Legislative Assembly,

Thursday, 17th August, 1933.

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

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Presentation.

Mr. SPEAKER: I desire to report that, accompanied by the mover, Mr. Tonkin, and the seconder, Mr. Wise, I to-day presented to His Excellency the Lieut.-Governor the Address-in-reply agreed to by the House, and that His Excellency was pleased to make the following reply:—

I thank you for the expression of loyalty to His Most Gracious Majesty the King and for your Address-in-reply to the Speech with which I opened Parliament. (Signed) James Mitchell, Lieut.-Governor.

QUESTION—LIEUT.-GOVERNOR, SALARY.

Mr. MARSHALL asked the Premier: 1, Is it a fact that the Lieut.-Governorship, when occupied by the Chief Justice of this State, was filled in an honorary capacity? 2, If not, what was the actual position when a Chief Justice occupied the position? 3, What is the actual salary paid to Sir James Mitchell, who now occupies the position of Lieut.-Governor? 4, Is it absolutely compulsory for this State to pay a salary to a Lieut.-Governor?

The PREMIER replied: 1 and 2, The regulation provides half salary for the Lieut.-Governor and the Chief Justice respectively. On one occasion the Chief Justice drew his full salary and half the Governor's salary. More recently the Governor's half salary was waived and the Chief Justice paid in full. 3, Nil. 4, Answered by No. 1.

QUESTION—COMMONWEALTH GRANT.

Mr. GRIFFITHS asked the Premier: What are the names of the persons who constitute the committee assisting the Government in the preparation of the case for a grant from the Commonwealth Government?

The PREMIER replied: The names were announced by me and published in the "West Australian" of the 11th July, and again nine days ago. As the hon. member apparently does not read the newspapers, and is perhaps the only person in the State not in possession of the desired information, I shall repeat it for his benefit. The members of the committees are Messrs. A. Berkeley (Chairman), G. W. Simpson, M. J. Calanchini, F. J. Huelin, A. J. Reid, R. G. Courtenay, and J. Curtin.

QUESTION—SECESSION.

Mr. GRIFFITHS asked the Premier: What are the names of the persons who constitute the committee assisting the Government in the preparation of the case for secession?

The PREMIER replied: No committee has yet been appointed for this purpose.

BILL—SOUTHERN CROSS SOUTHWARDS RAILWAY.

Introduced by the Minister for Railways, and read a first time.

BILL — FREMANTLE MUNICIPAL TRAMWAYS AND ELECTRIC LIGHTING ACT AMENDMENT.

Read a third time, and transmitted to the Council.

BILL—ROAD DISTRICTS ACT AMENDMENT (No. 2).

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. A. McCallum—South Fremantle) [4.37] in moving the second reading said: This Bill is a simple one and deals with only one principle, which is quite clear-cut, and therefore does not require much explanation at my hands. The measure is merely a Bill to abolish in the case of road districts the

system of plural voting which now operates in our road districts and municipalities. It provides that each ratepayer shall have one vote, and one vote only, thus doing away with the existing custom of plural voting. Requests are continually coming to the Government for widening of the powers of local authorities and giving them increased functions in many ways; in fact, requests for allowing them to operate in the field in which the State Parliament operates at present. To a great extent the Government agree with these suggestions. We consider that there are a good many things at the moment done by the State Parliament which could be done more economically, and probably more efficiently, by local authorities. Therefore the Government would favour the granting of extended powers to local authorities if we were assured that the local authorities represent the people. At the moment, however, that cannot be maintained. I do not think anyone will contend that under the existing law the local authorities represent the people to any marked extent.

Mr. Stubbs: They are elected by the people.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Not at all, and I shall show that as I go along. To transfer power from the State Parliament to the local authorities as at present constituted would mean the transfer of such power from one Legislative Chamber for which every adult in Western Australia has a vote, and an equal vote. No man or woman has more than one vote for this House. I acknowledge that the electorates are not evenly divided, and that we have not one vote, one value for this Assembly; but certainly there is no plural voting. There is no plural voting, either, as regards the other Chamber, which has a limitation to one vote for each province. Thus there is no plural voting for any one member of the Legislative Council. To concede the request to give local authorities power which at this moment Parliament has would merely mean taking away power from the people themselves to control certain activities, and handing that power over to a section of the people, to a favoured few. Our Legislative Council is one of the most Conservative Chambers in the world; its franchise is restricted; but even for that Chamber plural voting is not permitted in the election of representatives of any one province. Further, I would remind the House, as I have on previous occasions, that Australia is the only country in the world which permits plural voting for its local governing bodies. Every other country in the world has abolished plural voting. Moreover, not all the Australian States still retain plural voting. Several of them have made some progress, at any rate, towards the position obtaining elsewhere. I desire to give hon. members particulars of the existing franchise for road districts operating throughout the Commonwealth. In our own State for members of road boards an elector may, according to the annual or unimproved value of his land, have maximum votes in each road district. It all depends on how the rating is imposed; but if the rating is on the unimproved capital value, the number of votes in Western Australia ranges from one up to four. If the rating is on the annual value, the number of votes ranges from one up to four also, but the votes may be apportioned to different wards if property is held in more than one ward. However, when it comes to a poll on the question of raising a loan, resident owners only may vote, and they are entitled to only one vote. Under that heading, therefore, plural voting does not exist; and even absentee owners are not allowed to vote.

Mr. Patrick: Only resident owners may vote in that case.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: All this Bill proposes to do is to abolish plural voting. It does not ask for adult franchise, and does not propose to extend the franchise. It only proposes to limit voting to one ratepayer, one vote. It will be seen that when there is a question of committing a district to a loan, involving what may be termed the mortgaging of its assets, probably the most serious function that local authorities exercise, voting is limited to resident owners, and plural voting is not permitted. Thus a most illogical situation exists.

Mr. Stubbs: Has any damage resulted to anybody from the existing law?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I consider that any amount of damage has resulted from the present system, which has also caused a great deal of stagnation. In Queensland a ratepayer has only one vote for the whole district, irrespective of wards or of the value of property. In New South Wales the position is the same. At one time New South Wales, or at all events Sydney, had adult franchise.

Mr. Ferguson: You spoke of absentee owners not voting. Could not occupiers get those votes?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes: an occupier may have the vote, or the owner may have the vote.

Mr. Doney: How long ago did the change in the Queensland voting basis take place?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I do not know when the alteration was made, but I am stating to hon. members the present position. I do know that in the City of Sydney the adult franchise operated for a while, and even when a Conservative Government came in it did not give the Sydney City Council plural voting, but limited it to the single vote. There is only one vote in Queensland, and one vote in New South Wales. In Victoria an elector has votes according to his property qualification in each ward. In South Australia, when a district is divided into wards an elector has one vote in each ward in which he owns or occupies property, but when the district is not so divided he has only one vote. When it comes to a poll for a loan, they have reversed the position: for whereas we give plural voting for the election of members, but only one vote on a poll for a loan, in South Australia at a poll for a loan the voting is plural, ranging from one up to six. In Tasmania, in an undivided district the elector has anything from one to six votes, and in a subdivided district he has up to six votes for each ward in which he owns property. So it will be seen that at least three States of Australia have abolished plural voting, while the other three States remain the only parts of the world in which it is still retained. Even the old conservative countries, which we are inclined to look down upon and say they have not progressed, even those countries give a lead to us in that regard. There has been, not only in local governing bodies, but in the Parliaments of the world, a progress that has led to a distribution of the powers of government. That has been going on for centuries past. There was a time when a general belief was held in the divine right of Kings to govern. Then the nobles were given some power, and gradually the power of government has drifted, until in most countries it is now in the hands of the people. I admit there have been slips recently in two or three countries—Italy, Germany and Russia for instance—as the result of which the people seem to have lost the power of government, which has fallen into the hands of dictators. But I do not think Australia is likely to copy Germany, Italy or Russia in the methods of government they have adopted, for we pride ourselves on leaving the power of gov-government in the hands of the people. It has always been a puzzle to me why the people cannot be trusted to vote on an equality in respect of local governing bodies, when they can be so trusted, not only in respect of this House, but in respect also of our national Parliament. Although there is no absolute adult franchise in England, in recent times the franchise for elections to the House of Commons has been made much broader than it is for local governing bodies here. In England women have been enrolled and there are more women on the roll for the House of Commons than there are men. In this House we have unlimited power, within the Constitution, to levy taxation. We are not like local authorities, limited, but have unlimited power of taxation, and have power to discriminate, as we have done this week, and say that we levy so much on a given rate of income, and so much more or less on another rate of income. The power this Parliament possesses is immensely superior to the limited power of our local authorities. Also in our National Parliament, there is no limit to the extent to which it can impose taxation. And, it can discriminate; it may heap the load on to the wealthy and relieve the poor, or it may follow the opposite course. That Parliament has even power to declare war, power to conscript human life, power to conscript all the wealth of the nation; and yet in an election to that Parliament the votes of all men and women in the nation are equal. But when it comes to making a road or a footpath, we give to one elector six votes and to another only one. It seems to me quite illogical, and opposed to democratic government that such a thing should be allowed to exist. If it is argued—I know some members will put up the case, as they did on a previous occasion—that the one who pays should have the voting and the representation, if that is to apply in local government, it should apply also in this Parliament and in the National Parliament. But no country in the world admits that principle today. And if that principle is to be traced to its logical conclusion, who actually does pay? If in the metropolis, for instance, a person builds a house to rent, in the fixing of the rent the whole

of the capital charges are taken into account, including rates and taxes and all outgoing. All that is calculated when the rent is being fixed, and naturally those charges are passed on to the person who pays the rent. If it is an apartment house or a boarding house, the person who lets the flats or keeps the boarding house, naturally takes all his outgoings into account in fixing his charges, and so again it all comes down to the individual. It is the individual, not the person who owns the title deeds, who has to pay, it is the boarder or the lodger or the tenant who has to pay. And if it is a business house, one of our big emporiums in the city, the man carrying on the business takes into account his outgoings, and they are passed on with every article sold. So it is the public who pays, and it all comes right down to the individual; in no way can it be argued that the person who owns the title deeds is the person who has to foot the bill, for undoubtedly it is the individual who has to meet all those charges. It must be apparent to anyone who has travelled at all, that in other countries local authorities play a far more prominent part in the life of the community than they do in this country. Everywhere we go abroad we find the local authorities have wide powers, considerable authority, and the people themselves take more interest in them. Consequently those local authorities are far more active, and wield a far greater influence than is wielded by local authorities in Australia, particularly in our own State. That is largely accounted for by the fact that so few people are entitled to vote for the election of members of our local authorities. The same comparison can be made with the two Houses of this Parliament. When it comes to an election of this Chamber, there is ten times the interest taken in that election than is evinced in an election of the Council. The restricted franchise of another place so circumscribes the number of electors entitled to vote, that there is not nearly the same interest taken as is shown in an election for the Assembly. Even in districts around the metropolis only a mere handful of people will turn up to hear an electioneering speech, since a big section of the people are not interested, because they have no vote.

Mr. Sampson: On the Assembly the Government depend, whereas the other House is not so important.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It would be a tragedy if the Government had to depend on a House with a restricted franchise and for which less than a third of the Assembly electors are entitled to vote. In our local authorities the franchise is even further restricted, for an elector with a single vote can go along and find another entitled to cast six votes. The broadening of their franchise would be of advantage to the local authorities, for they would then find their position of more importance in the community. Far greater interest would be taken in their elections, and they would have some justification in coming to the Government and asking for an extension of their authority. In those circumstances we would agree to extend their powers, but we are not disposed to do so while this plural voting remains. I want that to be distinctly understood. There has been on the stocks in the Public Works Department for many years a Bill for a new Municipalities Act. The Act the municipalities operate under at present is obsolete and out of date, and does not allow those bodies to function as freely as we should like to see; but before we agree to give them a Bill that will allow them to operate in a wider field, we say there must be a broadening of their franchise and an abolition of plural voting. Unless the plural voting goes, this Government will not entertain any suggestion to widen the authority of the local governing bodies. I want to put this case to the House: The last Government had in hand a measure to establish a board of works in the metropolis. That board was to be composed of representatives of the various local authorities within the area, and was to take over the operation of all the local activities now controlled by the State. See what that means: water supply, affecting every man, woman and child in the community; electricity, tramways, every individual affected. But to-day every adult in the metropolis has a vote for this House, and so has some control over those activities. The suggestion was to take them all away from this House and give them to a local authority, for which very few people have a vote, and some have six times the voting strength of others. What kind of progress would that have been? If ever there was retrogression, that would have been. The present Government would not entertain any such idea. So long as we are in office, there will be no taking away of anything from the control of the whole of the people and giving it into the hands

of a few. We wish to see local government put on effective basis, so that those authorities may carry out their work more smoothly than is possible under the existing obsolete laws, and we are anxious to give them wider powers, but the first essential is to broaden the basis upon which their members are elected. As a first step in that direction, we ask that local authorities here be brought into line with the rest of the world. We should not lag with two other States of this small continent behind the rest of the world. New Zealand long ago abolished plural voting, but three States in Australia still cling to it. I hope that on this occasion the House will pass the Bill.

Mr. Stubbs: This House will pass it.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I have no doubt of that, and if the question is decided on its merits, Parliament will pass it. No logical case can be made out against the Bill. The argument is all against plural voting in a small community spread over such a large area. We should give the local authorities wider power so that they may become, in a way, small Parliaments. Only to the election of their members does the out-of-date principle of plural voting apply. When a poll for the raising of a loan is taken, it does not apply. I hope Western Australia will be cleared from the stigma of inclusion amongst three small communities that cling to this old idea. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Doney, debate adjourned.

BILL—LAND.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. M. F. Troy—Mt. Magnet) [5.4] in moving the second reading said: The object of the measure is to re-enact and consolidate the Land Act, 1898, the Permanent Reserves Act, 1899, and the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act, 1909, together with a number of amending Acts still in operation and some further amendments. This measure is very long overdue. Much confusion is caused by the fact that the Land Act has been amended quite a number of times and there has been no consolidation. There has been confusion amongst the people, in the department and in the courts as to the real intention of the law. The repeal of the existing Acts will not affect any right, title, interest or liability already created, existing or incurred. The Bill, with the amendments, embraces some 27 Acts which have been placed on the Statute-book since 1898 dealing with the purchase, disposal and reservation of the lands of the State. To facilitate a clear understanding by the House, the principal alterations have been printed in italics. The Bill was prepared by the previous Minister for Lands, but it has now come to me somewhat hurriedly, and there are amendments that I may ask to have deleted when the Bill reaches the Committee stage. Members who have to do with our land laws will appreciate how necessary the measure is. It will be noticed that since the compilation of the principal Act and its amendments, some ten years have elapsed, and experience has shown where amendments are desirable. The reason for each amendment will be explained in Committee. The Bill is divided into nine parts, as follows:—

Part I.—Introductory and general provisions.

Part II.—Divisions of the State.

Part III.—Reserves.

Part IV.—Town and suburban lands.

Part V.—Agricultural and grazing land, in which part is embodied conditional purhase, free homstead farms, working men's blocks, and special settlement lands.

Part VI.—Pastoral leases.

Part VII.—Special leases and licenses.

Part VIII.—Agricultural lands purchase.

Part IX.—Miscellaneous provisions.

Reviewing the principal amendments contained in the Bill, the distinction between the land within and outside agricultural areas is abolished, as the declaration of agricultural areas has been inoperative for many years. In former years it was the practice to gazette a certain area as an agricultural area, and within the area the land was made available under special conditions. This is not now necessary. The distinction between agricultural land and grazing land as separate classes is also abolished. Agricultural and grazing land may be acquired under conditional purchase provisions with or without residence.

Nowadays it is referred to as so many acres of cultivable land, and so many acres of non-cultivable land. The maximum area of cultivable land, or its equivalent of cultivable and grazing, or grazing, is reduced from 2,000 acres as at present, plus 1,000 to husband or wife as the case may be, to 1,000 acres of cultivable land or its equivalent in the same proportion as previously enacted, five acres of grazing land being equivalent to two acres of cultivable land. Though the Act provides that 2,000 acres may be allowed to any individual applicant, such an area has not been granted during the last 10 or 15 years because the Minister has exercised his power under the Act to grant a smaller area. The practice has been to provide 1,000 acres of cultivable land, or its equivalent, as a maximum. That applies to either husband or wife, the two being taken as one. The existing provisions as to the area of joint holdings are preserved, but the area of a married selector cannot be increased by acquiring half as much again in the name of his wife. We know that if a man has 1,000 acres of cultivable land, he has sufficient to sustain himself and his family. If a farmer farms 1,000 acres well, he will probably do better than a man who farms 2,000 or 3,000 acres badly.

Mr. Ferguson: There is plenty of evidence of that.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I consider that farmers in this State have been exhausting their energies over large areas, necessitating the purchase of large quantities of machinery and superphosphate, and getting very unsatisfactory results. With smaller areas properly farmed, they would be much better off. Many people hold the idea that a farmer who farms a large area is a big man, but he might be much better off if he farmed a small area. There is not much land remaining for settlement. People look at the map and talk about the tremendous area of land still available, and the great possibilities offering. Sometimes we see maps of the State showing how other countries could be embraced within its boundaries. It must not be overlooked that the cultivable area is small in comparison with the rest of the State. It will become greater as the population increases and as irrigation can be carried on, but as regards agricultural land development by the present rainfall system, we have not much land left for selection. I do not know where we could find a large area in the State to carry out any considerable scheme of settlement. What we must do is to encourage settlers to farm smaller areas and to get the better results from them. Members are aware that there are people in the South-West holding blocks of 10,000 acres. To talk of such a holding sounds very nice, but probably not ten acres of the whole property would be cleared. The rest would be merely a breeding ground for vermin, and the occupation would not be of any value to the State. Areas of 150 or 200 acres in the South-West, farmed well, are as large as any one man can manage. In some places, areas of 300 or 400 acres are necessary, because the quality of the soil is not uniformly good. One man might have a good farm of 150 acres, and a few miles away areas of 300 or 400 acres might be necessary to provide a living. That variation in the quality of the land applies to a great extent in this State. The part relating to free homestead farms is preserved, but provision is made to enable a selector under conditional purchase to obtain a homestead farm as portion of and subject to the conditions of his lease, but free insofar as the value of the land is concerned, the price of the area as a whole being adjusted accordingly. The 160 acres will be free, but there will be no need to have two certificates of title. It will obviate the necessity for two documents—a lease for 25 to 30 years and a homestead farm for seven years—issuing in respect to one location and will not only save the public fees but will facilitate future conveyancing.

Mr. Ferguson: Do you propose to increase the area of a homestead farm of poor land?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: A free homestead area to-day comprises 160 acres. In the case of this poorer country provision will be made for an equivalent of the 160 acres of cultivable land as a free homestead area, embracing grazing or non-cultivable land. It is quite right to do that. In the case of a homestead farm, in seven years the settler, provided he complies with the conditions, can get a certificate of title, but he will now not get a title for the homestead farm until the full 25 years have expired. In the past we have given the equivalent to 160 acres of homestead area in the case of the poorer country I have referred to, particularly in the group settlement areas. We have had to provide larger areas there because of the quality of the country.

The Land Act was amended in 1931 to permit of that being done. The same thing applies to the Napier River settlement in the vicinity of Albany. We had to provide larger areas there, and the Act was amended for that purpose.

Mr. Ferguson: It did not apply in the wheat areas?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No. In the South-West, owing to the peculiarity of the country, we have had to provide a larger area for a homestead farm than the 160 acres formerly provided. Consequent upon the deletion of grazing leases as a separate part of the Land Act relating to conditional purchases, we have now amalgamated them with the agricultural section of the Act. Discretion is vested in the Governor to arrange fixed prices for such land, to be not less than 1s. an acre nor more than 15s. an acre in special cases. This consolidates many provisions which have been included in amendments from time to time. The Act has been amended to effect deductions in the price of land because of Wodgil poison or other difficulties, or conditions which have made the land less valuable. This provision consolidates all amendments that were previously made to give relief in such instances. The existing provision that the rent shall not, except in special cases, exceed 6d. per acre per annum is preserved. It has been a long-standing principle that the rent paid shall not exceed 6d. per acre per annum; also that during the first five years the rent shall not exceed the interest on the cost of surveys, and the value of the existing improvements. The term may be extended to one not exceeding 30 years, to enable the price to be paid in full during the currency of the lease. If the payments exceed 6d. per acre per annum, the term will be extended up to 30 years to provide that the amount shall have been settled in full when the land has been paid for as a C.P. lease. The improvement conditions are retained, but the selector is required to effect improvements to the value of one-tenth of the purchase money every year, instead of one-fifth every two years where the land is held under residential conditions. When the land is held under non-residential conditions, the improvements are doubled. That is a reasonable principle. Previously it was 50 per cent. more than if the land was held under residence conditions. We would do well to tighten up the improvement conditions on C.P. leases. When I was Minister for Lands before, and there was a great demand for land, I had great difficulty in restricting dummying. Rapid developments were going on in the country, and at such a time it is not easy to keep out the speculative element. People were coming before the Land Board undertaking to effect certain improvements and live on the land, but they transferred it immediately they got possession of it. The Minister was not aware of the transfer until some time had elapsed. The selectors had sold the land and later on an application was made for the transfer. In 90 per cent. of cases no improvements were effected by the original occupier. I came into contact with many bad cases. I remember one individual who took up some very poor sand plain country along the Midlands. At that time people were hungry for land and wheat was bringing good prices. This unfortunate man gave his house worth £500 or £600 in part payment of a block that was not worth 1s. an acre. He parted with his home and settled upon a sandplain. We should certainly tighten up the improvement conditions. To-day the department is not troubled with demands for transfers, because there is not the same interest in land settlement; but it will happen again when prices begin to move, and when it does the speculator will come along. The Government should discourage that form of land dealing to the utmost extent. I could quote many instances of the kind I refer to. A man came from the Eastern States looking for land and was put on to a proposition along the Wongan Hills line. The original applicant had not lived on the block and had made no improvements, and had paid no rent for five years. He transferred the block to a company in Perth, and this company sold it to the Eastern States settler for £4,000, valuing the improvements at £400. They swore to the improvements, which had not been effected. The purchaser paid £600 or £700 down. He himself has paid no land rent but has now applied for the rent of 6s. an acre to be reduced. He has been told that if he can have the rent reduced, the bank will advance him £2,000 to enable him to pay the money to the company. He has not paid one penny piece in rental, but has made the cool proposition that I should reduce the rental in order that he might raise this money to pay the people who claim to have effected improvements to the value of £400.

I have refused to accede to the request. There are many people like this in the country and we must tighten up the improvement conditions. The best thing I could do in the interests of this particular settler would be to forfeit the holding.

Mr. Patrick: The previous Minister turned down the application, too.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I discovered that if I reduced the rent this settler could raise £2,000 to give to the company. He was prepared to give them the £2,000 but wanted the rent reduced. I think I had better forfeit the country and let him apply again. I am really surprised that the company got through with that proposition. In addition to an expenditure on improvements being required in the first ten years, it is provided that during the first two years of the lease the selector must establish ample water supplies. It is a necessary improvement that within the first two years this must be done.

Mr. Mann: It is very necessary.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The first improvement on any holding is the establishment of an adequate water supply. That is the money best spent.

Mr. Mann: Very true.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Settlers should put down either a big dam or a well in the very first instance. After that they can carry stock, build their homestead, and everything they do will be done cheaper.

Mr. Mann: It would have been a great asset to many farmers if that scheme had been adopted in the first place.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It would have been a good thing if the Act had provided for that. Many people went in for wheatgrowing by tractor power, and did not attempt to establish a water supply. In the majority of such cases they met with disaster. Had they put down a water supply, they could have used horses for their cultivation, and their position would have been very much better than it is. If we had insisted upon the provision of ample water supplies, these people would have been carrying sheep and other stock, which would have been of great assistance to them. When I was Minister for Lands before, I did my best to insist that settlers should follow this practice and work on stock as a basis. This would have been very helpful to them in the handling of their properties. Although I did my best to persuade them, I cannot say that the scheme was universally adopted. I advocated that they should straight away put money into dams and suggested that they could then carry at least 200 sheep, but I could not get them to adopt my point of view. It was sound advice, and could have been followed with advantage. In our huge wheat belt many settlers cannot carry stock because of the lack of water. It would be quite right to insist that one of the first improvements should be that of establishing a water supply. Lands held under residential conditions require a certain amount of residence each year for the first five years. The department has no opportunity to inspect the land during that term to ascertain whether the owner or approved person is actually in residence. If within five years the Minister secures evidence that the residential conditions have not been complied with, he may impose additional conditions, and may double the value of the improvements required. That is very necessary. The staff of the department is not sufficient to inspect all these holdings. We must rely largely upon the Agricultural Bank inspector for this purpose, and he has to travel many hundreds of miles in a year. Land along existing railways may lie idle for a long time, but we have not much opportunity of determining to what extent the conditions are being complied with. As I have said, power is being taken to double the improvements necessary, and this constitutes an important tightening up of the provisions of the Act. The residential provisions have been made liberal for certain reasons. Under the Act those who can be regarded as qualified to comply with the residential conditions are the lessee, his wife or parent, or his child who must be over 16 years of age. The experience of the departmental officials goes to show that there have been instances of persons having no other means of providing for a relative than by taking up land and placing him in residence on it. For instance, a lessee may put his father on the block temporarily.

The Minister for Agriculture: He might put his mother-in-law on the block.

Mr. Patrick: That would be a rather dangerous practice.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That course has been pursued in order to comply with the conditions of the lease. In that respect, we propose to liberalise the law, and it is provided that the section shall be amended by including the words, "or other near relative approved by the Minister."

Of course, hon. members know that public servants, railway men and others have taken up blocks of land, and whenever I have noticed any such application, I have always approved of it. It will be realised that those men are not entitled on retirement to any pension, and the most provident of them have taken up land. I know some who were formerly gangers on the railways who are now quite successful farmers. They took up their land long ago, and when they retired, they were able to engage in farming operations. As they could not comply with the residential conditions while they were in the railway service, they had to make arrangements for someone to remain on the blocks in the meantime. Many men who have to retire from the service are comparatively young, and I have always encouraged such persons to take up land, when they show a desire to do so, and make application accordingly. It will be advisable to extend the conditions to enable some relative other than those specified in the Act at present to remain on blocks to comply with the requirements of the Act, so long as the Minister approves of the person in question. In respect of land held under grazing lease, which mainly concerns land that is non-cultivable, the Act provides that the lessee must comply with the residential conditions by remaining on his lease for six months during the first year and for nine months during each of the next four years. The Bill provides an alteration and stipulates that the lessee must remain on his block for at least nine months each year for the first five years. That amendment has been found necessary because the Land Act has been unduly liberal in that direction. Its provisions are also liberal in respect to the price paid for the lease and the value placed upon the grazing lease. Much of the country held under that type of lease consists of sand plain and light land. When Sir Henry Lefroy was Premier and Minister for Lands, he introduced legislation to amend the Land Act, to enable that class of land to be taken up at 1s. per acre in 5,000-acre blocks, provided that the survey fees were paid in advance. If the survey fees were not paid in advance, the land could be sold at a minimum of 4s. 6d. per acre. In the succeeding year, hundreds of thousands of acres of that class of land were taken up, no interest was paid by the lessees during the first five years, and not 5 per cent. of the total area was ever utilised. I want to provide against that practice being continued. If people take up grazing leases they will have to reside on them for at least nine months annually during the first five years. In the past they have taken up those areas and held them for five years, during which no one else was permitted to make use of the land. So the Bill will make the conditions more severe regarding grazing leases than in the past. I can quote numerous instances of people taking up grazing leases, holding them for five years, doing nothing with them at all, and when the time arrived for rent to be paid, abandoning their holdings altogether.

Mr. Ferguson: Do you intend to retain the minimum price of 1s. per acre for the grazing country?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, provided that the survey fees are paid in advance. It will be realised that on the verge of the wheat belt and the pastoral areas, there are large tracts of country which, in my opinion, ought to be made use of as grazing farms. I would instance the country beyond the State farm at Dampawah, and the land east of the Wongan Hills line. I do not think a railway will ever be constructed through that part of the State. It is mixed country, suitable for mixed farming in blocks of from 5,000 to 10,000 acres. Settlers taking up such blocks could grow some wheat and would probably start with 1,000 sheep as the basis for their operations. In some parts a settler would require 10,000 acres, and he would be able to grow 100 acres of wheat or thereabouts, and he could also go in for pigs, poultry, sheep and so on. The areas I refer to extend beyond the known agricultural belt where the rainfall has been tried out over a period of years. That land could be utilised for mixed farming purposes quite satisfactorily. In no other way can it be properly utilised, for it is neither pastoral nor agricultural land. If it were taken up and worked as mixed farming propositions with sheep as the basis of operations, we would not risk pushing the farmers out to the borders of the pastoral country, with the possibility of failure. They could grow wheat for the first year or two, and then they would have their sheep or stock to carry on with. They would be in a far better position than many of the farmers in other parts, who depend on wheat alone and, in times of drought, suffer seriously. They would be better off, too, because there is a fair amount of top feed in that country on which the sheep would

thrive. The York gum country could be utilised with advantage. I think the Dampawah State Farm comprises about 20,000 acres, and the whole of the farming operations have been carried on where the York gum portions were cleared. My experience goes to show that there is no better way of operating successfully. At any rate, I shall not permit people to take up large holdings in that part of the State for speculative purposes. Those who take them up, will have to live on their blocks for nine months annually for the first five years.

Mr. Ferguson: You will require to make the improvement conditions fairly liberal.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I would regard fencing and the provision of water supplies as adequate improvements. In fact, that work alone would represent extensive improvements. Throughout the area I have in mind, water can be procured, without difficulty, by sinking. Formerly the land was held by pastoralists and no difficulty was experienced on the stations in securing satisfactory water supplies. That is not the policy of the present Government, because we have not the money available for the purpose, but we have made the necessary provision in the Bill to compel settlers to do so. When land is forfeited, the existing legislation provides that the value of the improvements may be paid to the former lessee. Hon. members know that legally, when land is forfeited, the improvements revert to the Crown, but, by Ministerial recommendation, the Governor may approve of the value of the improvements being paid to the lessee. That has been done in the past. It will be agreed that the Crown has no right to profit as the result of improvements made by someone else, provided there are no objections to that course being adopted. There have been instances when some person, other than the lessee, has effected improvements, and in those instances the lessee was not entitled to any payment on account of such improvements. I have already pointed out that when land settlement was progressing at a rapid rate, much speculation was indulged in, and many people who took up blocks, sold them immediately afterwards. In such instances, the individual to whom the original buyer sold the land, carried out certain improvements, and when the land was ultimately forfeited, generally speaking, the payment for those improvements went to the lessee who had not carried out the work and the person who effected the improvements was not entitled to any benefit. That was quite wrong. Of course, the original lessee did not do anything particularly wrong, and, in fact, that sort of thing was quite a common practice. Ministers, from time to time, have endeavoured to rectify that anomaly, but nevertheless the practice continued to be indulged in. On occasions when the transfer was submitted to the department, the second buyer had already been in occupation of the block for a year or more, and had carried out the improvements. The amendment in the Bill provides that payment for the improvements shall be, in such instances, to the person entitled to the money and, with that object in view, it is proposed to insert the words "or other person deemed to be entitled thereto." It will be agreed that that is a necessary provision. With regard to reserves, power is sought to lease reserves, not immediately required, for a term up to 10 years, instead of, as at present, from year to year, and provision is made that when it is proposed to lease such reserves for more than one year, applications shall be invited in the "Government Gazette." By that means people who may desire to secure such leases, will be acquainted with the position. It is essential in many instances that in respect to a reserve not immediately required, or for which there is no prospect of its being so required for some considerable time, the person to whom it is granted should have adequate tenure. Obviously no one would desire to take over such a reserve for one year only, because it takes some time to settle in occupation. Under such conditions, the reserves would be on the hands of the department without anything being done with them. No encouragement would be given to people to take them up, but, if provision is made for a lease extending over 10 years or whatever period may be necessary, that should get over the difficulty. Under the existing law any person desiring to appeal against an act of a Minister, such as his refusal to grant a lease, may do so at any time within six months. That provision has proved embarrassing to the department. The Government officers do not know whether or not the person concerned intends to appeal, and all they know is that the person's application has been refused and that at any time within six months he is entitled to lodge an appeal. The result is that any land so affected is held

up for six months during which nothing can be done with it. That is unsatisfactory and does not make for good administration. It is proposed to reduce the period within which an appeal may be made to one month or such further time as the Minister, owing to special circumstances, may permit. In the Kimberleys there are special circumstances, but in the South-West there are no reasons for allowing six months in which to make an appeal.

Mr. Patrick: To whom is the appeal made?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: To the Minister. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the lessee does not appeal, but in the meantime nothing can be done with the land and so we propose to reduce the period from six months to one month. There will be exceptions in regard to districts where there are special circumstances existing, and it will be possible for the Minister to extend the time in places such as the Gascoyne, the Kimberleys or in any of those localities where the mails are infrequent. That can be left to the Minister's discretion. Power is sought for the Minister to be able to enter into agreements with the approval of the Governor, with any body of persons incorporated, to enable land to be set apart for the training and settlement of youths. The previous Minister for Lands favoured the giving of special consideration to the students at Muresk. I do not consider that the Muresk students are any better fitted for the land than, say, the hundreds of boys that receive their agricultural education at the State agricultural farms. Many of these youths have nothing further to do with farming after they have passed through the college or the State farms. Consequently I objected to special consideration being shown to the youths from Muresk. There are bodies occasionally who desire to establish settlements for absorbing the youths of the city. That is what I should like to encourage. If any responsible body came to me and asked that I should set apart an area for a special settlement for lads, I should not hesitate to recommend strongly to Cabinet the granting of such an area. I consider it would be my duty to do so. It would be the means of giving youths an opportunity to lead healthy lives and also it would give them some hope for the future. So provision is made that the Minister, with the approval of the Governor, may make agreements with bodies to set aside land for the settlement of youths. The provision will not apply to any particular body; it will apply to all whose desire it is to find occupations for youths on the land. Regarding pastoral leases, the provisions as amended by the Land Acts Amendment Act of 1931 and 1932 are embodied unaltered except in respect to the period in which application may be made to surrender existing leases expiring in 1948 and the obtaining of new leases for a tenure to 1982. This period was fixed at 12 months from the 30th December, 1932, and would therefore expire on the 29th December, 1933. The Bill now before the House provides for 12 months from the date of the proclamation of the Act. This will mean probably 12 months extension of the period allowed under the Act of 1932. Part XI. of the existing law relating to timber leases is deleted as the provisions of that part have been superseded by the Forests Act. The Agricultural Lands Purchase Act, as already stated, is amalgamated in this measure. This will result in the considerable reduction of existing sections. The main alteration in this part of the Act is that the lease is extended from 30 to 40 years, and during the first five years a selector is required to pay interest only on the cost of the land which, as members know, includes the improvements, survey, etc. To-day the person who takes up land has to pay principal and interest from the time of occupation. During the first five years the selector will be required to pay interest and not principal. This is a concession to the holders of re-purchased estates. Any lessee of land that formed part of a re-purchased estate, whose lease has not been in existence for five years, will have the privilege of coming under this provision, and any payment which he has already made will be adjusted accordingly. We have experienced great difficulty in connection with re-purchased estates and the new provision will undoubtedly relieve the position and prove of great benefit to the lessees. Although the land comprising these estates was purchased at a price which compares more than favourably with similar land in the Eastern States, we have had to reduce valuations. I had a return prepared the other day showing the amount due on re-purchased estates. The position is very unsatisfactory as a great number of settlers are not making any payments at all. I am surprised, because the land, in many instances, was very cheap. Quite a number of settlers have enjoyed good years, but the

result to date has been anything but satisfactory. Provision is also made in the Bill that cropping leases may be granted over land in a re-purchased estate for a term not exceeding three years. It often happens that we have portion of an estate thrown back on our hands and the improvements deteriorate, whereas there are persons who would be anxious to look after the place for the Crown had they the privilege of cropping the land. The improvements would be maintained and we would not be hampered in disposing of the land at any time, subject, of course, to the growing crop. At present we have no power to give a lease and so we hope that the House will grant the department the right to lease those areas. The part of the Act dealing with compulsory acquisition of land for soldiers is deleted. This was never necessary. Not one acre in this country has been acquired compulsorily for soldier settlement. There is power under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act to purchase holdings for individual soldiers. This power has been largely availed of, but apart from it the Closer Settlement Act gives all the powers of compulsory acquisition that are necessary, and the land so purchased or acquired may be disposed of to soldiers or otherwise as thought fit. Although I was the sponsor of the Closer Settlement Act, I am not altogether too pleased with it. I agreed to the Upper House amendments, because I wanted the experiment to be carried out. There are many minor amendments which I will explain in Committee. These amendments are brought about solely by the consolidation of the existing laws. I hope the Bill will receive the favourable consideration of members, and that members will not embarrass me by moving many amendments. Our land laws are exceptionally liberal, our land conditions are easy and values are low. It must not be forgotten that the Crown has the right to expect some return from the sale of its land. Demands are being now made to bring about reductions, and every possible pretext is used. Of course the circumstances are favourable, but any re-valuation must be on some definite principle, otherwise there will be confusion in the administration. I commend the measure to the House and hope that it will be generously received. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Ferguson, debate adjourned.

BILL—YORK CEMETERIES.

Returned from the Council without amendment.

BILL—MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. A. McCallum—South Fremantle) [5.58]: With regard to this measure, there is not much more to be added to what I have already said on the Bill I introduced earlier in the afternoon. The amendments proposed in this measure are similar in effect to those in the amending Road Districts Act Bill. I propose to tell the House what the position is regarding voting in the municipalities of the various States. In Western Australia a ratepayer can exercise up to four votes for the mayoralty. If the rate is struck on the rateable value of the land, the number of votes varies from one to four for the mayoralty and up to two votes for each councillor in each ward. There is one municipality in Western Australia with eight wards and that will entitle a ratepayer there to 16 votes; there are three with four wards and ten with three wards, a total of 14 municipal councils throughout the State. Hon. members will see how the votes total up.

Mr. Sampson: If the Bill passes, it will be difficult to determine which ward should receive the vote.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The Bill provides that the ratepayer shall have his choice of ward, but that if he fails to make a choice the town clerk shall make it for him. In polls relating to loans the voting will be similar to that for mayoralty—up to four votes. In Queensland, for mayoralty and loan there is only one vote in the whole municipality, irrespective of wards or value of property; and the same position obtains in New South Wales. In Victoria the votes are according to property qualification in each municipality. In South Australia the ratepayer has only one vote for each ward in which he owns or occupies property, but as regards loans the votes vary in number up to six. Tasmania here, as in the other instance, heads the list: the votes vary from

one to six, and in subdivided municipalities a ratepayer has up to six votes in each ward. Tasmania is, therefore, consistent in allowing the utmost limit in plural voting. As this Bill affects the municipalities of the metropolitan area more than those in the rest of the State, I wish to make the position perfectly clear, enabling the metropolitan municipalities to see clearly what is the Government's policy. The proposal to hand over water supply and sewerage in the metropolitan area to a board composed of representatives of the municipalities cannot possibly be agreed to by the Government while plural voting exists. We know that an independent board could get money for water and sewerage works that at the moment the State Government could not possibly get; and the same thing applies to tramways and electricity supply. A separate board operating these utilities would be outside the purview of the Loan Council, and therefore would not be bound by the restrictions now imposed upon the State Government. It is realised that such a board would be able to obtain money, and thus to put in hand works which at present cannot be undertaken by the Government owing to shortage of funds. However, no Government representative of the people in this State could assent to the transfer of such activities, affecting the life of every person in the metropolitan area, from a House for which every adult in the State has a vote, to a board elected on the basis I have just outlined, a basis that includes plural voting. Such an idea is beyond the comprehension of us as democrats, and certainly it represents a policy for which the Government cannot possibly stand.

Mr. Sampson: The Bill merely proposes to give a vote to those who are concerned, not to give a vote to every resident of a municipality.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: All the Bill does is to abolish plural voting. It merely proposes one ratepayer, one vote. Certainly it does not go to the extent which a certain city newspaper alleged I stated to a deputation that waited upon me. That assertion represented purely a figment of the newspaper's imagination. I never said anything of the sort, and the Government never intended anything of the kind. The Bill proposes to abolish plural voting and to establish the principle of one ratepayer, one vote. Until that position obtains, the Government cannot possibly entertain the idea of handing over the activities in question to such a board as suggested. All the arguments I put up in connection with the other Bill apply equally to this measure, and I do not propose to detain the House by repeating them. Accordingly I content myself with moving—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Doney, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 6.6 p.m.

Legislative Council,

Tuesday, 22nd August, 1933.

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

PAPERS—LAND SETTLEMENT WEST OF CRANBROOK.

As to Tabling of Papers.

HON. A. THOMSON (South-East) [4.35]: I move—

That all papers covering Surveyor Hicks' report on the voluntary relinquishment of land west of Cranbrook, for the purposes of closer settlement, be laid on the Table of the House.

Frequently during debates in this House and in the Legislative Assembly, the argument is advanced that we should make use of land already alienated adjacent to existing railways. The settlers in the district referred to in the motion took up their holdings 30 years ago when it was the policy of