

my opinion about the action of the Legislative Council in the past, because that is the main reason why I occupy a seat in this Chamber at the present time.

HON. J. M. DREW (Central Province): As this is the first occasion I have had the honour of addressing the House, I hope both the President and the members will show me every indulgence. It appears to me, the question we are called on to consider is not whether it is advisable for this colony to enter federation or whether it would be injudicious to do so. If that were the subject of debate I should certainly proclaim myself as opposed to federation under the Commonwealth Bill, because I consider the measure bristles with dangers to the progress and prosperity of the colony. We are, however, called on to debate no such question. What we have to discuss is whether we shall allow the people of this colony to exercise the franchise on this question, or whether we shall attempt to rob them of their undoubted birthright. The electors on the roll, I may say, are only a portion of the people of the colony.

HON. C. SOMMERS: A small portion.

HON. J. M. DREW: A very small portion. There are about 30,000 names on the roll, a great many of which appear on the rolls for the different districts, and it is my firm conviction that, in consequence of plural voting, not more than 25,000 people are really represented on the roll. The adult male and female population of the country is about 90,000, and I fail to see how we can justify any attempt to deprive 65,000 adult persons of the right of expressing their opinion on the question of federation. There are special reasons why we should not adopt the course which has been adopted in the other colonies. In this colony we have an Electoral Act which would seem to have been devised specially to prevent people from getting on the roll, and to remove the names of persons already on the roll.

HON. C. SOMMERS: You are not far wrong.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: Which Electoral Act?

HON. J. M. DREW: The old Electoral Act. There are thousands of people, not only in the mining districts, but in the agricultural districts, who are not on the roll, and there are hundreds in the Geraldton district who have never been

on the roll, and never will be, because it takes an expert lawyer to fill in the form of application in accordance with the Act or, at any rate, it takes a person with special knowledge to perform that duty. Any little informality causes a claim to be rejected, and the result is that a great number of people are disfranchised, and if the Commonwealth Bill goes to the people, will not have an opportunity of recording a vote. It is my conviction that federation under this measure would be a serious disadvantage to Western Australia; but I may be wrong, and anyhow I am not going to put my opinion against the opinions of others who claim to represent some 90,000 persons in the colony, and who may be able to form a better judgment on the question than I individually. Some people say we should refuse to consult the people in the matter; but to say that is to argue either that the people are deficient in intelligence, or that they are dishonest—that they are political conspirators bent on ruining the colony, and while entitled to the franchise are not to exercise it. I cannot conceive any reason or pretext to justify such an unwarrantable calumny on the people of this colony. The people may approve of the Bill if it be remitted to them, and the result, as I said before, may be disastrous but far better our material interest should suffer than we should deal a blow at political freedom. We can only strive to deprive these people of their rights we could not succeed for any length of time. This House, if it attempted to restrict the liberties of the people in dealing with this question, would soon pave the way to its own inglorious extinction. I very much regret that Government have not made provision to have the Bill remitted, not to the electors alone, but to every man and woman who is 21 years of age, is a British subject and has resided in the colony for six months.

HON. W. MALEY (South-East): I am in favour of federation and of the Commonwealth Bill being remitted to the people, because I look on the latter as peculiarly a people's measure. I remember some 10 years ago I attended a conference on federation in the Town Hall, Melbourne, as a representative of the Australian Natives' Association in this