guarantee the company. In these particular cases the banks are not prepared to advance on the orders owing to the difficulty of shipping.

Hon. J. Mitchell: You cannot get the documents until you ship.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: We advanced on the timber to be shipped. We hold the documents and the company do not draw the money; we draw the money, or rather the bank draws the money and removes us from the guarantee. We are amply secured by the fact that the timber is exported and the payments go into the bank; they hold the documents and the guarantee will be removed.

Hon. Frank Wilson: Has the timber been shipped yet?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It is going on.

Hon. Frank Wilson: Is the guarantee being reduced?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: Are both amounts to one person or to one company?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, covering two different propositions. The security is against the value of the exportable timber plus the security of the assets of the company in Western Australia.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: What is the company?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It is not fair for me to mention the name.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: But you register farmers' advances.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, at the request of the other creditors because they want to know what advances are being made. However, I do not propose to make the name known as I do not think it is fair, but I will give the hon. member the name and if he likes to make the information public he can use his own judgment.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: You make the information public when assistance is rendered to farmers.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Because the farmer has other creditors who are not being paid and they want to know where they are before further advances are made. There is no comparison between the two propositions.

Mr. Thomson: There is a slight difference between the two amounts.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: And there is a grave difference between the securities. In some cases there is little or no security if it had not been for the farmer getting a crop. Therefore, there is a big difference in the security and necessarily a difference in the sound financial view.

Hon. Frank Wilson: What percentage, do you advance, of the £25,000 worth of timber?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I am not in a position to give the hon. member the particulars. I have not the details. If the hon. member for Perth had only shown a little fairness and raised this question on the second reading, or had given me notice of the point he was going to raise, I could have got the particulars. The only knowledge I have is that gained when the matter was submitted to Cabinet and investigated. It was reported on by the Under Treasurer and submitted to the Crown Law Department. It was very closely investigated. There was no doubt in the minds of the Government as to the security we hold.

Hon. Frank Wilson: We can adjourn the debate and give you time.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member can take that responsibility if he likes, but advances are being made that are not legitimate until the Bill passes and the Government will not take the responsibility of going on like this. We are determined to be fair to all industries.

Hon. Frank Wilson: What is the second £25,000 advanced against?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I told the hon. member I have not the details. The advances have been made on ample security. The reason of two separate amounts being stated I cannot say, as I have no particulars here.

Hon. Frank Wilson: Is it all on timber to be shipped?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I am not in a position to state the details. I say this, that the amount advanced is £50,000 and for some reason or other it is cut into two. Possibly that attitude was adopted by the Under Treasurer or the Crown Law Department to give us greater security. I do not know why it was done. But for the £50,000 we have ample security. It is because we were satisfied with the security that we gave the guarantee for that amount. We did it under the Act, and the matter is being closely investigated by the officers who advise the Government on all these subjects. There is no question but that the guarantee is amply covered by security so far as the State funds are concerned.

Hon. FRANK WILSON (Sussex) [5.16]: I must confess I am somewhat surprised at the statement of the member for Perth (Hon. J. D. Connolly) with regard to advances under this Act.

Mr. Munsie: You have discovered another mystery, have you?

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Yes. It makes one feel very uneasy.

Mr. Munsie: You have discovered that an advance was not made to Millars, I suppose, and you feel a bit hurt.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Did Millars want an advance?

Mr. Munsie: They asked for £75,000 reduction in railway freight last session.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: They have never asked for an advance. The Acting



Treasurer might ask them for an advance if he is hard up. I think guarantees given or advances made under the Act should be made publicly. I do not see why there should be any secrecy about the matter.

Mr. Munsie: Is every advance made to a settler to be advertised?

Hon. FRANK WILSON: That is done practically. Some mine was mentioned by name in this connection only in the course of the present sitting. The Minister, I think, mentioned its name. That mine has had an advance of £4,000.

The Minister for Mines: The member for Perth (Hon. J. D. Connolly) mentioned the name first.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Why should not the House and the public know who is getting this advance of £50,000? It is a different thing altogether when a private individual or a private institution makes an advance and keeps the business private, but a Government making advances from the public purse or giving a guarantee on behalf of the people of the State is another matter altogether. The people have the right to know every individual transaction. I cannot understand for a moment why such a matter should be kept dark. Who are the people to whom the advance of £50,000 has been made? What is the first £25,000 for? For timber, I understand. Ought we not to know what quantity of timber there is? Was this guarantee given in order that the timber might be produced, or was the timber produced before the guarantee had been given? What is the second guarantee? I understand it is for the benefit of the same people. What security is there for it? Is it against plant or against further material? The House is entitled to know.

The Minister for Lands: I told you distinctly that it is against both. There is no use in misrepresenting. I told you it was against timber for export and against the Western Australian possessions of the firm.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: The Minister did not make that clear. I understand that the Government have £25,000 worth of timber produced as a guarantee for

the first £25,000. Is the timber there on the ground?

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): Yes, of course it is.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: I do not believe the Honorary Minister knows anything about it. It would be better for him to keep quiet and allow the acting Treasurer to answer the question. I consider that the practice now proposed is a very dangerous one. These things ought to be done in daylight, publicly. People who want an advance or a guarantee of this sort from the Government ought to ask for it in public, so that everybody may know who is getting the advance or guarantee. And especially ought members of this House to know. The Minister first said that the advance had been made against shipping documents. The member for Northam (Hon. J. Mitchell) interjected that shipping documents cannot be obtained until the timber is actually on board the vessel, which is quite true. So that practically this is an open guarantee to a bank against timber which may or may not be shipped. The House, I consider, is entitled to be taken into the full confidence of the Government on this subject. Whilst I recognise that the Minister has some ground for complaint on the score that he was not informed of this at the second reading so that he might gather the information, yet I certainly deprecate any refusal on his part to take the House entirely into his confidence. I go further and say that, whilst Parliament gave very extensive powers for the purpose of assisting industries generally, it was never for a moment contemplated that powers under special legislation should be used when there were other powers already existing. In my opinion, the member for Perth (Hon. J. D. Connolly) is perfectly right as to that. If there is power under the Mines Development Act to assist a mine needing assistance, then the powers of the measure we are now discussing ought not to be used.

The Minister for Lands: It was distinctly stated when this measure was under discussion that it had to apply to all industries or none at all.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Probably, but I am putting it now as a principle that this measure should not be used when power exists apart from it.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I find that the hon. member is speaking when he has no right to speak, but it is owing to no fault of his. The fault is mine. The Minister has replied on the motion and thereby has concluded the debate.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: He was not replying, I think.

Mr. SPEAKER: The mover of a motion closes the discussion by replying. The Minister moved a motion and then replied.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: I think there is no Standing Order to that effect?

The Minister for Lands: I am not in a position to give this information. Nor do I intend to give it without consulting the papers and the people concerned. But I can assure hon. members that the information will be given. I detest these accusations of secrecy and all these beastly insinuations.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I have found that the House is doing something irregular owing to an oversight on my part. Therefore, the best thing I can do, under the circumstances, is to bring the discussion within proper form. In doing so, I must put the question for the third reading.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, but I think you will bear me out when I remind you that, although we have in this House a custom that when a Minister replies the discussion closes, yet it is not one of our Standing Orders. Moreover, this is an exceptional case. The Minister formally moved the third reading of the Bill. An hon. member raised a question of which we knew nothing at all. The Minister rose to explain so far as he was able to do so. Surely that ought not to close the discussion.

Mr. SPEAKER: I am afraid it does close the discussion. I am afraid my hands are tied by the rules of the House.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Have we such a rule?

Mr. SPEAKER: There is no question of that.

The Minister for Lands: We can supply the information in another place.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: You might supply it in speaking on the Estimates.

The Minister for Lands: We can supply it in another place.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: Why not supply it here on the Estimates?

The Minister for Lands: We can do whichever is preferred.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: I think the information ought to be given.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have been exercised in my mind as to whether the discussion was relevant. There is a doubt as to whether the details of a transaction can be so fully discussed on the third reading as they have been discussed this afternoon. I refrained from interposing because I was doubtful in my own mind whether I should be within my rights in doing so. If, however, this matter will come forward on the Estimates, then I should say the Estimates afford the proper opportunity for such a discussion. I must put the motion for the third reading.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

#### BILL — MARRIAGE ACT AMENDMENT.

Read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

#### BILL — VERMIN BOARDS ACT AMENDMENT.

##### *Second Reading.*

[Debate resumed from the 22nd September.]

Hon. J. MITCHELL (Northam) [5.26]: I do not intend to take up much time on this measure. In moving the second reading, the Minister told us that the principal Act is faulty and needs to be rectified, in order that the Government may compel pastoral lessees to pay the rates due by them. I think, however, the Minister will find that the fault is not in the Act. The last time a Bill for the same

purpose was before the House, he told us that the Crown Law Department did not agree with a certain decision of the Resident Magistrate at Carnarvon. It is necessary, however, that the Act should be made quite clear. We are now informed by the Minister that there are considerable arrears of rates, that 11 of the squatters within the area affected have paid their rates, and that 25 others have defaulted. We know that these squatters have had bad seasons for two or three years past, and I daresay that some of them have defaulted through no fault of their own. I entirely agree with the contention that no squatter should pay more than his fair share of the rates. I do not know whether the Minister intends to have the rate levied on each hundred acres within the area in order to provide sufficient funds to cover interest, sinking fund, and upkeep of the fence. If that is the intention, then I think no one will have a right to protest. I doubt whether the Minister will take that course if he gets the opportunity. Some of the squatters who have paid, have paid more than once, I understand.

Mr. Gilchrist: They have paid regularly.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: When the Minister proceeds to put the amended measure into operation for the purpose of collecting from the people concerned the amount which is due to the Government, I hope he will see that no injustice is done. Where a pastoralist is unable to pay because of recent unfortunate seasons, he should receive consideration, just as the timber company mentioned this afternoon has received consideration and just as the farmer has received consideration. In a matter of this kind we must recognise that our duty is to encourage production all along the line, whether it be production by the pastoralist, or by the farmer, or by the gold miner, or by anyone else. We have to remember also that a number of men in the Gaseoyne district are in a comparatively small way and have started comparatively recently. I am quite sure members have no wish that injustice

should be done to anybody. The interest and sinking fund should be paid. There is some doubt, however, as to whether the fence should be kept in order. I am of opinion that it should be maintained. The Government lent this money for the purpose of protecting that area of country. We were not looking for an investment for £66,000, but we were looking for the protection of the area and for interest and sinking fund on the sum expended. The member for Canning (Mr. Robinson) evidently had it in mind that the previous Government had forced this fence on the squatters and fixed the boundaries regardless of the views of those squatters. That is not the position at all. The pastoralists of that district were afraid that the rabbits would become troublesome, and they approached the Government, and finally the original Act was passed. It was drafted on the lines of the South Australian Act, which has worked very well. The Government did not erect the fence at all. At the request of the leaseholders we advanced the money for the erection of the fence, and it was constructed under their supervision and in a manner they approved of. If they had desired a larger area to be fenced, they would have seen to it. The chances of success against the pest are very much greater where the area fenced is small. This area was according to the wishes of the representatives of the squatters in that district. There can be no question about that. The member for Canning said also that it was costing £10 a mile to maintain this fence, as against 30s. on the fence maintained by the Government. There again I think the hon. member was at fault.

Hon. Frank Wilson: He exaggerated somewhat.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Yes. In the one case £10 is altogether too high; probably the amount necessary is about £4. and probably also that is about the sum represented in the maintenance of the Government fences. Again, the hon. member said the tax imposed is 2s. in the pound. I would like to correct him there. We imposed a tax not exceeding 2s. per 100

acres, which is a very different thing. I am sorry it should go out that we suggested a tax of 2s. in the pound to pay interest and sinking fund and maintenance. It is true that the leases fall due in 1928. After that time, whatever remains unpaid of this advance will be a charge against the land. Up to 1928 they merely pay their share of the interest and sinking fund, but after that time if the fence has not been paid for, it will remain a charge against the incoming lessees. The hon. member rightly said that if the Government would give some indication of what they intend to do with regard to the leases it would be helpful. It is impossible for anyone to develop a pastoral lease in the twelve years remaining between now and 1928, and where there is land to lease the Government would do well to so amend the Act that they can grant a lease for 28 years. This would be wise in the interests of the State generally, and particularly in the interests of the taxpayer, who has to foot the interest and sinking fund bill on this £66,000. The hon. member said that if the Government would indicate their intention with regard to the renewal of the leases the lessees might be induced to do something. I have the utmost sympathy with those who are struggling to develop their holdings up there, and if the Government could devise some method by which the leases can be renewed they would be doing good work. Just now we want to do all we can to foster production, which can only follow on a considerable expenditure on water supply and the provision of necessary facilities. The Minister must have power to get the interest and sinking fund on this advance, and I hope he will be able to arrange for the fence being kept in order. If it can be shown that there is no longer any danger of an invasion by rabbits, a different situation is set up, but so far I have heard no argument in favour of the abandonment of the fence. Until it can be shown that the fence ought to be abandoned, it is the duty of the House to see that the fence is maintained.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. W. D. Johnson—Guildford—in reply)

[5.37]: A lot of statements not altogether justified have been made in regard to the fence. The position as we have it to-day is that a sum of money has been advanced by the Government. It was advanced to a board representative of a certain section of pastoralists. They took the amount and promised to repay it. They failed in some of their payments, and we told them that we were going to call upon them to carry out the terms of their contract. Then the Crown Law said that there was a defect in connection with the Order-in-Council declaring the district. Thereupon we come to Parliament and ask that it be put right. We want to get that put right first. I will not agree to allow pastoralists who are in arrears with their rates to dictate terms as to the future. We have first to fix up the past. I repeat that I am prepared at any time to discuss the future, but I am not going to allow the past to influence me, or, in other words, a difficulty in the collecting of rates to be used as a means of compelling me on behalf of the Government, to give them special terms. We desire to legalise the rates struck in the past and make arrangements for their collection, and, in fairness to the pastoralists, we want to see whether we can make it better in the future. I think a more equitable form of rating could be devised. I am prepared to discuss that, and if the pastoralists agree we can consult Parliament in regard to it. But I am not going into the future at all just now. I want this liability recognised. The hon. member who represents the district states that they have no desire to repudiate. If that is so, let us pass the Bill, get it into form, and then I will be prepared to meet them in the most reasonable way, and see if I can assist to lighten the burden in regard to future operations in respect to the fence.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*In Committee.*

Mr. Holman in the Chair; the Minister for Lands in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—Short title:

Mr. GILCHRIST: There is a printer's error in the third line; 1905 should read 1909.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 2, 3—agreed to.

New Clause:

Mr. GILCHRIST: I move—

*That the following be added as a new clause:—"In striking the vermin rate imposed within the Gascoyne vermin district the Minister shall not have regard to the maintenance of the fence as from the first day of March, 1915, and shall only take into consideration the repayment of principal over a period of thirty years from the date of the loan, and interest thereon at the rate agreed upon."*

My purpose is to afford opportunity to the Minister to meet the pastoralists in the request they have made from two representative meetings in Carnarvon, namely, that the fence should either be maintained by the Government or abandoned. We do not suggest that the Government should maintain the fence, leaving that, of course, to their own judgment, for we recognise that the fence is a purely local one, and therefore it would come ill from us to try to force the Government to undertake the burden of this expenditure. But, looking at the matter from the point of view of the local pastoralists, we are perfectly justified in declaring that we can no longer maintain the fence, and therefore, so far as we are concerned, it should be abandoned. It will be understood that, as the fence is purely a local concern erected by the money of the pastoralists themselves, they have a perfect right to abandon the fence if they are not in a financial position to undertake its further maintenance. The position has been clearly placed in the resolutions which were sent to the Minister. If the Government lent the money to the local board in the first place, not merely because a request was made by the people concerned, but also because the Government felt that there was a necessity for protecting that district from rabbits, and the State as a whole was to be in any way benefited by

the erection of the fence by the Gascoyne pastoralists, why did not the Government of the day shoulder some of the burden of erection? They have rather allowed the local people to take upon themselves the whole of the burden and the cost of this fence. We do not say that the State is going to be benefited by the upkeep of the fence, but if the State feels that the fence could be kept up, the State should bear some part of the cost. We are prepared to hand over the fence free of all cost. We will pay off the whole of the £66,000 and interest during the period of 30 years allowed by the Minister for Lands. I am willing to expedite the passage of the measure, and am sure there will be no obstacle to it in another place if the Minister will recognise the rights of the local people in regard to their own local affairs, and will allow this amendment to pass.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I cannot agree to any amendment of the Bill. I am not going to allow the difficulties of the past to influence the future at all. I am prepared to discuss the future and take a very liberal view of the difficulties of the pastoralists provided the past is put right. It is not fair to the State and it is an act of repudiation. I will appeal to the Chamber not to consider it in the Bill. We want to get repaid the £66,000 which was advanced under honourable agreement. I am not going to agree to the new clause.

Mr. GILCHRIST: If my amendment is carried, the past will be put right, because the Minister has full power to collect the whole of this £66,000 and the interest thereon. The only stipulation in the clause is that the Minister shall not take into consideration the cost of the maintenance of the fence as from the 1st March, and the reason I put that date in was that the meeting was held by the Gascoyne pastoralists in January, and the Minister had the resolution in his hands within the first ten days of February. The Minister had no right, in view of that resolution, to go to the expense of putting the fence in order with-

out first answering the request of the Gascoyne people and making some definite arrangement with them. By the amendment, the Gascoyne people will be protected against any attempt to override their position so far as the fence is concerned. This fence is not a profitable undertaking for them, and they will not maintain it.

Mr. ROBINSON: The only way is for the Minister to have a talk with the pastoralists at once. If the Bill is passed first, and the pastoralists are spoken to afterwards, the Minister may find that he wants to do something which the Bill itself hardly gives him power to do. It is a purely business arrangement, and they do not want to get out of their liabilities. Whatever agreement is arrived at between them can be put into the measure by way of an amending clause. If the Minister does make an agreement for extending the time for repayment he will want statutory authority, and if we pass the Bill as it stands it is possible the same thing will happen all over again. The clause moved by the member for Gascoyne deals with the matter as well as it is possible to do, but it still leaves open the question of maintenance.

The Minister for Lands: It does not; it transfers the cost of maintenance to the State.

Mr. ROBINSON: Not necessarily.

The Minister for Lands: Either that, or we pull the fence down.

Mr. ROBINSON: The rate of 1s. per hundred acres will be ample to do all the Minister wants if it is spread over a sufficient term. That will be a rate which the poorest pastoralists should be able to pay.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: Not necessarily. Put it on the stock, and the poor person will have a better chance.

The Minister for Lands: That is the best system.

Mr. ROBINSON: That could not be done under the Bill as it stands now. That is a suggestion which adds weight to my argument that we should not settle

the matter now until the Minister has spoken to the pastoralists. I suggest that the further discussion should be adjourned for a week.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Hon. members are taking up a most extraordinary position. When the amount which is justly owing to the State is paid, I am prepared to consider the future. To-day they can repudiate the whole amount, less the amount already paid. Their liability to-day is roughly £12,000, and they can refuse to pay anything more towards the debt of £66,000.

Mr. Robinson: They do not say that.

The Minister for Works: Their actions do.

Mr. Robinson: Certain men have been let off.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No. The Minister for Agriculture had not the power to dictate to the board whom they should sue or whom they should not sue. A man was in arrears at the time and the board in making the representations to the Minister pointed out the difficulty and he agreed to take bills to cover the liability to the State. To say that some people had been summoned and others had not been is incorrect. As a matter of fact, the bills which were accepted proved to be of no value because they have not been met.

Mr. Gilchrist: The Minister picked out certain men who were to be given time.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That is purely the responsibility of the board. The Minister had no connection with the ratepayers.

The Minister for Works: It is a common thing for local authorities to pick out those who can pay most.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The pastoralists are in arrears £12,000 and it is suggested that we should not call upon them to guarantee that these arrears shall be paid before we fix up what we are going to do for the future. I will not agree to the proposition. I am surprised at the member for Canning suggesting that before they validate the rates I should discuss with the pastoralists what our future policy should be.

Mr. Robinson: You must have some clause in the Bill to cover the agreement which you are going to make with them.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The Government can say, "We are not going to charge up against you the improvements we are going to make to the fence." The amendment means, if it is passed, that it will not be a question of my negotiating with the pastoralists at all! It will simply be a question of wiping out the responsibility of maintenance so far as those pastoralists are concerned, and transferring it to the general community, or the Government, as representing the general community, may say they will not maintain the fence, but will pull it down. The amendment leaves only the one alternative or the other. Let us validate the rates for the past and the future will take care of itself. I will give the matter liberal consideration.

Mr. Gilchrist: This Bill refers only to the past.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: This will validate the past. The past is not legal.

Mr. Gilchrist: We will help you to do that.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The future is controlled by the principal Act. The future is a matter for the Minister to decide. The board goes out of existence. It struck a 2s. rate and it is for the Minister to say whether that rate shall be 1s. This Bill is purely to validate the past.

Mr. Gilchrist: The fact is, it clears the way for you to apply the old Act to the future.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The future has been put right already. Unless we get this Bill through, we shall lose the arrears.

Mr. Gilchrist: And the future is affected too. If this Act is not passed the district is illegal.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: We can put the district right by Executive Council minute.

Mr. Robinson: You will have to declare a roads board district.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: We can do that. It is the arrears that we

want to put right, and we cannot collect the arrears unless this Bill goes through.

Mr. GILCHRIST: I do not ask that the Minister should meet us in the future by giving us a concession, but merely that he should meet us by admitting our right to make a decision with regard to a local work. If our Carnarvon Council decided to close a street and the Minister under the Municipalities Act had the right to step in and prevent them closing that street, why should not the Minister meet the Municipal Council and discuss the pros and cons with them? And why should not the Municipal Council in the end have its will carried out with regard to that purely local undertaking? In this case, the Minister is going to ignore the repeated requests of the local people that that local undertaking should be given up. If the Minister would only meet us, as has been suggested by the member for Canning, and discuss the position, and give effect to the local wishes, then we could pass the Bill and the Minister would be able to collect the money which is owing. We do not desire to repudiate one halfpenny of the debt which is owing to the Government. The wealthy pastoralists are even ready to pool the arrears of the struggling settlers and pay their share of those arrears.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member's request is an extraordinary one. Suppose such action applied to all local authorities in Western Australia, what position would we be in? Suppose a local authority passed a resolution desiring to be relieved of the payment of rates for a number of years—

Mr. Gilchrist: We are not proposing anything of that sort.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member wants an extension of 30 years.

Mr. Gilchrist: Thirty years from the date of the last loan, which was obtained six years ago.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It shows clearly that, so far as the request of the hon. member is concerned, he desires that those who come after the present holders shall be deprived of the fence

which they will have to pay for. It is the duty of the present ratepayers to pay for the upkeep of the fence, as other ratepayers do. In regard to promissory notes, it is a well known fact that nearly all local authorities are in the position that they cannot pay, and there are very few who will take steps to bring pressure to bear by taking people to court or issuing distress warrants signed by the mayor or the chairman of the roads board, especially if it is known that the persons concerned are not in a position to pay their rates. When there are those who are in a position to pay, and who will not pay, action is taken immediately. That shows that people are treated in accordance with their ability to pay. I was surprised on going through the files, to find that the conditions were such as were put forward, and I could only come to one conclusion and that was that, if there was a technicality by which some people could get clear of paying their rates, they would avail themselves of it. It is our duty to see that the State is protected. The money has been raised and expended and it would be wrong for Parliament to step in now and say "We will not allow you to charge more than a certain rate so far as this work is concerned." I admit that the Gascoyne Vermin Board has a great advantage in that the money has been borrowed from the Government. If it had been borrowed from a private person, they would not have dared to approach Parliament. As it was borrowed from the Government, they think greater leniency should be shown to them. The district has full power under the Act to manage its own affairs and to pay its own liabilities. The duties of the board have been taken over by the Minister for Lands, and therefore the same power should be in his hands for the time being, so that he might administer the Act fairly.

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

Mr. ROBINSON: I object to the statement of the Minister for Works that some squatters had taken advantage of technicalities to avoid the payment of rates.

The Minister for Works: Did not they take it into court?

Mr. ROBINSON: During the hearing of the case, technicalities were raised to test the question but, so far as charging the settlers with refusing to pay their rates and with taking advantage of the technicalities of the Act is concerned, I say the settlers as a whole are willing to pay.

The Minister for Works: Some of them.

Mr. ROBINSON: They have practically offered that all the debts owing by the men who have not paid shall be pooled and added to the capital sum, so that the Government might lose nothing, and they ask that the redistribution be spread over a period of years. The remarks of the Minister reflect on men who are willing to do a magnanimous act of that description. If in isolated cases individuals have taken advantage of the Act, do not let us brand the pastoralists as a whole, because they compare more than favourably with any other body of men in the State. I have never heard of any set of men being willing to undertake the obligations of another set and defray them. This is a most honourable thing for them to do. I am not satisfied regarding the leases. In 1928 these leases expire. If in the meantime every pastoralist has to pay not only the principal and interest, but also his share towards the maintenance of the fence, at the end of 13 years the fence will belong to the Government and the land will belong to the Government, and the Government, owning both, will be able to dictate their terms. The pastoralists paying for the maintenance of the fence will in fact be making a present of it to the Government. When the conference is held this point must be taken into consideration in deciding the proper course to adopt.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I do not want any misunderstanding to arise from the hon. member's remarks. I was referring to only some of the settlers. There was a case in court and technical objections were raised.

Mr. Robinson: In one case only.



The MINISTER FOR WORKS: If there were half a dozen cases, there was no necessity to proceed with any more than one. Some of the settlers have paid, but I believe no person has paid since that decision was given.

Mr. Gilchrist: One person has.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I do not say that all these men want to get rid of their liability, because some were willing to pay, even though there was a technical error.

Mr. Robinson: And have paid for years.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes.

New clause put and negatived.

Schedule, Title—agreed to.

[The Deputy Speaker took the Chair.]

Bill reported without amendment and the report adopted.

## BILLS (2)—RETURNED FROM THE COUNCIL.

1. Grain and Foodstuff.

2. Permanent Reserve.

Without amendment.

## BILL — LAND ACT AMENDMENT.

### *Second Reading.*

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. W. D. Johnson—Guildford) [7.40] in moving the second reading said: I would like to explain in moving the second reading of this somewhat important measure, that on the face of it and at the outset, I considered it was a very simple proposition, but when I actually started to take the general principle and the details in the shape of repricing in order to frame a Bill, I found the task was bristling with difficulties. It will be remembered that the Government announced a definite policy of reducing the prices of first class land that had been alienated since 1910 to 15s. per acre, and that the term for the payment of the land should be extended for another ten years, making 30 years instead of 20 years. This would seem to be a simple matter. Apparently

all one had to do was to reduce the price of first class land to 15s., and arrange second-class and third-class land in proportion, extend the term to 30 years and the work was done. But, after starting and instructing the officers to put the policy into operation, the late Surveyor General submitted to me various questions, and in dealing with those questions I began to realise that the job was a much larger one than I had ever expected. Thinking in the first place that the matter was a small one and that the policy was definite and distinct, I had a Bill framed just on the general policy, and that Bill was actually introduced last session, but after having its difficulties presented to me, I realised that I could not explain the Bill and do justice to the situation, and convey to Parliament and the people the exact responsibility that they were taking. In other words I could not explain the loss which would accrue from a revenue point of view if such a Bill was passed. Then again, it was simply equivalent to giving the Minister a blank cheque, giving him the power to reprice the land, merely outlining what the maximum should be; that was a responsibility which no Ministry or Government should have to accept. On a big question of this description, Parliament should be informed exactly what responsibility they are taking in regard to loss of revenue. Therefore, this difficulty was explained to the House and the Bill was discharged. After the Bill was discharged, there was a fair amount of criticism and a large amount of misrepresentation in regard to myself in particular and the Government in general. For instance, the *West Australian* newspaper, I think, was largely responsible for a great amount of misunderstanding owing to the misrepresentation of the facts in a leading article which appeared in its columns on the 12th May, 1915. In dealing with land matters generally, and this Bill in particular, the article stated—

The Bill was not merely discharged. The Minister for Lands clearly announced that he would give no guarantee of its re-presentation next session.

Asked for a pledge that a measure of such far-reaching importance to the agriculturist would be placed before Parliament for this body's consideration next session, Mr. Johnson said, "I cannot do that. There may even then be difficulties in the way."

That was a gross misrepresentation of the facts, and the writer of the article must have known it. The actual facts are these—and members will remember the occasion, and will agree with me that *Hansard* conveys the correct attitude that I adopted, and the actual question that was asked of me. A perusal of *Hansard* for 1914 will show that. The following is an extract from page 1914:—

The hon. member who has just spoken (Mr. James Gardiner) wishes me to pledge the Government that this Bill will be introduced early next session.

My reply to that was—

I cannot do that, however. There may even then be many difficulties in the way.

In the course of my reply I went on to state—

As to introducing a Bill at the beginning of the session, I cannot make that promise because there may be all sorts of difficulties in the way.

The *West Australian* deliberately omitted the words "at the beginning of the session," and accused me of stating that I would not introduce the Bill this session. Of course, one has to put up with misrepresentation of that description; but I think it is a grave reflection on the leading paper of this State that it should stoop to such tactics. The Bill was postponed, as I stated, in order that more data might be collected and in order that the Minister might be placed in a better position to explain clearly during the following session the effect of the Bill on the revenue. After deciding to postpone the Bill I got the officers of the Lands Department, and principally the Under Secretary and the Surveyor General, to suggest a board of three men who would be most competent to go into the question with a view to repricing as many of the areas as possible before the introduction

of the Bill. Messrs. Canning, Fox, and Lefroy of the surveying staff were recommended for appointment to the board. After the board had been appointed, we had several conferences before we could arrive at a basis on which they should work. As the result of a good deal of discussion it was decided that they should work on a zone system. I wish to point out that in discussing the division of the area into zones I for the first time discovered that there would come under the Bill one or two areas in respect of which the Government had never anticipated a reduction of the price already fixed, namely 15s. I was not prepared to take the responsibility of reducing that price to less than 15s. I refer particularly to the zone marked A. The land comprised in that zone is principally in the Gnowangerup district, and there is some of it in the Bolgart district. Having made the discovery mentioned, I recommended Cabinet to increase the price for zones A and B from 15s. That recommendation was adopted by Cabinet, and on a perusal of the schedule it will be found that we restarted that land at 25s. per acre, instead of 15s. as promised to the House originally. I should like to go further and say that the land included in zones A and B was never regarded as land to be included in the repricing. Consequently, in submitting this proposal to the House the Government are including the area which it was anticipated would be included at 15s. downwards. As regards zones A and B, the land in which it was not anticipated would be included, we are consequently not going back on our policy altogether. In order to ensure co-ordination in the repricing, it was decided to take the present classification. One can, I think, say generally that the classification of our agricultural areas by the various surveyors have been fairly thorough. I do not know that I have encountered many complaints from settlers on the score of the classification of their holdings. It is generally found that the classification issued by the Lands Department as the result of the work of our surveyors in the field is correct. Having decided to adopt the classification and not

go to the expense and trouble of reclassifying, we then decided to start by making the first consideration climatic conditions, or in other words rainfall. The second consideration in fixing the price of the land was the distance from a railway, and the third consideration was the quality of the soil. This was a departure from the usual policy adopted by the Lands Department, but I claim it got down to a practical method and one which I think will be endorsed by Parliament. Next, it was decided to divide the south-western division and the area of land eastward of the Midland and Great Southern railways into six zones, with a schedule of prices for each zone. That schedule has been placed on the wall of this Chamber, but in order to have it recorded in *Hansard* I will give the particulars now—

Zone A: first class land, 5 miles from a railway 25s., 10 miles 20s., 15 miles 16s.; second class land, 5 miles from a railway 9s., 10 miles 7s. 3d., 15 miles 6s. 9d.; third class land, 5 miles from a railway 6s., 10 miles 4s. 9d., 15 miles 3s. 9d. Zone B: first class land, 5 miles from a railway 20s., 10 miles 17s. 6d., 15 miles 15s.; second class land, 5 miles from a railway 8s. 3d., 10 miles 6s. 9d., 15 miles 6s.; third class land, 5 miles from a railway 5s. 3d., 10 miles 4s. 6d., 15 miles 3s. 9d. Zone C: first class land, 5 miles from a railway 15s., 10 miles 13s., 15 miles 11s.; second class land, 5 miles from a railway 8s., 10 miles 6s. 6d., 15 miles 6s.; third class land, 5 miles from a railway 5s., 10 miles 4s. 3d., 15 miles 3s. 9d. Zone D: first class land, 5 miles from a railway 13s. 6d., 10 miles 12s., 15 miles 10s.; second class land, 5 miles from a railway 7s. 9d., 10 miles 6s. 3d., 15 miles 5s.; third class land, 5 miles from a railway 4s. 9d., 10 miles 4s., 15 miles 3s. 9d. Zone E: first class land, 5 miles from a railway 12s., 10 miles 10s., 15 miles 9s.; second class land, 5 miles from a railway 7s., 10 miles 6s., 15 miles 5s.; third class land, 5 miles from a railway 4s. 6d., 10 miles 4s., 15 miles 3s. 9d. Zone F: first class land, five miles from a railway 11s., 10

miles 9s., 15 miles 7s.; second class land, 5 miles from a railway 6s. 6d., 10 miles 5s. 9d., 15 miles 5s.; third class land, 5 miles from a railway 4s. 3d., 10 miles 4s., 15 miles 3s. 9d.

It will be found in each case that the minimum price is 3s. 9d. per acre. That is in accordance with the Land Act of today. The zones contain an area of approximately 4,400,000 acres made up approximately as follows: Zone A, 1,220,336 acres; zone B, 446,020 acres; zone C, 1,097,968 acres; zone D, 1,124,746 acres; zone E, 440,868 acres; zone F, 66,444 acres. Now I come to the serious side of the question from the financial point of view. The repricing, of course, carries with it an extension of time for the payment of the land rents. For instance, land at 15s. or over will be paid for in 30 years, or in 30 annual instalments. That is to say, for land at 15s. and over, the maximum term of payment is to be 30 years. Land at 12s. will be paid for in 24 years, land at 11s. in 22 years, and land at 10s. or under in 20 years. The object is to place everybody as nearly as possible on the same footing in regard to annual payments of land rents. In this way we are putting everybody on 6d. per acre per annum. Hon. members will be aware that previous to the increasing of land prices about 1910, first class land was priced at 10s. and 20 years were allowed to pay the price. Those people who were fortunate enough to get the land at that time, generally secured the best of the land, because it was in the best rainfall area. They are paying 6d. per annum, but the people who took up inferior land at increased prices are paying over 6d. per acre. Under the system proposed by this Bill everybody will be on a payment of 6d. per acre per annum.

Mr. Bolton: Everybody?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: All those on 15s. or under. Those, however, who are over the 15s. will pay more than 6d. per acre per annum, but the 30 years term will apply to them. It is estimated that the annual loss in revenue through the repricing and through the extension of time will be approximately £30,000.

I want hon. members to understand that.

Mr. James Gardiner: Extending over how many years?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Not over the whole 30 years. I have not gone into the question closely, but a certain amount has been paid already, and that amount will be credited at the end of the term. I think, however, that fact was taken into consideration in arriving at exactly what would be the effect on the annual revenue of the Lands Department. As I have already stated, the loss is due largely to the lengthened term of payment. For instance, 6d. per acre as compared with what is being paid to-day makes a marked difference in the annual revenue of the Lands Department. Instead of "What is being paid to-day," I should perhaps say "What the settlers are supposed to pay." I do not wish to convey to hon. members that those land rents are being paid. Apart from the extension of time on the areas we priced, there will be an annual loss in respect of areas not selected to-day which will be selected in the zones. That is, of course, land inside the zones which has not been classified or selected. I am referring principally to sand plain, and the class of country which has not yet been selected. We will not get the revenue under this system that we would have got under the old system. The payments generally in regard to the land selected in the future will be influenced by the fact that instead of paying a fifth in 20 years there will have to be paid a third in 30 years, and therefore the revenue from land selected after the passing of the Act will be less than it would have been under the old system.

Mr. Smith: Do you not hope for increased land selection by reducing the rents?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I do not think so; I think it is a matter of population. It is not a question of price. If we have not the people to go on the land we cannot sell it. If we have a lot of people the price of the land has not any great effect. The trouble is, that after they go on the land and find that it has been over-capitalised, they cannot farm

properly at the price at which they bought it. In regard to Zone A in particular, the extension of time is the only way in which we shall lose revenue; it is not anticipated that there will be a loss of revenue from the repricing of land in that zone. At any rate it will be a very small item compared to the loss there will be in Zone A through the extension of the time to 30 years. It is estimated that from January, 1910, to 30th June, 1915, there were 7,000,000 acres of land selected. Of that 7,000,000 acres, 2,500,000 acres embraced abandoned holdings within and without the zone limits. Most of these will be dealt with under the provisions of the measure which will enable us to reprice them as poison lands. In other words, of the 7,000,000 acres selected, roughly speaking, 4,400,000 acres are inside the zone, the remainder is made up of abandoned holdings inside and some outside the zone and a good deal of poison land. Roughly speaking we can arrive at the calculation that 2,000,000 acres or over will be dealt with under the provisions of the Act which will enable us to reprice the areas which, after they have been selected, have been proved to be poison lands.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Does that land come under the poison conditions if it is within the zone.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: If it does it can be dealt with as poison land. There are roughly speaking 2,500,000 acres of the 7,000,000 acres which have to be dealt with principally under the provisions provided for in connection with poison lands. The total revenue from all sources is £300,000, and the rents within the zones is £30,000, but then it is estimated in addition to that £30,000 which deals only with the zones that there will be an additional £6,000 from the repricing of the poison lands, and about £1,750 additional on the extension of the term of the poison land; in other words to the £30,000 we must add £7,750 for the poison lands, and so we arrive at the estimated total loss that will be incurred annually through the operation of this Bill if it becomes law. The figures which

I have given may seem somewhat large, but I want to go to the other side of the question and I do not want to take these figures too seriously. We must bear in mind that our agriculturalists, particularly from Zone C to Zone F have had a particularly trying time for a number of years. At the outset quite a number went on the land full of optimism and took with them a fair amount of capital. They were put on the land too far from railways, with the result that all the capital they had taken with them was exhausted before they were able to farm properly. The position would have been the same even if they had got the land for nothing. When they were were trying to farm under impossible conditions they were also paying rents from their own money. We must try and fix up the position from the community point of view by advancing money to the agriculturists from loan funds so that they might pay their rents and assume a liability in the shape of interest instead of placing it on the general community. It is not a serious matter, therefore, that we have not been able to get any revenue from the farmers. Then we have to bear in mind, that while the land revenue represents a large amount, comparatively speaking, of the revenue of the State, even that land revenue is small compared to what we can receive from land development. Therefore, if we reduce the price of land, the money which will be left to the farmers will enable them to increase their development, and the State will get more ultimately than it would have got from land rents. That point has to be taken into consideration. It might be said it is not sound to look at the ultimate gain if we are going to lose immediately, but we are not losing to-day because we are not getting anything, and if we can provide means by which we can get it ultimately, it is sound finance, and it will be of greater benefit to the State.

Mr. Thomas: You are not going to judge all time by the existing state of affairs?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I would be sorry to do that. The matter has been under review for some years. We are dealing with land that has been under cultivation for four or five years, and after going into the matter very carefully, Mr. Bath, my predecessor, took it into very serious consideration and appointed a board of the best officers of the Lands Department to investigate it, and from the result of that close investigation it was generally admitted that the price of land was excessive. Then, it is only fair to also take into consideration the fact that the best land was selected in the early days at 10s. Take the land around Northam, Grass Valley, and Meckering; it was all selected at 10s. and possibly less than that. The farmers in those areas are close to the market, and it is questionable whether we were acting fairly in putting men in more doubtful areas and calling upon them to pay, in some cases, one hundred per cent more for their land. All this should be taken into consideration when reviewing the matter.

Hon. Frank Wilson: Are you referring to the report which you read last session?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I am not going to say that the board recommended a reduction of price to the extent that the Government have adopted as their policy, but they undoubtedly did recommend that special consideration should be extended to those on the land.

Hon. Frank Wilson: Who had not railway facilities.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: They went further than that. My statement is correct that the Board and the Minister recognised that some special consideration had to be extended to those people. What the Board recommended should be done I do not remember.

Hon. Frank Wilson: You are inferring that the board came to the conclusion that all the prices were excessive.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member can take that from my remarks but it is not what I conveyed. Undoubtedly the board realised that an undue burden had been placed on the agriculturists by asking them to pay the

prices which were charged, and I think they recommended that for five years those people should not pay any land rent at all. The fact remains, that it was admitted by everyone who went seriously into the question, that the prices were excessive. We have also to take into consideration when we are dealing with the repricing of land, that it may possibly create a wrong impression in the minds of those outside Western Australia if they form the opinion that we are repricing land because we have not made great progress in regard to land settlement, and that the result of that settlement which has taken place has not been satisfactory to the State. In order to allay fears in that direction and to prevent misrepresentation in that regard, I would point out that the progress in the 15 years during which period land settlement in the State has taken place, has been altogether most satisfactory. The increased production of wheat, wool, meat, and other produce in the South-Western division is a complete justification for the amount of money we have expended and the encouragement we have given to the people to settle on the land.

Mr. Foley: Is it an argument in favour of the reduction of the price if the land is productive?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The area we are discussing does not come under the figures of production which I am going to quote. I am speaking of land which has been selected in the last 15 years. The land which we are repricing has only been selected during the last five years. In 1900 the number of sheep and other stock in the North-West portion of the State was largely in excess of the number in the South-West. To-day we find the positions vastly altered. In 1900 there were in the South-West 690,191 sheep while in the rest of the State there were 1,744,120. In 1914 there were in the South-West 2,077,693 sheep while in the rest of the State there were 2,377,892 sheep. In other words, from 1900 to 1914 the number of sheep in the South-West increased from 690,191 to 2,077,693. Those figures go to show there has been a marked increase in the

number of sheep carried in the South West portion of the State, where most of our settlement has taken place during the last 15 years.

Mr. Foley: That is not a good comparison, because the drought in 1914 in many other parts of the State caused the sheep to die.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: These are average figures and I think it will be found that they are a fair indication of the actual progress made and of the increased production as a result of settlement in those areas during the last 15 years.

Mr. Foley: Does the Bill propose to give relief to other settlers who could not produce as many sheep in other parts of the State?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No.

Mr. Foley: Then where is the equity of it.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: These are the provisions outlined in the Bill. I recognised that when submitting such a Bill, it would be utterly impossible to convey what is being done unless we presented a map and schedule. I have had these placed in the Chamber so that members can clearly understand the basis on which we are working. These will give them an idea of what prices will be applied to the various areas marked on the plan. I do not want to go into further details because members can obtain more information from the map and schedule than from any further remarks which might make.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Will the schedule be incorporated in the Bill?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No. There are other small matters of amendment in the Bill which have a bearing on land settlement and we want to get them introduced at the present time so that when the accountant is organising his books to make them apply to the altered conditions, he can also rectify these other difficulties which have been facing the department for a number of years. The represent little deficiencies in the Land Act and alterations which have been found necessary as a result of the administration since the principal Act was

passed. It is proposed under one clause to amalgamate the cultivable land and the grazing land in one lease. To-day when any one takes up first class cultivable land, it is included in one class and if the holding is made up of second class or grazing land it is put into another class, and we have to issue separate leases, one for the land which is cultivable and another for the land which is grazing. This makes it very costly to the department and causes misunderstanding among the settlers. Under the Bill it is proposed to amalgamate these and take into consideration the value of the land both from a cultivable point of view and a grazing point of view. We propose, therefore, to ask the House to permit these two or three leases to be amalgamated so that we can issue one lease.

Mr. Foley: You will not alter the price as it appears on the schedule whether it is grazing or cultivable land?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No, that is what we propose should be adopted. To arrive at what lease should be issued, if more than half the land is cultivable it will be granted under Part V., and if more than half of it is grazing land the lease will be granted under Part VI. The lease will be issued according to whichever has a preponderance and the price will be taken into consideration by amalgamating the whole. To arrive at the maximum area which can be lawfully held—we have a limit which any one settler can select—we calculate that five acres of grazing land is equal to two acres of cultivable land. That is the basis on which we shall work so that we shall know exactly under one lease what area any one selector can hold.

Mr. Foley: Who will have the final say in the classification between grazing and cultivable land?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The officers in the field will do it the same as now. Then it is proposed to repeal Section 53 of the principal Act that limits the selection to 1,000 acres by one person under conditional purchase conditions within one agricultural area. There is an anomaly in the Act which was not noticed at the time the measure was passed. It

provides in one place that one person may select only 1,000 acres in one agricultural area and in another part it provides that anyone may take 2,000 acres. The department have worked under the 2,000 acres provision. We simply wish to repeal the section which stipulates 1,000 acres as the maximum area which can be selected by one person in one agricultural area, because a lot of people are under the impression that they can take only 1,000 acres, whereas under another portion of the Act they may take 2,000 acres.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister) interjected.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member must realise that in most of the Eastern areas 1,000 acres is too small an area on which to make a decent living; I am satisfied about that. Another provision in the Bill proposes to deal with Section 137 of the Act, which provides that we must publish half-yearly in the *Government Gazette* the names of all holders of land, showing the instalments of purchase money or rent due, and also publish half-yearly the names of lessee in default. We propose to ask Parliament to leave that an open question. The cost of publishing these particulars annually is about £2,000 and it is altogether unnecessary. It is true that at given times it is necessary to publish particulars of land rents showing the holders of land and the instalments due, etc., but there is no need to do it half-yearly. It is costly, and in quite a number of cases the list is published and sent out to various portions of the State and never opened. It is necessary under the Act to do this and we have been incurring this expenditure which has been a direct loss to the State, so we are asking the House to delete that provision and leave it to the discretion of the department to publish it when necessary.

Mr. Willmott: How do you propose to work it if you do not publish it?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: We do propose to publish it but we do not propose to publish it half-yearly.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: You could issue supplements from time to time.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That is so. Supplements to the original publication might be issued. To-day we have to give the full list and it is a very costly matter. I am assured by the department that it costs upwards of £2,000 per annum.

The Attorney General: It costs something for postage alone.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Another provision deals with the matter which was introduced by the member for Northam to take into a special fund a certain amount of land revenue in order to recoup for the expenditure in regard to surveys. Up to 1908—I think the alteration was made during the term Sir Newton Moore was Minister for Lands—

Hon. J. Mitchell: No, I made it.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Surveys were paid for out of revenue, and of course when land was selected the revenue was recouped for the cost of the survey plus the price of the land, but the Government of the day decided to do the survey work out of loan funds and the cost of survey was added to the price of the land again, with the result that we were expending loan funds on survey and taking into revenue the result of that loan expenditure. The hon. member decided that this was not altogether fair and, in order that the Lands Department should contribute towards the loan expenditure incurred in connection with the survey of land, resolved to create a special fund. That fund was created but there was a deficiency in the section inasmuch as it did not permit the Government to utilise the money. It could not be invested in any shape or form.

Hon. J. Mitchell: You could get authority by vote of Parliament.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I do not think that was the intention. The intention was to create a fund which could be invested, and it would go on accumulating, but it was not proposed to create the fund and to provide by vote of Parliament that it should be expended in a given way. The fund has been used by successive Governments, of course, but

there was no authority for using it and we want to give the Government power to invest it and use it in the manner thought best in the general interests of the State. The only other provision is in regard to the surveys, and the surveys of fractions of an acre. To-day there are difficulties in dealing with the fractions. If 1,000 acres is to be surveyed and the area proves to be 1,000 $\frac{3}{4}$  acres, it is necessary to start over the  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre and make another survey. We desire permission to add the fractions on to the 1,000 acres so as to avoid the necessity for extra surveys and to avoid the extra expense. This will appeal to hon. members as a proposition which might have been given consideration when the principal Act was before the House, if it had been thought of. I do not propose to go into this matter further. I have endeavoured to give the Chamber exactly the basis on which we have worked. I have already conveyed an idea of the effect it will have on the revenue of the State, and I have tried to explain that, while the figures are large, they are really small compared with the advantage to the State in the increased development which I consider will follow as a result of the new prices. The other matters are necessary amendments to the Land Act and we want to get them through so that the new conditions will apply generally if the Bill is passed and if we are instructed to introduce the new pricing system outlined in the measure. I move—

*That the Bill be now read a second time.*

On motion of Hon. J. Mitchell debate adjourned.

## BILL—ROADS ACT AMENDMENT AND CONTINUATION.

### *Council's Amendment.*

Amendment made by the Council now considered.

### *In Committee.*

Mr. McDowall in the Chair; the Minister for Works in charge of the Bill.



Add the following new clause, to stand as Clause 3:—Amendment of Section 209. 1. The principal Act is further amended by adding a subsection to section two hundred and nine, as follows:— (6.) The duty of the Chairman to sign or initial each page of the rate-book shall be deemed to have been performed if each folio thereof is signed or initialed by him, and notwithstanding that the signature or initials may be set at the foot of the columns which are deemed not to be part of the rate-book. (2.) The amendment made by this section shall have effect as from the commencement of the principal Act.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The amendment has been inserted to protect those boards throughout the State the chairmen of which have not signed each page of the rate-book. The form of the rate-book was set out by regulation. On the folios there was left one place for the chairman to sign his name, instead of his signing it on each page. This procedure has been followed by a majority of the roads boards. As the result of a case which recently came before the courts a decision was given that each page should have been either signed or initialed by the chairman. That had not been done in the case I refer to, and there is a possibility of the same omission occurring in the future. The intention of the Council's amendment is to validate what has already taken place in this respect, and also to render the same procedure legal for the future. I explained the position fully a few days ago in this Chamber. I move—

*That the Council's amendment be agreed to.*

Hon. H. B. LEFROY: I hope the Committee will agree to the amendment, which is absolutely necessary. The result will be to save a considerable amount of trouble to the chairmen of roads boards, who will not in future have to sign in so many places, and who will be enabled to sign by initials instead of the full signature.

Question put and passed, the Council's amendment agreed to.

*(The Speaker resumed the Chair.)*

Resolution reported, the report adopted, and a message accordingly returned to the Council.

## BILL—POSTPONEMENT OF DEBTS CONTINUANCE.

### *Second Reading.*

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. W. D. Johnson—Guildford) [8.35] in moving the second reading said: It will be remembered that during the last session the Government introduced a Bill for the postponement of debts, which was passed by Parliament. It was understood then that if the necessity arose for putting that measure into operation it would be done by proclamation. Up to date, I am glad to say that while certain representations have been made to the Government at various times, it has not been found necessary to give effect to the measure. The existence of the Act in itself has had a good effect upon those who otherwise might have harassed quite a number of our people. The representations I have referred to were comparatively small, and in a number of cases the Government were able, by making representations in their turn, to overcome the difficulties that presented themselves. Accordingly the Government have not found it necessary to proclaim the measure. Its operation, however, was limited, and unless its operation is continued there is just a possibility that those who are in arrears, owing to bad times, may find themselves pressed; and therefore it is desirable that the Government should be in a position to come to the assistance of such people. I wish to say that I am recommending the extension of the measure principally in the agriculturists' behalf. During the last year or so the farmers have not been pressed to any considerable extent by their creditors; but that fact, I think, is due largely to a realisation on the part of merchants and others that it was not much use to press the farmer, that the conditions were such that the sale of a holding would probably not produce the amount of the debt, or, if that amount was pro-

duced, would inflict a gross injustice on the farmer. I am of opinion, however, that that condition of affairs will not continue, because we find that as the result of a fairly good season the value of farms is increasing and the farmer, in the eyes of the merchants, is in a better position to pay. So there is a possibility that just at the time when the agriculturist has a chance of squaring himself and meeting his creditors, as outlined in the Third Schedule—while if we have another good season he may get out of his difficulties—a possibility of his being pounced upon and harassed at this juncture. It is because I am afraid of that position that I recommend to the Chamber the extension of the measure. If it is not necessary, the measure will not be proclaimed.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: There are lots of lawyers' letters flying around.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I quite realise that. The very existence of this measure will have an excellent effect upon those who otherwise might harass people who happen to owe money or to be in arrears in connection with the purchase of furniture or other goods. I, therefore, recommend this Bill to the House as being purely a continuation of the measure passed last session. I move—

*That the Bill be now read a second time.*

Hon. FRANK WILSON (Sussex) [8.40]: I think we may congratulate ourselves on the fact that 12 months have gone by during which we have been suffering the severe strain of the war and yet have not found it necessary to utilise the extreme powers given to the Government under the measure which it is now sought to continue for a further period of 12 months. When the war broke out, naturally no one could foretell what might happen. The immediate consequence of the declaration of war necessarily was the disturbance of the financial market right throughout the Empire, and it is reasonable to suppose that if powers of this description had not been placed

in the hands of the Government, to be utilised only when the necessity arose, we might have had a panic which would have caused extreme hardship and led to disastrous consequences in connection with the finances of private individuals and others. Therefore the principal Act was passed. Now, I think we are in a different position to-day, especially since it has not been found necessary to enforce the powers conferred. Whether it is necessary to continue the operation of the measure or not is very difficult to decide. In the case of similar legislation we have already agreed to continuance. We do not know whether the powers under the Postponement of Debts Act will ever need to be exercised. We hope not. I am inclined to think, however, that as we have continued other emergency legislation of this description, really on account of the times and on account of the war, we ought perhaps to accede to the request of the Government to extend this measure for another 12 months. I do not see that any harm can result. If it was desirable 12 months ago to pass the original legislation—and we thought so—then I take it that it is equally desirable to provide for the utilisation of the powers under the Postponement of Debts Act if the necessity arises, seeing that we are still a long way, unfortunately, from the termination of the war. Of course, as was pointed out on the passing of the principal measure, such powers must be used with the greatest possible care and with extreme discretion, as otherwise they become weapons of injury.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: It is a wholesome check to have those powers in existence.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: I admit that. We are bound to admit that the result of our experience of this class of legislation has been that benefit results not from absolute action taken under it—there has been very little indeed of that—but from the fact that the legislation is there and that the powers exist. That is all that can be said about this measure. I do not propose to oppose the passing of the Bill. I think we had better let it go through.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*In Committee.*

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

## ANNUAL ESTIMATES, 1915-16.

*In Committee of Supply.*

Debate resumed from the 21st September on the Treasurer's financial statement and on the Annual Estimates; Mr. Holman in the Chair.

Vote—*His Excellency the Governor, £1,540:*

Hon. J. MITCHELL (Northam) [8.49]: The most important duty which devolves upon hon. members is to decide how much shall be spent during the coming year. It is possible that we shall not exercise much control over this expenditure. When it comes to administration we have very little to say indeed; still, we must discuss these Estimates and deal with the position as we find it. Unfortunately the war overshadows everything. We have thrust upon us the responsibility of managing the affairs of the State, and in doing that wisely I suppose we can serve the Empire. The Premier made what he called a plain and straightforward statement. It was perfectly plain, and so far as it went I have no doubt it was straightforward. We have a responsibility which must take us further than the Premier allowed us to go the other night, and we must act when we think action is necessary, but there was an instance the other day when Parliament was flouted and a large expenditure of money undertaken without authority. That was a matter where Parliament should have been consulted. In this regard, and indeed in the past four years, the Government have gone from bad to worse. It is quite true that in the past year we have had the war, and we have had our own troubles arising out of drought, while the effect of the war on the timber industry has made a consider-

able difference to the people of Western Australia. In spite of all that the finances have kept up wonderfully. Our revenue collection has been marvellously good, all things considered. It was only £65,000 less last year than it was in the year before. All through this troublesome period we have been able to borrow at the rate of £250,000 a month and with that amount one would have thought that the country would have been able to go along without much difficulty. I do not know that we need concern ourselves very much about the past, while the present is the time when we wish to avoid, as far as possible, party differences. The future is our concern, and we must look into the position as it is. Hon. members will realise that we have a deficit of a million and a quarter and we have also an interest bill which is even more serious than the deficit. The deficit when paid off will be forgotten. Our interest bill now amounts to £1,546,000. During the past four years, the period in which the present Ministry have occupied office, the interest bill and sinking fund has increased by half a million per annum, which is a third of our interest and sinking fund charge. That is a record which they cannot well be proud of.

The Attorney General: It was all for public works.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No. If the money had been wisely spent and railways had been built here and there, and if the people had been served with facilities, that would have been another matter but the position is just this, that in 1911, the profit from the money invested in railways and other public utilities earned sufficient to pay interest and sinking fund—

The Attorney General: We had not as many agricultural railways then.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: True, since that time 500 or 600 miles of agricultural railways have been built.

Mr. Munsie: Nearly 1,000 miles.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: A considerable mileage has been built, of course, but notwithstanding that, we find that last year the revenue was called upon to the tune

of £700,000 to meet interest and sinking fund. I venture to say this creates a far more serious difficulty than the deficit, because year in and year out, owing to the unwise expenditure of money, revenue will be called upon to contribute at least £500,000 for interest. If from the expenditure of all the loan money that this State did expend, some 23 millions up to 1911, we were able to provide facilities with which to pay for the money borrowed, surely in four short years we should not be in the position of having to find £700,000 from revenue to meet the interest due. It shows conclusively that there has been mismanagement in connection with the spending of loan funds. I want the House to realise what the position means. The House should know where its responsibility lies. If the House is willing that this extravagance should go on, that loan money to the tune of three millions should be spent annually, and very little shown for it, the House can take the responsibility. But the time has come when we must cry a halt and this reckless expenditure must cease. I should like to point out to Ministers that notwithstanding the borrowing of 13 millions we are still very far from having had provided facilities which are needed by a great many of our people.

The Attorney General: We will have to borrow more money.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: We borrowed enough and to spare and I suppose we must borrow again. It will take a million of money to build the agricultural railways that are needed at once and the House will agree that these railways will have to be built as soon as possible. We have to remember that our loan expenditure in the past has been enormous. New South Wales managed with £4 6s. 8d. per head in 1912-13 but Western Australia's expenditure in the same year was £11 3s. 7d. It is unfortunate for Western Australia that this loan expenditure has been on such a lavish scale. The Ministry have piled on the people a debt of about £2 per head for interest in the last year.

The Attorney General: And they are better off owing to that expenditure.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: How can they be better off when they have to pay to the extent that they must do?

The Attorney General: It pays them to pay.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The Minister knows that he has increased the charges against the farmers to the extent of £100,000.

The Attorney General: We only put them back to what they were.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: That is not so at all. We left them £100,000 better off.

Hon. Frank Wilson: What about the fertiliser rates? You put them on to the farmers.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I am pointing out that the Government have had the benefit of this expenditure of public money. Is it a grand thing to put £2 on every person for this money borrowed; I have been trying to show that we should not have to pay this amount. Taxation cannot very well be increased because the Federal Government are reaching out for more money.

Mr. O'Loughlen: A lot of money that the States should have got.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The Federal Government, having imposed their land and income tax, we have now to face a double tax.

Mr. Thomas: You do not object to the fewer opportunities for our Government for war purposes?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Not for war purposes; no one does. But I am pointing out that we have these taxes to meet and if they have to be met there are fewer opportunities for our people to get money.

The Attorney General: That is what makes our lot so hard.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The State Government have had the money but they have not spent it wisely, and so there are troubles to be faced. Our avenues of taxation have been taken from us by the Federal Treasurer. The Minister for Lands to-night said that if we settled people on the land we would get a great deal of benefit. I think the Federal Government should assist us when we bring

out people to settle on the land. The Treasurer will realise that he has but 25s. to come from the customs revenue per head of the population. We have to face the position with this deficit, with a heavily taxed people and with bad times in many directions. We are faced with difficulties and these difficulties we have to endeavour to help Ministers to overcome.

The Attorney General: When you were on this side you were a regular optimist; on that side you are a regular pessimist.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I do not think one can be very cheerful with the present Ministers in control of the Treasury bench. The Minister will agree with me that it is a pity we cannot continue our immigration policy. From all appearances there is no hope of doing so. Australia's future depends on production, and production depends on our population. We often talk about the loafers in our midst, but when we come to look at what is being done by 300,000 people in this State, we must marvel at their undoubted energy. I suppose there are no 300,000 people in the world who are doing more and producing more than the 300,000 people living here. Something was said to-day about the Premier's statement at the Melbourne conference in regard to the sinking fund. I hope that statement is not true, because the Premier should not seek to avoid his responsibilities. When we come to raise money in London we issue a prospectus that sets out the conditions under which we wish to raise the loan. In 1913 we paid less interest than any other State in the Commonwealth—that is we got our money more cheaply, which was due, I believe, to the fact that we put up a sinking fund. We must respect our obligations under this sinking fund. It is perfectly right to buy our own stocks in London so long as the purchasing of them decreases the public indebtedness, but it would not be right to do as the Premier suggests, namely, instead of putting £260,000 into the sinking fund this year to put in an I.O.U., and some day, when it is quite convenient, to pay that £260,000. Minis-

ters are continually saying that posterity must not be overloaded. We contend that posterity should pay for anything it is to have the use of. If a public building is going to last for 20 years, the money can be borrowed and the sinking fund spread over that period. The sinking fund enables us to do things that otherwise we would be unable to do. The Kalgoorlie water scheme was undertaken on a sinking fund of 3 per cent., which will pay for the work before the pipes have to be renewed. It is right that we should respect this obligation. It would be unwise in the interests of the people of the State to disregard our obligations under the sinking fund, and it would be unwise from the workers' point of view. It might appear that this £260,000 would remain in the State. As a matter of fact it would go to reduce the deficit; it would not provide any more work and any action in this direction would make it more difficult for us to borrow in future. The Premier expects a revenue of £5,500,000, and from the earnings of this loan expenditure, amounting to 30 odd millions of money, he ought to be able to pay interest and sinking fund this year. He has a very good year on the railways before him because our harvest will be good. I think we shall realise our 20 million bushels of wheat, and this notwithstanding—

The Minister for Works: Then you ought to be happier.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I am quite happy.

Mr. Thomson: That is the result of the Liberal policy.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The hon. member says the 20 million bushel crop will be the result of Liberal work four years ago.

The Attorney General: The result of solid labour.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: You put the Attorney General on the land.

The Attorney General: Yes.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Why, the Attorney General is a producer. I noticed that the member for Irwin (Mr. James

(Gardiner) made a suggestion as follows—

In times of great financial stress, when the heavy payments of our sinking fund would have a crippling effect on our finances, whilst there would be no justification for suspending the interest and sinking funds on the balance of these stocks held by investors, such a suspension might be deemed advisable on the stock which the State itself held.

That would be no better really than what the Premier suggests because our sinking fund is designed, when spread over the whole term of the loan, to cover the full amount of the indebtedness. If we failed, for instance, in the case of the Kalgoorlie water scheme, in connection with which we have £1,300,000 of stocks issued, to contribute our 3 per cent. to the sinking fund, we should find at the end of the term when we have to redeem those bonds that we were considerably short. The Attorney General says I am not as cheerful as I used to be. It is very fortunate that there are some people in this State who realise that we have unlimited natural resources, but do Ministers realise it? Do they realise what the 20 million bushels of wheat will mean to the State? Do they realise that in years to come, if we get the requisite population, we should be able to make that 20 million bushels 100 million bushels?

Mr. O'Loughlen: We should like to realise 5s. a bushel for the wheat.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Still, it is obvious that if the best is to be done for the people of this State, Ministers must realise what is ahead. In this connection the discovery that sand plain is of value for wheat production in comparatively dry seasons as well as in wet seasons represents the greatest discovery of the last four years. A few years ago no one would touch uncleared land in Western Australia. They used to say of the Eastern States that one could get land without timber, but there was none here. Now we find that we can produce more than the Australian average from our sand plain, and this opens up unlimited pos-

sibilities. There is not only sand plain, but there is all the lighter land which is of great value, and we should be at work now with this land. We should have surveyors out and not have these professional men walking the streets of Perth. Let us consider the possibilities in other directions. The 100,000 cases of apples which we are producing could easily be made one million cases in future. There is no reason why we should import butter and dairy produce. We have a magnificent pastoral industry. I suppose there is no better cattle country in the world than the Kimberleys of this State, and year by year enough feed to sustain hundreds of thousands head of cattle goes up in smoke. This development which I have indicated can only come with an increase of population. Apart from the pastoral possibilities and the agricultural possibilities we have our mines. Unfortunately, the value of the gold yield is year by year decreasing. I think some special effort should be made to encourage this industry. If this State is to develop we must have facilities; we must have railways. The Minister for Lands was in the back country the other day and discussed railways with the people there. These people must have railways, and I believe that as we have come to a time of financial difficulty we should revert to the policy which the present leader of the Opposition, when Minister for Works, gave effect to, the policy of light lines. It is of no use telling the member for Hannans (Mr. Munsie) that the light lines are impossible, because he knows that the wood traffic is run over very lightly laid lines.

Mr. Munsie: Better laid than the Dow-erin-Merredin section of your railways.

The Attorney General: We had practically to rebuild it.

Hon. Frank Wilson: You did not have to do anything of the sort.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: We did not spend anything like the amount of money on our new railways. The light lines policy must be reverted to. We want a line to traverse the area between the Dow-erin-Merredin and the Northam-Merredin railways. Undoubtedly these lines

are too far apart. Then we want to reduce the 15 miles limit wherever we can and this will be possible only by constructing light lines cheaply. The Goomalling-Dowerin line cost £1,060 per mile and it was a thoroughly good line for carrying the wheat traffic.

The Attorney General: It was dangerous.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: It was not. The sleepers taken out of the line are stacked alongside the line to-day and are perfectly good. They were round sleepers, I admit, and the present Government tore them up with the result—

Mr. Munsie: Why did they?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Because they did not know their business.

The Attorney General: Did not the Commissioner of Railways know his business?

Mr. Munsie: He refused to run trains over it.

Hon. Frank Wilson: We did not spend as much money per mile as you for rail ways.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The Commissioner of Railways naturally wants his lines standardised as speedily as possible. In the South-West the department are putting heavier rails down and the same applies to the Great Southern line. The Commissioner is improving the railways all the time. He would like every railway to be up to the standard of the South-West line, but that is not necessary. If it is possible to provide a 10 miles an hour service, that is quite good enough for the first few years after farmers have settled on their holdings.

Hon. Frank Wilson: And better than no railways.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Very much better, and since it is difficult to borrow money and since people must have some kind of a railway, let them have light railways. So long as it is possible to take the trucks to the farms and load the wheat on the trucks, the people will be satisfied. The Government have been spending twice as much on railways lately, including the purchase of rolling stock. Where it cost us £3,000, includ-

ing the purchase of rolling stock and all expenditure in connection with the railways for every mile of new line opened, the cost under the present Government is £6,000.

The Attorney General: We had to replenish the rolling stock which was absolutely starved.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Not at all.

Mr. B. J. Stubbs: The present Government have done more in one year than you did in six years.

The Attorney General: You could not do the work.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Members are ridiculous. The work was not there to be done. The trains were as well run four years ago as they are now, but we did not have the traffic which the Government have now, nor did we have this magnificent wheat yield which is due to the work done by the Liberal party when in office.

Mr. Munsie: We have had three or four failures in the harvest.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: We ordered rolling stock which the present Ministers purchased.

Mr. Munsie: And left them to pay for it.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No, the people paid for it. I have pointed out that we are faced with a pretty heavy burden of taxation, and I advise Ministers to think very seriously if it is not their duty now to spend nothing except on facilities that will lead to increased production. Let us provide for increased export. That can be done if such facilities are granted. It is not possible, of course, to develop the State without money; and I realise that it is not easy to get men of experience, men who know the world, men with means, to go upon the land. For that reason it is necessary in dealing with this question to refer to the Agricultural Bank. The Premier would have us believe that our bank was not nearly as satisfactory to the people as his bank is.

Mr. B. J. Stubbs: He was quite correct in that, too.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I am sure he would convince the hon. member interjecting. That hon. member, if he will

think for himself, as I am sure he is capable of doing, will find that the Premier is wrong. However, he supports the Premier whether the hon. gentleman is right or wrong. The Premier said that when the Liberal Government advanced £1,015,000 through the Agricultural Bank, which we did in the three years up to 1911, the repayments totalled £458,000; or, in other words, that £556,000 had to be found by the Government to finance the bank. But with that amount of £556,000 in our time we did a million pounds' worth of work, owing to the fact that £400,000 odd was repaid. The Premier said he had spent through the bank in three years £1,800,000 whilst the repayments were only £236,000, or in other words that £1,800,000 worth of work had taken £1,564,000 of Government money. Those are his figures. It shows that in our time landed securities were sought after, that Western Australian land had a value, that other banks were willing to lend, that the financiers of the State viewed with favour the security the farmer had to offer. But since that time, owing to the operation of several causes, amongst others those unfortunate regulations—

The Attorney General: Do not forget the bad seasons.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: And owing in a small measure to bad seasons, no one now wants to take farming securities. The regulations, of course, made the position impossible; and I regret very much that the present Minister for Lands has not withdrawn the instructions I referred to—they are not really regulations—because they are damaging to the people. The people cannot be benefited by having their security damaged.

The Attorney General: Those regulations represent the law.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No. They are outside the law. They cannot be regulations.

The Attorney General: They are simply a notification that the law will be observed—no more, no less.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: They are not in accordance with the law.

The Attorney General: Undoubtedly they are.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: They are not, and the Minister knows it.

The Attorney General: I know nothing of the kind.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Then the Minister does not know the Land Act. In connection with these matters the Government have always made a point of proclaiming: how much they have been compelled to do. I wish to point out that they have prevented other people from doing so much that the Government, as a consequence, have been compelled to do more. The State has not benefited from that course of action. The people have not benefited. Trade has not followed to the same extent. There has been unemployment, due to the fact that the Government have spent more money than they need in these directions. After all, the Government expenditure is not so important, seeing that it amounts to eight millions a year, while the turnover of the people is probably twenty times as much. Fortunately for the State, the Government expenditure, therefore, is not all-important. The present Government started off with a great flourish of trumpets and financed many with great liberality; but last year, in a time of trouble, they came down to £271,000 for the Agricultural Bank. That was the total amount last year, and it was only about £20,000 more than we advanced year by year during our own term. The Government are not even in their gait. They go off full pace, and, when trouble is on, come down to a crawl. In this matter of the bank, particularly, they have not done what is right. They said they would increase the maximum to be advanced by the bank to £2,000; but they have not done that except, I believe, in one instance. They arranged full payment to the farmers for a time, but now the farmers have some difficulty in getting advances approved. The Agricultural Bank money, I wish to point out, is just the best that can be spent. Money laid out in this direction provides work now and work for all time, because it is money spent in making farms. When a farm is made, continuous work for all time is provided. I would like Ministers to let us know what



they intend to do with regard to the Agricultural Bank. Is the bank to have enough money? Is the work of improving our lands—and, by the way, our farmers are bound under the Land Act to spend £500,000 annually in improvements—to continue and are we to fill ships with wheat; it depends on money advanced to the Agricultural Bank. We have on the Estimates what the Premier calls business undertakings, and we have also on the Estimates what he calls State trading concerns. The business undertakings he has marked as distinct from the State trading concerns. I suppose the hon. gentleman imagines that the State trading concerns are not business concerns, are not managed in a business-like manner. There is a vast amount of money invested in the State trading concerns. Probably if we could get the amount included in the cash now outstanding on revenue expenditure, it would be something like a million of money. I wish to be fair to the Government. The Premier has told us that he has assets to the tune of £184,000. That amount probably is represented by karri scantlings at the mills, by sleepers in the bush, and by machinery at the State Implement Works. Notwithstanding this, however, I wish to point out that the time has come when such expenditure should cease. Such expenditure, which now totals nearly a million, has not provided employment for a single man more than would have been employed had the Government never spent a penny in these directions. We might have had all that money put into agricultural railways. There would have been additional work for thousands of men in that case, whereas the Government have elected to spend money on trading concerns which will not provide additional employment. Ministers must realise, or they must be made to realise, that we shall be sufficiently taxed for the next few years to find money for the developmental works to which I have referred. If the proper facilities are provided, then private enterprise can be left to do the rest. Indeed. I have pointed out that private

enterprise to-day is worth about 20 times as much to the people as the Government are worth, when it comes to the turning over of money which is for the benefit of the people. We have borrowed a tremendous amount of money, and lost a tremendous amount one way and another. In these trading concerns we have an expenditure which can produce no good, and certainly the concerns themselves are not a credit to the country. Ministers themselves would no doubt be very pleased if they had never seen the State sawmills, or the powellising contract, which is going to cost the country a lot of money before we are through with it. Then, too, there is that freight agreement of which the cancellation cost £6,000. The existence of that freight agreement was due to the fact that Ministers had ventured upon the trading concerns.

The Minister for Lands: That is the beauty of party Government, the beautiful Liberal Administration in the Commonwealth Parliament.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The Minister says the cancellation of the freight agreement was due to the Liberal party in the Federal House.

The Attorney General: So it was.

The Minister for Lands: Absolutely party spite.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Let us look into the freight agreement, since we must do so. How was that agreement made, and why did Ministers pay £6,000 to cancel the agreement? Could the people who had the agreement have made £6,000 out of it?

The Minister for Lands: They made considerably more.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: They must have been on a good wicket, then.

The Minister for Lands: Look at the huge contract it was.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The whole thing was a hole and corner business.

The Minister for Lands: We beat the shipping combine, and Cook beat us; now you have it.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I think the shipping combine beat the Government for £6,000.

The Minister for Lands: With the assistance of Cook.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The shipping combine got the money and the Government got the experience. At all events, as regards the details of the business, we know that when prices were sent in there was an informal tender, and that this informal tender was finally accepted, with the result that the State lost £6,000. Next, we have the Nevanas contract, over which the State lost something like £9,000. I am not going to discuss that contract now, because it is the subject of an inquiry. Then what has happened in regard to the milling contract? What is taking place in regard to flour? I believe this State is putting flour on board at £16 per ton for the people of Adelaide, whilst £18 10s. per ton is charged for flour to the people of Perth. That is what our Grain and Foodstuff Commission are doing. Why have the people of this State to pay £2 10s. per ton more for Western Australian flour than the people of Adelaide have to pay for Western Australian flour? The contract with the flour millers is extremely one-sided, and will result in a considerable loss. The existence of that contract is due to the fact that Ministers like State trading. They went in for a considerable importation of bran, pollard, and so on. They could not sell their stuff because ordinary traders brought similar stuff in at a cheaper rate. When Ministers wanted a boat to go to the Argentine, they did not charter in the ordinary way, but said they would give £25,000 for a boat for the trip. I understand she took some 4,500 tons of bran at a freight of about £5 4s. 6d. per ton. The ordinary traders got their freight at about 40s. The result was that the Government were left, as they always will be when they get into competition with a smart business man. We have this wheat in the mills here being gristed under an arrangement which the millers have made. The flour is to be sold at £18 10s., and the bran at £10. It is provided that if the price of the imported bran falls below £10 the millers are to get the difference from the Government. In view of this I suppose that the difference between the

£10 and the £3 10s. at which the bran has been sold will be paid to the millers.

The Minister for Works: You suppose it.

Mr. Munsie: You know it is not so.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I do not know. The milling companies are to get the 49s. for gristing and handling.

The Minister for Works: It was a very nice agreement, was it not?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I would like to know in respect to this wheat, of which some 600 tons has now gone, if the millers get 10s. for distributing charges? If so, it is a very nice arrangement for the millers. There can be no justification for selling flour at £2 10s. cheaper than the people of Adelaide have to pay.

The Minister for Lands: What would you have done—reduced the price and kept it in the State?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I should have thought that if there is to be a loss, the people of the State might have the benefit of it.

The Minister for Lands: In other words, you would make the mistake as big as you could.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: This is not the only loss on the purchases made by the Minister.

The Minister for Lands: I admit we would not have bought it with the knowledge we have now.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: As a matter of fact, you would make the same blunder again.

The Minister for Lands: The hon. member urged that we should buy.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No, I did not urge the Minister to go to Argentine. I said there was a great deal more wheat in the country than the Minister believed. I went on the statistician's figures, but the Minister did not believe the statistician, and so sent to Argentine.

The Minister for Lands: We took the advice of the political board nominated by both parties.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I do not know whose advice the Minister acted on, but I know he did a very foolish thing in bringing in so much wheat, bran, pollard and maize. Where did our maize go to?

It was sold here at well under 3s. and sent to the East. What was maize sold at? When the Minister sold his lot it was well under 3s., but to-day, only a few weeks afterwards, it is pretty well twice as much.

Mr. Munsie: The ring has got in again and put it up.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The farmer did not get cheap bran, maize or anything else; he had to pay full prices.

The Minister for Works: He had an opportunity.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No, not unless he could come to Fremantle and compete there for it. The loss on this transaction will amount to well over £50,000. It is far too much money to lose.

The Minister for Works: I prefer that loss to no grain.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: But you could have had the grain and the money too. There is this immense loss to face. The Ministers' desire to trade is the reason why they brought in this stuff. Did they bring in this wheat for the farmer?

The Minister for Lands: No, the wheat was for the general community.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: And so, too, with the fodder.

The Minister for Lands: No, that was for the farmer.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Why, you sold it in the City from the very start. This desire to trade has led from one extravagance to another. We have the extravagance to which Mr. Stevens objects. No less than £105,000 has been expended on State steamers, and Mr. Stevens condemns the lot.

The Minister for Lands: Then you are opposing the policy of assistance to farmers?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No, but I want the business well managed. These steamers have cost £105,000 and they are condemned roundly by Mr. Stevens, who is asking for a new steamer. Ministers have now bought the "Kangaroo." I wish to protest against the method adopted by the Government in procuring the steamer. Parliament was not consulted, notwithstanding that it was sitting. What right had the Government to expend £140,000

without authority? We have already discussed the steamers from time to time, and I have continually raised objections to the methods of the Government in this regard. The "Western Australia" was a heaven-sent vessel. Nothing could be better.

The Minister for Works: I think you would be well advised to keep quiet in regard to the matter. You know who our advisers were.

Hon. Frank Wilson: Who? Let us have their names.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Will the Minister tell us what the instructions were? Freight was very difficult then. They got this steamer, but a month or two afterwards there were a couple of million tons of shipping to be sold in London. The Government were just a bit too soon in, and the boat proved to be altogether unsuitable. More than her original price of £39,000 was spent on repairs. She was a particularly bad purchase, although Ministers were proud of her. Following on that purchase we have this £140,000 invested in the "Kangaroo" without authority. What right had Ministers to spend this without consulting Parliament? Why do they submit Estimates at all? This expenditure should be objected to, for it was absolutely wrong. Members sitting opposite should assert themselves and insist upon Ministers acting constitutionally. They not only spent this money without authority, but they dragged the credit of the country in the mud at Home. They have gone to an insurance company and paid 5 per cent., with a sinking fund of 3¾ per cent. The security of the insurance company has been considered good enough, and they have our money.

Hon. Frank Wilson: They gave the bonds.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Yes. I claim that this £140,000 should have been spent only after consultation with Parliament.

The Minister for Works: I wish we had a few more like her.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: We should have spent the money in a way that would have meant work for our workmen, should have spent it in the State on rail-

ways for our settlers. The steamer is dear, and apart from that you have not the money to spend. You have not even enough money to go round, yet you can find £140,000 for this purchase. Again, it is very doubtful whether she is a suitable boat. She was not suitable when Mr. Stevens first thought of her, but she has become suitable since. It is doubtful whether she is worth £140,000.

The Minister for Works: Who raised the doubt?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Mr. Stevens in the first place. He questioned the suitability of the steamer.

The Minister for Works: For a particular trade.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: However, Ministers have acted unconstitutionally in spending the money without authority notwithstanding that we were here. I do not know whether we will have an opportunity of discussing these steamers on the Revenue Estimates. I desire to promise Ministers that when we get to the Loan Estimates they will have a lively time on this transaction.

The Attorney General: That is a threat.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Yes, and I will make further threats of a like nature. It is for the House to determine that Ministers shall do what is right in the expenditure of public funds. We are going to insist on having the money spent in the way which will benefit the people most. I hope the Premier's mission East will meet with some measure of success. I am sorry he is not here to listen to the debate on the Estimates. I realise that it is through no fault of his own that he is absent: he has gone East on public duty and it is because he is not here that we hesitate to criticise him roundly. I hope his mission will result in him securing sufficient money to enable us to go on with these railways. We want them built, and we cannot emphasise this fact too often. We cannot too often make the public realise that this is a country of unlimited possibilities. Given good government and the seasons we are going to have for at least the next ten years, there

will be no doubt about the future. We have agreed to help the Government and, if the Government will let us help them in framing their Estimates, the best that can be done for this State will be done. If the Government are left to themselves they might arrange other secret agreements and others "Kangaroos" might be purchased.

Mr. ROBINSON (Canning) [9.46]: Members of this House were very pleased indeed when the Government called both Houses of Parliament together to consider the appointment of a defence council. It seemed to me a step in the right direction that councils of this sort should prevail not only in matters of defence, but in other matters we have to discuss. In the conduct of the affairs of this State, it is not the concerted will of this House that prevails but the will of a particular section or a particular individual. It seems to me that if any good is going to come from the Government of this country by a House of 50 men, the views of the 50 men must be respected. At the present time in many instances the views of men, no matter how logical or how reasonable their arguments, are not respected. I would like to see this House take upon itself more control of the affairs of the country, and the entire control of the finances of the country. We are told that this House holds the purse strings.

The Minister for Lands interjected.

Mr. ROBINSON: I have never seen the purse strings. Where are they? This House is the proper body to control the purse strings. At the present time the purse strings are held—now that the Minister has called my attention to his existence—by irresponsible persons, persons who pitch away thousands and hundreds of thousands of pounds of the money of this country. Without a thought, without a care it is gone. I can show in a moment or two where a hundred thousand pounds has gone?

The Minister for Works: Where is it?

Mr. ROBINSON: I can tell the Minister. Lost over bran and wheat and ships and Nevanas £100,000. There the Min-

ister has it—this sum and more pitched away without a thought and without consulting us.

Mr. Griffiths: Only a hundred thousand pounds?

Mr. ROBINSON: That is a very conservative estimate.

The Minister for Works: I say there was no loss over Nevanas. We have the material.

Mr. ROBINSON: The point I am making is that this House is not consulted in connection with any of these things where expenditure is concerned.

The Attorney General: This House was consulted in the appointment of the Commission which authorised the purchase of that stuff.

Mr. ROBINSON: Which stuff?

The Attorney General: The bran.

Mr. ROBINSON: Yes, but while this House authorised certain things to be done in that way, it expected them to be carried out in a business-like fashion and as this House resolved itself into a committee from all sides to appoint a council of defence, so I would have such a council for finance, and before a Minister could commit himself to the purchase of several cargoes of this, that, or the other about which he knew nothing either of the value or the market, thus interfering in his own way with the commerce of the State, that council would be consulted.

The Minister for Works: You were consulted.

Mr. ROBINSON: I have not been consulted and I do not think any member on this side of the House was consulted.

Mr. Thomas: That is why it failed.

The Minister for Works: The leader of the Opposition was one and the leader of the Country party was another.

Mr. ROBINSON: I am loth to believe that either the leader of the Opposition or the leader of the Country party was consulted about the purchase or the sale of that bran.

The Attorney General: They had the authority granted by this House.

Mr. ROBINSON: Let me give this precise instance. When speaking on the

Address-in-reply at the opening of this session, I referred to the fact that there were rumours current in Perth, and I hoped untrue, that the Treasurer was thinking or talking of buying another steamer and spending £100,000 or £200,000 when there was no money to spend and when we wanted that which we had for the urgent domestic affairs of the State. The Premier replied to me across the floor of the House—"I am not only thinking of it or talking of it, I am going to do it."

Mr. B. J. Stubbs: And then you say it was a secret.

Mr. ROBINSON: The Premier in that statement flouted this House. What is the use of Parliament if that is to be done? Why not dismiss us all if there is to be a dictator on that side of the House who at his own sweet will is going to buy ships to bolster up some of these trading concerns which can be bolstered up by bed and bedding while the world lasts but never under existing management will they be made to pay.

The Minister for Works: When in future we are told we have been secret, we will turn up your speech.

Mr. ROBINSON: The point I am making is not so much one regarding secrecy. That I will come to in due course if necessary. The point is that this House was not consulted. There was not much secrecy about the "Kangaroo." Everyone seemed to know about it, but the House was never asked and never told anything about it, and the money was not taken out of the purse in the ordinary way. It was spent in the most extraordinary way that money has ever been spent by any Government in Australia. When we hear of a farmer who has mortgaged himself to the banks and cannot raise any more money from the banks or from the store-keeper, and then goes to a certain class of moneylender who charges a high rate of interest, we say he is going down and will soon be in the Insolvency court. When a man departs from the ordinary methods of trade, the public say he is up against it. I have to say on behalf of some people in this State that the Premier must be up against it very strongly

when he has to resort to what I call a moneylender's dodge to raise money.

The Minister for Works: Not a high rate of interest, though.

Mr. ROBINSON: Never mind the rate of interest.

The Attorney General: You should not be hard on the money lenders.

Mr. Foley: So long as it is not a usurer's dodge.

Mr. ROBINSON: If these methods are to be pursued any longer, let us dissolve Parliament; we have no control at all.

Mr. Thomson: Parliament seems quite unnecessary.

Mr. ROBINSON: Let us appoint a dictator because we are practically at the present time under a dictator Government.

Mr. Taylor: You do not want to take any risks now of going to the people.

Mr. ROBINSON: We are in such a bad plight financially that not only has the Treasurer flouted the House in the way I have described, but he is going to endeavour to flout the laws of the country and I do not think he will succeed. I observe from the Press—

Mr. O'Loughlen: That clipping looks a good colour.

Mr. ROBINSON: It is a fine colour which always inflames my friends opposite.

Mr. Taylor: It brings a blush to others in this House, too.

Mr. ROBINSON: It contains a well known photograph and of course where that photograph goes it is the sign manual that the statements must be accurate. I am taking this statement as being accurate. The Treasurer was asked—

What about the sinking fund, Mr. Seaddan? Some critics argue that you are wanting to commandeer this year's quota of £268,000.

The Minister for Works: It would be very handy.

Mr. Allen: Only a drop in the ocean.

Mr. ROBINSON: The Premier is reported to have replied—

They are quite wrong; we could not commandeer it if we wanted to. We do not want to, so that the statement is

utterly misleading. All that I suggest is that the trustees who control the sinking fund should invest this year's quota in new stock instead of old stock.

Mr. Foley: Is that extract from the *Worker*?

Mr. ROBINSON: The Treasurer says the statement is utterly misleading. Who is making a misleading statement when he says he is going to suggest that the trustees take new stock instead of old? Is he going to use the sinking fund for the purpose of extinguishing the debt of the country? No, he is going to use the sinking fund for the purpose of increasing the debt of the country. Who then is making the statement calculated to deceive? The Premier says his critics.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): His critics.

Mr. ROBINSON: The answer of the Honorary Minister carries so much weight in this country that when the people read his interjection to-morrow, they will know the answer to my question.

Mr. Thomas: You flatter yourself; they will not read it.

Mr. Allen: They will say it is another joke.

Mr. ROBINSON: The Premier has his advisers. He has legal advisers who in point of ability are second to none in this State. I refer to the Solicitor-General. I do not think the Attorney General has advised on this subject.

Mr. Thomas: Your opinions of one another are probably on the same basis.

Mr. Smith: Not fit for publication.

Mr. ROBINSON: The Attorney General knows I have a very high opinion of him. I am not dealing with him at present; when I do I always express myself in terms of which he can approve. Whether the Solicitor-General did actually advise the Premier or not, I do not know, but I venture the opinion—and I think it would be backed by any legal man who was consulted—that the Premier cannot and the trustees cannot use the sinking fund of this State to purchase new stock.

Mr. Male: Thank goodness!

Mr. ROBINSON: I say that deliberately. If he does it, he proves what I have already stated, that a dictatorship has been established and not only will Parliament be flouted but the laws of the country will be flouted and the trustees under this statute will be flouted also. I do not think that the trustees can be compelled to do this and I do not think they will do it. What is the sinking fund for? It is provided in such plain terms that even the ordinary person should not mistake it.

The trustees shall from time to time invest dividends, interest, or produce arising from the investments so that the sum may accumulate by way of compound interest towards the final extinction of the debt.

The object of the sinking fund is to eventually extinguish the debt. The purchase of securities and debentures contemplated by the Act is, therefore, for the purpose of extinguishing and in due course paying off the debt, and not for the purpose of increasing the debt, and no legal quibble and no juggling with words can enable any lawyer in the world to advise that the sinking fund moneys can be used for the purpose of increasing the debt.

The Minister for Works: Suppose there were bonds for sale, could they not purchase them?

Mr. ROBINSON: They cannot do so. They might juggle with the matter in same way but they cannot honestly, within the meaning of the statute, take up any loan that might well do other than extinguish the debt of the country. If they take up loans or bonds which are going to increase the debt of the country, I say they will be doing an illegal act and I say they can be restrained by His Majesty's High Court from proceeding, if any ratepayer chooses to interfere.

The Minister for Works: I was not wanting free advice.

Mr. ROBINSON: I am not giving free advice. If the Minister wants free advice on the subject he had better employ a competent person to give it to him.

The Minister for Works: If there was a new loan on the market and we had the

money to spare, could they not take it up if they wished?

Mr. ROBINSON: The purposes of the Act show that no amount of quibbling or juggling with words will alter the position, as I have stated. If the fund is used for the purpose of extending the indebtedness of the country it is illegal. If it is used for the purpose of extinguishing the debt of the country it is legal. We can only extinguish the debt of the country by buying our old bonds and old securities. The words used throughout the statute are always debentures or securities. They could not be called securities if they are not in existence now. The Premier said that he is using the sinking fund and would invest it in new stock, instead of old stock. He would thereby increase the indebtedness of the country, and would require to alter the Statute before he could do that. He would have to bring down a Bill to alter this Inscribed Stock Act before he could do such a thing.

Mr. George: Would that not be a breach of faith?

Mr. ROBINSON: That tone not only goes through the General Loan and Inscribed Stock Act of 1910, but it is in the old Inscribed Stock Act of 1897. Section 9 says—

The trustees appointed under this Act shall invest the sums appropriated for the formation of a sinking fund in Imperial or Colonial Government securities at their discretion, and shall from time to time in like manner invest the dividends and income of such investments so that the same may accumulate by way of compound interest and be applied to the redemption of the stock.

The one Act talks about the extinction of the debt and the other talks about the redemption of stock. No one in the wide world can convince me, or any other reasonable person, that by purchasing new stock we are going to extinguish the debt. As a matter of fact we are going to increase it. I defy the Premier to flout the law. He may juggle with the laws but he cannot flout them. I under-

stand there are three trustees in the old country free altogether from political influence. I do not see how these men are going to be a party to this sort of thing.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: Are those trustees in the old country; are not two of them out here?

Mr. ROBINSON: I understand that Mr. Goschen is one and that the Agent General is another. I understand that if such a proceeding is carried out by the Colonial Treasurer, it must be entirely outside the scope of this Statute. May I say that no one in Western Australia has done more injury to the credit of this country than the Premier when he has given forth to the world that that which we have prided ourselves upon for so many years, namely the keeping of a sinking fund for the redemption of our debts, he is going to demolish.

The Minister for Lands: He has not said that.

Mr. ROBINSON: He has said so. I will read his words.

The Minister for Lands: He has said nothing of the sort.

Mr. ROBINSON: I will read his words again—

All that I suggest is that the trustees who control the sinking fund should invest this year's quota in new stock instead of old stock, thereby increasing the debt of the country.

The Minister for Lands: Is that demolishing the sinking fund?

Mr. ROBINSON: Yes, certainly. Let us take it in round figures. Suppose the debt of the country is 30 millions and our sinking fund for this year is £238,000. If we used that sinking fund in purchasing old stock we are decreasing the debt of the country by a quarter of a million and probably more. If, on the other hand, we purchase £260,000 worth of new stock the debt of the country will be £3,268,000.

The Minister for Works: Not necessarily.

Mr. ROBINSON: If the country wants to borrow more money and increase its indebtedness, by all means let

it borrow, but let it do the business in a legitimate and proper manner.

The Minister for Works: Will not that increase the indebtedness?

Mr. ROBINSON: Let them increase the indebtedness if they want to, but let it be done by legitimate means.

The Minister for Works: And the trustees have no power to purchase?

Mr. ROBINSON: Let them borrow in a legitimate fashion but let them not borrow by subterfuge, but let them not borrow in a deceitful fashion. Let them not borrow by telling the public that they are not borrowing, while at the same time they are doing so.

The Minister for Lands: You know you are talking nonsense.

Mr. ROBINSON: No one knows better than the hon. gentleman that what I am saying is very sober truth.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): There is a good deal of piffle in it.

Mr. ROBINSON: What was said the other night when the hon. member for Irwin (Mr. Jas. Gardiner) interjected—"For the sinking fund you are going to give them sufficient bonds"? The Premier replied, "Yes, and that will make that amount available as a new loan". The hon. gentleman opposite interjects that it is nonsense when I say it is wrong. Let it go forth to the public that the men who are ruling the country say that sane business methods are nonsense. True, they have called sane business methods nonsense for four years, and that is why the country is in the particular state that it is in to-day. That is why some of our friends opposite act like jackals, and do not desire that a man should be heard.

Mr. Taylor: Why offend all and sundry?

Mr. ROBINSON: Of course there are exceptions.

Mr. Willmott: There are some hyenas.

Mr. ROBINSON: There are some very notable exceptions. Let me turn to another and more pleasing aspect of the affairs of the country. I have just had



the privilege of travelling through a large area of our lands outback.

Mr. McDowall: You were with a picnic party of the Minister for Lands.

Mr. ROBINSON: No, I was not.

Mr. McDowall: I thought it was the picnic of the Minister for Lands.

Mr. ROBINSON: I was in the company for some time of the Minister for Lands, and I found, when talking to him sanely, that he did not talk nonsense, neither do I think that he thought I was talking nonsense. Whilst we were there we were all very much impressed, at least I was, with the possibilities of Western Australia in a way that we were never impressed before. I saw thousands of acres of crop that would do anybody's heart good to see. I have heard the suggestion come from others than myself and I am not making it as original, but I desire to endorse it, that the Government should send an excursion train to our agricultural areas, say to Merredin, Goomalling—

Mr. Thomson: And Katanning.

Mr. ROBINSON: And Katanning and anywhere that the crops are as we see them there, and it will serve as an example to the people in Perth as to what can be done in the country. Let the excursion fares be cheap, say, 10s. return, or whatever small amount the Minister for Railways can do it at, in order that the people may have a look at the country. It will give fresh heart to the people in these hard times, and I commend the suggestions to the Minister for Railways. I have not heard from the Government side that they are going to help keep the pollard and bran in this country. I have said this many times before, that when we deal with wheat here we should not send it to the outside world as wheat and subsequently import the same article in the altered form of bran and pollard, but we should mill our wheat here and encourage our flour millers so that we may keep the offal within the State for our farmers. I suggest that we should keep all the offal in the country and that we should have mills dotted about Western Australia in order that the offal may be

supplied at a cheaper rate than it is supplied to-day.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Why do not millers take this up?

Mr. ROBINSON: The millers do all they can possibly do at the present time, handicapped as they are by the incubus which hangs over them, which interferes so much with their progress.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): Why did they not do that before there was an incubus?

Mr. O'Loughlen: What do you suggest for gristing?

Mr. ROBINSON: I would keep the Committee here all night if I went into all these questions. If the hon. member will read my speech in *Hansard* on the Address-in-reply last year, he will find the information he desires.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: State Flour Mills. I suppose.

Mr. ROBINSON: How could the Government run State flour mills? They would bungle them just as much as they have bungled the State steamships. They have no more idea of controlling State flour mills than they have of turning out bricks.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister) interjected.

Mr. ROBINSON: I never asked the Honorary Minister to do that. He never does anything. Let him shift sand. I have another suggestion to make to the Government.

Mr. O'Loughlen: If it is not better than the last one you had better not go on with it.

Mr. ROBINSON: I will keep it for the intelligent members of the House. I think members on the Government side should welcome suggestions, whether they are good or bad, from this side of the House. Any hard hits that I may have made this evening—

Mr. O'Loughlen: Hard hits?

Mr. ROBINSON: I am sorry for the lack of intelligence displayed by the hon. member and I will withdraw my reference to intelligence on the opposite side of the House. I desire to discuss the question of ferries. The Minister for ferries is not in this House, but I have had the pleasure of interviewing him. I

remember full well, in the days when I was electioneering, it was said on behalf of the Government, and by members of the Government, too, "Why, look at the ferries! We have made £2,000 profit this year on the ferries." I was business-like and, as supporters of the Government said, ridiculous enough to challenge those figures. I said that neither interest, sinking fund, nor maintenance had been taken into account, and that the £2,000 profit would wither away, when it was opposed to the strong forces of such factors as I have mentioned. The other day, when I was interviewing the Colonial Secretary in connection with the South Perth ferries, the hon. gentleman had no money to do this, and no money to do that, and no money to do the other. I said, "Why, you made some £2,000 profit last year." He said, "That was not a balance sheet profit. That did not take into consideration interest and sinking fund." I replied, "During the election I said the same thing, and I was not believed except by my constituents. That is the reason why I am in Parliament. I am glad you admit it." The Colonial Secretary said, "Anyhow, it is true. There is not the profit in the ferries that is estimated, when interest and charges are placed against the profit." We learned from the Colonial Secretary that the Queen-street ferry was being run at a loss of £500 per annum, and the Minister intimated that he proposed to drop that service. He also told us that the Como ferry service was not a paying concern. I can readily understand it. Everything depends upon management. I have no doubt—and I will give the Government the credit for this—that if certain Ministers of the Crown were placed in charge of some of the trading concerns, it is quite possible that they might make a financial success of those concerns.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): I do not think you could make a success of a hen-laying competition.

Mr. ROBINSON: But many such undertakings as the ferries have not had what I call a fair show. They are not

managed on what I call business lines. The ferry service, for instance, was saddled with the incubus of a ship which was unsuited for the purpose. That boat was copied from one of the vessels running in Sydney harbour, which had a comparatively deep draught, say, 7ft. or 10ft., with two decks and a lot of top hamper. But the expert designer at this end, who probably knew nothing more about ships than about anything else, cut off 5ft. from underneath and left all the top hamper, with the result that the ship of his design draws about 3ft. The consequence is that when the winds blow she drifts away, and there is no controlling her. Seven or eight thousand pounds has gone there. I do not know whether the Government propose to deepen the ship or to cut off the top hamper, but she cannot fly. I think she ought to be placed in commission with the "Western Australia." She is somewhat of a similar character. Now I would suggest—and here is my practical suggestion—that the ferries should be handed over to the South Perth council, who have a number of hard-headed business men among them, and who will look after that ferry service and make a paying concern of it.

Mr. O'Loughlen: This speech should be reprinted at election time for circulation in South Perth.

Mr. ROBINSON: The papers never reprint any speeches of the member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loughlen), I notice. They have not come to that yet.

Mr. O'Loughlen: I should be sorry to spend as much as you spend, at any rate.

Mr. ROBINSON: I think the suggestion I have offered is a practical one. Its adoption would result in the bringing in of a certain amount of money to the Government, and in relieving them of a lot of worry.

Mr. O'Loughlen: It is worth playing to the South Perth Council a bit for a few votes.

Mr. ROBINSON: Let the hon. member make a few more interjections of the same kind, then. I was pleased to hear the Premier start his Budget speech by saying that the key-note of it was econ-

omy. I hope, therefore, that when reasonable suggestions come along from this or even from the other side of the Chamber, in connection with details of the Estimates, those suggestions will not be considered on purely party lines—

Mr. Thomas: On what lines are you speaking?

Mr. ROBINSON: But will be considered on reasonable lines, with the idea of conserving the money of the country at the present time.

Mr. Taylor: How does that tally with your previous statements?

Mr. ROBINSON: The hon. member interjecting will perhaps have an opportunity of addressing the Committee tomorrow on this subject, when I shall be delighted to listen to him. I feel that unless such a tone as I have suggested pervades this House there will not be very much economy. I feel that, if Government members persist in saying that these Estimates are going through this House, that they, the Government members, are going to bully the Estimates through—

Mr. Thomas: Who said that?

Mr. ROBINSON: There will be no economy. On the other hand, I appeal to Ministers to allow each item as it comes along to be discussed dispassionately. If items can be reduced, let us reduce them. My reason for making that suggestion is that, despite the fact that we are at present in a worse state financially than we were last year, the general expenditure is larger. As a Minister has said, the same thing applies throughout the Empire. The cause of that, I suppose, is that expenses have increased all round. We have to recognise that; but, at the same time, if there is an item which we can do without at present, we should do without it. I speak in no party spirit when I say that we could have done without the purchase of that State steamer for £140,000. The expenditure on that steamer was unwarranted, and was unnecessary. That steamer is something which, if a private person went in for it, I would call a luxury. The condition of this country at the present time is not such as to allow of our

indulging in luxuries. If we can do without any particular thing let us do without it.

Hon. Frank Wilson: That steamer is a speculation, a gamble.

Mr. ROBINSON: As my leader says, the steamer is a gamble. The financing of the transaction shows that the steamer is of that category. I am quite prepared, on the lines I have suggested, to offer from time to time bona-fide criticisms, with the idea of helping in the discussion of some of these items, and I hope my criticisms will be accepted in the spirit in which I propose to make them.

Mr. WILLMOTT (Nelson) [10.25]: I do not propose to take up much of the time of the House, as the member for Irwin (Mr. James Gardiner) has very exactly expressed my opinions regarding the finances of the State. Never in the history of Western Australia has there been a time when rigid economy was more urgently required. Hon. members may well hesitate before suggesting additional expenditure. I myself have grave doubts as to whether there has been a sufficiently earnest attempt at true economy. We have heard the indictment of the last speaker, and we must all agree with him that there is a grave element of doubt as to the necessity of some of the purchases which the Government have made, and as to the advisability of some of the enterprises on which they have embarked. However, the matter has been thoroughly thrashed out, and no doubt more will be heard of it in the near future. I do not intend to dwell upon that aspect of the finances.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Give us a bit about the State sawmills.

Mr. WILLMOTT: The State sawmills at the present time are, I regret to say, like the Premier or like Mr. Micawber, waiting for something to turn up. That is the position of the Premier to-day, and I am sorry to say it is also the position of the Government.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Are not the State sawmills in a better position than the private mills?

The Minister for Lands: Was it a mistake to establish the State sawmills?

Mr. WILLMOTT: It was a mistake to establish them on such elaborate lines. It was a mistake to put such a huge amount of capital into them. So much money has been sunk in them that I very much doubt if we will ever see it back.

The Minister for Lands: Tell us exactly what you would have done.

Mr. WILLMOTT: Personally, I would have allowed private enterprise to go into the forests. I would have charged a royalty sufficient to make it worth the Government's while to let private enterprise work the forests.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The forests have been lying there for decades waiting for private enterprise to work them.

Mr. WILLMOTT: Private enterprise was not allowed to work them, because previous Governments—not only the Government in power to-day but other Governments too, I am sorry to say—would not allow private enterprise to work those forests. That course should have been adopted.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The last Liberal Government never refused an application for forest country, and did not get one application for these karri forests.

Mr. WILLMOTT: Where is the money coming from? That is the question which is troubling us all at the present time. For my part, I can see no golden lining to the clouds, and indeed I cannot see even a silver lining. What with the war and the bad seasons, it seems to me that Western Australia is right up against it. We have handed over nearly everything to the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth have absolutely skinned us. So far as revenue producers are concerned, the Commonwealth have everything. What chance, then, have we at the present time? The revenue producing channels remaining to us as a State are infinitesimal compared with the sums of money we require for the proper development of our country. Therefore, nothing is left to us but to borrow; and at the present time we cannot even do that.

Mr. Foley: It would be a good job if we could never do it again.

Mr. WILLMOTT: I regret that any member of the Committee can express

such views. Has all necessary economy been exercised in the past? I am afraid not, in many cases; and I will take—

Mr. George: The powellising plant.

Mr. WILLMOTT: Not the powellising plant, but I will go back to the purchase of the Perth trams. The trams have always been a sore point with me. Debentures should have been given for them, and not cash.

The Minister for Lands: If debentures would be accepted.

Mr. WILLMOTT: "Never part with cash when debentures can take its place" is a golden rule. Sufficient care was not exercised when the contract for purchase was drawn up. The use of that delusive word "may," instead of "shall," perhaps was the reason. So far as I can gather, it was intended that the payments should be in the form of debentures, but when the agreement was drawn up, instead of saying "debentures shall be given," we said "debentures may be given." In my opinion it would have been better if the State, instead of entering into competitive trading concerns, had spent the money, shall we say, in a vigorous scheme of water conservation. If that money, or a portion of it, had been spent in a scheme of water conservation for irrigation, a vast scheme would have been the result.

The Minister for Lands: Where would you spend it?

Mr. WILLMOTT: In the glorious South-West, God's own country, and I am sorry to see that on the map which we have on the wall of this Chamber there is not a bit of blue or red covering any portion of the South-West. The Minister who grasps this question of water conservation and irrigation will leave his name indelibly impressed on the scroll of fame. Now for a word of warning. We have heard something from several members regarding the sinking fund. The sinking fund should on no account be interfered with, because by doing so we should be jeopardising the whole financial position of the State. Finance is sensitive; there is nothing more so. Shall we compare it with the temperature of a fevered patient? The least excite-

ment affects it detrimentally. I would say that no sinking fund is necessary or desirable for further loans, if obtainable say during the war, but we must not do what I understood the Premier in his remarks to say he intended to do. I think that would be most unwise.

The Minister for Mines: What advantage would it be to float a loan during the war without a sinking fund?

Mr. WILLMOTT: The advantage is that we would not have to provide for sinking fund, and it is a wonder to me that that was not palpable to the Minister. His lack of business acumen is truly marvellous.

The Minister for Mines: Don't you display your ignorance about sinking funds; get back to South-West questions.

Mr. WILLMOTT: In times of stress, in my opinion, there should not be political strife, but at the same time are we going to sit here like a lot of dummies and not voice our opinions at all?

Mr. Foiey: You have always gone on as long as your wind has lasted.

Mr. WILLMOTT: It is not because I have a particular affection for those who are occupying the Government benches, but is simply because the money market is so sensitive that it is likely to be seriously affected at the present time by any form of political upheaval, that if I and my supporters, by occupying those benches opposite could benefit the State as a whole and the South-West in particular, we would not hesitate in assuming the positions which are now held by my friends.

The Minister for Mines: We have heard that for years past.

Mr. WILLMOTT: But it has never been headed.

Mr. O'Loughlen: This Government has spent more money in the South-West than any other Government has ever done.

Mr. WILLMOTT: Yes, but in what direction? The Government have advocated that economy should be observed by private citizens as well as by the Government, but in giving that advice they should remember that example is

better than precept. It is no good preaching what those who give the advice do not themselves practise. That should be borne in mind, and it should also be remembered that although the Premier may be able to borrow a little money in the Eastern States, and we all hope that he will, we do not know how long this war is going to last. Therefore, we really must exercise economy. I mentioned the other day one direction in which economy might be effected, but I was taken to task for doing so. But when the Estimates are being dealt with item by item, if we come across any particular item that should be struck out, I will not hesitate to move in that direction. I trust that we shall not have a repetition of the steamer buying. It seems to me that to spend £140,000 on a vessel with an engine which even to-day is in the experimental stage was nothing less than a crime.

Mr. THOMAS (Bunbury) [10-37]: One is led to believe in the earlier stages of this debate that a complete absence of party feeling would prevail, and that as hon. members addressed themselves to this subject it would be with the object of being helpful to those who are administering the affairs of the country at the present time. It was expected that suggestions for the better management of the country would be offered and that they would be accepted in the spirit in which they were offered, and that altogether the debate on the Estimates might prove of some value to the State. But although those pious hopes were expressed by members of the Opposition we find that the old party spirit has broken out again.

Mr. Robinson: What about the purchase of the "Kangaroo"?

Mr. THOMAS: The hon. member seems to have a limited knowledge of that proposed purchase. When he was discussing it he was offering opinions which showed that he was not in touch with the subject.

Mr. Allen: Should not the House know what is going on?

Mr. THOMAS: One of the faults I have to find with the existing system

of Government is that it is government by a few and that the majority do not have the opportunity of utilising their brains to the extent they should do. It becomes an easy matter to take a Government or a Treasurer or an individual Minister to task and make bald assertions about the maladministration, and then go on to belabour the Government and the party for not having done things that might have been done. That sort of criticism falls glibly from all our tongues. I is the least intellectual of all our efforts, but the one thing I regret in the matter of this discourse is that those who profess to understand high finance like the member for Canning, those who have a profound knowledge of the most intricate mazes of high finance like my friend, if they would devote themselves to offering some suggestion to the Government whereby they might do better—

Mr. Thomson: But would they accept those suggestions?

Mr. THOMAS: If they did not you would have a legitimate grievance.

Mr. Robinson: They will not give us an opportunity of discussing it.

Mr. THOMAS: The hon. member had a fair opportunity for about an hour this evening, in the course of which I failed to observe a single suggestion as to how we might economise.

Hon. Frank Wilson: What do you propose about the South Perth ferries?

Mr. THOMAS: I do not propose to become so parochial as to deal with the detailed affairs of South Perth. My existence in politics does not depend upon the vote of two or three or half-a-dozen, and during my speech I do not intend to talk about my constituency at all. There is a time when we should try to take a bird's-eye view of the position of Western Australia. We owe at least some duty to this country, and it is up to us to forget our party bickerings and see if we have not a suggestion somewhere which will be of benefit to the country. To take again the self-professed authority on high finance: In dealing with this question of the sinking fund the hon. member, with a peculiar kind of logic, says that if we

use our sinking fund to purchase old stock we are reducing the country's indebtedness, but if we use the sinking fund to purchase new stock we are increasing that indebtedness. I would like some hon. member to elucidate that problem for me.

Mr. Robinson: If you cannot understand that, you should take no further part in politics.

Mr. THOMAS: I like the hon. gentleman's assurance. He has laid down the proposition several times this evening and said "I think that, and consequently the Government are wrong if they do not agree with me." If I cannot quite understand the hon. member in that line of reasoning in regard to the sinking fund, I think it is possible that I am in company with a number of other members in this House, ordinary intelligent individuals. In regard to this matter of investing the sinking fund, if we purchase old stocks for which we are paying from  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. to 4 per cent. interest and go on the London money market to-day and borrow money on which we will have to pay 5 per cent. or  $5\frac{1}{2}$  per cent, would it pay us better to invest out £250,000 in old stocks or pay us better to save the interest on that amount of money on our new stocks?

Mr. Robinson: That is not the question at all.

Mr. THOMAS: That is the crux of the question.

Mr. Robinson: That is another question.

Mr. THOMAS: These authorities on high finance would have us invest our money to bring in  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.

Mr. Robinson: You can buy the stocks to-day at such a rate that you would be making 7 per cent.

Mr. THOMAS: I do not know that.

Mr. Robinson: You should know it.

Mr. THOMAS: I think it is self-evident that the trustees are serving the best interests of reducing the national debt, because whether they buy a new stock or an old one they are still buying stock and still keeping down the national debt by precisely the amount they invest in either direction, and if we can make a difference in saving from 1

per cent. to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. it seems to me rather a good investment. I do not know that hon. members were justified in asserting that the Premier is going to exercise some authority and compel the trustees in the bank to do as they may be desired.

Mr. George: He cannot do it.

Mr. THOMAS: I accept the hon gentleman's legal opinion that he could not do so, and I presume he would not attempt to do so; but if any reasonable argument can be adduced to show that he would be carrying out the spirit and the intention of the Act, and at the same time benefiting Western Australia, why should it not be done? The member for Nelson (Mr. Willmott) said that rigid economy was necessary. Of course, it is necessary. Did anybody ever dispute it? Why repeat the suggestion. It has been repeated here a hundred times. But why not tell us how a more effective economy can be applied. No suggestion at all is given, but merely a warning that the Government must not do any more of these things. We got no valuable suggestion as to what can be done. The member for West Perth (Mr. Allen) interjected that members should be more often consulted upon the administration generally. I replied that I agreed with that. I repeat the statement. The existing system of Parliamentary Government amounts to this. The country is managed by five or six Ministers, and the rest of us are occasionally consulted. Members express their opinions and the matter is quite forgotten. It seems to me that while the country is paying 50 of us—true but a very modest salary—members of Parliament might very well be utilised to better purpose than they are at the present time. Without any reflection on the Government I can safely say that many measures pass through the House which would be improved by a more careful and matured judgment expressed by members. I think we should adopt some system of committees in general, which I understand is adopted in the British Parliament, so that while certain legislation is going on, other mea-

asures could be receiving expert inquiry and criticism. Then when they come before the House for final acceptance valuable information would be forthcoming which would bring us to a sounder conclusion.

Mr. Allen: They have a committee like that in municipal government.

Mr. THOMAS: We might well learn something from a municipal council. I do not profess to understand the English Parliamentary system but it seems to me that there also they have a system of Parliamentary Under Secretaries. There can be no question, whether the Government in power be Liberal or Labour, that Ministers are over-worked. Ministers in Western Australia, and probably in other States of the Commonwealth as well, are expected to do three times as much as it is humanly possible for them to accomplish, and in endeavouring to carry out their tasks to the best of human ability, they may make mistakes. I do not suggest that the Government exists, or ever will exist, that will not make mistakes, but when mistakes do occur they are often due to the fact that Ministers have not the time and opportunity to give proper attention to the details of administration.

Mr. Smith: We asked them to hand over the water supply and sewerage to a board and the Minister would not agree.

Mr. THOMAS: I do not see the necessity for that. The hon. member must remember that the Labour party have always been in favour of a public works committee, and that all expenditure exceeding £20,000 should first receive the approval of such a committee. I have been a strong advocate of it but, curiously enough, we find that as the proposal is so enthusiastically advocated by the hon. member, it has been equally enthusiastically turned down by members of his own party. It is a peculiar thing that in Western Australia the Liberal party object to a standing Parliamentary committee on this question, while the Liberal party in the Federal Parliament advocated it.

Mr. Allen: Why? Because of the extra cost incurred.

Mr. THOMAS: I suppose such a committee would consist of about five members.

Mr. Smith: At large salaries.

Mr. THOMAS: Yes, at munificent salaries, a salary for which, humble citizen that I happen to be, I would not accept the job—two guineas a day for the chairman and one guinea for the members when sitting. The hon. members says it would be too great an expense to appoint such a body to deal with the loan expenditure of three millions of money per annum.

Hon. J. D. Connolly: What good would they do?

Mr. THOMAS: If the hon. member for Perth has such a poor estimate of his own ability, he has no right to occupy a seat in Parliament. I assume that such a committee would be appointed from both sides of the House. The 50 members comprising this Chamber have been elected, wisely or otherwise, by the people and it is only reasonable to assume that they are the best the State can produce, and I do not think members are wise in belittling their own status and ability. If they do not think they have the ability possessed by men outside Parliament, they ought to resign and give place to better men. At the cost of a few hundreds of pounds per annum every public work to be embarked upon could be inquired into by a committee of this Parliament; with ample time and opportunity to obtain all the evidence required, and instead of that being an expense to the State it would prove a very great economy indeed.

Mr. Allen: Very doubtful.

Mr. THOMAS: If, as seems evident, Ministers are overworked, why should not some members, without extra remuneration, be utilised as under secretaries, or under studies, if hon. members like, to go to their assistance, take over minor duties and give their undivided attention to them. If that were done, does not it appeal to hon. members that better administration could be secured in the management of many

of the concerns which our State has in hand to-day? Whether it be wise or not, this State has committed itself to a system of State enterprises and I do not think I am far wrong when I say that a majority of the people of the country approve of it. I do not say it is impossible to embark on some that are not necessary or wise, and I do not say the present Government, or any other Government, will not make mistakes, but along that path, properly directed, I believe lies the future prosperity of Western Australia, because we are saving for the advantage of the people profits which would otherwise go into the pockets of private individuals. In the way I have suggested, it seems to me it is possible to still further utilise the brains of Parliament. It is a waste of money and intelligence to have 45 members in the House who indulge in little else than idle criticism of the Government in general, and one another in particular, when they might be better engaged in other directions. Further, than that, it has seemed to me that one of the chief causes of extravagance in Western Australia is an ever growing civil service, or a Government service which does not seem to increase very much in efficiency as years go on. There always seems to me to be a difficulty in getting the service the Government require for the income they have at their disposal. I suppose that sums up the position because, if they could make the one do for the other, we would not have a deficit. It seems to me there is something lacking in connection with those employed by the Government that does not induce them to give all the service that the State could desire. I do not wish to cast any reflection upon that body of men. I dare say many of them are very fine fellows and some of them possibly might be seat warmers, but I say that in the Government service there is not sufficient incentive to exertion. I am told by those employed in the service that very often, whether one works hard or not at all, promotion seems to come along at about the same rate and it is pretty slow at the best. I read some time ago of



an American concern, having some thousands of employees, which has adopted a system that from the office boy who had just joined to sweep floors, to the highest official in the service there is open to all an opportunity by which they can privately make suggestions to a board quite outside their immediate superior officer or any of the officers, for the improvement of the concern in which they are employed.

Mr. Smith: That is private enterprise.

Mr. THOMAS: What is good for private enterprise could be made good for Government enterprise.

Mr. Allen: They would not adopt it.

Mr. THOMAS: If the employees of that firm make suggestions, the suggestions are carefully considered by the experts appointed for this work and if any suggestion is of value it is adopted and the individual is remunerated according to the value of his suggestion.

Mr. Thomson: That ought to be applied to the Government.

Mr. THOMAS: In the railway service of this State there are about 7,000 men employed. At the present time there are probably 100 officers doing all the thinking, while the remaining 6,900 men are just carrying out the tasks allotted to them. We sometimes have complaints that the railways do not make the profit that they should make, and that the efficiency does not reach as high a standard as is expected. Suppose instead of a dozen or 100 people thinking out questions in regard to management of the railways, we have 7,000 men, and every man is an expert in something no matter how trivial it may be—for no man can work in a service for any time without getting a special knowledge of something—see what an enormous benefit that would confer upon the system.

Mr. Smith: You would reward a man specially.

Mr. THOMAS: I would. I would provide an incentive to exertion for every man and boy in the service. I would have 7,000 brains every day thinking out methods for the better control and management of the Western

Australian railways. I would remunerate them generously wherever intelligence and effort were displayed. What would be the result? We would probably have the most excellently managed and most expeditiously run railways possible in the whole world. Why should we not do it? Why should there not be openings for ambition, no matter what the road may be? Why should we not have dangling before the eyes of boys and young men in the service the prospect of promotion from the day that they join to the day they leave? We are here to get all we can out of life, and to do good at the same time for others. I would have a different spirit prevailing in the Government service generally. It was stated that in Napoleon's army every soldier had a marshal's baton in his knapsack. Why should not integrity and effort be rewarded by offers of promotion? Let every man in the Government service know that we want brains, ability, and integrity, and that if he applies these characteristics, no matter what position he may hold, there will be a still higher position for him to reach. When we get the best man for a job let this man be given his opportunity. We shall thus find the spirit of emulation and ambition springing up amongst the people that will make the Government service more successful and better than any private service we could find in the world.

Mr. Smith: That is contrary to trades' hall teaching.

Mr. Munsie: It is absolutely in accordance with it.

Mr. B. J. Stubbs: How do you know anything about trades' hall teaching?

Mr. Smith: I read the *Worker*; in fact I print the *Worker*.

Mr. THOMAS: When the member for Northam (Hon. J. Mitchell) was speaking, he rated the Government for having received so many millions per annum in revenue more than any previous Liberal Administration had received. He said it was rank, gross, and criminal extravagance that they were spending that money and still had a deficit. To any persons outside Parliament altogether, and not in touch with the daily

Press or with the views of Parliament, no doubt that argument would appeal effectively. They would say naturally that under the Liberal Government they only had three millions of revenue, but that to-day, under a Labour Government, they have five millions of revenue, and that consequently the Labour Government are squandering two millions per annum. While any person unacquainted with the conditions of Parliament might say that, is it fair for a responsible politician like the hon. member to put a statement of that kind before Parliament, in the hope that it will be spread broadcast throughout the State? He knows that for every million of money we spend it does not necessarily mean that we are bringing in more nett revenue. When we build railways we spend millions possibly and not all the gross revenue which comes in is profit. We may spend five millions, and increase our revenue by only a quarter of a million, or whatever the case may be. But, in addition, there are wages, interest on the money, sinking fund, and so on, and there might be no profit whatever. While we may have an increase in revenue of two millions more than any previous Administration, the cost of getting that two millions may be equal to the two millions itself. Why, therefore, try to lead the people to believe that we are actually squandering this enormous sum of money? In my opinion the present Premier was not altogether wise when he decided to treat everything as revenue, and show on the corresponding side of the ledger everything as expenditure. If he adopted the system of only taking the profits on these various concerns operated on by the State, it would then appear that we would be getting a small revenue, which is really what the revenue is, because the five millions is really a fictitious revenue, as most of it is spent in order to get that revenue. If he had adopted a system which would have been plainer to the people there would have been fewer misunderstandings and less criticism. A great deal has been said about the deficit which it is anticipated Western Australia is going to

have this year, in the face of the conditions which are prevailing during this stressful time all over the world, and in Western Australia no less than any other place. I honestly think that, apart from being a supporter of the Labour Government, if the Treasurer can go through this year with a deficit of only £250,000, he will have performed a very good year's work. He will have done very well indeed in a time like this, if there is no greater deficit than that. I am told that while we anticipate a deficit of something like a quarter of a million, Victoria anticipates a deficit of a million and a quarter. But no one ever seems to think, while a Liberal Government is doing that, there is anything wrong attached to it.

Mr. Munsie: They had over a million deficit last financial year.

The Minister for Mines: South Australia closed the year with a deficit of nearly half a million.

Mr. THOMAS: Let us be perfectly honest, fair and just, in our criticism, irrespective of the party to which we belong. These other States are older than Western Australia and they had a longer time to consolidate their financial position, and get their affairs put under better administration, but for all that, they have enormous deficits. Is it fair or just for the hon. member to point the finger of scorn at the Western Australian Government, which are showing better results than anyone.

Mr. Gilchrist: Has Victoria an accumulated deficit?

Mr. THOMAS: I do not think so.

Mr. Smith: What is the deficit per head of the population?

Mr. THOMAS: The hon. member for North Perth (Mr. Smith) seems to have a list of interjections which he is firing off whether the place suits the interjection or not.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Is Victoria a fair comparison?

Mr. THOMAS: I say that the comparison is distinctly in our favour.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Look at our sparse population.

Mr. THOMAS: I have not a great deal to add. Because I have tried to

make a general defence of the position of the Government, because I regret that ungenerous criticism should at a time like the present be hurled across the floor of the Chamber—instead of helpful, suggestive, creative criticism being offered we get nothing but the carping, fault-finding variety—I do not go so far as to say that the Government might not exercise a greater degree of economy than they are exercising to-day. I am not going to claim for the present or for any other Government that they are perfection, that they are the absolute acme of achievement in that direction. But I most sincerely trust, and I believe too, that where criticism is offered in the right spirit, where the olive branch is held out, where an hon. member puts an idea before the Committee in the way that one member should submit it to another, there is no need for bitterness or recrimination or unpleasant reflections.

Mr. Smith: There is no bitterness on this side of the House.

Mr. THOMAS: The hon. member cannot deny that some of the remarks which came from a speaker on the Opposition side this evening were anything but flattering—a lot of bald assertions against and reflections upon the Government, without any evidence in support. I honestly believe that any suggestions made in the right spirit will be received by the Government in the same spirit and will be given every possible consideration. I have never observed any symptoms of swelled head on the part of members of the Ministry. If Ministers can get hold of a good idea they will, I have no doubt, be quite ready to utilise it irrespective of its origin. With regard to one item in particular, I have notions of economy myself. I refer to the Agent General's office. As to that institution I have rather strong feelings—feelings I am almost afraid to express. On that office we are spending from £9,000 to £10,000 per annum—I have not the exact figures on my tongue just now—to do work which could be done just as efficiently for one-quarter of the expenditure. I have casually glanced at the Budget

figures relating to the Agent General's office, and I observe £1,000 odd for travelling and incidental expenses, and a sum of £300 for entertainment. I wonder how many of the working people of Western Australia, who pay the major portion of the taxes, ever get anything out of the £300 spent annually by the Agent General in entertaining in London. Again, I noticed an item of £700 for a motor car. All these luxuries are being indulged in while there are people in Perth to-day starving.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Not starving.

Mr. THOMAS: There are many people suffering who do not care to make their circumstances public. I do not say that the Government would stand by and see any man, woman, or child suffer. Perhaps the word I used, "starving," represents an extreme statement of the case; but while we can provide money for an Agent General in London to procure motor cars, while we can furnish him with large sums for travelling expenses and entertaining—

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): But there is nobody in this country starving.

Mr. THOMAS: I withdraw that statement. It is perhaps extreme. However, there are many in Western Australia right on the verge of want. Instead of having an Agent General's office, we should have a general agent's office run on purely commercial lines. Are we, as a State, in a position to maintain an ornamental institution in London?

The Minister for Works: It is a good paying proposition for Western Australia.

Mr. THOMAS: The Agent General's office nowadays represents nothing but a convenient retiring ground for Premiers who have grown tired of office in Western Australia. I think we should send Home a man to deal purely with the business side of the question. Do not let us trouble about the social part. This young country is not out for so much social distinction, or for wasting money on people who can well afford to spend money on themselves. We can make a better use in Western Australia of the money that is being spent in

London to-day. I trust that when the debate on items referring to the Agent General's office comes along—I know the opinion of the Committee is strong on this point—that they will be dwelt upon. I trust, further, that when the voice of the Committee has been heard affirming that economy should be exercised in this connection, and also in some others, Ministers will listen and will accept the judgment of hon. members and take the responsibility, or let the whole Committee take the responsibility, of doing what is best for Western Australia. I believe that economy is practicable. I even believe it is possible that we might do with a few less motor cars than we have in Western Australia. In my opinion, we have not yet reached the stage of realising that we must rely on ourselves a great deal more than we are doing to-day. A tendency to lean on the Government has grown up in the people of Australia, and especially in the people of Western Australia, until we have reached this stage, that no matter what section of the community is concerned, it seems a question of who can howl the loudest for the most aid from the Government. And so it goes on until the country gets beyond its means. I think the time has arrived when we may justly and legitimately profit by the evidence which is abroad to-day, and realise that the old spirit of extravagance in the individual and in the State must come to an end. Times are not the same as they were, and they are not likely to be in the future what they have been in the past. If we can only profit by the lesson that is offered to us, by the dreadful times through which we are now passing, it will be a great benefit to us in the future. The sufferings of to-day will be amply repaid in the times to come, and when prosperity returns to this grand young country it will be on a more solid and permanent basis, and we shall be able to build more securely than in the past.

Progress reported.

*House adjourned at 11.18 p.m.*

## Legislative Council,

*Wednesday, 29th September, 1915.*

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

### PAPERS PRESENTED.

*Electric Power House, East Perth.*

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central): I desire to lay on the Table of the House, in accordance with the resolution carried on the 23rd inst., 123 files in connection with the electric light and power station. In submitting these papers, I would like to read to hon. members a letter which I received from the Commissioner of Railways—

Further to my letter of the 9th inst. addressed to the Hon. Mr. Scaddan, in accordance with the motion which was carried last week in the Legislative Council, I am to-day forwarding all contracts, agreements, correspondence, and papers relating to the East Perth power house contract, and the supply of electric current therefrom. As previously pointed out, the most serious inconvenience will be occasioned if these papers are away from the Department for any length of time, as they are in daily use, and I would specially request that those dealing with the supply of current to suburban districts be held for a few days at most, as negotiations are in hand, and agreements in course of preparation, and the work will be absolutely at a standstill so long as the files are out of my possession.

I move—

*That the Papers do lie on the Table of the House.*

Question passed.