

which under the other Bill it is proposed to levy by way of income tax.

On motion by the *Hon. E. M. Clarke*, debate adjourned.

BILL—AGRICULTURAL BANK AMENDMENT.

In Committee.

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

BILL—ELECTORAL.

First Reading.

Received from the Legislative Assembly, and read a first time.

ADJOURNMENT.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Hon. J. W. HACKETT : I should like to point out that a motion in my name has for several days past appeared in a very humiliating position on the Notice Paper. I rise to express the hope that the Colonial Secretary will give me an opportunity of proceeding with that motion.

The Colonial Secretary : You can proceed with it this evening. I will withdraw my motion for adjournment.

Hon. J. W. HACKETT : No; that is not desired.

The PRESIDENT : I must point out that a motion for adjournment cannot be debated.

Hon. J. W. HACKETT : I am not debating it; but I think that a member has a right to speak on a question of the business of the House.

The PRESIDENT : Yes.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : I have no wish to adjourn the House now if hon. members desire to debate the motion.

Hon. J. W. HACKETT : Will the Minister put the motion near the top of the list for to-morrow?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : Yes. Question put and passed.

The House adjourned at one minute past 9 o'clock, until the next day.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 4th December, 1907.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 4.30 o'clock p.m.

Prayers.

BILL—NEWCASTLE-BOLGART RAILWAY.

Introduced by the Premier, and read a first time.

BILL—DISTRICT FIRE BRIGADES.

Second Reading.

Resumed from the 19th November.

Mr. J. B. HOLMAN (Murchison) : I cannot compliment the Attorney General on the Bill he has introduced. Such a question should be dealt with in a purely non-party spirit ; but the groundwork of the Bill is to my mind even worse than that of the Bill introduced earlier in the session. The harder the Attorney General tries, the worse he gets ; and unfortunately, this is not the only work of his which is worse than he has done previously. In this Bill he seeks to introduce a system that has never been tried in Australia ; a system that will increase fire-brigade expenditure, and will neither promote the efficiency of the brigades nor conduce to better administration. In the first place, provision is made for cutting up the State into fire districts. When we legislate on any question, it is our duty to look back to preceding legislation, not only in the State where we live but in other States also. Victoria has a Fire Brigades Act in force for the last sixteen or seventeen years, and never yet amended ; and no State in the Commonwealth—I dare say very few in the civilised world—has a fire brigade service so efficient as the Victorian. The Victorian system, with

one or two alterations, would be very well suited to Western Australia. Victoria has two fire brigades boards, one controlling the brigades in the metropolitan area, some forty or fifty, and another, called the country fire brigades board, controlling the whole of the extra-metropolitan brigades, numbering a hundred. In Western Australia we have, all told, about thirty fire brigades, and the Attorney General proposes to appoint three boards for the country, as well as one for Perth. We know that the administrative expense of three extra boards will form a serious item. I have carefully studied the question, and I am of opinion that one fire brigades board in Western Australia would be quite sufficient to give us an efficient fire service at the least possible expense. But we are to have three country boards and one in Perth to administer thirty brigades. That is absurd. Again, provision is made for local committees. We can well do away with the boards, and let the local committees work the brigades. This system would be far less expensive and perhaps more efficient. But if we had one board we could administer in the most efficient manner the whole of the fire brigades throughout the State. Probably the Attorney General will say that the brigades would refuse to come under one board. For a number of years the same trouble was experienced in Victoria. When the country fire brigades board was formed there, many brigades objected for some time to be under the board, because they did not like the administrative offices being in Melbourne. But eventually every fire brigade in Victoria was included. I was in Victoria less than two years ago, and went all through the State, visiting Ballarat, Clunes, Bendigo, and making every possible inquiry on the subject; and I found it would be impossible to induce any brigade to break away from the country fire brigades board. The system is almost perfect.

The Premier : Is it a volunteer system?

Mr. HOLMAN: Practically volunteer, but not in all places. Bendigo has four permanent men, Eaglehawk one, Ballarat two brigades with several permanent men in each. To give a notion of the manner in which the brigades work

in Victoria, let me say that the expenditure for a hundred brigades amounted for the whole year 1905 to a little over £11,000; and it is about the same in each year. There are about a thousand firemen, and the actual cost is only £5 per man. If we are to have four boards in Western Australia, the expenditure will be all eaten up in administration. It costs only a nominal sum to keep going a number of brigades in Victoria. Some of the brigades cost as little as £25 each. In the larger centres, of course, the cost is higher. In Ballarat city the total expenditure last year was £821, and in Ballarat itself £811, or £1,632 for both; whereas at Kalgoorlie the expenditure is something like £1,200 or £1,400 a year. Comparing the ratable value of the property in the two places, we find that for about the same expenditure the people of Ballarat secure a much better service, and the Ballarat fire brigades have probably three or four times the annual ratable value of property to protect. In Western Australia we have the South-West district, the Central, and the North-West. The area of Western Australia is very large; and in some of these districts there will be about twelve brigades. The Attorney General will probably tell us that if we have the administrative office in Perth, the brigades in Kalgoorlie and other centres will not be satisfied. Then we have to look at it in this way. If the head office of the Central district is in Kalgoorlie, as it in all probability will be, the outside brigades will not be as satisfied as if the head office were in Perth. [*The Attorney General*: It is very much nearer.] It is an impossibility for the Mount Morgans brigade to be represented at Kalgoorlie except by outsiders, and therefore there will not be satisfaction. There is more danger of dissatisfaction owing to the fact that the chief officer of the central district will have his head quarters in Kalgoorlie, and it is therefore natural to suppose that Kalgoorlie will be treated better than any of the other brigades. At all events one would think so. If the head office were in Perth, with one chief officer for the whole State, then petty jealousies would not arise, for all the brigades in

the State would be treated alike. When we have the State split into four boards there will be four times the trouble. I am sorry the Attorney General has not adopted the system which has proved very successful in Victoria. In the Bill provision is made for what is called local committees. That system was tried in Victoria, but it is a remarkable fact that during the last few years local committees have never met there at all. To my mind the system adopted by the Attorney General will spoil the effect of the measure. The only redeeming feature is the fact that provision is made to compel the insurance companies to pay a fair share towards the upkeep of the brigades. Although I do not consider the Bill will be a success or satisfactory, for the one reason alone that the insurance companies will be forced to pay, I am not going to offer violent opposition to the measure. We have had too many Bills introduced into the House on this question, and we have refrained for too long from making the insurance companies pay their fair share. The Attorney General has taken parts of the Bill from the Victorian Act, and has tried to make those parts apply to the constitution which exists here. Clause 8, which refers to the election of local committees, says:—

“One member shall be elected by the brigade or brigades in such subdistrict, or if there are no such brigades, shall be appointed by the Governor.”

What reason is there for appointing local committees if there are no brigades? [*The Attorney General*: They may intend to form a brigade.] There will not be a necessity for a board or a committee until a brigade is there. This Bill will compel every brigade to come under the Act. [*The Attorney General*: That is brigades approved of.] I do not see in the measure any provision for roads boards districts, as it provides for municipalities alone. That is a great defect, as we have brigades in roads boards districts. The word “municipalities” in the Bill should be replaced by the words “local authority,” for any local authority should have a brig-

ade if they want it. It is impossible for us to have a permanent fire brigade system, for to a great extent we must work a volunteer system. It would be a good thing if it were possible for a system of partial payment to be made to all firemen. We must recognise that our system, as in Victoria, must, to a great extent, be a volunteer system. With the four boards, and four chief officers—permanent men as they must be, for their duties under the Bill are considerable—a great deal of extra expense will be necessitated. In my opinion one chief officer in Western Australia is quite sufficient to control the brigades of this State. In Victoria they have one chief officer who controls 100 brigades, and another chief officer over the metropolitan area who controls from 40 to 50 brigades. Here we will have one chief officer controlling the Perth brigade, and probably Fremantle; another chief officer controlling Subiaco, Leederville, up to Northam and down to Albany; another controlling the brigades in the Central district, and the fourth controlling the brigades in the Northern district. The result of this will be that the upkeep and administrative expenses of the four establishments will be very great. The secretary of each will have to receive payment, and every member of the four boards will get fees. You cannot expect a man to do that work for nothing. Under the system proposed by the Bill it is merely a question of quadrupling the work. Clause 36 defines the work of the chief officer, and it can clearly be seen that the officer will be compelled to devote the whole of his time to the work. Therefore these appointments will have to be permanent ones. An explanation is needed from the Attorney General with regard to Clause 41, which deals with the contribution towards expenditure. The clause states that the contribution towards the expenditure shall be in equal amounts by the Government, the municipalities, and the insurance companies. Farther on the same clause says:—

“The Colonial Treasurer shall contribute one-fourth of the amount of such annual estimated expenditure,

the said municipalities three-eighths thereof, and the said insurance companies three-eighths thereof."

This at the start says the three bodies shall contribute equally. I do not know whether this is a mistake or not, but it certainly looks as if it is. This shows the slipshod style of framing the Bill. In the first part of the clause it looks as if there is an attempt made to copy the Victorian Act, but subsequently it provides for a different allotment of contributions. In Victoria equal amounts are paid by the Government, the municipalities, and the insurance companies. There are several other matters in the Bill that require attention, but it is very late in the session to have the measure brought forward, and as I think we should have a measure governing the whole of the brigades as early as possible, it is not my intention to delay the passage of this Bill. At present the brigades are in a practically starving condition, having no means of raising revenue. With regard to the Bill generally, we find that the Government have copied out sections from the Victorian Act, but have forgotten altogether that the constitution laid down in this Bill is entirely different from that of the sister State. By taking the sections *holus bolus* from the Victorian Act and placing them in this Bill, the Government have committed a mistake, because with the different constitution here the various sections of the Victorian Act will have to be amended in order to suit the different circumstances in this State. As to fire brigades administration, the clause in the Bill is practically the same, with the exception of a few words, as the section in the Victorian Act. Here, however, we have four different boards and thus some of the clauses are sure to clash. Trouble will crop up every year, because with four bodies the work will be four times as great as it is in Victoria and will be spread over four different areas, while in addition there will be four different bodies to be satisfied. I regret that the Attorney General did not seek to frame a more workable measure. The Bill provides for four different boards in reality, although only three are mentioned. Those referred to in the

Bill are the South-West, the Central, and the Northern. In the South-West, however, there will be two boards, because the Attorney General does not propose to interfere with the Western Australian Fire Brigades Board. Therefore there will be two in the metropolitan area.

The Attorney General: Not unless they choose.

Mr. Scaddan: They will certainly choose it.

Mr. HOLMAN: Under this system of four boards, almost all the money will be eaten up in administrative expenses. There are several amendments which should be inserted in the Bill, and if the Attorney General gives us an opportunity of placing amendments on the Notice Paper we will do so. Instead of having a new Bill a better result would have been achieved by inserting a few amendments in the existing Act. The Victorian Act has been in force for 17 years, and the fact that it has never been altered shows how satisfactory it has been. I am very sorry indeed that the Attorney General did not adopt for this State the principle in vogue in Victoria.

Mr. W. B. GORDON: I move—

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion put, and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	..	..	..	26
Noes	..	..	..	14

Majority for 12

AYES.		NOES.	
Mr. Barnett		Mr. Angwin	
Mr. Brebber		Mr. Bath	
Mr. Butcher		Mr. Bolton	
Mr. Cowcher		Mr. H. Brown	
Mr. Davies		Mr. T. L. Brown	
Mr. Draper		Mr. Collier	
Mr. Ewing		Mr. Holman	
Mr. Foulkes		Mr. Hudson	
Mr. Gordon		Mr. Johnson	
Mr. Gregory		Mr. Scaddan	
Mr. Gull		Mr. Underwood	
Mr. Hayward		Mr. Walker	
Mr. McLarty		Mr. Ware	
Mr. Mule		Mr. Troy (Teller)	
Mr. Mitchell			
Mr. Mougier			
Mr. N. J. Moore			
Mr. S. F. Moore			
Mr. Piesse			
Mr. Price			
Mr. Smith			
Mr. Stone			
Mr. Veryard			
Mr. F. Wilson			
Mr. Layman (Teller).			

Motion thus passed, the debate adjourned.

BILL—ELECTORAL.

Third Reading.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. N. Keenan) moved—

That the Bill be now read a third time.

Mr. ANGWIN entered his emphatic protest against the Bill, which was intended to keep people off the roll and for the purpose of party government. In view of the condemnatory references already made by members to portions of the Bill, we should now consider as to the wisdom of rushing the measure through the House. When presenting the report of the select committee, the Minister in charge of the Bill refrained from dealing with the evidence, stating his intention of placing the papers on the table for perusal by members; yet an attempt was now made to rush the Bill through without affording members that opportunity. [Extracts from evidence read with reference to preferential and proportional voting.] A Bill of this character should be entirely free from party politics; but the only apparent object aimed at by the Government in the Bill was to squash a certain political organisation. The mode of compiling the electoral lists would result in hundreds being disfranchised because an opportunity would not be afforded for examining the rolls so compiled, between the taking of the census and the day of election. Another objection was the provision in regard to lodging objections to names on the roll.

The PREMIER: Was the hon. member in order in discussing in detail a measure which had already been discussed fully on the second reading and in Committee?

Mr. SPEAKER: A member could discuss a Bill generally on the third reading, as in other stages, but only in certain circumstances could amendments be made at this stage. The hon. member had, however, imputed motives in his last few words, and these it was hoped would not be repeated.

Mr. ANGWIN would withdraw any imputations if he had made them; but his last few words had relation to the

possibility of persons unconnected with the department lodging objections to claims already received, thus harassing electors.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member distinctly imputed motives to the Government, in saying they introduced the measure merely to squash a certain political organisation.

Mr. ANGWIN admitted he did so; but objection should have been taken at the time. It would be foolish for any political party in this State to seek to keep people off the rolls, because supporters of a political party to-day might a few months hence become political opponents of Ministers through something said or done, and there was not in this State the hereditary adherence to a political faith such as was found in some other countries. Every effort should be made to get names on the roll. One could lodge objections to persons entitled to be on the roll, because they were away from the district for the time being, and no revision court could say the objections were not valid, though, perhaps, in a few weeks' time the persons might return to the district. In this way an indiscreet person could harass an elector so as to make it impossible for the elector to retain his vote. There was no desire to delay the passage of this Bill; he merely desired to protest against what he honestly believed was detrimental to the electors of the State.

Mr. GULL moved:—

That the House do now divide.

Mr. Bath: The hon. member should not be foolish.

Mr. SPEAKER: The question was "That the House do now divide."

Mr. HOLMAN, on a point of order: The motion was not seconded. He desired to speak. [After a pause.] Could he proceed?

Mr. SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr. HOLMAN had not intended to speak, but he strongly objected to the gag being applied. There was no desire on the part of the Opposition to delay

the passage of the Bill; but even on the third reading, if any member desired to raise objection or to enter a protest against the passage of a Bill, it was the duty of any Government to give that opportunity. No member sent to Parliament to represent the people should be gagged. If this was to occur time after time, one would not know where we would be landed. There was no desire to delay this Bill. The majority had supported it, and if there were any defects the responsibility would rest on that majority, while those who had endeavoured to improve the measure and had failed would know they had done their best. One strongly objected to any member applying the gag when there was no need for it.

The PREMIER: There was no attempt so far as he was concerned to apply the gag. Members knew it was only on the last provocation he would attempt to apply the gag, but it was a very bad practice if we were going to discuss Bills on the third reading. When he first entered Parliament members were confined to the principle only on the second reading of a Bill. He had been pulled up on a second reading for referring to the clauses of a Bill.

Mr. Bath: It was a rather foolish idea to restrict discussion on the second reading.

The PREMIER agreed, but it showed that there were certain authorities who protested against going into detail even on the second reading, and it was much to be regretted if we indulged in detailed criticism on the third reading.

Mr. Collier: The Premier had not objected when the member for West Perth spoke on the third reading of the Land Tax Bill last session.

The PREMIER: The member for West Perth, as a new member, was given every opportunity, but it certainly was not in the interests of the Government. It could not be said the Government had put the hon. member up to speak. On the other hand it was evidence that the Government were desirous of giving fair play all round.

Mr. BATH: There was no intention to attempt in any way to delay the third

reading of the Bill, but the member for East Fremantle (Mr. Angwin) felt strongly on the measure and, in its amended form, considered it very objectionable. The various stages in the passage of a Bill were provided and fixed in the Standing Orders to enable any member who felt strongly on a Bill to protest at any stage, and experience showed that it was very foolish for any member to imagine that he could facilitate business by moving the closure with a view to preventing farther discussion. It only excited controversial feelings, and in no way conduced to the object which probably the hon. member had in view, namely, to shorten the discussion. He (Mr. Bath) deprecated any proposal put forward to prevent any member making a protest against a measure on which it was considered protest was necessary.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: When this Bill was in Committee there was no attempt made to push it through by any undue exercise of the rules of debate. On the contrary the greatest latitude was given to any member to express his views. Even in a measure of this kind where there was undoubtedly a determination to speak at considerable length on matters which sometimes were of small importance, he, being in charge of the Bill, had exercised every possible patience, and on no occasion had attempted to curb debate.

Question (third reading) put.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Ayes had it, but it was desirable on this occasion to have a division, so that there would be an absolute majority. He therefore gave his decision for the Noes.

Division called for on Government side; the House divided.

Mr. Holman: Was the decision given with the Ayes or the Noes?

Mr. Speaker: The first time with the Ayes, but the second time with the Noes, because it was impossible for the Clerk, without a division, to say there was an absolute majority. He had given it with the Noes, and immediately a division was demanded.

Mr. Johnson: If the Premier called for a division when the decision was given

for the Ayes, should he not vote for the Noes?

Mr. Speaker: It was declared that the Noes had it.

Mr. Johnson: It was declared that the Ayes had it, and the Premier and Treasurer called for a division. The Standing Order provided that in the event of a member calling for a division when it was declared in the affirmative, they must vote in the negative.

The Premier: The argument was all right, except that the decision was given with the Noes.

Mr. Speaker: The procedure was perfectly in order. There was no other means under our Standing Orders of ascertaining whether there was an absolute majority.

The division resulted as follows:—

Ayes	27
Noes	14

Majority for	13
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AYES.

Mr. Barnett
Mr. Brebber
Mr. Butcher
Mr. Cowcher
Mr. Davies
Mr. Draper
Mr. Eddy
Mr. Ewing
Mr. Foulkes
Mr. Gregory
Mr. Gull
Mr. Hayward
Mr. Keenan
Mr. Layman
Mr. McLarty
Mr. Male
Mr. Mitchell
Mr. Monger
Mr. N. J. Moore
Mr. S. F. Moore
Mr. Plesse
Mr. Price
Mr. Smith
Mr. Stone
Mr. Veryard
Mr. F. Wilson
Mr. Gordon (Teller)

NOES.

Mr. Angwin
Mr. Bath
Mr. Bolton
Mr. T. L. Brown
Mr. Collier
Mr. Heitmann
Mr. Holman
Mr. Hudson
Mr. Johnson
Mr. Scaddan
Mr. Underwood
Mr. Walker
Mr. Ware
Mr. Troy (Teller)

Question thus passed.

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

BILL—GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

Mr. T. H. BATH (Brown Hill): In regard to this Railway Bill, the main

point that has been discussed by members has been in regard to the question whether the railways should be vested in a Commissioner, who shall exercise practically independent control, or whether that Commissioner shall be answerable in every particular of his administration to the Minister who is responsible to Parliament. I would like to point out that the speech of the member for Guildford on this subject, and the vehemence with which he declaimed against the present position of affairs, must be regarded as a strong argument against Ministerial control, and as an advocacy for handing the control of the railway system entirely to a railway Commissioner without interference whatever from the Minister, members of Parliament individually, or Parliament as a whole. But looking at the underlying facts in the course of his speech, it is in no sense an argument against Ministerial control, against supervision being exercised by Parliament over the actions of the Commissioner, but rather an indictment of Ministerial control by certain Ministers whom we have had, and in that sense it was not in any way an indictment of Parliament as it was an indictment of the Minister at present controlling the Commissioner of Railways. I have always been an advocate of controlling our Railway Department through a responsible Minister, and I will advocate this because, if I understand the State aright and the State ownership of railways, the State means, and should mean in the views of members, the people of Western Australia as a whole. Every individual in the State is in the fullest sense a shareholder in the State railways of Western Australia, and to that extent is entitled to have representation in Parliament, and through the collective wisdom as a whole a say in the administration of the railways. It would be entirely a dereliction of duty for any Minister, by the force of the majority supporting him for the time being, to hand over the control of the railways to any individual Commissioner. I look on that from the view of the impossibility of getting any one individual man with ordinary human feelings, to control our railway system without some supervision

from the Minister. I say we would have to get a man practically who would be an angel from heaven to exercise that autocratic authority to the advantage of the community generally in the successful running of the railway system. When we compare private undertakings with State undertakings, it is absurd to say there are certain influences at work in State undertakings absent entirely from private undertakings. I have only to refer to many enterprises which are owned by shareholders outside the State. We know influences are brought to bear by the directors and influential gentlemen connected with companies to secure the appointment of people, not because of the particular ability of those people to carry out the work, but because they have some influence with the directors or the influential shareholders generally and are given the billet. Only yesterday I was reading a book called *Canada in the Twentieth Century*, where such control by English companies was strongly criticised. It was pointed out that manager after manager had been sent out to manage mining and other undertakings throughout Canada, not because of the skill or ability to do so, but because they had influence sufficient to secure them the position. We find the same thing in a lesser degree in the undertakings controlled in this State. Those who exercise powers in large companies do this sort of thing; and while it may be true, the member for Guildford made out a good case last night that influence was brought to bear on the Commissioner of Railways although it was understood that he had independent control, still that factor was not absent from private undertakings, therefore no comparison could be drawn between the two. I am satisfied if we, in our Railway Bill, laid down certain broad principles as to the conduct of the railways, it would be almost impossible for any individual, whether worker seeking employment, or some more influential individual seeking a concession, to bring influence to bear to have the railways administered so that he might secure some special favour. The requisite rules that are necessary from my point of view are in the direction

first of seeing that a Minister responsible to Parliament, while giving every year and oftener if necessary, and I think it is necessary, a complete and detailed account of the working of the railways of the State, not the whole system lumped altogether, but each individual section of our railway system; and it was a very bad thing for Western Australia, and a bad thing for the people of the State, the shareholders in our railway system, when we departed from the principle of having sectional returns in regard to the system. The arguments advanced by members on both sides of the House in favour of Ministerial control is that we have not to regard the railways so much as a commercial concern as we have to regard them as a very powerful means of encouraging the various industries of the State. We cannot understand or find out to what extent that encouragement is legitimately given unless we know how each section, which perhaps caters for different industries, is being run; whether it is run at a profit, whether it is paying interest and sinking fund, or whether it is run at a loss to the taxpayers of the State. It has been said that the indirect benefit from running the railway system will more than outweigh any loss incurred in the conduct of our railways. We have heard it advanced at different times, when proposals are submitted for greater consideration, say in the carriage of Collie coal or the carriage of agricultural produce, or the carriage of timber, that although a reduction of freight may bring about a loss on that particular line, still the encouragement given to those different industries will more than outweigh the loss that is incurred. If we have detailed statements giving the particulars of this loss, and if we apportion them to the various industries, members would be able to say we are justified perhaps in incurring a loss to give encouragement to the Collie coal industry, say for instance. Or if there are struggling agricultural communities we are justified in running certain spur railways at a loss in order to give them encouragement; or in regard to the timber industry, that it would be better to carry timber at a loss

than incur the stoppage of the timber industry. But when it is a question of one lot of consumers or users of the railway making up by freights on their section for the loss in other portions of the system, it becomes altogether another proposition. The Commissioner of Railways, in the course of his last report, draws attention to this fact, and points out the diminution in the revenue from the railways, which has been incurred from this principle being carried out. He says:—

"The most noticeable features of the above table (the analysis of working expenses and earnings) are the decrease in earnings (£97,000) and expenses (£66,000) respectively. The fall in earnings is made up approximately by losses in traffic as follow:—On traffic to Fremantle smelting works, back-loading £10,500, mallet bark £14,000."

These are two losses which no doubt it would have been impossible to avoid, in view of the closing down of the smelters at Fremantle, making it impossible for people to send their ore there if they had ore to send, and in connection with the mallet bark industry, the falling off in this industry. Then we come to sandalwood, £6,000, and timber and loss of general traffic consequent on the dispute in this industry, £38,000. This embodies more than the losses on traffic occasioned by that dispute; it embodies the losses incurred by the railways by a reduction in freights given to those embarked in the timber industry. The report goes on to say:—

"Then we have reduced grain freights and wharfage, £20,000, and passenger and other traffic generally, £3,500."

In these two items, the timber trade and the reduced grain trade and wharfage, we have a total diminution of £48,000. This is a serious loss, and it means the difference between interest and sinking fund on our loans and having to make up that amount from the Consolidated Revenue of the State. If we had a system of sectional returns it would mean while we have more than one-half of our loan capital embarked in our railway pro-

positions, and while we have to pay the interest and sinking fund on that loan capital, whether we earn it on our railways or not, we could see if a particular section and industry was incurring this loss. It would be a matter for submission to the electors whether they were prepared, in one industry where a railway was paying, to say they were ready to pay such freights on our railways which will permit of the encouragement of other industries, which must be run at a loss for some time to come, in view of the fact that the ultimate advantage to the State will more than recompense us. On the other hand, they might say, "We shall be prepared through taxation to make up the deficit involved in the concessions given to various industries." But the residents on the goldfields now say that for two years past they have been called upon to pay abnormally high railway freights on produce and other articles, to make up for the loss which was being incurred on the other railway systems of the State.

Hon. F. H. Piesse: That is decidedly incorrect.

Mr. BATH: I think it is absolutely correct.

Hon. F. H. Piesse: They have never been asked to pay anything more than the service justified.

Mr. BATH: I do not suppose they have been asked. Probably they were not consulted. The rates have been proportioned in such a way that the goldfields people had to contribute to make a surplus on the working of the goldfields line, a surplus over working expenses, interest and sinking fund, to compensate for the loss incurred on other systems; and I have only to point out to the hon. member that in the absence of sectional returns we are not in a position to rightly apportion this profit and loss. But if we take the last sectional returns which were issued, I think in 1903, we shall see that the Eastern Goldfields railway practically bore the whole of the burden of the railway system of the State.

Hon. F. H. Piesse: Because there was a larger number of people on the goldfields, and as all their commodities had to be brought to them by rail, they of

course had to pay for the carriage of them. But when we consider those who use the agricultural sections of our railways, we find that the agriculturists are developing the country for the ultimate purpose of cheapening the food supply of the goldfields people.

Mr. BATH: For a good many years I lived on the goldfields, and I know that while the goldfields people were paying these high rates, they received very little consideration in the way of cheaper food in exchange for the assistance they were giving to agriculturists and other producers throughout the State. For instance, the price of bread, flour, vegetables, potatoes, onions, wheat, chaff, and fruit was so high as to be almost prohibitive to a very large section of the goldfields population; and to some of the people the prices of some articles were absolutely prohibitive. The hon. member must know that, until a recent period, fruit, an article of prime necessity to the goldfields people, was a luxury absolutely beyond the ordinary working man with a family on the Eastern Goldfields. And although the Eastern Goldfields were being called upon year after year to pay these high railway rates on their railway to make up for the loss incurred on other systems, they never received any corresponding advantage in the reduced prices of the articles which were necessary for their welfare and support.

Hon. F. H. Piesse: I am not defending the rates; but I say it was not because of the railway rates that the prices of foodstuffs were so high. That was due to combinations of people banded together to keep up the prices.

Mr. BATH: Undoubtedly there were combinations, and there were combinations in which the producers were interested—the very people whom the goldfields population were being bled to encourage, in accordance with the railway policy. I am not anxious to excite the old animosities and controversies between the goldfields and the coast; but I do think the time has arrived when the agricultural industry, the Collie coal industry and the timber industry should be put on proper bases; they should be

able to stand on their bottom, and we should have particulars laid before members to let us know exactly what each industry is doing in regard to the railway system, how each is contributing, and whether any section of our railways is being run at a loss in order to encourage any industry. And when we know the facts I am satisfied that if it were put to any body of consumers either on the goldfields or in the metropolitan area, that a lower railway freight, even if it involved a loss, would give encouragement to a deserving industry—if the matter were put fairly and squarely before consumers, they would be prepared to accord that support. But they do not wish to be left any longer in the dark on this question; and I as a representative of a goldfields constituency am anxious that this matter should be put on a proper basis, and it never can be until sectional returns are submitted to this House. Another argument against independent commissioner control of our railways is that such a commissioner or manager, if he were an independent manager largely free from supervision by the Minister responsible to Parliament, would not be so anxious for the encouragement of industries; for that would be absolutely outside his domain. He would have no need to concern himself with encouraging industries.

The Minister for Railways: How would you make the manager free from Ministerial control?

Mr. BATH: Well, we have been informed on more than one occasion, when the railway administration has been criticised in this House, that the defects complained of were owing to the independent power exercised by the Commissioner under the existing Act. That excuse has been advanced by Ministers for their own lack of responsibility, or for shelving the responsibility on to the Commissioner. And although, where railways are owned by the State, it is absolutely impossible to lay down a law by which the conduct of those railways can be entirely free from the control of the people through their representatives, still we can by legislation give such powers to the management that a

member of Parliament representing the people has very little say with regard to railway administration. And under our existing system that has been made apparent by the manner in which inquiries and criticisms have been fenced with when it is a question of putting the blame on the shoulders of the Minister, apart from the Commissioner in charge of the Railway Department. My argument against such independent control is as I said that the Commissioner is not so much concerned with the development of our industries; with the development of various portions of the State, as he is with the administration of the trading concern under his control. He is concerned with cheapening the cost of running, with increasing the efficiency of the railways, with maintaining the permanent way, with improving discipline, and with other matters of that kind. And there has been a rivalry between the Railway Commissioners throughout Australia, with a view to securing the most up-to-date system on the continent. We have found our own Commissioner making improvements here and there, duplicating and improving the permanent way by various methods, and improving the engines—all with a view to building up the railway system and assisting it to rival the systems of other States and perhaps of other communities outside Australia. That is all very well in its way, when we as a community can afford it. But the question which should now commend itself to our attention is whether we should endeavour to give a cheap and reasonably efficient railway service to our producers and consumers, apart altogether from any fancy development of the railway system, or whether we should aim at having an up-to-date railway system, which, while it may rival that of other communities in Australia, will involve great expense. I object to the control of the railways by a semi-independent Commissioner; because we have increased the capital account of our railway system without a corresponding increase in the revenue which is derived from that system, and without a corresponding increase in that surplus over

working expenses which goes to pay interest and sinking fund. To prove this, I have only to point out that in the returns submitted by the Commissioner of Railways in his annual report we have particulars of the progress of the railways during the last five years; and we find that the increase in the capital account, an increase almost wholly made up of loan expenditure, was £2,890,512; and yet the increase in earnings during that period of five years between 1901-2 and 1906-7 was only £15,904. That is, we have loaded ourselves up to the extent of considerably over £100,000 in interest and sinking fund charges on our railway system, to earn only £15,904 more than we earned in 1901-2. That is a very serious discrepancy; and if that is to be the procedure of the future, we shall have a very high capital cost, not, perhaps, to be compared with that of other States where engineering difficulties are greater, but certainly a high capital cost considering the greater facilities for railway building that we have in Western Australia; while we shall not have that increase in surplus earnings which would compensate us for the increased interest and sinking fund charges in which we are involved. And that is a point where independent commissioner control has worked detrimentally to the railway system, and certainly detrimentally to the producers of this State. I am personally in favour of a combination of the two systems. When we are dealing with our railways, in which so much of our loan moneys is involved, I think we should never lose sight of the charges we have to pay every year by way of interest and sinking fund. At the same time, we should never have them solely in view. We should always bear in mind that we have a big country needing railways for its development, a country sparsely populated at the present time; and we should also bear in mind that the railways are a big factor in helping to settle our country and to develop our agricultural industry. And with a combination of the two schools of thought in regard to railway administration I believe that

under Ministerial control we can work advantageously for the future. I am somewhat astonished at the views which have been embodied in this Bill, representative as it must be of Cabinet councils, when I bear in mind the opinions which Ministers now in the Cabinet have expressed on railway administration. Let me quote for instance the Attorney General, who was briefly quoted last night by the member for Guildford (Mr. Johnson). In the course of a speech on the railways vote in the 1905 Estimates the Attorney General said:—

“If the department was administered not entirely from the point of view of a commercial concern but in the broadest possible manner in the interests of the State, it was in the interests of the State that the people on the goldfields should visit the coast, as much as it was in the interests of the people on one part of the coast to visit another part of the coast. If the Minister were empowered to make the alteration, there would be no difficulty in obtaining it; but unfortunately the position to-day was that the Minister, apparently, could only act as an onlooker in many respects. The Minister's hands were tied when it came to carrying out a reform urged by the House, and he found himself effectively blocked by the Commissioner.”

The Minister for Railways: I am asking for power to supersede the Commissioner, in the matter of charges.

Mr. BATH: Then in regard to the question of locally constructing the railway rolling stock, referred to by the member for Guildford, who pointed out that influence was brought to bear through political circles in other directions than in securing some man a job on the railways, the Attorney General, then a private member, said:—

“He congratulated the department on the initiation of the work of supplying their wagons and carriages, and also boilers for engines. This was a step in the right direction. If we could construct at anything approaching the cost of imported rolling stock, it was our duty to keep the money in

the pockets of our people. He hoped the policy would be extended if possible to the construction of engines. He believed that our own servants would have a far more valuable knowledge of our requirements than people abroad, and that they would construct engines which we could rely on as being suitable to our requirements.”

The gentleman who gave expression to those sentiments was a member of the Cabinet which gave a large portion of the contract to a privately owned concern. This was in spite of the emphatic expression of opinion by him that all the rolling stock should be constructed in the State railway workshops.

The Minister for Railways: The present Attorney General was not a member of the Cabinet which ordered the A.J. brake vans from a private firm.

Mr. BATH: If I have done the Attorney General an injustice I withdraw at once. I hope now that he is a member of the Cabinet the emphatic views he expressed then will be carried into effect by the advice he will tender to his colleagues when these matters are being considered. I am satisfied that, in the interests of the people of the State, who are shareholders in the railway, and in the interests particularly of the producing section, it will be infinitely better to have Ministerial control of our railway system. It is immaterial whether the permanent head of the department be called Commissioner or General Manager, so long as it is laid down that he is subject to Ministerial control. We should be supplied with details as to the sectional returns of our railways, for if this is done the people will recognise that, so far as their particular sections are concerned, they have either to pay through their rates the interest and sinking fund on the railway system, or else make it up by the taxes they pay to the Government of this State. It matters not in which way it is done. There is no getting away from the fact that we have to pay interest and sinking fund to the money lender, and the question arises whether it is not better to pay it directly through the efficient, just and equitable working of our railways rather

than contribute it in a sort of blind-fold way through contributions to the consolidated revenue, in an indirect manner. Although the taxpayer is not so much concerned when he contributes indirectly, it is always the most expensive way of raising a tax or meeting a deficiency. There is likely to be more efficient supervision and more interest taken by the people, if the facts are placed before them, than if they are indirectly taxed and do not know the purpose for which they are contributing. The information as to these sectional returns which I asked for, and which I have asked for repeatedly for years past, would be most advantageous, and I hope the time will come when the matter will be considered by Cabinet, and we shall have the returns submitted to the House. I wish to refer to a discrepancy between the returns submitted by the Railway Commissioner and those placed before us by the Treasurer in his Budget speech. We find that when the Treasurer in the course of his Budget speech was dealing with the results of the working of the railways he said, the net profit after paying working expenses and interest on loan and revenue capital expenditure in connection with the railway system was only £12,764 for 1906-7. When we turn to the Commissioner's report we find he shows an increase of £42,692.

The Minister for Railways: Look at page 100 and you will see the reconciliation.

Mr. BATH: We should have the position put plainly before us. If the people are to understand the railway figures exactly, there should not be two sets of figures given; one by the Commissioner and one by the Treasurer, who, as the financial adviser, is responsible to this House. Nine out of every ten persons who take an interest in the working of the railways, whether they be pressmen or private individuals will, when looking at the railway report, first of all turn to the results of the working of the system as it is given on page 4 of the report, showing the comparative results of the working for five years. There they will find that the Commis-

sioner states his surplus over working expenses is £42,692. They then turn to the Budget speech of the Treasurer, which is not only circulated in Western Australia, but is sent as an advertisement to the Agent General and circulated in the old country, and they find he says the surplus over working expenses and interest is only £12,764. It is immaterial whether there is a reconciliation account or not, for we want unanimity in returns, so that we shall know whether the profit is £42,000 or £12,000. Whatever explanation may be advanced to account for the discrepancy, the fact remains that the discrepancy is there. If these explanations are forthcoming they should be submitted before the returns are given to the public. As it is a discrepancy it makes our finances a by-word in the eyes of many financial critics of Western Australia. I should like to mention an objection which I have raised before, and which was urged by the member for Kanowna (Mr. Walker) when the Railway Estimates were before the House, that when we are discussing these matters, which are of the very first importance to the people, we should have the report of the Auditor General to guide us. He is the person directly responsible under the Audit Act to members of this House and through us to the people. He is, as it were, even above the Treasurer and the departmental heads, and we rely on him as a capable and skilled officer for advice and criticism concerning the departmental returns, and to show us whether they are correct or not. We discuss the Estimates, the Budget speech, and deal with the whole financial position of Western Australia without this report of the Auditor General. In his annual report the Commissioner of Railways states:—

“It is to be regretted that statements continue to be made that works have been carried on without the necessary authorisation of the Government, more especially in regard to the duplication of railways. The authority of the Government of the day has always been obtained prior to the work being done. If this were

not so, the Audit Department would immediately have drawn the attention of the Government to it."

We cannot tell whether the different departments have drawn attention to any discrepancy, or misuse of loan funds without authorisation, for we have not that report. Until we get the report we do not know whether the other departments are being financed in a proper fashion. That there has been a conflict between the Railway Department and the Auditor General is proved by almost the concluding words of the Commissioner's report wherein he says:—

"The Audit Department of the State has, to this department, been a source of trouble instead of assistance, and some friction has consequently ensued. While this is to be regretted perhaps for this State, there remains the compensation that, as no fear exists in the Railway Department, no favour is likely to be shown by the Audit Department. At the same time, nothing but trivial technical differences and queries have really arisen, and these the Railway Department would have been only too happy to alter to suit the requirements of the Auditor General, if that officer had made known what he required."

I remember very well that in the reports of the Auditor General we have had submitted to us, he has taken exception frequently to various items in the administration of the Railway Department, but then it has always been twelve months after the Estimates have been before us or the expenditure of that money has taken place. While it may be a satisfaction to know that we have a zealous officer in the Auditor General who is supervising the expenditure and seeing that all is fair and above board, still to get his report twelve months late is like locking the stable door after the colt has been stolen. I would remind the Treasurer, in whose department the Auditor General is, that the submission of this report to Parliament at an earlier date would be an agreeable surprise which would be probably recognised by members of the House, who would appreciate it owing to the responsibility they

hold towards the electors of this State. I have nothing farther to say on the second reading except that, in the Committee stage, there are certain amendments outlined by the member for North Fremantle (Mr. Bolton) especially in connection with the question of Ministerial control, which will have my hearty support.

At 6.15, the *Speaker* left the Chair.

At 7.30, Chair resumed.

Hon. F. H. PIESSE (Katanning): It is not my intention to deal at length with the proposals for amending the Railways Act, nor to allude particularly to the question of placing the railways under the control of a Minister with a general manager, as suggested by some hon. members. That, I take it, is a question by itself. We have had many discussions upon it, but no proposal has yet been made to change the present order of things. It is merely proposed by the Government in the Bill to amend certain sections of the Act, and it is particularly to the amending clauses I intend to refer. The clauses which will materially affect the people in country districts are Clauses 14, 16, 17, and 18. The last-named clause deals with the question of damage caused by fire to grass, crops, or live-stock; and there is a provision in the Bill that the Commissioner or the Crown shall not be liable for any accident or injury to crops caused by sparks from an engine, unless it be proved that the land in question was protected by a firebreak not less than one chain in width. Not only would this clause be dangerous for the Government and the country, but also dangerous for those through whose lands the railway passes; and it would be productive of numberless actions for damages in connection with fires that may occur, and in regard to which proof would be required as to whether or not this fire-break was in existence. This clause should receive farther consideration at the hands of the Government with a view to its elimination, relying on the existing law, which in a measure protects the Government and at the same

time affords a reasonable protection to those whose land the railway traverses. If, however, it is intended to retain the clause, then I think it should be subject to farther amendment. I would suggest that after the words "one chain in width," a farther provision be made of a discriminating character as between the different parts of the State. Take a railway traversing the Avon district, or those farther towards the goldfields, and that towards Newcastle; these were built in the early days when only a narrow strip of land was reserved for the line, one chain I think in most instances. It is in such cases that the greatest danger arises. In connection with most of the newer railways two chains were reserved, and in the case of the Great Southern Railway three chains. The result is that there is not so much danger in that country where three-chain reserves have been made. Farther the railway authorities have taken the precaution of clearing their land and ploughing on the outer edge a strip sufficient to afford protection in the event of a fire occurring within the railway boundaries. But in those cases where the reserved area is only a chain wide, there is necessity for farther precautions. It is asking adjacent owners to go to considerable expense to clear and plough the whole of their railway frontage to a width of one chain; therefore it may reasonably be expected that the Government will consider a proposal to amend the clause in the direction of leaving a portion uncleared where the railway reserve is a chain in width, so that it may be burned clear to a chain, which would be sufficient safeguard. Where the reserved land is wider than a chain and a half, the cleared area should be fixed at half a chain. A free portion 10ft. wide all along would be sufficient. But there is one thing I should like to be assured of by the Minister—and no doubt this point can be dealt with in Committee after consultation with the legal authorities—whether in the event of this fire-break being provided, the Commissioner would be liable in the event of damage done by a fire occasioned by sparks from an

engine. The clause reads that damage shall not be recoverable from the Commissioner in respect of any loss or accident, and so forth, unless it is proved by the plaintiff that the land in question was protected by a fire-break one chain in width and free from inflammable matter. But if this precaution be taken by an owner, I take it that the casual reader would say the Commissioner should be liable; but the point is a doubtful one, and if the clause be retained as printed, it may lead to actions for the recovery of damages where, in ordinary circumstances, it would be held that the Commissioner had been negligent and caused the fire. But any clause agreed to by this House should be such as will prevent useless litigation, and place the matter in such a clear light as to be easily intelligible to those concerned. I hope that when the Committee stage is reached—or I may have an earlier opportunity of discussing the question with the Minister in charge of the Bill—that a clause will be drawn which will meet the case. In fact, unless the clause is so drawn as to meet the case in any possible contingency, it is likely to be productive of difficulties in the future. In Clauses 16 and 17 there is a new departure, providing that the Minister may from time to time by Order-in-Council published in the *Government Gazette* declare that any branch or spur or other railway shall be deemed to be a district railway. That provision I take it deals with what are known as spur railways. It is a new departure; but no definition is given in the Bill of a "district railway."

The Minister for Railways: That provision is inserted for the purpose of dealing with the staff.

Hon. F. H. PIESSE: If that be the purpose of Clause 18, I have no objection to offer; but Clause 17 contains a drastic provision under which the Commissioner shall not be subject to any liability whatever in respect of damage.

The Minister for Railways: I propose to strike that provision out of the Bill.

The Hon. F. H. PIESSE: If it is the Minister's intention to strike that provision out, I withdraw my objection. In

the circumstances I shall reserve farther remarks on this matter till the Bill is in Committee. There is one other matter to which I desire to refer, and the point was raised by the member for Brown Hill (Mr. Bath) when speaking to-night in regard to the railway rates. As this is a question dealing with railway management generally, I take it this is a fitting opportunity to refer to this question, which is of grave importance to the country. I have expressed the hope when speaking previously on this subject that provision would be made this year to still farther reduce the railway rates with the object of assisting those engaged in the development of the country. There has been considerable disappointment in regard to the Government's decision on this matter; and one reason stated publicly why the Government decided not to farther reduce the rates is the difficulty the Ministers are faced with in that those responsible for the revision of rates cannot assimilate them so as to apply generally in a favourable way to both the goldfields and the agricultural districts. The hon. member when speaking to-night mentioned that the residents of the goldfields, who form a large portion of the population of this country—a large working population admittedly, and an important one—have hitherto paid more than their fair proportion towards the running of the railway system of the State. I will admit that the earnings of the goldfields railway contributed materially to the earnings of the railway system—much more than other portions of the State have done in proportion. But the fact must not be lost sight of that in paying for services rendered they are doing so at a rate which after all is not high when compared with ruling rates in other parts of the world; and they are paying only for what they receive. They have carried to them over the railways the requirements of the people. The heavier portion of those requirements have been in connection with mining machinery, coal, and other necessities for the working or development of the mines. The food for the people's consumption, wearing apparel,

and other personal necessities, form but a small proportion of the whole; so that after all the rates are not such a burden on the people of that part of the State as most members who spoke on the subject would lead the House to infer. In regard to the carriage of such commodities as food and other things mentioned the railway rates would have to be materially reduced to afford much relief in that direction. It has been already shown in comparison with Queensland that if a principal article of consumption is taken, say flour, our rates compare more than favourably. In Queensland flour is carried from the coast to a goldfield, a distance of 387 miles, at 44s. 6d. a ton; in Western Australia the rate is only about 32s. 6d.; so there is a considerable difference in our favour. But what we have been asking for is not for cheaper carriage of goods inland, but that the rates on produce should be so reduced that the producers would be able to compete with imported produce from other States in our own markets, and to convey produce to ports of shipment at rates which would place our producers on an equal footing with the producers of New South Wales. That is the point we are dealing with, and we ask that there be introduced what is known as the zone system, which has been found to work so advantageously in other countries. If we take the long-distance railways of America, Canada, and South Africa, it will be found that on the long-distance railways connecting Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and Durban with the interior, provision is made for the cheap transport of goods from inland centres to these ports of shipment; and this has been done for the purpose of encouraging those resident in the interior. Although the railways in Western Australia are nothing compared with the extensive railway systems in the far-back places in Canada and America, yet the same provision should apply; and that is where there seems always a conflict of opinion in regard to these proposals. What we want is some advantage to those who are producing the commodities required for the consumption of the people;

and though there has been some remark made in regard to the higher cost of living on the goldfields consequent on the high railway rates charged, yet after all, any consideration that can be shown to the producer is of benefit to the people on the goldfields ; because if we can produce within our own territory that which is required for the consumption of the people, it is likely to be cheaper than if we had continued imports from abroad, as was the case until a few years ago. It means that if those on the goldfields would only agree to give those on the land some advantage in regard to railway rates towards the ports, not taking into consideration the rates from the ports to the goldfields, then they will have materially assisted in helping the people on the land to develop their holdings and turn land into account which otherwise could not be made use of. After all, it is not a question of conveying these goods inland, it is a question of conveying produce from inland to the ports, enabling those people on the land to produce at a sufficiently low rate so as to compete with goods imported from other countries. I mention this matter casually in order to bring it again under the notice of the Minister, with the hope that he will not lose sight of a matter that is so material to the progress of the people in country districts, and that he will take it again into consideration. It is unfortunate that we have had the issue clouded by complaints from the goldfields where, no doubt, there is a large number of people complaining that if we reduce rates in other parts they should also be reduced towards the fields. In my opinion, they are already sufficiently low for such a service as is given to the fields, that is an inland service where the traffic is one way only. Under the existing circumstances of the high cost of working the railways sufficient advantages have already been given to the fields. However, the people on the fields should not refuse to assist the people who after all are of advantage to them by producing those requirements which cannot be produced on the fields. That is where we seem to come into collision every time, and the references made to-night by the member

for Brown Hill (Mr. Bath) again show that the question is not thoroughly understood. I would point out to the hon. member that in regard to the higher rates ruling for all produce on the goldfields, that is for fruit, vegetables, and so forth, one reason for these high costs three or four years ago was the higher value of those goods ; they were not produced so cheaply as they are to-day and we had not the area under cultivation that we have now. Prices have now been materially reduced by reason of the large impetus given to vegetable growing, and this has had the effect of reducing prices on the fields, notwithstanding that the railway rates have not been reduced. These goods are carried to the fields at something like £2 a ton, and that means barely a farthing a pound, which, after all, is not a high rate and should not mean such a great addition to the price of the articles on the fields. But we cannot get these prices down ; they are complained of in Perth and elsewhere ; there seems to be some sort of an understanding, even among the small traders, that prices shall be maintained ; because in most of these lines there are many bad debts, and there are many other things to be considered, such as high rents and high wages paid to assistants, all of which materially add to the cost of the produce. Therefore, while the present state of things exists we will not see such a big reduction in the cost of food products to the consumer. I hope this matter I have raised will not be lost sight of, and that we will see some change made in regard to the more distant parts of the country during the recess.

Mr. J. EWING (Collie) : I had hoped when the Minister introduced the Bill that the debate on a motion I introduced last year would have been given more consideration than the Government have seen fit to give it. However, there is no doubt the Government are fully justified in making up their mind not to alter the system of Commissioner control, because the majority of members voted against my motion for Ministerial control. I regret the defeat of that motion, but on this occasion I see no reason why I should

not support the second reading of this Bill, reserving to myself the right in Committee to vote in the direction I have always advocated, namely, full responsibility of Ministerial control in our railway management. I intend to take that opportunity, and I hope that when the division is taken the result will be that the railways will again revert to Ministerial control. I should like to point out in regard to our railway system what seems to have been lost sight of, that during the five years the railways were under Ministerial control the figures compared most favourably with those during the five years the railways were under the control of the Commissioner. If members will look at the *Statistical Abstract* they will find that during the five years from 1895 to 1902, when the Commissioner of Railways was appointed, the working expenses averaged 75.2 per cent., and that during the Commissioner's control from 1902 to 1907 the working expenses averaged 76 per cent. Also during the same period they were under Ministerial control the earnings were considerably greater than they were during the five years in which the Commissioner had control. From 1898 to 1902 the earnings were £362,833, or 1.1 per cent. on the cost of construction and equipment, as against £292,331, or .6 per cent. on the cost of construction and equipment in the five years 1903 to 1907, during the Commissioner control. It is not necessary to go into figures in connection with this matter, because I do not think it has been contended by the Minister in introducing the Bill that the financial arrangements of the railways have been any better under Commissioner control than under Ministerial control. If the Minister had contended that, of course these figures would at once refute the statement; but when we remember that in 1898 after eight years' trial, New Zealand reverted to Ministerial control, and when we consider that the conditions of the country were very much the same as they are in Western Australia to-day, it will show us that after a trial of Commissioner control they were satisfied the railways would be better under Ministerial control. That has been the case in

New Zealand, and I am perfectly sure it must prove the case in Western Australia.

The Minister : Not in the other States.

Mr. EWING : No. The real reason why I feel it my bounden duty to support Ministerial control is the fact well known to all members of this House and to everybody in this country, that there has been considerable difficulty in regard to the alteration of railway rates when any alteration has been necessary for the advancement of the State. I know that under the present Act, which I am glad to see is to be altered, the Commissioner recommends charges, and if these are agreed to by the Government they cannot be altered by the Government unless the Commissioner agrees. That is an intolerable position for us to be in. It would be intolerable to think that any officer in charge of the leading institution of the State should have that power, because the Government may make a mistake and agree to certain things which they see after is a mistake, and unless the Commissioner can be made to agree to the request of the Government to alter it, he can stand his ground. It is well known that during the last two or three years the Government have had very hard fights to alter certain rates which they desired altered for the development of this great State [*Mr. Taylor* : Nonsense !] It is well known, and I am perfectly sure it cannot be contradicted. These things have led to considerable trouble, and I want to do away with all this trouble and worry. If the Government think it necessary to make certain reductions in rates to advance any particular industry, they should be able to do it and take the full responsibility of so doing. [Interjection.] It is hardly a fair statement, because the Government have reduced rates to a great extent during the last 12 or 18 months

Mr. Taylor : Where ?

The Minister : To the goldfields.

Mr. Taylor : For agricultural districts, and for the Timber Combine.

Mr. EWING : It seems to me that when this amending Bill is passed if even a Commissioner is appointed he will be a Commissioner only in name ; he will

be practically General Manager of the railways. Some responsibility that should fall on the shoulders of the manager will be avoided by the fact that he is a Commissioner. I want Ministers, even if it be necessary to create another department, to have the full responsibility of the Railway Department. That is the position I have taken up, and I believe it will be to the advantage of Western Australia. The Leader of the Opposition inferred that all the advantages in the reduction of freights have been in favour of those living in the coastal districts. I think there has been a considerable reduction in the carriage of low-grade ores. They are carried at a preferential rate.

Mr. Taylor : Where are they carried ?

Mr. EWING : I believe they are carried from different portions of the goldfields. And I believe the Government are prepared to develop the low-grade ores of the State, to carry them at a preferential rate so that they can be worked. I want to point out one particular instance that may come up in the near future as to the development of the coal mining industry. Through the unfortunate strike in New South Wales a trial of Collie coal was given on the P. and O. boats. That trial has been successful. And another order I believe has been given for the coaling of the "Mongolia" the next time it comes here. This is evidence that the coal has given satisfaction. It is satisfactory to the House to know that this particular article has benefited and that it will benefit the people of the State ; and we may prevent in the future competition from the Eastern States. Unless the Government have the power, by running the railways under Ministerial control, to reduce the freights to carry the fuel to the ships, we may lose this trade. I may remind members that in other parts of the world, I do not think it so in the Eastern States, but in America over long distances, referred to by the member for Katanning, coal is carried to the seaboard at one farthing per ton per mile, and it is made to pay. If Collie coal were carried to the seaboard at one farthing per ton per mile, there is no question but that the output would be 15,000 to 20,000 tons in

a few weeks' time. I do not ask for preferential rates, because they are against the Commonwealth constitution. But if we can give this industry a preference, we may have ten thousand men employed in the industry. That is a serious position for the Government to consider. That is one reason why I endeavour to persuade the Government to take the full control and responsibility of this great department. There is not one person in the State, not on the goldfields or anywhere else, who would object to a reduction of freights to the lowest possible limit, if it will benefit the State. And the same thing should apply to the agricultural industry and other industries as to the Collie coal. I hope the words I have used will not fall on barren ground, but will bear fruit, and that the Government will take into consideration the advisability of carrying this fuel to the coast cheaply. The responsibility should rest on the Government without any consideration of Parliament, for Parliament can afterwards decide whether the Government have done right or wrong. They can take the full responsibility, and I am sure it will advance the State considerably.

Hon. F. H. Piesse : Clause 3 provides for that.

Mr. EWING : They have not the full power.

Hon. F. H. Piesse : They have.

Mr. EWING : Then that simply brings me back to the position that I started from that the Commissioner is a general manager, and if he is a general manager let us call him such, and not shirk the responsibility and say there is a Commissioner ; he is responsible ; whereas the responsibility should not fall on his shoulders. Let the Government take the responsibility of the department. The member for Katanning referred to certain clauses in the Bill that there shall be certain fire-breaks on each side of the line to prevent fire. There has been a dereliction of duty in regard to the construction of these railways, if as he states, from the centre of the line there is such a small reserve. It must be an oversight. It is well to understand that when any new railways are constructed, something

like three chains should be reserved, for it is necessary to guard against the injury by fire from the burning of Collie coal or Newcastle coal. The farmers should be protected, and I am sure they will not object to expenditure in this direction. They plough half a chain instead of a chain and the Government take a portion of the cost and the responsibility in this direction. If the farmers' crops are fully protected by a fire-break it should materially reduce the insurance charges on the crops during the season. Will that not compensate the farmers to a certain extent?

Mr. Stone : They are not always insured.

Mr. EWING : It is not always through fire from sparks from railway engines that the damage is caused. In Victoria fires have occurred miles and miles away from railways. Men go along, throw down a lighted match and all the country is in flames. It is not reasonable for the farmers to insure their crops? But if people alongside the railway line do not insure their crops, they are not good business men. I think my argument is good. If the clause passes, perhaps not in its entirety but even in some amended form, it will have the effect of reducing the insurance to a considerable extent, and in that direction the farmers will gain. In regard to certain remarks made as to the reduction in the number of employees on the railways, the Minister has stated that not one person will be employed unless profitable employment can be found for him. I think members will say that is a right sentiment. Where the State employs men it should find full work for them. Statements have been made that men here getting 9s. a day are put off and re-engaged at 7s.

The Minister for Railways : That is not correct.

Mr. EWING : I was just going to say that I am fully satisfied of the justice and fairness of the Acting Commissioner of Railways. I feel sure Mr. Short would do no injustice to anyone in the service. I am glad to hear the Minister say that the statement is incorrect. With regard to Ministerial control, I want to say, in my opinion it will be a great mistake

in the search for a Commissioner or general manager of railways to go outside the State of Western Australia. I believe we have plenty of men who have had experience here, and who are quite capable of taking other positions. I think in our service there are excellent men. It would be invidious to mention names; still I have them in my mind's eye. Members know the service rendered to the State by many officers, and when an opportunity occurs it is only right that we should give those who have rendered such good service to the State an opportunity of showing if they can give better service in the future. I hope the Bill will pass this session, and if I do not attain my end and have the railways placed under Ministerial control, there are many amendments which will improve the Railways Act. If for no other reason I hope the Bill will get through this session and do the good that is expected of it.

Mr. T. WALKER (Kanowna) : I do not expect that I shall throw any new light on this exceedingly important subject, but I do wish to endorse the views expressed by other speakers as to the unwisdom of the course of still continuing without Ministerial responsibility. The very interjection that the Minister for Railways made while the member for Collie was speaking, or was it the interruption by the member for Katanning, that under Clause 3 the Minister had power to direct the particular policy of the railways—

The Minister for Railways : In regard to the charges.

Mr. WALKER : That is quite so; in regard to the charges there is just that reserve left. I say this interjection shows clearly we have not gone far enough, and it suggests there can be no better means of escaping the responsibility than having both a Commissioner and the Minister. For whatever is done wrong by the Minister, he can put upon the shoulders of the Commissioner, and whatever is done wrong by the Commissioner he can casually place on the shoulders of the Minister. There will always be this shifting from one to the

other, so that one can never tell in the course of the history of the management of this institution which one is to blame and where the fault lies. There is and must be under this Bill within certain lines a definite sphere of authority due or in the possession of the Commissioner; a Commissioner must be the responsible authority within certain lines; we cannot touch him. Within certain lines he is an autocrat. The State cannot touch him and the House cannot bring him to task. You must give him, within these lines, his full sway. Now all that is left is what on general lines may be called the policy of the Minister, that is to say, the Minister shall have power to consider such industries as that represented by the member for Collie. He will have the power, if he chooses, of running coal from Collie to the metropolis for next to nothing, or running the produce along agricultural lines for next to nothing. He will have that power I admit; but that is not all that is requisite. The mere question of freights to consider various industries is not all that is requisite; for in the internal management of this institution the Minister ought, when occasion requires, have the power to intervene or interfere. He ought to be able to check abuses even in the internal ranks, even in the intimate staff that is associated with the Commissioner himself. I draw attention to this fact from one significant feature that must strike every member. The report of the late Commissioner draws attention to the conduct of the Audit Office in criticising that department as to the finances. And nothing can be more important than the finances of a big institution like that. Yet we discuss the Estimates without the Auditor General's report on the railways; we are discussing now a Bill affecting the appointment of a Commissioner of Railways still without the Auditor General's report. What can be more evident, what can be more clear than that this House is discussing the measure blindfolded? The Minister himself without such information as that can know nothing of what is going on as affecting the Treasury, as affecting in fact the backbone of the finances of the

State. That document is not here to-night, yet that document points out, I am given to understand—there are general rumours that there are some serious defects in the management of that great asset of the State. Where is that report? Here we are in the month of December, the last month of the year, and we have not the Auditor General's report either for this department or any other department; and blindfolded we are passing a measure committing the country to a course of policy for years to come. I am not by any means going to bolster Mr. Chinn as an infallible personage.

The Attorney General: His vanity.

Mr. WALKER: I think for self-assertiveness we could find no other better than the Attorney General and Mr. Chinn.

The Attorney General: What about the third person?

Mr. WALKER: In these matters I take a very humble position, for I should be sorry to put my assertions forward as gospel. But I do say this, that the article by Mr. Chinn I think in Monday's issue of the *Morning Herald* did not deal with that assertiveness for which some people condemn him, but it took the figures of the Acting Commissioner, of the Minister for Railways on certain occasions, and the figures of the Treasurer, and showed how distinctly the Treasurer contradicted the Minister. The Minister contradicted himself and contradicted the Commissioner, and the audited accounts from the railways. This was not mere assertion; it was put in plainly side by side. The system of these authorities, the Treasurer, the Minister for Railways on one side, and some Minister who had apparently forgotten what he had said before, on the other side. Then here we are in the month of December and that most important document for the safety of the State is not forthcoming. I mention that fact for more reasons than one—that we ought to be more independent of the accounts from the Railway Department. The Minister himself, as head of the department, ought to be able to give us some insight into the finances of the railways.

The Minister for Railways: You say that because Mr. Chinn made the same statement.

Mr. WALKER: So far as I am aware, Mr. Chinn did not make that statement. I am making it. I say, we ought to have a Minister who is head of the department and responsible for it, and able to supply this House with reliable information when it is asked for.

The Minister for Railways: Look at page 100 of the railway report, and you will see a full explanation of the difference between the Treasurer's figures and our own.

Mr. WALKER: Since that report was issued the Minister has made the statements to which I am now drawing attention. The Treasurer made some statements whilst speaking on his Estimates, since that railway report was issued.

The Minister for Railways: What were the statements?

Mr. WALKER: I will read only an extract from the article in question, but I will lend it to the Minister. The writer says:—

"Let me here place the whole position in a nutshell. The people of Western Australia own in their railway system a business proposition with a turnover exceeding $1\frac{1}{2}$ millions of money, which according to the Colonial Treasurer returns a net profit of only £12,764, equal to 0.12 or one-eighth per cent of the capital of £10,300,938 invested. The working expenses and interest absorb all this large income, with the exception of the balance above mentioned, and, as that balance on such a large revenue is a fast diminishing one, it is obvious the vanishing point, as far as profit is concerned, is just about reached, for the amount either one way or the other is liable to be wiped out during one week's operations, as instanced by the Minister, when he stated that our earnings were actually £23,000 less for the first four months of this year than for the same period of the preceding year. Yet in the face of this proof the Government declare the present time is inopportune for the fullest inquiry into the management, by Royal Commission. Could

any time be more opportune? I doubt it. Let us see:—

"Mr. Gregory stated during his speech on the Railway Estimates that the total expenditure, including working expenses and all interest charges for the first four months of the financial year 1907 was £459,244, and the working expenses alone for the same period were £337,032; so that the difference between these sums represents the total interest bill, which works out at £112,212, and therefore becomes a fixed sum as regards interest charges. He also gives the earnings for the period above mentioned as £499,330; so that by deducting the sum of £459,244 from this amount, we have a balance on the credit side of £40,086, shown as profit, after all charges had been deducted, and this, again, becomes a fixed amount.

"Now let us see what the Colonial Treasurer's figures disclose for the period herein dealt with, namely the first four months of this year, which are as under: July: revenue, £72,378; expenditure, £54,809. August: revenue, £117,743; expenditure, £88,488. September: revenue, £124,311; expenditure, £75,535. October: revenue, £124,141; expenditure, £99,236. Totals: revenue, £437,573; expenditure, £318,068. By deducting the expenditure from the revenue we arrive at the figures of £120,505, which according to the Treasurer's figures is the actual gross profit over working expenses; but, and here comes the trouble, the interest for the four months, as shown by the Minister for Railways, is actually £122,212; therefore the net profit vanishes, and instead of a credit balance being in existence at the end of October, there was a debit of £1,707; in other words, the railways have earned, by that amount, during the first four months of this year, enough to pay working expenses and interest charges.

"The Minister gave as a reason for the working expenses of October being so high (*vide Hansard* page 853) that during this month there were three pays instead of two, thus increasing

the expenditure by £20,000. Well, admitting this to be the case, and reducing the October expenditure by that amount, we still have, in round numbers, a surplus, according to the Minister's figures, of only £18,000 instead of £40,000 as shown by him. The Colonial Treasurer's figures, however, clearly show there was a deficit of £1,700, so the matter must be decided by that gentleman and the Minister for Railways, these being the only persons able to solve the riddle."

I give those figures for what they are worth.

The Minister for Railways: They are worth very little.

Mr. WALKER: I do not know that they are. I have not seen the Minister's explanation. And at all events, what we do require in order to understand these figures is the Auditor General's report. And we have a right to see that gentleman's comments on the financial management of this great institution. The Minister, I am sure, will not deny this.

Mr. Foulkes: Why have we not the Auditor General's report?

Mr. WALKER: I cannot tell. Ministers alone are in possession of that secret. But surely it is an injustice to the House to ask us to pass such an important measure without that report. What do we pay the Auditor General for? We might as well dismiss him and his whole staff. He is in that position specially to report for the guidance of this House. He is there for the instruction of this House. His report is due to this House. He is in every respect the tutor of this House upon the finances of the State.

The Treasurer: Since the present Auditor General took office, his report has been in earlier than the report of any of his predecessors.

Mr. WALKER: I am not blaming the Auditor General. If there is anyone to blame for the delay, it is the Ministry.

The Treasurer: Why?

Mr. WALKER: Because the accounts were not sent in soon enough.

The Treasurer: What have Ministers to do with the Auditor General's report?

Mr. WALKER: You have to give him

your figures; to make your returns to him. Every department has to make its returns.

The Treasurer: He has only to audit the accounts.

Mr. WALKER: He cannot audit them until they are sent in.

The Treasurer: Ministers do not delay the accounts.

Mr. WALKER: Who does?

The Treasurer: No one does.

Mr. WALKER: Why is not his report here?

The Treasurer: It has been impossible to prepare it earlier, and it is now being printed.

Mr. WALKER: It has been in the hands of the printer for the last month. So I was told when I referred to the same fact during the discussion of the Railway Estimates.

Mr. Taylor: Did not I ask a question without notice, and the Minister's reply was that the report was then in the hands of the printer? That was five weeks ago.

The Minister for Railways: It was three weeks ago.

Mr. WALKER: The Treasurer is at the head of this department. Has it never occurred to him that the House has a right to be in possession of that report? I need not I am sure impress that more strongly on Ministers, to show the absolute absurdity, in the absence of that official report, of dealing with a great measure of this sort, in which everything has to do with the finances of a great State department. But this also calls to mind another matter—the absolute necessity of having a Minister responsible. Under the present management there is always a final escape from anything disagreeable. The Minister can always avoid casting too prying an eye on the working of that institution, by saying: "There is a wall of law around that department. We are prevented by statute from too minutely looking into the working details of the Government railways. My duty is only to deal with general policy, with Cabinet directions. I can do no more." That is the present position; and I submit it is wrong. The railways ought to be managed for the benefit

of the State and not merely for the Treasury of the State, not merely to be paying concerns, or as I have often heard them called "business propositions," but natural arteries of the State. What the old Roman roads were in the progress of Roman colonisation, so should our railways be in modern times. They ought to be undertaken with care, and at almost any sacrifice, in order that the country may be settled, may be made to progress, to progress not only at one particular centre, not lopsidedly, but simultaneously through the whole country. What has been the result of the railway management, as we have had it from the Commissioner? The Attorney General must admit that on the fields he has heard sound arguments as to the mismanagement of that line. He has heard, I am sure, from his own constituents repeatedly the cry that the railways are run not for the benefit of the goldfields, but for the benefit of the coastal people and trade. In other words, the line between Perth and the goldfields is made to pay handsomely in order to cover the expenses on other less remunerative lines. There is some foundation for the cry, and I am sure the Attorney General, if he were not in the Ministry, would take this view, and would show clearly that the fields are penalised in order that the railways may appear on paper to pay and a good balance sheet shown at the end of the financial year.

Hon. F. H. Piesse: Do you mean to say there is a special charge put on that line, and that they are not benefiting by the rates, which are lower than in any other part of Australia?

Mr. WALKER: They are not benefiting as they should. The Attorney General knows the distinctions which are made between the passages to and from the fields. The people who go from here to the fields are given certain privileges, whereas those coming from the fields to Perth do not possess them. On holiday occasions, whenever special privileges are given to excursionists, it is not to the residents of the goldfields but to those on the coast. The Minister cannot deny that, for a complaint was recently made to Mr. George when Commissioner, and

he received petitions and deputations drawing attention to the fact.

The Minister for Railways: We have the same class of excursions going up there.

Mr. WALKER: Since when?

Mr. Bath: The Minister refers to the special cheap rates from port to port.

Mr. WALKER: There are other cases in which distinctions are made, and which have been brought before the notice of the Minister. However, when the Minister has been approached with regard to these matters he always says, "It is not a matter in which I can interfere, for it is a question for the Commissioner to decide." The Minister should be able to look after the working of the railways and be responsible, as every other Minister is with regard to his department. I know there is a tendency in every department to get rid of responsibility. I cannot understand the tendency in these modern times to put the responsible people into fetters. We have the Public Service Commissioner, who ties the hands of the Ministers, and then there is the Commissioner of Railways, and other Commissioners with equal responsibilities. Where is our responsibility? Where can this House remedy or alter evils that exist; what can we do to remedy the defects?

The Treasurer: It is democratic legislation.

Mr. WALKER: Surely the Treasurer is not the kind of a democrat who shirks all responsibility which should attach to his office.

Mr. Bath: It comes in very handy to shirk that responsibility in this hot weather.

Mr. WALKER: I am beginning to think that the Treasurer must have a very exalted idea of the Labour Party. There is nothing the Ministry do but they quote the Labour Party as an authority. There is no Act they launch but they say the Labour Party did it before. Whenever they are brought to task they say, "Mr. Johnson, Mr. Bath, or Mr. Daglish did this."

The Treasurer: That is because you complain about it.

Mr. WALKER: I do not live in last year, or the year before, or in the 14th century, but I am trying to live as the age advances, and with its progress to grow myself. I should like to see the Ministry try to do the same. It is time we got rid of this lazy system of government of making others take our responsibilities. The position is this. We are departing from a vital element in this form of government. The essential factor of British government is responsibility. Take that element away and all the life blood leaks out from the British Constitution. We are supposed to take our pattern from that Constitution which has always, from its very inception, been ready to accept responsibility. Indirectly this House is the people; the Government are responsible to us and through us to the people, and there should be no act committed in the course of that government that is not directly attackable or alterable by the people's representatives. As soon as a wrong occurs we should be able to administer correction. You give away these rights; you make Commissioners and give to them a sort of empire of government of their own. The railway service is about half of our public service, and contains the most vital part of it. By means of the railways you can make or ruin the country; by wise and judicious management of the railways in every respect you can add to the development of this great State of ours; you can tap its hidden sources of wealth; you can make people desert places, and make towns spring up in desolate areas; in short you can make this country yield up all its wealth; that is the recognised doctrine in all parts of the world, in England and in Oriental India where the railways guard against the periodical famines of days gone by, and make sure of developing undeveloped territory. In Japan the first step towards advancing civilisation was the construction of railways. In China the great project towards the awakening and development of that long oriental despotism has been the construction of railways throughout the land. Here we give a Commissioner charge for three or five years to take the control out of our hands and beyond our criticism.

If we bring the Minister to task here he always has a means of escape, rightly or wrongly, by saying, "I am guided by an Act of Parliament; my hands are tied, I am limited within the four corners of the statute; you gave that power to the Commissioner by an Act of Parliament." I hope this will stop now. We can get all the good there is out of Mr. Short, or any other general manager who may be appointed; all the best qualities out of him, and avail ourselves of all his knowledge and experience, or the information he can gather from all sources, while still we can make him only general manager. Let the Minister have power to interfere, to correct or amend anything, if his judgment requires it or this House may authorise it. That can be done without sacrificing any great principle. Although it might seem to be going backward because we once had Ministerial control, there is no disgrace in returning to what has proved to be a sound course of management, and to give up a system the evils of which we have seen. Even in Victoria and New South Wales the Commissionership experiment has not been an unqualified success; there have been complaints and some few alterations, and therefore modifications have been made. I know that in the Eastern States the principal reason for taking the railways out of what was called political control was simply because members of Parliament and others were always pestered by outsiders to get them in the railway service. In order to ward off applications for employment of this kind, and influence brought upon members and Ministers, the commissionership system was started. That was the sole reason. In order to ward off such things a Commissioner is not required, for we only need a strong Minister and a set rule with regard to such applications. You could still have your closed doors, so to speak, as in the civil service, and still have direct Ministerial control. It is for that I am pleading. We shall have opportunities of going into the clauses in Committee, and it is only for the purpose of asking the House to return to the principle of Ministerial responsibility, the vital essence of Constitutional

Government, that I have spoken as I have to-night.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. N. Keenan): A good deal of discussion has taken place on matters that may well be said not to be strictly pertinent to the principle underlying the clauses to be found in this Bill. In particular I refer to the discussion dealing with the rates and freights.

Mr. Bath: There is a clause dealing with that question.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The clause deals with the control of the rates, but that is a very different thing from discussing specific rates now in force. Without any question the proper time to discuss matters of that kind is when the railway vote is before the House in Committee of Supply. I take it that the proper matter to discuss to-night is the question of who is to control the rates, and not what the present rates are or whether they are advantageous or disadvantageous. However, I intend to follow the lead several members have taken in this direction. I feel sure no other justification is necessary than the fact that it has been made a matter of general discussion, and therefore other members rising are bound to notice it.

Mr. Taylor: Because others have sinned you will do likewise.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Because others transgressed. From what I can gather the discussion on the freights is this: On the one hand there is a complaint by some representatives of the agricultural districts that some consideration was not extended in the direction of reducing agricultural freights in the last few months; and on the other hand a very eloquent plea was made by the member for Collie (*Mr. Ewing*) for Ministerial control simply on the ground that it would lead to a freight being fixed for the carriage of Collie coal that would create a market for that product. Before dealing with these specific matters, I would say that unquestionably in the past when the railways were under direct Ministerial control, the rates were far more unfavourable than they are to-day in any comparison that can be made be-

tween the charges on goldfields railway and the charges on railways serving agricultural districts. Nobody can say that at any time the charges that were made on lines serving the goldfields can be described even as favourable. The most that can be said is, they may be justified by the services rendered. But in considering the principle of control of the railways, surely the very fact of these appeals being made should point out to members how dangerous it is to put a matter of this kind under political control. Here we have a member representing a district in which coal is produced; and in advocating in this House the interests of his district, he advocates Ministerial control of the railways simply and solely because that control would give that opportunity of obtaining a rate of freight for the product which, without that rate, would not have the brilliant future which he paints for it. We must remember that it is an inevitable result of human nature to seek advantages for the particular place in which we dwell, or the particular interest in which we are engaged. If Ministerial control were to be absolute, if it were to determine the rate of freight for carrying coal wholly irrespective of any consideration of the working of the whole railway system, or carrying coal irrespective of the proper figure that would give an adequate return to the railways, the exercise of that influence would be simply disastrous; and we have had that example prominently before us not only in other parts of Australia, but even in our own State in times past. There can be no question that control by the Government of the long-distance rates system was not a successful experiment; and in saying this I do not desire to criticise unduly the administration of that particular person. It may well be said that the administration was not successful in that case from personal reasons, from the fact that the man and the office were not suited to one another, and not from the fact that the system was at fault. We must give consideration to that feature of the case; for although the system may be calculated to produce the best results, the instrument selected for working the system

may for the time being be most unsuitable, and you may be led to false conclusions as to the cause of the failure. If a Commissioner could be found who would stand indifferent to all parts of the State, who would not allow himself to be influenced in any way by any considerable attempt that might be called political, who would not allow himself to be influenced one iota by any attempt to push one particular part of the State to the detriment of other parts, must not members recognise that his administration of the railways would be infinitely better than the best imaginable under Ministerial control? Because no matter how the Minister may resist the applications of members of this House and of others standing behind them, he knows he is their servant, that his very breath of office depends on their good will; and where a number of members combine together for producing a result, with the distinct understanding that it is to go round, wheat to-day, coal to-morrow, and next day something else, then unless the Minister was at once prepared to say he would sooner go out of political life than continue to carry on the administration of the railways under such influences—[*Member*: That very thing happened under Commissioner control]—if so, it was because he was not a suitable instrument. There the hon. member is centring his observation on the individual, and not on the system which the individual had to carry out. If Cabinet is to be given the power to interfere, as provided in this Bill, it should only exercise that power in emergency such as would justify interference with the man controlling the railway system. Imagine the difference. In one case you have a Minister having complete control subject to Parliament, and he is the man from whom you would ask a favour. In the other case you have a man in charge, with power reserved to the Governor-in-Council on grave emergency to interfere. There you see the vast differences between the cases; for if the interference took place, it would be on grave and important grounds.

Mr. Foulkes: It would be a kind of court of appeal.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The difference is so great, there is no comparison between the two. The member for Kanowna (Mr. Walker), in his argument dealing so largely with the finances of the railways and with the fact that the Minister, according to the hon. member's version, presents a glowing account of the railways, which account is not justified in the opinion of the authority he quoted to the House—that very argument supports the proposition that the control of the railways should not be in the hands of a Minister who would be always under a strong temptation to paint the State of the railways in the light that is complained about. The man in control should be one who does not care whether the railway results show that the system is going to the dogs, because he can say that unless certain charges or alterations are made, the railway system will not be able to discharge those functions it should discharge for the development of the country. If it could be imagined that "the right man in the right place" would be guilty of making a false representation, it must also be supposed that in doing so he would imperil his own position, for no possible gain, by making representations of a character that could not be justified by facts. Remembering this, we must also remember that when a Minister has got the control which some members seek to place on his shoulders, he undoubtedly has much to gain by allowing the impression to go abroad—which a strict examination of the facts might not justify—that he is decidedly optimistic in regard to the railways under his control. That is inevitable. We have also to remember that to appeal, as the member for Kanowna did eloquently appeal, to the tradition of a British Government with respect to responsibility being taken by the Minister placed in power by Parliament and the people, it is a tradition that has grown up and become sanctified under conditions which are not applicable to our modern socialism. Here we as a State are attempting to engage in trading concerns pure and simple. It is true we can turn those concerns to ends that will lead to

the success of the State, and also give the greatest benefit to settlers and other people in the country. But it still remains a trading concern; and to imagine that conditions which have grown up through centuries of constitutional government in England, and which had nothing to do with trading, are also applicable to the conditions in this State, is to stretch the theory of Ministerial responsibility to conditions which it was never meant to cover. I have no hesitation in saying that responsibility should be placed on the shoulders of every Minister for the proper exercise of Ministerial control; but when you engage in matters beyond the scope of Ministerial functions, that no Minister can be capable of discharging properly and fully, you must make other provisions. Who imagines that any Minister you may pick would be possessed of the knowledge and skill and experience necessary to determine the intricate questions of railway management, intricate questions as to freight, which after all have no connection with matters that have to be decided under ordinary conditions? True, we reserve power in the Bill, to be used under exceptional circumstances, for interference by the Government in that matter; but under ordinary conditions, can you imagine that any individual possessed of sufficient skill and experience and sufficient time can be found to discharge the all-important duty of managing a huge concern like the railways?

Mr. Walker: Could not the same be said of the Works or Mines Department?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The Mines Department is administered through wardens, and those wardens are wholly independent so far as they administer the mining laws. The only possibility the Minister for Mines has of interfering with the wardens in the administration of the mining laws is that interference sanctioned by statute, that is the forfeiture of leases. But that is only one side of the administration of the mining laws. The whole responsibility, without interference by Ministerial control, rests with the warden; and even in that case the warden recommends, and the Minister, if he does not approve, must place on record his grounds for not approving. Members of

this House may see the records by calling for them. I have said it was only by way of appeal against the decision of a warden; and it is open to the members of this House and the general public, not only to know what the warden's recommendation is, made in open court in the first instance; but in the next, any member of this House can call for and obtain the records showing the Minister's reasons for any difference of opinion in regard to the warden's recommendation.

Mr. Bath: Does not that apply to the directors of public companies?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Let us see what it amounts to. Take the case of a private railway company. What do we know to be the absolute practice in running a privately-owned railway, say such as the London and North-Western or the Great Northern, or any other of the great railways in England. There is a general manager who has whole and entire control.

Mr. Bath: Subject to a board of directors.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Certainly, but to what extent? So is the Commissioner of Railways subject to the Minister. A general manager is not subject in any sense to the board of directors for making an appointment or for fixing freights.

Mr. Scaddan: Do not the directors make appointments?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: No.

Mr. Scaddan: I have known them appoint a trucker in a mine.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I am asked by one member to discuss a matter relative to the subject matter in this Bill, but another member says he knows directors of mines who appoint truckers. What comparison can there be between a great concern like a railway, and a mine which may be anything from running three men to one of those colossal mines we have in this State, but which may not in its biggest proportions be in an infinitesimal degree compared with a railway system? I was dealing with a comparison which might lie, and it is a good comparison, between a big railway system at home and our railway system in this State. We find that the general manager of an

English railway system exercises the same powers, rights and duties which, under this Bill and under the existing Act, we ask the Commissioner of Railways to exercise and carry into effect. I may refer to the complaint as to the delay in the publication of the Auditor General's report. In years past it has been the custom to publish this report in the year after it is made. If the financial year closes on the 10th July the report would not be available until the following year, but last year for the first time it was made available in the same year. It is impossible for any department to frame a report of all the services of this State and all the departments, commencing its work not earlier than 11th July, and have it available except at a very advanced period of the year. It can be no concern of any person, nor within the power of any person, to delay the publication of that report a single day. The Auditor General is an officer in this State who is responsible to no Minister. He is wholly independent, he presents his own report if he chooses to Parliament; and to imagine that he would delay his work from any cause is to imagine that he would be capable of a neglect of duty that would warrant a serious contemplation of his continuance in office. I do not think the hon. member suggests anything like that. I think the hon. member's suggestion is that the Auditor General might make arrangements if possible to present his report at an earlier date to this House; but I would remind hon. members that in past years it has not been possible for Auditors General to produce their reports except in the year following in which the financial year reported on closes. Before concluding my remarks I would like to refer to the clauses which have been questioned by the member for Katanning and the member for Collie. The member for Katanning referred to Clause 14. That clause is that if a person or party does not clear land adjoining the railway to the extent provided in the clause he will be guilty of contributory negligence. Assuming a case where the Commissioner was guilty of negligence and therefore was responsible for damages

for injury caused by the negligence, if it could be shown that the parties themselves contributed to that damage by not taking this precaution, it would be a case for a nonsuit on the part of the Commissioner. It would not arise at all unless the Commissioner was in the first instance guilty of negligence. If he were not guilty of negligence the case would not lie. The decision of our Chief Justice in the first instance and the High Court has laid down the law that the Commissioner of Railways is not responsible for fires arising from the use of any fuel when he has taken the ordinary precautions in regard to the consumption of that fuel by providing engines suitable for the consumption. [*Mr. Stone*: Most unjust.] It may be unjust from the hon. member's point of view, but what would be the reverse, assuming that the other proposition were to stand, namely that the Commissioner was not allowed the right to use the fuel available, but was compelled to use the very best fuel in the world that he could get here by any means no matter what the expense might be?

Mr. Stone: Let him use what he likes, but do not let him damage the property of others.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: That was the only other proposition, but it would be intolerable. We would have to purchase Welsh coal.

Mr. Underwood: The cockies would have to go without their railways.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: A good many other people would have to go without their railways. If that theory were brought in practice, not only would the agricultural railways be suspended during the summer, but the increased cost of running the railways would make it impossible to run a service except at very high charges to other parts of the State. The other matter referred to was Clause 17 (exemption from liabilities). The Minister has stated that he intends to strike out Subclause (a). It is, however, a fact that hon. members no doubt are fully aware of, that the Commissioner at present is not liable where there is no ordinary place of discharge, any station, or means of unloading, and I take it that originally the object of inserting this

clause dealing with district railways was to relieve the Commissioner of any duty to erect places at which the discharge of goods could take place. It would be a great inconvenience for the farmers along these lines, it would be most unfair for the development of these districts if special spaces were selected for railway stations. I take it that what the farmers want is that when they are sending away or receiving produce they want to load or unload it at the closest point to the point of production. It would be a handicap to them in the long run, by making the freights higher, if we were to carry out a system of establishing stations at long intervals, as must be done to enable them to load or unload their freight. I have nothing farther to add to the discussion. As I remarked when I first rose, this debate has traversed ground possibly far in excess of the actual subject matter of the Bill.

Mr. Scaddan: What about Clause 4? Are you going to express any opinion on that?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I have not heard any discussion on it.

Mr. Scaddan: The member for North Fremantle mentioned it.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I was not in the House at the time. If the hon. member raised any point that I can elucidate I will be very glad to do so.

Mr. Scaddan: Is it not a contravention of the Truck Act?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The Truck Act, to put it in short terms, is to prevent employers deducting from the wages of employees any consideration for goods supplied to them. It was to prevent that state of affairs under which contractors used to make a large profit out of men they employed by forcing men to deal with them for the necessities of life and charging them high prices for those articles. It would not relate to a benevolent institution which is underlying this clause for the protection of the men, for their interests or for their better comforts when they are in illness or suffering disabilities. I hope members will not address themselves to this important question so much by illustrations and details which might be entirely mis-

leading, but that they will look into the general principle, which I submit undoubtedly is one that must be accepted as the best for carrying out the true intent of our railway system, as a system that will develop all parts of the State without favouring any part.

Mr. G. TAYLOR (Mount Margaret): I did not intend to have anything to say on the second reading of this Bill, had it not been for some of the statements made by hon. members who represent agricultural areas. I listened with great attention to the speech delivered by the member for Katanning, and I was somewhat struck by the ingenious way in which he tried to convey to this House, without a blush, that the goldfields people were being fairly treated by the railways, and that he regretted that there could not be greater leniency shown to the agricultural areas. I will deal with those remarks of the hon. member's later on, to give the hon. member an opportunity of being present. One does not like to reply to the vacant chair of the hon. member. The member for Collie also pointed out that it was the duty of the Government to in every way foster the Collie coal industry. I find having fired his shot, the hon. member has likewise fled from the Chamber. The hon. member illustrated that in other countries the railways carried coal from the various mines to the sea ports and made it a paying proposition, but the hon. member forgot to tell us that invariably the owners of the railways in other countries are also the owners of the collieries. That is a very important feature. [*The Attorney General:* Not always.] It is invariably so, because they are so mixed up, if not by actual ownership of both concerns, at least by the directors of the one being the directors of the other. [*Mr. Angwin:* And they provide their own trucks.] To say that certain conditions prevail in other countries where railways are run by private enterprise and where the collieries are in the hands of the same people, is no argument to use in favour of a farther reduction on the rates for carrying Collie coal. I have repeatedly spoken in connection with this

industry, and I have been twitted on the public platform and in this House, and also in Collie, as being one of those opposed to the Collie coal industry. I want to remove any of those false impressions. Whenever I have spoken in connection with the industry inside or outside the House, it has been my sole desire that the industry should be put on a sound footing and that the taxpayers of this country should know exactly what the State was contributing to that industry. There have been so many ways of contributing to that industry during its history that we do not know how much that industry has received. I have advocated in the past that it would be wise, and I would support any Government who would do this, to place on the Estimates a specific sum for the support of the Collie coal industry, say £10,000, £20,000 or £30,000, but let the industry pay to the railways the same as any other industry has to do. This industry should be placed on a fair footing, and the State should know how much the Government have contributed to this industry. If a lump sum were placed on the Estimates members could say for how many years they would be prepared to pay the sum. [Mr. Scaddan: That would be a bonus.] I am saying what I have advocated for years although not before the Commonwealth came into existence. I am tired of hearing the member for Collie appealing to the House for farther assistance to Collie coal. I am pleased to know that the companies trading on the waters are finding value in our Collie coal as a fuel. I desire to say I am not an opponent of Collie or its industry but I am an opponent of this phase of sops. The same thing applies to the farmers. We find if there is any reduction in the railway freights it is either given to large syndicates such as a Timber Combine, to Collie coal or the agricultural areas. We rarely hear of any concessions on the daily necessities of life to the goldfields. A speech was delivered in the House on the Address-in-Reply by the member for Coolgardie in July of this year. I will quote a few of the remarks made by that member which go to show that the concessions on the railway line between

Perth and the goldfields, extending as far as Laverton, are given to the products of the agriculturists. All other food-stuffs and other items of daily consumption on the goldfields pay 700 per cent. more than the products of the agriculturists. The member for Coolgardie spoke as a merchant having, I presume, paid these charges. I will read what the member said so that members on the Ministerial bench and on the Government cross-benches will realise what one of their own supporters, as a goldfields representative, a supporter of the Government, and a merchant thought.

The Minister for Railways: What was it about?

Mr. G. TAYLOR: The speech was delivered in seconding the Address-in-Reply, and it was to point out that the railway system of the State was badly administered, badly carried on, and that the railway between Perth and Kalgoorlie was carrying the whole of the railway systems of the State. He pointed out that the goldfields line was the only paying line in Western Australia controlled by the Government and I have proved that before by statistics. There is no doubt on that score. This is what the member said to prove the hardships that the people on the goldfields suffered, the bad treatment they were receiving from the Government railways as against those people who reside in agricultural areas, and those living in the more favoured portions of the State, from a Government point of view:—

"I have an illustration here. Produce, flour and stuff of that description are taken from Fremantle to Laverton for a charge of £1 12s. per ton—very cheap, too cheap almost in comparison with other things, whereas sandalwood, which the poor fellows in the bush have to cut, pays £3 and £4 per ton for carriage to Fremantle. The whole railway tariff requires revision. The present railway book needs burning or burying. I say without hesitation, and as a commercial man, that I protest against the rates charged, and that our tariff book is an abortion. No one understands it, nor even the men on the railways, and not even the Com-

missioner himself. I just want to give two or three figures showing the charges people on the goldfields are paying for their commodities. Flour, wheat, produce, etc., are taken up to Laverton at a cost of £1 12s. Third-class goods—there are so many classes in the book—tea and other household requisites have to pay £11 1s. 7d. per ton—a matter of 700 per cent. on the previous charge I have mentioned. This is preposterous. Then again, kerosene, is another item I would like to mention. The people's light has to pay £7 5s. 6d. as against £1 12s.—an extra charge of between four hundred and five hundred per cent. An 8-ton truck of one class of goods costs £12 16s., while an 8-ton truck of another class costs £58 4s., while there is the same work, the same handling, the same haulage. It is monstrous. Of course the cheap rate is done to assist the farmers. We want to assist the farmers, we wish them all luck and prosperity."

If we analyse the figures given by the member for Coolgardie they go to prove what he said then was correct. The only cheap freights on the goldfields line are those in favour of the farmers and in which the agricultural areas participate.

The Minister for Railways: Do you want us to raise the freight on flour?

Mr. TAYLOR: That goes to show that other commodities used in daily consumption on the goldfields have to pay exorbitant rates on the railways. I could not allow the speech of the member for Katanning to pass without bringing under the notice of the House that in my opinion, and in the opinion of the goldfields people, we have to carry the baby. We have to bear the burden, and the people there are for ever crying out against the railway freights. I could quote a speech delivered by the Minister for Railways before he was associated with the Government, dealing with the heavy rates to the goldfields.

The Minister for Railways: I have brought them down twice.

Mr. TAYLOR: I have a speech here delivered by the Attorney General which is different from the speech he delivered to-night.

The Attorney General: I have not changed in the least.

Mr. TAYLOR: Here is a gentleman who flatters himself that he has a good memory, and that he retains his principles. The Attorney General speaking on the annual Estimates in 1905—

Mr. Scaddan: In the first session he was in Parliament.

Mr. TAYLOR: Here is something brilliant, and it is before the Attorney General became contaminated with politics. He was speaking on the Railways Vote in 1905, and he said:—

"If the department was administered not entirely from the point of view of a commercial concern but in the broadest possible manner in the interests of the State, it was in the interests of the State that the people on the goldfields should visit the coast as much as it was in the interests of the people on one part of the coast to visit another part of the coast. If the Minister were empowered to make the alteration there would be no difficulty in obtaining it; but unfortunately the position to-day was that the Minister apparently could only act as an on-looker in many respects. The Minister's hands were tied when it came to carrying out reform urged by the House, and he found himself effectively blocked by the Commissioner."

The Attorney General: Is that the case in the Bill?

Mr. TAYLOR: In my opinion there has been too much in the past made about the incapacity of the Minister for Railways to do anything from a policy point of view with our railway system owing to the powers conferred on the Commissioner by Act of Parliament. I believe with all Commissioner George's faults, and it is said he had many, and I believe he had a few, notwithstanding all his faults he did some very good work as Commissioner. One could not call him a weakling by any stretch of imagination. With a strong Minister and a strong Government Mr. George was a man to listen to reason. What position did Mr. George take up in 1904-5 after having the authority of a previous Minis-

ter for Railways to expend £40,000 in the alterations to the Perth Railway Station? Mr. George had started to lay his foundations and the Government of which I was a member blocked him with an iron hand. Although Mr. George had the signature of a previous Minister for Railways—who was then leader of the Opposition (Mr. Rason)—and although his plans and specifications were drawn up to alter the railway station at a cost of £47,000, which in my opinion and in the opinion of the citizens of Perth would ruin a portion of the highway—did not the Commissioner cut down trees and rush men on to the work to be certain that he would carry the work out, but was he not blocked? Can anyone tell me a man of Mr. George's character, backed up by the authority of a Minister to expend money, would have allowed another Minister to block him?

The Attorney General: You started the same game at Fremantle. It was only a change of locality.

Mr. TAYLOR: I do not know anything about Fremantle. It was not while I was in the Ministry. I know they built a railway station at Fremantle and I believe it is a very gorgeous affair. Too much has been made of the power the Commissioner holds under an Act of Parliament. I believe there was no difficulty in the Minister's securing sufficient control, especially of the policy of the railways, under the existing Act.

The Minister for Railways: He always had that control.

Mr. TAYLOR: He always had it if he had the backbone to assert his authority. If he had only exercised the powers given him, the railways would have been run as the Government and the Minister desired them to be run.

Mr. Scaddan: Why do we need this Bill?

Mr. TAYLOR: I do know that there is any necessity for it.

The Minister for Railways: Simply to fix the salary of the Commissioner, as I promised the House.

Mr. TAYLOR: The Minister promised us last session that he would deal with the salary of the Commissioner, and said that for this purpose an amendment

of the Act was necessary. This is a very short measure. I will not promise to support it, nor will I say there is no justification for it. I recognise that some of the clauses will inflict hardship on agricultural selectors. If a railway runs through a man's farm, and he has to clear and plough his land for a certain distance on each side of the line, he cannot do that for nothing. It may cost him hundreds of pounds to clear and plough the necessary area, though the clearing will not be a recurring expense.

Mr. Scaddan: It means a great deal along two or three miles of railway.

The Minister for Railways: I purpose amending that clause so as to make it less stringent.

Mr. TAYLOR: It only shows that no matter how carefully a Minister may instruct the Parliamentary Draftsman, a Bill may need material alteration by Parliament. This is, in my opinion, a vital clause. The Minister considers the Bill necessary, but I am sure there are on the Notice Paper several Bills of greater importance; and if members desire to go into recess before Christmas, those measures should be proceeded with before this Bill. I should certainly advise the Minister to keep this Bill low down on the Notice Paper, and place more pressing measures in a prominent position so that they may be disposed of before we go into recess; and if there is, as I feel confident there will be, the usual slaughter of the innocents, let this Bill be one of them.

The Minister for Railways: We may wish to give the Commissioner a larger salary than £1,500 a year, and without this Bill we cannot do so.

Mr. TAYLOR: Taking into consideration the amount of the surplus that our railways show, I do not know whether it is wise to increase the salary from £1,500 to say £2,000.

The Minister for Railways: It may be wise for that very reason to increase the salary.

Mr. TAYLOR: I dare say we shall hear the same old argument, that by giving a thumping big salary we shall secure a thumping big expert. But that prophecy has not always proved true in

this State. When, for instance, it was proposed to appoint a State Mining Engineer, members inflated their chests and spoke of a big salary to induce the picked brain of the Southern Hemisphere to come forward. But I do not know that even after paying that big salary we have produced any more gold, or have done a great deal to improve the condition of our mining industry.

The Minister for Railways: The Railways Act contains a special section to the effect that the Commissioner's salary is subject to the approval of Parliament.

Mr. TAYLOR: The phrase "subject to the approval of Parliament" sounds very well to those not fully initiated into parliamentary procedure. What is the sanction of Parliament? It is the sanction of the Government; and a Government with a majority such as the present Government have can sanction anything; and Parliament will be responsible. No matter what opposition is raised, no matter what valid reasons are adduced, all will go for nothing so long as the Government have a majority such as they have at present. As soon as there is diversity of opinion on the Government side of the House, the Leader of the Government makes the matter a party question. Where then does Parliament come in? The Whips go to work, and the motion is carried against the wishes of members and against the wishes of their constituents.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have given the hon. member great latitude. He was allowed in the first instance to wander somewhat from the question before the House; for I had no desire to say to one member that he must not follow the example of others. But I hope the hon. member will confine himself more to the question of the second reading, which is the only question before the House.

Mr. TAYLOR: I was replying to the Minister, who said the Bill contained a provision that the Commissioner's salary must be subject to the approval of Parliament.

Mr. SPEAKER: You have replied; but you have laboured the question.

Mr. TAYLOR: I thought it necessary, as the Minister made such a strong point of the fact that Parliament has power to decide certain matters; and so far as I have gone I have not replied to the detailed statements made by Government supporters in connection with this measure. The measure affords scope for speaking of most of the branches of our Railway Department. Clause 3 is surely sufficiently elastic to permit of my dealing with the whole railway system; for the clause if carried will alter the laws in such a manner that one will not know them. I have no desire to go beyond the scope of the debate, but was induced to speak by the statement made as to the freights from Perth to the goldfields as compared with coastal freights and special freights granted for the benefit of certain State industries. I have previously pointed out that this measure should be kept low down on the Notice Paper, to enable the House to deal with more urgent matters. When in Committee I am confident that amendments will be moved to certain clauses, and I shall then have ample time, without detaining the House on the second reading, to deal with every clause in the Bill; and as the Minister himself sees the necessity for striking out one clause which is most vital to a large section of the community, that course cannot be objectionable. After the Bill was introduced and its contents made known, agriculturists and other country residents whom I met in Perth commented severely on the penalties which a certain clause would inflict on them. It is pleasing to know that sufficient pressure has been brought to bear by members on the Government side to have the clause struck out. I will reserve my additional remarks till we go into Committee.

Mr. J. C. G. FOULKES (Claremont): The Attorney General, in supporting the last Railway Bill that was passed, said that any failure attaching to the Railways Act was due to the fact that the wrong instrument, in the shape of the Commissioner of Railways, had been appointed to carry out the duties prescribed in the Act. That may be

either true or untrue. I do not wish to raise that point at present. But I should like to go a good deal farther by saying that whatever failures have attached to that Act are due entirely to the fact that the various Ministers for Railways who have held office since that Act was passed have neglected their duties. That applies not especially to any one Government ; but my experience is that every Minister for Railways distinctly refrained from exercising the powers conferred upon him under the Act. When some Ministers have exercised any power, they have in some cases actually denied that they exercised it. One Minister signed an approval of certain works to be carried out by the Commissioner, and afterwards denied that he had ever approved of such works ; but when the papers were produced in the House his signature was found attached to a statement approving of the works in question. In other cases the Commissioner of Railways has imposed various railway freights with the sanction of the Minister ; because in the original Railways Act it is provided that the various rates imposed by the Commissioner shall in all cases be imposed with the approval of the Minister. By Section 22 of the Act it is laid down that the Commissioner may, with the approval of the Minister, from time to time by notice in the *Gazette* fix the scale of charges for various goods. Repeatedly complaints have been made by various individuals with regard to the various rates imposed ; but never in any case, unless the agitation has become exceedingly strong, has any step been taken by any of the Ministers we have had to alter these rates, though in some cases, perhaps, the existence of the industry was at stake. Take for instance the rates in regard to the timber industry. They were altered by the present Minister. There were serious complaints for a long time with regard to those rates. They were originally fixed by the Commissioner with the approval of the Minister, but in about 12 months time they were recognised to be so intolerable that such pressure was brought to bear on the Minister that he consented to have them altered. What I complain of is that we

have not had a single Minister who has taken the trouble to look into these rates before they were imposed. He has only consented to have them altered when a considerable agitation has arisen to get them altered, as in the case of the timber rates. Here we had a Minister—I do not know who he was—who distinctly approved of those rates.

Mr. A. J. Wilson : And acted fairly too.

Mr. FOULKES : He acted on those rates.

Mr. A. J. Wilson : Fairly.

Mr. SPEAKER : Order !

Mr. FOULKES : Not only has there been neglect on the part of various Ministers for Railways, not only have they neglected to go into the question of the various rates, but they have neglected their duty in regard to the various public works carried on by the Commissioner. In some cases they have approved of an enormous amount of money being spent on certain works in connection with the department, which were really nothing but a scandal. Take the duplication from Perth to Armadale which cost something like £18,000. There we had the Minister approving of this work being carried out. But it may astonish the House to know that the line, although duplicated, was not in use until 12 months after the work was completed. That shows that we have had various Ministers who have sat down and like machines, simply signed their approval to various works that have been suggested by the Commissioner. I believe that fair justice has not been done to the Commissioner, because I fear that the various Ministers have not taken sufficient interest nor sufficient trouble to check some of the various schemes inaugurated by the Commissioner.

Interjections by *Mr. A. J. Wilson*.

Mr. FOULKES : May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to request the hon. member not to interrupt.

Mr. SPEAKER : I have already asked the member for Forrest to refrain. If the hon. member wishes to make a speech he will have an opportunity of doing so, but he must not interject as he is doing. It is bad taste, apart from being a breach of the rules of the House.

Mr. FOULKES : I am calling attention to this, because I am afraid that the same state of affairs will continue even when we get this Bill passed. Reference has been made to the large sums of money spent in what may be called improving the railways. The Department has spent two million pounds on various works. May I ask the member for Forrest not to interrupt? The hon. member is continually interrupting.

Mr. SPEAKER : I certainly did not hear the hon. member interject just now.

Mr. FOULKES : What I am afraid of is, that even if this Bill is passed, the same condition of affairs may arise. I was glad to hear the member for Kanowna refer to the present tendency on the part of the Minister to shirk responsibility, and what I am afraid of is that we shall have Ministers in the future who will do their utmost to screen themselves behind the sections in the original Railways Act. In that Act it still provides by Section 17 that the Commissioner with the approval of the Minister may make additions and improvements to any railway, and in the performance of such duty shall have the powers and be subject to the liabilities of the Minister for Works, etcetera. Now, I regret very much that there is no provision in this amending Bill to repeal that section and impose on the Minister the distinct responsibility of deciding what works and additions should be made to our railways. The Bill is silent on that point, but it is too great a power to give to any Commissioner, I do not care who he is, It is too great a power for the Commissioner to decide what additions and improvements should be made with regard to our various railway works. It is quite true the Act says :—"The Commissioner with the approval of the Minister;" it requires that the approval of the Minister of the day is to be obtained before these works can be inaugurated; but during the last three or four years we have seen how often various Ministers have given their sanction to various additions and so-called improvements that were really not justified. When the Bill goes into Committee I hope the Government will be prepared to accept the responsi-

bility of deciding on what are additions and improvements and whether they will go to the expense of carrying out the various works.

The Premier : You would not prohibit a man from carrying out certain improvements that are absolutely necessary?

Mr. FOULKES : I would place the responsibility entirely on the Minister to decide whether these works should be commenced or not. As it is now, the Minister can shield himself and say that he was informed by the Commissioner that these works were necessary. It is too dangerous a power to give to the Commissioner.

The Premier : But you give a maintenance engineer certain power in connection with improvements.

Mr. FOULKES : Yes; but Section 17 is too wide. It gives power to the Commissioner practically to incur the expense of duplicating the railway even without the sanction of Parliament. It is too great a responsibility, and we know that these Commissioners are appointed for a long term of years, and that once they are appointed it is practically impossible to remove them from office. It is a very dangerous power, and I can quite see that we shall have to be exceedingly careful about how much more capital we put into our railways, because there will be only a limited amount of loan money during the next few years. I hope this clause will be amended in the direction I have indicated. There is another clause dealing with refreshment rooms. The original Act provides that the Commissioner has power to lease these refreshment rooms for three years. By this amending Bill it is provided that the period shall be five years. I hope that clause will not be passed. If I had my way I would reduce the term of three years to one year, because anyone who travels knows that the management of some of these refreshment rooms is not at all satisfactory.

The Premier : It would not pay a man to take a refreshment room for one year.

Mr. FOULKES : The Attorney General has placed a certain interpretation on Clause 3, that the Governor will act as

a court of appeal in deciding whether the railway rates imposed by the Commissioner shall be regarded as fair. At present the Commissioner practically decides with the approval of the Minister, and of course the Minister like a machine signs his approval. Here it provides that the Governor has power to supersede any charges, conditions, and regulations that are imposed by the Commissioner. Unless successive Ministers for Railways are prepared to take more active part in the administration of our railways, I am afraid that this clause will be a dead letter. I am glad the Premier is here so that I can repeat once more the fact he must be well aware of, that the Ministerial control of the railways cannot at present be said to be satisfactory. I believe the present Minister for Railways does what he really thinks is best in carrying out his duty as Minister for Railways; but unfortunately for the control of the railways, he controls another important department, the Mines Department; and that prevents him from giving proper attention to the administration of the railways. I believe that, with all due respect to the Minister, he takes very little interest in the railways. His whole attention is so much devoted to mining that unavoidably he is prevented from giving proper attention to the administration of these railways. They are one of our most important properties, and I regret the Premier cannot see his way to appoint one Minister who shall devote his whole time and attention to the administration of the railways.

Mr. Johnson: If the Premier does not do so, Parliament can.

Mr. FOULKES: It practically lies with the Premier. He can decide it, and I have repeatedly suggested to him that he should make some arrangement in his Cabinet whereby at least one Minister should attend entirely to our railways. He has another important department to attend to, which necessitates his travelling many hundreds of miles, and which necessitates his absence from Perth and from the railway offices. The result is he really knows very little about railway management, and I really do not believe that he tries to increase his knowledge.

That will be the weak point of this Bill. Even if every clause is passed, I am afraid that the present system of Ministerial control will not turn out so successful as we would hope.

Mr. W. C. ANGWIN (East Fremantle): I rise only for the purpose of asking the Minister to make inquiries concerning the application of Clause 4 of the Bill. I shall want to know in Committee whether this clause will have any bearing on the Workers' Compensation Act in force in this State. Some time ago in England the case of Taylor and others v. Hampstead Colliery Company was heard. It appears that it was the custom of the colliery to insist that all persons employed there should contribute so much per week to a fund in order to provide for themselves in case of sickness or accident, and for their relatives in case of death. Consequently they were under these conditions debarred from any claim under the Workers' Compensation Act. The case was heard before three judges, and on March 8th, 1904, the court decided that the receipt of compensation under a certified claim was a bar to an action for damages. I merely raise this question in order to allow the Minister to look into the matter and see if the employees of the Railway Department would, under this clause, be debarred from any action in the event of an accident. This Supreme Court decision in England was given on a clause almost the same as the one in this Bill. I am pleased the Minister has brought the Bill forward as he has given us an opportunity to express an opinion whether we shall continue the present system of control of the railways or revert to the old system of Ministerial control.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (in reply): I must thank members for the way they have dealt with this Bill to-night, in contradistinction to the method adopted last night by the member for Guildford (Mr. Johnson). I may say for the information of the member for East Fremantle (Mr. Angwin) that in connection with the clause he has mentioned, I will lay the matter before the

Crown Law Department so that, when we reach the Committee stage of the Bill, I will be able to give him the opinion of the legal advisers of the Crown on the matter. Many matters have been mentioned by various speakers, and I do not propose to deal with them fully. The member for Brown Hill (Mr. Bath) and the member for Kanowna (Mr. Walker) spoke about the difference which occurs in connection with the Treasury figures and those given by the Railway Department as to the finances of the railway administration. If those hon. members would only read the Railways Act and the report of the Railway Commissioner they would recognise at once that the methods of keeping the books by the Railway Department must be somewhat different from those adopted by the Treasury. The latter make charges, according to their books, of all moneys being expended on the railways of the State, and these include the charges for railways in course of construction. The Commissioner has nothing whatever to do with railways in course of construction, and he keeps no account of that expenditure and does not charge himself with interest on the cost of that work until it has been handed over to him. On page 100 of the report it may be seen how there is a reconciliation of accounts as between the Treasury and the Railway Department. It is pointed out clearly that, according to the Treasury figures, in which we charge interest on £10,774,293, the net profit after paying working expenses and interest is £12,764; but according to the Railway Department, who charge interest on £9,683,694 of capital account—in addition to this there is a sum of £617,244 expended from revenue—the profit was £42,692. Then there are full particulars giving the information in regard to the reconciliation of these two accounts. The method is perfectly plain, and I am sure this must have been overlooked by the hon. members when referring to the question. That is the discrepancy which has been criticised on many occasions when dealing with the figures of the Railway Department. It is so easy to make a proper comparison if one would only

look through the Railway Report. In connection with the railway accounts, there is large expenditure for flotation charges, and the officials of the department agree that the amount should properly be charged against the capital account of the department; but, on the other hand, they contend that in future they should not be charged interest on the £617,000 expended from revenue on capital account. That matter has not been dealt with yet, but it will receive the consideration of the Government in the near future. That explains at once why there is a difference between the figures of the Treasury and those of the Railway Department. There are several small amendments in the Bill which I propose to make myself, more especially dealing with Section 17, as to the fire-break. I am only too pleased to meet agricultural members in this respect, and I think we should be satisfied if the fire-break is not made so wide as is rendered necessary under the Bill. If we insist on the fire-break being a chain in width, it only means very heavy expense to the owners of land alongside the railway lines. A good many statements have been made as to freight charges. The member for Mount Margaret (Mr. Taylor) pointed out how heavily people on the fields were being charged in connection with railway administration, and the particular matter he referred to was the charge of about 30s. per ton which was made on the carriage of flour from Fremantle to Laverton. If there is one direction in which we endeavour to make charges as light as possible, it is in connection with the carriage of produce to the fields. Twice since I have been in office we have made reductions in those charges, and vegetables, flour and produce generally are so carried at an exceedingly low rate. We could not do better in trying to make the conditions of life better and cheaper on the fields, than to give cheap railway rates. The member for Kanowna read some wild statements in connection with the receipts and expenditure of the railways during the past four months. The figures I gave lately to the Press dealt with the earnings and cost of the administration. They were not offi-

cial so far as the public are concerned, but official to me because they are signed by the Chief Accountant of Railways and show the earnings and cost of the administration up to date, each month as they are sent to him. According to these figures we have shown a good profit, although the earnings have been less, and shown great reductions in administration. We are going to continue that policy, because we want to try and give the people the benefit of the railways, we want to benefit the industries of the State. If we waste money by keeping many men employed for whom we have to work, we will not do so much good with the railways as we should. Members know that the receipts are made up to the 25th of the month. The expenditure is the money paid over by the Treasury to the Railway Department. Our wages may not be paid beyond the 14th or 15th of the month. The reason why a somewhat large profit was shown on last month's transactions was that in the previous month we paid a very large wages bill. There were three pay days in that month, and as each pay amounts to £20,000 the October expenditure looked very heavy indeed. The returns from the Railway Accountant show me approximately the earnings and cost for each month, and I can assure members that the position of the railways this year is going to be a very good one. A good deal has been said about the Auditor General's report. What has that to do with the Bill? I cannot understand at all why such comment is made in connection with a Bill of this sort. [Mr. Bolton: It is the only chance we have.] If the comment were made on the Estimates I could understand it. The report will be down next week and it will be the second time in the history of Responsible Government that the report of the Auditor General dealing with the State's finances has been laid on the table during the same year that Parliament was sitting. I do not think, taking past history into consideration, there is anything to complain of as far as that is concerned. The member for North Fremantle (Mr. Bolton), in speaking to the Bill, was evidently under

some slight misunderstanding in connection with the amendment of Section 22 of the Act. I want to assure him that the reason for the new clause is merely to give the Governor-in-Council power to supersede the Commissioner in connection with the charges he makes under Section 22. The amendment only deals with a question of charges, and does not give us other power outside of that. That is the sole power we are asking for. Looking through old debates I noticed that Mr. Hastie drew attention to that very matter some years ago, and suggested that this power should be given to the Governor-in-Council. The reason we desire this power is to put the responsibility on the proper authority in connection with a matter of this sort. At the time certain reduction in freight were made I saw criticisms which condemned Mr. Commissioner George for having made the reductions. Mr. George was not responsible for them. Under the Act the Commissioner must make recommendations before the Governor-in-Council can either increase or decrease the rates, and in this case, in order to comply with the wishes of the Government, Mr. George recommended certain reductions, which personally he did not concur in. That was an unfair position to put the Commissioner in. If this Clause is carried, when the Governor-in-Council desire to alter existing regulations, they have to gazette the regulations or altered rates, and these alterations will supersede the charges made by the Commissioner. The Government will then take the entire responsibility for the reduction or increase of railway freights.

Mr. Bolton: Would it not be better if the Minister had power under the clause, to suggest the charges rather than the Commissioner suggesting them?

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The Minister would not have the knowledge necessary to frame the rates generally. When it comes to a question of assisting some of the primary industries of the State then it is a matter for the Minister. Collie coal has been mentioned to-night, and it has been said the Government have done certain things to assist the Collie coal industry in the matter

of freights; but members have been talking without the book. Collie coal freights are just the same to-day as they ever have been; we carry coal at the M rate. We have the M rate, that is the rate for carrying it except from Collie to Perth, which is $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per ton per mile. If we wanted to reduce it below the M rate the Governor-in-Council would say, "We are going to reduce the Collie coal freight to so much, and the Government are taking the responsibility." I want that responsibility placed clearly on the Commissioner or the Governor-in-Council as the case may be. The same thing applies entirely to the expenditure of money. I do not want to deal with that now, I shall do so later on, but I wish to say a few words with regard to the remarks made last night by the member for Guildford, when he made statements of an alarmist description; when he told the House of the awful possibility of an accident in connection with the railway system owing to reductions made in the staff. He spoke of the huge dangers to the travelling public, and he said that if an accident occurred the responsibility would lie on the shoulders of the Government. Let me tell the member that perhaps the responsibility would lie on those who make these wild statements, because there are weak-minded and viciously-minded individuals who may do certain things. It is not so long ago that some person in the Perth yards slashed the leather fittings of the carriages costing hundreds of pounds. It was done by someone with a vile imagination; and when we hear alarmist statements made it is quite possible that we shall have some other person who will have a vague idea that he is letting the public see what is going to happen in Western Australia. There may be a wretched accident indeed. In regard to the policy I enunciated there is no question of yes-no about it. I want the policy of the Railway Department to be clearly laid down; I want to show clearly what I desire in connection with the administration; I want the Minister to carry out the policy of the Government, and the Commissioner to controls the administration. The Government should control all questions of

charges and should take the responsibility. The member for Guildford thinks, in regard to the railways, that the Government or the Minister should have absolute and full control of the railway system; I do not agree with him on that. On questions of administration in a huge department like this, as I pointed out the other night, it is impossible to get any person not thoroughly acquainted with railway administration to master the intricacies of the department; it is absurd to ask him to take the responsibility of carrying on the work. There are members like the hon. member (Mr. Johnson), who was only six weeks in office, who did not know much about it; not like the member for Katanning who was six years in control of that department. I think the member during the short time he was in the department certainly ought to have obtained a greater knowledge of the administration of the railways than apparently he did obtain. The member has led others to believe that the Commissioner was all supreme, and that if he desired to do anything it was impossible for the Minister to have any power over him. Let me tell members that the Minister is absolutely responsible for the expenditure of every penny of railway money. The Minister can be misled because he cannot have a knowledge of every request made to him; it is the same in every department, a Minister cannot know if moneys in every instance are properly and wisely expended. Generally he has a fair knowledge of how the money is expended. Even in connection with the salaries, although an amount is passed by Parliament, each quarter the Commissioner has to forward his papers to the Minister, and the Minister has to give authority for the expenditure. Money expended from railway revenue for the purpose of carrying on some new work, some small job, the approval of the betterment has to be obtained from the Minister in every instance. Where small votes are asked for, the Minister cannot undertake to say that every £40 or £50 is wisely expended; but when we come to the expenditure of a large sum of money no one should know better that the member for Guildford the power the Minister

has in regard to that expenditure. There has been a good deal of want of knowledge exhibited in regard to the expenditure at the Fremantle railway station. A good deal was said the other night as to the conferences, and why this had not been done, and why the other thing was done. It is as well to take Parliament into our confidence. The member for Guildford may be able to tell the House at some later date why this was not done. We find on 4th August, 1905, Mr Needham advised the public through the *West Australian* that the work in connection with the Fremantle railway station was going to be put in hand at once, and we find that Mr Johnson, who was then Minister, wrote to the Commissioner saying:—

"I have gone into this matter again, and with the exception of the last reduction of £7,380 I think your proposal is satisfactory. But in connection with this item I cannot see how you can claim that this is a reduction on the previous proposal, as this item would stand in any case. I think you could make a corresponding reduction of this amount by remodelling the roof proposed on the station. As far as my memory serves me when questioning the plans you stated that the proposed roof would be a very expensive item, and I thought at the time that it was hardly necessary. I trust now that you will go into this question to see if a cheaper roof could not be introduced. You will note that the difference between us now is simply confined to the roof of the station building, and therefore I think we could assume that we are sufficiently in accord to justify you in making a start with the work. An early reply to this will, of course, greatly expedite matters."

He then gives instructions that this work may now start.

Mr. Foulkes: Had the Commissioner informed the Minister how much that work would cost?

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes; the cost was £95,000, but after taking out certain work and allowing for

certain material and parts connected with the old station, the actual cost in cash was reduced to £79,718.

Mr. Johnson: Or £1,000 below the vote of Parliament.

THE MINISTER: At this time when the work was suggested the then Minister for Works, Mr. Lynch, had received reports from the Engineer-in-Chief in regard to this work, and it was then that the Minister for Works, Mr. Lynch, was desirous that there should be a conference before the work was started. The Engineer-in-Chief thought the work could be carried out with a great deal less expenditure and a big saving in land, which meant a large asset to the State. The Engineer-in-Chief through his Minister, Mr. Lynch, was desirous that there should be a conference between the Works Department and the Railways Department to see if some saving could be effected in connection with the matter.

Mr. Johnson: The Minister might tell all he knows in connection with this matter.

THE MINISTER: I want to make this clear.

Mr. Johnson: You tell half of it.

THE MINISTER: The member can have the file, he is quite welcome to it, and I hope he will not make as bad use of it as he did with another file the other night. It is just as well the truth should always be told.

Mr. Johnson: Tell it now, the whole truth.

THE MINISTER: In connection with this matter, when Mr. Johnson gave authority to start the work on 10th August 1905 there was a desire to get the station moved a little bit farther one way; there was not much expenditure in connection with that, but finally on the 21st August, 1905, the Commissioner stated that he could not reduce the cost of the work under £79,718. Let me impress this on members. This is not approved by Cabinet, it is not written in red ink, I thought it was, but the member is very loyal to his colleagues, and we find here that this expenditure, roughly of £80,000 was approved by the member for Guildford without any Cabinet minute to the

effect that Cabinet approved of the expenditure. The member for North Fremantle holds that the Government are responsible for not holding this conference. Let me tell the House that shortly after this took place a dissolution occurred and I had to proceed to the goldfields to fight an election. I had no sooner got back when the House was again dissolved, and I had to go back and fight another election. Six weeks elapsed, the work had proceeded prior to the then Government resigning, and when I went to Fremantle and saw the work I immediately gave instructions for the conference and we had one.

Mr. Bolton : I should not only condemn members on the other side but on this side also.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS : I should like members to know that the conference should have taken place prior to the money being expended.

Mr. Foulkes : When was the conference held ?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS : There was no conference until I became Minister. I suppose the member for Guildford refused to carry out the request of the Minister for Works ; I cannot lay the blame on anyone else. When I returned we certainly did have a conference, and found that such a large sum of money had been expended that it would be exceedingly unwise to stop the work, and we allowed it to go on. I have a file here to-night—which I intended at the earliest date to place on the table, and I will do so to-morrow—containing a report by Mr. Norman. We asked Mr. Norman to come here and inspect the whole of the work with a view of advising us whether the work was justified, and if there was any means of communication from that large extent of line to the wharves. I will place that file on the table to-morrow. These are the facts in connection with the building of the Fremantle station, and nobody should know better than the member for Guildford that it was absolutely impossible for the Commissioner to start that work until he had received from the member for Guildford the authority to expend the money. Even although that

authority was given, yet when the work was proceeding I asked to see the plans for the station, and as soon as I saw them I cut down by almost one-third the size of the building. There was also to be a huge canopy roof over the station, to cost an enormous sum. It would have been a magnificent ornament, a great advertisement for Fremantle, a splendid piece of work ; but I refused to allow the expenditure, and had a galvanised iron roof put on at a cost of £5,000, whereas the canopy roof would have cost £12,500 or £14,000. I do not wish either to defend or condemn any of the departments in this connection. I wish only to say that in all matters connected with the expenditure of money the Minister for the time being is absolutely supreme. He can issue an authority ; he can cancel an authority. In connection with certain A-J brakevans the member for Guildford made some statements which appear in this morning's newspapers and give a very wrong impression indeed. He told the House and the country that in letting a contract for five A-J brakevans to Hudson & Ritchie, the Government caused the State to lose over £7,000. That statement is entirely incorrect, though the hon. member was allowed to examine the file so that he might ascertain all the facts of the case. We called for tenders for the construction of ten A-J brakevans, and received one tender from England and another from this State. The amount of the English tender was £1,473 and of the local tender £1,474. There was then a modification in the plans.

Mr. Johnson : You got a departmental tender.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS : The hon. member is making a misstatement. The department in this instance did not tender, but afterwards gave an estimate. Later the department tendered in connection with other stock. The plans were modified, and the department then gave an estimate for this work. Hudson & Ritchie's price for the new vans was £1,118, to which had to be added the cost of a great many appliances which had to be supplied by the Railway Department, bringing the total price up to £1,422. The departmental

estimate was £1,147, and the actual difference, or the loss to the State, according to the cost stated by the Railway Department and the amount that we paid to Hudson & Ritchie, was £2,120, and not £7,000 as stated by the hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Read the Commissioner's minute from the file.

The MINISTER: That is how the hon. member was trying to mislead the country and members of this House.

Mr. Johnson: I challenge you to read the minute.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Minister must not accuse the hon. member of trying to mislead the country or the House.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I will withdraw the statement. I shall now point out what actually occurred. The Commissioner of Railways, when he sent in his estimate, being strongly desirous of manufacturing these vans, said he had a lot of material and stock in hand, and that if he used up that stock £7,000 less in cash would be required to pay for the vans. Can we imagine anything so stupid as the statement of the hon. member? Suppose a man called for tenders for building a house, got in the tenders, and then said: "I have 10,000 or 20,000 bricks in my yard. If I build the house myself and supply my own bricks, it will not cost me so much as it would if I gave the job to another man." In this case the Commissioner would have been using material he had in the Government workshops, and would have had to expend £7,000 less; but to say that on the construction of the vans he would have saved £7,000 is to make a statement not in accordance with the facts. Is there any question of political influence in a matter of this sort? Surely it is a question of policy whether we shall manufacture the whole of our rolling-stock in the Midland Workshops, or shall close down the workshops. The hon. member himself admits that such a question is one of policy. He visited those workshops before he became member for Guildford. I hope members will not forget that for a single moment. It was prior to his

becoming member for Guildford that he made the following speech, at Hudson & Ritchie's:—

"The Minister for Works also responded to the toast. He said that a great amount of credit was due to Messrs. Hudson & Ritchie for the energy they had displayed in the manufacture of rolling stock. He justified the action of the Government in their proposal to manufacture pipes at Fremantle, as the Government desired to be in possession of a guarantee as to whether private enterprise was dealing justly with the State or not. That would act as a check against private enterprise. It was not, however, the intention of the Government to carry out the manufacture of all pipes required. Was it reasonable to suppose that the Government were going to stamp out private enterprise in order to create a Government monopoly?"

Such was the hon. member's opinion before he became member for Guildford. The report continues:—

"If they had a Government manufacture which was a monopoly, with no check on outside enterprise, it would prove an absolute failure. Exactly the same argument applied to private enterprise. Wherever there were healthy manufactures there would be healthy competition. The idea that was abroad that the Government would not encourage new enterprises was absolutely incorrect. They must encourage private enterprise on legitimate lines."

Mr. Johnson: Not by giving it a subsidy of £7,000.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I have stated the facts regarding the £7,000; and the hon. member knows that the rules of the House will not allow me to say more than I have said. I have clearly pointed out that the difference is only £2,000 odd; and the hon. member himself admitted that, because he said that if the department had constructed vans at Midland Junction they would have been able to construct two more vans; and the vans cost £1,100 each. So where does the £7,000 come in?

Mr. Johnson: That is not my statement; it is in the minute. Read the

minute, and you will not make incorrect statements.

The MINISTER: It is just as well that the people should know something of the facts about the Midland Workshops. While the hon. member was acting as Minister for Railways, did he make any effort to build up those workshops by giving them new work to carry out? The first new or first-class work on a large scale given to the Midland Workshops was the five A-J brakevans. When dealing with the tender I said it was not fair for me to take an estimate from the Railway Department as against the tender which I had received, but that I would give the department a chance; and I asked the Commissioner to appoint a special man to supervise at the workshops, to keep accounts of the labour and material, and I allowed the department to make five vans, thus enabling them to make a start with the manufacture of such rolling-stock, and I gave the other five to Hudson & Ritchie. What has happened since? At the present time there is new work to the value of £130,000 in the Midland Workshops for construction. Some short time afterwards, instead of calling tenders for 350 trucks, the Commissioner told me he could best get them built by using the fine machinery at the Midland establishment, and instructions were therefore given that those trucks should be built in the workshops. For this financial year we have given to those workshops new work to the value of £130,000.

Mr. Johnson: Outside maintenance?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes. It shows the difference between those who bluster about assisting industries and those who try to do something without talking so much about it. There is only one other matter I want to deal with in connection with the member for Guildford. He talked last night about sweating in the Railway Department. I say there is no sweating, and that there is no desire to sweat. I have a statement from the Chief Mechanical Engineer, who says, "I know of no instance in this department where men at 9s. a day have been retrenched and have been put on again at 7s. a day."

Mr. Johnson: I said it was in the Way and Works Branch. Do you deny it is not?

The MINISTER: I have not made any inquiries in that branch.

Mr. Johnson: Will you make them?

The MINISTER: I do not intend to make any farther inquiries in regard to this.

Mr. Johnson: You are afraid to do so.

The MINISTER: I am not afraid of anything the hon. member may say. There is nothing in connection with the whole of the work of this Government which may in any sense be regarded as sweating in our railways. Let us look back to the time the railway employees cited the Commissioner before the Arbitration Court. That was just immediately after the hon. member left the department. I had no knowledge of that case being cited. When I was on the goldfields electioneering was the first I heard of the case the Commissioner put before the Arbitration Court. The whole thing was worked up while others were in office. I do not know whether others had any knowledge of it, but I had none. As members know the award went directly against the men; and if at any time I did anything wrong so far as the Act of 1904 was concerned, dealing with the powers of Minister and the powers of Commissioner, I did it on this occasion, because when the Commissioner desired that certain reductions should be made in connection with the maintenance men, when he asked that the wages to gangers and fettlers should be reduced, I sent the following minute to Cabinet:—

"Taking all things into consideration I cannot recommend the Government to approve of the Commissioner's recommendation, but, on the other hand, I would suggest that special investigation be made with a view to reducing the number of employees. I am a firm believer in a good wage, but with a good wage the very best results should follow."

It is too long to read it in full, but I strongly recommended that the wage paid was not too high, providing we got good men; and if we are condemned as a

Government because we had no power, it was in this when we instructed the Commissioner. But we did it from a humanitarian point of view, to have good men at good pay. None deserve less the name of sweaters than the present Government.

Mr. Johnson: You have fallen sadly from grace in that respect.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The hon. member is wrong. We have heard from him that those in the service who were loyal to the late Commissioner would be got rid of; lately when certain high officers were being dispensed with from the workshops, we heard a great deal from the hon. member; but it is our intention, and in every instance we do it on the recommendation of the head of the department, to free the railways from the employment of any person from whom we cannot get good service. During the last twelve months there has been a reduction of nearly one thousand hands from all classes and all grades. We have tried all we possibly could to treat them fairly. The hon. member said last night in connection with the dismissal of persons from the salaried staff that they were entitled to two weeks' and four weeks' pay according to the term of service. But under the regulations they served under, all we had to do was to give them one month's notice, and they could only claim one month's pay; but in no case was anything of that sort done in connection with the recent retrenchments. There is nothing whatever in the alarmist statements in connection with the Railway Department. We are making economies and they can well be effected. Each head of the branch has made his recommendation, and in each instance the heads are taking the full responsibility. I have this note here in regard to the examiners:—

“This retrenchment has been possible owing to the improvements in the axle boxes of the rolling stock reducing the tendency of the axle journals to heat and crack, and reducing also the amount of attention necessary as well as the oil consumption. Farther, the rolling stock is fitted with safety hangers to prevent the brake gear falling down should it

break or become uncoupled. The reduction of examiners does not in any shape or form interfere with the safety of the travelling public, which I consider is better safeguarded under present conditions than it was some few years ago.”

This applies all round in connection with the department. There is nothing whatever to fear in regard to any lack of efficiency in connection with the administration. Now I hope that when this question is being dealt with hon. members will retain Commissioner control, giving full and proper powers to the Government of the day, putting the full responsibility on them of all expenditure; giving the power, as I am trying to get it in this Bill, to revise the charges made by the Commissioner, thus throwing the responsibility entirely on the Government of the day, and then transferring to somebody who is independent the responsibility for all the huge details of the administration of the Railway Department. Then I think we will get the best administration. But are we going to ask a member of this House to try to master the intricacies and details in connection with the railway administration? One member says, “No, you have no need for that. All you need is a Minister who knows the requirements of members, and then you are going to make an admirable Minister for Railways.” If that be the hon. member's desire it is not mine, nor do I think it is the desire of the country. We are going to manage these railways in the best interests of the country, and we want the cheapest service we can get with efficiency. We want to pay our men well, and if we do that I think we will do well. I hope the House will agree to the second reading of this Bill.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

BILL—FREMANTLE GRAVING DOCK.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 17th October.

Mr. J. BREBBER (North Perth) : I hope the debate on this question will

be adjourned, as there are certain papers I have called for which I desire to see before speaking to the Bill. It is not fair that a matter of this kind should be rushed on at this hour of the night. Will the Premier allow an adjournment?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member cannot speak to a question of adjournment. Does he move for the postponement of the order?

Mr. BREBBER: I move—

That the order of the day be postponed.

Motion put, and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	..	..	..	7
Noes	..	..	..	26

Majority against .. 19

Ayes.	Noes.
Mr. Brebber	Mr. Angwin
Mr. H. Brown	Mr. Barnett
Mr. Draper	Mr. Bath
Mr. Eddy	Mr. Bolton
Mr. Hudson	Mr. T. L. Brown
Mr. Scaddan	Mr. Collier
Mr. Taylor (Teller).	Mr. Cowcher
	Mr. Davies
	Mr. Ewing
	Mr. Gordon
	Mr. Gregory
	Mr. Haywood
	Mr. Heilmann
	Mr. Johnson
	Mr. Mitchell
	Mr. Monger
	Mr. N. J. Moore
	Mr. Price
	Mr. Smith
	Mr. Stone
	Mr. Underwood
	Mr. Varyard
	Mr. Ware
	Mr. A. J. Wilson
	Mr. F. Wilson
	Mr. Layman (Teller).

Motion thus negatived.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Mr. BREBBER: I regret that I am forced into the position of having to speak at this late hour on the second reading of such an important measure. I want the House to understand that it is not so much the construction of the dock I oppose, as it is the site which the Government have fixed for the dock. It is neither the first nor the second place recommended as the most suitable site; for if it had been at one of these spots, I would have given my support to the construction of the work. But the Government are now endeavouring in a sense to force the House to support the build-

ing of a dock in a place which every engineer who has examined the river and the various sites has condemned. In these circumstances it is my duty to enter a protest against it. Surely it is a short-sighted policy to rush on with this Bill at a time when negotiations are proceeding between the Government and the Commonwealth Government as to the construction of the dock. A question of importance in connection with these negotiations and the construction is that the dock should be made suitable for the purposes of defence for the Commonwealth and possibly for the Empire itself. Now it seems to be the desire of the Government to build the dock in the most unsuitable position that could be imagined. *[Mr. Bath: Kick them out; that is the thing.]* Mr. Keele, the engineer, whose services were obtained from the Eastern States to report upon the best site for a dock condemned the one now suggested in no measured terms. He said it would be utterly impossible to attempt to construct there a suitable dock which would be capable of repairing the warships of the Empire. In dealing with a question of this sort we have to look a little forward and not construct a huge work which will be only of temporary utility. A dock should be constructed which would be of use and available for every ship desirous of using it. Once a dock is established in Fremantle in a suitable spot, we will have one of the finest and most important ports in Australia. It will be the chief port on the Western side of the Commonwealth, as Sydney is the chief port on the Eastern side, and both these harbours should be so constructed that first class naval stations could be established there. The Minister for Works put this question before us in another sense, saying the cost of building a dock at Freshwater Bay renders the work impossible. He said that the cost of building a dock there and a naval station would be £1,400,000; but he included in that cost the building of a railway on the south side of the river, joining the present railway at Belmont, and he also included the railway bridges over the river. In that estimate was included swing bridges at North and South Fremantle, and the whole of the

workshops and everything in connection with a first-class naval station and dock-yard at Freshwater Bay. If we take these extra costs away the dock could be built for less than £750,000, and if we are going to spend something like £250,000 or £300,000 in this work at a place where it will be serviceable for a few years only, it is right and fair that we should look a little into the future and place the dock where it will be of use for all time. The point I wish to put before the House, and I wish to put it as emphatically as I can, is that if a work of that sort is going to be built on the river it ought to be built in a place where it will meet all future requirements, and not be of a temporary nature. If the Government grasp the situation properly, they should look forward to the immense services that such a dock will be to the State and to the Commonwealth. If the Government build the dock at Rous Head it will only be a temporary work. Anyone who knows the river would never for a moment suggest that a dock of this importance should be placed in the situation the Government propose to erect it. If the Government carry out this work in the face of the reports which have been given, I say they are not doing what the Government are placed in office to do. They must look forward to what the country may require in the future, place the work in a position where it may be used for all time, although it may cost £100,000 or £200,000 more than the cost now proposed. If the dock were placed in Freshwater Bay the money would not be wasted as it will be if the dock is erected at Rous Head. I have read Mr. Keele's report and in speaking about the Rous Head site he says—

Mr. Angwin: What about a more able man, Napier Bell?

Mr. BREBBER: It is a question if he is a more able man. Mr. Keele in his report, bearing out the contention I have raised in regard to the site at Freshwater Bay, says:—

"The rocky knoll over the site is low, and will therefore be inexpensive to cut down to the cope level, and the configuration of the shore line adjacent to the site will admit of a fine area of

19½ acres being reclaimed for workshop purposes. Lastly, but not least, the dock and its establishment would be naturally protected from an enemy's fire."

That is the position he has selected in Freshwater Bay, and he says the current of the river will suit the entrance to the dock; it will suit vessels when leaving the dock; there is no cross current. It matters not what sort of tide, or where the wind comes from, the dock will be placed in a suitable position so that it can be entered, no matter what the weather conditions are. The Rous Head site is condemned in unmeasured terms because the current is a cross current, and the dock will not be sheltered from an enemy's fire.

Mr. Gordon: What are the guns placed at Arthur's Head for then?

Mr. Bath: To be blown up by the first enemy's vessel that comes along.

The Premier: You are an authority on the matter, are you?

Mr. BREBBER: If the dock is erected at Freshwater Bay it will be sheltered from any enemy's fire. If a disabled vessel is in dock at Rous Head, as Mr. Keele clearly points out, there will be no protection whatever; the only protection will be the Mole at Fremantle, which would be demolished.

The Premier: How far is your proposed site from Rous Head?

Mr. BREBBER: It is not a question of distance. The second best site is under the cliffs at Rocky Bay.

The Premier: Why could not the enemy fire on that as well as Arthur's Head?

Mr. BREBBER: Because the hulls of the vessels would be lying under the rocks. There is high land between the site and the ocean in both instances, and it would be impossible for vessels to be seen and for guns to touch them. If the dock is placed at Rous Head any enemy's fire will reach the vessels. It would be utterly impossible in case of war for any vessel to be repaired, for the vessel would be open to fire from any part. This is one of the things we have to consider well. We have not to consider what is best for the trade of Fremantle now; we have to look to what the port is likely to be; we must.

look into the future, and if we are to expend a huge sum of money on such a work, anyone who looks at the matter from a disinterested point of view must say that the site proposed is not a desirable one. It is not wise to choose such a site, or to spend an immense sum of money in erecting a dock on a site which will not serve this State for all time. We do not spend £250,000 on a work which may have to be abandoned to-morrow. An expenditure of £250,000 or £300,000 should be incurred only on a work that will be of service for at least fifty years; and even in twenty-five years the dock may be utterly useless. The Government, before going a step farther, should wait to see what arrangements the Commonwealth Government are ready to make with them, what sum the Commonwealth Defence Department are willing to pay so as to secure a dock that will be serviceable to the Commonwealth fleet when we get one, and serviceable to the Imperial fleet, if it ever meets with disaster in the Indian Ocean. The port of Fremantle, as anyone may see from the map, is half way between the two great trade routes to the north and to the south. Anyone fairly considering the port of Fremantle must conclude that it will be one of the main cable stations, if not the main cable station, in the Commonwealth; and with a port and a river such as we have, I contend that we are not doing what the country expects of us, nor doing what is best for the Commonwealth as a whole, in erecting a dock in a position which is utterly unsuitable. I enter my protest to-night, not against a dock being constructed at Fremantle. I should not have protested had the Government chosen even the second-best site at Rocky Bay. Then I should have supported the Government to-night, as I have supported them in the past. But I cannot support the Government when they choose not only a bad site but the worst site it is possible to select. I shall not longer detain the House. Had the second-best or, better still, the best site been selected, I should have supported the Bill, but now I must vote against it, having done all I can to prevent the construction of the dock on the site proposed. I should have

liked to see the discussion on the second reading adjourned, so that I might have had the figures at my fingers' ends. Seeing this Bill so far down on the Notice Paper last night, I had no suspicion that it would be discussed to-night, and I am sorry that I am not fully prepared to deal with this important question.

On motion by *Mr. Daglish*, debate adjourned.

ANNUAL ESTIMATES, 1907-8.

In Committee of Supply.

Resumed from the previous day, *Mr. Daglish* in the Chair.

WORKS DEPARTMENT (Hon. J. Price, Minister), discussion continued.

Vote—*Public Works*—Salaries £15,181:

Item—Chief Draftsman, £430:

Mr. TROY: Was there an increase of £50 in this officer's salary?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes, in accordance with a promise made to the effect that immediately the officers of the professional division were classified the salary of this officer should be increased as from the 1st July, 1905. The officer had charge of a very considerable drafting staff.

Mr. TROY: Had increases been given to all officers to whom the Commissioner had promised them?

The MINISTER was not aware of any case on all fours with this, where there was a specific understanding with the officer, *Mr. Pearse*, as to the salary he should receive.

Mr. TROY: Every time an increase was granted the excuse was the existence of a definite understanding.

The Minister: This arrangement was made by a previous Minister.

Mr. TROY: The Minister was not bound by a promise of his predecessor. However, as the officer deserved the increase, it would not be opposed.

Mr. JOHNSON: Members ought to mention the item they were discussing. He wished to discuss the previous item.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member had no cause of complaint. The item under discussion was distinctly mentioned.

The MINISTER: Was it not possible to permit the hon. member to discuss the previous item, because there was almost an understanding that a certain question would be raised on that item?

The CHAIRMAN: There was no objection if the Committee did not object, but if any member of the Committee objected there was an end of it.

Item -- Inspector, construction and maintenance work, £300:

Mr. JOHNSON: Last year £350 was voted for this officer and £321 was expended. A misunderstanding had occurred between the officer and the Minister. When he (Mr. Johnson) was Minister, the positions of inspector of maintenance and inspector of construction were combined, and the salary was fixed at £300, with the distinct understanding and promise on the files that it would be increased to £350. That promise was honoured by the member for Sussex when Minister, and £350 was provided on the last Estimates; but the present Minister did not pay that amount, apparently through some misunderstanding, being under the impression that the officer received this extra £50 while supervising the construction of the Claremont Lunatic Asylum. The member for Sussex admitted that had nothing to do with the increase, therefore an injustice was being done to this officer. The Public Service Commissioner had classified the position at £350. The Minister should see that the increase was given.

The MINISTER: There was no misapprehension as to the promise under which the officer was paid the £50 increase. True, the member for Guildford had left a minute recommending a permanent increase, and in due course the minute had passed to the Public Service Commissioner, who ruled that the increase was to be paid in the nature of a special allowance while the officer was supervising the construction of the asylum.

Mr. Johnson: But the previous Minister provided £300 on the Estimates.

The MINISTER: Even then it was in the nature of a special allowance. The files showed distinctly that the £50 was being paid for special work. The Public

Service Commissioner had classified the position at £405. The officer deserved £350 and if he (the Minister) could do anything to secure the officer's getting that amount he would leave no stone unturned on his part to get it for the officer.

Item—Resident engineers (8), £3,060:

Mr. SCADDAN: The Public Service Commissioner had recommended that the officer in charge of the metropolitan sewerage contracts should receive an additional allowance of £100 while engaged on the sewerage work. This was one of the absurdities of the classification. The Commissioner seemed to imagine that because an officer was taken off his usual work and put on special work, the officer should receive some special consideration and some higher dignity. He (Mr. Scaddan) had his doubts as to whether this gentleman was actually engaged as principal engineer-in-charge of the metropolitan sewerage contracts. It was understood that the officer did a certain amount of inspection to see that the specifications were complied with; but outside that, his duties as engineer were light, so that the Government should not agree to paying this extra salary. The officer was not overworked, nor was he doing anything very difficult.

Mr. SCADDAN: It was asking a good deal to request Mr. Hickson to do anything difficult in connection with sewerage engineering. The recommendation of the Public Service Commissioner should not be agreed to.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: In so far as Mr. Hickson was concerned, that officer had been engaged for a considerable time in supervising work. At all events the amount of criticism that had been passed upon the work was one indication of its importance. Mr. Hickson was recommended by the Engineer-in-Chief for a special allowance while on this work.

Mr. Scaddan: For what reason?

The MINISTER: Because it was very important work. Just now the member for Guildford (Mr. Johnson) drew attention to the fact that Mr. Allen, who was in charge of the Claremont Asylum, had an allowance of £50 made to him;

but the member for Ivanhoe (Mr. Scaddan) did not protest against that. It was a usual custom where an officer was in charge of a very important public work that he should receive some special allowance. In the present case the sewerage was under the direct control of Mr. Hickson.

Mr. Scaddan : The work was not under his direct control.

The MINISTER : The outside work was, for it was left to him to see that everything was carried out properly. All the inspectors were under him and he generally supervised the whole of the work. The undertaking was one of very great importance and the engineer in charge of it was fully justified in receiving an extra allowance.

Mr. SCADDAN was not satisfied with the explanation. He was not in a position to suggest a reduction in the item, for the payment of the extra allowance was not provided for in the Estimates under discussion. The sum of £100 special allowance would be voted from some other item. From reports it appeared that while Mr. Hickson might be an officer who filled a position in the service prior to the sewerage work being started, still as a sewerage officer he had absolutely failed. The Minister did not appear to know the condition of the filter beds at Burswood Island.

The Minister : The beds were not as bad as had been stated, as he had already said.

Mr. SCADDAN : The Minister had said he did not know that the condition of the beds was deplorable. He (Mr. Scaddan) then stated that the Minister was apparently the only person who had no knowledge of it. Certain questions were asked the Minister and the replies given to them proved that the statements made with regard to the beds were absolutely correct and also that Mr. Hickson was the officer responsible for the tests made on the ground.

The Minister : That was not correct. There were other officers also engaged in the work.

Mr. SCADDAN : In reply to a question in the House as to who was responsible for those tests, the Minister said it was

an officer under the direction of Mr. Hickson. In spite of that fact, Mr. Hickson was retained as principal engineer in charge of the outside work, and was down for an increase of salary to £380 a year and a special allowance of £100 while doing this outside work. It was a pity that officers were not employed who could do work other than their routine duties without having to receive an additional allowance. The salary of the officer was £340 a year, and yet because he was doing outside work, which was not in itself exceptionally laborious or which needed exceptional skill, he had to receive an extra allowance. There were inspectors doing the same work as Mr. Hickson at their ordinary salary.

The MINISTER hoped the hon. member would not persist in opposing the item. That member was scarcely correct in saying Mr. Hickson was the officer entirely responsible for the tests. The experiments made were accurate, right and proper, and nothing to the contrary had ever been shown. In all probability the Engineer-in-Chief instructed Mr. Oldham that the tests should be made; that Mr. Oldham then discussed the matter with Mr. Hickson, the outside superintendent, who saw Mr. Neunjar, an assistant engineer, and directed him what to do. Practically all the engineers were more or less responsible for the work. The hon. member might think it was a mischievous principle to vote this special allowance for men engaged on important outside works; but many others thought that the principle was a reasonable one and should be adhered to.

Roads and Bridges £70,252—Item, Grants, £35,000 :

Progress reported, and leave given to sit again.

ADJOURNMENT.

The House adjourned at 11.41 o'clock, until the next day.