

Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 19th February, 1918.

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

[For "Questions on Notice" and "Papers Presented" see "Votes and Proceedings."]

MOTION—COLLIE COAL COMMISSION, TO ADOPT RECOMMENDATIONS.

Debate resumed from the 30th January upon the following motion by Mr. O'Loughlen:—"That in the opinion of this House the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission on the coal industry should be given effect to"; and upon an amendment by Mr. Willecock, "That the following words be added to the motion:—'With the exception of those contained in paragraph 231 of the Commission's report.'"

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. C. A. Hudson—Yilgarn) [4.45]: It is well perhaps for hon. members to make themselves thoroughly acquainted with the motion moved by the member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loughlen). Its purpose is that the report of the Royal Commission made some time ago in relation to the Collie coal industry should be given effect to. In moving his motion the hon. member stated pretty distinctly that he did not intend to convey to the House his intention of pressing the adoption of the whole of the recommendations of the Commission, but to confine himself as to whether or not orders for Collie coal by the Railway Department to the different companies should be equally distributed or not. The member for Geraldton has moved an amendment to the original motion in these terms—

That the words, "with the exception of those contained in paragraph 231 of the Commission's report" be added to the motion.

The effect of that amendment, if carried, would be the exclusion from the report of the Commission of paragraph 231, which reads as follows:—

Provided that the use of Collie coal on the railways be regarded as a principle of national importance, and that Collie coal be used wherever and in whatever proportions it is possible to do so, we recommend that six years' notice, equal to the duration of two contract periods of three years each, should be given that the existing policy of the equality of railway orders will cease, and that after the expiration of that period the Railway Commissioner be allowed to select the coals which he regards as most suitable for railway purposes.

So that the motion and the amendment are diametrically opposed to one another. The member for Forrest having asserted the continuance of the policy of equal distribution of orders, the member for Geraldton has moved the exclusion of that portion of the report, and the issue we have to consider is whether

the department shall be called upon to give an equal distribution of the orders to the Collie coal companies for a further period of six years. This is a very important subject, one that involves a good deal of public money and of grave concern to the Railway Department and the people of Collie at the present juncture. It is therefore with pleasure I find the Premier giving prominence to the subject to-day in order that the matter may be settled in some such way as to avoid industrial disturbance. This matter is important in many ways. It is important to the State financially because the amount which is paid for coal to the Collie coal companies per annum is approximately £100,000. This year it will possibly reach £130,000, or an increase of 30 per cent. The member for Forrest in introducing his motion mentioned that as the member for Collie was absent he had taken his place in bringing forward this subject. I regret, for the sake of the House, that the member for Collie is absent because he would have been able to afford considerable information on the subject that other members do not possess. The member for Forrest made an eloquent appeal, however, to the House for a continuance of support to the Collie coal fields. There has been no intention on the part of the Government or the Railway Commissioner so far as I know of doing anything to injure the Collie coal industry. It is an adjunct to our commercial life; it is an asset we desire to develop and maintain, indeed, we desire to stimulate, and it is with that object in view the Government and previous Governments have done all they could to foster that industry. The member for Forrest made an appeal particularly on behalf of the Collie coal miners, that is the workers in the mines, the coal mine owners and the Collie people. Those three factors are combined in an effort to secure the equal distribution of orders for coal given by the Railway Department, and to secure those orders, I am going to show, whether they give a reasonable quid pro quo, that is provide the article required by the department, or not. I think it is a somewhat shortsighted policy on the part of the Collie people to attempt to enforce such a demand at this juncture and I propose to review the history of this equal distribution of orders. In the first place, I should like, however, to disabuse the minds of hon. members of an idea which seemed to prevail throughout the remarks of the member for Forrest. He spoke, and I have seen it repeated in the newspaper since, and particularly at the meeting at Collie, that it was the intention of the Railway Department to give all their orders to one mine, that one mine being the Proprietary coal mine at Collie. I wish to say there has never been any such intention; on the contrary, the contract of the Government will be fulfilled to the letter. It would be a shortsighted policy on the part of the Government and not to the advantage of the country if we were to have one mine only at Collie. It is recognised on all hands that in order that this industry might flourish, indeed that it might live, that the railway orders should be distributed, but that they should be distributed equally is quite another matter. That they should be

distributed fairly to those able to supply a decent article, goes without saying, but that there should be an equal distribution irrespective of the supply is not a business-like proposition. I hope the House will not be led away with the intention expressed that there is any desire on anybody's part of creating a monopoly in one company at Collie. It is true the railway unions at one stage of the proceedings which has led to this state of affairs set up a desire on their part to obtain only Proprietary coal. They said it was the best coal obtainable and they desired that they should, during the summer months at any rate, have the best coal only. It is some time since the equal distribution of orders was first arranged by the Government. There were then six collieries operating on the coal fields and a separate agreement was made by each of them with the Railway Commissioner that he should obtain from each one-sixth of his orders, that is one-sixth of the order which he undertook to give of the 80 per cent. of the whole of the coal he used. It was provided in the agreement that he should use 80 per cent. of Collie coal except on the Northern railways, the district railways, and during the summer months, that is from the 15th November to the 15th February, on the agricultural lines. In that agreement it was provided that the Commissioner may at his absolute discretion during any period of the agreement increase or decrease the proportion of one-sixth. It also provided that the agreement might be terminated at any time during its currency on either party giving to the other three months' notice commencing at the beginning of any one month. It further provided, and this has to be borne in mind in view of recent events, that if short coal was delivered or there was a shortage in any coal ordered from any one mine, the Commissioner reserved to himself the right of obtaining that shortage from any mine he thought fit with equal or better quality coal. Those are the main provisions so far as they affect this controversy, and I think it would be as well at this stage if I mention the names of the mines concerned in the business. They are the Co-operative, the West Australian, the Proprietary, the three mines supplying hard coal, and the other three, the Co-operative, the Scottish, and the Premier supplying a different kind of coal, commonly called soft. The price fixed by the agreement was 11s. per ton and that was to continue for three years. All the companies accepted that price and it was generally agreed throughout the industry that it was a fair price. However, I will deal with that subject presently. During the currency of the three years' agreement a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire generally into the coal-mining industry. That Commission, like a number of other Commissions which we have heard of lately, had a long life. It commenced in April, 1914, and did not make its report until November, 1916.

Hon. P. Collier: The hon. member should inform the House that the Commission suspended their sittings for a long period because of one of the members having other business to attend to.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It is only fair that that should be stated. I am not suggesting that they neglected their work in any way. In fact, they went exhaustively, clearly, and carefully into the matter that was assigned to them. They dealt, however—and that is a point I want to impress on members—with five companies only. There had been six companies in operation at the time the original agreement was made, but when the Commission entered on their labours and at the time at any rate when they reported, they dealt with only five companies, with three companies supplying hard coal and with two supplying soft coal. This has a bearing on the question when we come to consider paragraph 231 of the report and a still further bearing on the equal distribution of orders. I should at this stage perhaps deal with one or two matters which were mentioned by the hon. member in introducing his motion relating to an alleged neglect on the part of the Railway Department in not doing their utmost to further the use of Collie coal. There were three items the hon. member mentioned in the recommendations of the Commission that Collie coal should be covered in transit and kept covered until used. That referred particularly to the soft class of coal. The recommendation was published at the end of 1916 and there has been no opportunity if there was a desire, to carry that recommendation into effect. The cost of the material, if the opportunity was afforded to the Commissioner, would absolutely prevent the possibility of carrying out such a recommendation. The other point was in reference to spark arresters, and I think that should be left out of the debate because it was shown at the conference recently, and in the Press, and in answer to questions asked in the House that the Chief Mechanical Engineer and the Commissioner of Railways have done all that is reasonably possible in order to invent spark arresters and complete and improve the spark arresters at present in existence and generally to try and prevent the causing of fires in our agricultural districts.

Mr. O'Loughlen: With what results?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: With the result as I pointed out when answering a question that the Chief Mechanical Engineer has now secured one which he believes will be effective. This is being given a practical trial.

Hon. P. Collier: It has taken them a long time to wake up.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The other point which was dwelt upon by the hon. member was that there was no proper inspection of Collie coal. I am going to show that it is impossible under the circumstances which operate at Collie to have a proper inspection of the coal as it is delivered. It is known that the coal has to be taken delivery of in trucks at the pit's mouth, and as it comes up it is shot out from the screens into trucks. There is no opportunity for the inspector to make a thorough examination of it and ascertain whether it is up to standard. As a matter of fact the qualities have not been as good as they should have been.

Hon. P. Collier: That may be true, but it applies to all companies alike.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes.

Mr. Davies: Has any effort been made to alter that system of inspection?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It has been improved upon as far as possible. The leader of the Opposition asked me whether it applied to all companies alike. It does not in this sense, that some have clean coal and some have not, and some require closer inspection than others. It is not a very pleasant thing to have to criticise the quality of a local commodity, but it is only in the relative sense that I propose to do so now. We have these companies supplying coal of various qualities. Of the three companies supplying hard coal, one of them provides a good, clean coal. That is the Proprietary mine. The Westralia is a mine that has a coal seam three feet thick; then there is 18 inches of shale or stone, and then there is a further supply of coal. These are all shot down together, and there should be a proper separation of them before delivery. The same remark applies in more or less degree to the Co-operative mine, but the efforts that should have been made to supply clean coal have never been carried out effectively. If we refer to the report of the Royal Commission on page 14, it will be found that they have these remarks to make—

Much improvement has taken place of late years in connection with the coal cleaning at Collie, through the installation of picking belts, and if these are properly attended to, the companies should have no difficulty in supplying reasonably clean fuel. We are of opinion, however, that a good deal of shale is allowed to pass over the picking belt, so that it finds its way into the coal supplies for locomotives. In the case of the Co-operative and Westralian seams, some of the bottom coal is so extremely inferior, that it is a matter of opinion as to what shall be considered shale and what coal. It would be very wise for these two companies to discard the whole of their inferior coal, at least for railway purposes.

Mr. O'Loghlen: They claim to have done so.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: They have not done so. It was shown pretty clearly to us at Collie that they had not. It was exhibited to us that they would be able to do it almost immediately. There was only one place where they were taking out clean coal, and another place where they would be able to work without taking out dirty coal. But since that report was published those two companies have been supplying the railways with an inferior quality of coal. They had good coal. The coal was good enough, but the dirt and shale was such as to make it useless; indeed, it gave a great deal of trouble to engine-drivers, while in some cases it was so bad that it had to be discarded altogether. I have dealt now with the three hard coals. The other three are the soft coals. That from the Cardiff is a good article of its kind. It is a coal which disintegrates very quickly and it is only fit

for use in the immediate neighbourhood of Collie, that is to say within a distance perhaps of 100 miles. It can then be used economically and satisfactorily. But it must be borne in mind that the application of the Collie mine owners and the workmen and the people is that the orders should be distributed equally and at the same price. The Scottish mine has not been supplying for some time, and it does not come within the purview of the Commission's report. The coal from the Premier mine has been shown to be inferior to that of the Cardiff. That is also a soft coal and produces such a quantity of ash that it cannot be used effectively or economically in the interests of the Railway Department. That is the position with regard to the coal. I want now to draw the attention of the House to the aspect of the question in relation to price. Hon. members must bear in mind that the object of the motion is to compel the Railway Department to take an equal quantity of each kind of coal at the same price, and it would be interesting for us to follow that out. In dealing with the report of the Commission it is necessary for us to get at the facts as they existed when the Commission made their investigation, and upon what lines they based their conclusions that there should be an equal distribution of orders over a particular period. I would draw the attention of hon. members to Paragraph 224 of the report, which states—

Inasmuch, however, as our investigations show that Collie coal can be mined and sold at a good profit at its present price of 11s. per ton on trucks at pit's mouth, we recommend that the present maximum and minimum prices, viz., 12s. and 8s. 9d. per ton respectively be retained, and that the rise and fall of price be calculated by the existing method.

That is to say that the Collie coal companies were in a position in 1914 to the end of 1916 to mine and sell at a good profit at 11s. a ton. That was in the mind of the Commission when they reported. They only dealt with five companies, three supplying hard coal and two soft coal when they made the recommendation which is contained in paragraph 224 of their report. That being the price agreed upon, let us see what follows. That was the price under the agreement which was made in 1912. It was renewed in 1915 at the request of the companies and was approved in 1916 as being a payable price, but immediately afterwards in 1916 again, there was a slight disturbance amongst colliers in Collie and an application was made to the Government to give them another 6d. per ton. It has to be borne in mind that the higher the price paid for coal, the more remuneration there is for the hewers of the coal. The Government of the day granted an increase of price from 11s. to 11s. 6d. They were evidently carrying out a recommendation which was expressed in paragraph 173 of the report of the Royal Commission which says—

The fact that there is a maximum price chargeable for Collie coal of standard

quality, viz., 12s. per ton, is a surety to the Railway Department that they will always be able to obtain their supplies at reasonable rates, as this maximum price for the native fuel holds good, even if the price of the imported article were to soar to 40s. or 50s. per ton.

As a policy of insurance and to secure a regular supply of Collie coal so that the department would not be hampered by industrial disturbances, the Government advanced the price from 11s. to 11d. 6d. That was in December, 1916. In January, 1917, there was further trouble amongst coal miners in New South Wales. The Federal Government appointed a board presided over by Mr. Justice Edmunds to settle the dispute and he fixed the rate of wages for the miners and he also raised the price of coal to the consumer. The Railway Commissioner had no say in the proceedings, but the Collie people took an interest in it and as a result of the inquiry by Judge Edmunds, the price of coal in New South Wales was increased by 3s. a ton. Then in spite of the increase of 6d. made by the Railway Commissioner in this State in November, 1916, the Collie people made a claim on the Government for a proportionate amount according to the value of the 3s. increase in New South Wales and the amount was eventually agreed upon at 1s. 11d. a ton.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That was the order of the court. The railways had nothing to do with it.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It was an application from those who had agreed to accept the increase from 11s. to 11s. 6d. There was no necessity for the coal mine owners to press for that additional 1s. 11d. Since that time we have been paying 13s. 5d. per ton for coal and some of it inferior in quality to that demanded by the Railway Commissioner. The increase will this year affect approximately 200,000 tons and at 2s. a ton, roughly speaking, it will mean an increase to the Railway Department and consequently to the taxpayers of £20,000. Now there has also been another concession granted to the Collie coal companies in the form of a remission of royalties. Up to 1905 the companies paid a royalty, as required under the Mining Act. They paid altogether a sum of £14,500, which was at the rate of 2d. per ton. From that date, however, the royalty has been remitted from time to time.

Mr. Pickering: They had not paid it.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: They did pay it up to 1905, but from that year it has been remitted from time to time by way of bonuses or subsidies, and the remissions have amounted between 1905 and 1917 to over £60,000. The Collie coal companies have therefore benefited, and with them the working men, to the extent of a considerable sum of money.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Would not the Railways have had to pay 3d. per ton extra if they had not remitted this royalty?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: If there had not been a sort of combine amongst the coal mine owners and if there had been open competition, the best coal could have been obtained by the department at a less price than they are paying for it now.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: There is no competition with any person now, and they are all combines.

Hon. P. Collier: Is there any competition between Newcastle tenderers?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It is through their combination that they have secured such a high price. When it comes to a question of a fair deal with the Railway Department these things ought to be taken into consideration, and the department protected. At the commencement of the present summer we were faced with the position that whilst we were paying 13s. 5d. for Collie coal we had been up to that time using, according to the agreement, about 80 per cent. of Collie coal. Not being required from the 15th November to 15th February to use so much, we were entitled to go back to about 60 per cent. of our orders for Collie coal. As a matter of fact, if we had been able to get Newcastle coal it would have been within the terms of our contract to do this. Owing, however, to our being unable to get Newcastle coal, we were compelled to and did actually, take 90 per cent. of Collie coal, so that the companies benefited in increased orders to the extent of 30 per cent. over previous orders.

Mr. O'Loghlen: What benefit did the State get?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The State undoubtedly benefited. But the point I have to make is that as we had a difficulty in getting coal elsewhere, for use in our agricultural districts, we were compelled by the action of the mine owners and their refusal to meet us in any way, to use that quantity of inferior coal, when we should have had the best coal procurable in Collie. The farmers were in a very bad position because of that, and were running a greater risk in consequence of our having to use this inferior coal. Application was made to these people for the department to be supplied with better coal, but we were held down within the four corners of our agreement, and had to give the full orders, in equal proportions, to the different companies for an inferior quality of coal.

Mr. Harrison: Did they respond and give you better coal?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: No. We had to take the coal as they supplied it. If they could get their own way not only would they give us equal quantities of coal from the different mines, but if one mine failed and was not able to fulfil its orders—and it might be a company which had been supplying hard coal—we would have to take, on the distribution, a greater quantity of inferior coal, which is not a fair deal.

Mr. Harrison: The selection of the coal was not altered on account of your request?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: There was no change whatever made.

Mr. O'Loughlen: In the distribution of shortages now, you get two-thirds of hard coal and one-third of soft, owing to the closing down of the Co-operative mine.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The Westralian is not in a position to supply the quality of coal that it should supply, and ought to be closed down—

Mr. O'Loughlen: That is interesting.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: So far as that seam from which the bad coal was supplied is concerned. When the Westralian or the Co-operative mines are in a position to supply good coal, they ought to get an equal share in the distribution of orders. The use of inferior coal in the agricultural districts is a loss not only to the Railway Department, but to agriculturists. It is also a loss to the consumer on the goldfields. During the course of the year when we have had to use Collie coal on goldfields lines and in other parts of the State, and when we should in other circumstances have had Newcastle coal, there have been 17 wagons burnt, and 22 tarpaulins, and a large quantity of chaff which belonged to our customers who suffered in consequence, because it was carried at owner's risk.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Do you know what coal it was?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: No. This has been brought about through our having to use Collie coal when in other circumstances we should have been using Newcastle coal.

Hon. J. Mitchell: If it is inferior coal surely you are responsible.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I pointed out that this was forced upon us. We used the best coal we could get, but the companies would not provide us with the best coal they could supply. We obtain from the Collie coal companies 90 per cent. of our orders at the present time. We say that we are endeavouring to take an increased quantity from them, that the quality of the coal they have been supplying is not as good as it should be, and that the matter should be left to the discretion of the Commissioner to some extent, on the direction of the Government as to their policy to use as much Collie coal as possible. It is only fair to the House, and the people, that they should know if this motion is carried that there will be considerable loss to the community.

Hon. P. Collier: In what way?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The railway officers' association pointed out that they would have to exercise greater energy in using these coals than they did previously when they used Newcastle coal. They would have less work to do with Newcastle coal than with an inferior quality of coal, and more work to do with the Premier coal than with Proprietary coal.

Hon. P. Collier: They are getting a lot of sympathy in regard to increased work in quarters from which they had no sympathy before.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I do not follow the hon. member.

Hon. P. Collier: They are getting sympathy from quarters from which the workers never got sympathy previously.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I do not know that the mine owners are getting very much sympathy from the mine workers at the present juncture. In reference to the distribution of orders, the member for Forrest has argued for the continuance of such distribution in the interests of Collie, and says that if this is not done 300 men will be thrown out of employment. If the full amount of the coal order can be supplied to the Railway Department from Collie with 300 men less, it is for this House to determine whether this should be done or not.

Mr. O'Loughlen: I said 200.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Assume that it was 100. It is a tax upon the community, which the community ought to know it is bearing. If there is to be a continuation of the equal distribution of orders, and equal distribution of shortages, I repeat that there is going to be a serious loss to the State, because the Railway Commissioner will not be getting the coal that he ought to have at the price that is paid—and it is a good price—and he should not be blamed if he is not able to make both ends meet in connection with his railways. If the present state of things is allowed to continue, it will be no wonder that the Treasurer will suffer some embarrassment in regard to his finances. I cannot support the motion.

Mr. PICKERING (Sussex) [5.25]: I should like to refer to what appeared in this morning's "West Australian" adversely criticising the action of the Minister for Railways in connection with the recent trip of Parliamentarians to Collie. I think that the Minister is to be congratulated on the step that he took, and that hon. members should be pleased that they have been given this opportunity of making first hand acquaintance with the conditions in the Collie coal industry.

The Minister for Railways: For the peace of mind of the "West Australian" you might also remark that the other cars were paid for by the individuals who hired them.

Mr. PICKERING: I suppose that is a fact.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: It was a great mistake to take any notice of the statements at all.

The Minister for Railways: Possibly it was a mistake.

Mr. PICKERING: I think that the motion submitted by the hon. member is a very sweeping one, seeing that it embraces every aspect of the Commission's recommendations. It is true, as the Minister has said, that the hon. member confined himself more particularly to those paragraphs dealing with the equal distribution of orders.

Mr. O'Loughlen: I offered to withdraw the motion if that point was settled.

Mr. PICKERING: All the matters contained in the report are interdependent, and if certain recommendations were to be car-

ried out it would be perhaps more difficult to give this equal distribution of orders. I do not wish to refer particularly to the methods of mining or to the timber on the leases, or to hydraulic stowing. The quality of the marketable coal is most certainly of great importance, and it appears from my reading of the Commission's report, and from the opportunity I have had of looking into the question on the spot, that there is a great discrepancy in the qualities of the coal offered. One of the great factors in the matter is dirt. Two or three of these mines, particularly the Scottish, Co-operative and Westralian, have been known to supply dirty coal, because of the existence of shale in their coal seams.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The Scottish is a clean coal.

Mr. PICKERING: I am aware of that. I think the Minister was wrong in his statement regarding the methods of mining adopted by the Co-operative Company. The Co-operative is one of those mines which have a big seam in the centre, with about 14 inches of shale. We were shown that first of all the bottom of the seam of coal was taken, and afterwards the seam of shale was blown out, and then the upper seam. Then there followed a process of picking out the dirt and throwing it into what some gentlemen elegantly describe as a "gob." The methods of picking out the coal seem to me not at all thorough, because, according to the Royal Commission's report, experienced miners should have no difficulty in distinguishing between shale and coal. On the top we were shown a further process of cleaning the coal. My object is to prove that a good deal of blame rests on the coal owners in connection with the supply of dirty coal. There are certain provisions in the contract which, in my opinion, should enable the Commissioner of Railways to refuse coal which holds above a certain percentage of dirt. If the Government were to exercise supervision by the appointment of an additional inspector or two, it would be of benefit not only to the coal owners but also to the users of the coal, and would ensure to the Commissioner the getting of the article for which the State pays. Under the contract, I understand, the Government are not obliged to take the coal if it is not in accordance with the terms agreed upon. We find that the mines have provided certain measures for cleaning the coal, such as picking belts and screens; but the Royal Commission recommended that the bottom seams of coal, which are dirty, should be discarded. Perhaps that recommendation could be followed with advantage to the colliery companies and to the State. I do not understand all the technicalities of coal mining; but it seems to me that by discarding the lower seams the collieries would have a longer wall to work up, and that thereby the coal could be extracted at a profit, and the Commissioner of Railways could obtain the article he requires. The Minister for Mines has pointed out that there are three mines which supply hard coal—the Proprietary, the Co-operative, and the Westralian—

and three which supply soft coal—the Cardiff, the Premier, and the Scottish. One recommendation of the Royal Commission seems to have a considerable bearing on this point, and the soundness of the recommendation should be tested. If it is sound, there is no argument against the use of Collie coal. Paragraph 196 of the report states—

The admixture of these two coals gives excellent results in the fire box, the faults of both coals being minimised and the steaming improved. Although the Proprietary and the Premier coals—
which the Minister condemned so roundly—were selected for these tests, as typical of the hard and soft coals, it is anticipated that a mixture of any of the hard and soft coals would show similar results.

I contend that such a pronouncement must have been based on some good foundation, and that it is one which should be very seriously weighed by the Government before they condemn any coal. Another aspect which I regret, is disclosed by the Royal Commission's report. It is that the shale is often mixed with the coal by carelessness and by bad mining methods.

The Minister for Works: The coal owners get paid for it all the same.

Mr. PICKERING: I condemn them in that respect. I think that if the coal people were alive to their own interests they would exercise the utmost possible caution in supplying the best possible coal from those mines.

Hon. P. Collier: The coal is not nearly so bad as it was some years ago. Great improvements have been made.

Mr. PICKERING: We know that the Scottish mine has been out of commission for a good many years. The Co-operative also is practically out of commission; and the Premier, a small mine, is working on a new seam. But I wish to point out that those three mines, so far as my limited knowledge will enable me to judge, are putting in excellent work in opening up fresh seams. I venture to contend that the Co-operative tunnel could scarcely be bettered, and some of the other tunnels also are very good work indeed. To me it seems a very serious thing that any Government should contemplate the shutting-down of these mines without first considering some alternative course. The Minister for Mines went down the Westralian mine, I know, because I followed him; and I needed a good deal of pluck to do it, because we waded over our boot tops in water. I saw, however, what appeared to me a very excellent seam of coal, on which very good work was being done. When the companies are working so earnestly and endeavouring to open up good seams of coal, it is regrettable that they should not be given every encouragement. One point of the utmost importance at Collie is that justice should be done to the industry, and the only way of doing it is to put on the market the very best that the industry is capable of producing. I do sincerely hope that when we come to deliberate on the question, that phase of it will be borne in mind. It is not that the coal is not there, but that the people who have been

dealing with it have not dealt with it as honestly as they should have. The Royal Commission's report distinctly states that the coal mining companies shot down carbonaceous shale and filled up with coal in the truck.

Mr. O'Loghlen: That was years ago.

Hon. P. Collier: That was done in the mine the Government are supposed to give all the orders to now.

Mr. PICKERING: I could not quite understand the reply of the Minister for Mines to my question regarding the covering of coal under transit and in store. The Minister's answer to my question was as follows:—

During the summer months Collie coal in transit for the northern railways and other distant depôts is covered with condemned truck sheets. Collie coal is not stored at locomotive depôts, but in cases where there is an accumulation of coal in trucks the coal is covered in a similar manner. Each depôt has a stock of condemned tarpaulins for that purpose. The instructions re covering coal standing in trucks at depôts were issued in January, 1916, whereas the report of the Collie Coal Commission is dated November, 1916.

I understood the Minister to state just now in reply to an interjection that nothing was being done. I am unable to reconcile those two statements. In dealing with the recommendation made by the Royal Commission on this subject, however, we must concede that it is one of the most vital points. It has been demonstrated by experiment in Kalgoorlie and other inland centres that covering the coal and keeping it covered retain its efficiency.

The Minister for Works: Will covering make soft coal into hard coal?

Mr. PICKERING: Covering keeps the coal in the same condition as that in which it left the mine. If covered coal will be just as good at Kalgoorlie as at Collie, I consider the Government should exercise the strictest possible supervision over the industry. If that were done, then with a little greater anxiety on the part of the coal owners to produce only the cleanest of coal—

Mr. O'Loghlen: The coal miners are honest enough.

Mr. PICKERING: For cleaning purposes the coal is put through screens, and frequently the bottom of the screen is not kept clear. The small coal blocks up the bottom of the screen, and thus the process loses its efficacy. That is an important point to bear in mind. I think inspection of the coal should be made in accordance with the recommendation of the Royal Commission—that is, fortnightly instead of monthly. It is also urged that a bonus should be given for coal above 10,500 B.T.U. Money spent in that direction would be well spent if the State as a whole derived some advantage from it. It is quite evident that if we can obtain coal of an average exceeding 10,500 B.T.U., a service will have been done to the State.

The Minister for Works: And then there would be a fire in every other coal truck.

Mr. PICKERING: Another recommendation which requires attention is that there should be an improved fire box. Such an

alteration might involve the expenditure of a considerable sum of money, but if the larger fire box has been proved to be efficacious in other parts of the world I see no reason why some effort to bring about the same results should not be made here. I will not deal with the question of sparking, because the Minister for Mines has stated that the sparking arrangements are being acceded to. We have before us, however, a most elaborate statement by the locomotive engine-drivers. I think it runs into several columns of the "West Australian." The statement is very conclusive indeed, and a very learned statement to emanate from the engine-drivers. Where they obtained their information I do not know. However, some particulars of that statement do not, I think, come within the purview of the engine-drivers. The point I wish to make is that I have it on very good authority that the engine-drivers are not unanimous in the view expressed on Collie coal in that statement. I am under the impression that it has been said the Kalgoorlie branch of the locomotive engine-drivers are in favour of the use of Collie coal.

Mr. Green: You are quite right; that is perfectly true.

Mr. PICKERING: Therefore it seems to me that we should not place too much reliance on this statement by the engine-drivers on the subject.

Mr. Green: A large number of engine-drivers on the Murchison take up the same attitude as the Kalgoorlie branch.

The Minister for Railways: They are all in favour of the use of Collie coal. It is a question of the quality of the coal.

Mr. PICKERING: If a mixture of the Collie coals is the best, as the Minister says, there is no reason why it should not be used.

Mr. Munsie: The Kalgoorlie drivers are supporting the equal distribution.

Mr. PICKERING: I do not think it can be contended by anybody that the industry is not of great importance to the State. The Minister for Mines has pointed out that had it not been for this industry we would have been in a very peculiar position. I would like to know what the Government intend to do for those mines which the Commissioner of Railways may succeed in closing down. It is well known that the Collie coal basin is also an artesian water bed. It was evidenced by the Co-operative company that the water in that mine is making very rapidly. If the Government are going to cut out those mines from the one-sixth contribution those properties will be unable to carry on, and the workings will be flooded with water and ultimately ruined.

Mr. Lambert: Do you suggest that the mines are in artesian water now?

Mr. PICKERING: I do not say they are, but seeing that there is such a big leakage from above they might be flooded by an outbreak of artesian water. If once those mines are allowed to get out of working order, the water will gain on them and eventually ruin them.

The Minister for Works: Are they pumping at the mines?

Mr. PICKERING: The only mine at which they were not pumping when I was there was the Scottish. I think it will be admitted that the Collie miners have made a very great sacrifice to the Empire. Collie has sent 1,500 men to the Front. Those men went away having every confidence in the country doing a fair thing by their dependants in maintaining the industry in which they themselves had been brought up to make their living. It would be a scandalous thing to turn down those men.

The Minister for Works: Those 1,500 men were principally timber hewers and timber workers.

Mr. PICKERING: One point the Minister made was in regard to the question of the 90 per cent. basis. Perhaps the Minister might be prepared to consider an equal distribution on the basis of the original arrangement, if not on the basis of the 90 per cent. Another point which I was surprised at the Minister not referring to is the question of farming out. One gentleman down there, the manager of the Proprietary company, was so very strong on the question of farming out that I asked him was he not a supporter of the Country party.

The Minister for Railways: In that regard read paragraph 233 of the Royal Commission's report.

Mr. PICKERING: I hope the House in considering this important question will not discharge it lightly, that members will consider what is involved. I hope also that the Government in their wisdom will find an alternative to the closing down of those mines. It must be remembered that some of the mines to be closed down have been the chief contributors to the bunkering trade. If those companies are to be in a position to continue when the war is over and coal once more required for bunkering purposes—

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Do you think they will be allowed to supply after the Government have condemned their coals?

The Minister for Railways: The Government have no condemned them nearly so much as the Royal Commission did.

Mr. PICKERING: However, I commend the matter to the consideration of hon. members.

Mr. PIESSE (Toodyay) [5.50]: I am opposed to the motion, principally on the ground that the equal distribution represents a menace to the farming districts. If we accept the testimony of the Firemen and Engine-drivers' Union it is also imposing a serious financial loss on the Railway Department.

Hon. P. Collier: We should not have to depend on engine-drivers for information which the Commissioner of Railways ought to supply.

Mr. PIESSE: We have also the Commissioner's report to the effect that the Commissioner has always been against the free use of Collie coal.

Hon. P. Collier: Will the hon. member indicate where one may find that report?

Mr. PIESSE: I cannot show it in print, nevertheless the leader of the Opposition knows it is true that the Commissioner of Railways has been opposed to the free use of Collie coal.

Hon. P. Collier: The Commissioner would not use Collie coal at all if he could avoid it.

Mr. PIESSE: It is useless for the leader of the Opposition to attempt to side track this question, knowing as he does that it is impossible for me to supply the documentary evidence he has asked for. Let us view the question from all standpoints.

Hon. P. Collier: You are viewing it from the sparking standpoint.

Mr. PIESSE: No, I am taking it from the broadest possible standpoint.

Hon. T. Walker: The Toodyay standpoint.

Mr. PIESSE: We have suffered very severely in Toodyay from Collie coal. I can produce documentary evidence showing that we had a fire on a 15-mile front in the Toodyay district, and that it would have been repeated this year but for the consideration extended by the Commissioner of Railways in respect of the use of Newcastle coal on that short spur line; otherwise we would have been burned out from one end of the district to the other. I do not want hon. members to misunderstand me; I do not oppose the use of Collie coal as a whole, but I oppose the use of certain classes of it in a district where it has already proved a serious loss to the farming industry.

Hon. P. Collier: That is the greatest rubbish ever uttered. Where is the evidence that this coal came from Collie?

Mr. PIESSE: I saw it myself. Only a fortnight ago the locomotive drawing a train on which I was travelling lit the country in 17 places within two miles. One of the fires thus started ran a distance of half a mile.

Hon. P. Collier: That is Collie coal in general. It does not affect the point at issue.

Mr. PIESSE: We have the testimony of the Engine-drivers' and Firemen's Union, which I proposed to read. I venture to say that this circular submitted to members contains more knowledge of the practical use of Collie coal than does the whole of the Opposition. We have here the testimony of men who know the serious effects of the use of this coal on the locomotives, and know the danger it entails on the firemen and drivers themselves. There is no denying the fact that the coal from some of the mines at Collie is of a very harmful nature, imposing heavy work on the firemen, and, further than that, lighting the country.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Bunny is all right, but save us from the coal.

Mr. PIESSE: The hon. member is as near a bunny as anyone could get. He simply gropes through the country as a bunny does. May I be permitted to read an extract from this circular? It is a reliable document and well worthy of its place in the records of the House, because on this important subject it is due to those men that their views should be recorded in "Hansard," seeing that those views are based on an experience which it is beyond any member of the House to obtain. Let us take the cost of the coal. On this point this circular reads as follows:—

Again, the quantity of this coal which is consumed per train mile renders it a most expensive article compared with Proprietary coal, and on consumption two of them cost the State 2s. 10½d. per ton more than Proprietary, and the other 1s. 2½d. per ton. Thus, the railways are paying 2s. 10½d. per ton more for an article of an inferior nature which exposes the country to more risks and which is in every way inferior to other coal produced on the same field. These prices are only computed where the coal is used near the mines under the best conditions. We repeat that the compulsion of 50 per cent. of this stuff on our railway system is wrong and should not be allowed to continue.

Here we have the testimony of the men as to the cost of the coal. It is clear that the department is losing considerably by the use of Collie coal other than Proprietary coal. I hold no brief for the Proprietary mine.

Hon. P. Collier: You are holding a brief for an industrial union of workers just now.

Mr. PIESSE: When this circular was prepared these men had nothing more in mind than an honest desire to secure a fair deal. There is another paragraph in this circular which I propose to read. The sparking of this coal goes on to an alarming extent. It has been stated that it is impossible to so construct the locomotives as to prevent sparking. I myself have been shown a fire box half full of Collie coal ash. When Newcastle coal, which is very superior to Collie coal, is burned there is not a tithe of the ash left by our own coal. We cannot get better testimony than we have before the House in this circular. It shows that the coal field does possess a good workable coal.

Mr. Green: Who produced the report?

Mr. PIESSE: It is signed by the general president, the vice-president, and the general secretary of the Drivers and Firemen's Union.

Mr. Green: You are reading it.

Mr. PIESSE: It contains valuable information, and it should be read to the House. Let us take the agreement entered into by the Scaddan Government as equal orders. I am sorry the Minister did not tell the House he was prepared to cancel the agreement as he should have done, because there is no justification for it. The hon. member has stated that there will be a monopoly if the orders are given to the Proprietary mine. As soon as anyone brings in any sound argument or shows any solution of any trouble, members opposite trot out the monopoly business.

Mr. O'Loughlen: If you had put your life's savings in a mine, would you not cry out?

Mr. PIESSE: Trials have been made on separate lines with this coal.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Who knows the most about the subject, the drivers or the Commission?

Mr. PIESSE: The drivers have said again and again that serious damage has been done to locomotives through the use of Collie coal, and that serious loss has been sustained by the department. As to the question of equal orders, it is in the best interests of the State and of the finances of the department that the agreement should be cancelled, and the orders

for coal given principally to the mines which can produce good workable fuel. Where it is possible to use inferior coal on the suburban lines without serious damage to the locomotives, I say it should be used. This is not the time for sentiment. If a man chooses to put his money into the mines is it the duty of the State to continue to use the coal those mines are producing, although it is an inferior article? I say "No."

Mr. O'Loughlen: What is the Commissioner doing under the agreement? He has power to close up any mines he likes.

The Minister for Railways: A pretty chance he would have of doing it.

Mr. PIESSE: No doubt the Commissioner would have to pay a little compensation, but it would be just as well. Members cannot shut their eyes to the report of the Commission.

The Minister for Railways: Three months' notice has to be given to terminate the agreement.

Mr. PIESSE: We are practically through the summer now, and it does not affect the farming community so much to-day as it would have done two months ago, but I hope before next summer a new arrangement will have been come to by which the Government will be able to use the best coal.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Why have they been burning Collie coal for the last three weeks?

Mr. PIESSE: Because there is no other to burn. It is the duty of members to make themselves acquainted closely with the whole of this subject.

Hon. P. Collier: It is a pity that you did not make yourself acquainted with it.

Mr. PIESSE: But I have.

Hon. P. Collier: You have not the slightest idea on the subject.

Mr. PIESSE: The hon. member, Mr. Collier, is the Minister who signed the agreement, and he should be jolly well ashamed of himself. Why did he sign it? Because there were members of unions tickling him up and he had not the courage to go against them.

Hon. P. Collier: What unions tickled you up on this subject?

Mr. PIESSE: I would not be under such an obligation as the leader of the Opposition is to any union.

Hon. P. Collier: I never twisted on the evening of an election like you did.

Mr. Green: You got down on your belly to a new party.

Mr. PIESSE: I am sorry the leader of the Opposition thinks fit to speak in that strain, because it does not become him.

Hon. T. Walker: What about your reproach of honesty?

Mr. PIESSE: It is justified. The hon. member has made interjections, and I feel justified in returning a Roland for an Oliver. I hope the Government will see fit to amend the agreement, and give due consideration to all mines as far as the consumption of coal is concerned, so long as it does not mean any serious loss to the Government or to the farming community.

Mr. ROCKE (South Fremantle) [6.8]: Through the courtesy of the Minister for Mines I was enabled to visit the Collie coal fields and I came back better able to consider

the report of the Royal Commission than before I went down and I am now better able to cast an intelligent vote on this important and vital subject. The question before the House is not a parochial one, it is one that concerns the State. It concerns the mining industry of the State. I have had considerable experience in the use of Collie coal and other coals so that I feel I can speak with some little confidence. I have read carefully portions of the evidence given by men who have been using Collie coal and I find there is much to be said in favour of the coal which is condemned by the railway men. There is no doubt whatever from what I have heard and read that the Railway Department have been receiving coal that is not of first class quality. To any railway men or engineer who has to use unclean coal I extend my sympathy. I know what it means. I do not think unclean coal has been received by the department to the extent which this House in some quarters has been led to believe. I believe that during the day that the Parliamentary party visited Collie there were five trucks of coal condemned. I admit that I did not see that coal, I wish I had. Other members of the party said that they saw the coal that was condemned and that it came from the Proprietary mine. Had that coal got into use on the railways there is not much doubt but that it would have been charged against one of the other mines, certainly not the Proprietary mine.

The Minister for Works: How do you justify that statement?

Mr. ROCKE: Because there is a prejudice against the other mines.

The Minister for Works: I suppose you know that every truck is marked with the colliery from which it comes.

Mr. ROCKE: How does an engineer know where it comes from when he has it on his tender? This coal was in the Collie railway yard I understand. With reference to the equal distribution which seems to be the great question before the House, we have been told that the Government do not intend to create a monopoly. It stands to reason that if we have such a distribution as we are led to believe it is the intention of the Government to make, a monopoly will be created by reason of the law of cause and effect. It means that if a mine other than the Proprietary have not sufficient Government orders to keep them going, it is only a matter of a very little while when the orders will be taken up by others enjoying the larger share of the Government business. So that a monopoly is created. It will then be a matter of closing down the mines at the will of the Proprietary company. A monopoly will be created whether it is the intention of the Government to create one or not. The matter of the hundred thousand pounds paid by the Government is money well spent seeing that it is expended within the State. If we were importing coal from Newcastle we would be creating dividends for the large shipping companies, but in supporting the Collie coal industry we are supporting something which is of the greatest importance to the State. Some of the coal mines at Collie produce soft coal and some hard coal.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. ROCKE: Before tea I was dealing with the fact that the Collie coalfield produced the two necessary qualities of coal, hard and soft. It has been proved in evidence that the admixture of these qualities produces a good steam coal which I think is evidence that the House might accept in favour of the argument for equal distribution of the Government orders. With reference to the interjection by the Minister for Works relating to the fact that one mine supposed to be clean might be immune from blame for unclean coal being sent therefrom, I find that the report substantiates what I have already said. The portion I refer to reads—

We have found, however, on closer investigation, that some of the drivers are unable to distinguish the coal from the different seams. In many cases they can distinguish whether the coal belongs to a certain group or not, and very often it is found that the coal mine is incorrectly guessed. A number of the drivers have admitted this in evidence. Under these circumstances the question arises as to whether there is not a good deal of "give a dog a bad name."

That is evidence from the Royal Commission which we cannot lose sight of. I have already spoken of the prejudice existing against Collie coal, and from experience I find that it takes extra labour as well as extra coal to produce the same amount of steam as it is possible to get from Newcastle coal. But I think that difficulty might be overcome by allowing the firemen a little increase of pay when they are using Collie coal which is not up to the mark. There is also evidence in the report to prove that the Commissioner has power even to seal up a seam which has been proved to be unclean and not up to sample. If that is so, it would be an easy matter for the Commissioner of Railways to prevent unclean coal going to the railways. I found on my investigations at Collie recently that it was much easier to detect the shale in the coal in the mine. When it once gets mixed with the broken coal it is very hard to pick out. It was pointed out by miners there that it would be an easy matter to blast out first the lower portion of the seam and then drop the band down and throw it back into the "gob" and then after that drop the upper portion. It is only when portions of the band become mixed with the coal that trouble arises. I saw some coal going over the picking belt at the pit's mouth, and I saw shale pass three men before it was detected by the inspector. That shows that once shale gets into the coal it is very hard to detect it, and have it removed. But if the companies will guarantee to remove the band separately and not allow it to become mixed with the coal, I think the difficulty of unclean coal so far as that one mine is concerned, will be overcome. We have heard something about a new seam which has been opened up in the Westralia mine. With

other members of the party, I was shown that seam. It is 40 feet above the seam which is being worked now, and it is said to be clean coal, having high steaming properties. If that is so it will be easy for the Commissioner to refuse to take coal from that mine except it be from that seam, and I believe the proprietors would readily agree to supply that coal. Some comment has been made to-day with reference to the risk which farmers run on account of the locomotives using Collie coal. I think that that risk can easily be minimised by the ploughing of a fire break around the farming properties. I understand from farmers with whom I have had conversations that this is an inexpensive thing to do, and that it is worth while to do it. One man told me that by undertaking this work in a systematic way he has been immune from fires for the 15 years he has been in Western Australia, whilst his neighbours have been burnt out more than once. One member said this afternoon that the risk so far as farmers were concerned is practically nil now, because the season is so far advanced. If that is so it is another reason, I think, why we might continue as we are going. The motion as moved by the member for Forrest does not commit the Government very much. It simply says in effect that we will go on as we are doing for the time being, and it would be an easy matter to review the position and revise it at the conclusion of the war. If the Government decide to give this limited monopoly to the one mine, that, I think, would be ruinous not only to the people of Collie and to the mineowners themselves, but to many of our West Australian industries. We have found it impossible lately to obtain shipping space for coal from the Eastern States, and we have the right to suppose that it will be harder in the near future to obtain that space. That being the case, the closing down of the mines at Collie with the one exception, will prove detrimental. It seems to me that the fact of giving such a large proportion of the Government order to one mine will mean the closing down of the other mines. I do not see how they will be able to go on. I believe that in supporting the motion for the adoption of this report I shall be acting in the best interests of the State, and I commend the motion to the careful consideration of members. I am very sorry that a larger party did not visit the mines when the opportunity was given to them recently, and see at first hand just what was to be seen there. If more members had gone down the House would have been better able to understand the position. Reference has also been made to the fact that a large number of workers have left Collie for the war front. That I know is a fact, and those men have received promises that they will be able to resume their work when they return. If the Government decide they will not continue the equal distribution of their orders, it will simply mean that the promises made to those men will not be kept. That also is an argument why we should go on as we are doing at the present time.

Mr. MULLANY (Meuzies) [7.43]: After careful consideration I find that I shall not

be able to support either the motion moved by the member for Forrest or the amendment moved by the member for Geraldton. If hon. members will analyse both the motion and the amendment, many of them will find themselves in the same position. The motion if adopted as moved by the member for Forrest, will permit the Government to carry out the whole of the recommendations of the Royal Commission, which sat recently to inquire into the Collie coal industry. Many members keenly desire that there shall be an equal distribution of orders, yet I do not think there is one member in this House who would desire to commit the Government to carry out all the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Without going deeply into that matter, there is one recommendation, No. 177, that I would like to quote. It states—

We recommend that one shilling per ton be added to the equitable price of Collie coal in view of its value as an insurance.

It is admitted that the production of Collie coal in Western Australia or in Collie is undoubtedly an insurance, or of value as an insurance to keep our industries going if supplies of coal from overseas should cease. There is a company at Collie who, although they are entitled to participate in the carrying out of the agreement with the Commissioner, are unable to do so, I understand are being paid up to 2s. per ton by companies who are producing coal, and who farm the order out to them. If the companies can afford to pay 2s. per ton to gain additional orders, is the House going to deliberately recommend to the Government that they should, in addition, pay these people another 1s. per ton insurance value upon that coal? I am illustrating this to point out to members where they would be led if this motion were carried in its entirety. If we carry the amendment we are still committing ourselves to many other of the recommendations of the Commission to which undoubtedly the House would not agree. The member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loughlen) will admit that if he could get the one paragraph which the member for Geraldton objects to, he would not be concerned about any of the others. I believe that the whole question may be boiled down to three main issues. The first issue is as to whether it is worth while, as a business proposition, for Western Australia to endeavour to foster the production of coal in the State to the extent that has been the case in the past. The second issue is as to whether, under the agreement that is in operation to-day, it is not possible to secure a more effective inspection of the coal that is being delivered to the Railway Department.

Hon. P. Collier: Of course it is.

Mr. MULLANY: I believe it would be difficult, but even though it may mean the employment of an army of inspectors, I think it would pay the State to employ such men. Here we want a definition from the Minister for Works as to what constitutes an army of men. Probably not a great many inspectors would be required, if we could depend upon every inspector doing his duty and the work that he would be paid for. The member for Forrest points out that if the production of coal were to cease in Western Australia, our

industries and our railway system would be entirely dependent upon coal from the Eastern States, and that in the event of industrial trouble in those States, we would be dealing with only one company, which would be able to enforce any terms that it desired. This undoubtedly would not be satisfactory to Western Australia.

The Minister for Railways: It is not proposed to deal with only one company.

Mr. MULLANY: The member for Forrest stressed that point strongly. He said—

If the proposal which has recently been given prominence is given effect to, it will not only concentrate in the hands of one firm the entire coal consumption of the Railway Department, but it will mean the dismissal of some 300 men.

I believe this number has since been altered to 200 men, but the principle still remains the same.

And, later on, when the supply is safely in the hands of that one firm they will be able to dictate their own terms as to the selling price of coal.

That appears to be an effective argument and one which carries weight. In my opinion, however, the resolution carried in Collie at the public meeting held there recently has to a great extent undermined the effect of the argument. I regret exceedingly that the people of Collie, the coal owners, the miners and the business people, were so ill-advised as to carry that resolution. It is a pity they did not allow this discussion to be brought before the House and the question to be dealt with purely on its merits, instead of a pistol being held at the Government and the Government being told—these are the terms of the resolution—

That the Premier, the Minister for Mines and Railways, and the Commissioner for Railways, be notified that after Wednesday next, if the system of equal distribution of orders and shortages is not given effect to by that date, drastic action will be taken to enforce same.

I want to know from the member for Forrest exactly what is meant by "drastic action?"

Mr. O'Loughlen: If you knew the feeling down there you would understand.

The Minister for Works: Probably they intend to stop work.

Mr. MULLANY: I ask the hon. member if he can give the House any information on the point?

Hon. P. Collier: The engine-drivers arrived at a similar threatening resolution nearly six months ago.

Mr. MULLANY: I am dealing with this particular resolution. If the member for Forrest, as mover of the motion—and he is no doubt in the confidence of the Collie people in the matter—cannot give this House information, I must accept the definition placed upon it by the Minister for Works, namely, that the people intend to stop work and to cease supplying coal. How can the member for Forrest come here and put up such an argument as was contained in his speech, namely, that it would be favouring

a monopoly and might put the State into the position that, in the event of the supply of coal ceasing they would have to resort to only one or two companies? By this resolution the people of Collie have threatened the State that if the terms are not agreed to the supply of coal will cease. That is what this resolution means. I regret that the whole of the Collie people did not allow this motion to be moved and debated on its merits before this threatening attitude was adopted. I am not going to allow this to influence my vote upon the question. I will not support either the motion or the amendment in its present form and I believe that very few members of the House will do so. Seeing the great amount of dissatisfaction which has undoubtedly existed for many years over the Collie coal question, it is time that the Government took action. I would not say that the Government would be doing right in giving all their orders to one or two mines.

The Minister for Railways: Certainly not.

Mr. MULLANY: My idea is that the Government should insist upon a more effective inspection and that these coal mining companies, when they enter into a contract, should carry it out both in the spirit and the letter. If this is impossible, I want to echo a remark made by the member for Forrest in an interjection, when he stated that this was a time for justice. I agree with him, and say it is a time when we should see that not only the Collie miners and mine owners, and business people as a whole, but that the railway system also got justice. I believe that up to date the State has not had justice in its dealings with the coal mine owners of Collie. I should like to see some modification of the motion as originally moved, and something in the shape of a recommendation to the Government to see that a new agreement is brought into operation by which it will be possible, if they are satisfied that they cannot carry out the present agreement, to have justice done to all parties.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [7.55]: The Collie district, and the coal industry of the State, have experienced many vicissitudes of fortune during the 20 years of their strenuous life. There have passed through the House many keen supporters, and likewise several strong opponents of the use of our native coals, and the latest Daniel to come to judgment is the hon. member for Toodyay (Mr. Piesse). He has awakened this evening from his Rip-van-Winkle-like slumber of many years to pronounce judgment on this all important matter, but he was unable to give the House the benefit of his opinion on the matter, and all his profound knowledge of the intricacies of the subject, without casting a slur upon my courage. He informed the House that during the time I was Minister for Railways I had inaugurated a system for the equal distribution of railway orders amongst the companies because I had not the courage to stand up against the Collie Miners' Union. The charge of lack of courage coming from an hon. member who showed such a remarkable and extraordinary agility in somersaulting from one party to another in 24 hours, in order that he

might retain his seat in the House, is indeed strange. Having regard to the hon. member's own political record of courage, very little attention need be paid to this charge. What is the result of the hon. member's investigations into the subject? He comes to the House and makes vague references to some reports of the Railway Commissioner in regard to the inferior quality of some of the Collie coals, but does not quote or produce the reports, or give us any indication as to where they are to be found. The hon. member, above all hon. members, comes to the House and quotes as conclusive evidence, and the last word on the subject, the declaration made by the Locomotive Engine Drivers and Firemen's Union in this morning's paper. This subject had never occurred to the hon. member during all the years he has been in the House but he woke up this morning, rubbed his eyes, and read that information in the paper.

Mr. Piesse: Do you think it is false?

Hon. P. COLLIER: I will deal with that afterwards. The hon. member produced as his final authority the statement of a trade union. Never since I have known the hon. member, or other hon. members who are taking the same view on this subject, has he attached any value or importance to any document produced by any Labour union of the State. When we have this record of the hon. member's newborn zeal, love and admiration for the statements of the locomotive drivers' union, we are justified in viewing it with a little more than suspicion. Why did not the hon. member produce reports or recommendations from some authoritative source? Did he bring forward, in support of his wild, ridiculous and reckless statements regarding the liability of some of the coals to spark, the report of the Commissioner of Railways, who ought to know and ought to be an authority on the subject? Did he produce any evidence, or quote from the statements of the Minister for Railways in regard to the matter? Did he refer to the Royal Commission, which sat for nearly two years, and spent a considerable sum of money in investigating the matter? Did he go to any of these sources for his information? No! He discarded the whole lot of them. Sufficient for him that the Locomotive Drivers' Union gave certain information, as it is alleged in the report, and he has accepted their statements. In the course of doing so, the hon. member availed himself of the opportunity to state that my action in regard to this matter some six years ago was dishonest—that my action in instituting this equal distribution of orders was dishonest. I ask the hon. member whether he considers that my action on that occasion was dishonest? I do not really know what he means by dishonest; I should be pleased if he were less ambiguous about the matter. But even if my action was unwise, as he now claims, why has he been so neglectful of his duty for six years as to slumber in this House and not protest against that action? The hon. member has been guilty of a gross dereliction of duty in sitting in this House for so long and allowing the country to be plundered in this manner—or allowing an unwise policy to be pursued without a word of protest from him. So that his belated, eleventh-hour protest to-night will

carry no weight whatever. I am rather inclined to think the hon. member never heard of the subject previously. I do not believe he knew whether there was equal distribution of orders or any other policy in operation, until he was informed by interested parties in this country during the past day or two. He evidently knows the attitude of the Railway Commissioner in this matter. He said the Commissioner had protested to me, and all the rest, while I was in office. How does the hon. member know that? Has he been in consultation with the Commissioner of Railways on this subject? The information is not to be found in the official reports available to members of this House. Therefore I ask the hon. member whether he has been in conference with the Railway Commissioner in order to become enlightened, or be prompted, on this matter? From his statement it would appear that that was so. That is all I have to say with regard to the hon. member. I am glad that the air of uncertainty and mystery which has surrounded this question during the past few months has at last been cleared up. We have to-night a definite pronouncement from the Government as to their attitude on this question. It has been uncertain—although I believe it has been known in inner circles, it has not been known to the general public—whether the Government were going to continue the policy of equal distribution or were going to make the altered distribution announced by the Minister for Railways to-night. We have it now clearly stated that the policy of the Government is to depart from the principle of equal distribution which has been in operation for six years, and to revert to the old principle of allowing the Commissioner of Railways to take the great bulk of the coal from one particular mine. In view of the fact—as I believe it to be—that this decision was arrived at by the Government some weeks ago, it would have been fairer to the people of Collie if the Minister for Railways had refrained from going through the performance of visiting Collie, allegedly with an open mind, only last week in order to investigate and learn for himself the facts of the case, whilst all the time the verdict was signed, sealed, and delivered so far as the Government are concerned. Notwithstanding that position, the Minister for Railways visited Collie accompanied by a large number of hon. members. I think the Minister might have been more frank with the people of Collie and with the public generally, and have told them of the situation before he went to Collie. The Minister went to some trouble to inform the House regarding the assistance, or something in the nature of spoon feeding—although the hon. gentleman did not use that word—which Collie has received from the Government in recent years. He instanced the increased price paid for Collie coal since the end of 1916—an increase of 6d. per ton. As another instance of spoon feeding, he gave the remission of royalty by the Government during the life of the Collie coal fields. But the Minister, while pointing out the increase given to Collie coal, did not inform the House of the much greater increase in the price of Newcastle coal. There is an idea in the minds of many people here that Collie coal has been unduly subsidised or

spoon-fed at the expense of the taxpayers of this country ever since Collie has been in existence. But if they will turn to the reports of the Commissioner of Railways they will find that during the past 10 years—since 1908—whilst the price paid by the Railway Department for Newcastle coal has increased by no less than 11s. per ton, the price of Collie coal, covering the same period, has increased by only 4s. per ton; and nearly 2s. of that 4s. represents quite a recent increase. It is just as well the public should be acquainted with that fact. They are under the impression that the price of Collie coal has been rising beyond its value. If that is so, then the price of Newcastle coal has risen by 100 per cent. more, and has risen greatly beyond its value as well. Ten years ago the price of Collie coal was 9s. 3d. per ton, whilst the price of Newcastle was 17s. 9d. per ton. To-day the relative prices are 28s. 3d. for Newcastle, representing an increase of 11s. 1d.; and 11s. 5d.—which I believe is now 13s. 5d.—for Collie coal, representing an increase of 4s. per ton. The Minister for Railways said that Collie had had a bonus of practically £64,000 in the form of remissions of royalty and increased prices during its existence; but I want to show that it is an undeniable fact that the opening up of the Collie coal fields has saved this State, through its Railway Department, hundreds of thousands of pounds. Before Collie was opened up, the Railway Department were paying 28s. per ton for Newcastle coal. After Collie had been successfully opened up, the price of Newcastle coal came down to about 19s. per ton.

The Minister for Works: It was 15s. 7d. in my time.

Hon. P. COLLIER: A still greater decrease, then.

The Minister for Works: But there is the difference in quality.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Of course. That goes without saying. But, according to the relative values of the two coals, even allowing for that factor, the opening up of the coal fields of this State has saved the Railway Department hundreds of thousands of pounds. The Collie coal fields have acted as a policeman, as it were, to the colliery proprietors in the Eastern States. That is borne out by the fact that the price of Newcastle coal came down from 28s. to something like 15s., as the Minister for Works has said, during his tenure of the office of Commissioner of Railways.

The Minister for Railways: When was the price 28s.?

Hon. P. COLLIER: Prior to the opening up of the Collie coal fields.

The Minister for Works: Yes; but how long before?

Hon. P. COLLIER: Just before.

The Minister for Works: No. Further back than that.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The Minister can have it five years earlier, or 10 years earlier, if he likes. The plain fact is that the opening up of the Collie fields did reduce the price of Newcastle coal as I have said. At least, that is the information supplied to me whilst I was in charge of the Railway Department. Next, with regard to the contract or agreement. The

Minister for Railways says that when the Collie people entered into an undertaking or a contract to supply coal at, I think, 10s. 6d.—

The Minister for Railways: Eleven shillings.

Hon. P. COLLIER: They subsequently, at the end of 1916, insisted upon an increase of 6d. per ton. The Minister instanced that fact as proving that the Collie coal owners had broken their contract or agreement.

The Minister for Railways: I did not suggest that. That increase was given without compulsion. The additional 1s. 11d., however, was otherwise.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The Minister advanced that as evidence that the Collie people were not prepared to stand by their agreement or their contract, but were anxious to depart from it whenever they could do so to their advantage. However, the Collie people are not the only people who have departed from contracts in this connection. I have here in the Commission's report the statement, which I suppose is authentic—

Appendix XXXI. In May, 1915, arrangements were completed with the Collie District Collieries Defence Association whereby all existing contracts for the supply of Collie coal to the Railway Department were extended until three months after the cessation of the war.

That was an honourable contract made by the Railway Department with the Collie people—that the existing conditions of contract should prevail until three years after the war. Is that contract to be treated as a scrap of paper? The Government come forward and ask the House to support them in repudiating that contract entered into for that time.

The Minister for Railways: The contract conditions have been entirely altered by the raising of the price.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The price was raised before.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Let me tell the Minister that the Government at the end of 1916 increased the price by 6d. per ton. But they need not have done that. They did it voluntarily. They could have stood by their rights under the contract, and not have increased the price. I do not know the circumstances surrounding the increase, but it is quite evident that the Government raised the price freely and voluntarily.

The Minister for Railways: The Royal Commission recommended an increase by way of insurance.

Hon. P. COLLIER: But the Government were not obliged to accept the Royal Commission's recommendation. The Minister justifies that increase by the recommendation of the Royal Commission. But he goes on to repudiate the Royal Commission's recommendation as to equal distribution of orders. Is the Minister to be free to select whatever portions of the Royal Commission's report suit his argument and to reject other portions which do not suit his argument? Now we have the statement published this morning by the Locomotive Engine-drivers, Firemen's, and Cleaners' Union; and I wish to protest right at once against what I conceive to be the unfair tactics adopted by that body. Hon. mem-

bers have before them a circular letter bearing yesterday's date. I wish to know why the organisation held up an important statement of this kind until the morning of the day on which the subject is set down for discussion in the House? Is it not with the object of influencing members to their point of view without giving the other party to the dispute an opportunity of replying to their contentions?

Mr. Piesse: It is an honest statement.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The hon. member is not a judge of honesty, either as to statements or otherwise. I contend the statement is not correct or true in many particulars. To any man who will read the statement with an unbiassed, impartial mind, it carries its own refutation, because it is full of reckless assertions backed up by not one scrap of evidence. It is a most astonishing thing that to-night we find this important matter is going to be decided by the Locomotive Engine-drivers, Firemen's, and Cleaners' Union. The member for Menzies (Mr. Mullany) rightly protests against the resolution carried at Collie the other evening as to the attitude the miners there will take in order to force the adoption of their own views in this matter. But the hon. member must be aware of the fact that the other union which is a party to the dispute carried months ago a similar resolution, that they would refuse to use the coal. That was long before the Collie resolution was carried.

The Minister for Railways: That other resolution of which you speak has never been published.

Mr. Piesse: It has never been forwarded to members of this House.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I do not know that there is any secret about that other resolution. It was forwarded to influential persons in this country. It was forwarded to the labour organisations of this State, a decision, or a communication conveying their decision, that they would refuse to use these coals to which they objected. So, apparently, this question of the development of our native coals is to be decided as between the Miners' Union on the one hand and the Engine-drivers' Union on the other. We have reached a nice stage in the government of the country when the unions are to decide what coal is to be used. What is the view of the Commissioner of Railways on this question at the present time? Here we have a position in which the locomotive drivers are to control the policy of the Government in regard to the use of Collie coal. We have had the spectacle of an hon. member quoting the opinions of an organisation, which, by-the-way, he quoted so that it might be embalmed in the pages of "Hansard"—and even though we are retrenching in our printing I would ask the Treasurer to see that it is sent on to the Government Lithographer and artistically engraved as well. The hon. member asked the House to swallow every one of the statements made in that document which appeared in the newspaper this morning, without the backing of the responsible officers of the department. Have we come to a stage where the Commissioner of Railways

and other responsible officers are sitting back in this matter and endeavouring to achieve the object they have in view by the use of the Engine-drivers' Union? That statement which appeared in this morning's paper ought not to have been published. It is a most damaging document, damaging to one of our principal industries, not only to one or two mines, but to one of our principal primary industries. They say in a reckless fashion, without regard to facts or evidence, that certain of the coals are full of dust and stone. They talk about the liability to sparking, the effect the coal has on the boilers, and a hundred and one other questions. Do we know that the other coal companies likely to benefit by announcements of this kind are not going to broadcast this document all over the world? We can easily imagine that in England and other parts where an endeavour is being made to give Collie coal a footing on the markets, responsible persons who have the decision on the matter will have placed before them the statements which appeared in this morning's paper. I say the union had no right to publish such reckless statements without regard to facts. It seems to me that the authors of this document were actuated, not so much by a desire to have the Railway Department cease to take coal from some of these mines, as by a desire to boost and advertise another particular mine in the same district. Not only do they libel the coals from some of the collieries, but they go out of their way to give a free advertisement to another coal mine in that district.

Mr. Piesse: Will you make that statement outside?

Hon. P. COLLIER: I do not propose to take any notice of the interjections of the hon. member who has only to-day awakened up after six years of slumber. The hon. member is suddenly taking a keen interest in the Collie coal question. I wonder why?

Mr. Piesse: You know I have not been asleep.

Hon. P. COLLIER: The hon. member has been asleep, but some persons more deeply interested in this matter have been awake and have prodded him into wakefulness. Let us see what this union says. Listen to this—

Again, the quantity of this coal which is consumed per train mile renders it a most expensive article compared with Proprietary coal, and on consumption two of them cost the State 2s. 10½d. per ton more than Proprietary, and the other 1s. 2½d. per ton. Thus, the Railways are paying 2s. 10½d. per ton more for an article of an inferior nature which exposes the country to more risks and which is in every way inferior to other coal produced on the same field. These prices are only computed where the coal is used near the mines, under the best conditions. We repeat that the compulsion of 50 per cent. of this stuff on our railway system is wrong and should not be allowed to continue.

The Railways are said to be paying 2s. 10½d. per ton more for an inferior article.

Where did the authors of this document get the figures? If the Railway Department has been paying 2s. 10½d. per ton more than they have been paying for the other coals, it was the duty of the Commissioner to inform the House in his annual report. What is the Commissioner doing in regard to his duty in this matter? He makes no reference to it in his annual reports for the past five years. Only once do I find there any reference to the question.

The Minister for Works: He got tired of complaining.

Hon. P. COLLIER: He did not. If these are the facts regarding the relative values of the different coals, it was the duty of the Commissioner to present those facts in his report or, alternatively, it was the duty of the Minister for Railways to present them, and not to leave it to an outside organisation which has nothing to do with the question except in so far as it affects working conditions. And then they talk about cost. I thought first of all that this association was concerned only in the matter of extra work, but they have taken in the whole scope of the question. They are worried about the increased cost. As individual taxpayers, no doubt they would be, but as a labour organisation, as a union, they are not concerned in that aspect of the question. Let me read portion of the next paragraph of this document, which justifies my statement as to the unwisdom of the organisation publishing this report. They say—

The remarks applicable to the soft coal in no way apply to hard coal. The trouble with some of the hard coals is pure unadulterated dirt. Of the three hard coals it can be said at once that two are unsuited for locomotive purposes. The West-
Australian and Co-operative mines supply so-called coal to the Railway Department which is really a combination of shale, stone, and other matter. Every effort made by the mines—and they have made efforts—to clean this coal has failed, and the men know that it is impossible to get along with the coal from either of these properties.

Every effort has been made to clean the coal, and it has failed. If this is so it is in direct contradiction to the statements made in the report of the Royal Commission, which points out that considerable improvements have been effected during recent years in the cleaning of the coal. This Commission sought and obtained evidence from near and far, yet the authority of the Commission does not count alongside the statement made by this organisation which the member for Toodyay would have us accept. Right through the whole of that statement we find the same thing. They go into the question of sparking. What has that to do with this organisation? That is a matter for the Commissioner. If it be correct that these people are burdened with extra work because of the inferiority of some of these coals, what has the question of sparking to do with that? My opinion is that this was inserted in the published report this morning with the intention of influencing members of the

Country party. That is the reason—in order to scare the member for Toodyay into considering the possibility of a whole section of the country in his electorate being burnt out.

Mr. Hickmott: They are using Newcastle coal on his line.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It shows the value of the statements made by the member for Toodyay. The member for Pingelly now says that they are using Newcastle coal on that line, but before tea the member for Toodyay told the House that the whole of the surrounding country in his district had been burnt out by Collie coal. That is the kind of irresponsible, reckless statements upon which the House is asked to found its judgment.

Point of Order.

Mr. Piesse: On a point of order. The hon. member is mis-stating my remarks. He says that I used the words "that the whole of my district had been destroyed by fire."

Hon. P. Collier: I object. That is not a point of order. The hon. member wants to contradict my statement. I protest against the hon. member being permitted to interrupt my speech in order to contradict a statement.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member will state the point of order.

Mr. Piesse: It is that the hon. member is not representing me correctly.

Mr. Speaker: Will the hon. member please make his point of order.

Mr. Piesse: I do not know what other form I should adopt, but the hon. member states that I used certain words which I did not use.

Hon. P. Collier: I must protest against the hon. member being permitted to interrupt.

Mr. Piesse: The hon. member has mis-quoted me.

Hon. P. Collier: Well, the hon. member will have an opportunity of refuting it.

Mr. Speaker: If the member for Toodyay takes exception to any remarks made by any other member while addressing the Chair, he has the right to ask for their withdrawal. If the hon. member has made a statement to which the member for Toodyay objects, the member for Toodyay can ask for a withdrawal.

Hon. P. Collier: If it is out of order. Not if it is merely a difference of opinion.

Mr. Piesse: The hon. member has accused me of using words which I did not use, and I ask for a withdrawal.

Hon. P. Collier: I am asked to withdraw words. I do not know what words I am to withdraw.

Mr. Piesse: The hon. member said that I stated the whole of my district was destroyed by fire because of Collie coal.

Hon. P. Collier: I made no such statement. The hon. member ought to apologise.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Toodyay has taken exception to the statement. I ask the member for Boulder to withdraw it.

Hon. P. Collier: I did not make it, therefore I cannot withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member made some statement about the district of Toodyay being burnt out.

Hon. P. Collier: Not the statement ascribed to me.

Mr. Speaker: I ask the hon. member to withdraw the statement to which the member for Toodyay has taken exception, namely, that the hon. member's electorate was burnt out.

Hon. P. Collier: I cannot withdraw a statement which I did not make.

Mr. Speaker: I myself heard the member for Boulder accuse the member for Toodyay of making a statement to the effect that his electorate was burnt out, and add that it was not Collie coal but Newcastle coal that was responsible. The member for Toodyay asks that it be withdrawn, and I ask the member for Boulder to withdraw the statement.

Hon. P. Collier: I protest that I did not make the statement that the hon. member's electorate was burnt out. I said that some considerable portion of the electorate was burnt out, and that is the statement the member for Toodyay made.

Mr. Speaker: For the last time I ask the member for Boulder to withdraw the statement. Exception has been taken to the statement and a withdrawal asked for. It must be made.

Mr. Holman: It might be true.

Mr. Speaker: It does not matter.

Mr. Holman: It does matter very much.

Hon. P. Collier: I did not make the statement.

Member: Withdraw what you said.

Debate resumed.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Yes, I withdraw "Hansard" will be able to show that I did not say it. The hon. member had a lot to say about sparks and he stated that a large portion of his district had been burnt out through the use of Collie coal. The whole burden of his inconsequential puffing tale centred around the statement that portions of his district had been burnt out by Collie coal, showing that the hon. member's argument was against the use of Collie coal. These coals are proposed to be excluded. The hon. member does not know now from what particular colliery the coal came, whether it was Collie coal at all. It may have been native coal, it may have been Proprietary coal, the coal that the hon. member is supporting tonight. He made a general indictment against Collie coal. That is the position that the hon. member is prepared to swallow in toto. So we have this organisation going into the question of sparking. The whole question boiled down is that we have no direct proof given to the House in support of the assertion generally made that some of these coals are dirty and of an inferior quality. They would have us believe that this principle has been in existence for six years, and it has resulted in a considerable amount of capital being invested in some mines in good faith and in the belief that the Government would not alter their policy in this matter. The member for Toodyay, amongst others, stands for keeping faith in this direction. Is he go-

ing to wipe out of existence mines in which persons have invested thousands of pounds in the development of their property on the assurance of the Railway Department that there would be no alteration of policy? That is what some of the mine owners have done. They have purchased a considerable quantity of machinery. They have gone to considerable expense in developing in the belief that this policy would obtain.

Member: Are the Government bound to take all dirty coal?

Hon. P. COLLIER: No. It has been alleged that quite recently there has been an amount of dirt in some of the coals, but I do not believe it exists, only in the imagination or the minds of the men who want to achieve their end. It is a remarkable thing that during the past three years when the demand for Collie coal has decreased—for the overseas market is shut out from them—when they are hard put to keep going, it is a remarkable thing that the Collie coal should become more dirty than ever before. I do not believe it. I do not believe there is a difference in the quality of the coal as alleged or that there is the quantity of dirt as alleged. If I believed that were true I would vote for the amendment, but I do not believe it. There is no direct evidence of it beyond the mere tiddly-winking claptrap, street information. No proof has been submitted. I was for three years Minister for Railways after this policy was inaugurated, and I heard very few complaints as to the quality of the coal or the dirty nature of it, and it is a remarkable thing that during the past 12 months, more particularly during the past few months, this coal should become very suddenly inferior in quality and impregnated with dirt as our opponents would have us believe.

Mr. Teesdale: What interests have these people? You would not suggest that they have been bribed? It is a reputable union.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That is quite true. Are members to be asked to decide a matter of this kind merely on the statement made by a union?

The Minister for Works: They are not asking.

Hon. P. COLLIER: If the hon. member had had longer experience down here on the Collie coal question he would know the attitude the loco. drivers' union put up to-day against the use of this coal, and which they took up before the equal distribution policy was inaugurated. He would know that the argument previously was against the use of any Collie coal at all. The Railway Commissioner was strongly opposed to the use of any Collie coal at all. He would not have used any but Newcastle coal exclusively if he had had his way. Go back more than six years, before the coal distribution policy was brought into existence, and we find the same complaints made by the loco. drivers' union. They insisted then that not more than 50 per cent. of Collie coal should be used on the railways, and now they come forward and say, "We are prepared to increase it to 75 or 80 per cent., provided that the coal is taken from the Proprietary mine."

The Minister for Works: That is easily explained.

Hon. P. COLLIER: There is nothing that cannot be explained in some fashion or other. The hon. member referred to—night to the number of volunteers who had gone from Collie to the war. That has not a great deal to do with the question; in one way it has not. One of the mines which it is proposed to wipe out of existence is run on the co-operative principle.

The Minister for Railways: Which one do you refer to?

Hon. P. COLLIER: The Westralian.

The Minister for Railways: Yet they are not prepared to supply coal for three months.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That mine is owned by working miners almost entirely. They have left their dependants behind secure in the knowledge, as they thought, that there would be no alteration in the condition of things that existed when they went away. Now that they are away and that the member for Collie (Mr. Wilson) is away, things are changed. I do not believe there would be the same pushing for the change—it would not be so keen—if the member for Collie were here to-night. But when he is away, and when hundreds of his constituents are away, the Government come down and say, "We are going to treat our undertaking as a scrap of paper. We are going to alter our agreement prior to the termination of the war." I am prepared to put the recommendations of a Royal Commission composed of men whose fitness and qualifications cannot be questioned, whose zeal in the discharge of their duties cannot be questioned. I am prepared to accept the recommendations of that body that this principle should continue for another six years, rather than accept the authority quoted by the member for Toodyay. There is no comparison in the weight and value to be attached to the two authorities.

Member: Nor in the impartiality either.

Hon. P. COLLIER: On the one hand we have a definite undertaking by the Government that no alteration in the existing conditions should take place until three months after the war. This is supported by the recommendations of the Royal Commission who say that the condition should continue for another six years. Against that we have the Loco. Engine Drivers and Firemen's Union, who wish to take the policy of the House and the country into their own hands. No one else has been quoted to-night, except these two bodies, and the views of this one body are going to prevail over the weighty authoritative views of the Royal Commission.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. W. J. George—Murray-Wellington) [8.40]: The member for Forrest stated that this was a time for justice, and I agree with him. In connection with this matter, I have a letter here signed—I am not sure of the signature, I do not know whether it is Sims or Smith.

Hon. P. Collier: Sims.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: In which there is a quotation from a speech of the then Minister for Railways dated 8th Sep-

tember, 1905. In it the Minister for Railways, Mr. Gregory, stated—

The second consideration was, should the whole of our supplies be taken from one company? To do so meant cheaper costs, but our policy in the past has been to prevent monopolies, and we felt that we were not justified in giving effect to the policy of my predecessor by giving the whole of the contract to one company. Had we done so the other collieries must be abandoned, as the private trade is not such as would keep any of the collieries working, and at the expiration of the contract we would have been entirely in the hands of one company.

The Government endorse these words. I am authorised by the Government to say that we are not in favour of giving the whole of the contract to one company. The Government have shown that they are not in favour of supporting monopolies anywhere.

Hon. P. Collier: But you reduced the number of mines to three.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: What the Government have done and intend to do is to see that justice is done to the people and to the collieries, and also that justice is done to the remainder of the people of the State, who have to pay. I have had to do with Collie since the days when it was first started, when Mr. Deakin and others got out 1,000 tons of coal from the Government mine and had it carted to Roelands station, and I say that no Government would be so foolish as to attempt to injure Collie in any shape or form. The Collie coal was discovered and worked as a Government mine for some time. Then Mr. Deakin and others were encouraged to come and settle at Collie, and the township has grown up. The population has grown, and no matter what the financial position is so far as the State is concerned, any centre that finds employment like Collie has done is an asset to the country, and we cannot afford to injure it. We have a right as responsible Ministers to ask members of the Assembly, who are responsible representatives of portions of the State, when we have a case put before us in which full justice is not done all round, to ask for support in doing full justice, and that is the position the Government find themselves in to-day. If hon. members will turn to the report they will find on page 13 that there are there the views of the Commission upon the quality of marketed coal. Here let me say that if the member for Collie were with us he would not deny the statement that I am about to make, that on many occasions he and I at Brunswick Junction—which is the junction of the Collie railway with the Perth-Bunbury line—examined train load after train load of coal and discovered coal there, not in small quantities, but in big quantities, that the people who sent out should be ashamed of. I have said in Collie that the worst enemies of Collie coal are the Collie people who get out that coal and who send coal for use on the railways which they have no right to send.

Mr. Holman: What are your inspectors doing?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I will come to that directly. On page 13 of the report hon. members will find this statement, made by the Royal Commission, in reference to shale and dirt—

We have no doubt whatever that a great deal of the present opposition to the use of native Western Australian coals arises from the introduction of this material into the coal as supplied in the past, and it behoves the industry to use every endeavour to live down the evil reputation it has obtained, by supplying only the best of material.

These are the words of the Royal Commission, the gentlemen whom the leader of the Opposition referred to as impartial people. Let us go further and see what they say—

The only possible way of dealing with this is to extract it with the coal, and to discard it in filling the skips. This has not been done at all satisfactorily, and in one of the tests carried out by the Commission, a total of 44 lbs. of dirt was picked out of 10 cwt. of coal, whilst, on another occasion, a sample of Collie coal taken by the Commission at Northam, for testing purposes, was found to contain one piece of shale weighing over 100 lbs.

Is there anyone here who can tell me that a lump of shale like that crept in by accident?

Mr. Holman: You had your inspectors there; what were they doing?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Let us have a few more words from the report of this impartial Commission—

We cannot sufficiently reprobate this dishonest procedure.

Hon. T. Walker: That is not the coal, it is the dishonest handling of it.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: A little further on the Commission say—

The usual practice at the present time in the Co-operative and Western mines, is to machine cut, shoot down the bottom coal and fill this away, then to shoot down the top coal and band, and separate the band from the coal at the face. The miners are supposed to carry out this separation in filling the coal, and dirt scales are in operation at the collieries whereby the miners are paid for carrying out this work. One has only to see the enormous amount of material which is picked out of the coal at the surface, to be convinced that the men do not realise their responsibility in this direction. Hon. T. Walker: That is the men, not the coal.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: My friend from the Murchison remarked just now, what about the inspectors. I do not know how many inspectors there are there to-day but in my time, when the hon. member was my Minister, there was only one inspector there, Mr. Briggs.

Hon. P. Collier: There is only one there to-day.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is absolutely impossible for one inspector to go through the coal mines and see all that is done.

I believe it might come about in this way. If there were one inspector always down the mine and one on the tip, we would probably, in fact I am sure, get better coal than at the present time, and I believe it would pay the Railway Department to have those inspectors at each mine. But if the miners and mine owners would simply do their honest duty, there would be no necessity for inspectors.

Mr. O'Loughlen: If the miner puts in dirty coal he is penalised.

Member: The colliery owners offered to pay for the inspectors.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That would not do. I do not believe in anyone else paying the men but the Government and I do not believe in picnics to the mines when there are matters of this sort to be investigated.

Mr. Pickering: On a point of order; what does the Minister mean by that? I take exception to the remark.

Mr. SPEAKER: I do not know what the Minister means. The Minister may proceed.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I made use of that expression in a Pickwickian sense. Let us go a little further in the Commission's report. Hon. members will turn to paragraph 119 and they will see there a reference to ash. The report states—

We are satisfied that the Railway Department has a very legitimate grievance against some of the Collie coal on account of its tendency to form clinker, which blocks up the fire-box, and causes vexatious train delays. In most countries where coal is purchased in large quantities, a penalty for ash is inserted in the contract, and we believe that the insertion of such a clause in the contract between the Railway Department and the coal mine owners would be of advantage to both. We recommend, therefore, that coal having not more than 8 per cent. of ash be paid for at the normal price, but that a penalty amounting to one halfpenny per ton be imposed for each unit per cent. of ash above this standard value.

That is all right, but it cannot be carried out. How is it possible to carry it out? The coal has to be shovelled out of the trucks and it is not possible to brand every lump, and one cannot tell which will form a clinker and which will not.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Then it is difficult for the drivers to put the blame on to particular mines.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: When the coal is being mixed it is not common sense to suppose that any driver or fireman can spare the time to endeavour to detect which piece has been responsible for any mischief that may have been done.

Hon. T. Walker: The cure for that is your own suggestion, the inspector.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Recommendation 196 of the report says—

The admixture of these two coals gave excellent results in the fire-box, the faults of both coals being minimised, and the steaming improved.

I will go this far and say that if the Commissioner of Railways and his officers can spare the expense they can probably bring about this sort of shandy-gaff mixture. But have we the

right to put that extra labour upon the railways? Have we not the right, if we pay good money, to ask that good coal shall be supplied? I do not think there is any answer to that. On page 29 of the report there is a table showing the equitable value of one ton of Collie coal at Collie for use at depots on the basis of Table 6 in the report, and the Commissioners have evidently gone into a little mathematical calculation, and have concluded that the average price at the various stations should be 12s. 10½d. and that on top of that there should be 1s. per ton insurance. Years ago I objected to that 1s. a ton; to-day, in view of wider experience, I think that that 1s. might fairly be conceded. Paragraph 224 of the report states—

Inasmuch, however, as our investigations show that Collie coal can be mined and sold at a good profit at its present price of 11s. per ton on trucks at pit's mouth, we recommend that the present maximum and minimum prices, namely 12s. and 8s. 9d. per ton respectively, be retained.

That is the recommendation of the Royal Commission. That the coal can be mined and sold at a good profit at 11s. per ton requires no more illustration than the payment of 2s. per ton in the farming out process by those mines which have taken the orders from those mines that could not supply. Further, in paragraph 225 of the report the Commission state—

Undoubtedly, the ideal method for the Railway Department to secure its supplies of native fuel at the lowest market rate would be by allowing the whole of the mines to tender in open competition for the railway requirements.

That is the ideal process, but we are not likely to get it. It would not be business to shut up the whole of the mines with one exception, but whether it is necessary to keep six going when three can supply the requirements of the department is a question which the House must decide. There is sound common sense in paragraph 226 of the Commission's report which says—

This principle of open competition, however, is not possible while the existing policy of equal distribution of orders amongst the mines continues.

A little further on we find the Commission say this—

We are of opinion that extremely good cause should be shown before the number of collieries to share in the railway orders is further increased. We believe that the principle of equal distribution of orders militates against the principle of competition much more effectively than smallness in number of competitors.

In paragraph 232 the Commission state definitely—

As a result of our investigations we find that when a mine is unable to supply its quota of the Government order, it has been customary for the company, with the consent of the Railway Department, to arrange with one or more of the other mines to take over the supplying of its orders, usually at a satisfactory premium. In our opinion this procedure is quite incorrect, and should not be permitted.

Mr. O'Loughlen: That is all finished with; it is all abolished.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Paragraph 233 runs as follows:—

We recommend, therefore, that when a company is exempted from its liability to supply from its own mine, the Commissioner of Railways should have the right of allocating the amount of the order amongst the other mines.

Of course the Railway Commissioner should have that power. Under the Railways Act, the working and management of the railways are in the hands of the Commissioner. If there was no attempt to bring influence to bear in connection with Collie coal, the Commissioner could carry that out.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Do you believe that the Commissioner's decision should be paramount to the Government's policy?

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: If the Commissioner is given certain powers under the Act, and is responsible for the working and management of the State railways, he should not be interfered with in his commercial transactions.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The Government which gave equal distribution of orders did the wrong thing in your opinion?

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Never mind about that. The Commissioner is carrying out these contracts, and if he is going to be held responsible he should not have his hands tied behind his back.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Why are the Government tying his hands when he wants to increase freights and fares?

The Minister for Railways: Freights and fares are a matter for the Government.

Mr. O'Loughlen: So should this be too.

The Minister for Railways: It is not provided for in the Act.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Under the contract with the Collie coal companies there is a clause under which any coal that is unsuitable must be rejected before it leaves Collie. In my time we did not have that condition and, if we did, I did not stand to it. I condemned trainload after trainload in the Perth yards because of the rubbish that was brought up from Collie.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Did you tramp your inspector?

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Never mind about that. I say that an inspector in looking at the coal that is loaded into the trucks cannot see what is contained in the whole of a truck. If a truck when arriving at its destination is found to contain coal of an inferior quality, the Commissioner should have the right to reject that and throw the responsibility upon the proprietors of the coal. That was a course which I pursued as Commissioner of Railways, and which I would pursue if I were Commissioner to-day. That is what I would support the present Commissioner or any other Commissioner of Railways in doing so long as I was a member of the House. The proprietors of the coal mines should be told in unmistakable language that this sort of piffle—that is what I call these sheets of argument—which is based on nothing, has nothing to do with an honest contract, and if the companies

are not prepared to give an honest contract, the sooner they are wiped off the books of the Government, as contractors, the better.

Mr. O'Loghlen: There is an honest contract existing to-day which you propose to break.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The Government pay an honest price for honest coal, and if the different Collie coal companies will only give justice to the Government in the matter of their coal supplies, they will have no more trouble.

Mr. Davies: Have you the right to reject dirty coal now?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The Government have the right to reject it at Collie, but once it leaves Collie and passes over the weighing machine, the Government have to pay.

Mr. Stubbs: Why does it leave Collie?

Mr. O'Loghlen: Clause 14 of the agreement between the Commissioner and the companies provides that you can close up any portion of the mine.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Let us face the question as men. Assuming that the contract is as bad as it is possible to be, it is for us in making a further contract, and a fresh deal, which is apparently what is expected of us, to benefit from our past experiences.

Hon. T. Walker: Not until this contract expires.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member knows that we all gain by our experiences. I want the Government, whether in connection with the Collie coal or any other industry in which they have to pay for a commodity, to get value for what they pay, and I consider that we have a right to ask that. I was rather struck by what the member for Menzies (Mr. Mullany) said in regard to the shilling per ton insurance. I do not agree with him, and it has been said in regard to farming that the money had all gone into developmental work which I cannot entirely credit as I feel sure it has gone into the banking account, and only a portion came out for development.

Mr. O'Loghlen: That would be difficult to prove.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: If the banking accounts of the companies concerned had been before the House at the time these arrangements were made, and the expenses entailed had been made known since, I think it would be found that the banking accounts had considerably benefited.

Mr. O'Loghlen: I do not think you have a right to make that statement without proof.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I have the right.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Will you follow it up if you can see the books?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes, and if I am wrong I will make an apology.

Mr. Lutey: Why should you object to a company putting on more inspectors?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I object to the companies paying any of the inspectors who pass coal for the Government, and would advise the Government to pay the inspectors themselves. After all, they are only coal detectives and it is their business to see that the good coal comes along, but the mine which pays has the right to a pull over the services

of the employee. If the Government paid for these services, they would have a claim upon the inspectors which it would be difficult to put on one side. Something was also said about production ceasing in Western Australia, if the output of Collie coal was decreased. If the Collie coal mines were shut down or refused to supply the Government, and the State could not get its supplies of coal from the other States, we would have to try firewood, and if we tried firewood there would be far more trouble with fires in the country than with Collie coal, and that is bad enough.

Mr. Holman: There have been many fires on railway lines upon which Collie coal was not used at all.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The leader of the Opposition spoke about Newcastle coal. It is a long time ago since I have had occasion to think of the prices of these coals, but speaking from memory, I would say that 28s. 7d. was paid for Newcastle coal some years before Collie coal was found. At that time there were very few ships coming from the other side, and freights were very high. Immediately the gold boom started in this State we had plenty of steamers coming here which meant a reduction in freights, and in 1904 I was offered coal by a colliery in Newcastle, Brown & Cos., at approximately 12s. 6d. per ton delivered here.

Mr. Holman: It was 15s. 3d. a ton at Fremantle and Perth.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: And that was on a five years' contract.

Mr. O'Loghlen: They have been trying for 15 years to knock out the local product.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I do not wish to detract from the local coal, but I do say that if it is proved, as appears to be the case, that there are inferior Collie coals, and if it is necessary to make the best use of our local product upon our railways, we ought to have the best Collie coals if we pay the best price for them. With regard to proportions, Dr. Jack proved conclusively, and his statement is borne out by the report of the last Commission, that the best mixture of coal that can be got for our railways is 66 $\frac{2}{3}$ per cent. of Collie and 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ per cent. of Newcastle. If hon. members will look at the report they will see that the proportion is two to one, or four to two, but the 80 per cent. of Collie and the 20 per cent. of Newcastle is practically eight to two or four to one.

Mr. O'Loghlen: You know the reason.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The engine drivers had no desire to interfere with the occupations, or means of livelihood, of any other body of men, and were therefore content with the 80 per cent. of Collie coal and the 20 per cent. of Newcastle, but what they are asking to-day, and what the country has a right to expect, is that when good money is paid for coal the Government should get good coal free from dirt, shale, and other rubbish.

Mr. GRIFFITHS (York) [9.11]: I was not one of those hon. members who attended the picnic at Collie, but I am one who takes a great interest in the Collie coal question. I have felt it to be somewhat of an anomaly that I have had during the summer months to get up and oppose one primary industry as against another, in that I have had to

go to the Commissioner of Railways and ask him to withhold the use of Collie coal during the summer months. In going through the statement of the engine-drivers. I have been struck by the fact that so many half truths appear in it. What struck me, in regard to the granting of what appears to be only a partial monopoly, is that at present it takes seven shifts a fortnight to fill the local and private orders, and that if a monopoly is granted, the mine in question by working 11 or 12 days can concentrate on local orders without engaging any more than a few additional men. It pays better to engage on coal for locomotive purposes than upon coal for the bunkering trade. There is no inducement to look for shipping orders, because the coal in this case is sold at a reduced rate in competition with other companies. I am informed that the Co-operative mine supplied thousands of tons of coal to the Germans before the war, as well as to the P. & O. Company.

Mr. O'Loughlen: And there were no complaints.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: And I believe there were no complaints in regard to the bunkering. The Cardiff and the Westralian Companies also had good orders for bunkering coal, but the Proprietary mine has seldom looked for any shipping orders at all. I understand the Proprietary Company is also able to make up any local shortage from any other mine and supply one-half of the local requirements, but that the Cardiff and Westralian Companies could if they had a chance do this themselves. It has been said in connection with the engine-drivers' report that these people are anxious for Collie coal to be used at the present moment. In looking through the report of the Commission I find that almost without exception witnesses before the Commission admitted that 50 per cent. of Newcastle coal should be used. It is, therefore, pleasing to note that their attitude has changed since they gave that evidence. With regard to the equal distribution of coal, and allotting a fair proportion to each of the six companies concerned, these engine-drivers know well that whilst each of these companies is entitled to one-sixth of the Government orders, it has not been putting out that quantity of coal. The Proprietary have for some years been supplying the whole of the Premier Company's order. The circular which has been referred to as so much "piffle" makes a statement to that effect. It is in this respect that members not knowing much about the Collie coal industry are likely to be led astray; and we somewhat resent the feeling of doubt which is created in our minds. Certainly, the Government want to get good value for the State's money; but this is not only a money question. It has a wider aspect. There is the scrap-of-paper aspect. We know of an agreement that the contracts shall continue until three months after the termination of the war. It has been suggested that the terms of the agreement can be altered; but there is an obligation to many men at the Front, who, we are told, have invested their money in the Collie

mines, or who have been promised that they shall find their work at Collie on returning. A further aspect of the matter is the Minister's admission that the Government have the right to close down a mine or seize a mine. Why, then, have the Government not acted on that right? Something must be wrong. We heard of a former Minister having gone into a railway yard and condemned a whole train load of Collie coal. In Eastern Australia coal is now being conveyed from Newcastle to Adelaide. If it is the position due to the shortage of shipping which has caused us to use nothing but our local coal, it will wake us up to the importance of doing something as regards using that coal even, as has been jokingly said, in the form of Collie dust. If the question of fuel had been properly gone into years ago by the Railway Department, as it should have been, our railways would have been using nothing but Collie coal for a long time past. The mixing of coals does not appear to have been stressed to-night. As regards calorific value, there is a phase which appeals to me—that the mine which is to be given the preference for railway orders comes only third on the list as regards calorific values. Some people say the calorific value is not the truest test, but the Commissioner for Railways and the head of the Locomotive Branch say it is the best and fairest test available. The Westralian coal is hard coal, while the Premier coal is soft. Those two coals apparently exceed the Proprietary in calorific value.

The Minister for Railways: But you must look at the other constituents, as regards ash and so forth.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: There are so many factors to be considered that the question needs to be studied very closely. There is, for example, the matter of new seams. The writer of the letter which has come before us to-night says—

To show the absolutely unfair attitude taken by the engine-drivers, they have actually condemned the coal from the Scottish Collieries in that seam which is at present being opened up, and of which not one ton has yet been supplied to the Railway Department.

The question of honouring the contract which we have made with these people appeals to me keenly, as regards both the bunkering trade after the war, and the preserving of the other mines which at present seem likely to be compelled to close down.

Mr. HOLMAN (Murchison) [9.25]: I think you, Mr. Speaker, will probably remember that many years ago this matter was fully discussed here. A reference to the debates of 1904 in this House discloses pretty well the same position as to-day. But to-day there appears to be some desire on the part of officials or members or unions to give a monopoly to certain companies.

The Minister for Railways: But not on the part of the Government.

Mr. HOLMAN: I am glad to hear that interjection, because from certain remarks of the Minister for Railways one might gather that his inclinations lay in that direction. In

1904, when the Collie mines were much younger than they are to-day, the same position cropped up. In those days there was an endeavour on the part of two mines to create a monopoly. When the two companies got a monopoly, they put in a price of 12s. 9d. to the Railway Department, endeavouring to beat the country at the rate of 2s. 3d. per ton. One of the first questions the Labour Government of 1904 had to deal with was the Collie coal contracts. The James Government had refused to deal with the matter, owing to the price quoted by the two companies. There was a tender of coal of a lower value at 11s. 6d. The question was a burning one; and a deputation from Collie brought the question before myself, more particularly, as Minister for Railways at the time. After discussion we were successful in securing contracts, not at 12s. 9d., but at 11s. per ton. A short time after that, a new company started operations—I think it was the Co-operative. They offered to supply Collie coal at the price of 10s. 6d. Still another company offered to supply at 9s. That was competition. The stipulation made by me as Minister for Railways was that so long as a company paid the rate of wages ruling in the district, the Government would be prepared to take coal from them, and from any such company that came along.

The Minister for Railways: That is contrary to the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

Mr. HOLMAN: We secured a Royal Commissioner in the person of Dr. Jack, and we were successful in saving over £100 per week on the cost of Collie coal to this country. That was the result of preventing a monopoly. If we allow a monopoly to be created now, then in all probability the State will in future be compelled to pay through the nose, not to the workers, but to the monopolists.

Mr. Thomson: What do you reckon Collie coal has saved Western Australia?

Hon. P. Collier: Hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Mr. HOLMAN: The question is one utterly impossible for any man to answer. I maintain Collie coal has saved this State a very considerable amount of money. But, even if the Collie coal industry has not saved this country one penny directly, if it has cost this country thousands of pounds, still I say that the establishment of our coal industry is worth hundreds of thousands of pounds to Western Australia. The contract which the Minister for Works mentioned was brought about at the same time. While we were paying 9s., 10s., and 10s. 6d. for Collie coal in 1904, we made a contract with Brown and Company, of New South Wales, to supply Newcastle coal delivered at Albany or Fremantle for 15s. 4d. per ton. I venture to say more than double that price would have to be paid at the present time for Newcastle coal. In those days agricultural members used to move the adjournment of the House on the question of the use of Collie coal. They became very dramatic on the subject of the danger of Collie coal to the crops. One hon. member actually spoke of bringing a dagger into the House and dashing it on the floor of the Chamber in order to direct attention to this matter after the fashion of Ed-

mund Burke, the orator of the eighteenth century. When the whole thing was analysed, however, it turned out that in connection with one particular train which was stated to have caused fires not an ounce of Collie coal had been burned; indeed, it was proved that no Collie coal whatever had been used in the district for weeks before the fire occurred. Collie coal has been blamed for a good deal for which it is not responsible. There are numbers of men in this country who endeavour to decry our own industry. I hope members of this Chamber will not allow the growth of the Collie coal industry to be retarded. I trust the House will do everything possible to encourage that industry. The worst thing we can do, however, is to give a monopoly to one or two companies; because they will try to do now what was done in 1904—increase the cost of coal to the State. Dr. Jack went thoroughly into the question. Hon. members will find his report in the 1905 volume of "Votes and Proceedings" of this House. Since then the member for Collie (Mr. Wilson) has had another Royal Commission appointed. I am satisfied that the House cannot do better than follow the reports of these Royal Commissions. The Commissions consisted of practical men who thoroughly understood the question, and if we depart from their reports we will be doing an injustice, not only to the people of Collie but to the State as a whole. I hope we shall endeavour to keep open as many mines as possible. I think we can get more valuable opinions from the Royal Commissions who have inquired into this question than from any organisation that sees fit to write to us. In 1904 I formed my opinion of Collie coal, and I have not yet seen any reason to depart from it. If we start tinkering with the present state of affairs we shall bring about a condition even worse. I hope the motion will be carried.

The PREMIER (Hon. H. B. Lefroy—Moore) [9.32]: The motion of the hon. member reads as follows:—

That in the opinion of this House the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission on the coal industry be given effect to.

To that an amendment has been moved as follows:—

To add the words "with the exception of those contained in paragraph 231 of the Commission's report."

I feel unable to accept the amendment, nor am I able to accept the original motion. We have here a report, the compilation of which occupied a considerable time. I do not think the hands of the Government should be so tied as to compel the Government to give effect to the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission in their entirety.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Will you agree to another amendment to the effect that the existing conditions be continued?

The PREMIER: No.

Mr. Holman: Give us the policy of the Government.

The PREMIER: I will tell you the policy. I deprecate anything that may be said in this House or outside disparaging to the Collie

coal industry. That industry has had a great deal to contend against. We have a coal in New South Wales; and no doubt the influence of those directly interested in Newcastle coal has been detrimental to the interests of Collie coal. Whenever a new industry starts, those outside who are desirous of pushing their own industry do all they can to strangle the new one. We have had demonstrated, more particularly during the last few months, what Collie coal is capable of doing. It has been demonstrated that Collie coal can be used largely for bunkering purposes. At one time it was stated that it would never be of any use for bunkering purposes, and everything possible was done to prevent steamers from using it. We have now arrived at the stage when Collie coal is used largely for bunkering, and we have also proved that at a pinch the railways can be run exclusively on Collie coal. I think it is very satisfactory to know that when pressure comes from outside we have within our borders something which will enable us to tide over a difficult time. What has happened during the last few months has been all in the interests of Collie coal. At the present time there is a very considerable feeling existing between two sections of the community in regard to the use of Collie coal, and we want to arrive at some basis which will be satisfactory to all parties concerned, while at the same time conserving as far as possible the best interests of the State and of the industry itself. If the recommendations of the Royal Commission are to be carried out—and many of them should be given effect to—it will be necessary that there shall be a fresh agreement. After considering this question very closely for some time the Government have decided to exercise their right and give notice of cancellation of the present contract with a view of formulating an agreement which will be more satisfactory to all concerned.

[The Deputy-Speaker took the Chair.]

Mr. O'Loughlen: On what lines?

The PREMIER: On lines which will be in the best interests of the industry itself, and at the same time in the interests of the Railway Department, which must be protected. It has been recognised that in normal times it is necessary that a certain amount of Newcastle coal shall be used on the railways.

Mr. Holman: What are you paying for Newcastle coal now?

The PREMIER: I do not know.

Hon. P. Collier: Twenty-eight shillings and sixpence.

The PREMIER: The Government considered that the Railway Department has a perfect right to make up the shortage of Newcastle coal by taking this extra 30 per cent. from any source of sources at Collie which the department considers most suitable to their purposes. That is the policy of the Government. We believe that this matter cannot be properly and satisfactorily settled until a new agreement is made.

Hon. P. Collier: On what lines do you propose to make that agreement?

The PREMIER: I have just indicated what the lines shall be. The member for Forrest I think, by way of interjection, stated that the Government are desirous of breaking a good agreement. The Government have never had the slightest intention of breaking any agreement.

Mr. O'Loughlen: The preceding Government gave an undertaking that the present conditions should continue until three months after the war.

Mr. Thomson: Why did the companies raise the price of coal?

Hon. P. Collier: That was voluntarily done by the Government.

The PREMIER: The Government feel that no satisfactory arrangement can be arrived at unless we have a new agreement.

Mr. Nairn: Are the Government prepared to enter into negotiations with all the companies in Collie?

The PREMIER: Certainly, with all the companies. The Government are desirous of seeing the field developed in the best possible way.

Hon. P. Collier: That is an evasion of the worst possible kind.

The PREMIER: To say that the Government should accept all the recommendations of the Royal Commission would be, I think, to tie the hands of the Government, which I am sure the House does not desire. The Government are desirous of avoiding the creation of any monopoly and of giving every possible opportunity to all the mines.

Hon. P. Collier: These generalities are no good.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Why not let the existing conditions continue?

The Minister for Railways: You are not prepared to allow the existing conditions to continue.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Yes, we are.

The PREMIER: The Government are not yet prepared to quote the exact words of the new agreement.

Hon. P. Collier: You want to get into recess.

The PREMIER: We do not.

Hon. P. Collier: Well, you have no policy, at any rate. Your Minister has pronounced one to-night, and you are now enunciating another.

Mr. Johnston: Will some of the companies be excluded from the new agreement?

The PREMIER: There will be equal distribution of coal as far as it can possibly be carried out. The Government will not agree to take for the railways coal not efficient for the purpose. In order to see that that efficiency is maintained it may be necessary to have more inspectors, or some new method of inspection, at any rate. The desire of the Government is to see that all the mines at Collie, as far as possible, and in the interests of the railways—which, like the interests of the State, have to be conserved—are developed. If it can be proved that some of the coals at Collie are a danger to the country at certain times of the year,

I maintain that those coals should not be used during that time. It has been recognised in the past that they are dangerous at certain times of the year. Of course that is no proof that the coal is useless; but certainly it is not safe for railway purposes.

Mr. Holman: You know that Collie coal has been blamed for much that it is not responsible for.

The PREMIER: Some of the country is like a powder magazine in summer time, when a single spark may send a fire from one end of the district to the other. It is the duty of the Government to obviate that danger, but it is also the desire of the Government to see that all the mines at Collie should be given fair play in the development of the industry. The policy of the Government is that the Railway Department should not be compelled to purchase coal which is not efficient for the purpose for which it is required, when there is available other coal of a better description. There is the policy which the hon. member asked for. In order to carry this into effect the Government, after considering the matter from all points of view, find that the only way of coming to a satisfactory conclusion is to exercise their right to cancel the present agreement by giving three months' notice. Every thing will be done in order, and an efficient agreement will be entered into, which, I trust, will be satisfactory, not only to the railways, but to the miners themselves, and which I hope will prevent any of the friction that has lately been in evidence.

Mr. THOMSON (Katanning) [9.45]: I am going to oppose both the motion and the amendment. I oppose the motion because I am not prepared to accept the whole of the recommendations embodied in the Royal Commission's report and certainly I am not going to support the amendment moved by the member for Geraldton at this stage. I want to say that I have clearly indicated in previous debates my views as far as the Collie coal industry is concerned. I am a great believer in fostering local industries and I believe the fact that we have these coalfields in this State has been the saving of hundreds of thousands of pounds to Western Australia. At this stage I want to voice my disapproval at the action of the people of Collie. I think when they moved this motion—

That the Premier, the Minister for Mines and Railways, and the Commissioner for Railways be notified that after Wednesday next, if the system of equal distribution of orders and shortages is not given effect to by that date, drastic action will be taken to enforce same.

They are not giving the Government a fair deal. I honestly consider this industry should be given every consideration by the Government. I am also surprised to see the information coming from the engine drivers' union. I regret they should have seen fit to put forward such a serious indictment against our coal. It is regretta-

ble that such opposition to this valuable local industry should have been stated. In my opinion a great deal of the trouble in connection with Collie coal can be directly attributed to the agreement which was entered into—that is so far as the receipt and delivery of coal is concerned. At a first glance, it seems the Commissioner has the absolute right to receive coal that is not of good quality, and it has surprised me to find that during all these years—last year I believe the Railway Department paid £90,000 to £100,000 for Collie coal—that all that coal should have been inspected by one man. The whole thing, to my mind, is absurd. It is ridiculous to expect that one man can inspect all the coal coming from five or six mines in one area, and I agree with the Premier that it is necessary for a new agreement to be entered into whereby the Commissioner shall have the right to refuse coal which is not of the quality provided for in the contract.

Mr. O'Loughlen: He has it now in the present contract.

Mr. THOMSON: I admit he has the power but it seems to me, that unless we are going to do as the Minister for Works suggested, have one inspector down the mine and one on top to see that every load is tipped into the truck, we are not going to get the satisfaction we would have if there was a new agreement wherein the Commissioner could refuse to accept a truck of coal that is not up to the quality stipulated. I think that should be a condition of the contract now. True, it is in the agreement but it is impossible for one man, or a dozen men, to see that we get the proper class of coal.

Mr. Griffiths: How would you remedy it?

Mr. THOMSON: The Government should accept, as far as possible, coal from every mine on the coal fields to-day. I agree with the report of the Commission in paragraph 230 where it says—

We recognise that several mines at Collie would not have come into existence had it not been for this principle of equal distribution, and it would be manifestly unfair to cancel the arrangements which have been entered into, without due notice. Therefore, I am not going to be in favour of absolutely cancelling the whole of the orders as far as the mines are concerned, because I consider like those who sat on the Commission, that it would be unfair and unjust to say to the coal owners at the present stage, "We are not going to take any of your coal but we want a better system than that which is in existence to-day. We want to get value for what the State is paying." I consider seeing that the Government have given due notice that a new agreement should be entered into, and seeing the Premier has made a definite statement that he is going to take the matter into consideration as far as the coal mines are concerned, it was not wise to pass such a resolution in such drastic terms as that which was moved at the meeting at Collie. I think, through our present financial stringency, it behoves every section

of the community to see that the people pull together and keep the State afloat.

Mr. O'Loghlen: You do not like pulling together when you get hit with a club.

Mr. THOMSON: This matter has been discussed for a considerable time and if there has been any threatening with a club, the coal proprietors and miners certainly have done so.

Mr. O'Loghlen: What about the loco. drivers?

Mr. THOMSON: Certainly they are to-day holding a club at the head of the Government, which is wrong. I agree with the leader of the Opposition that we should not be swayed by the letter sent in from the Firemen and Drivers' Union, but we have a right to consider their objection. As the Premier has pointed out, it is possible for the railways of the State to be run entirely with Collie coal, but, as far as I am concerned, we should not wilfully do anything to injure the industry which is of great value to the State. The present agreement should be altered, in my opinion, because it is not satisfactory.

Mr. O'Loghlen: What is your objection; with what paragraph do you disagree?

Mr. THOMSON: Under paragraph 14 I admit the Commissioner has the right to reject coal at Collie.

Mr. O'Loghlen: What more power can you give them in any agreement?

Mr. THOMSON: I admit the Commissioner can at all times send a man down the mine, but seeing that this agreement has worked unsatisfactorily all these years, it is right that the Railway Department should be protected and I want also to see the industry protected, and that we should have equal distribution of coal as far as possible, consistent with giving the Railway Department value for the money spent.

Mr. NAIRN (Swan) [9.55]: I want to know where we stand in regard to the statement made by the Minister for Works. If I understood the Minister correctly he promised, on behalf of the Government, that the Government intended to review the contract and to negotiate with three companies only.

The Premier: That is entirely wrong.

Mr. NAIRN: The Premier has given me his word that the statement is wrong and that is sufficient for me on that particular point. I want to give the Government that necessary freedom that all parties should have on entering into a contract, but I do not want the House to affirm a principle which may not be the wish of the House, and that is that the companies doing business with the Government should be excluded from further negotiations. I think there has been a great deal of bluff on all sides in dealing with this matter and therefore the Government should be justified in standing firm. I do not agree with the leader of the Opposition when he severely attacks the union who have placed their views before us. If there is any body of men in the community who have had a deal to do with the handling of Collie coal it is the engine-drivers, and if the coal is not of the best

quality they quickly know it. It is in their own interests to make a protest. Therefore, their statement can be accepted as coming seriously from a deeply interested party. As one who has had a great deal of association with the Collie coalfields from their inception, I believe the basis on which the Government will get good value lies in good inspection. The Government have never made the inspection to see that they are getting proper value for the money which is paid. It is impossible for one man, notwithstanding how good an inspector he may be, and I believe the present inspector is a good and conscientious officer, but however conscientious he may be, no individual is capable of giving that necessary inspection by himself of all the coal which is required by the Government. Even the report of the Royal Commission is definite on that matter. They say that he must have assistance. I go further and say that the Government are justified in placing in their agreement a clause giving them the right to reject coal at any part of the railway service it is found, provided it is traceable to the mine which it left.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Would you fix a time?

Mr. NAIRN: Yes, but that is a matter of detail. The principle of giving the Government sufficient inspection, if they are going to get value for their money, is an important one. The point I rose to speak about was the statement by the Minister which I evidently misunderstood, but the impression I gathered was that the Government only intended to deal with three companies. If that had been the intention of the Government I should have opposed it seriously indeed.

Hon. P. Collier: The Minister for Railways made a similar statement.

Mr. NAIRN: The Premier has given an assurance to the House that every company will get fair consideration.

Hon. P. Collier: Does that mean orders?

The Premier: No.

Mr. NAIRN: The Premier says, no; he does not mean orders; he means that he does not guarantee. The Government are entitled to that much freedom on entering into a contract, so as to protect themselves. Provided they insist on proper protection and proper inspection at any point at which coal is found, they can do business with any mine they are prepared to do business with and who are prepared to do business with them. It is not the intention of the House to exclude any company from participating in the orders. I am prepared to accept the word of the Premier, who is in a position to speak with responsibility, as against the word of the leader of the Opposition.

Hon. P. Collier: Which involves disbelieving the word of two other Ministers as well as that of the leader of the Opposition. I have two Ministers in the same boat with me. You have the Premier with you, and I have two Ministers with me.

Mr. NAIRN: I pin my faith to the Premier rather than to the Ministers.

Hon. J. MITCHELL (Northam) [10.2]: I think the member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loghlen) is to be congratulated on having brought this

matter before the House. We must consider the question as it affects the public, though, of course, we all have sympathy with the gentlemen who have put their money into the coal mines. I believe the policy of the past has been a wrong one. The mine owners were told that the orders of the Government would be equally distributed, and naturally they invested their money in the mines on that understanding. After many years of work it is found that coal from some of the mines is of inferior quality for, at any rate, railway purposes. While we have sympathy with the gentlemen, and while no one has any desire to injure their investment, and while we have sympathy also with the miners working at Collie, we are bound to face the position as a matter of duty. If it is true that 100 men more are required at the six coal mines in order to produce the Railway Department's coal requirements, it seems to me that we are wasting the work of those 100 men; and that is a thing which the State cannot afford to do at the present time. After all, the question is one of supply and demand. There seems to be a supply of coal of superior quality at Collie quite equal to the Railway Department's demand. Every member of this House knows the reason for the development of the industry by artificial means, and we can quite understand the coal owners' objecting to the artificial means being cut off at a moment's notice. A statement has been furnished to members of this House by the locomotive engineers who have had experience of the Collie coal—reliable men who can be trusted and whose advice we can safely take. They say that 70 cwt. of Newcastle coal are equal to 100 cwt. of Proprietary coal, and equal to 125 cwt. of other Collie coals.

Hon. P. Collier: We are not prepared to accept that information from the Engine Drivers' Union. We ought to get it from the Railway Department.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The union support the officials of the department. The leader of the Opposition has been Minister for Railways and he knows that these are the facts. I wish the hon. gentleman would state all he knows about the subject. Certainly, he knows that these statements of the engine drivers are correct.

Hon. P. Collier: I do not. I absolutely deny the statements of the engine drivers in many respects.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: But not the statements as to the values of Collie coal?

Hon. P. Collier: I do not accept those statements either. I want the information from the heads of the Railway Department.

Mr. Munsie: I think it will be found that a good many of the engine drivers contradict those statements.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: An engine driver told me that if he got the best of Collie coal he could run his train to time, but that if he got inferior Collie coal running to time was out of the question.

Hon. P. Collier: It is very curious to hear a case from the other side of the House based entirely on the statements of a Labour organisation. It is a new experience altogether.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I am astonished at the attitude adopted by the leader of the Opposition.

Hon. P. Collier: No further evidence is required—the information comes from a Labour organisation.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: It was always so in the mind of the hon. member. Unfortunately for him, however, there are two Labour organisations concerned—the Engine Drivers' Union and the Coal Miners' Union. If it be true, as stated, that 125 cwt of average Collie coal are required to do the work of 100 cwt. of Newcastle coal, it is a very serious thing for the country. The extra 25 per cent. of coal has not only to be paid for, but has also to be hauled long distances over the railways before being used. The engine drivers have certainly justified their case. They have pointed out that we can use Collie coal with advantage, but not all Collie coal.

Mr. O'Loughlin: What about the Royal Commission? They do not count against the railway organisation, do they?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I am sure the leader of the Opposition is of the opinion that the officers of the department are with the railway men. If the Premier sought the advice of his responsible officials, they would, I am certain, confirm all that is said in the engine drivers' statement. We are told that it costs 2s. 10d. per ton extra to use Collie coal.

Hon. P. Collier: Where did the hon. gentleman get that information? That is a fair question. The information is not to be found in any official publication supplied to members from the Railway Department.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I believe the railway officials confirm in every detail the argument of the Engine Drivers' Union. The loss of 2s. 10d. per ton from the use of Collie coal means a great deal to the State annually—a matter of about £20,000. Further, to keep the engines in order whilst they are burning inferior coal costs a good deal more. Then there are the consequent delays to the staff, and the inconvenience to the travelling public. We have heard a great deal about monopoly from hon. members opposite, yet they speak to-night of this combination as common sense. It is strange to hear hon. members opposite talk in that way. We know that the users of the railways have to pay the extra cost.

Hon. P. Collier: Where is the proof of the extra cost in any official document?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The extra cost may be £40,000 or £50,000 or £60,000 a year, but the users of the railways have to bear it. The member for Toodyay (Mr. Piessé) to-night made an excellent speech, and he very rightly pointed out the dangers involved. That hon. member was taken to task by the leader of the Opposition, simply because his argument did not suit the leader of the Opposition; indeed, it irritated the hon. gentleman, and he attacked the member for Toodyay and charged him, who is always very much alive, with having been asleep for six years.

Hon. P. Collier: On this question.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Not the member for Toodyay, but the House, has been asleep for six years. It was asleep until the member for Forrest brought up this matter to-night. I

have already said that the thanks of this House are due to that hon. member for having raised the question. It appears that for the privilege of paying something like £100,000 annually for Collie coal, we are penalising the users of our railways to an enormous extent. The use of inferior Collie coal will mean an increase in the quantity of coal used. We are told that to-day 90 per cent. of Collie coal is being used on the railways. If only the superior Collie coal was used, I think the Railway Department could use 100 per cent. of Collie.

Hon. P. Collier: No.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Why not?

Hon. P. Collier: Because the Engine-drivers' Union will not agree to that.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: We have been told that the inspection of the coal has been weak. In ordinary business one says to a man, "I will buy your goods." But if the goods are not up to standard, that man will in a short time be told not to call again. I do not believe the responsibility for insufficiency of inspection rests upon the Government. I think that responsibility rests entirely upon the coal owners. They should have seen that a good quality of coal was supplied to the Government. There are many interesting points in connection with the Collie industry. I admit that the Government agreed to take an equal quantity from each mine—not from six mines, but from as many mines as there might be, irrespective of the cost.

Mr. O'Loughlin: No. The equal quantities are to be taken only from the six mines.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: We agreed to spread our orders in the hope that some day better coal would be obtained. I think it is a reasonable point of view, that we are not likely to get different coal for some time to come, at all events from some of the mines.

Hon. P. Collier: We do not know that.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: We have had a pretty long experience, and have paid a pretty good round sum for our experience, and we are justified now in seeing what should be done. There is some talk of covering the coal in transit and during storage, and of the use of soft coal on the goldfields. These things would mean terrific cost in the erection of sheds. I do not think the Government can be expected to undertake that expenditure. The leader of the Opposition talked of monopoly, but I thought the Railway Department's order was still to be distributed over two or three of the best mines at Collie. I believe that is the case. With regard to soft coal, we have been told that it does excellent work on the engines at Brunswick. I hope the House will see that it is their duty to determine what is best for the State. We are talking of economy and we should practice it now. I remember a few months ago when the owners increased the price of coal to the Government it was understood that the owners would work at that increased price until after the war, and a short time afterwards they were before the Federal Arbitration Court asking for an increase in the price. They got the award to 13s. 5d., which is 5d. higher than the award for Newcastle coal. I intend to support the amendment.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. W. J. George—Murray-Wellington) [10.18]: With the indulgence of the House I would like to make a personal explanation. There is an impression that I stated on behalf of the Government that it was intended to take coal from three mines. I did not say that and if "Hansard" was produced it would be seen that I did not make such a statement.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Mr. DAVIES (Guildford) [10.20]: I came to the House with an open mind on this question and I have not been approached personally or by letter in the matter. I regret that references have been made to the Locomotive Engineers' union to-night. I believe the members of that union were actuated by the best of motives, and I scorn the idea that they are out on behalf of monopolies. Those men have had sufficient experience of Collie coal to know that some of the stuff they are burning is absolute rubbish, and it is time that state of affairs came to an end. I know the opinion of Collie coal which is held among the Midland railway men. They burn a certain percentage of Collie coal with Newcastle coal and I understand it is an admirable mixture. There is coal to be found at Collie which makes a good fuel for railway purposes, but there is one thing to be said, and it is that if the Government entered into an agreement with the mine owners, that agreement should be observed. When an agreement was entered into the companies must have known that unless they supplied an article that was worth burning the agreement would come to an end. I have been a member of the party who are to-day sitting opposite, and I do not know what their objection is to this business unless it be that they want to justify themselves as an Opposition. But I do not believe that is their reason. There must be some other which has not been given on the floor of the House because it is against the principles of the Labour party or the Socialistic party.

Mr. Jones: What do you know of the principles of the Labour party?

Mr. DAVIES: It is against the principles of the party opposite or the Socialistic party to keep six mines in existence to supply coal which can be supplied by three.

Hon. P. Collier: I do not know any principles that that is against.

Mr. DAVIES: To reduce the cost of production to the lowest possible extent.

Mr. Green: What about their attitude against monopolies?

Mr. DAVIES: It is the same with bakeries or butcheries or anything else. To keep six mines going to produce what three can supply is economically unsound.

Mr. Munsie: No one has advocated that nor has there been an attempt to do so on this side of the House.

Mr. DAVIES: If these mines could be kept fully employed at the present time there might be some reason for keeping all

going. It would be interesting to know whether these mines were fully occupied during the pre-war days.

Hon. P. Collier: Three would close down but for the railway orders.

Mr. DAVIES: Would they close under normal conditions?

Hon. P. Collier: I do not think so.

Mr. DAVIES: Why then should they exist at all especially when they do not provide a good article?

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The reason is the prejudice against the coal.

Mr. DAVIES: On whose part?

Hon. W. C. Angwin: On the part of a lot of people.

Mr. DAVIES: I suppose people buy the best article they can for the money. The State has a perfect right to encourage local industry, and the Government have been very fair in regard to Collie coal, and I shall always be prepared to sit behind any Government which will give this industry a fair deal. I believe that the State has fostered certain mines up to the absolute limit, and I think it is reasonable that those who desire to assist the Government in these trying times should now stand behind the Government. There is one thing which can be said in regard to inspection, but I do not know whether the suggestion I would make will be regarded as a good one or not. I would suggest that an engine-driver should be appointed as an inspector for a period of six months, and instructed to act at Collie alone or in conjunction with the present inspector. If there should be any question as to the quality of the coal it should be made possible for a third person to come in and settle the difference. As a railway man of 19 years' experience, I know that the engine-drivers have about reached the limit it is possible for them to get to. Hon. members have asked what led the engine-drivers to dictate the policy of the Government. The engine-drivers, like anyone else have a right to enter a protest if conditions are becoming unbearable. The position with them has reached the stage that a remedy must be effected or they will give it up in despair. These men are expected to run trains to time, and if they fail, whose fault is it? The delays are due entirely to the fact that trains are expected to be run on what is nothing but rubbish.

Hon. P. Collier: I have heard members on the Government side suggest that the fault was due to the desire on the part of the men to get in a bit of overtime.

Mr. Munsie: That has been said repeatedly by members on the Ministerial side of the House.

Mr. DAVIES: I would never subscribe to that.

Hon. P. Collier: They do not say it now; they have reformed.

Mr. DAVIES: The amendment, when it was moved by the member for Geraldton, struck me as being a remarkable one, and I wondered what was intended. I listened attentively to the remarks of the member for Forrest, and if it were a matter of senti-

ment I would vote for the motion, but the matter is not to be decided on sentiment, and I intend to stand behind Ministers in seeing that the country gets a fair deal. I intend to vote against both the amendment and the motion.

Mr. BROWN (Beverley) [10.27]: The documents which I have received will not influence me in any way in regard to the direction in which I intend to vote. It would have been very much better if this information had not been handed to hon. members. Members of Parliament have their own opinions, and on a subject like this, with the report of the Royal Commission to guide them, they have at their command all the information necessary. Some hon. members even journeyed to Collie on what was described by the Minister for Works as a picnic in order to inspect the mines for themselves, and they should be better able to form an opinion. Hon. members have no desire whatever to place any obstacle in the way of the Collie coal industry. It is the desire of all to support local industries and more especially the coal industry, because if it were not for that, we would to-day be paying a much higher price for that commodity. We must look at it from that point of view, and consider whether we should not support our local industries, for while we are doing that we are keeping the money within our own borders and protecting the State from being overcharged for the imported article. As a representative of the Country party I have reason to complain of the use of Collie coal during the summer months in the agricultural districts. I myself have been a sufferer, and this year there has been thousands of pounds worth of produce destroyed by the locomotives, owing to the use of Collie coal.

Mr. Green: From which mine?

Mr. BROWN: I am not going to say, because in all probability the coal from any of the mines at Collie would be capable of lighting those fires. I had the experience of travelling on trains for at least two years when only Newcastle coal was used, and during the whole of that time I never knew sparks to carry beyond the boundaries of the railway line. It is only since the Railway Department has been using Collie coal that we find our properties destroyed. I am not going to use the agricultural industry as a lever against Collie coal, because proper precautions should be taken, first of all by the Commissioner of Railways. It is only necessary to use Newcastle, or a big percentage of it, on the agricultural lines during a certain period of the year, and rather than abolish the use of Collie coal altogether it would be far better for the department to use Newcastle coal principally during a certain period of the year, and for the rest of the year to use Collie coal. By doing that they would avoid a great many disastrous fires. Of course they have not been able to follow this plan during the present year, because Newcastle coal is not procurable. In regard to the use of Collie coal during summer months, I think much of the danger could be easily avoided. The

Commissioner frequently discards suggestions made in regard to spark arresters. I have spoken to the Minister for Railways about the suppression of the sparks. I think it is not at all necessary to use a spark arrester inside the engine to prevent the sparks escaping. I made a simple suggestion to the Minister, which I think would be effective. Collie coal is very light and, as hon. members know, the engine-drivers complain that in using it they have to open the flue to get the draught, with the result that a large quantity of burning coal is blown out and, if there should be a strong wind, it is carried over the fences for at least half a chain. That could be avoided by the simple remedy of placing a cap above the funnel so that the sparks would strike it and fall down, instead of being carried beyond the railway boundaries. Alternatively, I suggest that the Government compel all landowners adjoining the railway to clear a break along the railway fences at least a chain wide, and that the department then plough the breaks outside the fence each year. Thus we would have a break sufficiently wide to prevent sparks being carried into the crops.

Hon. P. Collier: The Railway Department has never made any serious attempt to devise effective plans for dealing with Collie coal.

Mr. BROUN: Financially, the Government would be justified in making this proposed break, because recent fires have burnt considerable lengths of railway fencing, which will cost a lot of money to replace, whereas, if they had these breaks outside the boundaries and attended to them each year their fences would be protected. Although I do not wish the Government any harm, I am pleased that at last they have been sufferers from the use of Collie coal in the agricultural districts. At the Avondale State Farm this year there have been two fires, each of which destroyed a good deal of property.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: I suppose they are well insured?

Mr. BROUN: Probably they are not well insured. Nearly every farmer is insured, but the insurance companies will only insure up to a certain point. They always have a good margin, leaving a farmer liable to the loss of thousands of pounds worth of wheat and other property. The member for North-East Fremantle (Hon. W. C. Angwin), like many others, may believe that a farmer insures his crop as at 15 bushels, when it really goes only three or four bushels. Although I have heard such things said, I have never known of its being done. Even if the farmer did such a thing, I say it is for the insurance companies to keep their eyes open. I am not going to vote for either the motion or the amendment. I agree with the member for Katanning (Mr. Thomson) in concluding that this is a matter for the Government to decide. In the past the Government have not had a fair deal from the Collie coal companies. There is no doubt about that. What the Government really want is a good, effective agreement with penal clauses, and a thorough inspection of all the coal that comes from Collie. Then, any inferior coal should be thrown out.

The department will have no need to use it if the agreement is there.

Hon. P. Collier: They have an agreement now.

Mr. BROUN: It seems to me the complaint of the Government is that the inspection is not effective. If they cannot carry it out at the mines, they should be able to carry it out at some distance from the mines. If the coal is inferior it should be condemned. In respect of equal distribution of orders, the Government should make use of the best coal: but to close down the mines without giving them a fair trial would impose a very great hardship both on the companies and on the miners. I hope the Government will fix up an effective agreement and that under it they will be protected in every direction. In my opinion the Collie coal companies have to a great extent been spoon-fed, although hitherto we have only heard in this House of the spoon-feeding of the agricultural industry.

Mr. Green: Why not give the companies the same deal?

Mr. BROUN: The Government have been taking coal from them for years, at a cost of 2s per ton more than the Newcastle coal, in comparison, of course.

Mr. Green: Where did you get that information?

Mr. BROUN: I think I am right.

Hon. P. Collier: That is absolutely incorrect.

Mr. BROUN: Then we have to consider the royalty, in connection with which there is something like £60,000 owing to the Government.

Hon. P. Collier: Threepence per ton.

Mr. BROUN: That is a big sum. These companies have had every help from the Government in the past, and the least the companies should have done was to have supplied the Government with decent coal. I hope that for the future they will do this, and that there will be no necessity for further long debates in the House on the matter. If the companies do supply inferior fuel I trust the Government will be able to deal with them.

Mr. MUNSIE (Hannans) [10.42]: Many strange arguments have been brought forward in connection with the Collie coal industry. Firstly, some hon. members have taken it for granted that, because on the one hand the Loco. Engine-drivers, Firemen, and Cleaners' have issued an ultimatum to the Government, and on the other hand that these people have sent a letter to every member of Parliament, it represents the opinion of the whole of the engine-drivers, firemen, and cleaners throughout the State.

Mr. Jones: They are hysterical.

Mr. MUNSIE: I have a letter from the president of the Kalgoorlie branch of the Loco. Engine-drivers, Firemen, and Cleaners' Union which indicates absolute opposition to the action of the executive, and informs me that this is almost the unanimous opinion of the members of the Kalgoorlie branch. In fact, the letter point blank contradicts the statement of the executive. Furthermore, the executive of this organisation have publicly stated that a ballot of the whole of the members was taken. There are, however, two branches of

the organisation in this State which have challenged the executive to take a ballot amongst the members, but the executive will not do so. The Premier stated that a very strong feeling has grown up between two sections of the community, the railway engine-drivers on the one hand, and the Collie miners on the other. I admit that this is so, but would add that the entire blame for this rests upon the shoulders of the Government. The Premier cannot see how that comes about, but I do. The whole thing has been very cleverly worked by a section of the community to relieve the Government of any responsibility in connection with the settlement of this matter, while in the meantime two trade unions or labour organisations are tearing at one another's throats and fighting the matter out among themselves.

The Minister for Railways: It might have been very much better to have left them to fight it out.

Mr. MUNSIE: A resolution was carried by the Collie miners only three days ago, and a resolution exactly in the same terms, though worded in a different manner and couched in stronger language, was carried and sent to the Government, as well as to the various labour organisations of the State, some months ago by the railway organisation. This latter resolution was evidently all right, for no exception was taken to it. When, however, the Collie coal miners, in an attempt to justify their attitude, carry a resolution similar to that carried by the railway organisation, it becomes a crime in the eyes of the Government.

Mr. Mullany: It was not to justify their actions, but to make members afraid to vote against them.

Mr. MUNSIE: Their actions will not influence me one way or the other. I am absolutely in accord with the engine drivers in their demand for clean coal from the coal proprietors. Here is another funny point. The Government have set their minds on taking almost all their supplies for the railways from one particular mine in Collie.

Hon. P. Collier: They have fixed the quantity.

Mr. MUNSIE: But the one mine that they condemn in Collie is the Westralian. It does seem remarkable to me that the owners of the mine, from which the engine drivers want two-thirds of the railway supplies taken, are practically breaking their necks to buy the Westralian mine. These people have made overtures in this direction times without number.

Hon. P. Collier: They tried to buy the shares when they could not buy the mine outright.

Mr. MUNSIE: They have tried to work this in different ways. I would point out that the Westralian mine is virtually a co-operative company. They have now had to go to the extent of altering their articles of association in order to prevent the Proprietary company from getting control by purchasing the shares. Evidence can be brought to prove this.

The Minister for Railways: That must be on account of the new seam.

Mr. MUNSIE: I am glad the Minister has made that interjection.

The Minister for Railways: I know nothing about it.

Mr. MUNSIE: I do not know whether that is so or not. The Commissioner, I am informed, when making the agreement between himself as consumer and the Collie coal proprietors, insisted that the test for the coal should be based on its calorific value. That standard, at all events, carries the greatest weight in respect to the price that shall be paid. But I would again point out that the very mine which the Government are condemning and endeavouring to wipe out, produces coal of the highest calorific value on the field, and this is based on the tests made every week by the Railway Department.

The Minister for Railways: The question is the shale, not the calorific value.

Mr. MUNSIE: I blame the company to a certain extent, but not more than I blame the man who was placed there by the Government to inspect the coal. The Commissioner is just as much to blame. Under the agreement he can object to take coal from certain places because of the dirt, and if the company persists in supplying dirty coal, the Commissioner can close that portion of the mine down from which the dirty coal comes. The Commissioner has had an opportunity for the past three years of closing that portion of the mine up, but he has not done so. There is one other statement I want to reply to, and that is the statement of the Minister for Railways in dealing with this proposition. He knew from the statement made by the member for Forrest that it would mean the throwing out of employment 300 men. The member for Forrest contradicted the Minister and said 200 men. Now that statement has again been contradicted in to-day's newspaper, and the number of men is stated to be 100. The Minister based his argument on the 100 men, and made the astounding statement, that it was time the public of Western Australia, the taxpayers, were warned that by carrying out the present conditions they would be practically paying 100 more men. What an absurd statement for the Minister, and for a Minister who is also a lawyer, to make.

Hon. P. Collier: Absurd even for that Minister.

Mr. MUNSIE: The public and the taxpayers of Western Australia are not going to benefit one halfpenny if the colliery supplies that coal, because the colliery that will be supplying the coal will employ one-third of the men. You will only increase by 50 per cent. the profits of the company who are supplying the Government with the coal. Supposing the 100 men are cut out and the Government take the same quantity of coal, agreeing to pay the same price for it, how is the taxpayer, by employing the extra 100 men, being robbed? If by wiping out the 100 men the Railway Department could receive the coal at that amount of money less, then the taxpayers would be receiving some benefit. I want to warn the Government that if they persist in carrying out their present intentions, within 12 months of doing so the mine

that is causing most of the trouble, that is the Westraian, will be closed down, and within six months that mine will become the property of the present Collie Proprietary company, and will be supplying the coal from the very mine which they have closed down.

The Minister for Works: You are posing as a prophet.

Mr. MUNSIE: There is very strong circumstantial evidence. I hope the Government will not insist on doing something that is going to close down three of the mines at Collie. If the Government do something that will insist on the coal owners supplying the country with clean coal, then I am with them.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN (Forrest—in reply) [10.55]: In view of the lateness of the hour and the wish of members to catch their trains and trams, and my desire to see the question put to the vote, I shall not reply to the arguments. I have taken a note of the arguments, with a view of putting up a case on some future occasion. I regret I am not given an opportunity to reply to-night, but I hope hon. members will be guided by the evidence which has been placed before them, and by the seriousness of the situation at Collie.

Amendment (that the words proposed to be added be added) put and negatived.

Mr. MULLANY (Menzies) [10.57]: Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, I desire to move an amendment.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member has already spoken.

Mr. MULLANY: To the amendment. I intend to move a further amendment if I am allowed to do so.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member has addressed himself to the motion.

Mr. MULLANY: No, to the amendment.

Mr. SPEAKER: The motion and the amendment were before the House at the same time. I rule the hon. member out of order.

Mr. MULLANY: The amendment has been disposed of; now it is open to move a further amendment.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member having spoken, cannot move an amendment.

Mr. MULLANY: With all respect to your ruling, when the House met to-day the question before it was the amendment moved by the member for Geraldton to the motion of the member for Forrest, and I submit the only question we have discussed to-day has been the amendment.

Mr. Holman: It covers both.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member has addressed himself to the motion and to the amendment likewise. Any hon. member who has not addressed himself to the subject is in order in speaking to the motion now if he so desires.

Mr. MULLANY: I submit—

Mr. SPEAKER: I have ruled the hon. member out of order, and unless he dissents from my ruling I ask him to resume his seat.

Mr. MULLANY: Then I shall move that the House dissent from your ruling.

Mr. SPEAKER: Will the hon. member put it in writing?

Dissent from the Speaker's Ruling.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Menzies has disagreed with my ruling. He desires to move—

“That the ruling of the Speaker be disagreed with on the ground that I have not previously spoken to the motion before the House.”

Regarding the hon. member's ground of dissent, I desire to point out to the House that the debate, after the moving of the amendment, proceeded on the motion and on the amendment. The hon. member has addressed himself to the question, and I have ruled that he is not in order in speaking again to the motion or in moving a further amendment. That is the ruling from which the hon. member dissents.

Mr. Mullany: I must again draw attention to the fact that from the Notice Paper as drawn up members coming to the House to-day would have no intimation regarding the motion moved by the member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loghlen). The suspension of the Standing Orders was secured so that the House could discuss the motion standing in his name on the Notice Paper.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member is in error. The Standing Orders have not been suspended. It was resolved that motions be proceeded with.

Mr. Mullany: Yes; that is so. But the difference is only one of degree. I take it that the House to-day has been discussing, or should have been discussing, the amendment moved by the member for Geraldton (Mr. Willcock). If those speaking were allowed to speak all round the subject, as I have heard stated, then, I take it, that was not the fault of those members. With all due respect to the Chair, Sir, I submit that if you wished to move in the direction you have now indicated, you should have confined members to the amendment. The House is now in this position: whilst I, for one, cannot support the motion in its present form, I do desire that some modification of that motion should be carried: I hold that by the moving of an amendment a freer expression of opinion would probably be obtained from members. But, of course, if the House now upholds your ruling, Sir, in which ruling I am unable to follow you, I shall be debarred from moving the amendment I have in view. My reason for dissenting from your decision, Sir, is that I maintain members should not have been permitted to stray from the amendment. They ought not to have been allowed to do so. Having regard to the seriousness and urgent importance of the question, I assume the House desires to have it discussed from every point of view. For that reason I must leave the decision on my motion of dissent in the hands of the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any seconder?

Mr. Lutey: I second the motion of the member for Menzies.

Hon. T. Walker: I think the member for Menzies, in dissenting from your ruling, Mr. Speaker, is under a slight misapprehension, or, perhaps, I should say a serious misapprehension, as to the custom in debates in Par-

liament. An hon. member who speaks to a motion before an amendment is moved, speaks only to the motion—naturally. He has then the right to speak to an amendment subsequently moved; but in that case he must confine himself to the amendment. But an hon. member who rises after an amendment has been moved, speaks to both the motion and the amendment. He, therefore, has exhausted his right of speech in speaking once. That is the course which has been taken this evening.

Mr. Holman: Quite right.

Hon. T. Walker: The motion was before the House some days ago. Subsequently, an amendment was moved; and after the moving of that amendment the member for Menzies rose and did discuss both the motion and the amendment, thereby exhausting his right to speak. That is the custom and the law in Parliamentary debates. Therefore I hope the House will uphold your ruling, Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of the proper conduct of debate in future. Otherwise, we should have no end of speaking, and there would be infinite contention in debates.

Mr. Holman: I support the remarks of the member for Kanowna. If the member for Menzies were right in his contention, it would be open to a member to move a dozen amendments, and so endlessly delay the business of the House. The remarks of the member for Kanowna bear out my views on the point. On such a motion as this, after a member has spoken on both the amendment and the motion, he finally closes his mouth.

Mr. Lutey: I support the member for Menzies. Under Standing Order 117, I take it, the hon. member was quite in order in speaking to the amendment. If he was wrong, and spoke to both motion and amendment, I think he should have been called to order and made to speak to the amendment only. According to the rules of debate to which I have been accustomed, a man can speak only to an amendment when an amendment has been moved. At all events, the amendment was the question before the House.

Mr. Speaker: To which Standing Order is the hon. member referring?

Mr. Lutey: No. 117.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Brownhill-Ivanhoe has referred to Standing Order 117, which I will read.

Mr. Holman: It has no bearing on the point at all.

Mr. Speaker: No; it has no bearing on the question. It reads as follows:—

A member may speak to any question before the House, or upon a question or amendment to be proposed by himself, or upon a question of order arising out of the debate, or upon a question of privilege, but not otherwise.

Mr. Holman: I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that you read also the next Standing Order, No. 118.

Mr. Speaker: If it is the wish of the House, I will quote that Standing Order also—

No member may speak twice to a question before the House, except in explanation or

reply, or in Committee of the whole House.

Mr. Lutey: I wish to ask a question. Whether there is an amendment before the Chair, which is the question—the motion, or the amendment?

Mr. Speaker: So far as my seventeen years' experience in this House is concerned whenever an amendment to a motion has been moved, the debate has proceeded on both the motion and the amendment. If hon. members will cast their minds back over the debate which has just been concluded, they will recall that the addresses have been on both the motion and the amendment.

Motion put and negatived.

Resumed.

Question (that the motion be agreed to) put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	12
Noes	22

Majority against .. 10

AYES.

Mr. Chesson	Mr. Lutey
Mr. Collier	Mr. Munsie
Mr. Green	Mr. Pickering
Mr. Griffiths	Mr. Walker
Mr. Holman	Mr. O'Loghlen
Mr. Johnston	(Teller.)
Mr. Lambert	

NOES.

Mr. Angelo	Mr. Plesse
Mr. Broun	Mr. H. Robinson
Mr. Brown	Mr. R. T. Robinson
Mr. Draper	Mr. Stubbs
Mr. Durack	Mr. Teesdale
Mr. Gardiner	Mr. Thomson
Mr. George	Mr. Underwood
Mr. Harrison	Mr. Veryard
Mr. Hickmott	Mr. Willmott
Mr. Hudson	Mr. Hardwick
Mr. Lefroy	(Teller.)
Mr. Mitchell	

Question thus negatived.

House adjourned at 11.15 p.m.