

QUESTION—CHARTERED STEAMER "N2": RENT AND CONDITIONS.

Mr. MALE asked the Premier: 1, Are we to understand from the reply given to the leader of the Opposition yesterday that the Government has secured the use of the steamer "N2" free of any charges, or is there a rent to be paid in addition to the terms and conditions stated yesterday? 2, If so, what amount of rent or charter money has to be paid?

The PREMIER replied: 1, The Government received the steamer free of charter charge in consideration of the vessel being put in a seaworthy condition and maintained in such condition. Docking, repairs, and insurance involved an expenditure of over £5,000 by the State. 2, Answered by No. 1.

QUESTION—POISON AREAS, CLASSIFICATION.

Mr. S. STUBBS asked the Minister for Lands: Is it the intention this year to reconsider the present classification of poison areas in the Great Southern District?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS replied: It is not intended to re-classify any land, but a Bill will be introduced dealing with the re-pricing of land. This will include poison lands, which was the subject of investigation and report by a Special Board in 1914.

Mr. S. STUBBS: Will it be done this session?

The Minister for Lands: Certainly.

Mr. S. STUBBS: And some relief afforded to the unfortunate persons concerned?

QUESTION — EXPEDITIONARY FORCES, LEAVE OF ABSENCE TO PARLIAMENTARY OFFICIALS.

Mr. B. J. STUBBS (without notice) asked the Premier: Following on the intimation given yesterday by the Premier of his intention to move for leave of absence to members of Parliament

joining the expeditionary forces during the whole period they are away, I desire to ask if he would favour a similar or any concession as regards leave and salary being granted to officers of Parliament who might enlist.

The PREMIER replied: I fear that the matters contained in the question are those for consideration by the committees controlling the various officers of both Houses, and are entirely beyond the scope of myself, either as Premier or Treasurer; although I take it that the concessions already granted to the public servants would naturally also be granted to officers of either House of Parliament.

BILL — FREMANTLE MUNICIPAL TRAMWAYS AND ELECTRIC LIGHTING ACT AMENDMENT.

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

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

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

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Fourth Day.

Debate resumed from the previous day. Mr. GILCHRIST (Gascoyne) [4.40]: I owe it to the Gascoyne district to take this opportunity to reply to reflections made upon the pastoralists of the North-West during the recess. In April the Minister for Lands made a statement to the Press which contained this paragraph—

After the attitude of the Legislative Council on the Vermin Board Bill when wealthy squatters were encouraged to repudiate their liabilities under an agreement by which £65,000 was obtained from the State, I am prepared to expect anything from my political opponents. Reckless as they are undoubtedly becoming, it is very satis-

factory to know that the Government have full legislative authority to protect the State's funds against this latest attempt to prevent the collection of arrears of agricultural land rents, etc., and according to the best legal authorities, it is not necessary for us to write off the £9,000 due from the Gascoyne pastoralists under the Vermin Board Act. I, therefore, propose to go straight ahead with a view of getting this amount paid.

In the *Geraldton Express*, a newspaper which is in the fortunate position of having exceptional opportunities of knowing the Ministerial mind, I find an article published in February last under the headings—"A Generous Legislative Council."—"Fortunate Gascoyne Squatters." After dealing with the two amendments proposed, while the amending Bill was before that Chamber, the article concludes—

The Assembly refused to agree to the course adopted by the Council, and the Bill will probably be shelved, with the result that the 36 pastoralists of the Gascoyne, including some of the wealthy men of the State, will be able to get away with £66,000 of the people's money. Truly, the Legislative Council ought to be proud of its handiwork.

A section of the Gascoyne people is charged with conspiring with members of another place to bring about a deadlock by which they would be able to repudiate their honourable obligations to the Crown to the tune of £66,000. I absolutely deny that there ever has been from an authoritative source the slightest suggestion of repudiation. On the morning of the day I spoke on the amending Bill in this House, I attended a meeting in Perth of these Gascoyne pastoralists who happened to be in the City at the time, and discussed the position fully with them. The opinion was unanimous that the Government should be asked to take over the fence and maintain it out of the general revenue, in the same way as the other great barrier fences of the State are maintained. The opinion was almost unanimous that in the event of

the Ministry refusing to accede to the wish of the meeting the fence should be abandoned. There was not one dissident from the principle laid down and adopted at the beginning of the meeting, that whatever happened the liability of £66,000 must be shouldered by the pastoralists within the fence. I have never heard of anybody proposing repudiation of this debt.

The Minister for Lands: Did you read the debate?

Mr. GILCHRIST: Everybody admits that a mistake has been made, and we desire to cry a halt before the burden becomes altogether unbearable. At the end of January I attended a meeting in Gascoyne which was more representative of the Lower Gascoyne pastoralists, and afterwards addressed the following letter to the Minister for Agriculture—

At a meeting of ratepayers of the Gascoyne Vermin Board district held here on Saturday night the following resolution was passed:—"That the Government be approached and asked to take over and maintain the fence out of general revenue, and that the Government levy upon the ratepayers a fixed rate of 6d. per 100 acres for the period of thirty years to cover interest and general fund on the £66,000 owing." In the event of the Government declining to maintain the fence, it was unanimously agreed, but with much regret, that the fence would have to be abandoned. In either case there is not the slightest suggestion that our obligations should be in any way repudiated, and the burden of the £66,000 will be honourably faced. I am asked to point out however, that the fence has been protecting Crown lands (unleased) and that all leased lands are actually Crown lands, and the present rental places the Government, to a certain extent, in the position of landlords. The ratepayers claim, therefore, that the State should shoulder some of the burden, even as the road board is doing in regard to reserves within the vermin board district.

Mr. James Gardiner: At the present juncture £66,000 would be rather acceptable to the Treasury.

Mr. GILCHRIST: They would not get the whole of the £66,000 paid at once anyway. Neither of the two meetings I attended in Perth and at Carnarvon lent the slightest colour to the suggestion that we ever plotted, or even desired the repudiation of the debt as it stood when the Minister made his statement to the Press. When the amending Bill was before the Legislative Council, that Chamber was willing to pass it if the Government would agree to reduce the maximum tax to a shilling per 100 acres, in other words, to double the rent on the land, instead of it being trebled as it is under the existing arrangement. As the one shilling rate would raise £4,400 per year, it can readily be understood that this amount, if fixed for 30 years, would pay not only interest and sinking fund on the £66,000, but even cover maintenance, which is reckoned by the officers of the department, once the fence is placed in order, to cost £1,200 per annum. If this amendment had been agreed to by the Ministry, the Bill would have been passed, and there would not have been any litigation, or irritation, and the collection of arrears would have been placed beyond question. The Minister for Lands states that "wealthy squatters have been encouraged to repudiate their liabilities." I need hardly point out to the House that the wealthy squatters within the fence, who can be counted on the fingers of one hand, have never lost any sleep over the vermin tax, heavy as it is. If the men within the fence had all been wealthy, there never would have been any agitation, and I would not now be making an appeal on their behalf. It is because many of the men inside the fence are struggling beginners, and are finding themselves cruelly handicapped, and their holdings jeopardised, that I again press this matter on the attention of the House and the country. I placed before the Minister the case of two steady young men, born in the State, who with their father had taken up land. One of the sons was working the property while

the father and the other son were driving wool teams in order to keep things going. So far these men have not been able to get assistance from the financial institutions and they are finding the vermin tax almost prohibitive. I know of other instances which together make a strong case for revision of the position. A man who has been hard hit by the drought writes to me as follows—

I notice the Government are going to repair the fence and enforce the old Act. I cannot understand why they are going to do so when it is the wish of the squatters concerned that it should be abandoned, as they now find the fence was a mistake in the first instance and useless as a means of keeping out rabbits. One reason why it is so is that the fence runs across all the creeks and watercourses in its track... Every time it rains heavily enough to make the creeks and watercourses run the fence will be washed away... Up to a few months ago, there had not been many washaways owing to the drought, yet the upkeep of the fence has been very heavy... What must it be when we have rainy seasons?

There is a point raised in this letter which is worthy of serious consideration, and it is that the Minister has authorised heavy expenditure for making the fence rabbit proof again after the numerous washaways of the past nine months, and that he has determined to continue the upkeep of the fence and all the heavy burden of this most remarkable tax in face of the distinctly expressed wish of the local pastoralists who are the only persons concerned in the matter. This raises the question, which must be considered fundamental, as to the right of priority of the wishes of a locality with regard to its own purely local affairs over the wish of the central executive.

Mr. James Gardiner: Who particularly asked for the fence; was it these same squatters?

Mr. GILCHRIST: The late Minister for Lands, Mr. Bath, declared a few years ago that "centralisation of authority had had a most pernicious effect on politics throughout Australia," and the pro-

sent Labour Premier of New South Wales said; "I regard the right of every people to self-govern themselves as one of the fundamental principles of progress and liberty." In the United States political right, like material development, proceeds from the outback to the centre, instead of vice versa, as seems to rule in Australia with crippling and disastrous effect. At the present time practically all Europe is at war, largely in order to vindicate the right of local opinion in Serbia and Belgium. To my mind an executive is not created to be a kind of dictatorship, but to hold the balance between localities in matters of general concern and to register and carry into effect the wishes of a particular locality with regard to its own local affairs, by which other localities are not affected to any appreciable extent. We people of the Gascoyne district contend that the State as a whole, or any part of it outside the Gascoyne, could not be affected by the abandonment of this fence, and we therefore claim the right to demand the abandonment of a work which we initiated ourselves, and for the maintenance of which we have been paying ourselves, the heavy debt of which we readily accept as a debt of honour which will be fully discharged in due time. If the Ministry, who are the real owners of the Gascoyne leasehold lands, decide that this fence must be maintained, upon them the burden must fall; upon us will fall the liability for the £66,000 principal, but upon the Rabbit Department the cost of the maintenance of the fence, as upon them falls the cost of the other barrier fences, towards all of which, by the way, the Gascoyne people have to contribute. In the Governor's Speech appear these words, "My advisers fully conscious of the great struggle proceeding between the Empire as a whole and its enemies, and feeling that now is a time above all others when all persons should act in concord and good fellowship, are not desirous of introducing controversial legislation." In what contrast is the decision of the Federal Government to plunge the whole of the Com-

monwealth, in this time of Imperial danger, into all the bitterness and disunion involved in the Referenda proposals, for which prominent Labour members and Labour officials admit there is no urgency. I can claim to be no party bigot, but I strongly resent this glaring attempt to take advantage of the absence of brave men on the battlefield and the pre-occupation of those who remain in the absorbing issues raised by the life and death struggles of the nations of Europe. I cannot follow the argument of the member for Forrest in that excellent speech he delivered last night, when he said that at the Adelaide Labour Conference he spoke strongly against the motion that the Referenda proposals should be again introduced, on the ground that the time was not opportune. The hon. member declared that he was losing faith in Federation because he found that of late the Federal Government had been showing a propensity for trenching upon State sources of revenue, and other local prerogatives. Yet he declared to this House that he was going to take the platform in order to advise the people to pass the Referenda proposals. Let me say that I despise that fetish of solidarity that is causing some men to surrender their own emphatic judgment and to teach the people the contrary of what they themselves believe, I sympathise with those courageous Labourites, who have not been unknown in this Chamber, who are finding that this Referenda coercion spells political martyrdom. The member for Forrest declared that the one argument with him in favour of the Referenda is that the Upper Chamber in this State is standing in the way of democratic progress.

Mr. Bolton: That is true.

Mr. GILCHRIST: Would it not be more reasonable, and safer for the hon. member to enter upon a campaign for the abolition of the Legislative Council?

Mr. Bolton: We have for years past fought for that.

Mr. GILCHRIST: It would be better for the hon. member to do that than to hand over to a Parliament, meeting on

the other side of the Continent, powers and rights which, once surrendered, can never be recovered. I assert that the Ministry has never once made any serious attempt to affect the position and power of the other Chamber in regard to measures passed by the Assembly. I am as radical and as democratic as the members of the Ministry.

The Minister for Lands: You used to be.

Mr. GILCHRIST: And I am now. When I am convinced that Parliament, and Executive are, as they should be, free and untrammelled institutions legislating and administering by their own volition, and responsible only to the whole of the people of the electorates, then I will co-operate whole-heartedly with the Ministry for the institution of the unicameral system. Meanwhile the Federal Government have decided that these referenda proposals are to be submitted to the people in December next. Doubtless all of us will take the platform on that occasion, and I admit I do not relish it. What right have we to disunite the people and turn them aside from the almost superhuman task which is facing us, and which demands the concentrated untiring purpose of all the people of all the scattered parts of the allied Empires? On Tuesday night the Premier accepted the olive branch held out by the leaders of the two Opposition parties but did not make light of the difficulties in the way of a truce. He and our deputy leader asserted that the Imperial crisis did not demand the surrender of private principles, but that those principles should be asserted in a manner the least galling and irritating to those whose principles were different. Eliminate the desire to irritate, and we soon reach a basis on which to co-operate. I refuse to believe that there is a gulf fixed between Labour and Liberal, coinciding with an irreconcilable separation of Labour from Capital. The Minister for Lands—I am sorry to have to quote again from him—in his Northam speech said the Liberals were now quite united because well drilled by the secretary of the Employers' Federation. A

few days later he explained to the Press that:

The Employers' Federation gets, as I said at Northam, into direct communication with Liberal members. . . . I drew attention to the matter merely to show that party government to-day is class government, and that the employing class have materially strengthened their organisation by securing the services of the secretary before mentioned.

I have not the pleasure of knowing the gentleman who has earned the eulogy from the Minister for Lands, neither do I know his organisation. I have never heard either mentioned in meetings of Liberals, nor in conversation among Liberals. I feel quite sure there is not that class division of party in this House, otherwise we would not see several employers of labour sitting on the Ministerial side. If I were conscious of any pressure attempted to be exerted upon me by the Employers' Federation or any other outside organisation, I would resent it, and would not criticise any attempt on the part of industrial organisations to do similarly.

Mr. Foley: Did not the leader of the Opposition last session read his speech from a speech which appeared in the Chamber of Mines' journal, which is controlled by the Chamber of Mines?

Hon. J. Mitchell: No.

Mr. GILCHRIST: I do not care what the leader of the Opposition did. The Minister for Lands said nothing about the leader of the Opposition or any other person. He said the Employers' Federation was getting into direct touch with the Liberal members. I say it is not. I have never heard the organisation, or any of its works, mentioned at any meeting of the Liberal party.

Mr. Foley interjected.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The member for Leonora has already addressed the House and is not entitled to interrupt. When I call order he must keep order.

Mr. GILCHRIST: It is a common assertion of our opponents that there is an alliance, actual or tacit, between the Liberals and the land owners, merchants