

next—at Newcastle; and she is expected to make her first voyage from Fremantle to Darwin on the 16th of next month.

Hon. A. F. Griffith: It has been proved to be an advantage.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: A definite advantage. Other troubles causing delays to shipping in the North are disputes which arise from time to time. They are not at all infrequent, and although they might only last for an hour at a time, they cause delay. The atom bomb tests, on this occasion, also disrupted shipping to a very great extent.

During his speech, Mr. Willesee mentioned that three ships passed through Port Hedland at the one time. Whether they were all travelling in the one direction I would not know, but I should not think so because Port Hedland is midway between Darwin and Fremantle and with ships passing up and down the coast, they frequently pass at Port Hedland and race each other to get in on the tide. Port Hedland is a tidal port which ships can enter only every 12 hours. If one ship is travelling south and another is travelling north each will try to race the other to get into port. Thus, the fact that three ships may be in the port at the same time is something that frequently occurs and it cannot be avoided at present.

I should think that under normal conditions and with the provision of wharfage facilities at Darwin, a deep sea jetty at Derby, an extension to the Wyndham jetty and the Port Hedland jetty, there will be less delays to shipping along our coast. Now that more ships are on the run the greater will be the congestion at the ports. However, the State Shipping Service does its best and it can do no better than that. I have spoken much longer than I intended; and, in conclusion, I would point out that if any vital points raised by members have been overlooked by me, I will ask the Chief Secretary to answer them when he makes his speech in support of the motion to adopt the Address-in-reply.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, debate adjourned.

BILLS (3)—FIRST READING.

1. Evidence Act Amendment.
2. Commonwealth and State Housing Agreement.
3. Albany Lot 184 (Validation of Title). Received from the Assembly.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. G. Fraser—West): I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till Tuesday, the 18th September.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.3 p.m.

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 12th September, 1956.

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The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr. Moir) took the Chair at 4.30 p.m. and read prayers.

ASSENT TO BILL.

Message from the Lieut.-Governor and Administrator received and read notifying assent to the Marketing of Potatoes Act Amendment Bill.

QUESTIONS.

WATER SUPPLIES.

Extension of Bolgart Scheme.

Mr. ACKLAND asked the Minister for Water Supplies:

(1) Is it intended to utilise the available water supply situated approximately one mile from Bolgart to supply the State hotel at Bolgart?

(2) If so, when will this work be undertaken?

(3) If and when this work is undertaken, will he make provision to have water available to all premises in the town of Bolgart?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The suggested source of supply is listed for investigation.

(2) Pending investigations, no date can be given.

(3) Decision will depend on results of investigations and finance.

LIQUID FUEL.

Purpose of Government Subsidy.

Mr. ACKLAND asked the Premier:

(1) Is any contribution being paid by the Government to keep down the cost of liquid fuel north of the 26th parallel?

(2) If not, was any such contribution paid in previous years?

(3) In either case, what was the purpose and effect of such payment?

The PREMIER replied:

(1) Yes, through the application of special shipping freight rates. Petrol and oil are carried to all North-West ports by the State Shipping Service at the same rate as if consigned to Geraldton.

In addition, a payment of £5,003 was made towards the cost in May, 1955, of a direct shipment from overseas of 4,549 drums of petrol, which were landed at North-West ports.

(2) Similar contributions were made in previous years.

(3) Direct shipments from overseas have been necessary from time to time due to an occasional shortage of shipping space on State vessels. These shipments have been subsidised by the Government to keep the cost of landing fuel at North-West ports to a figure comparable with the cost of transport from Fremantle by the State Shipping Service.

ROAD SAFETY.

Introduction of Compulsory Lectures.

Mr. JOHNSON asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) Is consideration being given to introducing the practice of compulsory lectures on road safety to persons reported for minor traffic breaches?

(2) Is this practice in effect in other Australian States and some overseas countries?

(3) Will the introduction of this practice need legislative action, or can it be done by regulation?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) A recommendation has been made by the National Safety Council and is being considered.

(2) Yes.

(3) It is considered that legislative action will be necessary and further information is being sought from the Eastern States where it is in practice.

STOLEN VEHICLES.

Number of Cars and Persons Involved.

Mr. OLDFIELD asked the Minister for Justice:

(1) How many vehicles were stolen during the years ended December, 1954, and 1955, and so far this year?

(2) How many persons, involving what number of cars, were charged with "unlawfully assuming control" in each of those years?

(3) How many of those charged were—

(a) under 18 years of age;

(b) under 17 years of age;

(c) under 16 years of age, respectively, in each group?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) 1954—478 vehicles stolen.

1955—713 vehicles stolen.

1956—560 vehicles stolen to date.

(2) 1954—472 charges recorded. (Police Court, 317; Children's Court, 155.)

1955—519 charges recorded. (Police Court, 347; Children's Court, 172.)

1956—255 charges recorded. (Police Court, 58; Children's Court, 177.)

(3) 1954—	17 to 18 years	....	48
	16 to 17 years	....	42
	Under 16 years	....	54
	Not stated	....	11
1955—	17 to 18 years	....	59
	16 to 17 years	....	51
	Under 16 years	....	59
	Not stated	....	3
1956—	17 to 18 years	....	21
	16 to 17 years	....	15
	Under 16 years	....	5

COLLIE COAL.

Suitability for Manufacture of Plastics.

Mr. OLDFIELD asked the Minister for Industrial Development:

(1) Has any investigation been made as to the suitability of Collie coal for the manufacture of plastics?

(2) If not, why not, and when is it anticipated such investigation will be made?

(3) If the answer to No. (1) is in the affirmative, what was the result of such investigation?

(4) To what extent would the establishment of a plastic industry at Collie solve the problems of the coalfields?

The PREMIER (for the Minister for Industrial Development) replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) Answered by No. (1).

(3) It is known that intermediate products known as synthesis gases must first be prepared from coal for conversion into secondary and tertiary products, which in turn can be converted into other chemicals, including plastics. The process is exceedingly complicated and requires the highest degree of technical skill. Research by huge overseas concerns is continually widening the range of products and resulting in improvements in operating techniques. Experimental research in Western Australia may be required later into specific phases of the comprehensive chemical industry envisaged.

(4) The feasibility of establishing a chemical industry at Coille will depend on many factors. These would include the finding of millions for capital expenditure, the comparative high cost of coal and other services, and the distance of the plant from the principal markets for the final products. Prolonged and patient research into the possibilities would be required. Collection and classification of information by the Department of Industrial Development is continuing.

SEWAGE.

Conversion of Perth Treatment Works.

Mr. CROMMELIN asked the Minister for Works:

Will he indicate when the Perth sewage treatment works will be converted to the activated sludge system to prevent contamination of ocean beaches, as promised in the Premier's policy speech?

The MINISTER replied:

Progressively from one to three years in accordance with the availability of funds.

NATIVE WELFARE.

Assistance from Mission Stations, etc.

Mr. EVANS asked the Minister for Native Welfare:

(1) On what grounds are natives provided with food rations from mission stations?

(2) What is the maximum subsidy allowed per week per child to a mission station?

(3) Has the Forests Department made any intervention of late into the making of native curios for sale purposes?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) When they are otherwise indigent.

(2) A total amount of 40s. 9d. of which, in some cases, 5s. per week is contributed by the Lotteries Commission. In addition, child endowment of 10s. per child per

week is paid direct to the mission by the Commonwealth Social Services Department. The Department of Native Welfare is also responsible for dental, medical, hospital, optical, funeral and transport costs.

(3) Discussions with the Forests Department led to an agreement that natives would be permitted to use timber for this purpose in specified areas. The arrangement is satisfactory to all concerned.

ASSISTANCE TO PROSPECTORS.

Amount Available and Eligibility of Pensioners.

Mr. EVANS asked the Minister for Mines:

(1) What financial assistance from the Mines Department is available to prospectors out on the field?

(2) Are aged pensioners eligible for this, or part of this, allowance?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION (for Minister for Mines) replied:

(1) Food ration orders to the value of £4 10s. per week on goldfields south of the Tropic of Capricorn and £5 10s. per week north of that line, a limited purchase of explosives, and loan of prospecting equipment.

(2) Aged pensioners are eligible to apply for assistance and each application is considered on its merits, the physical condition of applicants being taken into account among other things.

HOUSING.

Provision of Front Fences at Maniana.

Mr. JAMIESON asked the Minister for Housing:

(1) What is the estimated cost for provision of dividing front fences for the duplex type dwellings at Maniana?

(2) In view of the constant requests from tenants at Maniana for provision of these fences, would he further consider this matter?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Approximately £1,850.

(2) Owing to the shortage of funds it is not possible to accede to this request.

POLICE FORCE.

Educational Standard for Recruits.

Mr. LAWRENCE asked the Minister for Police:

(1) What is the education standard required for recruits entering the Western Australian Police Force?

(2) Has the standard been changed since 1950, and if so, when?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The minimum standard is 6th standard State education. Recruits in training receive further education in the police school.

(2) No.

BILLS (3)—THIRD READING.

- 1, Evidence Act Amendment.
- 2, Commonwealth and State Housing Agreement.
- 3, Albany Lot 184 (Validation of Title).
Transmitted to the Council.

MOTION—RESTRICTIVE TRADE PRACTICES.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

HON. A. F. WATTS (Stirling) [4.45]: I move—

That a select committee be appointed to inquire into and report upon the extent to which restrictive trade practices or agreements detrimental to the public interest operate in trade and commerce in Western Australia, and whether any, and if so, what, legislation should be passed in this State in regard thereto.

In submitting this motion standing in my name on the notice paper, I would like to refer members, as I did last year, to a Press report which appeared on the 1st July, 1955, in "The West Australian," because I think that will serve as the foundation for the moving of this motion. That report dealt with the findings of what was known to the British House of Commons as the Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission. It was a commission of 10 persons which had been appointed by the British Government to make inquiries into certain industrial practices.

At that time, of course, the report of that commission was not available in Western Australia and there was nothing to work on except the Press report which went on to say—

The report of the Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission is likely to cause a big stir in industry. It said that a wide range of industries and trades were operating private agreements which "affect the public interest adversely." One of the methods criticised by the report was the power of trade associations to dictate to the individual traders agreed prices at which goods must be sold. "Such agreements place in the hands of associations a power over individual traders which we regard as excessive and dangerous."

Since that time I have had, with the co-operation of officers of this House, an opportunity of perusing the report of the commission. I can assure members that it is an extremely difficult document to read. It is quite lengthy and highly technical; it deals with some aspects of restrictive practices of which I have no knowledge as to whether they exist in

Australia, and particularly in Western Australia. I therefore do not propose to burden the House by endeavouring to read any portion of that report. It will be available if any member desires to examine it further.

This commission, as I indeed indicated last year, was divided on the question as to what action should be taken to restrain those concerned where the practices were in operation in Great Britain. It was clear from the report that seven members of the commission were in favour of legislation to make them illegal, but three members of the commission expressed the opinion that registration of such agreements at the Board of Trade, so that their terms and conditions might be publicly known, would be a sufficient action to take. Since last year, the Conservative Government of Great Britain has passed legislation through the Parliament of that country aimed at controlling a number of the practices referred to by the commission in its report, the object of the Bill being to regulate and control in the public interest the practices of which the commission complained.

It may be remembered that last year when I dealt with the matters allied to this motion, I said I had little reason to believe that similar practices had found their way into Western Australia. That was approximately a year ago. Since then, presumably partly as a result of the publicity then given to the matter, information has reached me that a number of these practices, or similar practices likely to be detrimental to the public interest, are in existence in Western Australia. In consequence, it seems to me very desirable that there should be an inquiry here, as there has been in the instances I mentioned overseas, so that a proper assessment of the position may be made.

Let me say straight away that I am not in the least concerned unless the practice in question, whatever it may be, can be shown to be detrimental to the public interest. For example, I think we would all agree whole-heartedly—I certainly do—with associations of persons, whether they be manufacturers, traders or others, which are formed to attend collectively to the problems that may be common to all of them when they are engaged in the particular line of business, which enable them to exchange technical and other information, to ensure concerted action when improper treatment may be about to be meted out to any section of the industry, and to assist generally in the solution of problems which would help to achieve greater production, or better quality, or anything of that sort.

But, above all, I am convinced, as I endeavoured to explain last year, that given complete, fair and free competition in industry of all the kinds to which I made reference a moment ago, we have

nothing to fear in regard to unfair prices to the public and, in those circumstances, would have little or no need to consider the imposition of onerous legislation upon persons engaged in those trades or industries. I would like to add that I respect what is, I believe, known as the profit motive. Obviously, no one can be expected to give his time and energy without reasonable reward. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you know very well, none of us do. So I do not want anyone to imagine that, because I bring this motion before the House, I have any intention of trying to prevent anyone from making profits; quite the contrary. Without them, of course, there would be no opportunity for the development of industry. There would be a position shortly realised virtually of stagnation; and I reiterate that none of us would be content without adequate reward for the services in one way or another we may render to the people, to industry, or to the State.

If I now understand the position aright, many of the agreements and arrangements I am referring to have, for at least one of their purposes, that of preventing one or more persons engaged in some industry from making a living out of it, while others acquire the cream of the business and maintain prices at a higher level than otherwise might be the case, because there are arrangements among themselves which enable that to be done. If that, in the result, is detrimental to the interests of the public, then it behoves every member of the legislature to take those practices into consideration with a view to ascertaining to what extent they should be checked.

At this stage, I do not think anybody is able to postulate accurately what should be done when it was established that such practices were in existence. In countries of the world other than Great Britain, as was very clearly indicated in last year's debate by the member for Roe, differing methods have been adopted of dealing with some of these things. In Australia, up to the present, little or nothing has been done either by way of regulation, control, or the rendering of them illegal.

It appears to me, from such information as I have been able to collate in the last 12 months, that there is not a complete understanding among persons actively engaged in the types of industry which may be affected by these things of exactly what they are. Nor is there any certainty as to what degree they might be undesirable in the public interest. It seems to me that no really satisfactory answer can be obtained to the problem of what should be done unless first of all there is some careful inquiry, by persons who themselves have no interest in these arrangements, to ascertain just what they are, and whether they are detrimental; and, if so, what remedial measures are practicable and should be taken.

I am firmly convinced, not only from my own feelings in this matter, but from past experience of similar inquiries, that a committee of the Legislature, particularly of this House—because this is the one in which I have to move a motion—would be a very suitable body to make the necessary inquiries and advise the people and the Government as to the true position. It is for that reason that I move the motion in my name.

But before I pass on to one or two other aspects of this matter to which I want to make reference, I would say that there has been handed to me in recent times a resume which has been prepared by somebody who is in industry in the City of Perth and who has had acquaintance with some of the arrangements which he alleges are in existence in this State and who, as a consequence of the discussions that took place here last year, has submitted this document to me, which he says is a resume of the information which he, because of his personal contact, has been able to collate and he was of the opinion that both I and other members in this House should be acquainted with it in order that we might more fairly decide whether or not an inquiry such as I have suggested should be put into operation.

I want to make it quite clear to all members that this is not of my own preparation; it was given to me quite voluntarily and, indeed, quite unsolicited as I had not more than a very sketchy acquaintance with the gentleman prior to my receiving this document. Therefore, although I have since satisfied myself entirely as to his bona fides by inquiry, added to what I knew of him before, I think the document is well worth reading to the House and should be given the closest attention by members. It reads—

Foreword:

There is an increasing tendency in W.A. in the distribution of goods to channel such through clandestine associations whose main interest is the individual benefit of its members.

The Set Up:

In very many cases these associations are purely private nests composed of a privileged and limited membership.

They are sponsored by the more powerful business interests concerned in a particular class or range of goods but do include lesser lights. Most decisions are made by an inner circle of the more powerful members with the balance of the members being yes men fearful of their place among the bigger shots. Very few of these associations function under or are subject to public enactments, nor are they responsible in any way to legislative authority, registered trading or manufacturing associations or the general public.

These associations are secretive bodies capable of making decisions dictatorially, and membership is not disclosed outside the association itself even between other similar or related associations.

Some of these associations are regulated by a constitution, some by a code of laws, others by regulations and rules, some by all three, and some by nothing at all, but purely verbal agreements as to action duly recorded. Where they exist the rules and regulations are purposely loose and indefinite.

Membership.

The qualifications governing membership are vague, can be applied narrowly and are inelastic. Membership is granted in most cases on the personal feelings of the members of the association. In many cases it is possible for an application to be approved or rejected by a minority of the members of an association. There is no appeal against the association's decisions. There is no provision for a personal submission of an application for membership.

Procedure.

Originally these associations gathered in a mutual spirit of co-operation, fairly openly, set up standard price lists and often published them. In those days merchandising was not spread very widely outside immediate city circles and these associations were small bodies and generally speaking did include most interested concerns.

However, the tendency now is to introduce the very undesirable arrangement of restricting the merchandising of goods to a favoured circle of firms. Circumstances are altering conditions. Merchandising is spreading to the suburbs and to country towns and the public for various reasons want to deal in their own chosen centres. Also modern trends are making decentralising desirable, one might almost say imperative. The impact of this developing trend of restriction of trade by these associations is still not great but with the growth of the State the increase in big manufacturing concerns and the growing strength of some of these associations and their members, it is urgent that corrective action be taken early before the whole set-up becomes too powerful and too undesirable.

Locally Manufactured Goods.

By virtue of their ability to deal in attractively large quantities, members of these associations provide strong temptation to manufacturers to embrace an apparently easy and unobtrusive method of disposing of their

goods by confining their sales to members of these particular associations. They can avoid the complexities of advertising, distributing, related services and administration connected with the ordinary trade and retail marketing. In many cases lack of capital and personal ability to conduct their own sales organisation makes the temptation more irresistible. The result of this is the imposing of up to four successful margins of profit on the manufactured goods (including the manufactures) sometimes 33½ per cent. and up to 50 per cent. over the manufactured costs.

In times of shortage members of these associations enjoy an advantage in securing goods and the customer must go to the goods whatever the difficulties.

Members of these associations are in the position and do play one manufacturer against the other or others which generally results in a lowering of quality to meet competition or a drift of the more unbusiness-like into financial difficulties. It prevents the general public having access to local manufacturers for special goods and services.

Australian Made Goods.

Australian manufacturers generally appoint Australia wide agents who in turn choose separate agents in each State. These State agents very seldom have comprehensive sales ability, mostly work on a small commission and deal in indent orders only. They readily, through force of these circumstances, confine their sales to members of these associations. This results in additional profit margins being added to the ultimate selling price of the goods.

This means that in many cases a Western Australian manufacturer is debarred from buying basic goods and materials from their source and is at a disadvantage with on-the-spot larger Eastern States manufacturers who can buy direct by virtue of the quantities they can order.

In the cases where there is a single Australian manufacturer it has been known where supplies have been repressed to the point of victimisation.

Where Australian manufacturers have their own branch or representation in this State these associations can still bring pressure to bear to have the distribution of the goods controlled by them, and the privileged distributors limited. In many cases this results in bad service.

I am not in a position to say, of my own knowledge, whether the effect on locally manufactured goods or local factories is as indicated in those last two or three

paragraphs. But if it is, then it is more highly desirable that we should get to the root of this problem. It is not of much use pointing out, as has been pointed out to us in recent months, that we have an adverse trade balance in this State running into many millions of pounds and that there are opportunities for obtaining raw materials here that are desirable for converting into manufactured goods, and the setting up by the Government of a Trades and Industries Promotion Council, if it is, as it appears to be from the remarks I have just read, possible to undo or prevent most of the benefits that might be derived from those activities, by an extension in this community of some of the things to which I have referred. What use are these efforts to the community? So in that interest, too, it seems to me desirable that we should find out exactly what the position is.

If these things are not going on, or if they are going on and it could be shown that they are not detrimental to the public interest, let us say so. Let not there be public suspicion, as there is in many quarters, that these things are going on and are detrimental, if that is not the case. Let us find out the truth of this matter, as a responsible authority, so that we can let the public know the facts. Far be it from me to attempt to malign any section of industry incorrectly; but if I do not bring this matter before the House so that it can be properly investigated, that suspicion will still be abroad. If it is not correct, and these things are not detrimental to the public interest, then those who hold the views that they are should be disabused of those views.

So on all counts, whether they be for the benefit of one side or the other in the ultimate result, I suggest it is desirable that this problem should be probed. However, I will finish this document which goes on—

Goods from Outside Australia.

Here again manufacturers in other countries appoint either Australian agents or State agents. These associations bring pressure to bear on these agents to confine their activities to members of the particular associations concerned and as a consequence when one goes abroad and contacts sources of supplies abroad who are willing to sell, the arrangements rest on the recommendation of the State or Australian agent who is virtually dictated to by one of these associations.

Effects.

It all boils down to the fact that both manufacturers and outside merchandising business sooner or later come up against the obstacle that their supplies have to come through unwelcome channels often from oppositions and always adding unnecessary

expenses which impose burdens on their finances and restrictions on their services. Often inconvenient and often cumbersome.

Country merchants despite their ability and stability suffer a great disadvantage both in purchasing power and additional handling expenses.

Conclusions.

A possible solution is that private associations should be either prohibited or controlled and that orderly marketing and distribution of goods should be in the care of associations sponsored by public bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce or the Chamber of Manufactures or the like who are properly registered and are responsible to the general public for their conduct. Such associations should be properly constituted and subject to legislative control in the public interest.

It is desirable that some protection be given to genuine distributors of goods to buy where they want to and to the best advantage if the public are to be given the best service.

Also it is necessary to assist manufacturers to avoid getting tied up in these distributing circles even against their own inclination where ultimately they find themselves enmeshed in restrictive agreements and customs.

So there we are. As I said, those are not my views but they are the views of someone who has been in business in this city for many years and, unsolicited, supplied me with those comments in order that a better understanding might be given to the members of this House as to the reasons which indicate that some inquiry is desirable.

I would like to make some reference to what is going on in some other States of the Commonwealth where, presumably, similar thoughts to those that are actuating me have been actuating Governments. Here again, as far as I can see, they have not yet grasped the full extent to which these things might be going on because they have not had any preliminary inquiry to ascertain to just what extent that is so, and while they are, according to Press reports, taking steps to introduce legislation in certain aspects, I would imagine that there are probably other aspects that might also need their consideration if they were aware of them. However, I will read these extracts from the Press. The extract from "The West Australian" of the 4th September, 1956, reads as follows:—

Melbourne. A Bill to protect price-cutting retailers was now in the final drafting stages, the Premier (Mr. Bolte) said today.

He was opposed to any restrictive trading practices, Mr. Bolte said. His Government stood for free competition.

Under the proposed Retailers' Protection Bill, groups or people withholding or withdrawing supplies from price-cutting retailers could be charged with an offence.

Mr. Bolte made his comment in relation to a price-cutting dispute between the proprietor of a Mitcham (Melb.) supermarket and a Government backbench member who is a master baker.

That, as I say, appears to be one aspect of this matter which is being dealt with by Mr. Bolte.

The Minister for Works: He believes in free competition with pegged wages.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I am not concerned with the second part of the remark of the Minister for Works, if I caught it aright. I am merely saying the Bill is to protect price-cutting retailers, and I would suggest that if those retailers can supply the goods to the public, if they can get them, at a price less than that supplied by those who are engaged in selling similar goods elsewhere, then it is to the public interest.

I do not suppose that those who are offering the goods at a lower price are doing so at a loss, because I anticipate that the profit motive, to which I have already made reference, stands reasonably high in their opinion. It would be extraordinary if it did not, because they would not survive very long. They do, however, undoubtedly make some contribution to the public interest, and Mr. Bolte, I would suggest probably quite rightly—though I have not the whole of the facts from this cutting—is anxious to protect them. I have only made the suggestion that he seems to be dealing with one aspect when there may be several others which could very well also be dealt with in that State.

The Premier: Could the hon. member tell us whether the Victorian Government has introduced the Bill?

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I cannot say; this is a cutting dated the 4th September and that is comparatively recent. There was also reported over the A.B.C., and this was transmitted to me from elsewhere, a case which appeared in what is known as the "Port Moresby Newsletter," a publication connected with the A.B.C., dealing with its service to the Papua and New Guinea areas. It is of interest, because it refers to what the Tasmanian Government proposes to do.

The Minister for Transport: Which one?

Hon. A. F. WATTS: Here we have the Governments of two States, both of a different political complexion, arriving at a similar conclusion, or virtually so. The

article from the "Port Moresby Newsletter" to which I have referred reads as follows:—

The Tasmanian Government is preparing legislation to prohibit what it calls a number of dangerously restrictive trade practices in Tasmania.

The Acting Premier of Tasmania—Mr. Fagan—says the restrictive practice that has brought most complaints is the setting up of business associations which bring pressure to bear on manufacturers and wholesalers not to supply goods to any trader outside the associations.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Which Government did you say?

Hon. A. F. WATTS: The Tasmanian Government.

The Premier: But which one?

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I know of only one Government at a time in any community, so it would be whichever one was in existence on the 4th August last.

The Minister for Transport: There will be another in existence on the 13th September.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: The article continues—

"This is not a case of compulsory unionism," says Mr. Fagan, "because I have evidence of several traders who sought admittance to the association concerned and were rejected for no good reason."

The Acting Premier quotes a letter sent to one trader by a manufacturer of electrical appliances. The letter says—"We regret that through the Tasmanian Electrical Wholesalers' Association more or less holding a gun at our heads, we are not able to supply you with goods."

Mr. Fagan says similar complaints have been received from traders in the glass, hardware and sports-goods trades. He hopes the Government's proposed legislation will be ready for consideration by the Parliamentary Labour Party later this year.

Hon. D. Brand: Too late!

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I am not concerned which Government may be in power in Tasmania but at the time the cuttings were published, there were two States with Governments of a different political complexion and they both arrived at the same conclusion. I do not think there is any other conclusion at which they could have arrived providing these things took place and it was detrimental to the public interest. I therefore think it is our business to probe this matter because I guarantee that there is nobody in Western Australia who could give detailed information on all things that might be inquired into.

In conclusion, I repeat that my interest in this matter is to ensure free competition for the public benefit, not to prevent the making of reasonable profits; not to prevent the people from banding themselves together for legitimate purposes, and in no circumstances to prevent any practice which cannot be shown to be to the detriment of the public interest. With those thoughts in mind and without wasting or taking up any more of the time of the House, I move the motion standing in my name.

On motion by the Premier, debate adjourned.

MOTION—MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS ACT.

To Disallow Land-Use Zoning By-law.

MR. HALL (Albany) [5.25]: I move—

That by-law No. 19, relating to land-use zoning, made under the Municipal Corporations Act, 1906-1945, by the Municipality of Albany, published in the "Government Gazette" on the 19th July, 1956, and laid upon the Table of the House on the 7th August, 1956, be, and is hereby disallowed.

My reasons for moving the disallowance of the by-law are that, although I feel the Albany Municipal Council has carried out its duties in advertising the fact of this zoning by-law correctly, it has been done in rather an obscure manner. I think that one of the essentials of justice is the right of all to help in the framing of by-laws which apply to all.

After being approached by representatives of the Albany Progress Association, I asked them to meet the mayor and councillors and to conciliate at all possible cost, realising, of course, that I believed the zoning by-law to be essential for the progress of the town. We must start somewhere and I felt that the zoning was correct. But when we receive a petition signed by nearly 530 people, it is necessary to consider what is actually wrong.

Accordingly I would like to read an extract from a letter from the Albany Progress Association addressed to me. It reads as follows:—

We, the undersigned ratepayers, property owners and residents of the Albany district, request you to move in the Legislative Assembly for the disallowance of the Albany zoning scheme (By-law 19) on the following grounds:—

The proposed zoning scheme was insufficiently publicised before approval by the Albany council. As the public meeting called to discuss the plan was after the council had approved

the scheme, ratepayers were then of the opinion that further action was useless.

The whole future of Albany, as a major port and commercial centre, is affected by this scheme, and with Albany ratepayers and landowners scattered throughout the State, wide publicity was essential to enable them to express their views. Land has, in fact, been purchased for future commercial expansion and owners of land outside the proposed business area zone are in confusion, notwithstanding council assurance. Some absent owners have only recently and inadvertently become aware of the zoning proposal.

Public demand for business sites strongly favours the new business area radiating from the monument at the top of York-st. Large capital has already been invested in new buildings in this shopping centre, including three large new banking premises, and many new businesses have been established. Numerous businesses, mostly new, are already established outside the proposed very restricted business area in this zoning scheme.

The whole future of Albany, as incorporated in this zoning scheme, has been prepared by the Albany council planning committee of six members. The scheme has been developed from a plan of business sites of the town as it then was, prepared by the building inspector at the request of the Town Planning Commissioner, Mr. Hepburn, in an effort to get something started concerning town planning. The original plan did not include the large recent expansion in the monument area.

No professional town planning consultant was employed by the council, we believe, on the excuse of cost. In a vital matter of this magnitude, cost should not have prevented employment of an expert. Several other progressive centres, including smaller townships, have employed a professional town planning consultant.

We support the general principle of town planning, but request the present scheme, as embodied in the present plan, be disallowed and a new scheme be prepared by an independent professional town planner, taking into account world trends and

present day requirements of a modern port and commercial centre, after consideration of the various viewpoints expressed.

As I said, I have endeavoured to bring the two parties together right throughout this discussion and I made representations to the Minister for him to pay a visit to Albany. I am happy to say that the Minister visited Albany and the two parties met and the Minister was able to achieve a reconciliation as to the amendments which will be presented when their town planner, Miss Feilman, visits Albany at the end of this month. On the ground that I have achieved this result on behalf of the people and that both people want the amendment to the by-law, I have no hesitation in urging the disallowance.

On motion by the Minister for Health, debate adjourned.

MOTION—LIQUID FUEL PRICES.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

MR. ACKLAND (Moore) [5.32]: I move—

That a select committee be appointed to inquire into and report upon ways and means of obtaining uniformity, or at least a substantial degree of uniformity, in the prices of liquid fuel throughout this State.

I feel that if this motion were agreed to it would not be creating a precedent as we have several instances before us where there is uniformity or where there is a substantial degree of uniformity of prices in Western Australia. In moving this motion I am confident it will have the support of all three parties if for no other reason than that the parties all believe in a policy of decentralisation in Western Australia. When we realise the degree of centralisation that has taken place, I think it must be agreed that it is high time some definite steps were taken to effect a reduction in the bringing together of so many people in the metropolitan area.

We have 670,750 people living in the State and of that number approximately 370,000 reside in the metropolitan area, or, in round figures, 55 per cent. in the metropolitan area, living in the confined space of 191 square miles. Outside the metropolitan area, we have 45 per cent. of the population or approximately 300,000 people spread over more than 970,000 square miles, and if the position is not already out of hand, it is getting very near that position. There is little real evidence that any corrective measures have been taken for many years in Western Australia and I do not think there is likely to be any alteration because the cost of living figures are so much higher for the pastoral, mining and country districts.

Recently the Minister for Works gave me some details which showed the position with reference to the cost of water in the metropolitan and country areas respectively. Whereas we find that in the metropolitan area the quantity provided for by water rates and excess water charges is supplied at an aggregate cost of 1s. 9d. per 1,000 gallons, we note that in Kalgoorlie the prices are 4s. 6d. and 3s. per 1,000 gallons under those two headings. This means that the people of Kalgoorlie are paying 270 per cent. more for their water provided for by rates than the people of Perth, and 170 per cent. more for any excess water they may use.

The Minister for Works: True enough, but they are getting heavily subsidised.

Mr. ACKLAND: Much the same thing applies to power but in regard to power we have already an indication that the Government of Western Australia does realise that there should be a degree of uniformity. We find that in the South-West power scheme there is a uniform price for power and light within the boundaries served by that scheme.

Only this afternoon I was able to find out from one of the tyre companies which operates from Perth that there is a uniform price for tyres from one end of this State to the other. It does not matter whether one buys a tyre for any purpose in Perth or in the most remote part of the country or pastoral districts, one will pay exactly the same price. Then we have the sugar company which grows its sugar in Queensland and manufactures it in various places. However, in every capital city of Australia the prices of its sugar and products are uniform. So I am of the opinion that with precedents such as these, a good case can be put forward for some uniformity in regard to liquid fuel.

It is almost impossible for any industry in country districts today to operate in successful competition with industries conducted on the coast. Power and water are so much more expensive that it is folly for them to make any attempt to conduct a decentralisation policy by moving or starting factories in districts outside the metropolitan area.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: And transport, too.

Mr. ACKLAND: I do not want to bring in freight. Let us deal with one matter at a time. I was interested in the answers which were given to me by the Premier this afternoon in which he informed me that the price of petrol—or at least the transport charges on petrol—are subsidised in the North-West on the same basis that petroleum products can be landed at Geraldton. I have been able to obtain some figures which show that the companies do not sell petrol at the various ports for a uniform price. It would appear that their

transport costs are the same at Carnarvon, Derby and Wyndham as they are at Geraldton.

The Minister for Works: Does the hon. member think it would be a simple matter to buy "The West Australian" at a uniform price?

Mr. ACKLAND: I hope the Premier will give us an opportunity of discussing "The West Australian" at some future time because I have decided views about that matter. I have found that there is a basic price for petrol whether it is super or standard petrol and the basic price is that charged at Fremantle. At Albany and Geraldton it is plus 1½d.; Bunbury, plus 5½d.; Esperance plus 1s. 1½d.; Carnarvon plus 9½d.; Broome plus 11½d.; and Wyndham plus 11½d. From this information—and I have no reason to doubt it correctness; it was given by the Premier this afternoon—it appears that the prices should have been the same as at Geraldton, namely, 1½d. above the basic price at Fremantle.

Further, I have been able to obtain some figures showing the plus basic prices which are charged for petrol in many centres in the State. These show that at Hall's Creek the charge is 2s. 1½d. above the basic price at Fremantle, at Esperance 1s. 1½d., Norseman 1s. 1½d., Kalgoorlie 11½d. and these are mining centres. The costs to be met by our mining companies and prospectors must be increased to a very considerable degree because of the fact that they have to pay so very much more for their petrol than is paid in the metropolitan area. When we get to the purely agricultural areas we find at Lake Varley the price for petrol plus the basic price is 10½d., at Lake Grace 9½d., Dalwallinu and Morawa 7½d., Milling and Katanning 7d., Wongan Hills 6½d., Goomalling 5½d., Moora 6d., and at Northam 4d.

I have been able to get some rather interesting figures about the important part the cost of fuel and oils plays in the cost of growing cereals in the agricultural districts of Western Australia and these figures are for farmers on the average freight charged by the railways for their produce consigned to Fremantle. They pay 1s. 1½d. to transport their wheat, which the Minister for Agriculture told the House some time ago was the average freight price charged from all country districts. These farmers are picked men—they are young men—who started farming in recent years. I know them personally and they are excellent businessmen.

In dealing with these figures, I have taken the three years, 1953, 1954 and 1955, instead of one year, because it often happens that a man has a carry-over of fuel oil at the end of his financial year, or his stocks may be depleted. These figures indicate a very good average. For the three years, Farmer A paid £731 to crop

970 acres; Farmer B paid £1,561 for his petrol and oil to crop 2,703 acres; Farmer C paid £1,150 for petrol and oils to crop 1,270 acres; and Farmer D paid £614 for petrol and oils to crop 676 acres.

Mr. Nalder: That was the average for the three years.

Mr. ACKLAND: Yes. I have the names of the farmers here should anyone be interested to know them, but I did not see that there was any reason for them to go into Hansard. As a result of these figures, it can be seen that they vary from 15s. to 18s. 3d. per acre for fuel oils for the four farmers. This represents quite a big cost. There are many reasons why the Premier and the Minister for Works should support a move such as this; particularly the Premier, as Treasurer, when he knows the finances of the Railway Department.

It is a fact that farmers can buy their fuel oils cheaper in the metropolitan area than they can in the country, but I doubt whether it would be worth their while and whether they would have any inclination to make up a load of produce at home so that they would have the right to take back from the city a load of fuel oil and other products of a similar nature, if it were no longer a good proposition for them to do so. As a result I believe there would be an increase of hundreds of thousands of pounds to the Railway Department in extra freight. When we take into consideration the extra cost that must be incurred by the mining and pastoral industries, which are situated much further from their source of supplies, the position must be aggravated.

So, the Treasurer and the Minister for Railways have a great interest in trying to obtain the same uniformity with petrol as applies to tyres and tubes in Western Australia. The Minister for Works is called upon very often to find heavy expenditure for the maintenance of the main roads throughout the State. I understand that the Main Roads Department, which he administers, pays the differential rates when it purchases its requirements in the various parts of the State. One can realise how much that must be at Norseman when work has to be carried out on the overland road.

The Minister for Health: They have a flat rate now for all petrol within 30 miles of Perth.

Hon. A. F. Watts: Sometimes further than that.

Mr. ACKLAND: Yes, sometimes it is further. It is not necessary for me to labour this motion. I believe that to pass it would be in the interests of Western Australia including those people who live in the metropolitan area, even though they may be called upon to pay a little more. It would be little more because such a big percentage of the fuel oil and liquid fuel is consumed within the metropolitan area. People in the country districts are crying out because of the high cost of power and

fuel. If they were able to purchase their requirements at a reasonable rate, there would not be the great differential that exists today in regard to power in the smaller country towns.

I am quite willing to admit that great difficulties confront a suggestion such as this, and it is because of those difficulties that I ask the House to appoint a select committee to find out if they are insurmountable. Unless some legislation is introduced, it is possible that the oil companies will try to concentrate in the metropolitan area rather than give the service that is required in the remote parts of the State. I think there would be difficulties in persuading a new company, not already operating here, to decide to sell its products beyond the limits of the metropolitan area.

For my part, I do not know just how difficult these problems are, but in introducing the motion I am not unmindful that they exist. I am conscious of the fact that decentralisation is essential to this country. I am also conscious of the fact that the cost of production in the outback—further out than the South-West Land Division where I know they are heavy—are high indeed. It is in the interests of the people of the metropolitan area that those who are in the outback areas should be given encouragement and that the possibility should be put within their hands of reducing their costs so that they are able to compete for overseas markets.

It is not my intention to talk about overseas markets other than to say that we are falling behind because our costs are so excessive, and I believe this is one way by which we could look into the possibility of bringing into existence a uniform price for all fuel oils. It cannot be impossible to do that. The Government itself is doing it with reference to the South-West power scheme, and we know that the Colonial Sugar Refining Co. is doing it as far as the capital cities of Australia are concerned, although in the case of Western Australia it has to bring its product many thousands of miles from where the raw material is grown. Also, as I have already mentioned, the tyre companies are paying the freight, so I was informed over the phone two or three hours ago, on their products going into the country districts, so that their goods can be sold at a uniform price throughout the State.

The Premier: There is nothing to stop the oil companies from doing the same if they are prepared to do it.

Mr. ACKLAND: The Premier has a great deal more faith in the oil companies than I have if he thinks they are going to do that without some persuasion, let me say, being brought to bear on them.

The Premier: I did not say they were going to do it, but that they could do it, if they would.

Mr. ACKLAND: Yes. We all could do lots of things.

The Premier: Why do not you?

Mr. ACKLAND: The Premier could agree to all the things I have asked him to do for my electorate, but I do not find him doing it.

On motion by the Premier, debate adjourned.

MOTION—FIVE-DAY BANKING WEEK.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

Debate resumed from the 29th August on the following motion by Mr. Johnson:—

That a select committee be appointed to inquire into the desirability of establishing a five-day working week for banks operating in Western Australia; the effect of such proposal on commerce and industry and the public generally; the question of banking hours most suitable to the industry and the general public; and the effect of the present six-day working week on the banking industry.

THE PREMIER (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [5.55]: This motion aims at the appointment of a select committee to inquire into the desirability of establishing a five-day working week for banks operating in the State. The objective behind the move for a five-day working week is, I believe, the abolition of Saturday morning work. It can be said that the banking industry is rather in a class of its own in respect of the five-day working week question because of the existence of an Act of Parliament under the provisions of which the banks have to remain open on Saturdays.

It is only on that point that there would appear to me to be adequate justification for setting up a select committee to inquire into this question. If it were not for the existence of that statute, the Industrial Arbitration Court could, within the jurisdiction given to it by the Act under which it works, proceed to award a five-day working week to bank employees, and in the giving of that decision could, in fact, eliminate Saturday work from the banks. I understand the court has indicated that it is not in a position to make a decision on this issue because of the fact that there is a statute which lays it down that the banks must remain open for business on Saturdays, or on some portion of Saturdays.

In that special circumstance, the Government is prepared to support the motion. Before the court could finally decide the issue on an industrial basis it would, it seems, be necessary for Parliament to amend the Act, and for the Act no longer to lay down that it would be illegal for banks to close on Saturdays. At present

it is illegal under the law, and therefore the Act would have to be amended to make Saturday closing legal.

It is true that the motion for the select committee goes much further than that because it directs the select committee to investigate many other angles of the situation. For instance, the second part of the motion—if the motion be carried in this form—calls upon the select committee to investigate the effect of the proposal for a five-day working week for banks, on commerce and industry, and the public generally; to investigate the question of the banking hours most suitable to industry and the general public, and also the effect of the present six-day working week on the banking industry.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Why has not some action along these lines been taken in the other States? That is, the States on the mainland. I understand that banks in other States are open on Saturdays. One would have thought that some action would have been taken in this regard if it were desirable for banks to close on Saturdays.

The PREMIER: In reply to the Leader of the Opposition, I would think that a similar position exists in other States and that the only way by which the five-day working week could be legal in any State would be by an appropriate amendment to existing legislation.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: And yet, so far as I know, no such action has been taken.

The PREMIER: I could not speak with absolute authority on that point. However, I have no doubt that the organisations concerned in the other States have probably made some move in the direction of trying to have the five-day working week established in the banking industry. Probably in their efforts, they come up against the same difficulty, on an industrial basis, as the local organisation has done in this State.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: It would appear that those Governments are not favourable to it or they could have amended the legislation.

The PREMIER: As far as I know, no Government in Australia in the past has introduced legislation to make a five-day working week legal except possibly the Government in the State of Tasmania which may have done so in respect of at least Hobart if not in respect of the whole of the State. I believe that in the city of Hobart the five-day working week is quite comprehensive. I believe it covers retail stores and I understand it covers banks. Whether the five-day week for banks is State-wide or relates only to the city of Hobart, I am not in a position to say.

Mr. Roberts: Is it not a fact that the New South Wales and the Commonwealth Banks are extending the hours of bank trading, commencing with the branch in Wynyard station?

Mr. Ackland: Yes, that has appeared in the Press.

The PREMIER: I am not aware of that fact, but I did notice in the newspaper this afternoon that the Commonwealth Bank, during the last financial year, made a profit of over £17,000,000. So it seems to be doing all right financially. Whether it is necessary for it to establish a new branch near Wynyard station in New South Wales, I do not know.

Mr. Court: It is mainly in the savings bank section that it is extending the hours.

The PREMIER: However, I think that, in view of the special circumstances of legislation existing to prevent the closing of banks on Saturdays in this State and even to prevent a five-day working week in the banks, an investigation by a select committee could be of considerable value to Parliament in the event of a Government or even a private member, at some future date, moving to amend the existing law. In view of that fact, I would say that there would be sufficient justification for the appointment of a select committee.

If no legislation existed in regard to this matter, the banking industry would have no greater claim for the appointment of a select committee to investigate the possibility of a five-day working week than any other class of industry where the five-day working week does not operate at present. In that situation we would require to have a general investigation into the whole question. So the point of view of the Government is that it supports the motion in view of the special circumstances which exist in regard to the appropriate legislation.

MR. COURT (Nedlands) [6.5]: I feel I should have something to say on this particular motion in view of the action I endeavoured to take when a Bill was before this House to limit the banking week to a five-day week. I find that one needs to have a keen sense of humour in this place; otherwise one would give up completely—

The Premier: Hear, hear!

Mr. COURT: —because I well remember the mover of this motion, after I had appealed to him in the early hours of the morning to get a select committee appointed in respect of his Bill, saying to me, "He talks and talks and talks—"

The Premier: That is only half true.

Mr. COURT: "—and, in my opinion, he talks rot!"

The Minister for Education: That was last year.

Mr. COURT: Fortunately, I could appreciate the humour of it at the time and I can still see the humour of it, which is heightened by the fact that the hon. member who expressed those remarks

about me has now moved for the appointment of a select committee. I do not hold that against him because he made those remarks rather late in the session and the Bunbury by-election was either upon us or behind us, and, of course, anything could have arisen from that.

Mr. Heal: Look what came in!

Mr. COURT: Nevertheless, this motion is one of considerable importance and it has a far-reaching effect. Apart from inquiring into the desirability of establishing a five-day working week for banks operating in Western Australia, it is also to inquire into the effects of such a proposal on commerce and industry and the public generally and further it is to inquire into the question of banking hours that would be most suitable to the industry and the general public and the effect of the present six-day working week on the banking industry.

In other words, the inquiry is to be made not only into the impact of a five-day banking week on commerce and industry but also its effect on the economy generally. It is on that point that I want to have something to say because I feel that this matter cannot be accepted as merely a matter of inquiring into whether it is desirable for the banking employees themselves to have a five-day working week. The fact is that this proposition will be State-wide in its application and it cannot be denied that it will have considerable effect on retail trading in this State. In addition, of course, it will cause some great inconvenience to certain people in this State, particularly to those residing in the country areas.

Furthermore, if this motion is carried I hope that the members of the committee will appreciate that there is an Australia-wide implication. I know the mover of this motion is well aware of that because he has commented on it not only on this but on other occasions. But it is important that that fact should be emphasised because there are certain laws dealing with banking which are Australia-wide in their effect and after all is said and done, we are part of a Commonwealth and we cannot dissociate ourselves from what is happening in other parts of Australia.

During the debate last year on this particular point, the Leader of the Opposition suggested that the matter was an appropriate subject for discussion at Premiers' conferences and with that I agree because whilst Tasmania does not affect the other States to the same extent, I feel that concerted action by all the States in Australia on this particular issue is desirable, if not imperative. Therefore, a subject of this nature lends itself to appropriate action at a Premiers' conference when the leaders of each State are together and when they can, at the same

time, confer with the leaders of the Commonwealth Government and thereby a degree of unanimity could be achieved, I think, and the overall effect could be ironed out. A further point that I hope will be given proper emphasis, should the motion be carried and the select committee be appointed, is the position of the people in the country.

I hope that the select committee will ensure that people in the country will be able to give evidence in their own particular district. This will probably mean a great deal of travel for the members of the select committee but a representative group of places could be chosen. It does not mean that every town or hamlet need be visited. As I have said, a representative group of towns could be chosen, apart from any towns that specifically request a visit from the select committee for the purpose of tendering evidence. For instance, the Goldfields people, as a section of the community, should be given the opportunity to give evidence on the Goldfields on a matter such as this. Major towns such as Northam, Geraldton, Bunbury, Albany and many others should also be given an opportunity to give their evidence without undue inconvenience because the reaction towards the closing of banks on a Saturday morning will be different in various parts of the State.

Since this matter was discussed in the House last year there has been considerable growth in the activities of the various savings banks. There is no doubt that the savings banks are stimulating considerable interest and one has only to go past any of them to note the great volume of business that is being done by a certain section of the community at these savings banks on a Saturday morning. This is a point to which I hope the committee will give a great deal of consideration.

Last year I strongly advocated that the fact that these savings banks are open, apart altogether from the ordinary trading bank section, indicates that more people are in circulation and during that circulation of people there is an impetus to retail business. People who use the savings banks on a Saturday morning are normally those who do not have the same type of business transactions as people with possibly more wealth and more general commercial acumen and commercial interests, and it is most important to them that they should be able to go into a savings bank on a Saturday morning and withdraw or deposit their money as the case may be.

When I made some investigation into this problem, I found that the traffic was so heavy at the Forrest Place section of the Commonwealth Bank that the police had to be employed to direct the people into that chamber. This was also necessary at Victoria Park—as another case in point—in order to provide some control over the people coming and going at that branch

of the Commonwealth Bank. I cannot believe that that number of people would do anything but stimulate the retail turnover in their particular area. That in turn, of course, has an effect on employment and the general prosperity of those particular districts. When I moved for the appointment of a select committee last year, I listed six points as being important reasons why such an appointment should be made. I feel it is appropriate to re-state them.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. COURT: I was about to state the six reasons which I gave in support of my proposition for a select committee when a Bill was before the House last year dealing with this particular subject. They are: Firstly, there are many people directly and indirectly affected and they are entitled to be heard. Secondly, the economic aspects of this measure, as distinct from the lesser factor of inconvenience, could be thoroughly examined by a select committee. Thirdly, a select committee would afford ample opportunity for people to be heard without their being put to any great expense; they could be heard in an informal atmosphere, and would have ample opportunity to present a case themselves and bring evidence in support of it.

Fourthly, a select committee could examine the effect of Saturday closing on savings bank depositors and the operations of the savings bank deposit system. Fifthly, it could examine whether the Bill would bind the Commonwealth Bank. It could determine the effect if the Commonwealth Bank were not bound—I have my doubts whether it would be—because it could be detrimental to our own Rural & Industries Bank if it were not allowed to function on a Saturday, and to the Western Australian branches of the several trading banks. Sixthly, the select committee could examine the methods necessary for providing ample security for depositors' funds.

That is a fairly comprehensive range of points to be examined. From the motion before us I would say that each of those aspects could be read into it. The committee could adequately cover all those points. In fact, the mover of the motion went to some pains to explain that he meant to cover those points, if not completely, at least in the main. I feel that one should not discourage an inquiry of this nature. It would be grossly inconsistent on my part if I did.

I want to make this point: We should not under-estimate the importance of the matter involved. I have on a previous occasion gone to some pains to demonstrate that the issue was greater than the question of certain bank employees having Saturday mornings free. There are other very important factors related to the economy, and particularly to the volume of retail trade, and—just as important as that—the con-

venience of the people who use the savings banks' facilities to a large extent. To make the point again, the people who use those facilities for their everyday banking transactions are in an entirely different group to the people who have access to the ordinary banking system day after day. The needs of the former are apparently greatest on a Saturday, if one is to judge from the volume of people who go in and out of savings banks on a Saturday morning.

By interjection, someone commented on the fact that there was a tendency to extend the hours of banking. In respect of the savings bank section, the Commonwealth Bank has extended very considerably the hours of business in New South Wales in at least one branch, the Wynyard branch. I understand that one can make a deposit as early as 7.30 a.m., and those facilities are used considerably.

Mr. Heal: I understand that over the last two years the Commonwealth Bank in Perth has reduced the hours of trading on Saturday mornings.

Mr. COURT: But that does not say that banks are not, in fact, open on Saturday mornings and giving a service to the public. In conclusion I want to repeat one observation. I feel this is a matter which the Government should take up officially at the Premier's level during a Premiers' conference. Whilst it might be discounted as being comparatively unimportant, the fact remains that it is a nation-wide issue. It is a problem that has been before the Industrial Arbitration Court in at least two States. Because of Commonwealth and State legislation, those courts have declared that the matter must be dealt with on a parliamentary basis before industrial tribunals can adjust the awards accordingly. Surely a matter of this nature involving the banking system of Australia should be discussed at a Premier's level with a view to trying to reach agreement between certain States.

I do not oppose the motion, but I hope that when the select committee deliberates on this matter it will make it easy for the greatest number of people to give evidence, preferably in their own locality, in the atmosphere of their own local conditions, and that the Government will take some action to sound out the reaction of the Premiers in the other States. In Queensland where there is no Legislative Council and where a Labour Government has been in office for the best part of 40 years, Saturday morning closing has not been introduced. As far as I know, it has given no notice of intention to provide for Saturday morning closing of the banks in that State.

MR. BOVELL (Vasse) [7.37]: I support the motion because I consider this is a much better approach to the subject than that made by the member for Leederville on two other occasions. Previously he had

introduced a Bill to provide bank holidays on every Saturday morning. We know that the Bills of Exchange Act applies, and the only way in which this legislature can deal with the position is to declare Saturdays as public holidays. If it is intended that a general five-day week shall operate in the banking industry throughout Australia, then it is a matter for Commonwealth legislation and not for State action.

Personally, I believe bank officers should participate in some of the privileges enjoyed by the Commonwealth and State public servants. Generally speaking, the latter work a five-day week. Bank officers who are engaged in similar occupations should be given an opportunity to share in the benefits that are conferred on Commonwealth and State public servants. As I said before, the banking industry owes certain obligations to the community. In view of the most alarming increase in the number of robberies, even of banks, the banks themselves must be prepared to accept the responsibility of custodian of the public's money by providing facilities for the safekeeping of their customers' cash. In the metropolitan area night safes are available for the use of the banks' clients, but in the country those facilities are not to be found.

I welcome the opportunity for the appointment of a select committee to inquire into the position. On previous occasions I did not receive any lead from the Associated Banks or the bank officers in regard to this matter. A certain amount of pressure was brought to bear by the Bank Officers' Association, but, generally speaking, individual bank officers and executives made no recommendations as to the closing of banks in this State on Saturday mornings. This might be quite a good opportunity for all concerned—not only the executives and officers of banks, but also members of the public—to present their cases. This is a good move and after inquiry, Parliament will be in a position to decide on the evidence taken by that committee whether it is in the public interest to have a five-day week in the banking industry.

HON. L. THORN (Toodyay) [7.41]: I have no objection to this motion by the member for Leederville because I feel that it will produce the information that is required to inform ourselves whether it is a wise move to have a five-day working week for bank officers. The banking institutions of Australia are rendering a great public service. In my opinion, that service is just as necessary on Saturday morning as on any other working day. As a matter of fact, the volume of banking business done on a Saturday morning is much heavier than on any other day of the week. As I pointed out on the last occasion when I spoke to the Bill then

before the House, they render a great service to the people who cannot do their banking business during the week. A great volume of overseas drafts are executed on Saturday mornings.

When I spoke on the Bill previously, the member for Guildford-Midland doubted the opinion I expressed that at Midland Junction there is a great volume of business from new Australians and particularly from the Yugoslavs living in the Swan district, and from working-class people who cannot use the banking facilities except on Saturday mornings when they are free. All sorts of arguments can be put up relating to this question such as this: If it is good enough for the bank officers to have Saturday mornings off, it is good enough for the post office because that is another Commonwealth Department. If we approve of all civil servants working a five-day week, why not extend the same condition to the post office?

Mr. Ackland: Why not to the Tramways Department?

Hon. L. THORN: Why not extend it to everybody including shop assistants. In my opinion, they are entitled, if we support the principle put forward by the member for Leederville, to a five-day week also.

The Minister for Police: Do not the people in Tasmania send any drafts?

Hon. L. THORN: That was what the Minister brought up on the last occasion. As the member for Nedlands said, in Queensland there has been a Labour Government in office for many years. Neither there nor in New South Wales and in other States, have Labour Governments moved to introduce a five-day week for the banking industry because they have realised what a great service the banks are giving the public. They know that the services of the banks are required on a Saturday morning.

Robberies were mentioned. Why should shopkeepers have to carry extra money over Friday night for use in their businesses? Why should they not be able to get change on a Saturday morning? I do not think it would be a good move to close the banks on Saturday morning. I notice that a conciliation commissioner in the Eastern States refused to grant this concession when a deputation put a case to him on behalf of the bank officers. We know why that was so. It was because the Bills of Exchange Act would prevent it, and he could not give a decision on the matter without the authority of an Act of Parliament.

However, I agree to the proposal for an inquiry, because I believe that is the right way to go about the matter. The member for Nedlands referred to the attitude of the member for Leederville on this question last year. On that occasion, when the member for Nedlands suggested an

inquiry, the member for Leederville said, "What rot!" He has probably been enlightened since then.

The Minister for Police: He has seen the light—the light that glows brighter!

Hon. L. THORN: On this occasion, the member for Leederville is approaching the matter in a reasonable and sensible way. Let us have an inquiry. It will be most interesting, because the select committee will have to travel to different parts of the State, and it will secure first-hand information as to the effect of closing banks on Saturday mornings in different districts. Such information will be valuable.

I would agree to the employment of skeleton staffs in banks on Saturday mornings. I think a lot of that is going on. Banks have only skeleton staffs to deal with the business, and they give their employees as fair a deal as possible. I support the motion.

MR. ROBERTS (Bunbury) [7.47]: I support the motion, and I feel that the field of inquiry of the select committee must be considerable and that special consideration should be given to country areas. I notice that one of the terms of the inquiry would be the effect of Saturday closing on commerce, industry and the public generally. In country areas the retailer is the banker and the nursemaid of the public generally before the banks open at 10 a.m. and after they close at 3 p.m. The primary producer in the country areas depends considerably on the retailer to change his cheques; and I hope that the select committee, in making its investigation, will keep in mind the point of view of the retailers in country areas.

Another aspect that I think the select committee should not overlook concerns the tourists, especially in centres such as Bunbury. They leave the metropolitan area on Fridays and may want to change cheques on a Saturday morning. The retailers in tourist centres like Bunbury—

Mr. Hall: And Albany.

Mr. ROBERTS: Yes, and all the other centres, have difficulty in keeping up a supply of ready cash for changing cheques, especially for their own clientele let alone strangers who visit the district. I support the motion.

HON. D. BRAND (Greenough) [7.50]: I support the motion. Like the member for Nedlands, I am very pleased to see that the mover of the motion has seen some advantage in coming to this House and seeking an inquiry, rather than asking members to put legislation on the statute book providing for a five-day week for bank officers without the effects being ascertained. As someone has said, it is not a matter merely of a five-day week for bank officers. The effect of such a decision might be far-reaching.

Representing a country electorate, I could perhaps express the opinion which I think would emanate from centres like Mullewa and Carnamah or any other country town that might be mentioned. Until some two or three years ago, the people enjoyed Saturday afternoon shopping. Now, except in a few towns, only Saturday morning shopping is available to them. If the move to make a five-day week universal for bank officers through the State were successful, I imagine that there would very quickly be a move to close all shops on Saturdays. So far as I can ascertain, there is only one State in which there is a public holiday on Saturday, and that is Tasmania; and I am not sure that that is universal throughout Tasmania. Perhaps the mover of the motion could tell me.

Mr. Johnson: It is.

Hon. D. BRAND: I understand that there is a public holiday on Saturday in Hobart and that that capital is then like a morgue, in spite of the fact that there is a big tourist trade in Tasmania. I imagine that that city would be losing a great deal of that trade by virtue of having allowed a law to be placed on the statute book providing for the closing of shops and banks and all business on that day.

Mr. Jamieson: Hobart is prosperous.

Hon. D. BRAND: Looking through the eyes of the member for Beeloo, it might be prosperous; but I am stating cold, hard facts. I imagine tourists—including a few people from this State—have found it inconvenient to some extent to visit Hobart on a Saturday, when they have wished to buy souvenirs and have been unable to do that or to enjoy themselves as they would wish to. I think a good deal of encouragement would be given to trade if that city could revert to at least a half-day of shopping on a Saturday.

Even in this State, as the member for Bunbury has mentioned, people visiting towns like Bunbury, Albany and Geraldton would experience a great deal of inconvenience if the banks were closed on a Saturday. One could go on quoting instances in which such a move would not be convenient. Certainly it would not be desirable to close the banks on a Saturday morning without first giving consideration to the whole effect of such a move. One would expect that States like Queensland, with a Labour Government, would have moved along the lines suggested by the member for Leederville and provided for a five-day week for banks. But no such action has been taken. No Government, in any of the other States, so far as I know, has taken such action and there must be some very good reason why the privilege that is enjoyed by civil servants has not been passed on to bank officers.

Hon. L. Thorn: The Government here will not move in the matter either.

Hon. D. BRAND: That is true. The move has been originated by private members, in particular the member for Leederville. As was said in the debate last year, we are here to do the greatest good for the greatest number and a searching inquiry, such as could be conducted by a select committee, could give consideration to all the problems involved in this matter. There may be a time far ahead when the banks will close, and such a move might readily be accepted by the people. But at this stage I am at a loss to understand how any such procedure can be adopted when betting shops are now open for business on Saturday afternoons. There are a lot of officers and clerks working in those shops. It seems to me that in one direction there is a move to close down banking facilities available to the public on Saturday morning, while on the other hand the fact is overlooked that another set of employees are providing other services to a certain section of the people in the form of betting facilities.

Because of the confusion which probably exists in the minds of the public at large, since there is a very different issue at stake in the country from that which would obtain in the metropolitan area, and because other States have not moved in this matter, I think the subject is one which might well be discussed by the leaders of the States at a Premiers' conference or some other gathering of that sort. I believe it is important that we should move towards uniformity and no action should be taken by one State but rather, in a matter such as this which would affect the overall banking organisation, action should be taken through the Commonwealth as the result of conferences between the States on a Federal level.

I am happy to support the proposal for an inquiry. I think it might be a good thing if ample time were given to the select committee to gather its information and if every opportunity were given to that end, even to the smallest section of the community, before any decision is reached with regard to legislation.

MR. JOHNSON (Leederville—in reply) [7.58]: I wish to thank all members who have spoken to this issue for their general agreement to the appointment of a select committee to inquire into a five-day banking week. I think I should commence my comments in winding up the debate with one of the points I tried to make when I introduced the motion; that is, that in moving for a select committee I am not myself convinced of its necessity for establishing the information that is available. That information is in the main fairly readily available, and the purpose of the select committee would be to make it

available in one place so that those who are entitled to vote on legislation, if and when it is introduced, will be able to get it without any labour to themselves.

When the Bill was before the House last year, I was very disappointed at the amount of research that had been done and the amount of understanding that there was in the minds of those who spoke against it. As I said then, there appeared to be only one opponent of the Bill who had done any research at all. On this occasion the wording of the motion intended to indicate that it is my intention that the select committee should cover all the ground possible in this matter and that nobody should be restricted in any way in seeking or giving information to the committee. In other words, it is not my intention to make this in any way a whitewashing committee or to cover up or hide any information or prevent anyone from giving any information.

It is my firm belief, after 30 years of banking experience, that there is no necessity for banks to be open on Saturdays. No one can produce sufficient evidence to show that there is any necessity for it. That is not to say, however, that there is no convenience in having the banks open on Saturdays; there would be further convenience in having them open on Sundays. The point is the degree of necessity.

Mr. Court: I think there is one point that you will not concede and that is that there might be another factor other than just releasing employees for the Saturday. You seem most insistent that it will not affect commerce at all.

Mr. JOHNSON: Of course, it would have no effect of commerce—or no appreciable effect anyway. That is one of the main points I am trying to make, and I have some little knowledge of the subject and of the effect of banking on commerce.

Mr. Court: What amount do you place on a savings bank system?

Mr. JOHNSON: That has some degree of importance but it should not prevent the banks from shutting. I do not say that it will not have any effect on commerce, but I am prepared to say that the effect will be small.

Mr. Court: Do not you think that the average type of person who has only a savings bank account is the type who uses the Saturday morning facilities.

The Premier: That is one of the things the select committee will find out.

Mr. JOHNSON: I think it will be found on examination that it is not of very great importance. I would suggest, for instance, that there is a savings bank agency in one of our largest shops; it has been there for many years. I can remember the scandal when it was first closed down. That savings bank agency

is entitled to be open during the whole time the shop is open. As long as the shop is trading, the savings bank is trading. For instance, there was an advertisement stating that an agency of the N.S.W. savings bank was being opened in a news-agency shop last week-end. That agency will trade on Saturday and the hours are from 7.30 or 8 a.m. to 1 o'clock and from 3 to 8 p.m. The bank advertised that those were the trading hours in that instance.

All these points have to be taken into consideration. The savings bank business is now being spread over a wider field. There are now five savings banks operating in Western Australia and each of them is competing in a rather unrealistic but still apparent fashion. The spread of agencies is widening and it will be found that it is possible for all savings bank business to be transacted other than at the premises of the bank concerned.

Mr. Bovell: That is a good idea.

Mr. JOHNSON: The argument which had some validity 12 months ago has now ceased to have any appreciable validity. There are a number of points to which I feel a reply should be given and the member for Bunbury dealt with the tourist issue. The banks already have operating a system of supplying service to travellers arriving or departing on aircraft or ships, or for any group movement of people, particularly from outside Australia, and in some cases from the Eastern States. In fact, bank officers are expected to go down to the airport or to the wharf and provide facilities at those points at the time the ship or aircraft arrives from overseas. This is provided for in the award and will not be affected in any way by the closure of banks on Saturdays. This is a service that has been provided on days like Christmas Day, if a ship or aircraft arrives on that day and that practice would not be affected by this issue. I have given banking services to people arriving from overseas on Sundays; and might I say that when it was first introduced, we had a battle to get overtime for it; but I believe that it is not so difficult now.

Mr. Court: I do not think that was altogether the point the member for Greenough made.

Mr. JOHNSON: It is a very large proportion of it.

Mr. Court: He said that there are tourists arriving in the State who want access to banking facilities on Saturday morning.

Mr. JOHNSON: That is so and they can very quickly learn that banks provide travellers' cheques which are available as a very useful form of transportable cash and which are becoming more and more acceptable throughout trade generally.

Mr. Perkins: Some tourists come from countries where they are not accustomed to being pushed around so much.

Mr. JOHNSON: That is true and some countries where they are used to being ordered around more.

Hon. D. Brand: They would not have any money if they came from there.

Mr. JOHNSON: The position is that to all the objections there is an answer, and the object of the select committee is to find those answers, to find the objections and to balance up the value of each. I can say, and I have said, from real experience, that there are no objections that are not capable of being answered in regard to this matter.

The tourist trade is one to which an answer cannot be completely acceptable; but then nothing in life is 100 per cent. perfect, and being a tourist is not travelling on a magic carpet completely. People who are tourists at least make some arrangements in regard to a supply of ready cash before they set out. In Tasmania where the tourist industry is important, one of the virtues of a five-day week is that bank clerks themselves are available to go out and put money into the tourist industry—the only trouble is that they have little to spend in that way.

Mr. Court: Hobart is missing a lot of turnover through not being open on Saturday mornings.

Mr. JOHNSON: The latest information that I have been able to obtain from such sources as the Chamber of Commerce and others is that the suggestion that there should be a six-day week in Tasmania is opposed by all but a few traders. Those who want to open on Saturdays are certain hungry individuals and the last set of figures I had indicated that the only group in which there was more than an occasional individual looking for a six-day week was the butchers.

Mr. Hearman: That of course, is not comparable because the shops in Hobart are closed on Saturday morning and there would be no point in the banks staying open. Here the shops remain open and it is a different matter altogether.

Mr. JOHNSON: That point does come into it and information can be obtained in regard to it. But the only people who trade in Hobart, or who desire to trade on Saturdays, are a small proportion of the butchers. The rest of them prefer the advantages of a five-day week.

Mr. Ackland: Hobart is like a morgue on Saturdays. I have never known such a dead place.

Mr. Heal: It is not a bad place.

Mr. JOHNSON: I cannot speak from personal experience but I understand that one of the ideas of a two day week-end is that people can get out of the towns.

Hon. D. Brand: Where do they go? To a place where there is not a public holiday on Saturday?

Mr. Lapham: Has the hon. member been in a morgue yet?

Hon. D. Brand: Not yet.

Mr. JOHNSON: The various points that have been raised have been answered in many ways, but there are a couple I wish to discuss. One is that I am surprised to find the importance that is placed upon the suggestion by people who voted against the Bill last year and who, whilst supporting the appointment of a select committee, are obviously not prepared to support any action—at least at present. I do not think that the provision of banking facilities on Saturdays is a matter of great importance. I feel sure that the evidence will prove that it is of minor importance. I am certain that the fact that there will be banking facilities only on five days instead of 5½ days of the week will have little or no effect upon trading and certainly not upon the economy as a whole.

The volume of trade that is done in banking will still be done; the total will be done in a more efficient and more effective way. Members opposite have suggested that there must be some deep, dark reason why the Governments, and particularly the Labour Governments of the other States, have not introduced this legislation. I would suggest that there is no deep, dark secret about it; it is just that it is not sufficiently important. The number of people affected is so small and the whole matter so unimportant that I feel it would not have been introduced here had it not been for the fact that I came from that particular background and I know how much it irritates people in the industry to have to attend, in the main, for no very useful purpose.

Mr. Bovell: That is not in accordance with fact.

Mr. JOHNSON: Many years ago Saturdays were the worst days of the week, but since the introduction of the 40 hour week which is normally worked in five days in most industries, the banking industry has been less important on Saturdays than it was formerly.

Mr. I. W. Manning: No.

Mr. JOHNSON: I used to get home at half past two or three o'clock on Saturday afternoons before the introduction of the five-day week in other industries, but when that came into force it was possible for me to get home about half past one. More recently the banks themselves reduced the hours and decided to close at 12 o'clock then half past 11 until now it is 11 o'clock on Saturdays. That has been done partly out of consideration for the volume of business and very largely out of consideration for the staff, and I find that my banking friends in the main can get home,

or at least leave the city before 12 o'clock because the volume of business is not sufficient to keep them at work any longer.

Mr. Bovell: Banking systems have been simplified.

Mr. JOHNSON: There are individual cases where that varies. The member for Toodyay suggested the appointment of skeleton staffs in banks on Saturdays. That is a point that could be examined. Banking business is not one that lends itself readily to skeleton staffs. It is not one that lends itself readily in the change-over in duties from one person to another. In the smaller branches the practicability of reducing the staff by a regular number makes it almost impossible.

In the bank in which I was working we did try to reduce the staff. As ledger keeper I permitted a proportion of my ledger machinists to take Saturday off in rotation. However, I was instructed to cease doing that because the other sections in which girls were employed objected because those girls also wanted Saturday off, even though they were not working longer hours in the aggregate. While there are a couple of banks that are pressing very hard for a reduction of staff on Saturdays—and I think there is one which as a matter of routine reduces the staff so that everybody gets one Saturday off in three—there are also banks which have standing orders to the effect that there is to be no reduction of staff on Saturdays because of the difficulty in moving it around fairly.

I would further like to point out that the banking profession is one which has always been regarded as being in the higher range of clerical industries, and one in which a certain degree of ability—perhaps above average—is required. They find now that they are not able to get the intake of youths up to the standard for which they ask. There was a period after I got in—otherwise I would not have got in—when the banks asked for the leaving certificate for every employee. At the time I entered the banking business they were only asking for the junior certificate. They raised the standard later to the leaving certificate, and not very many people without that qualification got into the bank.

The position now seems that the junior certificate is sufficient, and in some cases they go lower than that in their requirements. So there is a possibility that the standard of the banking profession itself is slipping, because of the difficulty in obtaining the best class of recruits. Naturally, the best class of recruit looks for a job that carries a five-day week if he can get it, and there are many comparable industries in which he can. That is a point that must be examined. The suggestion was made that the matter should be discussed at a Premiers' Conference. I would

support that, because I feel it is something that should be inaugurated in all States. But the importance of the matter is so small that I fancy this will not take place. The effect on the trade will be very small and I think it will be found that banks can be done without.

Whether this will have any effect on the shops, and whether they will ask for a five-day week, I do not know. I will admit, however, that the Shop Assistants' Union has had the question of a five-day week on its books for a long time, and it has already made two approaches to the court on that score. It can be expected therefore that the union will also claim a five-day week. I thank members for having supported the motion for the appointment of a select committee, and I hope and trust that they will vote for it.

Question put and passed.

Select Committee Appointed.

On motion by Mr. Johnson, a select committee appointed consisting of Mr. I. W. Manning, Mr. W. A. Manning, Mr. Lapham, Mr. Gaffy and the mover, with power to call for persons and papers, to sit on days over which the House stands adjourned and to move from place to place; to report on the 17th October.

To Refer to Joint Select Committee.

Mr. COURT: I move—

That a message be transmitted to the Legislative Council acquainting it that the Legislative Assembly has appointed a select committee of five members to inquire into a five-day week for the banking industry and requesting the Legislative Council to appoint a select committee with the same number of members with power to confer with the committee of the Legislative Assembly.

In doing so I feel that to make this inquiry conclusive and fully effective it will be desirable to have a committee from the Legislative Council appointed with the same objectives as the committee appointed from this Chamber. There are several reasons that prompt me to move this motion. Firstly, we would have an all-embracing opinion from both Houses, with all-party representation from this House, and all-party representation from the Legislative Council.

The second point I have in mind is that the Government majority in this House has previously passed legislation which would have given effect to Saturday morning closing of banks, and which has been rejected in another place. Therefore, I feel, if the members of that Chamber are co-opted, as it were, through the procedure laid down, we would have a more general expression of opinion and any legislation introduced as a result of that joint select

committee's report would have the backing of a more widespread opinion from both Houses.

Hon. L. THORN: I have great pleasure in supporting the motion because, as the member for Nedlands has said, no matter what happens, the Government with its brutal majority will carry the Bill if it is introduced in this House. I would point out to the member for Leederville that the members in another place are very touchy.

The Premier: Did you say patchy?

Hon. L. THORN: No, I said touchy. They should be consulted on this matter and given the opportunity of appointing a similar committee to consult with the committee appointed by this Chamber. If that is done the member for Leederville will have a better opportunity of succeeding in his endeavours, than he would if he were to ignore another place. I support the motion.

Mr. JOHNSON: I am amazed that such a motion should be put forward after a debate in which there has been unanimity as to the desirability of appointing a select committee from this Chamber.

Mr. COURT: This is not against unanimity.

Mr. JOHNSON: Members who have spoken to this motion—and that includes the mover and the seconder of it—did not have the decency to suggest a joint select committee being appointed. They seem to think it is clever, and that they can put it forward in such a manner as to annoy another place and thus use that Chamber as a means of shelving the whole committee and to give them a parallel committee with a different political set up. I regard it as an attempt to indicate that they do not think that the select committee which has been appointed will bring forward an honest finding.

Hon. D. Brand: Do not talk rubbish!

Mr. JOHNSON: That is how it looks. The whole thing is offensive in the way it has been done.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Rubbish!

Mr. JOHNSON: Had it been done with any decency, the people who moved and seconded the motion would have suggested a joint select committee being appointed during the course of the debate. Had they done so I would have given it serious consideration and put forward my reasons for accepting or rejecting it. This is a matter to which I have given a good deal of attention.

Hon. D. Brand: There are precedents, you know.

Mr. JOHNSON: Had I thought there was any real value in the appointment of a joint select committee, I certainly would have moved in that direction. Members of the Liberal Party last time suggested

there was necessity for speed. The hon. member who moved in that direction suggested that speed was necessary. Now he is endeavouring to prevent speed.

Mr. Court: This does not slow it down. You would be chairman of the committee.

Mr. JOHNSON: Unless I misunderstood the motion, the suggestion seems to be for the appointment of two select committees, both examining witnesses and conducting the matter in a dual capacity. Unless I misheard, there was never any suggestion for the appointment of a joint select committee and the members who did not suggest it in their speeches are not the types of people who would be helpful when serving on this committee—although unfortunately I have done so in preliminary discussions.

Mr. Court: It sits as one committee.

Mr. JOHNSON: It is beyond me why the hon. member did not mention it in his speech. Had he done so we could have debated it in a proper manner. This is a very poor way of dealing with it and it would not be possible to have both committees appointed, then taking evidence and considering the ramifications of the subject and still reporting in five weeks. The intention seems to be to make it difficult, if not impossible, for a Bill to get through this year.

That would appear to be a tactical way of handling it. I am absolutely astounded that during the period the motion has been on the notice paper, nobody has suggested to me anything about the appointment of a joint select committee when they have discussed the motion with me in the corridor. The whole idea does not appeal to me, but if the members who moved and seconded it will give an undertaking on behalf of their parties that they will support anything that comes out of the select committee, I will agree to it whole-heartedly.

Mr. Court: We cannot bind other people.

Mr. JOHNSON: I am opposed to it but not because it deals with another place. I have already considered that angle but do not regard it as necessary. It was my intention to suggest to this select committee when appointed that each member of another place should be advised of its sitting and be invited to be present.

Hon. D. Brand: They would be pleased!

Mr. JOHNSON: They could ask any questions they wished through the members of the select committee and could request the attendance of any witnesses they wished to appear. I want to make it completely clear that I do not want this to be a white-washing or cover-up committee. Unless there is some form of undertaking that the two parties one of whose deputy leader in the House, is second in command, and the other whose third in command—he

is second in the House at the moment—who moved and supported the motion, can give some indication that their parties will be, at least to some degree, bound by the findings, I will not agree to the motion.

Hon. D. BRAND: I think that if the member for Leederville is really sincere in his approach to getting this legislation through at a later date, he should bear in mind what happened to his last effort. It does give an opportunity to members of the Upper House to be in on the inquiry. I am sure they would not be impressed with the Legislative Assembly select committee suggesting they should come along and question the witnesses that came forward. I think the more practical way would be that suggested by the member for Nedlands for the appointment of a joint committee sitting together and thrashing the whole thing out.

The Minister for Lands: A more practical way would have been to give notice before today.

Hon. D. BRAND: It is clear cut and we appreciate that the member for Leederville can make a decision on the spot in regard to it. He either accepts it or turns it down.

Mr. JOHNSON: You can either turn it down or accept it.

Hon. D. BRAND: The decision rests with the member for Leederville. We have tried to be helpful and there is a precedent when the former Administrator of the Northern Territory was here and was Leader of the Opposition. We had a Bill—the Kauri Timber Company Limited Agreement Bill—which was referred to a select committee and it was felt that the inquiries regarding the matter should be carried out by a joint select committee. Accordingly, a request was sent to the Legislative Council—

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member must not refer to another place as the Legislative Council.

Hon. D. BRAND: In another place it was decided they should be given an opportunity to confer on this rather contentious Bill, and it was agreed that the Premier's motion should be agreed to. It was along similar lines to the motion moved by the member for Nedlands and the Premier of the day moved that the motion be submitted to the other place, and I think there was some satisfaction obtained as a result of the deliberation.

The Minister for Works: What impresses me is the great solicitude being shown for the motion of the member for Leederville.

Mr. I. W. MANNING: I support the motion moved by the member for Nedlands requesting that this motion go to the Legislative Council asking for its co-operation regarding the select committee.

The Minister for Works: On the grounds that there are more ways of killing a pig than choking it with butter.

Mr. I. W. MANNING: The member for Leederville, after moving for the appointment of members of this side of the House, the member for Narrogin and myself, implies that he takes exception to our being on this committee. He talks about being insulted. I think members on this side of the House have been insulted. He asks for our co-operation and then raises objections. I am very surprised. The member for Leederville has also moved that this select committee report back in five weeks. I can see quite readily that it is going to be a heavy task to return a finding in such a short period of time.

The Premier: The member for Vasse has left the Liberal Party over this.

Mr. I. W. MANNING: We will be sitting more than Saturday mornings at this rate and I suggest the inclusion of members of the Legislative Council on this committee could be of considerable value indeed, because it looks as if most of the evidence will come from parliamentarians, as by the time we get around the country and ask people what they consider should be done about closing banks on Saturday morning, the five weeks will run out.

The Premier: Who will pay the expenses of this committee?

Mr. I. W. MANNING: I should think the member for Leederville would have had that organised. I urge that this House accept the motion moved by the member for Nedlands as he is trying to be helpful.

The Minister for Works: We are touched!

Mr. I. W. MANNING: I can see, without giving it a great deal of thought, that it could be very helpful indeed, and I urge members to accept the motion.

Mr. HALL: I feel I have to protect my worthy friend, Mr. Johnson. I think for a Labour member he is very liberal in the selection of his committee.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Don't worry about that!

Hon. D. Brand: It is a wonder he did not jump up in protest.

Mr. HALL: I can see no useful purpose in the appointment of the select committee if the intention is to delay action being taken on the lines suggested by Mr. Johnson.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Albany must not refer to the member for Leederville as Mr. Johnson.

Mr. HALL: I must apologise, but I am new to the House. The member for Leederville in his selection of that committee included members of the Opposition, which made it a very select committee.

Mr. COURT (in reply): I should like to reply very briefly. I want to assure the member for Leederville that in moving the motion—

Mr. Johnson: You could have told me this afternoon when you were talking to me.

Mr. COURT: I can assure the hon. member that at that time it was not known I was going to speak on the motion and I do not think there was anything lacking in courtesy, when I have regard for the cavalier fashion in which the member for Leederville dealt with my motion last year. I feel I was extremely moderate because he used strong language regarding myself on that occasion.

The Premier: He was only half right.

Mr. COURT: The Premier is entitled to his own opinion. I think the member for Leederville on reflection will realise that if he has representatives from the other Chamber in consultation on this committee, it will facilitate discussion and there will be an exchange of views on this matter.

Mr. Johnson: Will your party be bound by the findings?

Mr. COURT: I cannot bind any other member of this Chamber, either on the hon. member's side or mine, and I cannot bind those independent gentlemen in another place. There is one thing I should mention in particular. The member for Leederville referred to the fact that this motion would defeat his object and would change the political colour of the committee. I think in that statement he made a disastrous error because it seems that he was upset that some political advantage in the committee might have been disturbed by adding to it the representatives of the other place.

There is this further point: The member for Leederville does not appreciate that this is a motion whereby a joint select committee is formed. The Legislative Assembly appoints its committee, and under the terms of this motion, the other place is requested to appoint a similar committee. The motion expressly says that it has power to confer with the committee of the Legislative Assembly. So far as I can ascertain, that is the procedure whereby the committee is brought together as a joint select committee. I also understand, and I am open to be corrected, that the member for Leederville would automatically be the chairman if the other place agreed to appoint its appropriate select committee. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	....	....	....	16
Noes	....	....	....	19
Majority against				3

Ayes.

Mr. Ackland
Mr. Bovell
Mr. Brand
Mr. Court
Mr. Crommelin
Mr. Hearman
Mr. I. Manning
Mr. W. Manning

Mr. Nalder
Mr. Owen
Mr. Perkins
Mr. Roberts
Mr. Thorn
Mr. Watts
Mr. Wild
Mr. Hutchinson
(Teller.)

Noes.

Mr. Andrew
Mr. Brady
Mr. Evans
Mr. Graham
Mr. Hall
Mr. Hawke
Mr. Heal
Mr. W. Hegney
Mr. Hoar
Mr. Jamieson

Mr. Johnson
Mr. Lapham
Mr. Lawrence
Mr. O'Brien
Mr. Potter
Mr. Sewell
Mr. Sleeman
Mr. Tonkin
Mr. May
(Teller.)

Pairs.

Ayes.

Mr. J. Hegney
Mr. Kelly
Mr. Gaffy
Mr. Toms
Mr. Nulsen

Noes.

Mr. Cornell
Mr. Mann
Mr. Grayden
Mr. Oldfield
Sir Ross McLarty

Question thus negatived.

MOTION—UNECONOMIC RAILWAY LINES.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

Debate resumed from the 29th August on the following motion by Mr. Hearman:—

That in view of the obvious problem of uneconomic railway lines, a select committee be appointed to inquire into and make recommendations on—

- (a) the establishment of an experimental test road to determine the lowest attainable cost of providing a road, and operating road transport vehicles in country areas of low traffic density at present served by uneconomic railway lines;
- (b) a suitable length of road or roads for the establishment of such an experimental test road;
- (c) the type of authority considered most suitable for the conduct of such an experiment and research into related questions;
- (d) the types of vehicles and equipment and operating conditions best suited to the several requirements of giving satisfactory service to the areas likely to be affected;
- (e) to make any other relevant suggestions.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT
(Hon. H. E. Graham—East Perth) [8.50]:
The Government welcomes this motion as being indicative of serious thought on the part of at least one member of this Parliament in the matter of a great and

serious problem which must be faced, very shortly, by the whole of the State Parliament. That problem is the question of road and rail transport.

It can be said definitely and emphatically that the present is a transitional period so far as transport is concerned; and that, of course, applies in many fields. During our short lifetime we have seen the change from donkey teams and camel teams to the horse and cart, supplemented to a large extent by a rail system, but gradually, and in later years rapidly, being challenged by road transport. I feel it becomes necessary for us to adjust our minds and our approach to the whole question of accepting the inevitable, otherwise we shall find ourselves engulfed in a ridiculous situation, perchance, where road transport has already become old-fashioned and is superseded by air transport. There have been several occasions within recent years when interruptions to the rail service in Western Australia have indicated to us just what road transport is capable of doing.

On each occasion it appears that there is a less and less impact upon the normal processes of the State as a result of the growing capacity of road hauliers to cater for the major requirements of Western Australia. I know that is not a complete answer to the whole question. What I am doing is suggesting that there is a change and that there is a problem which has to be faced up to in Western Australia by this Parliament. I want to add further that whatever be the position of the railway system in Western Australia, it continues to stagger along—I think that is perhaps how it can be most adequately described—to a great extent because of the attitude of the Transport Board which, under its charter, is required, amongst other things, to give consideration to existing forms of transport. Sometimes I feel that the Transport Board is paying too much regard for the existing forms rather than for the service which would be capable of giving maximum satisfaction to the people.

It will be interesting to members for me to point out that the railway system of Western Australia has a capital cost of £58,000,000, from which amount some few years ago—in 1950—£12,000,000 was written off. But it must be borne in mind that a great deal of that money was spent many years back when £1 was equivalent to £5 at the present moment. Therefore the mere recital of figures stretching back over history will not, on its own, tell the true story. During the last ten years—this is the important part of it—to the 30th June, 1956, no less than £34,727,000 of loan moneys has been spent on capital works for the Railway Department. During the same period the losses have totalled the staggering figure of £32,452,000. In other

words, a total on loan and revenue accounts of just over £67,000,000 has been involved for the ten years up to the 30th June last.

Mr. Bovell: This problem is not confined to Western Australia.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I know it is not, but the Government, and I believe all thinking persons, are, or must be, concerned at this trend and the impact it is having on the finances of the State. I repeat, that over the last ten years the staggering amount of £67,000,000 of loan and revenue moneys has been involved. Just imagine what could be done with that sum in the way of drainage, water supplies, schools, hospitals, the implementation of the Stephenson plan, and so on!

It is not as though that money has been expended and we now have a modernised, efficient and well-equipped railway system, because we have not. As a matter of fact, in a report which is before me at the moment I find it is estimated that a further £7,500,000 per annum will be required, in each of the next ten years, to be spent on capital works in order to make our railway system reasonably efficient. Of course, this can be done only to the detriment of other vital works; works that are essential for the ordinary happiness and enjoyment of our people, and also for the development of our resources. This, surely underlines my previous statement that we, as responsible members of Parliament, irrespective of party, should give serious consideration to this tremendous question in all its various aspects.

Mr. Nalder: Do you know from the sum you have mentioned the amount apportioned to rollingstock?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: No. I have no dissection of it. It will be appreciated that I am not the Minister for Railways, and therefore could not be expected to be familiar with the various items, but I would hazard a guess that the great proportion of the money to be expended in the future will be devoted to ballasting, reballasting, resleepering, the provision of new rails and so on. In other words, it will be spent on the track, perhaps, more than on rollingstock; although I notice from certain reports that we have a terrific quantity of rollingstock of one form or another that is 40 or 50 years old, or more. Of course, there cannot be too much useful life left in those vehicles. Now the railway commissioners have pointed out that because of the state of the rollingstock it—the rollingstock—is spending too much of its time in the repair shop at Midland Junction instead of being out on the track rendering useful service.

I am devoting some attention to this matter of railways before getting down more specifically to the question of road transport because, as will be seen from the motion, the member for Blackwood wants

an experimental test road established for certain purposes with a view, by and large, to seeing whether a road built on such a basis could be an alternative to uneconomic railway lines serving certain districts at the moment. I think members will agree that, in view of what I have said up to this point, it is a matter of seeing whether something should be done in order to test the point—if we are not already possessed of the information—as to whether we can allow the present condition of affairs to continue.

It is a fact that at present there are 1,500 miles of railway lines in Western Australia which are returning less—and I must repeat this—returning less than 50 per cent. of the operating costs, without making any provision for interest or depreciation.

Hon. D. Brand: How many miles of railway lines?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: More than 1,500 miles. And the total railway mileage in the State is 4,111.

Mr. Bovell: It has been reduced in recent years. It used to be over 5,000 miles.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I do not know how that could be because there has been nothing like that difference in mileage of railway line either closed or with operations suspended and therefore I think the member for Vasse is making some mistake, unless perhaps the figure he has in mind includes that portion of the Commonwealth railway line that is within Western Australia. The figures that I refer to relate to those railway lines that are under the control of the Railways Commission.

Mr. Bovell: Before the war I understood that there were approximately 5,300 miles of railway lines within Western Australia. That included the Commonwealth railway line.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I want to cite three examples of our railway lines to indicate the lack of patronage: in other words, to indicate how little the people desire to use them. In the great majority of cases, such traffic as is being borne by these railway lines is being carried largely because of restrictions imposed by the Transport Board. I will quote the first example. This is a railway of 111 miles in length which carries a total of 12 tons of freight only per working day.

The Minister for Works: One could carry that much in a wheelbarrow.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: That is the point.

Mr. Nalder: It all depends who is pushing the wheelbarrow.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: If necessary rehabilitation is carried out in respect of that railway line and proper charges are made in the accounts to meet the additional capital cost, it will cost no

less than 6s. 7d. per ton mile for every ton of goods hauled over that particular railway. These cases get better as I go on. Another railway line of 37 miles in length is carrying no more than nine tons of freight per working day throughout the year. If that line was put into proper shape the operating costs would be 10s. 9d. a ton mile. The third case I will give is a railway line of 64 miles in length which is carrying only seven tons of freight per working day and if essential rehabilitation work is carried out in respect of it, in order to meet the operating costs—including all factors—the charge that would have to be made to meet such costs would be 15s. per ton mile.

We know that road trucks can haul goods for something less than 1s. per ton mile, but I repeat that the cost, on the railway system, would be 15s. per ton mile and that particular railway is carrying only seven tons of goods per working day in the year, which is less than that which could be transported with one road vehicle, even assuming that all of the traffic was in the one direction. Despite this, the usual thing is for there to be a hue and cry from the people in the affected district if there is any proposal advanced to terminate the railway services in that area; services which are not being patronised by the local people and which would be patronised far less were it not for the intervention of the W.A. Transport Board.

Mr. Bovell: That applies also to the metropolitan passenger traffic.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: That could be so.

Mr. Bovell: It is so.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: But in regard to the metropolitan railway system, those lines are already there and they must be maintained and certain organisation in connection with them has to be made in regard to the last few miles of line over which country goods trains must travel to reach their terminus. So during the day there may as well be passenger coaches flying backwards and forwards along those railway lines in the metropolitan area. If they were discontinued, there would, I understand, be a minute reduction in the overhead costs for the maintenance of the track and the rest of it although, somewhat naturally, there cannot be a clear distinction between whether it is passenger or goods trains that are causing the general wear and tear as a result of passing over the railway lines in the metropolitan section.

Mr. Bovell: To my knowledge £750,000 per annum is being lost on the metropolitan railway system.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: That may or may not be so. I do not want to be at loggerheads with anyone

on this question. Neither do I want there to be a contest—the city versus the country districts. For that reason, I have deliberately refrained from identifying the three railway lines I have mentioned. I want this matter looked at objectively. I do not want a member representing a country district to feel that he is called upon to defend the railway line operating in his particular electorate because I would prefer him to have a look at the overall problem. I repeat that this is a problem which has to be faced not only by the Government but also by the Parliament of Western Australia.

It is not my intention to be critical of anyone during the course of my remarks. It would be quite easy for me to say that the McLarty-Watts Government should not have spent all the money that it did in purchasing diesel locomotives, rollingstock and all the rest of it, because now, in 1956, it is comparatively easy to see the ascendancy of road transport and the remarkable development there has been in its progress and the increase in sums of money that have been made available in Western Australia for road construction and so on. However, the picture was not as clear in those days when the Government made its decision to spend vast sums of money.

Hon. D. Brand: Each State did the same.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: That may be so and possibly each State is at the moment regretting that there is this additional capital burden on its railway system which has to be faced up to, when, at the same time, there are many thousands of road vehicles clamouring to do the work and the business fraternity, the producers, the people from the city and also the country districts, are seeking to make the utmost use of this modern form of transport.

The Minister for Police: What about the effect on the Midland workshops?

Mr. Bovell: The problem extends beyond this State.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I do not know which way to turn and I cannot hear what is being said because both the Minister for Police and the member for Vasse are speaking at once.

The Minister for Police: As long as you do not close the Midland Junction workshops.

Hon. D. Brand: This matter should have been thrashed out in Cabinet before being brought to the House.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I am not advocating any course whatever. I am endeavouring to present before

Parliament certain matters that are statements of fact. From that there are certain conclusions to be drawn and, later on, certain decisions to be made. When the decisions are made, no doubt there will be some conflicting points of view. I have no quarrel with that. Surely, first of all, it is necessary to have a look at the picture of the operation of our railway system and the effect it is having upon the economy of the State; in other words, the State's finances.

The Minister for Police: As long as you do not create unemployment.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: There is no doubt that, irrespective of economics, the employment situation and where things are made or obtained, there are very many people who prefer the convenience of a service that calls at the factory door and which is able to deliver goods to a farm shed or to any other place to which they are destined. Even if it costs them a little more which, in many cases it does not, they prefer that convenience, that time-tabling, that freedom from so many processes of handling with the attendant risk of losses, breakages and so on. As a result, people are continually asking for permits for the use of road transport. I suppose that more than 50 per cent. of the members representing country districts have approached me in recent weeks asking for certain concessions in the matter of road transport in preference to using the railway systems which, in many cases, run directly to the township or the district concerned.

Mr. May: And you will get some more requests.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: No doubt I will and I am passing no comment on that other than stating it as an illustration to show members the direction in which the minds of the people in the business fraternity and the farming community are working. It is not for me to say, in the course of this debate, that one system of road transport is preferable to the other. I merely wish to let members know definitely and without question that that is the form of transport that is being sought by a great number of people and in increasing numbers.

Mr. May: In regard to certain lines of traffic only. They do not want the poorly paying traffic.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I do not know what the poorly paying traffic is.

Mr. May: Small parcels.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: Getting back to one of the railway lines I have mentioned, if the minimum cost is to be 15s. per ton mile, I do not know what could be hauled cheaply by the railway line because I am certain that no road haulage system would contemplate charging as much as 15s. per ton mile and

not even 15d. per ton mile. However, let us not continue along that line of argument any further.

It is a fact that the railways, having regard to modern circumstances, were built too close together. The general policy was to have them sited approximately 25 miles apart so as to have a maximum of 12½ miles haulage in either direction. That policy was adopted in the days of the horse and dray. It is a comparatively simple matter these days, with motor-trucks in use, for farmers to carry their produce from the farms or the goods they require a much greater distance. So today there are more miles of railway line per farm than the railway system is able to carry in the financial sense. Because of the very small volume of goods which is being transported by the railways, naturally there is a most infrequent service.

In certain places where road haulage systems exist in Western Australia, the people are able to send goods backwards and forwards every day, or every second day, but if they have to depend on the railways, having regard to the volume of goods to be carried, possibly one train every fortnight would be sufficient to meet the requirements of such a district. From what I have said, quite apart from the instance that I gave of a certain line of 64 miles carrying 7 tons per day, a road truck could handle all the goods without any difficulty, and furthermore instead of one train per week there would be six trucks per week, almost a daily service. The effect on the existing roads would be exactly nil, because no roads in Western Australia directly linking one township or area with another exist which are not capable of carrying the damage that is likely to be caused by one truck per day.

Whilst I have used this individual case, there are many other railway lines carrying a very small volume of traffic. As a matter of fact, half the railway system in this State carries less than 40,000 tons per annum. I am informed by competent authorities that any of our roads connecting the main centres could, without difficulty, carry that tonnage without any damage being done to the roads, provided always that the trucks conformed to the requirements of not exceeding a certain tonnage axle load. Here in Western Australia the standard is approximately the same as in other parts of the Commonwealth. Where the annual tonnage exceeds 40,000, no doubt a certain amount of damage would be done and the cost for maintenance would be increased. Not for the next few years, at any rate, would we be likely to give consideration to closing more than 50 per cent. of the railway lines in Western Australia; therefore, that does not become a practicable proposition. I am assured that anything up to 40,000 tons should not have an undue detrimental effect on the roads.

Hon. D. Brand: After a Government has closed 25 per cent of the lines, I doubt whether it will have the opportunity to close the other 25 per cent.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I am not suggesting that the Government is or proposes to do that. I am stating a problem and giving suppositions relating to that matter so that members will have a clear picture of the whole situation. I shall indicate presently what the Government is doing and how far it has gone.

My information is that with the introduction of new machinery, equipment and modern methods since 1938-39, the cost of constructing roads per mile has not increased, notwithstanding the nominal increase in the costs of all the components that go into a road. That is brought about by the general efficiency and the greater output of machinery, and so on. With regard to railway construction, maintenance, attention to rollingstock, etc. the cost over the same period has increased by 300 per cent. Therefore, whatever may have been the position in prewar days with regard to providing a route for a railway line, as against a road, the position is vastly different at the present time. Dealing more particularly with roads I am informed by the Main Roads Department that it can construct an 18ft. wide 6in. deep gravel road for £1,000 a mile.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: That is just gravel without foundations?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: Precisely. I am told there would be extra costs for foundations and where required for culverts and bridges. On a gravel road the maintenance cost would be in the vicinity of £50 per mile per annum, but if there was a sealed bituminous concrete road from two to four inches thick, capable of carrying heavy loads—

Hon. D. Brand: How wide?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I presume over the same width of 18 feet. The cost of constructing such a road would vary between £5,000 and £8,000 per mile, that being the initial capital cost. Maintenance, of course, would be much less.

Mr. Bovell: For the first 20 years?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: That is so, until the road is worn and it has to be rebuilt. Lots of things could happen in the interim. I am informed that the ordinary bitumen seal on country roads costs, for preparation and priming, £1,500, and for sealing £1,000; in other words, a total of £2,500 per mile. These roads are satisfactory for an axle load of $7\frac{1}{2}$ tons which is the general maximum imposed by the Main Roads Department. So it will be seen that the country roads, as we know them at the present, can be sealed for £2,500 per mile.

I was interested in some of the earlier remarks of the member for Blackwood relating to what has been done in the South-West. I made inquiries from a certain sawmilling concern and was informed that the cost of a road, including clearing, forming, gravel surfacing and culverts—but naturally excluding bridges—was only £1,800 per mile and that the maintenance would not exceed £150 per mile per annum. That firm told me that, in addition, the load on those roads averaged 20 tons gross weight, but at times up to 35 tons gross weight, with an average axle load of about 7 tons but up to a maximum of $8\frac{1}{2}$ tons.

In other words, those roads are carrying a greater tonnage and a greater axle load weight than the roads constructed by the Main Roads Department. In this particular case 60,000 tons of logs were hauled every year. No doubt there would be many other vehicles carrying goods but of a lesser weight using those roads and which are not included in the figure I have given.

Mr. Nalder: The speed would be restricted on those roads, and speed is the greatest cause of damage.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: Not necessarily, because the log trucks used by the sawmilling companies carry exceedingly heavy loads and it is usually necessary for them to go as fast as possible on the downward slope to enable them to pick up sufficient momentum to get over the steep gradient on the opposite side of a valley.

Mr. Nalder: That happens on the small feeder roads but has no bearing as regards the main roads.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: Many of the so-called main roads have, in fact, been constructed to their present stage by the sawmillers and are maintained by them, notwithstanding that they are used by the general public as well. I can state without hesitation that log trucks have no great respect for speed limits. They get along just about as fast as it is possible for them to go to haul the heavy tonnage they are carrying.

Mr. Nalder: That is certainly correct on the main roads.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: If the hon. member goes to the lower South-West, he can see what happens on the sawmill roads. With regard to the comparative costs, that is an interesting aspect. The Railways Commission estimates that the line between Boddington and Narrogin—I am merely using this section so that members can have a mental picture—requires no less than £684,000 to be spent, and spent urgently in order to rehabilitate it and keep it in working condition—an amount of £684,000! Yet I am informed by the Commissioner of Main Roads that he can seal a road along the

same route, in other words of the same mileage, which is 51 miles, for £250,000. That is far less than half the cost of rebuilding and making serviceable the Bod-dington-Narrogin railway line, one which is hardly used by the people in the district through which it passes.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: A little helicopter might do the whole lot easier.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: That may well be. We have to remember that between 1949 and 1953 the roads—a great majority up to that stage, at any rate had not been prepared for heavy or great volumes of traffic—carried over 1,000,000 tons of wheat through Midland Junction to Fremantle. During the same period almost 250,000 lb. of superphosphate was carried in the opposite direction. Similar haulage of considerable quantities of wheat to some of the other ports like Bunbury and Geraldton also took place. By and large the road system in this State stood up to that heavy traffic.

The Minister for Police: The member for Katanning did not think so last year.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I am not unduly disturbed by what the member for Katanning thought last year.

Mr. Nalder: You had better qualify that.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: The position with regard to the Main Roads Department, with which up to a few months ago I had only a nodding acquaintance, is that there is an organisation with experienced and efficient officers who possess a wealth of knowledge and information which is readily available. I was absolutely astounded at the organisation which they have and how, almost at a moment's notice, it is possible for the Main Roads Department to gather statistics of actual road checks and surveys of movements of vehicles and all the rest of it—that is, as pertaining to the matter of metropolitan traffic. But in the wider sphere of long haulages and main roads, it has been specialising in this question ever since 1924.

My feeling is that there are senior men—technically and professionally qualified and experienced men—who have been dealing with roads and road questions for the better part of their working lives, carrying out these road studies, and conducting research into all aspects of traffic problems, transport problems, road problems, and everything associated with them. They are constantly in touch with developments in other parts of the Commonwealth and in other parts of the world. They are thoroughly familiar with our local climatic conditions, and with the types of earth and road construction materials that are available. From experience they know the effect of sustained traffic over the roads they have constructed. They are aware, too, of the transport requirements of Western Australia.

Therefore we have, without inquiries by any select committee, an organisation that is fully equipped and well informed with regard to this matter. There are very many roads in Western Australia that any of us could choose which could be accepted as test roads; and so far as the economics are concerned, I think I have said sufficient to make us think, in view of the staggering bill which confronts Western Australia for the rehabilitation of the railways, and if these costs are passed on to the users of the railways, that position on the one hand, as against the comparatively small sum that would be required either to construct entirely new roads or to keep our existing roads in trafficable condition in order to cater for the haulage of certain types of goods, at any rate, and in some localities perhaps all types of goods, because of the very small volume which is offering at present. In other words, the information is with us.

For some time the Government has been investigating this whole tremendous and difficult problem. First of all we appointed an interdepartmental committee comprising responsible representatives of various Government departments which might be interested, and which could bring some useful information to bear. The committee consisted of representatives of the Public Works Department, the State Housing Commission, the State Saw Mills, the Railways Commission, the Forests Department, the Transport Board, the Main Roads Department, the Treasury, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Supply and Shipping. Practically every one of those officers was a top level officer, if not the chief executive officer.

The committee spent the best part of 12 months going into all sorts of transport matters and searching out the facts with a view to submitting a report to the Government. That report, in turn, was considered by a sub-committee of Cabinet. The sub-committee has asked for certain further particulars from a small committee comprising representatives of the Railways Department, the Main Roads Department and the Transport Board. An interim report has been submitted to the Cabinet sub-committee in recent days, and it is hoped within the next week or so to present a report to Cabinet for its information and in due course its full consideration, and no doubt some decisions will arise from its deliberations.

I close on the note on which I opened. I desire to express appreciation of the constructive approach adopted by the member for Blackwood, and to emphasise that he has been thinking not only this year but—reference to Hansard will show—on other occasions deeply on this matter, and indeed has been concerned about the problem until now he has felt it necessary to bring it prominently before Parliament. So he moved this resolution for our consideration.

It is my hope that I have indicated sufficient to show first of all that in the Main Roads Department we have an organisation that either has or can quite readily obtain all the information necessary for the purpose of making a full assessment; and, secondly, that the Government has taken, and is taking, certain steps with regard to making a decision in connection with this great problem which is imposing such a financial burden on Western Australia.

My final point is that, irrespective of what may be our predictions, this whole matter of transport which is so vital to any country, and particularly vital to a State such as Western Australia with its long distances, is one that has to be faced up to fearlessly and courageously and the right thing has to be done by the people of Western Australia. What the ultimate decision will be I know not; but it does require some straight thinking because, as already indicated to members, in the short space of 10 years almost £70,000,000 of loan and revenue moneys has been spent on the railways or lost on the railways, and something drastic requires to be done.

I hope members will approach the whole question in that spirit and deal with the motion in just as constructive and thoughtful a manner as the mover did when he introduced it. But there is no need, in my opinion, for the appointment of a select committee, for the reasons I have outlined.

MR. WILD (Dale) [9.40]: I want to commend the member for Blackwood for bringing this motion before the House because, while railways and transport generally have not been my forte, it has been a matter which has exercised my mind over the years; and, like the Minister, I realise we cannot go on the way we are at present.

The Premier: Would the hon. member please speak up?

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Does the Minister support a select committee?

Mr. Bovell: No.

Mr. WILD: When we realise that, as we have been told this evening, we have a colossal number of lines that are virtually not paying axle grease, we know that it is time we looked at this question completely divorced from politics. Without a doubt, we must move with the times. No one will deny that today is not the era of the railways. About three years ago the Premier was in England and Europe at the same time as I, and he must have realised that even countries like England and Germany which, over the years, had been dependent for the movement of their goods on the use of railways, had virtually given them away.

On one occasion I was travelling from London to Scotland along what is known as the A1. road, and we were passed by so many hundreds of large vehicles that I said to my wife who was seated alongside me in the car, "Will you count for a matter of 10 minutes the number of vehicles coming in the opposite direction so as to get an indication of the amount of heavy road traffic?" She did this on two or three occasions for 10-minute intervals, and I was amazed to find them averaging 160 vehicles an hour, that roughly being three every minute.

Mr. Ackland: All heavy traffic?

Mr. WILD: Yes: I would not like to say what they were carrying, but they looked to be in order of 10-ton trucks, most of them with trailers.

Mr. Lawrence: How many hours did you travel?

Mr. WILD: It was a one day's journey along that A1. road going towards the north of England. While I was over there I took the opportunity of having one or two conversations with the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Transport in the House of Commons, and we discussed the question of road transport and the nationalisation of railways which had taken place some few years before. He pointed out to me that they had exactly the same problem in England as we had here, with the railways trying to retain the business they were doing and being backed by a Transport Board. But they found the system was breaking down.

I remember that he made mention of the co-operative societies, of which there are quite a number in England. When the nationalised railway scheme was put into operation, the Transport Board ruled that no one was to cart goods for a greater mileage than 20 miles. The co-operative stores have big shops and factories in London and other stores in towns away from London—possibly in Bristol, Cardiff, Brighton and Portsmouth and other such places—and they have found it uneconomic to put goods on the trains and then tranship them again at the other end. So the mileage was extended to 40 miles and subsequently to 50 miles.

When I went over to Germany I saw exactly the same thing on the autobahns. I was told, when down in the Ruhr, that practically the only commodity being carted by the railways in Germany was coal and heavy steel and iron being transported from the steel industries in the Ruhr. Getting back to England again for a moment, it seemed to me from my observations that in the main the railways in England were being used only for fast passenger traffic in the metropolitan area. They were using electric systems and trains travelling north, west and south were carrying only passengers. With the exception of the coal trade, virtually no goods

are being carried on the English railway systems today. Now, coming back to Western Australia, we must realise that the great outback would not have been opened up had it not been for our railway system. But that was 35 or 40 years ago.

Mr. O'Brien: Fifty years ago.

Mr. WILD: Yes. Over the years conditions have changed and I suppose the day is not too far distant when people will be travelling around in helicopters. But the time has arrived when we have to face up to this problem. This State of Western Australia cannot go on suffering losses and, irrespective of the Government in power—they are all the same—those losses are anything up to £3,000,000 or £4,000,000 on our railway system; and yet it is still not providing the service which the people want. If we can do anything which will enable us to face up to this problem and recognise that today the road transport system is the system of the times, we should accept it and ascertain whether our roads are capable of standing up to all this traffic.

Mr. Lawrence: Do you believe that that is what the people want or what we should give them?

Mr. WILD: I think it is a case of what we can afford to give the people. I believe that if we had a referendum today we would find that most people—I am speaking of the country districts now—or at least 90 per cent. of them, would say, "Give us road transport."

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: When we close a railway line down, the people are up in arms against it.

Mr. WILD: That is something which Parliament has to try to get over. In the few years that I have been a member, when there has been a suggestion about the closing down of certain lines, someone has said, "That affects my district. Do not touch it; but you may touch the other bloke." We have to be big enough, as a Parliament, to get over that idea. The move that has been made by the member for Blackwood appeals to me for the very reason that in the main I am certain that if we could show the people that the roads to be built would be able to take the place of, and enable a better job to be done than is now being done by, the railways, the objections would quickly disappear.

Mr. Lawrence: You have hit the nail right on the head.

Mr. WILD: That is why I strongly support this motion. We should endeavour to prove it to the people concerned, even if we do the work in stages—I do not know all the districts to which the Minister referred—and if we took one particular district for a start and put down a good road and told the people, "We are going to permit you to cart your own goods on the

road that we have constructed," I feel sure that it would not be long before all the objections which we hear so frequently would fade away like snow. We cannot keep going the way we have been in the last few years.

While the Minister told us that the department is in possession of all the necessary data, I still think that anything constructive must be to the ultimate good of everybody in Western Australia. When one thinks of all the money that has been tipped into this system, and we still cannot get the service we want, one begins to realise that some other system would be better able to handle the position. The people now employed in the railways would not lose their employment because they could be employed in the provision of roads and road services. The most important point is that we would not be having these colossal losses and at least we would be able to get a better service.

I commend the member for Blackwood for the thought he has given to this subject and the work that he has put into it. He has done a good deal of research and the thought he has given it has prompted him to move the motion. I join with him and the Minister in saying that I hope that this will be looked upon as a non-party issue. This is a matter in which all of us have to take a tremendous interest; if we do not, the ultimate result will be a complete breakdown.

The Minister for Transport: I am inclined to agree with everything you say, except that I cannot see the necessity for a select committee, as suggested by the member for Blackwood.

Mr. WILD: If we could get a select committee, at least we would get the views of some members—those most vitally concerned, and I refer to country members. If they could be satisfied and could go back to their people and say, "Here we have a road that will stand up to the wear and tear and which will take the place of the railways and give you a better service," then I feel sure that no opposition would be made to it; it would just melt away like snow. In reply to the Minister I would say that for that reason alone I think a select committee would do a lot of good. I would prefer to speak, in regard to this matter, as a member of Parliament and not as a member of any one party. If we treat it as a non-party issue, we will be able to crystallise our ideas and do something to overcome this problem as quickly as possible. So I hope the Minister will agree to the proposal of the member for Blackwood because I think in that way we will have more chance of being able to do something which is the wish of all of us.

On motion by Mr. O'Brien, debate adjourned.

BILL—GAS UNDERTAKINGS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 29th August.

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 13th September, 1956.

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THE PREMIER (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [9.53]: In the absence of the Minister for Works, who has a dash of influenza, I wish to say on behalf of the Government that no objection is offered to this Bill. As the member for Fremantle explained when introducing the measure, the maximum rate of interest which the Fremantle Gas Company is permitted by law to offer to the investing public is now 6 per cent. At this figure the company has not succeeded in raising the capital which it needs and therefore the member for Fremantle, on behalf of the company, is moving to amend the existing law to raise the present maximum by $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Similar steps have been taken in other parts of Australia, including New South Wales, Queensland and the city of Newcastle.

I would not be keen about this Bill except for the fact that there is some reasonable and effective measure of control over the price which this company is entitled to charge to the public; that control being found in the fact that the State Electricity Commission has to be satisfied that the price being charged, or any proposed new price to be charged, by the company is reasonable in all the circumstances. In view of that measure of control by the State Electricity Commission over the price which this company is permitted to charge for the product which it produces and makes available, the Government offers no objection to the Bill.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

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

House adjourned at 9.58 p.m.

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The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr. Moir) took the Chair at 2.15 p.m., and read prayers.