

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 21st August, 1929.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.

ASSENT TO BILL.

Message from the Governor received and read notifying assent to Supply Bill (No. 1) £1,900,000.

FREMANTLE HARBOUR.

Report by Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. A. McCallum—South Fremantle) [4.33]: I have a report by Sir Alexander Gibb and partners, to the Government of Western Australia on the proposals for improvements to and extensions of the harbour at the port of Fremantle. This reached me only yesterday afternoon and only one copy was received. I have had the report itself typed, but the House will readily understand that the maps and plans could not be reproduced in the time. I propose, therefore, to lay on the Table a typed copy of the report, and if any member desires to see the plans, he may do so by calling at my office. It is the intention of the Government to have the whole of the plans and report reproduced and to supply a copy to each member. I move

That the typewritten copy of the report be laid on the Table of the House.

Question put and passed.

QUESTION—MT. KEITH COMMONAGE.

Mr. MARSHALL asked the Minister for Lands: 1, Is it a fact that portion or the whole of the Mt. Keith commonage has been leased as a pastoral proposition? 2, If so, who was the successful lessee, and on what terms was the lease made? 3, Before the lease was granted, was the road board in whose district the commonage is situated consulted on the matter?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS replied: 1, Yes, the southern portion. 2, Tenders were called. The successful applicant was the Mt. Keith Pastoral Company, Limited. Area 13,000 acres; term for one year, renewable at the will of the Minister for Lands, and subject to determination at three months' notice on either side; also subject to the condition that prospectors shall have the right to run their stock at will, and the use of any waters on the common, and that no compensation will be paid for any improvements at the expiration or on the sooner determination of the lease. Rent was £4 per annum. 3, Yes, and no objection was raised.

QUESTION—CENTRAL RAILWAY STATION, ADVERTISEMENTS.

Mr. A. WANSBROUGH (for Mr. Coverley) asked the Minister for Railways: 1, Has he noticed that advertisements of a distasteful nature surround the railway employees' Roll of Honour Board at the main entrance to the central railway station? 2, If so, will he have this artistry obliterated or removed?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied: 1, The advertisements referred to cannot reasonably be termed distasteful. 2, Answered by No. 1.

BILL—CHILD WELFARE ACT AMENDMENT.

Introduced by Mr. Latham and read a first time.

PAPERS—PASTORAL LEASE 3335/97.

MR. MARSHALL (Murchison) [4.39]: I move—

That the file appertaining to pastoral lease No. 3335/97, since forfeited, and now forming part of N. R. Ward's pastoral lease, east

of Wiluna, then held in the name of M. Rodan, be laid on the Table of the House.

In moving this motion I find myself in a position similar to that which I occupied when I moved a motion regarding another pastoral lease a week ago. I should like to point out that I have been inundated with all sorts of charges and allegations against the administration of the Lands Department insofar as it applies to this particular block. I would like to have the file in order to get a correct digest of what really happened. While I know the block fairly well, I cannot say that all which has been alleged to have transpired in connection with the block did take place. The information given to me, however, is from a very reliable and authentic source and, if it is true, then I am sorry to say there has been a grave miscarriage of justice or want of fair play, or if it does not come within either of those categories, there has been a great deal of wire pulling in the Lands Department to prevent the forfeiture of the block. That there was no reason whatever for refusing the forfeiture of the block, I can prove from my own knowledge of it. The lessee who held the block did not develop it at all and, so far as I have been able to ascertain, he visited it on only one occasion and then for only one afternoon. Having regard to the fact that it is a block of 100,000 acres, he could have gained very little information of the value of the block. The present owner of the lease applied for forfeiture. It was held under the soldier settlement scheme, rent free for five years. From experience gained during my association with the road board at Meekatharra, I know it was impossible in many cases to get any rates whatsoever from such leases.

The Minister for Lands: It is not within the boundaries of the Meekatharra Road Board.

Mr. MARSHALL: I am not saying that it is in the Meekatharra Road Board district. I am saying that my experience of allotments under the soldier settlement scheme, so far as it applied to the Meekatharra Road Board, was that it was difficult to get any rates whatsoever from them. These blocks are not held actually for the party in whose name they stand. They are being dummied and held practically for speculative purposes. I do not say it was so in this instance, but I wish to tell the

Minister that when the lessee was asked by letter what he wanted for the block, he replied that he wanted £400 for it. Yet he had not paid one penny in rent. What was paid in rates is another matter on which I cannot speak at present. There were no improvements on the lease and it has never been stocked. As time progressed the forfeiture of the block took place, and rightly so. That is the law. The Minister is usually very emphatic about enforcing the law and I agree with him. I shall support him every time he does it. In this instance, however, the block was forfeited, thrown open for selection, and then withdrawn from selection. Some three months later it was finally forfeited. Meanwhile the person who was developing the adjacent country found it inconvenient to make any progress. In other words, the department were retarding the development of the country by not having permitted selection to proceed. Whether that is true or not, I cannot say, but the source from which I obtained the information is so reliable that I venture to give the particulars. There is a minute on the file, and though I cannot say that the document I hold in my hand is a word for word copy, it is as near as the party who saw the minute could give it to me.

Mr. Latham: How can they see these files? They have no right to see them.

Mr. MARSHALL: This party could have seen the file.

Mr. Latham: It is within the department?

Mr. MARSHALL: No, not this file. The minute, as nearly as I could get it, not word for word, says—

To the Under Secretary.—The Minister desires that this and other blocks shall be withdrawn from selection. Kindly take the necessary action.—Jago.

I know Mr. Jago; he is the secretary to the Minister. The Under Secretary referred to is the Under Secretary for Lands. If the Minister desired to withdraw the blocks from selection, why did he not do it direct through the Under Secretary for Lands?

The Premier: That is absurd. Ministers do not call in highly-paid officers just to give instructions. What is the clerk there for?

Mr. MARSHALL: I am not interested in the procedure that was adopted, but I am interested in the withdrawal of the blocks from selection.

The Premier: I know; but you remarked just now that you could not understand why the instruction was given to a clerk, and not to the Under Secretary.

Mr. MARSHALL: Most likely I have not had the experience that the Premier has had. He ought to know more about the matter than I do.

The Premier: I would not call in the Under Secretary to give him a tin-pot instruction, if I had a clerk there.

Mr. MARSHALL: What I am concerned about is this. The blocks were withdrawn from selection after being forfeited, and were again held for a further term of three months.

Mr. Latham: They increased in value in the meantime, and there was an effort to obtain more revenue for the State.

Mr. MARSHALL: While they were held by the previous lessee, they were rent free. After they had been given to the other party who applied for them, rent became payable, the other party not being a returned soldier. I am not concerned about the rent, but I am concerned about the development of the country and about the law. It is useless for the Minister to tell me in one case that he is compelled to enforce the law, that the law must be enforced, while in another case the law is absolutely flouted and the development of the country thereby retarded. I merely want to see the file in order to check the allegations or charges which have been made. I can assure the Minister that there has been much comment about this block, and also about the other block. Had the Minister laid the files on the Table, I would have satisfied myself on the subject, and the files could have gone back. However, seeing that the Minister has forced me to speak, I have to submit reasons for wanting to see the file, and consequently am compelled to say things that I would rather not say. I cannot get the files laid on the Table without submitting an argument in support of the motion. My argument is that no rent has been collected. Rent would have been paid had the forfeiture proceeded, and in that case development in and around the centre would have been more rapid. I cannot support the motion with additional arguments, and so I shall have to resume my seat, submitting the matter to the House. I sincerely hope I shall be afforded an opportunity to see the file. The case made out may appear a great deal worse than it would seem if

one had followed the file through. But having merely piecemeal information, and having to guess at much, one has difficulty in submitting a good argument. I want to ascertain what reasons influenced the Minister. When I have ascertained them, I shall be satisfied. Otherwise I shall have to accept the charges levelled against the Minister and his department as made to me by those who have a great deal of inside information, by reason of having handled the matter at the time.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. M. F. Troy—Mt. Magnet) [4.53]: I am rather sorry for the hon. member if he thinks he has proved the charges made. As a matter of fact, the hon. member has dealt in innuendo, in insinuations as to terrible things happening in the department, which, if rumour is correct—I repeat “if rumour is correct”—ought to be investigated in this House. In a previous speech the hon. member said it was very disagreeable to him to have to make statements to the House on the basis of rumour. In his present speech, however, he says, “I make these statements on the best authority, absolutely reliable authority”; and the hon. member quoted a minute which is on the file. It occurs to me to ask, if he wishes to see the file now, and if he claims that he would not have made the charge if he had seen the file, how did he come to see that minute which he quoted?

Mr. Marshall: I did not see that minute.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Then how did the hon. member get the information?

Mr. Marshall: That is another matter.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It is an extraordinary matter. The hon. member who complains that he has never seen the file makes charges on the authority of an authentic informant and quotes official information to the House. It is a startling thing that a member should quote from a file and yet say that he has never seen the file.

Mr. Marshall: I am not saying the quotation is accurate. I say it is near enough.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: If the informant who gave the hon. member that minute is reliable, he could not be anything else. It is a deplorable state of affairs if there are in the department officers who give information to members who sneak around the department.

Mr. Latham: I have never seen a minute except in the Minister's office.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS: Let me show the attitude of the hon. member, the very hon. member, who is so fair and above-board, the man who does not like saying such things in this House, who is pained by having to make such accusations in the House. The hon. member "doth protest too much." I was in Meekatharra a month ago, and I know that all the things he has said here he has said on the Murchison. Eight or ten persons in Meekatharra told me what the hon. member was going to say when he got back to the House, how he would show me up here. I was corrupt, he said. The hon. member comes to this House and says that the matter is horribly disagreeable to him, that if the Minister had provided the papers there would not have been another word about it. But this disagreeable matter he has already talked about up on the Murchison. The hon. member could have seen the file had he come to my office and asked for it. He could have seen any of these files, and could have got from me a further explanation, as hon. members, my opponents on the other side of the Chamber do. They come to the Minister's office as honest men, put their cards on the table, and get information. They do not play these dirty, despicable games. They do not slander me in the country and then come here saying it is a very disagreeable and most painful duty. There is not a week that hon. members do not come to me at the department on behalf of their constituents. The hon. member who has moved this motion has never done so. He has never asked me to let him see the file. He has come to my office, however, and seen me in regard to matters not connected with his electorate, but connected with the electorates of other hon. members. He said the other night that if I had produced the papers he would not have said another word about the matter. He did not come to me and ask me to treat the matter as formal; he did send a message to ask that. Inasmuch as he has spoken slanderously in the country about these matters, let him make his statements here. Let him come here with all the insinuations he knows so much about. He will remember how the late Mr. Holman was undermined in the Murchison electorate by the allegation that he had taken £5,000 from Millers to betray the Timber Workers'

Union. But, please God, I shall not be undermined by such slanders. The hon. member will not say that I am dishonest. I may on occasions be characterised by leniency, and my humanity may be exploited; but no one will say that I am a dishonest man. Now, what about this case? It is true this lessee took up the land and held it for some time. Mr. Rodan is a returned soldier, and he held that land for some years while I was not Minister for Lands at all. He was notified that if he did not make the improvements required under the Act, the lease would be forfeited. He asked for consideration from me and the Under Secretary, and he got it, in the shape of two months' extension. Then the lease was forfeited. If I remember rightly, another gentleman who sold an interest, getting £2,000 for it, came to me and said, "Can you hold the lease for a while longer? I am going in with Rodan, and we will work the lease." I said, "Yes, I will give you a chance." There is not the slightest reason in the world why I should not have done so. The man in question had some capital, and I think is a returned soldier. The lease is not good land; it is largely spinifex country. The hon. member knows it is not good at all. Mr. Lukin, who applied for it, said it was not much good. I said, "I will give you a few weeks; I will hold it up." It was held up for six weeks. Then the lease was forfeited by me on the 30th July, nothing further having come to hand from those people. There is scarcely a day that somebody does not come to the department to ask if the forfeiture of some lease cannot be held up to give them another opportunity.

Mr. Latham: It is usual; I have made such requests myself.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS: That is all there is about it. It is a case of "Much Ado About Nothing." The hon. member could have had the file had he asked for it. But he did not ask for it. He furtively got behind my back. He may have destroyed others by such means, but he will not destroy me. In any case, I am not the sort of man to take it lying down. Let the hon. member do his best. That is all there is to be said about it. With pleasure I will lay the papers on the Table of the House.

Question put and passed.

The Minister for Lands laid the papers on the Table.

RETURN—GROUP SETTLEMENTS, BUSSELTON.

MR. BARNARD (Sussex) [5.0]: I move—

That a return be laid upon the Table of the House, showing:—(a) The cost of supervision of Group Settlements in the Busselton area for the 12 months ended 30th June, 1929, with particulars showing the salaries and expenses paid to field supervisors, foremen, and other similar officer; also, the upkeep and allowances for motor cars and other vehicles; (b) the amount of money received by the Department from settlers as interest on stock and plant in the same area for the same period.

Settlers in the Busselton area spoke to me regarding the matters covered by the motion and in consequence I asked a question, but the Minister told me that he could not give me an answer and that I should move for a return. The settlers consider that too much expenditure has been incurred in connection with the supervision of the group holdings in the Busselton area, and believe that the cost of their blocks has been increased accordingly. Colour is lent to that suggestion by the action taken by the Valuation Board. The settlers would like to know what amount of money has been paid during the last 12 months under the headings covered by the motion. They consider too many foremen and supervisors are running round in motor cars and horse-drawn vehicles, which require expenditure upon upkeep. They believe that those costs are charged up against their blocks. In their opinion it is unnecessary to have so many of these vehicles running round. Although the point is repeatedly stressed in this House and elsewhere that such a large amount of money has been spent in connection with group settlements, the settlers themselves point out that nothing is ever said about the interest that is collected from them. They would like to know how much money has been collected from the settlers on account of interest upon the cost of their stock and plant.

The Minister for Lands: The settlers have not paid any interest on the land or plant.

MR. BARNARD: But they pay interest on their stock and plant. I have moved the motion so that when the return is furnished the settlers may ascertain the position. It may be that they are wrong in their supposition that undue expense has been incurred in connection with their holdings.

MR. J. H. SMITH (Nelson) [5.3]: I second the motion, although I do not know that it will do much good. What applies to the Busselton area, applies largely to others as well. The Minister suggested in the House that 25 per cent. of the expenditure in connection with group settlement was on account of overhead charges.

The Minister for Lands: Overhead charges cover a lot of items.

MR. J. H. SMITH: Even if we get the figures for one particular area, I do not know that much will be achieved, but I presume the people in the Sussex electorate have asked for the information. It will mean a fair amount of work for the officers concerned before they can provide the Minister with the necessary information for presentation to Parliament. Of course we know that the Minister, through the Group Settlement Board, has received money from the settlers on account of interest upon their stock and plant. A lot of that money has been paid in respect of dead, or repossessed stock. I am sure that the settlers generally will be glad to get the information that is sought by the hon. member.

On motion by the Minister for Lands, debate adjourned.

BILLS (3)—THIRD READING.

- 1, Transfer of Land Act Amendment.
- 2, Industries Assistance Act Continuance.
- 3, Stamp Act Amendment.

Transmitted to the Legislative Council.

BILL—WATER BOARDS ACT AMENDMENT.

Third Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL WATER SUPPLIES (Hon. J. Cunningham—Kalgoorlie) [5.10]: I move—

That the Bill be now read a third time.

MR. STUBBS (Wagin) [5.11]: Before the motion is put, I desire to make an explanation regarding the Bill. I was called away last evening and when I returned the second reading debate had concluded. In view of statements made by some hon. members, I wish to make the reason clear to the House why the Bill was introduced.

About 18 or 19 years ago the Government of the day decided to provide a water supply for Wagin. The work was carried out at a cost of £18,000. It was done against the advice of a number of men who knew more about local conditions and the holding capacity of the country, as well as other phases of the scheme, than did the departmental officers. The Government of the day decided to follow the advice of their engineers. The result was a howling failure. Successive Governments have sent Ministers and expert officers to inspect the scheme and when they saw the work that had been carried out, they wondered how any sensible engineer could have been responsible for such a failure. Eventually the present Government decided to construct an entirely new water scheme, under certain conditions, at a cost in the neighbourhood of £30,000. The capital cost of the old scheme had been written down several times by past Governments until it stood on the books at a valuation of between £6,000 and £7,000. When the new scheme was evolved by the present Engineer-in-Chief, approval was given by the Premier for the expenditure of the necessary money. Last evening certain criticism was levelled against the Bill on the ground that it would create a dangerous precedent. I am sure that those hon. members who spoke in that strain could not have been conversant with the facts, or they would not have offered any such criticism. That brings me to the point that an hon. member, when speaking in another place last week, took the Government to task for the wrongful expenditure of money without parliamentary sanction. My attention was drawn to those statements by a Minister of the Crown, and I immediately despatched a letter to the mayor and councillors of Wagin asking them to explain how the information embodied in the statements made in the Legislative Council had been furnished to the hon. member who had spoken, and to advise whether that hon. member's speech met with the approval of the people of Wagin. Last night the following telegram reached me and, in fairness to the Government, I think I should read it to the House. It was as follows:—

The following resolution was unanimously carried last night at a council meeting:—
 "Members of the Wagin Council and Water Board very much regret that material and

correspondence supplied by the town clerk to a member of Parliament in connection with his speech in the Upper House was given without the slightest knowledge or consent of members of the council or of the water board, and further the council and citizens of Wagin very much appreciate what the Government have done for them in supplying a new water scheme and also hospital accommodation.

The object of the Bill is to ratify the agreement entered into between the Government and the council under which, instead of a rate of 6d. in the pound being levied, the residents of Wagin will rate themselves up to 3s. in the pound. Annually the council levy a rate on the people. Last November they levied a rate of sixpence in the pound. The new water scheme had not come under the control of the Wagin people at that time. In the month of February or March one of the Ministers went down and handed over the key of the engine room to the citizens of Wagin, on the distinct understanding that a rate of three shillings in the pound would be levied for the unexpired portion of the financial year. In other words, November, December and January were three months of the expired portion of the year, and the people were rated sixpence in the pound on those three months. In fairness to the Government and one of the obligations that made the Premier accede to the request that he should spend some thirty odd thousand pounds the council unanimously decided that for the balance of the year they would strike a rate of three shillings in the pound. Afterwards it was found there might be some questions raised by a taxpayer of Wagin, who contended it was illegal for the council to strike two rates in one year, one of sixpence for a portion of the year, and the other of three shillings for the balance of the year. At the time this question was raised the Government decided that if the Crown Law Department could not give an assurance that the ratepayer who objected to being called upon to pay three shillings in the pound was wrong in his contention, the Government themselves as soon as the House met would bring in a Bill to ratify the agreement honourably entered into by the citizens of Wagin. I may say the agreement was the more readily entered into for the reason that during the last 15 years, for the greater part of each summer the water supply of Wagin has been so indifferent that at times one could have a

mud bath if he wanted it. Consequently the people of Wagin were so pleased at getting the new scheme that they were quite willing to tax themselves to the maximum amount under the Act. All I desire to do is to make it clear that the people of Wagin were not aware that the criticism that was levelled against the Bill emanated from any person residing in Wagin. I have pleasure in supporting the third reading.

HON. SIR JAMES MITCHELL (Northam) [5.18]: I think the hon. member misunderstands the position and overlooks the fact that the Bill has general application and does not particularly concern itself with Wagin. Indeed Wagin is not mentioned in the Bill. We were discussing the Bill in its general application, and not as it happened to apply to Wagin.

The Premier: But there was a statement made in another place, where an hon. member referred to it on the Address-in-reply. He was dealing with exactly the same thing.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: But our discussion here was on the general application of the Bill, not its special application as affecting Wagin.

The Premier: But that member in another place spoke of its special application to Wagin.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: It was its general application to which members here objected.

The Minister for Agricultural Water Supplies: An occurrence similar to this might happen again.

The Premier: It might even occur at Northam.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I hope it will not happen again at Wagin, where the water supply should now be perfectly satisfactory. Also I hope they will be able to get through without a three shilling rate.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

BILL—VERMIN ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

MR. SAMPSON (Swan) [5.21]: In moving the second reading said: This is a very small measure, and the desire expressed in it is a very simple one. The Bill aims to

exempt religious bodies, public hospitals, orphanages and other charitable institutions from the incidence of the vermin tax. The Vermin Act of 1918, Section 100A, Subsection 1 provides that every owner of a holding shall pay to the Minister annually on demand at rate of such amount as may be fixed by the Minister by notice in the "Gazette." Then there is a proviso exempting certain properties, and Sub-section 3 reads: "This section shall not apply to any holding which does not exceed 160 acres in area." When the Act was before the House the point as to the imposition of tax on religious or charitable bodies was not discussed. By some means it was overlooked. The principle of non-taxation of the lands of religious or charitable institutions is recognised in various other Acts. In the Municipal Corporations Act for instance land belonging to churches or hospitals or charitable institutions is not liable to rating. The same applies to the Road Districts Act, and the principle is carried further in the Traffic Act, where a minister of religion working for his church is allowed to have one vehicle free of tax for that purpose. I do not know that I need say any more. The measure is entirely a non-party one, and I submit that the non-exemption of those lands was entirely an oversight when the Bill amending the Vermin Act was before the House. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Premier, debate adjourned.

PAPERS—PASTORAL LEASE 3496/96.

Debate resumed from 14th August on the following motion by Mr. Marshall—

That the file appertaining to pastoral lease No. 3496/96, and held in the name of G. S., I. S., and H. C. Herbert, situated east of Meekatharra, be laid upon the Table of the House.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. M. F. Troy—Mt. Magnet) [5.25]: Here again the hon. member could have got these papers and seen the file by applying to me at my office. The hon. member would thus have saved himself what he pretends was a disagreeable task in recommending his motion to the House. This again is one of the subjects to which he has referred in the back country, declaring what he would do when he obtained the papers asked for. The

hon. member in speaking to the Address-in-reply last year referred to areas of pastoral country between Meekatharra and Wiluna which he said were being held for speculative purposes. He made particular reference to one block, but did not give the name of the lessee. Here is a paragraph from the hon. member's speech on that occasion—

What particularly stirs me to mention all this is that recently there were in Wiluna two young men, both possessed of any amount of money, in search of pastoral country. They had travelled throughout the eastern gold-fields, the greater portion of the East Murchison and over the Murchison areas, but they found it impossible to obtain any pastoral country within reasonable distance of a railway or a port. I took the lithograph they had in their possession, and showed them land aggregating in four blocks a little over a million acres of pastoral country. I indicated the names of the present owners. One of these is the name of a man who is an important citizen in the State. This land has never been improved or stocked.

Mr. Marshall: That is not the block.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It would be interesting to know why he referred to an important citizen in the State, and why he has called for these papers regarding a person who holds but an unimportant position, a hard-working honest man. Why has the hon. member not called for the papers regarding the wealthy lessee since that occasion last year when he mentioned this important citizen? Is it not extraordinary? Why should he table a motion of this kind? The hon. member said he had mentioned this particular case to me. As a matter of fact, he did not. But he did mention to me the person referred to in the motion discussed a few minutes ago—Mr. Rodan. And when he discussed that person on the Estimates in his usual manner, the lease referred to had been forfeited. It was forfeited before the hon. member made his speech. But he never referred to Mr. Herbert's lease when speaking to me later. What are the facts in regard to Mr. Herbert? The lease, which is the subject of this motion, was not taken up for speculative purposes. I know that, because the lessee is not by any means a speculator in the way in which that term is understood. It was taken up by Mr. Herbert with the laudable intention to develop a pastoral lease for his son. It is admitted that the improvements required by the Act were not made, but this was entirely due

to the lessee's inability to get finance, and to his own illness and that of his wife. Reference was made by the hon. member to Mr. Snell, in order to compare the treatment meted out to him with that meted out to Mr. Herbert. He said that Mr. Snell had done a lot of pioneering in the State, and that this had entitled him to every consideration at the hands of the State. Mr. Snell has done a lot of pioneering, is entitled to consideration, and would have received it had he approached me. When Mr. Snell's leases were forfeited, they were forfeited under the rule that if a lessee is one day in arrears with his rents, his leases at once become liable to forfeiture.

Mr. Mann: Are they automatically forfeited?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: They are forfeitable if they are one day in arrears for rent. The person who is in arrears may ask for consideration. If he is a good type of man, and even if he is a poor type of man, he frequently receives that consideration. Mr. Snell wrote to me but I was in New Zealand. Had I been here his leases would not have been forfeited. As it was they were forfeited. The member for Mount Margaret then put in a letter on behalf of Mr. Snell. He did his best for Mr. Snell with the result that his leases were restored to him. He was also given time in which to pay his rents. Every consideration asked for was meted out to him. There is nothing wrong about that. It is done every day in the week in the office. The member for Mount Margaret did the usual thing, and other members are continually doing the same thing. He represented Mr. Snell as a struggling man who could not meet his liabilities and when he had put up the facts Mr. Snell received consideration. This sort of thing is done year in and year out on behalf of people who cannot meet their liabilities. What the member for Mount Margaret was lauded for doing on behalf of Mr. Snell I am slandered for because of the treatment I meted out to Mr. Herbert. Mr. Snell is a hard worker and a good pioneer. The same can be said of Mr. Herbert. The latter is a pioneer in both the mining and the agricultural industries. He was in the back country 35 years ago, prospecting, mining, well-sinking, fencing, and teamstering. He has never been anything else but a hard working and honest man, trying to make good in the country

and paying his debts. I have known him for years. When he first took up the leases and failed to get the necessary finance he wrote to me. I was not Minister for Lands then, but knowing him to be an honest man I was able to get time for him in which to pay his rents, and he paid them. There is a note on the file by Mr. Morris dated the 19th January, 1926, saying, "Rents paid to date." There is another note by Mr. Morris stating, "Rents paid to 31/12/26." I came into office in 1927. Mr. Herbert called on me. He did not approach me this time about rents. He was in very poor health at the time as was also his wife. He was in financial difficulties and had not been paying his rent. He came to tell me he could not go on with the business as he had no support, and asked my permission to transfer his leases. I always come down upon a mere speculator, but I have never refused a hard working and honest man, and one who has deserved well of the country. I never will refuse help to such a man.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Why should you?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, why should I? An hon. member may say to me "This man is a good trier, he has had a bad time and has bitten off more than he can chew. He has taken on responsibilities he cannot carry. Will you give him time in which to pay?" In such a case I always will give a man time, and will never press down anyone in difficulties. If Mr. Herbert had been a man who had just dropped into the country, and taken up land with the object of selling it to some other person, he would have had no consideration from me. Mr. Herbert, however, is still a farmer at Hines Hill, and has done all kinds of hard work to make a living. He is one of the men who has made this country. It is a deplorable thing that men who have pioneered the country as Mr. Herbert has done, who have put their money into it, and have developed it, should now be shot at in the House by a man who has never put a shilling into the country, and never will do so. Because of Mr. Herbert's health I gave him permission to transfer his lease. At that time I think his rent was up to date. I gave permission to transfer on condition that the rents were paid up to a specified

date, and that the transferee submitted particulars as to the contemplated development to the satisfaction of the department. That was a few months after I came into office. The purchasers of the lease got into difficulties and had to call a meeting of their creditors. This held up the lease until 1928. In July of that year the solicitors for Mr. Herbert informed the department that he would resume possession of the leases and pay all the rents due. When this letter was received from the solicitors I instructed the Under Secretary to take necessary precautions, as legal issues might be involved, and I did not wish the Department to be embroiled. In August Mr. Herbert paid £140 off the rents. The rental is £197 a year, quite a tidy sum. He paid £140 off the arrears, leaving £119 19s. due. This represented a little over half the year's rent. I sent him to Mr. O'Dell, and he told Mr. O'Dell that he was going straight on to the lease with one of his sons to commence the work of developing it. On the 19th February of this year Mr. Herbert, in addition to improving his holding, paid off an additional £50 from the rental due. Is not that evidence that this man was trying to meet his obligations? At the end of last year he owed arrears to the amount of £103, from which he wiped off £50 in February of this year. This left less than a year's rental in arrears. Mr. Baker, to whom the hon. member referred, made application for the forfeiture of the lease in November, 1927. That could not receive attention because at the time Mr. Herbert had permission to transfer. When the application came to the department, the forfeiture could not be considered. When Mr. Herbert took up the lease no one else wanted it. The area is spoken of as a good piece of country. If so, why did it remain unwanted for all those years? Mr. Herbert took up the lease at a time when his age should have caused him to think about retiring from working and considering his health. Instead of doing that we find him starting out again to pioneer a piece of new country. We now find his representatives in this House shooting at him, though shooting not so much at him as at me. I guarantee that the hon. member is not game to face Mr. Herbert and tell him what he has said here and in the country.

Mr. Marshall: I have no grudge against Mr. Herbert.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Of course not.

Mr. Marshall: It is the administration I am finding fault with.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Under the Land Act I have given reasonable and decent consideration to men who have deserved it.

Mr. Marshall: That is all the information that is wanted.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Is it? The hon. member could have obtained that information by coming to my office.

Mr. Marshall: I do not propose to go to your office.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: But the hon. member did come to my office on behalf of others outside his constituency. He did not want to come to my office about Mr. Herbert. He would rather go to the department and obtain surreptitiously extracts from the minutes on the file so that he might slander me.

Mr. Marshall: That is untrue.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Then where did the hon. member get the information? The file had never been out of the department, but the hon. member was able to quote word for word and letter for letter from it.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: You do not say that the file was in your room all the time.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No.

Mr. Corboy: No member should go to an officer of the department for that sort of thing.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Of course not.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Imagine any member going to one of the officers and trying to get from him, information on which to attack the Minister! Imagine a member trying to induce an officer to be disloyal to his Minister and betray him.

Mr. Marshall: That is not correct.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Where did the information come from?

Mr. Marshall: That is all right.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member must explain that. I know nothing more despicable than that a member should go to a Minister's department, and induce some disloyal servant to allow him to inspect the minutes on the file, and later use the information on the floor of the House. Baker's application for forfeiture was not entertained for the reason I have given. Members realise

how difficult and costly it is to develop a pastoral lease. Whereas the Land Act is most liberal to agriculturists, it is most harsh to pastoral lessees. It is so harsh to pastoralists that no man unless he has a lot of capital can possibly embark upon the pastoral industry. A poor man has no hope, because our Land Act is insistent that he shall pay half the rent from the very day he goes on to the holding. He receives no railway facilities and no financial assistance. He has to pay rates and taxes from the day he takes up the lease. He goes out into the country away from schools and every other facility. He has to pay for the haulage over a long mileage of railways for all his windmills, piping and other station materials. He is the most handicapped man in the country.

Mr. Latham: Although he is doing such valuable work.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes. If he does fail occasionally and cannot meet his liabilities, and if he is a trier, I am not going to penalise him unduly. The agriculturist gets five years rent free. He receives financial assistance. He gets a hundred and one concessions, railway transport, water supplies, schools and other advantages. In my opinion the man who goes out and develops the pastoral holding with limited resources is bound to be in trouble sooner or later. That was the unfortunate position of the man whose lease is now under discussion. It is not extraordinary that lessees should be unable to pay their rents. This man was one year in arrears at the end of 1928. What is the position with regard to lessees who are in arrears with their rents? The arrears due by landholders in the country, both agricultural and pastoral, totalled last year no less than £167,766.

The Premier: No wonder I have a deficit.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: It has always been the same.

Mr. Latham: It must be so in a new country like ours.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I would like to quote a few instances just to show how far some leaseholders are in arrear of rent. One man owes no less a sum than £1,018. He is on a repurchased estate and the amount represents about eight years' rent. Only last week an hon. member of this House brought to me a person whose lease had just been forfeited. The settler owed eight years' rent and he never re-

plied to any of the letters sent to him by the department; he ignored every one of them. It might be said that the administration in that respect is lax, but I do not send out the letters and I have no knowledge of these matters until some hon. member comes to me and represents the case by saying, "This is a hard case; the man has done his best." I can instance the case of another man whose annual rental is £20 and who owes £121, which represents six years' rent.

Mr. Kenneally: Apparently the State is a much more lenient landlord than the private individual.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Another man who has held his country for 20 years and whose lease has expired owes £93 15s. He was to have paid only £3 14s. 2d. annually. Another client is in arrears to the extent of £460.

The Premier: I hope these figures will not be published.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Here are the explanations. One states—

In April last lessee promised to pay 12 months' rent, but despite two reminders payment has not been made. The matter will be referred to the Agricultural Bank who hold a mortgage.

Here is another—

Lessee paid £109 in March, 1929, and promised a further £100 before the end of March, and more, later on in the year. In response to a reminder about the £100, the lessee stated that owing to the low price of wheat it was taking him all his time to pull through and get a crop in.

In this case protection was granted till harvest. Mr. Snell got the consideration to which he was entitled, and so will every other settler in this State. A return which I have shows the arrears of rent to amount to no less a sum than £167,000. Does that show that the State is not giving consideration to the settlers?

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: It has been the same for years and years.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That is so. In many cases settlers struggle on and pay their rents and when they get financial assistance from some institution, they make good. Mr. Snell wrote to me and I was struck by some of the remarks in his letter. He said in his communication—

With the rents paid on the leases I intend to dismantle the windmills and pull the wire out of the fences, and abandon the leases if the Land Act does not prevent my doing so

I shall be glad to hear from you if I can do this. I have shifted my wife and family to town, and am now selling what cattle have not been driven away. It is impossible to get a living out of cattle stations; the land rents, taxes, etc., take the lot. The lands are good but the burdens are too heavy. Sheep alone will pay under such damnable conditions, and there is only one out of every 50 leaseholders that can finance sheep. Proof of this lies in the fact that 160 miles square of country north of Wiluna and east of the rabbit fence, the most of which is held under lease without a single hoof of stock on it, Yandil alone excepted, is some of the finest sheep land in the State, and there are millions more awaiting development now breeding vermin; rabbits are increasing by the thousand, and the dingos, unmolested, is further afield. All I ask of you, after 10 years' battle on the land, is time to pay the rent, and the right to pull the windmills down and the wire out of the fences.

Mr. Snell says that there are 100 miles square of country without a hoof of stock, representing 6,400,000 acres, and the hon. member said not a word about that. He preferred to go after the scalp of Mr. Herbert. The Agricultural Bank is financing Mr. Snell who has had an advance of £1,000. If Mr. Herbert, is a wise man, he, too, will go to the Agricultural Bank and try to get assistance. It has always been my policy in the department that when I know a man is a pioneer worker and is honest, then if he cannot meet his obligation, I always assist him. My policy is that by their merits they shall be judged. But in the case of a man as old as Mr. Herbert, he is courageous to undertake such a responsibility. He can have but a few years of life left, and in going out pioneering again, with limited financial resources, he can only undergo hardship and difficulty. In giving him the consideration I extended to him, I did what I would do for any other man in this country. I have no objection whatever to placing the papers on the Table of the House.

Question put and passed.

The Minister laid the papers on the Table

BILL—AGRICULTURAL LANDS PURCHASE ACT AMENDMENT.

In Committee.

Mr. Lacey in the Chair the Minister for Lands in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Grants of holdings to group settlers:

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Last evening I drew attention to a clause in the board's report and to the manner in which it is worded, especially the final paragraph, which may be read in more than one way. Is the price of the land included in the amount set against each holding? The wording is anything but clear. The board told the Minister they had included the value of the land in the price they fixed, as the price paid for the block.

The Minister for Lands: I discussed this matter thoroughly with the board. They have included the value of the land in the valuation.

Clause put and passed.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment and the report adopted.

BILL—MAIN ROADS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

MR. C. P. WANSBROUGH (Beverley) [6.0]: I have little to say about the first of the proposed amendments. In fact there is only one controversial feature and that is the 25 per cent. contribution of traffic fees to be paid by local authorities to the Main Roads Board in accordance with the agreement arrived at between the executive of the Local Governing Bodies Association and the Minister. It is surprising to me that the executive should have agreed to the proposal. While they as a body may be voicing the opinion of some of the boards, there are quite a number of country boards who will not receive the suggestion with favour. Many of them, I consider, will be in a worse position than they occupy at present. Many country boards, in fact, will have to pay 200 or 300 per cent. more than they are paying now.

Mr. Ferguson: That will be only for the time being.

Mr. C. P. WANSBROUGH: No. I am referring to the country road boards, more particularly those in the wheat areas. Those

beyond the outskirts of settlement have the pioneering problems to face and their contributions under the present incidence of assessment have been light, and were likely to be light for many years. As soon as they come under the 25 per cent. provision, however, they will find themselves liable for a contribution of about £1,000, whereas they are now paying less than £100. I know that a number of boards are not at all satisfied with the proposal. There is no chance of getting a petrol tax, which in my opinion would be a fair proposition. The Bill, however, should be referred to a select committee in order that the position might be clarified. We could then arrive at a fair decision, instead of risking the dissatisfaction between the road boards and the Main Roads Board that is likely to arise if this proposal is adopted. The Minister, in introducing the Bill, spoke of keeping the Main Roads Board free from political influence. In the past many difficulties have arisen between the Main Roads Board and local authorities, and members of Parliament have succeeded in bringing about an agreement. While I agree with the general principle enunciated by the Minister, it should not be overlooked that members of Parliament have proved of material help to the country road boards. Under the suggested amendment, we may have access to the Minister, but I am afraid there will be delays that we shall be unable to obviate. If the Bill becomes law, I foresee increased taxation for the ratepayers, because the average of traffic fees collected in the country centres ranges between £2,000 and £3,000, and to have £800 or £700 deducted to meet Main Roads Board expenses spread over a term of 10 years will necessitate that amount being made up in other ways. For that reason the Bill should receive mature consideration before it is placed on the statute-book. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will accept the suggestion of the member for Swan and be reasonable.

MR. FERGUSON (Moore) [6.5]: It is absolutely necessary in the interests of the local governing bodies, as well as of the Government and the State generally, that efforts should be made to improve the Main Roads Act. The provision in the Act delegating to the Main Roads Board the power to allocate certain

sums to be paid by road boards on account of the benefit they derive from the construction of roads in or adjoining their territory is absurd. I cannot understand how the Main Roads Board, the Minister, or any other human being, could equitably assess the value of the expenditure on any particular road to any particular local authority. That provision in the Act, more than anything else I know of, has caused dissatisfaction among local governing bodies from one end of the State to the other. Repeated protests have been made to the Minister against the allocations, together with requests to have them held up. Practically every board in the State has lodged an objection against the allocations. The Minister now proposes that the allocations for the first year be wiped out. I hope he will agree to the same thing being done for the second year also. If we agree that the present provision is unsatisfactory, it is natural to expect that we should have something to suggest in its stead. Every local authority was in hopes that some *modus vivendi* might be found to permit of the imposition of a petrol tax. That proposal having fallen through, it seems that there is no more suitable way of financing Main Roads Board expenditure than the one proposed in the Bill. While local governing bodies object strongly to having to forego any portion of their motor license fees, most of them nevertheless realise that it will be far more satisfactory to have a definite and easily calculated contribution for which they know they will be liable. They will know exactly what they will be required to pay each year to finance expenditure on main roads. In addition, they will have the satisfaction of knowing that it will not be at the whim of the Main Roads Board whether they have to pay a large or small amount towards the expenditure on a road which may pass through their territory or nowhere near it. While they do not wish to part with any portion of their traffic fees, they have come to the conclusion that it will be far more satisfactory for them to have the contribution fixed on a definite basis. The provision to deduct 25 per cent. of the motor traffic fees and pay it into a trust fund at the Treasury will operate somewhat harshly in isolated instances. There are certain districts where there has been very little expenditure on

main road construction either within or near their territory. Consequently the allocations to those boards have been very small. Now, however, they will be called upon to pay 25 per cent. of their motor traffic fees, which will be much more than they are paying under the present allocation. However, we must take the broader view and consider the effect on the local authorities generally. According to the Bill, the boards in the northern part of the State will be exempt and only local authorities in the lower parts of the State will be concerned. If we take as a basis the probable expenditure over a period of 10 years, as suggested by the Federal Aid Roads Act, it will be found that the local authorities in the country districts as a whole will be better off under the 25 per cent. provision than under the scheme at present in operation. Certain individual boards will find that the 25 per cent. provision will press hardly on their finances, but it is not possible to legislate for individual boards. We have to consider how the proposal will affect the great majority of the boards and their ratepayers, and the opinion is that a fixed contribution will be far more satisfactory than the present arrangement. Provision is made that the Main Roads Board shall not incur any expenditure exceeding £1,000 without first having obtained the written consent of the Minister. That seems to be unnecessary, especially in view of the statement made on various occasions that the Main Roads Board is entirely free from political influence. If political influence cannot operate, why should it be necessary for the board to have to secure the consent of the Minister previous to being permitted to incur expenditure of more than £1,000? Surely such a board should have that privilege, and should not have to run to the Minister every time they wish to spend a paltry £1,000. The provision that the board may determine the respective liability of each local authority for expenditure on a road which forms a common boundary is a common-sense one, and should commend itself to members. Under the Road Districts Act, where a road forms a common boundary between two districts, each board is called upon to pay 50 per cent. of any expenditure on the road. In many instances that provision has proved to be manifestly unfair. A road may be a common boundary between two districts, but it may be used mainly by the

ratepayers of one district, and it is very hard on the other board, who have little use for the road, to have to contribute 50 per cent. of any expenditure on the road. The provision in the Bill is a wise one. I suggest to the Minister that a great deal of the work of the Main Roads Board has been largely of an experimental nature and that a lot of the money spent during the first year or two of the board's operations was spent extravagantly. In many instances the work was carried out at exorbitant cost.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.00 p.m.

MR. FERGUSON: Prior to the tea adjournment I had expressed the hope that the Minister would see fit to waive the charges for the 1927-28 period as well as for the 1926-27 period, in view of the fact that the initial stages of the Main Roads Board were largely of an experimental nature. The board had been newly constituted, and was called upon to carry on work that for years had been carried on by the Public Works Department. They were largely new to the job. If hon. members will cast back their minds to the commencement of the Main Roads Board's operations, and recall the conditions under which they started, members must realise the immensity of the task that was taken on under extremely difficult circumstances. The board were housed in a couple of rooms adjoining the Public Works Department in the Old Barracks. The place is one that in my boyhood days was used as a stable, a miserable old building where the board experienced great difficulty in accommodating their staff. There was not room in it to swing a decent-sized cat, let alone run an undertaking of the size of the Main Roads Board. Thus their task was most difficult. In view of those circumstances I suggest to the Minister that it would be fair, instead of having the charge levied on the local governing bodies throughout the State, to meet it out of Consolidated Revenue, the State as a whole thus bearing the burden.

MR. BROWN (Pingelly) [7.33]: It has been suggested that the Bill should be referred to a select committee. I consider that course advisable. Many hon. members really do not understand the position, and we have been told that there is difference of opinion among the road boards. The conference of those bodies, it is said, did not

agree to this proposal at all; but evidently the executive of the road boards, in conjunction with the Minister, agreed upon the alterations. A select committee could take evidence from the various road boards, and this would be of the utmost advantage to the House and to the boards themselves. There is a great difference between the old-established road boards and new boards outback. Very few main roads, if any, have been declared outback by the Main Roads Board. Most of the expenditure hitherto has been in the districts of old-established boards. For example, there is the road from York to Katanning, and even further on, which has been declared a main road. Only portions of it are now in good order. Similarly we have some of the worst roads imaginable, simply because the road boards say, "This is a main road, and we do not care about spending any money at all on it." Another consideration is the petrol tax, though that matter really has nothing to do with the Bill. Even with regard to that there is difference of opinion. Some boards favour such a tax as being the most equitable. Others are dead against it because they depend on carriage license fees for much of their revenue. Many boards have between 300 and 400 cars in their districts, and on these cars the tax would average £6 or £7. If the greater part of that revenue is taken from the boards, it will make a serious difference. The select committee could go into these questions, and obtain information which would be most useful. The 25 per cent. proposal looks all right, but the question should be fully discussed and thoroughly examined. I repeat, old-established boards are in an altogether different category from boards outback. As to developmental roads, the Minister said the Main Roads Board had no control whatever over them, and that there was no such idea as handing them over to that board. But there must be something to that effect in the parent Act, because the Bill proposes to repeal a certain section. Developmental roads should be absolutely under the control of the road boards, since these are roads which will not be declared main roads, and are required by the ratepayers of the various road boards for the purpose of getting their produce to market. To my mind the system of declaring main roads is altogether wrong. Most of our

main roads run parallel with railway lines, and sometimes only a chain or two away from them. The main road which I mentioned just now is practically alongside the railway. Thus we are building roads to compete with our railway system, a plan which I consider absolutely wrong. If left in the hands of the road boards, these roads would be in a much better condition than they are in at present. For any work costing over £1,000 the consent of the Minister must be obtained before the letting of a contract. I wish to emphasise that most of our road boards do splendid work. They have good plants, and whenever they succeed in getting a contract they carry it out well. Undoubtedly the money is well spent by them. There is no extravagance, and a considerable area of ground is covered for the funds expended. We should let as many contracts as possible to road boards that have good plant and in the past have done such good work. Not for a moment do I suggest that the Minister would withhold his consent to such a proposal, but still we are giving him tremendous power.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Too much power.

Mr. BROWN: Yes, too much altogether.

The Minister for Works: Where is the Minister given such power?

Mr. BROWN: As regards all works costing more than £1,000.

The Minister for Works: Who is going to find the money—the Main Roads Board?

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Yes.

The Minister for Works: Where will they get it?

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: From the people.

Mr. BROWN: Tenders would not be called unless the necessary funds were available.

The Minister for Works: How do you know?

Mr. BROWN: I do not suppose the Minister would allow a tender to be called if there was not money to pay for the work. I rose chiefly to support the suggestion that the Bill be referred to a select committee. That course will be advantageous to Parliament and to the road boards.

MR. J. H. SMITH (Nelson) [7.41]: I do not know that it is necessary to refer the Bill to a select committee. Even if that course were adopted, I doubt whether much enlightenment would be gained. The present position has arisen mainly through a misunderstanding between the Main Roads Board and the various local authorities. Confusion and much dissatisfaction have been created among the local authorities by the levies imposed by the Main Roads Board in respect of roads not passing through the territories of the local authorities. The position became so acute that the local authorities protested to the Minister and to the Main Roads Board. Thus a deadlock arose. The 25 per cent. proposal strikes me as unfair on the basis which has been agreed to, namely that the Commonwealth, for the Main Roads Board, should find £300,000 odd annually, while the State Government and local authorities should contribute 15s. to the pound of Federal money. Roads were to be constructed from borrowed money, and the local authorities were to contribute according to their traffic fees or mileage of road an average of £100 to £200; but on the 25 per cent. basis proposed by the Minister to be taken out of the traffic fees, which were supposed to be sacred, the local authorities would be called upon to contribute an average of between £400 and £600. Apparently the Minister is going to obtain much more revenue under the Bill than was intended by the parent Act. I am afraid the local authorities will be deprived of revenue which they cannot afford to lose in view of their heavy commitments. Developmental roads have to be maintained entirely by the local authorities. On top of that, and on top of the cost of rate collection, they have all the feeder roads to construct to the railways. In the case of new selections the local authority is called upon to provide roads; that is not a Government function. At one time the local authorities were assisted by the Government pound for pound to make and maintain main roads. The Main Roads Board are getting into their stride very much better than was the case in the earlier stages, and the community at large, as well as the local authorities, are becoming better satisfied. Still, local boards cannot afford to pay 25 per cent. of their traffic fees to the Main Roads Board. And who knows that there may not be another amending Bill? If the Act is broken in this respect—the traffic fees were supposed

to belong in their entirety to the local authorities—who knows that the Minister may not next session demand 33 per cent or 40 per cent. of the fees?

The Premier: It is not a sound reason to refuse a thing because something more may be demanded next year.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: That is my very reason. I am afraid that may occur. The Premier has practically admitted that 40 per cent., or even 50 per cent., may be required next year. The Government are getting in the thin edge of the wedge.

The Premier: This is by consent of the organisation.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Yes; but last year's Road Boards Conference decided unanimously that in view of all conditions and circumstances they would oppose any scheme or action on the part of the Main Roads Board to take away traffic fees. I emphasise that that resolution was carried unanimously, that local authorities were promised that their traffic fees would not be interfered with. Since then a deadlock has occurred, and the executive of the Road Boards Association agreed with the Minister that this amending Bill should be accepted and that 25 per cent. of their traffic fees should be taken away. I cannot speak on behalf of all the local authorities in my electorate because I have not had sufficient time to communicate with them. I know they appreciate what has been done. In the older settled districts the scheme may not give rise to hardships, but has the Minister taken into consideration the effect it will have upon the local authorities in the outback areas? They may be called upon to pay £400 or £500 to the Main Roads Board, and yet they may not have any money spent in their districts for many years to come! I presume the Minister will not oppose the Bill going to a select committee if the House desires that course to be followed, but I shall vote against the Main Roads Board receiving 25 per cent. of the traffic fees of local authorities, because I do not think they can shoulder such an impost.

MR. GRIFFITHS (Avon) [7.46]: The main proposal embodied in the Bill regarding the levy of 25 per cent. on traffic fees represents a serious matter for the local governing authorities in new areas. I sent telegrams to six road boards in my electorate and I have received replies from

three. I find that last year the Merredin Road Board collected £2,800 on account of traffic fees and 25 per cent. of that will mean that they will contribute £700 to the funds of the Main Roads Board. Last year the charge against that board was £45, so the proposal embodied in the Bill will represent a difference of £655 in the amount the Merredin Road Board may be called upon to contribute.

The Premier: Did the Merredin Road Board pay the £45?

Mr. GRIFFITHS: Regarding the Cunderdin-Meckering Road Board, the traffic fees collected last year amounted to £3,232, and 25 per cent. of that will mean £808. The charge against that board for the last financial year was £73, so that the increased amount that board will have to contribute will be £735.

The Premier: Did the board pay the £73?

Mr. GRIFFITHS: Then the Kellerberrin Road Board collected £2,624 3s. 11d. on account of traffic fees last year and 25 per cent. of that represents £696. The charge against the Kellerberrin Road Board was £44 10s. 5d. in the first place and later there was another charge of £25 1s. 5d., making a total charge of £65 19s. 10d. In that instance the difference will be about £531. The member for Nelson (Mr. J. H. Smith) said that the proposal embodied in the Bill would mean a difference of anything from £400 to £600. In the instances I have quoted the differences will be £655, £735, and £581. The attitude adopted by the Executive of the Road Boards Association seems to be extraordinary. The Minister says that the executive prompted him to introduce the Bill making provision for the collection of 25 per cent. of the traffic fees. If that is so, it is apparent that the executive of the Road Boards Association are out of step with many of the local governing authorities. I well remember a resolution carried at one of the road board conferences in which it was set out that the revenue the local authorities received from traffic fees should be regarded as the unalienable property of the road boards. The statements made by the member for Nelson regarding the Main Roads Board apply to a certain extent, but I contend that more expensive methods of road construction have been introduced in many

of the country districts since that body was established. I am afraid the craze for going in for a programme of road construction that is on far too ambitious a scale will create more difficulties in the future. I am inclined to think that we would have been better off had there been no Federal money available in connection with our road construction.

Mr. J. H. Smith: No.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: There has been much waste of money, and expensive methods have been introduced in the construction of roads. I need refer only to the much quoted instance of the Canning-road which cost £10,000 a mile. I know that is not a Federal matter, but it has a bearing on the methods that have been adopted in the construction of main roads throughout our State. When we consider that the eight or nine miles of road in that instance will represent something like an expenditure of £1,000 per mile for interest over the next 20 years, when the loan will mature, it will be seen that, even though the money in the sinking fund will earn interest in the meantime, the whole thing is wrong. It appears to me that the executive of the Road Boards Association have turned a complete somersault. In common with the member for Nelson, I know that protests have been coming forward from the local authorities, and those protests are well grounded.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: We shall see that justice is done.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: Members of Parliament are in earnest in seeing that the interests of their electors are safeguarded, and I ask the House to consider seriously the effect the Bill will have on road boards throughout the State. At the outset the State was applauded for taking advantage of the cheap money made available by the Commonwealth for road construction, but I consider that we are not in a position to embark upon a huge road construction programme on such an ambitious scale.

On motion by Mr. Doney, debate adjourned.

BILL—LAND AGENTS.

In Committee.

Mr. Lutey in the Chair; the Minister for Justice in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1 and 2—agreed to.

Clause 3—Land agent defined:

Mr. SAMPSON: I move an amendment—

That in line 3, after "whose," the word "principal" be inserted.

I presume it is not intended to bring under the provisions of the measure anyone who deals in land to a minor degree.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: It is not desirable that anyone shall be allowed to blow into the land agency business and perhaps engage in fraudulent dealing. If the amendment were agreed to, it would make the position more difficult. A man might say he was running a barber's shop.

The Premier: Or a small country newspaper.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: He would then say that his principal business was not that of selling land. Lawyers are exempt under the proviso should they act for clients in the sale of land. We should not encourage men to act as land agents without requiring them to be registered.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Under existing conditions a man can sell land, but at the same time carry on another business.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: That is so.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I do not know that the amendment will make much difference.

The Minister for Justice: It will make it hard to define whether or not a man should be registered.

Mr. Latham: It might give him protection he was not entitled to.

The Minister for Justice: Quite so.

Amendment put and negatived.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I do not know why an owner who is selling his own land should have to take out a license.

The Minister for Justice: It would apply only if he were selling his land in allotments or in subdivisions.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Why should not a man be able to sell anything he possesses without being required to take out a license? This is going too far.

The Minister for Justice: If a man does much of that sort of thing, the registration fee he would have to pay would be a small one.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Perhaps the Minister thinks he can prevent fraud by

the means. I do not think it necessary to go so far as to require an owner to register. Such a man can be made answerable for his misdeeds under the laws of the land. I move an amendment—

That in line 7 the words "whether as owner or otherwise" be struck out.

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: If the amendment were agreed to it is doubtful whether the effect of the subclause would not be just the same. A person might become possessed of a large area of land four or five miles out of Perth, paying for it only £10 or £15. He then cuts it up into 100 blocks and, as owner, he goes about trying to sell them at an enormous price. In those circumstances he should be registered as a land agent and brought under proper control. Without that safeguard there would be nothing to prevent him from engaging in fraudulent practices. Under the Bill any land agent must, so to speak, get a certificate of character from the court.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Under this provision a man dividing his block into two and selling it would have to take out a license as a land agent.

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: The clause will be much safer as printed, and so I cannot accept the amendment.

Mr. STUBBS: In my opinion we cannot tighten up this law too much. Tom Jones buys an area of sand on the Canning River for a nominal sum, and cuts it up into blocks of a quarter acre each. Thereupon he, with two or three assistants, goes about the country in motor cars including people to buy those worthless blocks at £100 each. Anything that will safeguard the public from such practices will be in the best interests of the State. I support the clause as printed.

Mr. LATHAM: I agree that we ought not to prevent an owner from selling his land if subdivided into, say, only two or three blocks. But certainly we should do something to put an end to practices that have been going on. In my opinion the inclusion of the words proposed to be struck out has no effect whatever on the meaning of the clause.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I do not believe that everybody who owns a block of land is a swindler. Moreover, do what we will we cannot protect the public.

The Minister for Justice: We try to.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Yes, and in consequence we have on the statute-book hundreds of laws that have never been administered. If we cannot enforce one Act, we cannot enforce another. People ought to be taught to protect themselves. Under the Criminal Code, of course, we can punish anybody who indulges in fraudulent practices. But I do not see why a man owning land should not be allowed to sell it. If we are going to legislate every time some person does wrong, where shall we get to? One swallow does not make a summer.

The Minister for Justice: We have had a whole summertime of frauds practised in the selling of land.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: At all events, I hope the amendment will be agreed to.

Mr. SAMPSON: It is clear from the remarks of those who have spoken that the words proposed to be struck out should be struck out. The clause, as printed, is a sample of redundant language. If the words objected to by the Leader of the Opposition were struck out, the only effect would be to leave the provision clearer. The Minister himself has said that even if the words were removed there is nothing to say that a person whose business is the selling of land can do so without taking out a license. Again, the Deputy Leader of the Country Party has pointed out that the words proposed to be struck out have no effect on the meaning of the clause. If only in the interests of good English, the words proposed to be struck out ought to be struck out, for the omission would not affect the meaning of the clause.

Mr. BROWN: I will support the clause as printed. If we were to lose one word of the clause, the Bill itself would be useless. It is not intended that if the owner of a block of land decides to sell it he shall take out a land agent's license. The clause does not mean that.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: It says it, anyhow.

Mr. BROWN: It does not. It is intended to apply only when the land agent owns land himself. If the clause is amended as proposed, it will spoil the Bill.

Mr. MANN: If the Bill is intended to cope with the dealings of go-getters, the clause should remain as it is. Part of their scheme is that when they sell a block of land they take another man along to purchase it back from the buyer at a large

profit, and a small deposit is paid upon it. They then introduce another block of land which they sell at a fabulous figure. In order to make them liable the clause must be worded to include the owner of the land. Go-getters are increasing in number, and now comprise men who have given up other forms of fraud for this one. The clause may be hard upon genuine landowners, but to prevent the public from being taken down these words should be allowed to stand.

Amendment put and negatived.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 4 to 30—agreed to.

Clause 31—Evidence of contracts of agency.

Mr. LATHAM: I move an amendment—

That all the words after "rate" in line 11 be struck out.

We enable land agents to make their own charges, which are hall-marked by the Chamber of Commerce, and the Bill now proposes to allow them to impose a further charge, provided the person paying it enters into an agreement to allow it. It is our duty to protect unsophisticated people. I know of a man who was prepared to accept £200 for his equity in a farm. He went to a reputable city land agent, who loaded the property with another £100. A buyer came along and paid £5 deposit, but later discovered that the agent had put on the extra £100. I know of a widow who said she desired to invest £500 in a block of land. The agent bought one for £300 and charged her £500.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: We do not want this Bill to protect her.

Mr. LATHAM: This was done by inducing the woman to sign a document she did not understand.

Mr. MANN: I am opposed to the amendment. It is easy to sell some properties but, when it comes to a question of selling an out of the way property, it is necessary very often to offer special inducements to the agent to advertise it extensively and adopt special means to find a buyer.

The Premier: That could be arranged by agreement.

Mr. MANN: Yes; is is the object of the clause to enable that to be done. An agent goes into a wider field of advertising and spends money to make a sale and has an agreement in writing. Unless that is so

you will not induce a man to make a special effort to sell land that another person desires to dispose of. The clause would not cover a case such as that quoted by the member for York. What he suggested might take place would be a criminal act.

Mr. Latham: He might say "I have it in writing and I can charge what I like."

Mr. MANN: He would be selling as an agent and if he received £300 and returned only £200, it would be theft.

Mr. Kenneally: But if I say that I only want £200 for the block?

Mr. MANN: Then it would be a case of fraud on the purchaser.

The Minister for Works: What is to stop an agent buying for £200 and selling for £300?

Mr. MANN: The whole question was gone into fully by the select committee and the evidence showed that it would interfere with legitimate efforts to do business if the paragraph was not included in the clause. I hope the Minister will not agree to the words being struck out.

Mr. LATHAM: My object is to protect the public. I do not know that there is any business more lucrative than that of a land agent and he must take the good with the bad.

Mr. Mann: It is the vendor that you will penalise, not the agent.

Mr. LATHAM: If agents want to charge 20 per cent. on unattractive business let them define what the unattractive business is.

Mr. KENNEALLY: I hope the clause will not be altered. The clause deals with the question of the right of the agent to sue to recover certain money for services performed and if the words proposed to be struck out are struck out, it will create this position, that a person in good faith will enter into an agreement with an agent that for a certain consideration he will sell a property for a certain amount, and the agent with his eyes open, and the vendor with his eyes open, will enter into that agreement. But if the vendor likes to say after the sale "I am going to pull out unless there is some such clause," the vendor will be able to pull out of the agreement he entered into with the agent, even though he entered into it with his eyes open.

Mr. Latham: If he can take down a land agent he is welcome to do so.

Mr. KENNEALLY: The Bill does not propose to give him that opportunity, but

if two parties enter into a contract we should not make it possible for one of the parties to be able to say "I am not going on with the contract I entered into."

Amendment put and negatived.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 32 to 38—agreed to.

Clause 39—Duty of land salesman to register:

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: I desire to make an alteration in this clause. When the Bill was first printed it was provided that after the 31st March, 1929, a person should register as a land salesman. As the Bill did not go through in the 1928 session I propose now to alter the year to 1930. I move an amendment—

That in line 2 the words "twenty-nine" be struck out, and "thirty" inserted in lieu.

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

Clauses 40 to 61—agreed to.

Schedules 1 to 6, Title—agreed to.

Bill reported with amendments.

BILL—DIVORCE ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. SIR JAMES MITCHELL (Northam) [8.45]: I do not propose to offer any objection to this Bill which is long overdue. I agree with the Minister that if a husband against whom the court has made an order for the support of his wife reaches a better financial position, the wife should share it if the order of the court happens to be lower than would normally be awarded on the increased means of the husband. When the husband possesses much, consideration should be extended to the wife in the shape of sufficient support. I heartily agree with the second provision to enable a wife to get a divorce when her husband has disappeared and his whereabouts cannot be traced. If the husband deserts the wife in this State, it is only fair to consider that the domicile for the husband is continued in the State. I think we have made divorce far too easy, but having done

it, we must make small amendments which from time to time appear to be necessary.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

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

BILL—INSPECTION OF SCAFFOLDING ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. SIR JAMES MITCHELL (Northam) [8.15]: This is really a Committee Bill, as are most of the Bills that have recently been presented to this House. I agree that fees should be reduced. Even the fees now suggested will, in my opinion, be far too high. The Minister should agree that these shall be the maximum fees and that lower fees may be fixed by regulation. Then if he found it possible to reduce the cost, it would be open to him to charge lower fees without coming back to Parliament for authority. I think we must fix the fees set out in the clause as the maximum fees. I believe that another place objects to fees being fixed by regulation, so that if we provide that these fees shall be the maximum, that trouble will be overcome. I agree that we should not make money out of the inspection of scaffolding. Inspectors are appointed and paid by the Government, and the Government should be able to cover the cost of inspection, but that is all they are entitled to do. The Government should not desire to add unnecessarily to the cost of building houses, but we do want to protect life and limb. In Committee I shall probably object to one or two of the provisions, but they can be discussed later. I suppose the Bill would not have been introduced but for two main proposals, the one providing for the inspection of certain gear which is used in the construction of high buildings and which does not come within the definition of scaffolding, and the other the fees. It is quite refreshing to find that fees are being reduced. It seems to me that the present fees are considerable, particularly when

applied to buildings costing say £50,000. It may take longer to construct such buildings, but I suppose the inspections are no more numerous than in the erection of a £1,000 cottage. However, this is so essentially a Committee Bill that I offer no objection to the passing of the second reading, though I hope the Minister will not proceed with the Committee stage to-night.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

BILL—PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

MR. SAMPSON (Swan) [8.55]: The object of this Bill is to amend the law relating to the licensing and regulation of buildings used for public entertainment, public meetings and other purposes. Apart from the excessive fees, I would not oppose the provisions relating to buildings privately owned and used for the purpose of entertainment in large centres. I realise that in certain instances inspection is essential. That is so in connection with large houses of public entertainment to which the Minister referred and which exist mainly in the metropolitan area. Even so, the fees proposed to be charged are excessive. The Minister is evidently under the impression that houses of entertainment such as picture shows, talkies, etc., are fair game for the collection of revenue. For buildings where the seating accommodation is for under 300 people from 300 to 500, from 500 to 750, and in excess of 750, the fees chargeable each year are to be £5, £10, £15 and £20 respectively. The charge is to be levied not only when the plans are submitted and approved and on the first occasion when the building is used for entertainment purposes, but each year before a license is issued to permit of the building being used. Therefore I feel sure members will readily agree that the charges are excessive. The circumstances attending the need for inspection do not justify those very voracious charges. The Minister for Health collects an entertainment tax, which is something to be faced by the people who carry on the business of public entertainment. As to the halls referred to as

public buildings in the first and second schedules and denominated by the grades "B," "C," and "D," with an annual charge of £10, £3 and £1 respectively in accordance with the seating accommodation, no fee whatever should be imposed. The Minister is introducing what I claim to be a most undesirable innovation. The Health Department already have the duty of seeing that the public halls of the State are in good order and condition, and that the continuance of concerts, dances, and other little entertainments in them is not likely to be of danger to the public. These fees, again, are not levied only for the approval of plans. There are fees to be paid for the approval of plans, and they will be collected by the Health Department; but the Minister for Works proposes—

The Minister for Works: Those fees will not be collected by the Health Department.

MR. SAMPSON: That makes the position all the worse so far as the Minister for Works is concerned, because his department will be collecting twice.

The Premier: Where?

MR. SAMPSON: When the plans are submitted a fee will be chargeable, and every year thereafter a fee for the licensing of public halls, varying in amount, will be collectable before a license can be issued.

The Premier: Do you know of any business, carried on anywhere, that does not have to pay a license fee?

MR. SAMPSON: There is no license fee charged on our public schools, for instance.

The Premier: Oh!

MR. SAMPSON: To a large extent, as I am sure the Minister for Works will realise upon giving further consideration to the matter, the small public halls in country districts are in the nature of a school.

The Premier: A school for scandal.

MR. SAMPSON: There, when an officer visits the district perhaps from the Agricultural Bank or possibly from the Public Works Department to discuss various matters with the residents, is the meeting place. Again, when it is decided to form a progress association, a parents' and citizens' association, or some other organisation having for its object the welfare of the people of the district, the meeting is held in this little public hall. I have said that the Government already have the entertainment tax. That applies also to these small country halls.

The Premier: We ought to charge the entertainment tax where meetings of the Primary Producers' Association are held. Such meetings are a bit of an entertainment.

Mr. SAMPSON: It is some little time since I had the privilege of attending such a meeting.

The Premier: That meeting in committee the other day, there ought to have been an amusement tax on that!

Mr. SAMPSON: At all events, a fine result was achieved at that meeting.

The Premier: It was a close go, though.

Mr. SAMPSON: The result was fine.

The Premier: The fees should go to the executive.

Mr. SAMPSON: Following that, I can picture the Minister for Works, with the octopus-like attitude he has adopted recently, viewing the meeting place of the Primary Producers' Association, the hall of the Westralian Farmers, as one coming within the scope of the Bill. Thus, with the aid of the suggestion thrown out by the Premier, more ill-gotten gains will be secured by the Treasury. As regards small public halls, the imposition of a license fee would be a quite unjustified revenue grab. I know the fee is not large, but the principle involved is one which the House must resist. If we allow the Minister for Works to secure approval to the principle of imposing a fee in order to enable a concert to be held in some little hall, I do not know where this matter may end. Picture the Premier proceeding on some odd occasion to Boulder, where, possibly at the back of one of those dumps, there is a little hall. Before the hon. gentleman may have an opportunity legally of addressing his constituents he must make sure that the hall is properly licensed; otherwise the crowd storming the building, or possibly the absence of a crowd, may bring about a danger to those attending.

The Premier: Behind the dumps! Are you talking about a two-up school?

Mr. SAMPSON: I am drawing attention to a supposititious case.

Mr. Marshall: Are you thinking of an early mining camp?

Mr. SAMPSON: There is the Premier prevented from doing his duty because a too enthusiastic Minister has seen in this little hall the possibility of adding to the Consolidated Revenue Fund. I trust the

Premier will be warned in time. We need go no further than to draw attention to the district of any member in the Chamber at the moment. The member for Leonora (Mr. Cowan) has a hall in Leonora, the Alexandra Hall. The people of Leonora would be unable to gather there until they had met the unjustified, the cormorant demand of the Minister for Works under this Bill. I can only hope that the Minister will wink his eye at the existence of such an ill-conceived and unjustified measure.

The Premier: That is rather harsh language.

Mr. SAMPSON: Local health inspectors already can do all that is necessary.

The Premier: Why will the power, if already existing, create all these hardships when transferred to another department?

Mr. SAMPSON: Here is the germ of a new department to be brought into existence.

The Premier: No. It is a transfer from one department to another.

Mr. SAMPSON: The Health Department already have this duty of seeing that public halls are in good order, that the steps and so on leading into them are in good condition.

The Premier: The Bill says that in future that shall be the duty of the Public Works Department instead of the Health Department.

Mr. SAMPSON: We had better leave the matter as it is. I think we are safer with the Minister for Health, who has not this disposition to introduce innovations that add to taxation.

The Premier: What do the officers of the Health Department know about the safety of buildings, the strength of steel, and matters of that description?

Mr. SAMPSON: The Health Department, when a plan is submitted to them, pass it on to the Principal Architect through the Public Works Department.

The Premier: Instead of going around the circle, the plan will go straight to the Principal Architect henceforth.

Mr. SAMPSON: In country districts the inspection of buildings is an obligation on the local road board secretary, who is also the health inspector. That officer is quite able to do all that is necessary.

Mr. J. H. Smith: That is not so in every instance.

Mr. SAMPSON: It is so in all districts of any importance.

Mr. J. H. Smith: But it is not always done by the secretary.

Mr. SAMPSON: If the secretary is not the health inspector, then there is a special health inspector, as the hon. member interjecting suggests. The first charge is for the approval of the plans, but after that there is to be this collection every year.

The Premier: That is the only new thing in the Bill, the annual license fee; the rest is a mere transfer.

Mr. SAMPSON: It is an innovation, and a very improper innovation, if I may be pardoned for using that word.

The Premier: The charge is very light.

Mr. SAMPSON: It is not heavy, but it represents the commencement of the building-up of a system which will necessitate the sending through the country of inspectors from the Public Works Department.

The Premier: Oh no!

Mr. SAMPSON: I do not know how the Public Works Department will be able to attend to the inspection unless they do send inspectors. The collection of revenue from these small public halls is undesirable. Already they are very difficult to carry on. I would not mind for the time being confining this to South Fremantle, but even there we would strike it out as speedily as possible. Certainly there is no justification for it in country districts. Small country halls do present a great difficulty. Their incomes are extremely small. It is only by the public spirit of a few people that their existence is rendered possible. The Bill provides that any church or building used exclusively as a place of worship is not to be levied upon. You and I, Mr. Speaker, will readily agree with that, because we feel that buildings used for the purpose of public worship must be given all possible assistance; yet I would point out that where a building is used partly for public worship and partly for public entertainment, the district is smaller and less able to bear even the small burden proposed by the Bill. Halls which are used for a multiplicity of purposes would come within the scope of the measure. These small communities are already sufficiently taxed. I hope the Minister will agree, so far as any charge is concerned, and as there is no need for inspection of these small

buildings, the provisions should be deleted from the Bill. From the standpoint of the main houses of entertainment in large centres there is justification for careful and regular inspection, but I say again there is no justification for the excessive fees which the Minister proposes to levy on those buildings. There is hardly a hall or a house of amusement in the metropolitan area—certainly none of any size—for which the annual fee for renewal of license will amount to less than £20. I hope the Minister is not working too much in line with the Treasurer. After all, the main duty of a Minister for Works is not the amassing of license fees. In my opinion this Bill amounts to a taxing measure. It is a revenue-snatching instrument, which will, I hope, so far as the licensing fees are concerned, encounter the opposition of a majority of hon. members. I shall certainly oppose that portion of the measure, although, as already indicated, I endorse the regard which the Minister shows in the Bill for the need of inspecting those more important houses of entertainment where people congregate in large numbers. Their inspection, regular and careful, is essential; but the houses already have to face the entertainment tax, or those who attend them have to; and ultimately the result, should this measure pass, will be an increase in the cost of admission to picture shows and other houses of amusement. I hope members will rally to my assistance with the object of defeating this attempt to impose a levy upon those least able to pay it. I refer to those in charge of small halls throughout the country districts.

HON. SIR JAMES MITCHELL (Northam) [9.16]: I hope the Bill will not be hurried through Committee. It is true that the object of the measure is really to continue the supervision over public buildings that is now exercised by the Minister for Health. As usual, the Minister for Works has not done the thing by halves. Under the provisions of the Bill he will take over some of the duties of the Minister for Health. He ignores altogether the Minister for Justice and he is to decide whether a hall shall be opened for entertainment purposes or not. The Minister for Works, acting alone and without the advice of anyone, will say whether in his opinion an entertainment ought to continue, whether it is fitting for the preservation of public morality, good manners or decorum that the entertainment

should continue. He is to be the judge of all these things. I can quite understand that he should be in charge of the next consideration, which refers to a breach of the peace at public meetings.

The Minister for Works: That is where I come in!

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The Minister has had some experience under that heading. Then, too, there is reference to damage to any performer or other person. Perhaps the Minister may have had some experience in that line as well. Then the Minister for Police is set aside, although I do not suppose he minds very much. Whereas in the past the police have had something to do with meetings, political or otherwise, those meetings will now come under the control of the Minister for Works. I do not know why we should have the Minister for Police, the Minister for Health, or even the Premier, so long as we have the Minister for Works! He asks us to agree to a proposal that will enable him to take over the duties of all of them. In effect he says to us, "I am to be all-powerful."

The Minister for Works: Yes, I take it all to myself.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: In this instance, he goes a little further than he generally does. Under the provisions of the Bill he says that if the provisions contained therein are not sufficient, they may be extended by him without consulting Parliament.

The Minister for Works: That is a good idea.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Quite a good idea.

The Minister for Works: It will save a lot of trouble.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: It might save us some trouble if legislation could be extended by the Minister for Works along these lines.

The Minister for Works: Look at the time it would save.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: It might save time here, but it might cause a lot of work in the Police Court and the Supreme Court if the Minister made laws as he would desire them under such Bills as this. It is right that the Works Department should supervise the construction of buildings used for public purposes of the description mentioned in the Bill rather than that the Health Department should

be charged with that responsibility. On the other hand, it is not right that buildings that have been erected with the approval of the Public Health Department should now be condemned by the Minister for Works. In the past the Health Department issued licenses for the erection of those buildings, and now the Minister for Works seeks to have power to condemn what the Minister for Health approved of. Such a proposal could easily cause hardship. If a building has stood the test of safety over a number of years, the chances are it is still safe. We can readily understand that if something had happened and it was disclosed that the material used in a building had been inferior, or some other serious defect had been ascertained, the circumstances might justify the Minister in taking action.

The Minister for Works: What if some of the exits had been closed up?

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: That would be an offence under the existing legislation and the Minister for Health could take action. There is no objection to the authority now possessed by the Minister for Health being vested in the Minister for Works, but the Minister for Works desires to have new powers.

Mr. Kenneally: Very few.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Some buildings have been up for years and have proved safe, but it would be possible for the Minister to compel the owners of those buildings to spend large sums of money upon alterations. Then, again, there is to be an annual license only. I agree with the member for Swan (Mr. Sampson) in his opposition to that provision. We desire that places of entertainment shall be standardised to an extent and be controlled, but we do not desire the Minister to impose unnecessary charges against the public. People who erect such halls should be encouraged. In some places in the country districts the local authorities have spent thousands of pounds upon the erection of a public hall. That is done for the convenience of the people of the districts, yet those local authorities will have to pay a considerable amount by way of license fees. While I will not oppose the second reading, I suggest that the Committee stage be postponed till next week so that those interested in public buildings may have an opportunity to look through the Bill. I have not heard of any objection raised to

it, but I doubt if the public know what is proposed. We should not rush legislation of this description through too hurriedly.

MR. LATHAM (York) [9.23]: I would like the provisions of the Bill made applicable only to the metropolitan area. It is there that overcrowding of public buildings takes place and it is essential that those buildings should be under supervision.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: People in the country are more valuable than those in the town.

Mr. LATHAM: There is, of course, really no difference in the value of people's lives, but there is not the danger in the country districts that there is in the metropolitan area. If the provisions of the Bill are made applicable to the country districts, difficulty may be found in having buildings erected there. It will be admitted that public halls are essential for the promotion of social amenities in the rural areas. My experience of the architects engaged at the Public Works Department is that they are over-careful. If they had their way, I am afraid the erection of public halls in the country areas would be so expensive that the people would not be able to finance them. Designs submitted to the Public Works Department for hospitals, halls and similar buildings are usually condemned because the proposed construction is not strong enough, or for some other reason. The erection of buildings under the specifications provided by the Public Works Department is more costly than is the erection carried out under ordinary specifications. For that reason I am afraid of the effect of the Bill. I am most anxious that the building of halls in the country areas shall be as cheap as possible consistent with public safety.

The Minister for Works: All the halls that have been erected within the last two years have been approved by the Public Works Department.

Mr. LATHAM: That department has not had anything to do with them.

The Minister for Works: The Health Department receives the plans and approves of them, but no action is taken without consulting the Public Works Department.

Mr. LATHAM: I know that the plans have to be submitted to the Health Department, but I do not know what process

is followed once they have been lodged there. Almost invariably plans are condemned because a window is too high or too low or because some exit is not in the right position.

Mr. Corboy: In my electorate we have had that experience too.

Mr. LATHAM: It seems to be regarded by these officials as their absolute duty to find fault. I do not remember the plans of one hall having been accepted without some fault being found with it. I do not mind that course being adopted with regard to minor details, but I am afraid of the cost of buildings mounting up.

The Minister for Works: Can you cite one case where such alterations have been insisted upon in recent years?

Mr. LATHAM: No. I will be candid and admit that I cannot. If it simply means that the same process will be followed as hitherto, I cannot see any objection to the Bill.

The Minister for Works: That is all that is intended.

Mr. LATHAM: I am glad to have the Minister's assurance on that score. I do not want to see anything agreed to that will prevent the people in the country districts having their halls erected for social purposes. They have to find half the money for the erection of the halls and they should be able to have them erected as cheaply as possible. Without the assistance they receive from the Government fewer halls would be erected.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

BILL—RESERVES.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. SIR JAMES MITCHELL (Northam) [9.30]: This is the usual Bill. Each session we consider the matter of changing the purposes of reserves. There is nothing in the Bill except the final paragraph. It always happens that the local authority is concerned with the reserve affected, and in every instance and every year the local authorities are consulted before the Minister brings down this Bill to the House. I am sorry to see that the clause affecting

the reserve at Narembeen provides that the change over of the site for the school shall only be agreed to when the people there agree to pay the cost of removing the school and re-erecting it. When I was up there some time ago the school buildings did not seem at all suitable for the purpose, and even now the Minister might well consult the people and suggest that they ask for better school buildings. Narembeen is an important centre, and when we pay £100 for removing a small building we do not get much for our money. If the present building could be sold for some other purpose and the money used to aid in the erection of a more suitable structure, the people would have better value for their money. None of the other proposals in the Bill is important until we come to that dealing with the Claremont Road Board. I had something to do with this matter when we made an advance to buy additional land. This land that has been bought is vested in the Crown, and the Minister is agreeing to the sale of the present reserve, which is unsuitable for recreation purposes, in order that repayment may be made to the Treasury of the money advanced. The State is not losing anything: in fact we are gaining something. It is our duty to provide recreation grounds, and we have made that provision rather badly down there. But we want to see that the local authority are given land that they can sell. Of course if it were actual foreshore we should object to the disposal of the land. The matter has been carefully gone into by the department, and the proposed exchange must be approved. There is no question about that. I understand it is not arranged quite in a way that will meet with the approval of the local authority or with the convenience of those who will buy the blocks. If that is so I hope the Minister will agree that the Surveyor General may look further into the matter before we finally pass the Bill. Any necessary amendment could be made in Committee. I suggest that the second reading be passed, and that we then have a little delay until the local authority has consulted with the Surveyor General, who would advise the Minister. We want to see houses erected there, and so we ought to meet the wishes of the local authority, who know more about it than we possibly can. I suggest we pass the second reading and

delay the committee stage until this investigation has been made.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

House adjourned at 9.36 p.m.

Legislative Council,

Thursday, 22nd August, 1929.

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The PRESIDENT took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.

QUESTION—PARLIAMENT HOUSE COMPLETION.

Hon. Sir EDWARD WITTENOOM asked the Chief Secretary: Do the Government intend to carry out the wishes of both Houses of Parliament, as expressed in resolutions from both, that Parliament House and grounds should be completed as the most fitting memorial of this Centenary Year?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: The difficulty of obtaining loan moneys will not permit of this venture being undertaken during the present year.

BILL—TRANSFER OF LAND ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central) [4.35] in moving the second reading said: Very little explanation is necessary regarding this Bill, as it is explained in the printed memorandum. The