

public bodies in England, including the London County Council and the corporations of Birmingham and Glasgow, while two of the Australian Governments, and several Australian Corporations have also brought it into operation. In view, therefore, of all that, it cannot be said that we, in this colony, cannot define the minimum wage, that we cannot do what hundreds of others have done.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): Which colonies have adopted it.

MR. JAMES: Victoria and New South Wales, and several local and municipal bodies in those colonies have also adopted it. The position which I take up is one which all will support if they consider this question quietly and sympathetically. If the good people of Melbourne, which was the richest city in Australia, had been told a few years ago that they would have in vogue in their midst a system of sweating, so vile that a Royal Commission had to be applied to inquire into it and that an indignation meeting was held in the Town Hall a few nights ago, would they have believed it? No, Sir, they would not, but the evil does exist there, and we should prevent it from even growing up here. If it grew up in Victoria during the period of her brightest prosperity, and before the present depression, how can we say that we are safe, during our prosperity, and are not subject to the same influences that acted there? What harm can be done by the Government following the example which has been set by the Imperial House of Commons, by two of the Australian colonies, and by so many important corporations throughout the length and breadth of England and Scotland, and by various corporations in the Australian colonies? If, by any reasonable effort, we can prevent wages from falling below that level beyond which it is unsafe that they should go, it is not too much to ask that we should make that effort. I do not wish the Government to accept my estimate of what the minimum wage should be. I let the Government fix it themselves, and, I think, they should, after fixing it, recognise it as the minimum wage on the Government work. There is nothing unreasonable in that request, neither is it unreasonable to ask them to follow the examples which have been set them by other countries. I am not advocating an increase in the rate of wages, but I simply want the Government to say that the wages shall not fall below a certain level, so

far as the Government are concerned, in connection with our Government contracts. I hope hon. members will pass the resolution, and leave the details to be settled by the Government during the recess.

MR. SIMPSON seconded the resolution.

MR. WOOD moved that the debate be adjourned.

Motion put and passed.

Debate accordingly adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest) moved that the House, at its rising, adjourn until Monday, October 7, at 7.30 o'clock, p.m.

Motion put and passed.

The House adjourned at 11.30 o'clock, p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Monday, 7th October, 1895.

Roadways for New Estates—Reported Outrage by Natives—Goldfields Bill: third reading—Public Health Act Further Amendment Bill: third reading—Electoral Bill: third reading—Collie Coalfields Railway Bill: third reading—Donnybrook Bridgetown Railway Bill: third reading—Explosives Bill: third reading—Mines Regulation Bill: third reading—Stock Diseases Bill: third reading—Parks and Reserves Bill: Legislative Council's Amendments—Engine Sparks Fire Prevention Bill: in committee—Establishment of Minimum Wage in Government Contracts—Adjournment.

The **SPEAKER** took the chair at 7.30 o'clock, p.m.

PRAYERS.

ROADS FOR NEW ESTATES.

MR. TRAYLEN: I would like to ask, with out notice, whether the Government can do anything, during the recess, towards providing that when estates are cut up into small blocks, there should be ample roadways left.

No reply.

REPORTED OUTRAGE BY NATIVES.

MR. CONNOR: By leave, without notice, I desire to ask the Premier whether he has received any information of a lot of cattle be-

ing killed by natives in the Kimberley district ; and, further, whether it is the intention of the Government to provide more police protection to the settlers there ?

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): In reply to the hon. member, I am aware that complaints have been made by the owner of one station on the Ord River, in regard to the natives attacking stock, but I have not been informed whether this information has come down by mail, or by telegraph to the coast, because the information received by the Government does not bear out the statements contained in the telegram shown to me by the hon. member. The Commissioner of Police informs me that "Sub-Inspector Orme, who has only just returned to Wyndham from a round of visits to all the cattle stations, reports that the natives are giving little or no trouble whatever, and that the few depredations committed are greatly exaggerated. Sergeant Wheatley, also just returned from another quarter of the district, to which he had been sent to enquire into alleged depredations, reports that the complaints were without foundation. Sergeant Brophy, at Hall's Creek, reports that the natives are very quiet, and have expressed a desire to be on friendly relations with the whites." I may add that I will forward the telegram which the hon. member has shown me, and make further inquiries into the statements contained in it.

MR. CONNOR: I take it that if the Government find, on inquiry, there is any necessity for further police protection in that district, they will send the necessary force.

THE PREMIER:—Certainly.

GOLDFIELDS BILL.

THIRD READING.

Bill read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

PUBLIC HEALTH ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL.

THIRD READING.

On the motion of Mr. TRAYLEN, the Bill was read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

ELECTORAL BILL.

THIRD READING.

Read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

COLLIE COALFIELDS RAILWAY BILL.

THIRD READING.

Read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

DONNYBROOK-BRIDGETOWN RAILWAY BILL.

THIRD READING.

Read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

EXPLOSIVES BILL.

THIRD READING.

Read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

PARKS AND RESERVES BILL.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL'S AMENDMENTS.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the amendments made in Clauses 8 and 12 (*vide* Message, p. 1235 *ante*) were agreed to, and the resolution of the Assembly was communicated by message to the Legislative Council.

ENGINE SPARKS FIRE PREVENTION BILL.

On the motion of Mr. TRAYLEN the Bill was committed *pro forma*.

IN COMMITTEE.

THE CHAIRMAN (Mr. Traylen) said the Attorney-General had kindly somewhat re-cast the Bill since the second reading, and it was now placed before the committee *pro forma* with a view to its adoption in the form as re-cast and re-printed, after which the ordinary procedure would be followed.

The Bill passed through committee *pro forma*, as recast, and was ordered to be reported to the House.

The House having resumed, and the Bill being reported *pro forma*, the usual form of committing the Bill was then proceeded with.

MR. TRAYLEN as author of the Bill, moved that it be re-committed for consideration.

Motion put and passed, and the Bill re-committed.

IN COMMITTEE.

Clause 1—"Short title; Commencement":

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt), referring to the date for bringing the Bill into operation (1st Nov., 1895), said it appeared to him advisable to apply the Bill to such portions of the colony as might be declared for that purpose, and not to the colony as a whole, because the conditions as to burning off grass and herbage along a railway in one

district at a certain season of the year might not be necessary at all, or not in the same degree, in districts to the Southward. He proposed as an amendment, to strike out the words "come into operation on the 1st. day of November, 1895," and substitute the words "apply only to such parts of the colony as the Governor may, by Order in Council, direct." That would enable the Government to postpone the date for the Bill coming into operation, in districts where that date would be too early for the season. The operation of the Bill in the Greenough district might be urgent, and an Order in Council could be issued as soon as the Bill passed, for applying its provisions to the Midland Railway district at once. The Bill would thus come into operation as soon as passed, but its provisions would be inoperative until applied to particular districts by Order in Council. There was also not the same necessity for burning off grass along a railway in scrubby country as for burning it off in districts or localities where crops were grown.

MR. LEFROY said if it was necessary to burn off along the Midland Railway, to check fires from railway engines, it would be just as necessary to do so along the Great Southern line. In the absence from the House of members representing that Southern Districts, the Government might consider his suggestion.

Amendment put and passed, and the Clause as amended agreed to.

Clause 2—" Interpretation " :

MR. LEAKE asked whether it was considered necessary to make the Bill applicable to Government railways, the same as to other railways.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) said it would be impracticable to apply these penalties, in the case of Government railways, as this House would not be likely to impose penalties on the Commissioner of Railways for non-compliance. The presumption was that whatever was necessary to be done on Government railways would be done, without assuming that the Commissioner would neglect any necessary things, or do them only when penalties were threatening him. There was no precedent, to his knowledge, for imposing penalties in the case of the Commissioner of Government Railways.

MR. LEAKE said he would be sorry to think that the Commissioner of Railways, or the Engineer-in-Chief, or the General Traffic Manager, was likely to commence his criminal career under this Bill, but there was every

likelihood of it ; because if a fire were caused by sparks from an engine on a Government railway, the owner of the damaged property would sue some one in the Railway Department. He did not like the provisions of the Bill at all, and was sorry the Government did not see their way to mutilate the Bill, now that it was before them. He held that, under the interpretation of the word "owner," the Railway Department would be liable, and it should be remembered that certain sections of the Shortening Ordinance were incorporated in the Bill.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) said he intended to propose the addition of other provisions ; one addition being, that the Bill should not apply to Government railways.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 3 : " Every engine to be fitted with spark arrester and steam jet " :

MR. ILLINGWORTH said it would not be necessary for every engine used on a railway to be fitted with a spark arrester, but only such engines as ran in districts where there was danger from fire.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) said that, in his opinion, every engine should be fitted with a spark arrester ; and he believed that, under the law, if an engine were run without a spark arrester, the owner of the engine would be liable for any damage caused by fire originating from the engine. There might not be a perfect spark arrester, but there could be an efficient one, and such an arrester would materially prevent sparks from flying off.

MR. A. FORREST said he understood it was difficult to keep up steam when a spark arrester was on the funnel. There would be no practical necessity to use arresters in some parts of a railway ; for instance, from Southern Cross to Coolgardie, or from Mullewa to Cue, there would be no necessity, because there were no crops to set on fire, and it would be rather a benefit to fire the scrub near the railway. It should not be a hard and fast rule to require spark arresters. Would the provisions of this Bill be applied to the Government Railway between Southern Cross and Coolgardie ?

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL : I should say not.

THE COMMISSIONER OF RAILWAYS (Hon H. W. Venn) said he did not see in the Bill any provision for the payment of an inspector ; and as the Bill provided for inspectors,

to be appointed by the Government, but not for payment of them, the committee could not expect the inspectors to work for nothing.

MR. LEFROY said that, reading Clause 3 along with Clause 6 (onus of proof in proceedings to recover damages), the protection to owners which the Bill professed to give would do more harm than good; because an owner who suffered damage from railway sparks, had a right of action, under the present law, for recovering the amount of damage, whereas, under this Bill a railway company had only to prove that their engine was fitted with a spark arrester—not an efficient one, for he believed there was no such thing—and that defence would enable them to evade liability. Therefore, the protection offered by this Bill would place the owners of crops in a worse position, because the fitting of a spark arrester would not prevent fires. This Bill was dangerous, and should be carefully considered.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) said the spark arresters had to be approved as efficient by a Government inspector.

The CHAIRMAN (speaking as a representative, by indulgence of the House) said no district was more affected by this Bill than that which he represented (the Greenough), and that represented by the hon. member for the Irwin. He had been assured, during two or three years past, that there was no efficient spark arrester; and he had also been assured, of late, with equal confidence, that efficient spark arresters were obtainable. However, that might be, he was now prepared, as author of the Bill, to withdraw Clauses 3, 5, and 6, so far as he was concerned. To withdraw Clause 3 would do away with the compulsory fitting of a spark arrester and a steam jet; and the effect would be to allow a trial of the provision for burning off along the railway. Those concerned could only come to the House another year, if they found the burning-off provision was an insufficient protection to the crops, and could then ask for more protection in the direction indicated by the clauses that might now be withdrawn. Clause 6 (onus of proof in proceedings to recover damages) might also be struck out, and a slight alteration be made in Clause 4, Sub-section 4, relating to penalty.

MR. LEFROY moved that Clause 3 (requiring spark arrester and steam jet) be struck out.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S.

Burt), referring to remarks made on the onus of proof for recovering damages, said it was not correct to state this Bill would give no more protection than at present, or would leave the owners of crops in a worse position, because the effect of the present law was that if any sort of spark arrester was used, and a fire resulted which damaged crops, &c., the owners of the engine would escape liability for the damage; whereas this Bill required that an efficient spark arrester, to be approved by a Government Inspector as reasonably fit for the purpose, must be used on an engine. It would be only upon proof that this provision had been complied with, that the owners of an engine causing damage could escape liability in future; therefore, the hon. member's (Mr. Lefroy's) interpretation of the law was not correct. In claims for damage that had previously come before the courts, he had found the difficulty was to prove what kind of spark arrester the engine had, at the time when the fire was caused; because the owner of a crop set on fire could not run after the engine to see for himself, and direct evidence was not easy to obtain. Unless some provision was made such as the Bill proposed, for requiring the use of efficient spark arresters, such districts as the Greenough Flats must inevitably, in the next month or so, be swept with fires, more or less, if engines were allowed to go along without spark arresters. He believed that in England, no railway engine travelled a mile without a spark arrester, and the only way to escape liability there for setting property on fire was by proving that every practicable means had been used for preventing fire from sparks. He supposed it was absolutely impossible to have an arrester that would stop every spark, as the draught through the fire-box must not be impeded more than was necessary. It was also very serviceable to have a jet in the ash-pan, and he believed that idea came from the General Manager of the Great Southern Railway (Mr. J. A. Wright), and many of the engines on that line were fitted with a jet. He (the Attorney-General) had been assured there was no trouble in regard to it. This was not a Government Bill, and he was only trying to make it a practical and useful measure.

THE CHAIRMAN said that, in relation to the difficulty of proof for obtaining compensation, and the withdrawing of certain clauses, he had spoken under the impression that he hon. member for the Moore and him-

self were interpreting the law correctly, whereas it now appeared they had been mistaken.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) moved, as an amendment in the first line of Clause 3, to insert, after the word "fitted," the words "by the owner thereof."

Put and passed.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) moved, as a consequential amendment, to insert the same words in the first line of Sub-section 2, after the word "fitted."

Put and passed, and the clause as amended agreed to.

Clause 4—"Owner of line to burn grass, &c.":

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) said it would be seen, by this clause, that the period of the year for burning off was to be notified in the *Government Gazette*, but as notices therein might not be generally seen by the public, he moved, as an amendment, that the words "in the *Government Gazette*" be struck out, and the words "to be served on such owner" be inserted in lieu thereof.

Put and passed.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) said many miles of a railway would go through country that was absolutely waste land, where no crops could be injured by a fire, and it would not be judicious to put too heavy a burden on owners of railways by requiring them to burn along the whole length of a railway. It would be sufficient to require this, by Order in Council, in localities where crops might be injured by fire. Therefore he proposed, as a further amendment, to add after the word "railway," in the fourth line, the words: "where such line passes through, or by, any land under crop."

THE COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS (Hon. A. R. Richardson) said that to burn particular patches along a railway would not be effective for the purpose of protecting crops, because a fire occurring in the unburnt portions along a railway would run for miles, and so reach the places where crops were planted. The burning, to be effectual, should be all along the line, or there would be a false sense of security.

MR. ILLINGWORTH said that to burn along a railway once a year was not found a hardship in other colonies, and could hardly be so here, because the linesmen had to be maintained, and might easily manage the burning off once a year.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest) said that, by the first clause as amended, the Go-

vernment could limit the operation of the Bill to certain defined portions of a railway, say between the Fifty-five and Ninety-Mile, and, therefore, the burning-off need not be required in places where it was unnecessary.

MR. LEFROY said the Premier's suggestion would meet the case; but, in a district under crop, the burning-off within such district should be thorough, and not be limited to a patch here and there.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) asked leave to withdraw the words of his amendment, and substitute the words "on such parts of the line as mentioned in such notice." He said the notice might describe the mileage within which the burning-off must be done.

Amendment by leave withdrawn, and the fresh amendment substituted and agreed to.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) moved, as a further amendment, that Sub-sections 4 and 5 be struck out. He intended to incorporate them in a general clause, later on. The sub-sections fixed the penalties, and he thought it better to provide for them in a separate clause.

Put and passed, and the clause, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 5 and 6:

Put and passed.

New clause:

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) moved the following new clause to take the place of Sub-sections 4 and 5 of Clause 4, which had been struck out:—"Penalties for offences: 7. (1.) The owner of any engine "which is used under steam without a spark "arrester and steam jet approved by an Inspector under this Act, or on which such "spark-arrester and steam jet is not maintained in good order and fit for its purpose, "shall be liable to a penalty of not less than "ten, nor more than fifty pounds.

"(2.) Any owner of an engine failing to "comply with any of the requirements of "Section four of this Act shall, in addition to "any civil proceedings to which he may be "liable, incur a penalty of not less than five "nor more than twenty pounds.

"(3.) Every person who hinders or obstructs an Inspector in the exercise of any of "his powers or duties under this Act, shall be "liable to a penalty not exceeding five "pounds.

"(4.) All offences under this Act shall be "summarily punishable upon conviction

' before any two or more Justices of the Peace " in Petty Sessions."

THE COMMISSIONER OF RAILWAYS (Hon. H. W. Venn) said he would like to see some penalty placed on the owners of adjoining properties who did not attend to the order to protect them, after notice. It was due to the negligence of these people that fires were started.

THE CHAIRMAN said he would like to see an addition to the clause, providing for a penalty against any person who permitted a fire to get beyond the boundaries of the fence.

MR. LEPROY agreed that there should be a penalty on all those who were guilty of carelessness. More care was requisite, and the employees of the Railways should be compelled to exercise greater caution. At the present time, he had heard it said that when the farmers and others were engaged beating out the fires, the men on the railway engines laughed at them and made fun of them. The Bill itself was generally a dangerous one.

Clause put and passed.

New clause:

THE ATTORNEY - GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) moved that the following new clause be added to the Bill:—

"Appeal.—8. Any person convicted under this Act may appeal, and such appeal shall be made to the Court and be subject to the procedure mentioned in Section 139 of 'The Police Act, 1892.'"

Clause put and passed.

New clause:

THE ATTORNEY - GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) moved that the following new clause be added to the Bill:—

"Act not to apply to Government Property.—10. Nothing in this Act shall apply to any railway or engine belonging to Her Majesty's Colonial Government."

Clause put and passed.

Preamble and Title:

Agreed to.

Bill reported, with amendments.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS AND THE MINIMUM WAGE.

Debate resumed on the following motion by Mr. JAMES:—"That the Government be requested to consider the advisability of providing that, in all Government contracts, the persons employed should be paid at a

"specified minimum rate of wage by the contractor."

MR. WOOD: In moving the adjournment of the debate on Thursday night last, I was actuated wholly with the desire to give this House an opportunity of hearing a full and fair discussion on one of the most important features of the great labor movement; and I have to thank hon. members generally, and the Government in particular, for their consent to the adjournment, because I feel the inclination was to get rid of the matter that night, and, if that inclination had been followed, I feel convinced the motion of the hon. member for East Perth would have received very short shrift indeed. I am very glad to be able to say a few words on the subject, and to feel that I may be followed by other hon. members who will lay such statements and facts before the House as will convince those who do not take such a keen interest in the welfare of the toilers and workers, that there really is some good foundation for the agitation that is now proceeding throughout all parts of the world. I may say at once that I am not one of the leaders in this cause, but I must acknowledge that I am a very willing helper of the labor party and workers of this country. That party is one for which I have the keenest sympathy and regard, and I am only too anxious to assist in any way likely to have the effect of bettering their condition. What is more, Sir, I am with those who will strive to secure the time when the masses and the classes are not divided at all—when, in fact, any division between them is only like the imaginary line dividing one district from another. It is only possible to arrive at a proper understanding on this question, by hearing what the people have to say, and then, having listened to their case, hon. members can be in a position to calmly consider the request of a large section of people, who form part and parcel of the great community we are trying to build up in this new country. I say new country, Sir, because it can only be said to have begun to breathe, to have any real life at all, very recently. I am sure the older members of the community will excuse the term, but there was a new country born here in 1889 or 1890, and it is with the altered conditions of a new country that we have to deal. The labor problem is one that will have to be faced sooner or later here, and in just the same way as it is being faced to-day in other parts of the world. So far as we are concerned, I believe it is better

that we should face this question now, when everything is quiet, and we should anticipate the requests of the various organisations more immediately affected. If this is done, it will be another matter upon which we can congratulate the Government for its efforts in the direction of progressive legislation, for the Acts they have brought into being this session alone are the Employers Liability Act, the Crown Suits Bill, the Acts for the protection of the working miner, and many others. That is a very great deal from what I might fairly term a Conservative Government, and it only wants a little more thought on the part of the Government and of hon. members to make them feel obliged to support measures for the amelioration of the condition of the workers and toilers, and to make them feel they belong to us and one great family, and that there is very little difference between them and ourselves. I think, Sir, the public men of this colony should not hold aloof from the different organisations, the existence of which is necessary to the artisan and skilled laborer. It is only by association with them, that we shall be able to understand and realise their wants and aspirations. With regard to the motion of the hon. member for East Perth, in favor of a minimum wage, I think it must be left an open question whether a minimum wage is a good thing for those whose interests we are anxious to serve. In fact, it might have the very opposite object to that which the hon. member seeks to effect, for the minimum wage may become the highest wage paid. We must recollect that the labor classes are not always loyal to each other, and we may find people taking the minimum wage rather than see their families go hungry, and in this way the minimum rate would be established as the ruling rate. It is only to be expected that employers of labor will secure their labor with as little outlay as possible, and that they will embrace any chance of getting their work done under the cheapest conditions. It will only be when there is the true feeling of humanity throughout mankind that the high ideal of the hon. member for East Perth, which really amounts to a worldly paradise, will be reached. However, the motion is one in the right direction, and the experiment is one that is perhaps worth trying. Instead, however, of striving too much after a minimum rate of wage, I think it is possible we might do useful work in other directions. For

instance, we might shorten the hours of labor, improve and add to the means of recreation, encourage co-operation, and, lastly, limit the hours during which shops may be kept open, while we also endeavor to improve the conditions under which the shop assistants have to labor.

MR. COOKWORTHY: What about those at home?

MR. WOOD: What home? Where is home?

MR. COOKWORTHY: What about the work of women in their homes?

MR. WOOD: Oh, that is another branch of the subject, but I rather fancy the women at home can look after themselves. They say the work of a woman is never done, but I do not know how true that is. The reforms I have mentioned, are some of those, I, at any rate should be glad to see brought about. I am quite in accord with the efforts of the hon. member for East Perth, and I am quite sure those efforts are sincere. For this reason I should like to see the subject fully discussed. We all know that the hon. member is a great democrat, and I should like to see him given a show this session. He has not had one yet in matters of this nature. I am sure that the educational tone of the views expressed will do a great deal of good to hon. members. I support this motion with a very great deal of pleasure, because I think the principle laid down in it, is worth trying. I do not think it will be all the success some of its supporters believe, but there can be no harm in giving the idea a trial.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): Sir, we have laid down for ourselves in this House as a rule, an axiom, and that is that we should not introduce or assist the introduction of a Bill to provide legislation of any sort, unless it is necessary. That is a rule I have always tried to adopt with regard to the business of the Government, for unless it was absolutely necessary for public works or to perfect legislation, I would never feel justified in asking the House to give its sanction to any measure. That is my view with regard to the motion that has been brought forward by the hon. member for East Perth—that it is not necessary. I say the object he seeks is not at all necessary at the present time, although, of course, it may arise by-and-bye. When it does arise, I shall be very pleased to work with any others in dealing with it. To my mind it may prove mischievous to introduce legislation

that is not necessary, and I quite agree with the suggestion that it will be possible for the minimum wage to become the maximum, and the whole of the efforts of the hon. member might have the very opposite effect to that intended. So far as the Government are concerned, and the carrying on of the public works no one can say there is any desire whatever to give a very low rate of wage, and in no department of the public service, including those where the great bodies of men are employed, can it be said that a fair wage is not paid. I have never heard any complaint whatever with regard to the wages paid in the Government service. With regard to Government contracts also, I believe the rate of wage is as high as that paid in any part of the colony, excepting, of course, the wage paid to underground miners. I have never heard that the railway contractors pay their men a low rate of wage, but, on the other hand, I have been told that the contractors pay, not only a fair wage, but at a very high rate. That being so, and the hon. member having been unable to show us, in his speech the other evening, any pressing necessity for the motion he introduced, I am not disposed, myself, to fall in with the hon. member and vote for a resolution, the necessity for which, in the present history of the colony, he has totally failed to prove. The hon. member for East Perth took occasion, during his very lengthy speech, to refer to the Hon. the Attorney-General, and to these references I desire to take the most decided objection. He made what I regard a most improper observation with regard to the Attorney-General of the colony. He said, in effect, that the Attorney-General belonged to the Manchester School, and that members of this school treated men, not as human beings, but as mummies. I wish to say here, Sir, that there is not a more liberal-minded man in this colony than the Attorney-General, and a good deal of the legislation of a liberal character, passed during the past five years or so, owes its introduction, in a large measure, to the liberal views of that gentleman. Amongst them, I may mention the abolition of the qualification for members of this House, the giving of the franchise to everyone in the colony, the Employers Liability Act, the Mines Regulation Bill, and I could enumerate many more if I had time to do so. All of these measures are largely due to the liberal and broad minded views of the Attorney-General, and no man in this House, or the colony, has a

greater regard for his fellow man, and a more earnest desire to advance the interests of the workers, than that gentleman. I should like to ask the hon. member for East Perth what justification he had for the language which he used. If he searches the whole political career of the Attorney-General, from its beginning, he will find nothing whatever to justify this language. Personally, I think the language he made use of was both unjustifiable and improper, and I am very glad of the opportunity of telling the hon. member so. There is one thing I do object to in the hon. member, and I have objected to it ever since he came into this House, and that is the oracular way in which he deals with subjects he introduces in this chamber. One would always think, to listen to him, that the hon. member was one of the most travelled and learned men on the face of the earth. We know, however, that the experience of the hon. member is very little indeed. We all know him, and consequently, if he could manage to drop this most objectionable style, any of his efforts in the direction of fresh legislation would be far more appreciated. The hon. member has undoubtedly devoted a good deal of time and energy to the study of socialistic works and the doctrines of the socialistic party, but, though these may be very good in their way, I can never understand why he should ram these doctrines down the throats of other hon. members in season and out of season. I do not think it is necessary that we should invite the hon. member to give us the benefit of some of his nostrums, until the occasion for some cure arises. There is no necessity for it at the present time—none whatever. Until there is a necessity, I would advise the hon. member not to commit himself too deeply. It is time enough to commit oneself when the necessity does arise, for he may depend upon it, he will find his ideas on many subjects change, as time goes on, and he will then be glad that he never committed himself too far. I am sure the policy of the hon. member will lead him into all sorts of trouble as time goes on. I would also impress upon the hon. member the fact that all men are judged in this world by their actions, and not by their words, and if those people who express a desire to benefit others would do a little more, and talk a little less, they would possibly gain more for them. This is advice I would especially give to the hon. member

for East Perth. It is time to do something for the working man when the necessity arises, and that time has not yet come in this colony. It is because I cannot see any necessity for the resolution at the present time that I cannot vote on this question with the hon. member. In fact, I believe it will be mischievous, or if it is not that, it will not do any good. I could not even see any necessity for the long speech the hon. member saw fit to make the other evening. There will be time enough to fix a minimum wage when it is found necessary to do so in the interests of the wage-earners, but, at present, they are better without it. I hope the time will never come in this country, but it is not here now, when we are in the midst of all our progress and prosperity. There is not the slightest reason for us to talk in the House to-night about some vague thing that may happen in the far future. Let us deal, rather, with those practical questions which are of pressing importance, than with old-world problems or those which are agitating the eastern colonies because of the time of depression they have suffered. We have not this depression, and we have not the necessity to impose a minimum wage which too many people, possibly, would soon make the maximum.

MR. SIMPSON: I am entirely in favor of the resolution of the hon. member for East Perth and which he has so fervently advocated in this House. At the same time, let me advise the hon. member to pay very great attention to the delicious homily delivered by the Premier, so that he may benefit most fully from the teaching it conveys. That homily, Sir, I must confess, did one almost as much good as if he had been in church. I sincerely hope the learned member will fully recognise his extreme audacity in daring to bring before this deliberate Assembly, a question which is agitating all parts of the world to-day, which is engaging the earnest attention of every learned society, and which is of great moment and of every day discussion in such countries as America, England, France, and other parts of Australia. I trust he will, by this time, have recognised the audacity of submitting such a resolution to this House—of submitting such a tentative resolution for the opinion of the members. The resolution merely requests the Government to consider the advisability of providing that, in all Government contracts the persons employed shall be paid at a specified minimum rate of wage by the contractor.

I am foolish enough to admit that I have read some of these works which the Premier refers to as socialistic. I do not know whether the Premier himself ever troubles about such matters. In fact, I have heard it stated that he cares to read nothing but the newspapers. At the same time, I must confess that I am not convinced that the fixing of a minimum rate of wage in Government contracts will be too good a thing for the class whom the mover of this resolution seeks to benefit. There may be a great deal in the suggestion of the hon. member for West Perth, that what is fixed as the minimum rate of wage may become the maximum, and I must admit further that, so far as I can see, and so far as my own ideas on the subject go, it is quite possible this would be the case. I support the motion because the mere fact of its being brought forward and being debated will set the members of this House, and the people of the country thinking, and possibly endeavoring to arrange some system that will prevent such disasters as have occurred in other countries, making their appearance here. The Premier says, "Let us wait until a difficulty occurs." I imagine the time is not very long ago since I heard the same gentleman advocating quite a different doctrine. I can recollect him saying that it was in times of quiet and peace, and when everything was prosperous and the Government strong, these debatable matters should be settled, so that when great questions and great labor problems occur, a satisfactory state of the law will have already been reached. That, some day or other, we shall be face to face with these questions, even in this country, I have no doubt whatever, and that the question is of vast importance will be granted, as soon as we realise that in that great Empire to which we all belong, tens of thousands of workmen are daily starving because they cannot get work. For myself, I am as sure, Sir, as the sun rises, and the setting of the sun follows its rising, we will have to consider the great labor problems at some time or other, and the question is whether we cannot take lessons from the distressing experience of other lands, and provide measures which will have the effect of ameliorating the condition or preserving the prosperity of the working people in this country. Instead of blinking at the facts, it is our duty to recognise that, so far as we are concerned, there is a solemn duty in being our brother's keeper. I do not think any one will dispute the fact that

in all large centres of employment, the hope of the capitalist is to keep the workman down to the lowest level, or that it is a fact, that it rests with these same employers whether a man is to have means of subsistence or not. No one would hesitate to say that while there have undoubtedly been errors in the past, the real effect, and effort, of the trades unions, for the last forty years, have been to better establish the position of the wage earner, and that in consequence, the position of the wage earner is better than it was. Take the wage earner to-day and you will find him able to live better and earn more than used to be possible, and the credit for all this must be given to trades unions. It is too often asserted that the only object of the unions is to fight capital by means of strikes. As a matter of fact, if you look back over the history of trades unionism during the past forty years, you will find that the real leaders of the movement have been men who have been most strongly opposed to strikes. The strikes have led the trades unions into many difficulties and many troubles, and the effects of a strike always turn upon the men themselves. Of course, capital has often been diminished, but, within the last few years, men, women, and children have starved because of their loyalty to the unions, and because they fought for what they knew to be right, and the right they fight for is that men should not be brought into the world, and then be denied anything beyond the barest means of existence. The Premier has alluded to the liberal views held by the Attorney-General. Personally, I have always held, and always thought, that the Attorney-General was a man of liberal views. My opinion on this point was confirmed five or six years ago, when I heard him in the old Council speak for, and urge strongly the granting of the boon of manhood suffrage. That, like anything else, was only established afterwards, because the public well demanded it, and while I agree with the Premier as to the views of the Attorney-General, I think many of the liberal measures have been due, not so much to his views, as to the force of public opinion. I cannot see any possible harm in the resolution submitted by the hon. member for East Perth, and, as for waiting, and the remarks made by the Premier generally, I hope he will not forget the fact that that hon. member was elected to this House by a larger majority than that ever held by anyone in this country pre-

viously, and that the metropolitan constituencies are generally supposed to represent the most progressive thought on the very problem we are debating to-night. Any attempt to disparage the hon. member for bringing this question forward, will have very poor results. We do not want to indulge in old and worn out platitudes, nor do we want to set up the fact that finality has been reached in economic science. When a man attempts to treat economic science as one of the exact sciences, he always appears to me as being in about as difficult a position as the one who indulges in theological discussions. America, with its great idea of birthright that all men are born free and equal, has not yet given its workmen the eight hours system, and while in the early days of the system, the hours of recreation were possibly not used to the most benefit, it cannot be said that the state of society, physically, socially or otherwise, is any the worse for this boon having been granted to the workmen of Australia. I do hope the Premier will not consider it necessary to reject the motion. It is a resolution which can hardly work any harm, while it will set people thinking and investigating what are the steps necessary to prevent the occurrence here, of what has been so hurtful elsewhere. To my mind it is a question upon which the truth will triumph and if there is no truth in the contentions raised here, we shall not be any the worse for passing this resolution. It will do a good thing, if it will only set people thinking, and it is possible that we shall be able to evolve some legislation, so that, at any rate, it will not be said social disasters of the future are due to a want of foresight. I do not think it is sufficient for us that matters are going on pleasantly to-day, for we have the acknowledged fact that about 98 per cent. of the British Empire are born in a condition of hopelessness. Their hopeless career is engraved or written in letters of brass, and there is no hope beyond the mere means of subsistence, and, perhaps, a little for their covering.

THE COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS (Hon. A. R. Richardson): Notwithstanding that the hon. member for Geraldton urges the Government to take the motion before the House into consideration, I think it would be a mistake for them to do so, because that would imply in the minds of reasonable men, that the Government had some idea of carry-

ing the resolution into practical effect, while we have no intention of doing so. And why should we consider the resolution when the two hon. members who have spoken in favor of a minimum wage have much doubt whether a minimum wage would not, instead of ameliorating the condition of the working classes, have an opposite effect. The hon. member for Geraldton is sure that it would have an opposite effect, and yet he asks us to support the resolution.

MR. SIMPSON: I object to being misquoted by the conscientious member for the De Grey. What I said was, that I was not sure as to whether a minimum wage would do all the good that its advocates expected, but that the resolution was well worthy of consideration.

THE COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS (Hon. A. E. Richardson): Well, the hon. member for Geraldton asks the House to pass this resolution, although he is sceptical of its efficacy even if it were put into operation, and the hon. member for East Perth, in proposing it, has approached a very weighty problem—one of the largest problems that is perplexing the wisest minds in the civilised world to-day. The hon. member quoted very largely in his speech—in fact, I think his speech was for the greater part made up of quotations—and I do not think it would be difficult for anyone in a short time to produce as many quotations of equal authority on the other side of the question—quotations that would completely disprove the arguments of the hon. member as to the supposed benefits of establishing a minimum wage. Everyone who studies the question knows that there are great thinkers who are entirely opposed to this principle of making all men of one vocation equal, and paying them all alike, although we would all wish to see a rate of wages fixed that would enable every man to live in health and comfort, and maintain his family, but the question arises—"Is the adoption of a minimum wage a practicable way of attaining this object?" In other words, is it possible for legislation to fix a universal minimum wage for those who are just as much toilers as those who work on Government contracts? Will the hon. member sketch out any scheme of legislation that will regulate the price of wheat in order that the cultivator who works—not eight, but of ten or twelve hours per day—may not get less than a minimum wage for his labor, when that labor takes the form of wheat, which is to be sold in the open market. Or

will he (Mr. James) tell us how the wool or fruit-grower, or the producer of any other commodity, is to be protected against having to sell that produce below a certain price in the markets of the world, that will give him a fair return. It is said competition is cruel, but I do not see how we are going to escape it. You can fix a minimum rate of wages, and say that a cabinet-maker, for example, shall receive so much per day for his work, but supposing, when the furniture comes to be sold, it does not realise so much as the man's wages, who is to make up the difference? Or, supposing one country or one employer shall fix a minimum rate of wages, and there is competition on the part of a country or an employer paying a lower rate of wages, the result would be that the former would be knocked out of the market, and, instead of paying higher wages, or a minimum rate of wages, further production would cease, and there would be no work and no wages at all. And, even supposing that a uniform minimum rate of wages was paid all over the world, the intrinsic value of manufactures or produce would not be enhanced. The only effect would be that prices would be raised all round, the wage earner might, in some cases, be better paid, but the cost of living would be greater, and he would be no better off in the end, but would be simply travelling in a circle, so to speak. Then, again this resolution loses sight of the inherent selfishness of human nature, which cannot be controlled by legislation, and, as some of the greatest philosophers of the day have pronounced, if you try to interfere by legislation with what are called natural laws, the result is total failure. The fact that, as the hon. member for Geraldton has told us, the wealth of the world is not equally distributed, is undisputed; but, in my opinion, that argument only touches the fringe of the question. If all the wealth of the world was equally divided, you would still find that some men would not get all that they could wish, and you would have to legislate in such a way as to make labor twice as productive as it is before you could increase the wealth of the general community. The day is very far off when the value of every man's skill, strength, and knowledge can be made equal by Act of Parliament, and some of the wisest men are agreed that even if this could be done, it would not be a good thing for the progress of the world, for, directly you reduce all men to one

common level, you put an end to the individual efforts, to the motives, men have to excel each other and to get ahead in the race of life. It would make men sluggards to destroy their hope by special reward for special excellence and industry, and the loss to the community of such a state of things would be far greater than the gain. It is quite absurd to say that, at the present state of Western Australia, it is necessary to establish a minimum wage, for, in this colony, every man who is willing to work can live very fairly by his labor, and as the resolution is not now warranted by our circumstances, I do not think that the Government ought to accept it.

MR. JAMES: I regret, although it was perhaps unavoidable, that in the remarks I made in introducing the resolution the other evening, the Premier should have perceived an oracular tone, but the hon. gentleman, by passing over an order of the day, thus causing one to bring on the motion at a late hour, wished to burk discussion upon it, and I was determined that he should not do so. I could say some unkind things of the Premier, but, coming to the merits of the question, I will quote Kingsley's opinion of the Manchester School to which I admit some good men have belonged. Kingsley says, "Of all the narrow, consistent, hypocritical, anarchic, atheistic schemes of the universe, the Coden, and Bright, one is exactly the worst." I know, of course, that Kingsley was a fool, and that the only people whose opinions are worth listening to, are those who treat men like monkeys, with the difference that you have to look after, and feed a monkey if it is to be kept alive, but it does not matter about a man—if he starves or dies of ill-treatment you can buy another one. I should not use words so strong as Kingsley's in bringing forward this motion, nor words so strong as those I might have used about the Manchester School to which Cobden and Bright, the Attorney-General, and Commissioner of Crown Lands belong; and I may say that, when in the course of my efforts to do my duty to the public, the Premier finds it necessary to give me counsel—which I am at all times glad to receive—I should be better pleased to receive it, if it were given in a more kindly tone, and less in the form of a homily. As to what has been said as to the alleged danger that if a minimum wage is established, the minimum wage is likely to become the maximum wage. I do not think that that is a forcible argument,

because, we know that the employer will always try to get labor at the cheapest possible price, and if there is no restriction as to the amount of that wage it is likely to fall lower than it would on the execution of Government contracts, if we were to say that it should not fall below a certain sum. I cannot follow the argument of the Premier—who does not belong to the Manchester or any other school of economics—when he says that the question of a minimum wage might be suitably discussed at some future time, say in ten or twenty years. I think that is a very weak position, for surely the Premier will agree with me that things will be in a very bad state when men are receiving less for their labor than they can subsist upon, and I submit that we should not wait until the emergency arises, until steps are taken to adopt a beneficent measure which would prevent an evil which is very insidious to its growth obtaining root. The example of Victoria should be a warning to us in this respect. In the days of the prosperity of Melbourne, a proposal to establish a minimum wage would have been scouted as quite needless, because of the good times that were being enjoyed, and which enabled the working classes to be fairly paid, but a time of depression came when the safeguard to which I refer was much needed. And who will say that, in connection with our Government contracts, there have not been instances where men have received less than a subsistent wage, instances in which, owing to subletting, men have been paid rates which I am sure the Director of Public Works would never have consented to, had the fact been brought under his notice. I say that this practice will grow up unless it is checked, and there cannot be a more opportune time than the present to take a precautionary step by passing this motion. When it was proposed in England to legislate for reducing the hours of labor, and in other respects ameliorating the condition of the working classes, exactly the same arguments were used by the opponents of those measures as have been advanced by the Commissioner of Crown Lands. And authorities were quoted to show that such terms would prove to be unworkable, but experience has proved that under those laws British commerce has grown in a marvellous manner, and the British artisan is now better paid, and has more comfortable conditions of life than he ever enjoyed before. I only ask the Government to consider, in the light of

the experience of the sister colonies, whether anything can be done to give the working classes a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. I do not see that there is any obstacle to the principle being carried out in connection with Government contracts, nor can there be a more favorable time than the present for providing that this rule shall be carried out. The representatives of the people in this House have the right to say on behalf of the people who are the employers when public works are being executed, what shall be the lowest rate of wages paid for these works, and we have a right to say that the men shall not be employed at a less rate of pay than they can subsist upon. I am sure that it is not too much to ask that the Government shall set an example in this direction.

Motion put and negatived.

ADJOURNMENT.

The House adjourned at 9.45 o'clock, p.m.

Legislative Council,

Tuesday, 8th October, 1895.

Width of Tyres Bill: first reading—Production of Vegetables—Collie Coalfields Railway Bill: first reading—Donnybrook-Bridgetown Railway Bill: first reading—Goldfields Bill: first reading—Electoral Bill: first reading—Public Health Act Amendment Bill: first reading—Explosives Bill: first reading—Building Act Amendment Bill: second reading; Committee; third reading—Constitution Act Amendment Bill: Memorial to the Secretary for State—Adjournment.

THE PRESIDENT (Hon. Sir G. Shenton) took the Chair at 4.30 o'clock, p.m.

WIDTH OF TYRES BILL.

This Bill was introduced and was read a first time.

PRODUCTION OF VEGETABLES.

The Hon. E. McLARTY moved:—"That in the opinion of this House, it is desirable that the Government should inquire as to the best steps to take to encourage the production and preservation of vegetables." He

said: In moving this resolution, I may say that unfortunately, the rules of the House prevent me from going as far as I had wished to, otherwise I should have framed the resolution in favor of a substantial bonus being given to any establishment which might produce 25 or 30 tons of preserved vegetables in any one year. Hon. members are aware that we are now importing large quantities of preserved vegetables. Last year, I believe, the value of our imports in this direction amounted to between £8,000 and £9,000, and next year the amount will, probably, be larger. This fact I regret. I speak with some practical knowledge, when I say that we can produce, at certain seasons of the year, at all events, any quantity of vegetables, and I should like to see some encouragement given for their growth, so that we may supply our goldfields and our northern parts without resort to importation. At Mandumb, one of the preserving establishments has already gone into the business, and it is turning out an article quite equal to anything which is being imported, and all that is now required is that there shall be a supply of vegetables to enable us to produce all the preserves we require. I think a bonus should be given to enable the establishments I refer to, to offer a sufficient price for vegetables to induce people to grow them. If that were done, it would, in time, save the colony the large amount which is being annually sent away for preserved vegetables, and it would, instead, be distributed among our own settlers. Only this week I have noticed how much land is being taken up; but on a considerable portion of it, people are planting fruit trees. These will take four or five years to mature, and if, in the meantime, some inducement could be offered to them to grow vegetables between the rows of trees, they would be much benefited. Vegetables will grow luxuriantly, and a return can be got in a few weeks from them. At present, the prices which the factories can offer are so low that there is no inducement to people to grow them, but if we can only give the industry a start, I am sure it will do much good in the future. This may seem a small matter, but it will help the settlers. I do not think I need say more, except that I hope this motion will be accepted by the House.

Question put and passed.

Ordered that the resolution be transmitted to the Legislative Assembly, and their concurrence desired.