

Legislative Council.

Wednesday, 31st October, 1923.

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The DEPUTY PRESIDENT took the Chair at 7.30 p.m., and read prayers.

ASSENT TO BILLS.

Message from the Governor received and read notifying assent to the under-mentioned Bills:—

- 1, Electric Light and Power Agreement Act Amendment.
- 2, Supply (No. 2) £1,050,000.

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I have received from the Auditor General, in pursuance of Section 53 of the Audit Act, 1894, the thirty-third report for the financial year ended 30th June, 1923, which I now lay on the Table of the House.

QUESTIONS (2)—LAND SETTLEMENT.

Retirement of Mr. A. R. Richardson.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER asked the Minister for Education: Will he lay on the Table of the House all papers dealing with the retirement of Mr. A. R. Richardson?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied: Yes. The papers are now laid on the Table.

Peel and Bateman Estates.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER asked the Minister for Education: 1, What are the amounts of expenditure on the Peel and Bateman estates in connection with group and soldier settlement on—(a) development, (b) road construction, (c) railway or tramway construction, (d) drainage? 2, What is the total amount advanced for the supply of seed, super, and implements? 3, What is the value of seed and manures lost through floods? 4, Who will bear such loss? 5, What was responsible for the flooding of the areas that were supposed to have been drained? 6, How

many settlers on the Peel and Bateman estates are being assisted by the Agricultural Bank? 7, What is the nature, and what is the amount of the advances being made? 8, How many officers are engaged in connection with Agricultural Bank operations, and what are their respective salaries? 9, How many men have been settled on the estates for a period of six months or longer, and how many of these are working their holdings without further Government assistance? 10, What are the respective numbers of men employed at 10s. and 14s. 4d. per day? 11, How many men have been reinstated on the estates after having been put off as not being satisfactory? 12, What vote will be debited with the amount that has been expended by the Lands Department on the Peel and Bateman estates?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied: 1 to 12, Return, in course of preparation, will be laid on the Table in a day or two.

QUESTION—WATER SUPPLY, EASTERN AGRICULTURAL AREAS.

Hon. J. CORNELL (for Hon. W. Carroll) asked the Minister for Education: 1, In view of the possibility of a serious shortage of water in the eastern agricultural areas similar to that experienced last summer, have the Government made any arrangements to provide water for the ensuing summer, in order to obviate enormous economic loss to the State and serious hardship to individual settlers? 2, If so, will the Minister state the nature of the arrangements made? 3, Have the Government decided upon a comprehensive scheme of water conservation in the wheat areas? 4, If so, will the Minister state—(a) the nature and cost of the proposed scheme; (b) when the scheme will be put into operation?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied: 1 and 2, In view of the wet winter it is not anticipated that there will be any serious shortage such as was experienced last year. The difficulty will be met when it occurs, as is always done. 3, Yes. 4, Details are now being worked out.

QUESTION—COAL FIND, ERADU.

Hon. J. MILLS asked the Minister for Education: Is it a fact that some years ago a 6ft. seam of coal was found at Eradu at a depth of 118 feet, and that the Geological Department reported it to be better than Irwin coal, and equal to Collie coal when first discovered?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied: In 1906 a bore was put down in the bed of the Greenough River, near Eradu. This bore commenced to cut thin coal seams at a depth of 100 feet, and at 118 feet encountered a 6-foot seam of weathered coal, shaly in part. Samples from this seam were

tested in the Departmental Laboratory, and the following were the best results obtained—

Moisture	9.59
Volatile hydrocarbons ..	40.28
Fixed carbon	37.97
Ash (white)	12.16
	<hr/>
	100.00

Calorific value—B.T.U. 9,900.

The following opinion was expressed:—"This coal is superior to that of Irwin River and equal to that of the lower grades of Colliie coal, but since it was very weathered owing to the fact that its cover consisted largely of drift, it is sure to improve greatly when worked in the solid country." Further information relative to the results of this bore will be found at page 10 in Geological Survey Bulletin No. 59.

SELECT COMMITTEE—THE WEST AUSTRALIAN TRUSTEE, EXECUTOR AND AGENCY COY., LTD., ACT AMENDMENT (PRIVATE) BILL.

Report presented.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON presented the report of the select committee appointed to inquire into the Bill.

Report received and read.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I move—

That the report be adopted and printed.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: Is it the usual thing to adopt a report before the House has considered it in Committee? I think we should have an opportunity of considering the report before it is adopted.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The Bill which is the subject of this report is a private Bill, and differs in its nature from any Bill previously brought before the House. The procedure in this case is somewhat different from the ordinary procedure.

Hon. A. LOVEKIN: The proper course would be to have the report printed, and then to take it into consideration when the House is in Committee on the Bill.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I cannot see where any difficulty arises. Mr. Duffell will have full opportunity to consider the Bill in Committee.

Hon. J. Duffell: That is a different thing altogether. We do not know what is in the report until we have considered it.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I have no objection to hon. members considering the report, but they can take it for granted that the select committee went thoroughly into the Bill.

Hon. J. Duffell: Move that the report be printed.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: It is unnecessarily delaying matters, because there is nothing in

the report that can be cavilled at. However, I ask leave to amend my motion to read:—

That the report be printed and be taken into consideration at the next sitting of the House.

Motion by leave amended accordingly.

Hon. J. CORNELL: Some hon. members are a little facetious to-night. The original motion moved by Mr. Nicholson was purely a formal one. It would not bind members when in Committee on the Bill.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: On a point of order. I take exception to Mr. Cornell's use of the word "facetious." As a member of this Chamber, it is my duty to give full consideration to every measure brought before us. We claim to be a House of review, and so we should carefully consider every report before adopting it.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Does the hon. member wish the word "facetious" to be withdrawn?

Hon. J. DUFFELL: No, it does not matter.

Question put and passed.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by Hon. J. J. Holmes, leave of absence for six consecutive sittings granted to Hon. G. W. Miles (North) on the ground of urgent private business.

BILL—CHANGE OF NAME REGULATION.

Introduced by Hon. A. Lovekin and read a first time.

PAPERS—SANDALWOOD TRADE MONOPOLY.

Hon. E. H. GRAY (West) [7.53]: I move—

That all papers (including tenders) relating to the proposal of the Government to grant a monopoly in the trade of sandalwood be laid upon the Table of the House.

When I saw the newspaper last night I concluded that the whole of the sandalwood difficulty was settled.

Hon. E. H. Harris: It is not yet begun.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: And that as the result of the work put in by those interested, and by certain public men, the Government had decided to grant justice to those engaged in the sandalwood trade. But to-day all sorts of wild rumours are floating about the city, and I am given to understand that the position now is worse than it was before. Some three years ago the Government decided to alter the system of dealing in sandalwood, but as the result of a deputation the Government gave way, and things went on as before. In view of the disclosures now made public, it seems it would have been better if the Gov-

ernment had made some stand and either taken over the business themselves, or put a much higher royalty on sandalwood. In March last tenders were called for permits for the taking of sandalwood. Three months previously a letter was received by a private firm in Perth from people in China, as follows:—

It has been rumoured that the W.A. Government intends to restrict, if not to stop, further shipments of sandalwood, but we do not know whether this is correct, and we shall be glad if you will advise us of any such vital information as, naturally, it is of the utmost importance to us.

It seems that some outside people were busy and got on the track fairly early. In consequence, three months later the Government called for tenders for a monopoly. I do not believe in casting slurs, and I know that public men of all parties have to stand a fair share of misrepresentation and abuse. Therefore my attitude on this business to-night is rather that of a big brother to the Minister. If the Minister's statements in another place are correct, he requires a big brother to look after him, for evidently there is ample proof that machinations are at work, not only impugning the morality of business men, but constituting a serious menace to the State and to the Government. Anything I have to say will be said in a desire that the House should stand up for fair play to all engaged in the industry. Members have seen advertisements and newspaper articles written by various persons interested in sandalwood. Up to date the allegations in those articles and advertisements have not been answered. When people interested in sandalwood make grave statements impugning the honour, not only of the Government but also of competitors in sandalwood, other firms, if they know those statements are incorrect, have proper means of securing redress. I have here a printed pamphlet reading as follows—

We learn from Mr. Paterson that wood is very scarce and that Mr. Paterson himself has some idea of attempting to corner the market in Australia and preventing the opposition from securing supplies. Previous experience tended to show that this is not possible, and Mr. Hector contrived to get supplies before when similar tactics were employed. How far conditions have changed since we do not know.

Here is another statement relating to a new company—

After the defeat of the scheme, the Australian Traders and Export Co., Ltd., having its registered office at the offices of Unmack & Thomas, solicitors, Howard-street, Perth, was formed—for all practical purposes a company absolutely identical with Paterson & Co., Ltd., its two largest shareholders being Mr. John and Mr. Paterson. There is no appearance of the name of any Chinese shareholder on this infant company's share register, which for the most part is made up of

names of Messrs. Paterson and company's office staff, in addition to the names of two prominent solicitors.

Up to date this company has not bought a single stick of sandalwood. Nevertheless, it is asserted that the company put in a tender for the sandalwood monopoly.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Who is the author of that pamphlet?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: You may have a look at it. It is issued by a sandalwood firm in Perth, one that tendered for the monopoly.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Why do you not give the author of the pamphlet?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It has not yet bought a single stick of sandalwood.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: What is the name of the company?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Australian Traders and Export Company. If there is any monopoly to be instituted in connection with this industry it should be a State monopoly. Any other form of monopoly is a pernicious evil, as has been proved ever since the early days of civilisation. A monopoly cannot be defended by any party or individual on the ground that it is a public utility. The sandalwood question has occupied a considerable amount of time and brought about a lot of discussion. Before the war there was a big movement in sandalwood. Arguments have been put up by various people to show that as the result of exchange and the depreciation in the value of the silver currency, Chinese people made big deals in sandalwood. Other arguments have been brought forward to disprove this, and to show that it was the ordinary course of trade. Whichever side is right we know that the State has lost thousands of pounds, and that the getter has not made much out of the business, although the bulk of the work of developing the industry has fallen on the shoulders of the getter. Before the Government embark upon this new scheme this House should be made fully aware of the facts of the position. The papers should be laid upon the Table so that we may be able to draw our own opinion in place of the rumours that are going about. If the rumours are correct then we should protest against the Government being mixed up in any scheme of this kind.

The Minister for Education: Did you see what appeared in the "Government Gazette" yesterday?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Yes. It is rumoured that a certain company will receive 62 per cent. of the sandalwood business.

Hon. T. MOORE: That is not in the "Government Gazette."

Hon. E. H. GRAY: And that 38 per cent. will be divided amongst the other traders. I am given to understand that 2½ per cent. of the trade has been allotted to the firm which at one time were shareholders in one of the big firms, as a recognition that they should have something out of the business. It is also rumoured that these allotments are being made by the Government.

Hon. E. H. Harris: On what basis?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I do not know.

Hon. R. J. Lynn: I expect for services rendered.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: This is a great injustice to those who are engaged in the trade. I have tried to get to the bottom of this matter. When I was travelling with the Parliamentary party last week I interviewed a number of men on the fields who are vitally interested in the industry. During the six days I was away I did not meet a man who would admit he was in favour of the proposed Government scheme. When the cutters get to know of this new scheme of the Government I am certain there will be an uproar from one end of the State to the other.

The Minister for Education: Why?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It is an injustice to those who are engaged in the work, and to those who are shareholders in the co-operative company.

The Minister for Education: But they will get a good price.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: That may be so.

Hon. J. Cornell: The co-operative company was only formed to stop the other scheme.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Nothing during recent years has aroused so much public interest as the sandalwood question. It is our right that we should see the papers relating to it so that we may form our own opinion. We should not have to rely upon rumour, and upon the announcements that are made from time to time by outside people interested in the industry.

Hon. T. MOORE (Central) [8.7]: I second the motion. I believe every member of the Chamber desires to know where we stand on this question. The new regulations have been laid on the Table of the House. I was told before they were placed there that certain permits had been granted to certain firms allocating to them different lots of sandalwood which could be collected by them.

The Minister for Education: No permit has yet been granted.

Hon. T. MOORE: These rumours are afloat. After what has happened we are prepared to believe almost anything, but we want to find out for ourselves how the position stands. There has been so much controversy, and so many interested firms have taken part in it, that members are entitled to know the exact position. Why have the Government refrained from giving to those people who are interested in the trade the reason why this juggling has been going on? It is nothing but juggling. First of all one move was made. A certain party in another place took up a strong attitude, forcing the Government to alter their tactics. There is still a tendency on the part of the Government to grant a monopoly. Whether the monopoly is given to one firm or five it would be wrong to give it. Members of this Chamber, who believe in private enterprise,

must agree that all persons engaged in private enterprise are entitled to equal opportunity. If, as has been suggested, permits are to be given, such as can be given under the Forests regulations for sandalwood or any other timber, we want to know on what basis they have been given, and why they have been given on any basis. There is a great amount of secrecy about the whole business.

The Minister for Education: There is no secrecy in this.

Hon. T. MOORE: We know the Government decided to give a certain firm, which had tendered, the monopoly of the trade. They have said so, but they do not say they are prepared to do that now. Owing to the diversity of opinion in another place they have changed their attitude. The country has a right to know what the tenders were, and whether the contract was to be given to the highest tenderer. The whole matter has now been dropped. Seeing that the Government are not prepared to accept any tender, we want to know the reason for the change of attitude. If we were to ask for the papers in connection with any tenders for any particular department, I believe they would be laid on the Table, but not so in connection with the sandalwood trade.

The Minister for Education: Not papers disclosing the tenders.

Hon. T. MOORE: Yes. The tenders have now been dealt with.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: The position cannot now be affected.

Hon. T. MOORE: No, because the matter has been dropped. We should have an opportunity of perusing the papers so that we may know all about the matter. This would clear up all doubts and rumours that are afloat. We want plain and fair dealing. We want to know all about these regulations, not about merely a part of them. We want to know if anything further is to be added to the regulations, and whether permits are to be issued.

The Minister for Education: None have been issued.

Hon. T. MOORE: Are the Government going to issue any? Are they going to confine the permits to certain firms, or will every firm in the State be allowed to carry on as before? I hope the House will insist upon its right to know how the position stands.

Hon. J. CORNELL (South) [8.12]: I support the motion. As I shall be leaving the State to-morrow for approximately three weeks this is the only opportunity I shall have of speaking to it. There is no need for recrimination or the launching of charges. Probably later on some firm, institution, or persons will pose as the saviours of the sandalwood getter and of the trade. There is a section of the community which may take that flattering unctious to its soul, whose prime object is to assist itself—I refer to the people who buy and deal in sandalwood. They have moved heaven and earth, the stars and all the planets, in their endeavour to prevent

the granting of a monopoly to one firm. I hope they will not come to regard themselves as the saviours of the country. Some months ago the Government decided upon a wide departure concerning the regulations governing the handling of sandalwood. A fundamental change has been made from open dealing with no limitation on the number of firms to participate, to a monopoly with control in the hands of one firm. As I understand the position, that procedure has been jettisoned. We are somewhat in the air as to what the position really is under the most recent regulations gazetted by the Government. We do not know whether all the existing firms interested in the sandalwood trade will be allowed to compete on an equal basis. We do not know whether there will be competition amongst the several firms, or whether there will be an allocation of the amount of sandalwood to be exported from Western Australia by the several firms operating now. We do not know whether there will be any embargo against other companies participating in the trade. Seeing that the Government set out to secure a measure of control over the industry, and to allow the sandalwood dealing to be in the hands of one firm, we should have more information in view of the changed front. The Government have issued drastic regulations providing for £16 per ton for the cutters and £9 royalty for the State. The former royalty was fixed at £2 and the cutter received what the buyer chose to give him. In view of this fundamental change, it is important that another aspect should be taken into consideration. If the regulations are not disallowed by either House, they will have the full force of law after the expiry of a certain period. Those regulations will have more force than any existing statute, because any hon. member can introduce a Bill to amend existing legislation. If the regulations become law, no hon. member can interfere with them. That being so, what valid objection can be offered to the whole of the papers dealing with the sandalwood question and the circumstances leading up to the framing of the latest regulations being placed upon the Table? As a layman who has not been behind the scenes in connection with the sandalwood business, I cannot conceive of any valid objection. If the Government offer objection to the tabling of the papers, there can be only one inference, namely, that something is contained in the papers that the Government do not desire to be made public.

The Minister for Education: No, it is only the question of the tenders.

Hon. J. CORNELL: The Minister says that the Government merely desire that the tenders shall not be made public. I am pleased to have that admission. It means that the Government have nothing to fear or hide regarding their dealings in the transaction.

The Minister for Education: That is so.

Hon. J. CORNELL: That brings it to a simple issue regarding the tenders. As I un-

derstand the position, the Government called for tenders. A certain number were received for a specific purpose. In the light of recent events, that specific purpose has been jettisoned. The departure from the proposal to grant a monopoly to one firm abrogates the tenders already received, and that being so, what valid objection can any tenderer offer to the fact becoming public property that if he had received the monopoly, he would have been prepared to pay so much for it. If the information is made public, we will be in a position to know whether or not the Government did right in not proceeding with the proposal to grant a monopoly. We would then know whether it would not have been more in the interests of the State and of the cutter if the Government had gone on with their proposal and granted the monopoly. In view of the controversy that has raged around the whole question, and in view of the regulations having the full force of law, if not disallowed, and in view, further, of the fact that the tenders have been set aside and not accepted, I cannot see any valid reason why the papers should not be placed on the Table. As to the whole issue involved in the sandalwood question, and any charges that have been, or may be, levelled at anyone interested, I consider the proper course to adopt is to move that the regulations be disallowed.

Hon. T. Moore: We do not know what they are.

Hon. J. CORNELL: They have been gazetted. If such a motion is moved, the whole case for and against may be traversed. Do not let us confuse the issue as to the tabling of the papers by the introduction of charges of corruption and so forth. If my memory serves me aright, every motion launched in this Chamber for the production of papers in the public interest has been agreed to. It has to be said to the advantage of this House that it is not one which automatically ceases from time to time. It is a House of continuity. Whatever may be said by certain sections of the community regarding the Legislative Council, when broad questions of public policy and interest are involved, there has been no semblance of party considerations or anything else of a derogatory nature imparted to the discussions. Questions involving the tabling of papers or other matters have been discussed from the one standpoint. The only consideration has been the public good. I think the papers should be tabled, and by agreeing to the motion we will act in keeping with our past record and the honesty of purpose that has always distinguished our actions. I hope the request for the tabling of the papers will not be refused and that the Council will be true to its traditions.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER (East) [8.25]: I had no intention of speaking to the motion until I heard the Leader of the House interject. His words made me think that the Government may be opposed to the tabling of the papers.

The Minister for Education: I have not said anything at all.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: The Minister's interjection made me think so. I hope that is not the case. For some time now we have heard ugly rumours around the town that are certainly derogatory to various persons. Some articles of an unseemly nature have appeared in the Press. Now that the question has been raised in the House, hon. members should have an opportunity of perusing the papers and ascertaining what the position really is. The question of a monopoly is not a new one so far as the sandalwood industry is concerned. Two or three years ago the Government made a move in this direction, but owing to the opposition that developed, the Government withdrew from the position they had taken up. After the lapse of that interval the Government for the second time took action and called for tenders involving the granting of a monopoly. I will not discuss the question as to whether the granting of a monopoly is right or wrong, for this is not the time to do so. The Government have had all this time to consider the matter and their decision must have been well thought out. I have enough confidence in them to believe that the decision they arrived at must have been a ripe one and that in their opinion it would have been beneficial to those concerned, as well as to the State, if the monopoly had been granted. At any rate, they came to the point when they called for tenders. I take it that all the firms interested in the sandalwood industry put in tenders. Before the tenders were known, however, a hubbub was started from those persons who considered, it would appear, that they had been unsuccessful and they must have known it. How that could be is beyond me. The Minister says the objection to the motion rests in the tabling of the tenders. Outside persons seemed to know what the tenders were, and came to the conclusion that they would not be successful. It would appear to me, though I may be wrong, that, having arrived at that conclusion, certain tenderers, who believed they would be unsuccessful, proceeded to raise a hubbub on the score that the monopoly was a bad thing for the State. If those firms who are now opposed to the monopoly were content to submit tenders for that monopoly, I take it they would have been satisfied if they had been successful. That leads us to this point: we must recognise that the Government must have dealt with the tenders after they were received. If the tenders were unsuitable, they should have been rejected and the Government should have immediately called for fresh tenders. Instead of that, the Government have adopted an attitude which I do not think they can stand up to. They have adopted an attitude that is not in accordance with the practice in the commercial world. After calling tenders they threw the whole thing open again and allowed the firms tendering to come in and get a certain proportion of the business that is to be done.

Hon. J. Duffell: Very likely they will land before the Privy Council before it is finished.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I do not know about that. Through procrastination the Government have lost between £60,000 and £70,000 in royalties and that money would have been beneficial to us. The Government have allowed that money to slip through their fingers.

The Minister for Education: How much was lost to the State before that?

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Why did not the Government call tenders first and charge a royalty of £9 instead of £2? When they came to the conclusion that the sandalwood business was worth so much more to the State than they had been charging, why did they not have the courage to impose the increased royalty then? The Government have not been prepared to face public criticism. Why do they not face it in the right direction now? They have lost enormous sums of money. This State has a monopoly of the sandalwood trade, India and one of the islands in the Straits Settlements only having a small proportion of the sandalwood required by China. Knowing we had a monopoly, why did not the Government act? They let years pass and they have now allowed all the firms trading in sandalwood to build up not heaps but mountains of sandalwood at Fremantle, out of which they will make a profit at the expense of the State.

Resolved: That motions be continued.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Mr. Cornell, who represents a district where a large quantity of sandalwood is cut, said the regulations should be disallowed. I agree that no member would be in a position to move for the disallowance of the regulations until he had the papers before him. He would be working in the dark. Why the Government should adopt a certain attitude calculated to be beneficial to the State and then back down is beyond my comprehension. The State is in a parlous position financially and there was an opportunity to save not hundreds but thousands of pounds, and surely the duty devolved upon the Government to seize the opportunity. We hear a lot of talk about settling the country in order to put the State on a sound footing. That is quite right, but here was an opportunity to conserve the interests of the State and secure for the State the profits of an industry that will now go to private individuals. It is time we took action. I hope members will agree to the motion in order that light may be thrown on this question. It is high time publicity was given to a matter about which so many statements have been made. Advertisements covering whole sheets of the newspaper, costing about £45 each, have been printed not once, but several times and this surely is an indication of the importance of the industry.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: It is an ill wind that blows nobody good.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: If it is profitable to spend £45 on advertisements regarding sandalwood in order to bluff the Government—and these people have been very successful in their bluff—there must be a tremendous profit in sandalwood. Look at the profit the State has lost in the past. I do not know how the new arrangement will work. It seems to be a very peculiar arrangement. Presumably it is intended to adopt a percentage basis according to the quantities handled by the different firms.

Hon. E. H. Harris: We are told that is not correct.

Hon. J. Cornell: Draw it out of the hat, I expect.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I cannot believe that the Government are going to fall back on lottery methods; they do adopt business methods. After reading the regulations I think it must be intended to put the firms on a percentage basis.

Hon. T. Moore: Up to date that is hearsay.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: All I have to go upon is what I read between the lines of the regulations. The papers should certainly be tabled.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES (North) [8.34]: I hope the Minister will not oppose the tabling of the papers. All said and done we are the custodians of the public rights, and it is our duty to know how the business of the State is being conducted. At one stage of the business there may have been an objection to tabling the papers, because it may then have been unfair to disclose the tenders, but we have passed that stage. The tenders have gone by the board. We have progressed from a monopoly of one to a monopoly of five.

The Minister for Education: You think we should disclose the tenders?

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: The Government have made waste paper of the tenders.

The Minister for Education: Why should one man know another man's tender?

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Why should not we, the representatives of the people, know the scheme that some people may have tried to work? Why should not we know what is in the papers in order that we may be able to deal intelligently with the regulations before us? The papers may disclose why the Government departed from their decision to create a monopoly and why they now propose to split the business among five firms. The papers may disclose that they narrowly escaped being landed in another Privy Council case that would have cost many thousands of pounds, because it is said the State cannot give a monopoly of an industry to one person to the disadvantage of the rest of the community. I understand there was sufficient money available to take the case to the Privy Council if the Government had persisted in giving a monopoly of the business to one firm. The Government, however, have got past that stage; they have taken in five of the sandalwood dealers. Hence it may be there is no one outside the combine to take the

case to the Privy Council, and we may find ourselves acting to the advantage of five residents of the State and to the disadvantage of all the rest, irrespective of whether they are in the trade or not. It is becoming the usual procedure to refuse to table papers. Parliament, however, is supreme and is entitled to know what is going on. Otherwise it is useless for us to sit here at all. In my Ministerial experience, which extended over only a few months, due to myself and no one else, the Government refused to table papers on only one occasion. We took the view, "This is the country's business, and the country is entitled to know what is going on."

Hon. C. F. Baxter: But Governments have changed.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: This practice of refusing members of Parliament public information is foreign to the procedure of the past. The one case in which we refused to table papers was this: At one time Collie coal was a menace to the agricultural industry—I say nothing about it to-day. Actions were pending against the Railway Department, and some of the litigants wished to obtain possession of the papers in order to put up a case against the department. That was an entirely different proposition from the one now under consideration.

Hon. J. Cornell: You were then protecting the public.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Yes, and we refused to table the papers. The Minister has referred by interjection to the loss of revenue. The present Commissioner for the North-West, Mr. Drake-Brockman, some years ago was sent to the Far East to report on the consumption of sandalwood there, and on his return he presented a report that placed Ministers in possession of information as to the value of this asset. But the drift has gone on. We have been receiving only £2 per ton royalty when we should have been getting £10.

The Minister for Education: And objection was raised to the £2 royalty.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Yes; but the Government are there to do their duty to the State as a whole. In my opinion £10 per ton royalty without any restriction was all the State should have imposed. It was John Chinaman that would have had to pay the £10. According to the religion of the Chinese, I understand the higher the price paid for sandalwood, the greater the concessions they get from their joss.

Hon. J. Cornell: And the easier it is to enter the kingdom hereafter.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: And to share in the glories to come. For that reason alone we might easily have got £10 a ton. The papers may disclose how the Government propose to cut up the orders amongst the five different firms. But if I wished to enter the sandalwood trade, why should not I, as a British subject in a British community, be able to do so? Why create this monopoly for five people? I think it is a constitutional question

that has upset the Government's programme. They find they cannot give a monopoly to one person to the disadvantage of the rest of the people. They have now taken in five persons, probably the only five with sufficient money to appeal to the Privy Council, but they are doing an injustice to other people who may wish to participate in the business, and who under this regulation will be prevented from so doing. All this goes to show the necessity for tabling the papers. I put aside all the charges that have been made against Ministers.

The Minister for Education: I have never heard of any charges against Ministers.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: I have. I put them aside; I go so far as to say I believe there is nothing in them. In justice to them, however, the papers should be tabled so that we may judge of the facts for ourselves. We are a suspicious community. If the Government take the responsibility of withholding these papers, the public will immediately say there is something in it, and will become the more anxious to peruse them. If the papers were tabled, I do not think the public would get what they want, but the House would. We could see whether the Government were right in adopting the proposed regulations. Mr. Baxter has dealt with the question of royalty, which is a very serious matter. The people who have been buying sandalwood under a £2 royalty now find that £9 must be paid, and there is £7 a ton profit they will get out of John Chinaman which the State should have had.

The Minister for Education: We shall get it now.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: But owing to the action of the Government—

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT: Due entirely to their lack of action.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: —Well, due to their inaction, the State will lose that money. The trouble is, the Government will not face any position or finalise anything. My idea of a government is this: When Cabinet come to a decision that a certain line of action is necessary to conserve the interests of the State, they should stand or fall by it. We cannot get the Government to stand by anything. They will fall by anything, but will not stand by anything. Take the Government Bills brought down after mature consideration. The Government in their wisdom say that is as far as they can go in the interests of the State. As soon as the measures reach another place, they are taken up by members of the Opposition, and loaded—loaded in some instances in such a way as to be detrimental to the best interests of the State, but still the Government accept them. If the Government decided to give a monopoly of the sandalwood industry to one person and the royalty was fixed at £9 a ton, they should announce it and the royalty should take effect immediately.

The Minister for Education: The regulations had to be printed.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Yes, they could be printed on the same day, but this matter has been under consideration for some months. What we want to know is—Did the Government come to a decision to give a monopoly? On what date did they come to that decision, and why the day following should have been the day on which the royalty was to be increased by £7 a ton? I hope the Government will not refuse to present the papers to the House as requested. After all, it is our business, and we are entitled to know how it is being carried on, just as we are entitled to seek information in respect of other affairs into which we wish to inquire. I therefore support the motion.

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT (South-West) [8.48]: I have listened with a great deal of interest to the remarks of the previous speakers, who, it appears to me, have put up a very good case in support of the laying of the papers on the Table of the House. The regulation now on the Table may be the subject of a debate in the near future, and I fully agree that it will be impossible to do justice to any debate that may take place unless we have a great deal more information than is in our possession at the present time. Mr. Holmes says it does not matter a rap what the public have said about Ministers, and that he does not believe what is currently reported. I say it is a very serious matter, not only to the Minister, but to every member of Parliament that so many allegations can be made and not refuted.

The Minister for Education: What are they?

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT: Allegations of corruption on the part of the Minister directly concerned, the Minister in charge of forests.

The Minister for Education: I have never heard them.

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT: I have heard them; the dogs have barked them.

The Minister for Education: On a point of order, I do not think the hon. member should make such a statement. It is not quite the right thing to say in the House. Such remarks are spread far and wide, and they go to build up a reputation for a Minister that is not deserved.

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT: I cannot withdraw a fact. I do not charge the Minister. On the contrary, I wish to see the Minister go out of politics without a stain upon his character.

The Minister for Education: So be will.

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT: What better way is there of accomplishing that than by letting us have all the papers, so that we may be able to become familiar with all the transactions from the day of their birth to the present time. I cannot for the life of me understand why the Minister should raise any objection.

The Minister for Education: You should not spread such statements.

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT: I am not spreading them; they have been spread. The statements have been made.

The Minister for Education: You are emphasising them.

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT: Certainly, because I do not like the insinuations; I want to see them grappled with; I want to see them trampled down. It is not good for Parliament to have mud thrown at its members. It is not good for members of the Government to be attacked as they have been attacked, and as they are being attacked. It is all very well for the Minister to say he has not heard these remarks. I do not know where he has been. It may be that his work so confines him to his office that he does not meet the man in the street, who is gabbling this, what shall I call it—filth.

The Minister for Education: Pass it by.

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT: I cannot pass it by. I would rather see it dealt with. From my knowledge of the Minister for Forests I declare that he would not be guilty of any of the practices alleged.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: We all know that.

Hon. F. E. S. WILLMOTT: I remember what occurred many years ago. Allegations were even then made against the same Minister and his Government, and I was one of a select committee that put in many weary weeks investigating the matter, and I am pleased to say that the Minister was entirely vindicated. It will be found that the latest, too, is also a pricked bubble. If the wishes of members who have spoken are granted by the Leader of the House by the placing of the papers on the Table, the position will be considerably facilitated. Unless the Minister can give us the soundest possible reason for declining to table the papers, I shall support the motion.

On motion by Minister for Education, debate adjourned.

BILL—FRIENDLY SOCIETIES ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from 9th October.

Hon. J. DUFFELL (Metropolitan-Suburban) [S.53]: In supporting the second reading of the Bill I desire on behalf of the Council of Friendly Societies to express their high appreciation of the courtesy extended to that body by the Leader of the House in permitting them to have time in which to consider the Bill now before the Chamber. It is generally conceded that the consolidation of the numerous acts now on the statute-book is a move in the right direction. When we take into consideration that this Bill will consolidate no fewer than seven Acts of Parliament, if for no other reason, the proposed legislation will serve a very useful purpose. The Bill will bring into operation certain amendments which are regarded as highly desirable, but

even though it will perform an important function in this direction and will be a distinct march along the path of progress, I regret to say the measure is not exactly what the friendly societies desire. It was reported in the Press yesterday that a deputation had waited upon the Colonial Secretary and brought under his notice certain facts connected with the Bill that were not exactly to the liking of the Council of the Friendly Societies. Clause 5 provides that certain securities shall be held by the trustees of the friendly societies as security for loans. This, however, does not go far enough, and the Minister is reported to have told the deputation that he was prepared to consider the request submitted. I do not know what the Minister proposes to do, but when the Bill is in Committee it is my intention to add a few lines to paragraph (b) of Subclause 5 of Clause 9 which I think will bring the clause into line with what is desired by the friendly societies. When the friendly societies grant loans to their members, those loans are almost invariably granted on a system whereby repayment is made quarterly. It may be necessary to hold securities over and above the value of the amount advanced. The trustees of the friendly societies having become satisfied that the original loan is being reduced, desire to have the power to return portion of the securities in their possession, and it is with a view of giving that power that I intend to submit an amendment when the Bill is in Committee. I shall place the amendment on the Notice Paper so that hon. members may know the exact purport of it. It will read, "And by a like form of receipt the trustees may discharge or partially discharge any further charge or collateral security which they hold, provided they are satisfied with the security remaining." This is not asking anything that will involve the trustees in trouble. It is a matter to which they have given careful consideration, and if the House will agree to the amendment it will enable the trustees of the friendly societies to carry out their work with greater expedition than is the case at present. There is also another matter which I think will be admitted to be of great importance. Subclause 6 of Clause 9 reads:—

Provided that it shall be the duty of the trustees in making any investment to observe the precautions indicated in the proviso to Subsection 1 of Section 10 of the Trustees Act, 1900.

The provision in question is rather a serious one to have in the Bill. How it came there even members of friendly societies would have difficulty in explaining. Perhaps I may be permitted to give one or two illustrations of the operations of friendly societies in this connection. I think those illustrations will be quite sufficient to convince hon. members that the provision in question is absolutely unnecessary. I do not wish to mention the name of any society, but I am prepared to submit the letters which I have on the subject to any member who wishes to see them.

The transactions of one society show that during the past 15 years no less a sum than £37,983 was invested in small loans ranging from £50 up to £300, with the exception of one investment of £2,000 in Commonwealth peace bonds. No less than £35,983 was invested by that society in loans to 120 borrowers, who were all members of friendly societies and desirous of obtaining homes of their own. Throughout the whole period of 15 years the proportion which has proved what I may term a bad investment has been less than £250. That loss was made on the gold-fields, owing to the depreciation there following on reduction of population. It is a loss which could not have been avoided even if the advice of a licensed valuer had been taken at the time the loans were made. The only effect of adopting that course would have been to increase the expense to the borrower. Another society has during a similar period advanced a total of £29,548 in sums averaging £295. As a result of the placing of that sum of £29,548 with the members of friendly societies, the cost to the individual of obtaining a loan has panned out at only £4 5s. 6d. The smallness of the cost has been due to the fact of the societies not having to obtain the advice of licensed valuers. Investigation shows that if each borrower had had to pay for the opinion of a licensed valuer, the average cost of obtaining the loan would have amounted to about £14, as against the actual cost of £4 5s. 6d. This point should be stressed, seeing that the object of the Bill is to assist members of the working class to obtain homes of their own. Such people should not be called upon to pay more out-of-pocket expenses than is absolutely necessary. If the subclause in question is allowed to remain in the Bill, they will undoubtedly be faced with heavier expenses in obtaining loans. I will leave the matter at that point, because I shall have the opportunity of going further into the question during the Committee stage. I shall not now touch upon the clause dealing with returns. I am obliged to the Leader of the House for the information which he has placed before us to-night, and which shows that the request made by the delegation to the Colonial Secretary on Tuesday last has received favourable consideration. Clause 18 can also be dealt with in Committee. I shall uphold the retention of that clause unless an amendment to deal with the matter otherwise is suggested. I realise the importance of having these societies registered with the Registrar of Friendly Societies if they are dispensing benefits of any kind. I am surprised that the matter has not attracted more attention in the past. When all is said and done, societies, whether private or public, which have more than ten members are evading the law if they are not registered under the Life Assurance Act, for instance. The interpretation section of that Act includes persons who engage in the kind of business to which the Bill refers. That

point, too, can be dealt with more fully in Committee. Many private societies are operating in this State without having been recognised by the Registrar of Friendly Societies, simply because he does not know anything about them. Let me point out what that involves. The employees in a large city warehouse may be contributing towards a fund to provide relief in case of sickness. An employee may be paying into such fund for a number of years, and then, through some unforeseen circumstances, finds that his services are dispensed with. Thus he loses the whole of the money which he has paid into the fund with a view to obtaining benefits in case of sickness. Further, in such a case the firm might be carrying a heavier risk than actuarial figures would justify, or than the amount of the subscriptions would justify. It has been stated that one branch of industry is being operated on the basis of a payment of 1s. per fortnight by each member, that payment entitling the member when sick to an allowance of £3 per week. I believe the fund receives some subsidy from the Government. We know very well, however, that no registered friendly society would be allowed to operate on such a basis, because it is against all actuarial calculations that the society could make a success of it. Moreover, a person who is entitled to £3 per week from the sick fund to which I have referred might also, as a member of another friendly society, be entitled to £2 per week in case of sickness. Under the Bill that amount will be raised to £3 per week. Thus the position would arise of a man being entitled to total benefits of £6 per week in case of sickness. I say at once that there has been very little, if any, malingering in this connection; but I think the circumstances I have stated make evident the necessity for registration. The supervision of the Registrar of Friendly Societies would ensure the carrying on of sick and benefit funds on a sound basis. Would the funds of the societies which are not registered be able to stand the strain of abnormal circumstances? We know that for years past the employees of the Railway Department have been contributing towards a fund for assistance in case of death. That society is not registered. It certainly should be registered. The members have nothing to hide, and so why should they object to registration? Registration would simply be a means of obtaining a guarantee that the subscriptions are ample to meet all reasonable claims. The Railway Department death benefit fund was not capable of standing the strain brought to bear upon it by the war. As a result, the fund was obliged to obtain assistance, possibly by way of advance, from the Government to the extent of about £12,000. Only by that means was the fund enabled to meet its obligations and keep faith with its subscribers. Let hon. members contrast that position of affairs with the operations of friendly societies which are registered in this State. Instead of the registered societies having to fall back upon some other

source, they have been in a position not merely to meet all claims arising out of the war and other circumstances, but also to pay the subscription of every one of their members who enlisted, during the whole period that those members were at the front. And, more than that, the registered societies were able to provide free medicine for the wives and families left behind. I want hon. members to realise the necessity for registering all the societies, and so safeguarding not only them and their liabilities, but also those who invest their money in them. Generally speaking, the Bill is a good one. It will strengthen the hands of the trustees of various friendly societies and will accomplish much good, especially in respect of the artisan class in this State.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION (Hon. J. Ewing—South-West—in reply) [9.16]: I thank the hon. member for the way in which he has discussed the Bill. I have several amendments to move, the outcome of a deputation that waited on the Colonial Secretary and did much to clear up the position. I hope that any hon. member who has other amendments to move will place them on the Notice Paper and that to-morrow we shall be able to go into Committee on the Bill.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

BILL—INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE ACT CONTINUANCE.

Second Reading.

Debated resumed from 16th October.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER (East) [9.17]: The Bill is for the re-enactment of an Act brought into being after the drought of 1914. At that time deputations from the farmers waited on the then Premier, Mr. Scaddan, and laid what was virtually the draft of the measure before him. A few months later the Bill was introduced and passed. The Act has been a boon to a lot of farmers. Under it the State has had its assets secured, and settlers who would otherwise have gone to the wall have been saved by timely assistance. But I cannot say the administration of the Act has been all that could be desired. A few of the clients of the board have not been altogether satisfactory, but the great majority have proved highly satisfactory, notwithstanding many drawbacks, for which the department was responsible. The exasperating delays imposed by the department have handicapped quite a lot of good men. Those delays are still in evidence. Then there is the annoyance of irregular inspections. Inspectors originally appointed under the Act are to-day working for the Agricultural Bank, and inspecting for the Industries Assistance Board in their spare time. Consequently, those inspections are very lax, and so settlers are held up for advances for machinery, for manures, for seed and the like, with the re-

sult that their crops suffer. I am afraid the position will not be relieved by the retirement of Mr. A. R. Richardson, that grand old man who has done so very much for agriculture in this State. I am puzzled to know why he should have retired just now.

The Minister for Education: He is an elderly man.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: No younger man put in his place will be able to do the work Mr. Richardson has been doing. You cannot tell me that Mr. Richardson has resigned on account of age.

The Minister for Education: That is what he says.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I am convinced his retirement is due, not to age, but to the fact that he does not agree with the administration of the affairs of the board. His resignation means a tremendous loss to the State. A select committee of another Chamber considered the forerunner of this Bill last session, and recommended an amendment of the Agricultural Bank Act to allow of the Industries Assistance Board being taken over by the Bank. I do not know whether that would be an advantage, because we should still require the same staff.

Hon. V. Hamersley: What about the securities?

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I do not know that they would be much different. A number of members in this Chamber support the proposed change, but I am afraid the Government would be loth to part with the Industries Assistance Board. The board returns a fair sum of money into revenue, and to a Government with a deficit, £129,000 received through the board, loan money which can be put into revenue, is sufficient to encourage them to keep the Industries Assistance Act in operation. Last year the amounts the Government received from the board were as follows: Land rents, £29,900; Agricultural Bank interest on ordinary accounts, £43,977; soldier settlers' accounts, £50,957; water rates, £1,393; land tax, £485; income tax, £1,257; or a total approximately of £129,000: a nice little addition to revenue. We are not likely to find the Government dispensing with the Industries Assistance Act.

Hon. T. Moore: The Government would get the same revenue through the Agricultural Bank.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Not unless the Act was amended. Two or three years ago I felt that the Industries Assistance Act was likely to be repealed, but to-day all that has been altered. So great has been the increase in the value of our lands that properties held by the Industries Assistance Board are now good, sound propositions. And that improvement will increase. The securities are better to-day than they were six months ago, and are still improving. However, when it comes to inferior properties, light lands, the position is impossible. The Government realise that. They have done a little writing down, but they should start the work in earnest and

write down all light land properties, although not in the way they have done in the past. The practice has been to push a man off the property he has developed, reduce the liability, and then let a new man come in. Far better would it be to give the pioneer settler a chance to hold on, that is, if he be worthy of it.

The Minister for Education: Perhaps he would refuse.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: As I say, the practice has been to push off the original settler, reduce the liability and bring in a new man.

Hon. J. Mills: They are doing that to-day.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I hope the Minister will impress upon the Government the importance of keeping the pioneer settlers on their properties. I wonder why the Government have not done something in regard to the light land question. While I held a position as member of Cabinet I called a conference of those who had dealt with light lands, in an endeavour to find out whether something could not be gained from their experience for the framing of a policy for the handling of such country. All those who knew what took place at the conference regarded it as one that had produced the most good of any field in the State. It was a triumph on that particular question. What has become of the recommendations of the conference, and of all the information that was gleaned? Apparently nothing has been done. At the time we all felt very pleased with the result of the conference. Why have not the Government made use of the recommendations? They would help the Government considerably in dealing with the light land question with the Industries Assistance Board. The time has arrived when the outside creditors of the board should receive a little consideration. The position is altering, and the securities are being built up, and everything is now so secure that the outside creditors, many of whom have waited for their money since 1914, should begin to get something back. They have had no interest on their money, as Mr. Mills has said, and they would be prepared to take a smaller amount in the pound.

Hon. J. Mills: I said the interest was being added to the debt.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: They are not given credit for interest by the Industries Assistance Board.

Hon. J. Mills: I know they are not getting it, but it is being added to their debt.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: That is worth nothing to them. They have no chance of getting it and they know it. Many of them would be pleased to receive a few shillings in the pound, leaving out altogether the question of interest. It is time the Government made a move in this direction. Before any extension of the Act is made to the South-West, the Peel Estate and the group settlements, extreme caution must be used. A fortnight

ago I had a conversation with a settler on the Peel Estate, and was greatly astonished by what he told me. I asked him how he was getting on and if he was still getting the 10s. a day sustenance. He said he was not getting it, that he was on his own block, and that the Government were advancing him and many of the settlers £2 10s. a week. I asked why they were getting that, and he replied that it was to assist them in developing their blocks. That is rather an astounding statement. I can hardly credit that the individual who told me this would mislead me. The Government pay sustenance at the rate of 10s. a day, but when the settlers get on their own blocks they receive £2 10s. a week. What are they to produce for that £2 10s. a week? Nothing of any value has been produced off that estate during the last six months. This is only loading up the blocks of the settlers, and they cannot hope to get all the capital out of them. The Government are extending their powers of giving sustenance beyond what the Act provides.

The Minister for Education: The settlers have to work for what they get.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: They are trying to grow a few vegetables, and plant some seed that will probably be washed out again.

The Minister for Education: You say this is being done on the Peel Estate?

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Yes. No doubt it will be news to members. We were told the Government would get the land ready, and that the settlers would begin to produce straight away. We now find that the Act has been extended by the Government without authority.

Hon. J. Mills: The settlers are getting a daily wage for the improvements they are effecting.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: They are now supposed to produce something from their blocks.

Hon. G. Potter: Was this man an immigrant? It might have been a repatriation grant.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: That was not the case. I notice in to-day's paper that the Premier referred to a circular issued by some person or body down there asking a number of questions. Apparently the Premier did not know who had written the circular. One would have thought he would have endeavoured to find out who was seeking the information. The people concerned must have left some address for the answers to be sent to them. The Premier said that anyone could get any information he liked from the departments. That is hardly in keeping with what occurred this afternoon. I required some information to deal with this Bill. I was told by the Leader of the House that a return would be prepared.

The Minister for Education: It will take some time to answer your questions.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: My questions remain unanswered. There is no reason for this veil of secrecy. Most of the questions required a simple answer, and there was no

occasion for a return to be prepared. The Government had a fortnight in which to frame the answers. This would have taken up a little of the spare time of the officers who are running about on the estate. I am not opposing any extension of the Act to the South-West, for the time may come when it should be extended in that direction. I do, however, urge extreme caution before anything of this kind is done. To commit oneself at this stage would be ridiculous. The Government should bring about a better system of inspection under the Industries Assistance Act. When travelling about my district many complaints are brought under my notice, most of them being justifiable. People complain about the long delays of inspection. Time and again supplies have come too late to enable settlers to put in their crops. In one case a settler was compelled to seed ground from which both he and the inspector knew it was hopeless to expect a payable return. In another case a man had to put in a certain acreage to meet the requirements of the board. He had to run his drill over land which would not yield three bushels to the acre, because it was wodge country. He knew he would not get the price of his seed back, let alone any return for his labour and super. These things are very detrimental to the settler. The Act has been in operation long enough to enable the authorities to institute a proper system of inspection. A better method of getting supplies out to the settlers should be inaugurated to enable them to get their crops in at the right time. The regulations requiring a certain area to be put in should not be enforced if the land is not there to crop. I trust the Leader of the House will bring these matters before the Government. I am in accord with this Bill, and will support the second reading.

On motion by Hon. T. Moore, debate adjourned.

RESOLUTION—ESPERANCE NORTHWARDS RAILWAY EXTENSION.

Assembly's Message.

Message received from the Legislative Assembly requesting the concurrence of the Legislative Council in the following resolution—

"That in the opinion of this House the Government should obtain the necessary authority as early as possible to extend the Esperance Northward Railway line (now in course of construction) so that it may junction with the existing lines of the State at Norseman," presents the same to the Legislative Council for its concurrence.

House adjourned at 9.42 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 31st October, 1923.

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The DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair at 7.30 p.m., and read prayers.

QUESTION—QUEENSLAND PROBATE COMPANY, LOCAL CAMPAIGN.

Mr. JOHNSTON asked the Premier: 1, Have the Government any information regarding the value of shares in the Queensland Probate Company, a campaign for the sale of which has lately been conducted in Narrogin and other country centres by Mr. J. A. Greig, M.L.C., director for the said company in Western Australia, and Mr. Harold Seddon, M.L.C., inspector and salesman for the said Queensland Probate Company under Mr. Greig's direction? 2, If not, will the Government institute inquiries, as the said shares are not listed in any Australian stock exchange list? 3, Have the Government any information as to the salaries, commissions, and other profits being received by the promoters of this company? 4, Is it the intention of the Government to introduce legislation to protect the residents of this State from exploitation in regard to the purchase of shares in the large number of new mushroom insurance companies of unknown and doubtful value which are being hawked round the country districts by plausible directors and their salesmen and employees?

The PREMIER replied: 1, 2, and 3, Intending investors should satisfy themselves of the bona fides of a company before becoming shareholders. No one is compelled to purchase shares. 4, The Government do not know of any individual who has invested in such concerns.