

MR. JACOBY: Reduce working expenses.

THE PREMIER: It is said, "You must reduce your working expenses to a satisfactory basis." [OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Hear, hear.] And who would be the judge of that satisfactory basis? The question will arise, who is to judge? [OPPOSITION MEMBER: The percentage.] How can the percentage possibly decide it? The question has to be decided.

MR. MORAN: Ask the member for Cue.

THE PREMIER: Certain members maintain that there must be no increase in rates until the administration has been perfected. But there is no such thing as perfect administration; and it is no argument to say that we should not venture to increase our railway rates until our working cost has been so greatly reduced that ours is the most cheaply worked system in the world. That, indeed, is one of the most astonishing theories I have ever heard put forward. I submit our duty is plain. When we find there is need for increased rates under existing administration, although we should never slacken our efforts to improve administration, we certainly ought to require that those who use the railways shall pay increased rates. That is the general principle. On the other hand, I freely admit that increased rates should be imposed with the utmost care and the utmost caution. I submit, however, that on the principle involved in the imposition of increased rates, this House should have no hesitation in giving support to the present Government. There are far more important questions, after all, than the appointment of Mr. George and the increase in railway rates. One more important question is, are we going to have one session of settled government in this State? In May last we had the Throssell Government; in June we had the Leake Government; in November we had the Morgans Government; in December we had the Leake Government; and in July we have the James Government. Are we now going to have three weeks of Nanson Government, with again six months of James Government? (Laughter.) What is to be the end of it? What is the country to think of us?

[Several interjections.]

MR. DOHERTY: We want the country to settle the question.

THE PREMIER: What did the country send us here for?

MR. DOHERTY: The country did not send us here to appoint George.

THE PREMIER: To attend to its work or to waste time? The country sent us here for work, and not for idle chatter; to deal with principles, and not with glorified quibbles; to put the time at our disposal to some practical use by clearing off the arrears of legislation; to pass a measure of constitutional amendment, and then return to the country. That is what we want to do; that is what the Government want to have a chance of doing. I say, without hesitation, that of all things the country wants, stability of government is the first, and that members should shut their eyes and ears to the empty turmoil and clatter of party and party cries. On vital principles, they should most certainly reserve the right of expressing dissent at all times from the action of the Government in power; but on any question less than vital, they should at all times consider whether, on the whole, the men out of office will prove more satisfactory than those in office. If hon. members will bear that in mind, we shall secure that stability of government which is of far more importance to the community than the question whether Mr. Nanson is leader of the Government or whether I am.

MR. J. M. HOPKINS (Boulder): I would like to correct one or two erroneous impressions, particularly in regard to the influence created on the Eastern Goldfields by raising the railway rates. The Premier, in the course of his remarks, has dealt, following the Minister for Railways, most effectively with the question; but the result remains that there has been an increase in the rates. I would like to say, with regard to the imposition of the rates, that I do not think they are such as are likely to be imposed to the satisfaction of the country by any single person who has had any experience on the question. The leader of the Opposition, in moving the amendment to the Address, I think was performing a duty which the Opposition are expected to carry out—that of criticising any propositions of the Government when these conflict with public testimony.

We are forced into the position that while we are constrained to offer our condemnation of the existing rates, and to some extent the railway policy, to acknowledge that the circumstances which have led to the increase in the working of the railways have been brought about by bad management. In some countries it would have been accepted that in a run of 400 miles into the interior of a country the staff stations should have been situated as they were originally placed along the line, 40 or 50 miles apart. But the rolling-stock was not sufficient for the requirements of the country, and the staff stations along the Eastern Goldfields line were brought down to 25 miles apart. Still portions of the line were duplicated and these staff stations were made only 14 or 15 miles apart, and at the present time, if anyone looks at the time-table, they will see that there are staff stations existing on that railway of 400 miles into the desert every four or five miles apart. That is an absolute indication of the wanton extravagance which has characterised the past administration of the department. It is evident that every time a staff station has been opened it has had to be equipped, which means a great expenditure. In the Eastern States, one of the last things which the management considers is to open new staff stations, because it does not mean only the employment of one set of men, but there have to be three shifts employed at each of the stations. The result is the piling up of expenses from beginning to end. I question whether it is right that the duplications which are going on should be carried out from the vote for "Improvements and additions to opened lines." At the present time the improvements to opened lines are carried out from money obtained from revenue, and every now and again we find two or three duplications being made at the various sidings. By and by it will not be a question for Parliament to say whether the lines shall be duplicated or not, because all that the authorities will have to do will be to take up the ends of the duplications and join them, and the line will be duplicated and the question will never come before Parliament. I take exception to that system. With regard to the late Minister for Railways, he said

in regard to some of the public meetings which were called at Kalgoorlie that probably the small number of people who attended was due to the inclemency of the weather, and therefore the meetings were not a success. The fact of the matter is this. With that marvellous capacity which the late leader of the House had, he took an opportunity of announcing, when the rates were imposed, that the Government had no idea of receding from the position taken up, nor would any Government which followed do so.

MR. THOMAS: The Premier refused to receive a deputation from the goldfields.

MR. HOPKINS: That is so. These persons have become accustomed to this process of taxation, which is unfair and unjust, and, as in the past, they have accepted the inclemency of the Government in this matter. The suburban railway freights have been reduced, and this brings about a loss of £25,000, of which amount £23,000 would have been collected from the people in the metropolitan districts. I do not know if it was the right policy for these people, who never have paid any freights on the goods they use, on the tools which they have handled, or the clothes they wear, to have their freights reduced, and that the amount should have been handed on to the people in the interior who, in the past, have had to pay excessive railway rates, and, in addition, have had to pay on every commodity consumed, on all the machinery used, and on the clothes they wear, and the articles which have to be handled by them. They have to pay sufficient profit to the Railway Department to enable that department to pay dividends on all the railway lines in the country which do not pay. If a merchant establishes branches of his business in different parts of the State, he looks to each of those branches to pay its own way. If it does not do so, he closes it. Not long ago the country authorised the construction of the Boulder-Brown Hill loop line. Only the other day, at a public meeting, the Minister for Railways announced that the cost of the line was 6s. per train mile, whereas it was producing a revenue of about 1s. 6d.; yet we do not see any effort made to curtail the trains run on that line. This is another imposition heaped on the people of the Eastern Goldfields, and the time has arrived when

the question as far as possible of each railway line being kept separate, should be brought about; and if there is any deficit in the revenue of that line, it should be made good from the consolidated revenue, instead of taking money from one part of the railway system to make good a deficiency caused in another.

MR. MORAN: The accounts are all kept separate.

MR. THOMAS: Not in detail.

MR. HOPKINS: The next thing I wish to speak about is in connection with the appointment of a board of Commissioners, and to some extent I agree with what the Premier has said on that point. Matters are in a chaotic condition, they are going from bad to worse, until recently they have got into such a shocking state that it is evident something had to happen. Out of that chaos the country was seeking that something better should be brought about, and I am prepared to pin my faith to a board of Railway Commissioners. When it was appointed I had hoped the appointments would have been those of men highly skilled in railway administration. The present management has, to a certain extent, forfeited the respect of the community. Had the Government done as I have suggested, the railways would have been placed in a better position than they are to-day. I contend that the Government should have appointed experts who, if they went into a railway workshop, or into a shunting yard or the signalling branch, or into any branch of the department, would have been able to say whether the administration was being carried out in an able and efficient manner, and whether the duties performed by the members of the staff were being done on the latest and most up-to-date principles. For that reason I had hoped that some better appointment would have been made than the one that has been received with some degree of astonishment throughout the country. We are in this position in regard to that appointment, that we have to consider the proposals embraced in the Speech of His Excellency the Governor. There are over 20 proposals in that Speech; and if for example we voted against the Government and brought about a change, it would really result in the Opposition being called on to form an Administration, and to pro-

mulgate a policy which, at the least, should meet with our approbation to a greater extent than the policy of the present Government. Now, if it so happened that the present Government were defeated and hon. members opposite were asked to form an Administration, would the formation of that new Government insure the removal of Mr. George?

MR. MORAN: Yes; so far as our leader (Mr. Nanson) is concerned.

MR. HOPKINS: Then the introduction of the new Government means a reduction in the railway rates?

MR. NANSON: Undoubtedly.

MR. HOPKINS: And the Esperance Railway? (Laughter.) And the abolition of the food duties, and the removal of the sliding scale? [SEVERAL MEMBERS: Hear, hear.] And a satisfactory amendment of the Constitution Act? [OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Yes.] Hon. members say yes. I wish I could believe it. I do not suppose they undertake to pin their colours to every proposition included in that Speech, but I have no doubt they will to the major portion of it. Speaking my own sentiments, I think it would have been preferable had the Government simply met the House and thrown upon the table the amendment of the Constitution Act, and after allowing the House to discuss that, appealed to the people. However, the discussion of other matters cannot be altogether avoided; and in connection with our railway administration, a matter for serious consideration is the remarkable falling off in the value per ton of the ore being milled on the Eastern Goldfields during the last five years, from something like £9 10s. to £4 5s. That is a remarkable diminution in the profits of the companies; and therefore the present cannot reasonably be accepted as a suitable time for the imposition of increased railway rates. The member for Sussex (Mr. Yelverton) was, I think, quoting from Shakespeare; and if I remember, he was quoting incorrectly. He might have gone farther, and altered Shakespeare to read, "Whether it is nobler to cast our votes against the Government, and by opposing it to die, perchance to dream, and in that dream to see another Government bequeathing greater shocks than the present combination can ever make us heirs to."

MR. DOHERTY: Say that over again.

MR. THOMAS: Do you think that is possible?

MR. HOPKINS: Well, it remains to be seen. I have no doubt the member for Dundas will see fit, in the course of a very brief period, to change his seat in the House during this session. If he do, he will only be following out the policy he has previously inaugurated. A Commission has been appointed to reorganise and reclassify the Public Service, and that Commission is, I think, very essential, unless Ministers were satisfied that they themselves had the time at their disposal to bring about those changes and that retrenchment necessary, in order that the official class which has been so long cherished with emoluments and privileges might, in the future, discharge at least a portion of the disabilities and burdens pressing so heavily on the people of this State.

MR. CONNOR: Then why did you not vote for that procedure?

MR. HOPKINS: I should have been much pleased to vote for any proposition which would bring about a betterment in the present state of affairs; but I am satisfied that the Premier is seized of one desire—to do the best he can in the interests of the country.

MR. MORAN: So is everybody else.

MR. CONNOR: Are not you?

MR. HOPKINS: Probably we all are; but I say we are in a position where it is perhaps just as well that the present Government should remain in office. And I believe if members on the front Opposition bench were asked to express an opinion, they would be almost willing to withdraw the amendment. I do not think they desire any change of Government at the present time.

MR. CONNOR: They desire a change in the administration of the railways.

MR. HOPKINS: While I have good reasons for condemning certain matters connected with the railway policy, I do not think I should be justified at present in bringing about a change of Government. I do not think it right that a man should be called on to form an Administration one day, and on the next to promulgate a policy which would meet the requirements of the country. But I do think, after a Minister has been in power, and has had the advantage of the opinions of expert officials, that the expert officials

of a great public service, together with Ministers, ought to be able to promulgate a policy which would meet with the respect not of this House only, but of the people.

MR. H. TEESDALE SMITH (Wellington): There is one thing which must strike hon. members more than another—the divergence of opinion in the Opposition. On the one hand, there is the member for West Perth (Mr. Moran) giving it as his opinion that the appointment of Mr. George is the most unconstitutional act ever perpetrated in this State. On the other hand, there is the member for the Williams (Hon. F. H. Piesse) saying that it is quite constitutional, and that the Government are well within their rights in making that appointment. [MR. DOHERTY: Even lawyers differ.] I think also the member for Cue (Mr. Illingworth) has proved to the House that in making this appointment the Government were acting rightly. I differ from the members for the Williams and for Cue as to the desirableness of appointing Commissioners to take charge of the railways. I remember years ago, when Commissioners were appointed in New South Wales, in Victoria, and in South Australia, that the difference made in the conduct of the railways was very considerable, and warranted every fair-thinking man in saying that the appointments were justified.

MR. ILLINGWORTH: They were all right until political influence came in.

MR. TEESDALE SMITH: If Commissioners are troubled with political influence, what is the position of the Ministerial head? He is surrounded by members of Parliament, every one of whom is trying to get some patronage in connection with the railways. Are we to follow the example of Tasmania, which has never tried the system of Railway Commissioners, and where the deficit, year in and year out, amounts to about £100,000, which has to be made up out of general revenue? I say, surely it is far better for us to follow New South Wales, where Commissioners have proved such a great success.

MR. CONNOR: What about the other States?

MR. TEESDALE SMITH: In the other States, I say Commissioners were