

Hon. SIR CHARLES LATHAM: Wait until the Chief Secretary is 74 years of age! I am not giving away any secrets in that respect. Sometimes I think it would be a good idea if males who are called up for jury service were mentally tested by a psychologist in order to determine whether they are fit to serve.

Hon. F. R. H. Lavery: Who would test the psychologist?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I do not know what the determination is at present. I do not know whether a police officer looks at a man in order to decide whether he is intelligent or otherwise.

Hon. E. M. Heenan: It is a good job we are exempt.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I am past the age, but the hon. member is not. However, a member of Parliament is exempt under the Act. Men subject to the jury list have to reside within a distance of 35 miles from where the court sits, and there is a limited number who could be placed on the list; and I presume the same conditions would apply if we extended the privilege to women. In order to satisfy Mrs. Hutchison, who is a very keen advocate of this class of legislation and who wants to see her sex take its place alongside men—I hope in all walks of life—I think it would be a good plan to get the opinion of all people concerned, such as the legal fraternity and others. We could take a cross-section of this House which might justify us in expressing the views of people who might be unfortunate enough to have to appear before a court in which women jurors would decide either their freedom or conviction.

The Chief Secretary: Do you think a select committee could give a unanimous report?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It all depends; I have known quite a number which have done so. I know of one which included the hon. member and which gave a unanimous report.

The Chief Secretary: That would be strange.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. F. R. H. Lavery: Perhaps it would be wise if he were included.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: A select committee might be one means of altering my views and if that is so, I shall give it the credit and not Mrs. Hutchison, who has very determinedly opposed my views. I shall support the motion and hope the House will agree to it. It should not take such a committee long to make a recommendation to this House.

On motion by Hon. R. F. Hutchison, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 7.51 p.m.

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 19th September, 1956.

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

QUESTIONS.

PROFITEERING AND UNFAIR TRADING LEGISLATION.

Tabling of Deputation's Case.

Mr. JOHNSON asked the Premier:

(1) Will he lay on the Table of the House a copy of the prepared written case submitted by the deputation of employing interests on Monday?

(2) Will he likewise table a list of the parties to the deputation, showing the names of the organisations represented?

The PREMIER replied:

Yes.

DAIRYING INDUSTRY.

(a) *Soldier Settlers Evicted, Reasons.*

Mr. BOVELL asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) What are the separate reasons for 11 war service land settler dairy farmers being put off their properties as referred to in his reply to my question of the 7th August, 1956?

(2) In which district are the properties concerned located?

The MINISTER replied:

An answer to these questions is not in the general interest. In explanation, I would like to say that, in my view, it would not be in the interests of the settlers concerned to make this information public. The districts which the member for Vasse wants identified are widely scattered and only an occasional settler in each district has been affected. Some of the offences committed by the settlers, which led to their being dispossessed of their farms, included the offence of stealing cattle, another of stealing wire and a third one was a criminal offence. These people have now left the farms and are endeavouring to rehabilitate themselves elsewhere.

Mr. Bovell: I do not want their names.

The MINISTER: The hon. member asked for the districts concerned and immediately the names of these are announced, the people living in them will be able to identify the settlers who have been dispossessed of their properties. It is not the intention of the Government to chase a man to his grave after he has paid the penalty for any offence that he has committed, especially when he seeks to rehabilitate himself. However, if the hon. member would like to have a look at the list of the districts and properties affected, I will make it available to him privately.

(b) *Amplification of Reply.*

Mr. BOVELL (without notice) asked the Minister for Lands:

Further to his reply to my question in connection with the eviction of war service settlers from dairy farms, will he give an unqualified assurance that dairy farmer war service land settlers will not be put off their properties for reasons other than those enumerated by him this afternoon? In explanation, I might say that some of the settlers are concerned with the attitude adopted by the field supervisors and they do not like the tactics they adopt.

The MINISTER replied:

I cannot give such an assurance for there are many reasons other than the two or three I mentioned this afternoon whereby, under the agreement between the Commonwealth and the State Governments, it is necessary to dispense with certain settlers. A settler may not be interested

in the property allotted to him or he may be one who, for various reasons, will never make full use of the farm allotted to him. So it is impossible for me, at this stage, to make the promise that the hon. member desires.

If any of the settlers have complaints to make about the supervision and administration generally, there is the proper place for the lodging of such complaints which, up to now, have always been attended to.

POTATOES.

(a) *Exports to Eastern States.*

Mr. HEARMAN asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) What quantity of Western Australian potatoes is estimated to have gone to the Eastern States without the approval of the Potato Marketing Board since the 1st June, 1956 to the 15th September, 1956?

(2) What quantity of potatoes is estimated to have gone to the Eastern States for the week ended the 8th September, 1956, and the week ended the 15th September, 1956?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Approximately 1,500 tons.

(2) Less than 100 tons which are alleged to have been sold before the amendment to the Act came into force.

(b) *Prosecutions Pending and Responsibility for Costs, etc.*

Mr. HEARMAN asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) What prosecutions are pending since the coming into operation of the 1956 amendment of the Potato Marketing Act?

(2) In the event of the Potato Marketing Board seizing potatoes in transit, losing the subsequent court action and being proceeded against for damages, will such costs and damages ultimately be paid by the Government or by potato growers who have remained loyal to the Potato Marketing Board?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Nil. However, two cases are in the course of being thoroughly investigated.

(2) A decision will be made if the eventuality arises.

(c) *Local Stocks and Consumption.*

Mr. HEARMAN asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) What are the estimated stocks of potatoes at present in Western Australia?

(2) What is the normal weekly consumption in Western Australia?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Impossible to estimate.

(2) Approximately 750 tons.

(d) Prices Received by Grower and Retailer.

Mr. HEARMAN asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) What was the price of potatoes in Adelaide during the first week in September, 1956, received by the grower?

(2) What was the retail price of potatoes in Adelaide under price control during the first week of September, 1956?

The MINISTER replied:

No information available, but it is being sought.

ROADS.*Surfacing of Red Hill-Toodyay Section.*

Hon. L. THORN asked the Minister for Works:

When is it proposed to complete the surfacing of the Red Hill-rd. to Toodyay?

The MINISTER replied:

A length of some miles of the unconstructed portion of this road requires deviation. Further construction and surfacing has not been planned, and it cannot be said now when this will be done. Furthermore, Toodyay is already served with a first-class road.

IRON ORE DEPOSITS.*Extent of B.H.P. Rights.*

Mr. JAMIESON asked the Minister for Mines:

Has Broken Hill Pty. Ltd. any rights to iron ore deposits in this State other than with respect to deposits at Koolan Island, Cockatoo Island and Koolyanobbing?

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

This company has no rights over iron deposits in Western Australia other than those which cover deposits at Koolan and Cockatoo Islands.

PETROL.*Uniform Price in Other States.*

Mr. EVANS asked the Premier:

Is any legislation in force, or practice adopted, in any of the other States of Australia, whereby petrol is sold at a uniform price in a particular State or States?

The PREMIER replied:

I am not aware of any such legislation or practice in any other State.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLIES.*Annual Percentage Increase.*

Hon. D. BRAND asked the Minister for Works:

What has been the annual percentage increase in demand for electric current over the last six years—

(a) in the metropolitan area;

(b) under the South-West scheme?

The MINISTER replied:

The details are as follows:—

Winter	Percentage Increase in Maximum Demand (over half an hour)	
	Metro- politan	South- West
1951	35.9	3.5
1952	11.8	16.8
1953	11.9	29.8
1954	9.4	43.8
1955	17.2	5.8
1956	16.4	6.7

EMU-PROOF FENCE.*Use of Pine Posts.*

Mr. ACKLAND asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Do the specifications for the erection of the proposed emu-proof fence for which tenders are called specify that pine posts are to be used?

(2) If the answer is "Yes," what is the anticipated life of such posts?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Specifications include the use of posts of native Cypress pine (*callitris glauca*), which is not damaged by termites.

(2) Cypress pine posts have been in the rabbit-proof fence in this district for over 50 years, and for 30 years in the area through which the new fence will pass.

MIDLAND JUNCTION ABATTOIR.*Report on Humane Killer.*

Mr. WILD (without notice) asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Has he received the report from the committee that inquired into a most humane method for killing at the abattoir?

(2) If he has, will he lay it on the Table of the House?

The MINISTER replied:

Yes.

PENSIONS, 1871 GROUP.*Report of Commissioner.*

Mr. ROSS HUTCHINSON (without notice) asked the Premier:

Will he table the report of the commissioner concerning the inquiry into submissions by the 1871 pensions group?

The PREMIER replied:

I shall have another look at the report. I have not done so for some weeks. I shall advise the hon. member in due course.

EDUCATION.*Wiring of Roleystone School.*

Mr. WILD (without notice) asked the Premier:

In view of the fact that the Education Department cannot find an amount of £20 to pay for the installation of two electric

light poles to connect the Roleystone school with electricity, would he see if the necessary amount can be found from Treasury funds to meet this requirement?

The Minister for Works: The Education Department does not put up electric light poles for schools.

The PREMIER replied:

I am not sure that the hon. member has stated the proposition correctly. However, if he cares to write to me about the matter, I shall have it looked into.

BILL—HEALTH ACT AMENDMENT.

Introduced by the Minister for Health and read a first time.

BILL—MUNICIPALITY OF FREMANTLE ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 29th August.

THE PREMIER (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [4.43]: The Government has no objection to this Bill.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

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

BILL—CHILD WELFARE ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

MR. ACKLAND (Moore) [4.46] in moving the second reading said: This Bill to amend the Child Welfare Act sets out to accomplish two main objectives. In the first instance it provides for parents or guardians to be responsible for the action of their children in regard to any fine, damages or costs, if the child concerned is proved to be guilty under the provisions of that Act. In the second instance it empowers the court to make parents and guardians give security for the good behaviour of their children.

It is proposed that it shall be obligatory for the court to make parents and guardians responsible for the acts of their children up to the age of 14 years, or whatever age may be proclaimed under the Education Act as the compulsory attendance age for school. The court will have the discretion, if it thinks fit, to make the parents and guardians responsible for the acts of their children up to the age proclaimed under the Child Welfare Act. It will be noticed that no definite age is set out in the Bill, but that age will conform to what is prescribed by the Education Act, which, of course, stipulates up to 14 years of age at present. Many of

us are hopeful that it will not be very long before compulsory attendance at school will be increased up to the age of 15 years.

This amending Bill has not been introduced lightly. The realisation of the extent to which vandalism by children occurred not only in Western Australia but also in many other parts of the world made me endeavour to find out what was being done to deal with the matter in other countries. I found that in the United Kingdom there is an Act along the lines of this amending Bill. Section 55 of the Children and Young Persons Act, 1933, provides that—

Where a child or young person is charged with any offence for the commission of which a fine, damages, or costs may be imposed, if the court is of opinion that the case would be best met by the imposition of a fine, damages, or costs, whether with or without any other punishment, the court may in any case, and should if the offender is a child, order that the fine, damages, or costs awarded be paid by the parent or guardian of the child or young person instead of by the child or young person, unless the court is satisfied that the parent or guardian cannot be found or that he has not conducted to the commission of the offence by neglecting to exercise due care of the child or young person.

The Bill provides that if a child under the age of 14 has been found guilty of an offence it is the duty of the court to make the parents responsible for the child's actions. Beyond that age a child may be at work and able to meet his own expenses; but if for any reason the court thinks it wise to do so, it may compel the parents in such cases also to meet the costs involved. Under the Child Welfare Act at present the court cannot compel parents to meet the damage caused by a child unless they have been a party to the offence committed by the child or unless they have incited the child to commit the offence. The Bill provides that parents must exercise due control over children to prevent them from committing an offence at all.

I have discussed this proposal with various people who come in close contact with children. I have discussed it with the magistrate who presides at the Children's Court, with officials of the Child Welfare Department, with ministers of religion who are interested in social welfare, and with social workers generally, and they are unanimous about one thing. In the majority of cases they have a great deal of sympathy for a child who has committed an offence. It was remarkable to discover that in every instance sympathy was expressed for the children involved and that parents were blamed for the offences in very many instances.

These people spoke about the selfishness of the parents who were far more interested in their own pleasure and displayed a lack of concern as to where their children went and what they did. The folk with whom I discussed the matter are far more qualified to speak with authority about it than I am, and they were of the opinion that parents should be made to recognise their responsibility towards their children.

All members will have seen many articles that have appeared in the daily Press from time to time. I have one here dated the 13th of August. It is a cutting from "The West Australian" and it is headed "Roaming Children Admit Shop Thefts". The article reads as follows:—

The parents of three children, aged 12, 10 and 8 were told by Mr. E. B. Arney, Special Magistrate, in the Children's Court yesterday that children should not be allowed to roam as they please.

The children were charged with stealing and receiving goods from a city store.

"No children should be allowed to roam as they please," Mr. Arney said. "Leaving them in town to fill in their time is not looking after them."

In the same paper is an item headed "Boy on Holiday Job Steals £5". The article reads—

A 14 year old boy who stole £5 while he had a holiday job was directed yesterday by Mr. E. B. Arney, Special Magistrate in the Perth Children's Court, to write to his father and tell him what he had done . . .

The court was told that the boy took the money from his workmates' handbags. He spent it on taxis, cool drinks and sweets.

I have here also the report of a rather shocking case which was published in the "Daily News" of the 2nd July. This item reads—

During the past 12 months, the mother of a 15-year old girl had often tucked her daughter into bed with the girl's 21-year-old boy-friend. Counsel said this in the Children's Court.

On many occasions the girl's mother tucked her daughter and Tyler together on a couch in front of a fire for the night.

She referred to Tyler as her son and called the lounge room of the home their love nook.

That young man was guilty of a very grave offence and I consider that the responsibility for what must have taken place with this young girl of 15 was far more the responsibility of the mother than of anybody else.

I have here another article which appeared in the "Daily News" of the 2nd February containing the report of an interview with the secretary of the Perth Y.M.C.A. who said—

I don't think there is any doubt about it. There is less sense of responsibility in young people. The prosperity of the postwar years has made life so rosy that they want pleasure without responsibility.

Young people are only what adults make them and they would not be human if they were not influenced by the selfishness and violence encouraged by movies, radio and pulp fiction.

Then there is the case of five boys who were sent to an institution because of having taken cars. The boys were all young. The report about the case is quite a long one and it is not necessary for me to read it.

Another article appeared in the "Week-end Mail" of the 26th May. It carries the heading "Do you Know What Your Child is Doing Tonight?" and it begins—

Many parents, it seems, have no idea where or how their children spend their leisure hours. What is more, they couldn't care less.

The article goes on to give a list of convictions against children in America, New Zealand and Sydney, and it finishes up with what has happened recently in Western Australia. It proceeds—

This week, for instance, four boys—three aged 17 and one 16—faced more than 100 charges after an orgy of burglary and car and motorcycle stealing.

The same day another five youths admitted unlawfully assuming control of a car and joyriding during a week-end.

Two years ago, of 315 arrests for having stolen cars, 74 of them were juveniles.

So far this year, of 133 cases of car stealing recorded, 111 of them had involved juveniles.

In each of these cases there has been a feeling of sympathy towards the children on the part of those people before whom they have appeared in court or who have been in close contact with them through the Child Welfare Department and social service organisations.

We have heard a lot of what happens in America and I was able to get hold of some figures with reference to an Act which was passed in the State of Michigan in 1953. This measure is entitled the Parental Responsibility Act and it holds the parents responsible for their children's vandalism. Since then, although in many other parts of America vandalism has increased to an

alarming extent, in Michigan the number of convictions of young people has fallen considerably. Prior to the passing of this law, the old legislation was exactly the same as it is in Western Australia. The parents were shielded from any costs when their children committed acts of vandalism. This law in Michigan holds the parents responsible for up to 300 dollars or £A120 in regard to damages which may have been caused by their children.

The results have been astonishing. In one Detroit juvenile court, cases of malicious destruction of property dropped from 244 in 1953 to 192 in the following year, and the number has fallen considerably since then. In another similar court—vandalism has dropped by more than 50 per cent. from 69 cases to 30. These figures appeared in the report of the Chief Commissioner of Police, Police Chief Daniel O'Leary. The Act was passed in Michigan only after the probate judges had been advocating it for more than five years. Those who came in close contact with the children were alarmed at what was going on, and it was only after the legislature in Michigan also became alarmed that the legislation was passed.

One section of the report goes on to state that the experience in Michigan was that there was a disturbing change from natural, rather harmless, mischief on the part of youth to such offences as setting fire to schools, slashing seats in buses, sawing park benches in half, desecrating churches and tombstones and playing havoc generally. There were many other items listed in the report. I have with me an article which appeared in the April issue of "The Reader's Digest," 1956, and it deals with exactly the same set of circumstances in the State of Michigan. The heading of the article is "Michigan Puts it Up to the Parents." It then goes on to state—

A simple, logical law holds them responsible for their children's vandalism—and it works.

The senator who introduced this Bill into the Michigan legislature, Senator Harold M.-Ryan, had this to say—

I was prompted by the idea that if vandalism costs the parents money, they will take a keener interest in where their children are and what they are doing.

That is almost the same as appeared in the heading which I quoted from the "Weekend Mail." One of the parents who was convicted had this to say—

It's our failure in bringing up our kids—and believe me, we're correcting it. If a man's dog wrecks somebody's property the man is responsible; why shouldn't he be much more responsible for a child whom he's supposed to teach the difference between right and wrong?

The article goes on to state—

One 14-year old boy stole an automobile last January, took it on a 175-mile joyride and smashed it against a pole. Under the Act the boy's parents were handed the bill.

This is what the mother of the boy had to say—

My boy has learned his lesson. He has hurt us by making me and his father spend our savings to pay the bill. Before, it was just a prank to him. Now he realises that he destroyed something of value, and he is going to work and pay us back.

I do not think it necessary for me to quote any more instances. But in the two years since the Parental Responsibility Act became effective, officials in Michigan have noted a marked improvement in juvenile delinquency and parents who formerly gave trouble are now far more co-operative with their children. The article had this to say—

And there are by-products. Detroit Police Commissioner, Edward Piggins, calls the law a "deterrent which has saved thousands of dollars in damage to public and private buildings."

We in Western Australia are going through a phase and in the last few years there has been a good deal of juvenile delinquency, as the cases I quoted illustrate. It is well known to many of us that a great many parents do all that is in their power and direct their children by example and teaching, how to become good citizens. But there are many who do not care at all. To that type, children are a nuisance; they interfere with their pleasure and parents do not know where the children are half the time. In the interests of good citizenship, and in the interests of the happiness of our young people, it would be wise if this House accepted this amendment to the Child Welfare Act.

The parent who has genuinely tried to bring his child up in the way it should be brought up, and has failed, has nothing to fear under this amendment because there is a provision in the Bill which states that in such an instance the parent is not held responsible. Whereas under the present Act a parent had to be a contributing factor, he had to incite the offence and had to take part in it or do something along those lines before the law could touch him, under this Bill he will be asked to prove that he has done all that was humanly possible, otherwise he is held responsible for the acts of vandalism committed by his children. I trust that the House will see the wisdom of agreeing to the amendment in the interests of the children and the parents themselves. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by the Minister for Child Welfare, debate adjourned.

BILL—ELECTORAL ACT AMENDMENT (No. 2).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 29th August.

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE (Hon. E. Nulsen—Eyre) [5.10]: I am somewhat surprised at the member for Cottesloe bringing down a Bill of this description. As he was a school teacher, one would certainly think that he would have made more investigations before introducing a measure that could not possibly be supported even by his own side of the House, let alone by those on this side. Teachers might not be different, physically, from the average person, but they should be different psychologically because, by virtue of their training, they have to do a good deal of preparation for their classes and one would have thought that a man with such training—as the hon. member has had—would have made some preparations and investigation in this regard.

The Bill before us appears to be a crude attempt to restrict the Chief Electoral Officer and his officers in doing their work and carrying out the duties which they were appointed to perform. The hon. member, by this Bill, wants to restrict them for undertaking a canvass, making inquiries outside their own office, or the offices of other Government departments, improving the Legislative Council rolls, obtaining new enrolments and checking the rolls. As the provision in the Bill is only a short one I shall read it to members to let them know what is proposed. It reads—

39A. Notwithstanding the provisions of this Act or of any other Act, or of the regulation made under such Act, a person shall not be required by the Government at any time to work outside the offices of the Chief Electoral Officer or of any registrar or returning officer, or the Offices of any Government department (whether State or Federal), for the purpose of obtaining information to enable the Chief Electoral Officer or any of his officers to add to, alter or revise any roll or supplementary roll, whereon enrolment is not compulsory.

If this Bill is passed it will put the Chief Electoral Office right outside the panel. The Chief Electoral Officer will be there only for the purpose of registering names for enrolment on the Legislative Council rolls. He will not be allowed to make inquiries outside his own office or the offices of other Government departments. Of course, there are a number of people who are not aware of their rights to enrolment and it is the duty of electoral officials, whenever possible, to enlighten people and give them information and help them to become enrolled.

Hon. A. F. Watts: Why only people in the Metropolitan Province?

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: They were in districts which contained newly-settled housing areas. But I favour electoral officers enrolling people throughout the State for both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. That is why they are there; whether voting is compulsory or not. Half of these people do not know their rights of enrolment. If we are going to have government of the people for the people by the people, then we must see that those who are entitled to vote are enrolled. The officers at the Electoral Office are quite impartial, and have no political leanings at all, particularly as it applies to the work they do.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Have you any of them out in the field at the moment?

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Yes, they are always out in the field trying to complete both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council rolls. But, of course, they are not canvassing at the moment because it is not necessary; it will, however, be necessary at the next election. It is no use the member for Cottesloe smiling because I shall quote him instances that he may not like.

Mr. May: Do not hurt his feelings.

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Under this Bill the party with large sums of money at its disposal will have a definite advantage over those people who have not got such large sums. For instance, the Liberal Party would have a distinct advantage in that regard. If it came to a point, it would be nothing for members of the Liberal Party to hand out a few thousand pounds to ensure enrolments for the Legislative Council; indeed one-eighth of 1 per cent. of their profits would be all the money they would require to ensure that the rolls were complete.

Mr. Court: What is this business about our profits?

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: There is no question about that. The Labour organisations have not got that amount of money and if the Liberal Party were able to keep Labour organisations out, it would enable that party to do what it liked in relation to the Legislative Council rolls. If this Bill became law, the matter would be left to political parties and candidates. There would be no enrolment by the Electoral Office because its officers would not be allowed to go outside their offices in relation to non-compulsory enrolment. Parliament should not be asked to agree to such an undemocratic proposal.

The Premier: Hear, hear!

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: At the moment, the other place has a very poor representation as compared with this House. I think it has a voting power of something like 16 or 17 per cent. of this Chamber.

Mr. Court: Isn't that because people have not taken the trouble to get themselves on the roll?

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Now members opposite want to pass a Bill and leave the matter of enrolment to political parties and candidates. They do not wish to delegate that power to the Chief Electoral Officer who, as we all know, is most impartial; he does not discriminate in any way.

Mr. Court: The people themselves have a responsibility to get on to the roll if they wish.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: That is another matter. It is something like the question of juries.

Hon. A. F. Watts: Some people on the Legislative Council roll never vote.

The Premier: Especially if they have not paid taxation.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: None of the officers of the Electoral Department would be permitted to make any inquiries outside his office.

Mr. Bovell: Did the officers of the Electoral Department have ministerial direction in this matter?

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Of course, they did!

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: The Chief Electoral Officer uses his own discretion. As Minister, I agree that the officers of the Electoral Department should see that the rolls are complete.

Mr. Bovell: As Minister, did you direct them to go out and put these people on the rolls?

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: I did, and I am not ashamed of it. I make no apologies for doing so.

The Minister for Transport: What are you people afraid of in electors being placed on the roll?

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Why do you select certain parts for political advantages?

The Minister for Transport: They were new suburbs.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: If the Opposition had the opportunity, they would certainly have selected new suburbs, and I will prove that the Leader of the Opposition's party has set a precedent in this matter.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: If that is so, it is all the more reason why this Bill should be passed.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: That is a very poor excuse.

Hon. D. Brand: I have heard the Minister say that two wrongs do not make a right.

The Minister for Lands: What is wrong with the department doing this work?

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: It is perfectly all right if it is done fairly and if certain areas are not selected.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Of course, there is nothing wrong with it. If the Liberal Party had its way, it would take advantage of the vast amount of money that it possesses to get these people on to the Legislative Council rolls. As a matter of fact, that party has officers going to the Electoral Office every week to check the Legislative Council rolls.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: What is wrong with that?

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Nothing at all. But what is wrong with the Chief Electoral Officer attending to this matter? He is one of the best officers we ever had in that department.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Doing what you told him to do.

Hon. D. Brand: And you are paying him overtime to do it.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: That is a mere trifle. We spend more time and money debating questions that should never be brought up at all. The Bill seeks to provide that the matter of enrolment shall be left to the political parties and the candidates. The Country Party does not seem to have come into this directly because the measure was moved by a member of the Liberal Party. I would say that it probably emanated from some outside organisation that has instructed them to do this.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Big business, of course!

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: But members opposite will have to be very much more wide awake to put anything over the Labour organisations.

Hon. D. Brand: What big organisation said you had to put electors on the voluntary roll?

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: I deny that it was done by any Labour organisation.

Hon. D. Brand: I did not say anything about a Labour organisation.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Can we not use our own initiative in such a matter? This Bill will make the Chief Electoral Officer a registering agent, but he will not be allowed to go out and make any new enrolments. Everything will have to be done in his office. As a matter of fact, it might be better if legislation were introduced to control canvassing and the methods adopted by political parties.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: It might.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Half an hour before the rolls closed for the Legislative Council in the Suburban Province, nearly 1,000 cards were handed in.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I know of a former member of this House who had pockets full of cards and he used to hand them in right at the death-knock.

Hon. A. F. Watts: We all know who he is without telling.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: We all have our suspicions as to the examination that these cards go through. On the occasion I have mentioned it was the Liberal Party that handed in 1,000 cards. The measure seems to be designed as a protest against the Chief Electoral Officer canvassing in the West and Metropolitan Provinces during February and April. I offer no apologies at all for what we did because I think it was the right thing. We went out to the new building areas and endeavoured to give the people concerned an opportunity of being placed on the roll; and to do that, it was necessary to send our departmental officers out.

Mr. Lapham: A pure and democratic way.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: We want democracy and we want all these people on the roll; we are not afraid of the roll being filled.

Mr. Roberts: Nor are we.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: We only went into the new residential areas, and no one can dispute that. Not only did we seek to complete the Legislative Council rolls but the rolls of this Chamber were also given attention whenever it was possible to do so. In going out to these districts the officers visited every house. There was no discrimination, nor did any political consideration enter into the duties that were being performed by the electoral officers concerned. They did what they thought to be right and that is the only practical approach if we are to get full enrolment. What a tremendous difference there is between electoral officers going out and completing the roll and the method of leaving it to the political parties and candidates! There is no comparison at all.

I say we were quite justified in every way, even so far as the Metropolitan Province is concerned. Canvassing for non-compulsory rolls is not a new innovation; it has been utilised on several occasions in the past. Prior to 1909 enrolment for the Legislative Assembly was not compulsory. In 1906 the newly appointed Chief Electoral Officer was very proud when he reported that he had a pure, full and up-to-date roll. At that time it was done wholly and solely by the Chief Electoral Officer, and this did not apply only to the Legislative Assembly but to the Legislative Council as well.

As a matter of fact, I think Mr. Angwin was defeated in 1906 by 20 votes, and he was a Labour candidate. It was a non-Labour Government that was in office at the time. In 1907 a house to house canvass

was carried out in 35 districts of East Fremantle and the police officers and private citizens were engaged to obtain a full roll. The same was the case in 1908. In 1911 there were canvasses for the whole of the State which dealt with both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council, and in 1912 there was a canvass for the Legislative Council roll. At that time I think 20,000 circulars were sent out to property-owners.

The Minister for Transport: Who did this?

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: In every case it was a non-Labour Government.

The Minister for Transport: What a pack of bushrangers!

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: That is the reason I said the member for Cottesloe could not have made any research, otherwise he would not have committed himself.

The Minister for Transport: The Liberals have not changed much in a generation.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: The rolls of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council should be wholly and solely under the jurisdiction of the Electoral Department, and candidates could assist. The Legislative Council rolls could be improved accordingly. The Leader of the Opposition implied that the electoral officer would not contact people and try to get them on the roll unless he thought they would vote for his party.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Where did I say that?

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: The Leader of the Opposition implied it indirectly a few minutes ago.

The Minister for Transport: That is what he would do, too.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: It is the attitude of quite a number of members.

Mr. Bovell: The Minister has a very vivid imagination.

Mr. Ackland: I would say it was a super imagination.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Does the Leader of the Opposition take his roll on a face?

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I will tell you later on.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: I am going to tell him that I do. On no occasion have I avoided taking my roll from house to house. Since 1950, the only time when I have been opposed, I have gone from house to house knowing that quite a number of the people would not vote for me. However, there is always a chance of their doing so.

Hon. D. Brand: It is those few that you were after.

Hon. A. F. Watts: You say you did what the department is not doing, taking them on a face.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Yes, the department is.

Hon. A. F. Watts: No.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: It was done on a face so far as the electoral officers are concerned. They know no politics. As regards the West Province, 1950 was the last year when it was contested by the Liberal Party. At that time the Labour majority was 1,240. There was a lot of talk about the West Province to the effect that Labour might lose the seat, but we had a wonderful candidate in Hon. Evan Davies and had no chance of losing it. I will go back as far as 1946 and give some election results for this province. They are as follows:—

1946	Gray, (Lab.) 2,369	Withers, (Lib.) 1,602	Majority	....	767
1947 By-election	Davies, (Lab.) 2,738	Samson, (Ind.) 2,133	Majority	....	605
1948	Fraser, (Lab.) 3,157	Hutchinson, (Lib.) 2,544	Majority	....	613
1950	Davies, (Lab.) 3,131	Treloar, (L.C.L.) 1,891	Majority	....	1,240
1952	Lavery, (Lab.) 3,137	Solomon, (Ind.) 1,259	Majority	....	1,878
1954	Fraser, (Lab.) 2,327	Collins, (Ind.) 949	Majority	....	1,378

Mr. Bovell: How many State electoral districts are there in the West Province?

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: I do not know. I feel that the member for Cottesloe must have been directed to bring this Bill along. I do not know whether it is as result of the last State election or whether someone is trying to gain some advantage as regards our political standing, but I think he has failed miserably. I am perfectly satisfied that if the members of this House have any guts, they will turn the Bill down and we will have a unanimous vote on it.

Mr. Bovell: That sounds like the guillotine.

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Perhaps, if he is allowed to, the hon. member might withdraw the Bill before it goes to the vote. The outside judges may say the hon. member should have tested it. The Bill as proposed by the member for Cottesloe is quite the opposite to what is done by his own party.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: The opposite?

The MINISTER FOR JUSTICE: Yes, by his own party. It is contrary to what has been done by his own party since 1906, and I feel the Bill is a wash-out. If it

became an Act it would affect only the Chief Electoral Officer. Regarding the Legislative Council, we should take the opportunity to put on a couple of clerks to record the changes for the political candidates. I say definitely that the Liberal Party had in mind that it was financially stronger than we were and thought it would be an advantage to retain political control of the Legislative Council. To say that we would not get a clear and full roll as the result of the work of the electoral officers is, I feel, a reflection on the Electoral Department, and I ask the House to vote against the Bill. We should try to get as many on the Legislative Council roll as we can, so that there will be better representation of the electors in that House, and the only way to achieve that end is to have a full, clear roll. I admire the Chief Electoral Officer of 1906 who was proud of his rolls and reported to the House that they were full, pure and clear.

MR. MAY (Collie) [5.42]: I want to say at the outset that I hope I will not be so badly interrupted by the irrelevant interjections to which I was subjected when I last spoke in this House.

Mr. Bovell: Sounds like an invitation.

Mr. MAY: In the Electoral Act Amendment Bill (No. 2) introduced by the member for Cottesloe, he raises objections to the Government spending money to enrol electors on the Legislative Council rolls. It may have been the member for Cottesloe who introduced this Bill, but I think it was conceived somewhere else.

The Minister for Lands: It was conceived out of wedlock.

Mr. MAY: Yes, possibly, but I think it was conceived somewhere else and the member for Cottesloe had the job of presenting it to this Chamber.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: You do not know what you are talking about.

Mr. MAY: I have a fair idea. I am not far off the beam.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: You are quite off the beam.

Mr. MAY: The member for Cottesloe said any political party was quite at liberty to spend money enrolling people provided it had the funds, and I would say the political party with the most convenient amount of funds would be the Liberal Party. I should imagine that there arises the reason for this Bill.

The Premier: I think the Liberal Party is getting more hard up. It is appealing to Country Party farmers in the Great Southern.

Mr. MAY: It is nothing new for Governments to provide funds for putting people on the roll. It is done in connection with the Legislative Assembly; the

Federal Government does it and I cannot see any reason why the Legislative Council should be on any different footing. I should say that behind this Bill there is a very good reason why the Liberal Party is so anxious to stop, in this particular instance, the Electoral Office from enrolling people on the Legislative Council roll. It feels that that particular Chamber may be in jeopardy so far as its own particular party is concerned.

I remember that, over the last nine years at any rate, a Bill has been introduced into this House for the purpose of extending the franchise to people to enable them to vote at Legislative Council elections. On each and every occasion the Bill has been thrown out of the window after reaching the Upper House. Why is there any valid reason that people should not be entitled to vote at Legislative Council elections? Why does the Legislative Council throw out the Bills? Obviously there is only one answer, and it is known even to the member for Cottesloe. I think that is why he introduced this Bill. As for the expenditure of party funds in connection with the enrolment of people, I would say the Liberal Party has that by the short hair.

There is another matter to which I shall draw attention. I do not suggest for one moment that the member for Harvey had anything to do with it, although it was posted in Harvey. Whoever posted it forgot to put a stamp on it, and as a consequence a well-known Labour supporter in Yarloop received this letter from the Liberal Party, and it cost him 7d. I want to say that neither I nor any other supporter of the Labour Party objects to receiving propaganda from the Liberal Party, provided that the Liberal Party pays the postage.

The Premier: Hear, hear!

Mr. MAY: It is a most peculiar thing that although this was posted in Harvey—if the member for Harvey wishes to see it afterwards he can—it was authorised by J. R. Willoughby, Director, Federal Secretariat, Liberal Party of Australia, Box 21, G.P.O., Canberra, A.C.T.

The Premier: More Canberra domination!

Mr. MAY: Now we can see the connection between Canberra and the various States.

Mr. Bovell: Read out a few of the home-truths that it contains.

Mr. MAY: It is well worth while.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: It is. Pass it on when you have finished with it.

Mr. MAY: Speaking of party funds, I want to explain the contents of a letter that appeared in one of the newspapers

of this State. This letter which was published under the heading "Political Party Funds" stated—

I would appreciate any action you may care to take, either in publishing the following or using its contents to inform interested subscribers to your paper:—

Some electors in this part of the State have written regarding a letter they have received from the Liberal Country League (Liberal Party) which asks them to subscribe to the funds of that party, and suggests at least in one case that an amount of £4 4s. per 1,000 sheep owned be given, or more if so inclined.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: More, I hope.

Mr. MAY: I am just wondering how far this will affect the Leader of the Opposition at Pinjarra.

The Premier: He will have to weigh in heavily.

Mr. MAY: I want to say, in explanation, that this is not a Pinjarra paper.

The Premier: Is this to help get Liberal Party members on the Legislative Council roll?

Mr. MAY: No, it does not make any distinction, really. The letter continues—

Two points loom from these letters that require answering:

1. Will any money subscribed to the L.C.L. benefit only that party or will the Country Party benefit in any way therefrom?

That is quite a reasonable question—

The reply to that question is that the Country Party will not receive one penny from any donation made to the L.C.L. On the contrary such money could be used to finance opposition Country Party candidates.

That is a pity, is it not? Yet I see the Country Party members in this House are still in some way or other tied to the political apron-strings of the Liberal Party of this State. I just cannot fathom it.

Mr. Nalder: Do you believe that?

Hon. L. Thorn: It would take more than you to drive a wedge between us.

Mr. MAY: Actions speak louder than words. I am just being guided by the actions of the Country Party members in this Chamber when a division is called.

Mr. Roberts: Who wrote this?

Mr. MAY: I thought members opposite would get curious.

The Premier: You must admit it is well written.

Mr. Bovell: It sounds like Dr. Evatt.

Mr. MAY: The letter continues—

2. Does the Country Party suggest that donations to its funds should be based on an assessment per 1,000 sheep in the case of a farmer, or on some other basis where other occupations are concerned?

The Country Party does not approve of these methods—

I am glad to hear that—

—and leaves its supporters to decide what amount they care to give outside the annual subscription.

Referring once more to the letter received from the Liberal Party which goes on to say it has placed an organiser in this district in the hope of building up Liberal strength in that area with a view to greater representation in Parliament, it could be rightly suggested that it is quite clear that such greater representation of the Liberal Party can only be secured by defeating existing Country Party members either in the Legislative Assembly or the Legislative Council.

It, therefore, behoves those who support or vote for the Country Party candidates to refuse to have anything to do with the suggestions contained in the letter from the Liberal Party.

The Premier: What an exposure!

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Tell us who wrote it.

Mr. MAY: I will not say who wrote it because the Leader of the Opposition has as much opportunity as I have to find out.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: It is probably from a very good union secretary.

Mr. MAY: I know the Leader of the Opposition suffers from blood pressure.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: No, he does not; he is all right.

Mr. MAY: If I were to give the writer's name, he would have an apoplectic fit.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I will take the risk.

Mr. MAY: I will go this far, and show him afterwards, confidentially, because I do not think he would be able to suffer the knowledge in this Chamber.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I am willing to take the risk.

The Premier: Did not this appear in a public newspaper?

Mr. MAY: Yes.

Mr. Oldfield: Was it the member for Stirling?

Mr. MAY: Anyone can go to the reading room and have a look at it.

Mr. Court: We can't; you have torn it out.

Mr. MAY: I will make it a little easier. The date is the 7th September, 1956.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: What paper is it?

Mr. MAY: Go and have a look.

Mr. Roberts: Is this "The Light Grows Brighter?"

Mr. MAY: It is from a newspaper.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: What has it to do with the Bill?

Mr. MAY: It has a lot to do with it inasmuch as the Liberal Party, in order to gain political funds, is prepared to do this rather than give adult franchise for the Legislative Council.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: You should have told us when you started that you were supporting the Bill.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I wish you had got into the Legislative Council.

Mr. MAY: Yes, and probably a lot more members here wish the same. Not many votes separated me from the Liberal Party candidate when I did stand for the Legislative Council, and I might suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that he thoroughly had the breeze up on that occasion in case his candidate was going to be beaten. Am I right? Of course I am!

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I remember you did address two people somewhere in my electorate and created a very good impression.

Mr. MAY: There is no doubt about that; so much so that the Leader of the Opposition got the breeze up, and he brought the candidate out of the metropolitan area to go and do some electioneering.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I did?

Mr. MAY: I know that the hon. gentleman did. We will get back to these political party funds. I wish now to read a reply to the letter I have just read. The reply is as follows:—

As a Liberal, —

The Leader of the Opposition will be able to obtain this man's name, too—

— I cannot allow the rather curious letter from the writer, which appeared in your last issue, to pass without comment. The writer asked two questions and then proceeded to furnish the answers. Regarding his first question, no one with any intelligence would even suggest that money donated to the L.C.L. would be used to benefit the Country Party—

I do not think it would either, if I know the Liberal and Country League—

— or, for that matter, vice versa.

That is something in the hon. member's favour, at any rate—

The writer then referred to the suggestion of a donation based on a penny a sheep and informs us that the C.P. does not approve of these methods.

I am glad to hear that—

It is of no consequence whether the C.P. approves or not, and this system has been used for a number of years by farmers and pastoralists all over Western Australia.

This is not original but something that they have been doing for years.

Mr. Bovell: It is better than compulsory unionism.

Mr. MAY: I doubt very much whether it is. By this amount of a penny a sheep, these people are asked to donate some of their hard-earned money for the purpose of increasing the representation of the Liberal Party in the various Parliaments. I do not think there is very much to cry about that. The letter continues—

The writer seems disturbed that the L.C.L. is organising in his and other C.P. members' electorates. So what? Does not the C.P. organise in Liberal areas with the hope of one day contesting these seats, and did they not contest the Avon Valley seat against the L.C.L. member at the recent State elections? These activities do not disturb the L.C.L. The writer and his colleagues may well have cause to feel disturbed for the votes accorded the Liberal Senate team in the three rural electorates of this State suggest an increasing number of rural people are doubting if the existence of the C.P. serves any useful purpose except, perhaps, to provide a refuge for discarded Liberals.

Once again I ask the Country Party members: Why the devil do they follow blindly a party in this Parliament that is prepared to write that in the public Press? I would be ashamed of it. Country Party members should stand on their own. Their job is to liquidate the Liberal Party so that the country people—the people of the outback—may have the true and proper representation to which they are entitled, and not be ruled by these people from St. George's Terrace. The member for Nedlands enjoyed that one.

Mr. Court: I enjoyed the smile on your face.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: The C.P. candidate gave you a run in Collie.

Mr. MAY: The Leader of the Opposition was not game to put a candidate down there.

Hon. A. F. Watts: The member for Collie should join the Repertory Club.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Give us your opinion of the Bill.

Mr. Bovell: He likes it.

Mr. MAY: The Minister for Justice correctly summed up the situation. Everyone in the Chamber, including the member for Cottesloe, knows the reason why the Bill has been introduced.

Mr. Court: I hope the member for Cottesloe does!

Mr. MAY: It is just possible that he did not realise the reason when the job was given to him.

Mr. Court: I think he elected to do it, of his own choice.

Mr. MAY: I think if he had realised the hypocrisy in it he would not have had anything to do with it. I say again that the Minister for Justice correctly summed up the reason for the introduction of the Bill. What does he care about how many people are on the roll? He does not. He has never had a worry so far as the Legislative Council is concerned, and never will until the electors are allowed, in a democratic manner, to cast their vote for that Chamber the same as they do for any Federal House or for the Legislative Assembly of this State.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Any man should care where a Government uses its power to gain party advantage.

Mr. MAY: I will say this to the member for Cottesloe, that the Liberal and Country League has command of such amounts of money as to make it independent, and it can fight its political battles. That being so, then I say any other party is entitled to do the same.

For my part, I do not squeal; and I have never squealed when we have been defeated at Legislative Council elections although I know full well there are two specific reasons why we have lost. One is that the Liberal and Country League can command whatever party funds it desires to contest elections; and the other is that it absolutely refuses to extend the adult franchise to people for the Legislative Council. I will leave the member for Cottesloe to ponder over those remarks.

The methods adopted by the Liberal Party in this State are behind the reasons why this Bill was introduced into this House. I know that that party is able to afford to engage four canvassers or organisers to work in the South-West. I will admit that those canvassers are paid a decent salary, but where does the money come from? It comes from the poor farmer who runs about 1,000 head of sheep. He has to cough up four guineas towards the party's funds. That is where the party gets its money from.

The Premier: Subtle intimidation! Socially ostracised if he does not pay up!

Mr. Bovell: Who are the four organisers?

Mr. MAY: The member for Vasse is a member of the Liberal Party and he does not know who the four organisers are!

Mr. Jamieson: The member for Bunbury did not even know the organiser in his electorate.

Mr. MAY: He did not even know he was there! All members know how conscientious the Minister for Justice is, and I think that he correctly summed up the situation when he spoke in regard to this Bill.

Mr. Nalder: Especially about the flat rate for water!

Mr. MAY: If there were no undercurrent surrounding this Bill I would be with the hon. member, but because of the reasons behind its introduction, I intend to oppose it.

HON. SIR ROSS McLARTY (Murray) [6.2]: I will support the Bill because it contains a principle. When I read that canvassers had been sent out by the Electoral Department, and on the Minister's own admission tonight, under his direction, to canvass in certain specified areas, I was naturally resentful.

The Minister for Justice: In new housing areas.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: I will agree with the Minister that it was in new housing areas, but I can think of another area, in the South-East Province, where hundreds of people were not enrolled, especially in those new areas in the Merredin and Bruce Rock districts and all through those parts where the names of the people were transferred from the province for which they were enrolled to the South-East Province roll. The Electoral Department made no effort to carry out a canvass in that part of the State. Why? Why select new housing areas in the metropolitan area and neglect the country areas?

If it is right to enrol people in the metropolitan area, it is equally right to do the same for those in the rural areas, but no such action was taken. Is it not necessary for the department to enrol the people in the rural areas when it takes the trouble to enrol those who are residing in the metropolitan area?

The Minister for Justice: Do you think that we should do that at the next election?

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: If the Minister intends to do it at all, it should be done in all electorates and not in a particular area.

The Minister for Justice: So you are in favour of it being done at the next election?

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: Provided it is done properly. The member for Cottesloe is quite correct when he says that this is a voluntary roll. It is the electors' responsibility to see that they are enrolled for the Legislative Council. The Minister delved back into ancient history of over 50 years ago when voting was not compulsory and in those far-distant days there used to be an attempt made by the Electoral Department to get the names of people on the roll. Nevertheless, special areas were not selected. The Minister also referred to the work of the police who used to canvass in all districts, but not in a spot here or a spot there. No unfair methods were used under the system that applied in those days and it was certainly not parallel to this one.

The Minister for Justice: So far as the West Province and the Suburban Province were concerned, you knew that the West Province belonged to Labour and we knew that the Suburban Province belonged to the Liberal Party.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: It is no use the Minister putting up that argument, because it is very weak. I know that the officers of the Electoral Department went into certain areas to carry out only the enrolments mentioned, and I also know that they were strong Labour areas.

The Minister for Justice: Do you mean to say that the Suburban Province was a strong Labour area?

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: Where the officers of the Electoral Department went, it was. The Minister took good care that they did not go to Floreat Park, for instance.

Mr. Heal: We looked after that very well.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: And the hon. member would look after it very well from his point of view. This legislation has been introduced by the member for Cottesloe in an effort to prevent what I think is a very unfair attitude on the part of the Electoral Department from being adopted again.

The Minister for Justice: You cannot blame the Electoral Department. It was only doing its duty.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: Yes, its officers were acting under direction and the Minister, by way of interjection, said that he gave the direction. In my opinion, he gave an improper direction and he used Government funds for party political advantage.

The Minister for Justice: That is what they did in 1906 and in 1912. They even sent out 20,000 circulars to property-owners.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: In 1906 the police made a canvass but they did not select any particular areas. They covered the whole State.

The Premier: The police must have been "hardy" in those days.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: The Minister did not cover the whole of the State in this instance. He selected certain areas.

The Minister for Justice: I probably did not wake up soon enough to cover the whole of the State.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: I think the Minister eventually realised that he should have woken up earlier and should not have done what he did. The member for Cottesloe is entirely justified in bringing this Bill forward and if the House is anxious to see justice done it will pass the measure. It has been suggested that the party to which I belong has an advantage in electioneering work because it has funds to pay canvassers to enrol people. We do pay certain people to put electors on the roll and I wish we had sufficient finance to employ more. However, our funds are not so large as the Minister and the member for Collie make them out to be, so that we can put more officers on to do this work.

We certainly do as much as we can and recruit all the voluntary labour possible, otherwise we would never be able to cope with the enrolments. I cannot see any objection to any party canvassing for enrolments. However, when the Government enters in a partisan manner—and this was partisan—we have every reason to object. In the early stages of this controversy, the Press drew attention to the Government's action because it thought it was extraordinary. Yet despite the criticism that followed upon the disclosure, it was some considerable time before there was any reply from the Minister. If I remember rightly he was charged then with acting improperly and with giving a direction to the Chief Electoral Officer. We have heard tonight that that direction was given to canvass certain areas only.

The Minister for Justice: It was given rightly and justly to canvass only in the new housing areas.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: It was neither right nor just but was very partisan, and this Bill seeks to prevent a similar situation from arising in the future. If the Minister will accept the Bill, it will probably keep him out of trouble in the future. I again ask him why he selected certain areas only and did not send the officers into the South-East Province, for instance, where hundreds of people were not enrolled and who had just as much right to be enrolled by the Electoral Department as those people in the new housing areas.

The Minister for Justice: I told the Leader of the Opposition why we went into new housing areas.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: It does not matter whether an elector lives in a new or old house. He has the same qualifications and the Minister knows that full well.

I commend the member for Cottesloe on bringing down this legislation. It is not true that pressure was brought to bear on him to introduce the Bill.

The Minister for Justice: It was probably pressure from an outside organisation.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: Probably an outside organisation suggested it to him. There is nothing wrong with that.

The Minister for Transport: You are admitting that now, are you?

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: If an outside organisation asked him to introduce the Bill, the Minister has no objection to that, has he?

The Minister for Transport: I was just asking. You are admitting it now, are you?

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY: I do not know, but it may be right. The hon. member certainly spoke to me about it and I told him that he had every right to introduce the Bill. After hearing the facts that have been presented to this House, I cannot help but feel that he was fully justified in bringing this legislation forward. Therefore, I intend to support the second reading.

MR. EVANS (Kalgoorlie) [6.12]: After listening to the Leader of the Opposition, I am convinced that the member for Cottesloe cannot be blamed for bringing this Bill down. It is the pernicious work of the Liberal Party which follows much the same pattern as the complaint that was lodged when this ominous canvassing—as the Liberal Party calls it—was carried out by some obscure person in Dalkeith. That person cannot be blamed either because once again it is the fault of the organisation.

By consistently repeating that the Labour Party gained a definite advantage as a result of the enrolments made by the electoral officers, the Liberal Party hopes that its statements may be accepted. But they are not true. They are exaggerated and they are false, because the actual results of the subsequent election gives the lie to those statements. Those people who consistently repeat that we gained an advantage show that they have a one-track mind. In my opinion, they are on the wrong side of the track and the traffic on that side is very light indeed.

I would like to quote one of the salient features of the Bill. It reads as follows:—

a person shall not be required by the Government at any time to work outside the offices of the Chief Electoral Officer or of any Registrar or Returning Officer, or the offices of any other Government Department (whether State or Federal)—

That word "Federal" is very interesting.
Continuing—

—for the purpose of obtaining information to enable the Chief Electoral Officer or any of his officers to add to, alter or revise any roll or supplementary roll, whereon enrolment is not compulsory.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. EVANS: Before the tea suspension I outlined to members one of the salient features of the provisions in this Bill. I would like to point out that these features are obnoxious in their content because of the very serious repercussions that will result from the conditions set out therein. For example, if this Bill becomes law it seems to me that if there was a shift in population in one or more areas, and a redistribution of seats was mooted, officers of the Electoral Department would be prevented from leaving their offices to conduct a survey of the houses and their occupants.

Mr. Roberts: The occupants have a right to place their names on the electoral roll.

Mr. EVANS: If the hon. member realises how keen some people are about voting, he would not make that comment at all. I am sure that if the sponsor of this Bill realised this, he would not have persevered with the measure. When he did realise the implications, there was a pernicious motive behind them. I want to say if he cannot be clever, he should at least be careful. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the South-East Province and particular areas such as Bruce Rock and Narembeen which he believed favour anti-Labour candidates. He said that no survey for enrolment had been made in those areas.

I would like to point out to him that when he drew attention to the South-East Province, he did not draw attention to all the areas in it. That province reaches into Kalgoorlie and extends to Balfour-st., South Kalgoorlie, on the boundary of my own electorate. The voters in this district strongly favour Labour candidates; according to my information they are 7 to 1 in favour of Labour. Yet those very places in Kalgoorlie were not canvassed by the officers of the Electoral Department! No favour was shown by those officers in not canvassing the Narembeen and Bruce Rock areas.

As I see it, the reason for the people in the particular sections referred to being canvassed was that they had recently acquired homes. They were new voters who had not been eligible for enrolment before and included people who had been renting homes and did not realise they had the right to vote. Against that, the people in the established areas mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition for years

had the right and the opportunity to vote. I would like to mention in passing the qualifications for enrolment in the Legislative Council as they exist and to point out that those conditions are parsimoniously restrictive. If a person has a right to vote under the iniquitous system he should be given every opportunity for enrolment.

However, members of the anti-Labour parties always oppose the widening of the franchise or the widening of qualifications for enrolment, but to deny people this right to vote is an injustice. A vote in favour of the Bill will add to that injustice. There is reason behind the Bill and I say it is a very selfish one, in that any attempt to threaten the predominance of anti-Labour politics must be fought with might and main. That is the reason why this Bill has been introduced by a Liberal member. I want to conclude by saying that for these reasons, I claim this measure is a hand-made absurdity and I strongly oppose the second reading.

MR. LAPHAM (North Perth) [7.36]: I have quite a lot of sympathy for the member for Cottesloe and for his ideals, because I feel that in this Bill he has in mind the prevention of political interference in any way with enrolment. Not for one moment am I suggesting or conceding that there has been political interference. Inasmuch as the Bill purports to take away political interference from enrolments, I am in complete agreement, except that I consider the mover has based the Bill on a wrong principle. He proposes to take away from the body which has the right and to give that right to a political party.

The Electoral Department, being the servant of the people and a State instrumentality, should have a greater right to enrol people for the Legislative Council or any electorate, than a political party or any part thereof. As a consequence, I would suggest to the member for Cottesloe that he reorients his Bill to provide that political parties should be given no right whatsoever to enrol anyone for a Legislative Council election and to ensure that the complete right is given to the Electoral Department. By doing that he will accomplish what he wants; that is something apart from political interference.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: I see your point. This would not prevent the Government, if it so desired, from putting officers into the field.

Mr. LAPHAM: Under my proposal it would be the duty of the Electoral Department at all times to see that the rolls were complete and in order. It would be a continuous survey of all electorates with a view to keeping the rolls up to date. As a consequence there would be no necessity,

except for a periodic check, to seek enrolment. Therefore the suggestion made by the hon. member that successive Governments might use the Electoral Department for the purposes of canvassing in different places has no value because all the electors in every district would have been enrolled.

If the mover of the Bill agrees to transpose it, this House will be in complete agreement with him. I see nothing wrong with the ideals behind the measure. I am inclined to think there was a little playing with politics in the original intention. I am not sure whether the mover of the Bill has a right to withdraw it now, but I would suggest that move to him. This will give him every assistance to bring down another Bill to include the suggestion I have put forward.

MR. O'BRIEN (Murchison) [7.40]: I have listened very attentively to the various speakers on this Bill and I would like to add my opposition to the second reading. The Bill provides that officers of the Electoral Department are not to work outside their offices. I would like to draw the attention of members to what happens in an electorate, not in the metropolitan area but, say, in the North-East Province. There was a redistribution of boundaries of the Legislative Council Provinces and there was also a redistribution of seats. Many of the people eligible for enrolment on the Legislative Council rolls for the North-East and South-East Provinces were of the opinion that they had been transferred to the new roll automatically. Quite a number of them were obliged subsequently to seek enrolment, resulting from the change of boundaries. In my last election campaign I heard many of them complain bitterly about the whole set-up with regard to Legislative Council enrolments. Many of them could not see why they should be compelled to vote for the Legislative Assembly candidates but were not compelled to vote for the Legislative Council candidates.

Mr. Court: This time the polls were taken together, were they not?

Mr. O'BRIEN: Yes, due to the readjustment of boundaries.

Hon. A. F. Watts: Half of those eligible were not on the Council rolls.

Mr. O'BRIEN: That is the point, having only half on the roll. This Bill does the opposite to what it should do. I say that the Electoral Department should be empowered to see that people are enrolled, and that is the reason I oppose this measure.

HON. A. F. WATTS (Stirling) [7.44]: With the intention of the member for Cottesloe I must say that I have very substantial agreement. I do not know, since I have heard the Minister for Justice, that I am entirely convinced that the last

few words of this Bill could not be suitably altered, because it may be true, as the Minister said, that it would prevent, in its present phraseology, certain officers of the department carrying out their normal functions, to which I am sure the member for Cottesloe would have no objection. I am attracted, too, by the argument put up by the member for North Perth. But unfortunately it will be quite impracticable for the member for Cottesloe, or any private member of this House, to provide for a compulsory State-wide overhaul of the rolls at every election, which is what I think the hon. member had in mind.

Mr. Lapham: No, a continuous overhaul.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: A continuous overhaul would be better. But it would have to be done, in the hon. member's opinion. It would not be a matter of do it here and not there. It would have to be done, and that would involve the Electoral Department—and hence the Crown—in a very substantial expenditure which, while from many aspects it would be entirely justified, would require a Message from the Governor, which no private member can obtain; and it would therefore be promptly ruled out of order by you, Sir, if it were suggested.

What the member for Cottesloe objects to most strongly, as far as I can ascertain, is the piecemeal working which has gone on in recent times and which gives rise to the suspicion—whether it is completely justified or not, it certainly gives rise to the suspicion—that it is being done deliberately in certain areas in order to satisfy the requirements of the supporters of the Government party.

The Minister for Justice: There was no advantage gained.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: Maybe there was not any actual advantage gained in the net result, but the suspicion has been unquestionably that it was thought some advantage might be gained; and for all I know, some advantage was gained perhaps, because the minority of the Government candidate might have been greater if there had been no activity of the nature referred to.

I think the member for Cottesloe mainly objects, if I understood his speech aright, to the piecemeal nature of these activities; and I must say that I subscribe to that, too. I fear that to conduct a complete continuous canvass on a State-wide basis would be a very expensive proposition that any Government might look askance at before facing up to the expenditure. Therefore that might be regarded, from the point of view of the Treasurer, as being impracticable also. But in my view either that must be done or nothing.

Either it must be done on the lines suggested by the member for North Perth or not done at all so far as seeking to make enrolments of voters for the Legislative Council in specific districts is concerned.

Attention was drawn by the member for Murchison to the fact that when there was a redistribution of boundaries in the North-East Province, where his electorate lies, there was not a complete transfer of Legislative Council enrolments from the province in which they were to the new province in which they found themselves; and in consequence, there were complaints from those people because that was not done. Precisely the same state of affairs, as far as can be ascertained, took place in the South-East Province.

There, if I am given the correct information, while in the more eastern part of that province, in the Yilgarn area, there was some activity by a Government official in attempting to enrol persons, there was no such activity in the new portion which had come in from the South Province to the South-East Province, namely, the the Bruce Rock and Narembeen road board areas.

Whether the intention is open to suspicion or not, I am not in a position to judge and do not propose to try to judge. But the fact remains that the electoral records will disclose that the Yilgarn section of that district is more likely to give the present Government a majority than is the Bruce Rock-Narembeen area.

Mr. Evans: What about the South Kalgoorlie area?

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I am dealing with the Bruce Rock-Narembeen area, and I do not propose to be sidetracked by the member for Kalgoorlie. The situation was, therefore, that a great many persons who could have been put on the roll by electoral officers, or officers of the Government of some sort, had they been there were not on the roll; and I came across, in a short space of time, quite a number who were not enrolled for one reason or another.

So the position is clearly this: Either the Government should face up to the expenditure in the manner suggested by the member for North Perth—and I will again express the opinion that the expenditure would be pretty considerable—and have a continuous audit, as it were, of these rolls so that eligible persons are placed upon them, responsible officers being employed to see that they are placed upon them and the whole thing done regularly through every province of the State.

Alternatively I suggest that it be not done at all; that the electoral officers confine themselves to such normal inquiries as they may have to make in respect of

the changes of boundaries and the like, which will be comparatively infrequent and will involve the Government in little or no additional expense, and place the responsibility on the outside organisations who are interested in the political life of this State.

This will be perfectly fair to all three of them, or all four of them, whichever it is, because there will be no favour. Each organisation will be entitled to do the best it can, either by volunteer or other means, to have these persons enrolled. The Government of the day, whatever it may be, will not be open to any suspicion that it is selecting areas for some political purpose best known to itself.

These are the only two alternatives. The piecemeal method which has been adopted has worked unfairly—there is no question about that. Some sections have had assistance given them for enrolment when, as a matter of fact, they are better placed to obtain enrolment than are other areas which have been given no assistance, such as that represented by the member for Murchison, and the district of the Bruce Rock-Narembeen Road Board, to which I have referred, because many of the people in those parts are a considerable distance from where enrolments are recorded, whereas those in the metropolitan area are within a comparatively short distance of the electoral office, and not only that, they are in close contact with easy means of communication.

If this is to be confined mainly to settled places, as it appears to have been, then it not only is unfair in general principle, but also in individual instances because it does not make for any equality at all as between different sections of electors. That equality, I suggest to the Minister, is one of the first principles of the democracy to which he is always referring. We cannot have satisfactory democratic government, such as the Minister continually dwells upon, unless we are reasonably certain that there is equality between the citizens so far as opportunity to take part in that government, within the law, is concerned.

So, as I have said, I think the Bill requires amendment, but it is not the only Bill that has come before this Parliament which could not be satisfactorily adopted in its original form. But it has prepared the groundwork or, as it were, given birth to the idea and it is now in the hands of the legislature to make a job of it. For the reasons I have discussed, and those that have been mentioned by other speakers, although in view of the position of the electoral officers in some other aspects of their occupation the Bill requires some minor amendment, I propose to support the second reading.

On motion by Mr. Oldfield, debate adjourned.

**BILL—GERALDTON SAILORS AND
SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL INSTITUTE
ACT AMENDMENT.**

Second Reading.

MR. SEWELL (Geraldton) [7.58] in moving the second reading said: This Bill has been brought forward for the consideration of Parliament, by the trustees of the Institute and the Geraldton sub-branch of the R.S.L. The measure contains five amendments and provision for adding after Subsection (4) a further Subsection (4A). Since the principal Act was gazetted in 1929, the institute has been controlled by a trust. This trust consists of five trustees who are a body corporate under the name of the trustees of the Geraldton Sailors and Soldiers' Memorial Institute, with perpetual succession and a common seal, and have power to hold real and personal property and to sue and be sued.

The mayor for the time being of the Municipality of Geraldton is ex officio one of the trustees and chairman thereof. Of the trustees, two are ratepayers of the municipality of Geraldton elected by the council, which may at any time remove any of them from office and may on such removal or on any cause occurring in the trustees so elected by the council, fill such vacancy by election of another ratepayer or ratepayers. Either or both of the trustees may be a councillor of the municipality.

The remaining two trustees are appointed by the executive of the Geraldton sub-branch of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia which, on any vacancy from any cause occurring in the trustees appointed by it, may fill the vacancy by the appointment of another person.

It is proposed to amend the principal Act by—

Substituting for the words "Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia" in lines two and three of the definition "Returned soldier" the words "the Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia."

Section 4 of the principal Act is to be amended by—

(a) substituting for the words "Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia" in lines three and four of Subsection (4) the words "Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia";

(b) inserting after the word "it" in line five of Subsection (4) the word "shall";

(c) adding after Subsection (4) the following subsection:—

(4a) (a) The two trustees appointed under Subsection (4) of this section shall cease to hold office on the first day of January, one thousand nine hundred and fifty-seven and the vacancies shall be filled by the executive, which shall appoint one trustee for a period of one year and the other trustee for a period of two years computed in each case from the first day of January, one thousand nine hundred and fifty-seven.

(b) Subject to paragraph (a) of this subsection, every appointment made by the executive to fill a vacancy occurring by effluxion of time shall be an appointment for a period of two years from the occurrence of the vacancy, but an appointment made to fill a vacancy occurring from any other cause shall be an appointment for a period being the balance of the term for which the former holder of the vacant office was appointed.

(c) A former trustee shall be eligible for appointment.

Section 6 of the principal Act is to be amended by—

Substituting for the words "Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia" in lines nine and ten of paragraph (c) the words "Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia."

The memorial institute, or Birdwood House, as it is more generally known, is a well constructed brick building set back on a very suitable block. It contains a billiard room, lounge, retiring rooms and hall for meetings and entertainments. There are amenities in the institute for members and visitors and it is used as a meeting place for all who are connected with the R.S.L. activities of ex-servicemen and women. The institute is well conducted, is a credit to the trust and the R.S.L. and is a land mark in Geraldton. It is serving a very worthy cause. The trustees and the executive of the sub-branch wish the principal Act to be amended as outlined by me. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by the Minister for Health, debate adjourned.

MOTION—RESTRICTIVE TRADE PRACTICES.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

Debate resumed from the 12th September on the following motion by Hon. A. F. Watts:—

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

THE PREMIER (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [8.21: The motion moved by the Leader of the Country Party aims to have a select committee appointed for the purpose of investigating the extent to which restrictive trade practices or agreements detrimental to the public interest operate in the trade and commerce of this State. I might say at the outset that the Government proposes to support this motion.

There is only one qualification to the support and that is that neither the support by the Government of the motion nor the subsequent carrying of it shall be used legitimately as an argument for holding up or defeating the Profiteering and Unfair Trading Prevention Bill which is now before this Chamber. That Bill deals, in one of its clauses, with the same subject matter as the suggested select committee would investigate.

There is general recognition of the fact that organisation has become much more solid and extensive in the fields of trade and commerce in recent years. There are probably some good reasons for this organisation and there could also be some not so good reasons in some directions. It is argued by those who subscribe to arrangements and systems and controls within trade and commerce, that they are all developed for the purpose of protecting the public as well as for the purpose of protecting those who are members of the particular association.

I think we all know that some trade and commerce associations exercise very strict control in regard to the minimum price which is to be charged for particular commodities. Some commodities are supplied by manufacturers to wholesalers, and through them to retailers, on the strict understanding that the commodities shall be sold at a set price or, alternatively, shall not be sold below a particular price. Unless everybody concerned in the handling of this sort of commodity is prepared to abide by the terms of the agreement, they become subject to the severe penalty of not having any further supplies made available to them in the future.

As I have said, those who promote this type of association or agreement argue that it has many more advantages generally than it has disadvantages. They argue that it provides reasonable protection, for instance, to the smaller people in the retail trade. The point they make there is that if no such agreement operated, the larger people in the retail trade would be able to sell more cheaply than those operating on a smaller basis and, consequently, the smaller traders would be put out of existence by the competition which they could not stand up to for any considerable period of time.

I had another type of case explained to me the other day which would come within the scope of the investigations of the suggested select committee. The principles of this case seemed first of all to be that the manufacturing firm offered discounts in regard to substantial quantities of the commodity which were purchased from the firm. The second point was that considerable pressure was being put upon this manufacturing firm by the smaller people in the wholesale and retail side of the business. They were arguing that the bigger retail firms, by virtue of their ability to buy in very great quantities, were receiving large scale discounts which enabled them to sell the commodities at a much lower price to the public than the smaller purchasers could do.

The smaller purchasers, through their particular organisation, were exercising pressure upon the manufacturer to cease selling direct to the large retailing concerns or to continue selling to the larger retailers only on a basis which was comparable to the discounts which were given to the smaller retail buyers. The manufacturing firm concerned was most resentful of the pressures that were being applied and the threats that were being made. It was arguing that it believed in free enterprise and free competition and that it was fair and reasonable to sell its commodity in large quantities at a lesser price per article than when it was selling it in smaller quantities to a large number of different purchasers.

We know, too, that although there is often strong competition in the selling of particular goods, there is no price competition. That applies particularly to the sale of petroleum products. I doubt whether there would be any industry in Australia which spends more money on advertising than the oil industry. Yet there is no competition in price between the various companies which operate within the oil industry. They advertise very extensively against each other in the newspapers; they work very strongly against each other in the service stations, which we find now operate at every corner, and they compete with each other in other ways but only for the purpose of selling

more petroleum products than their competitors. There is no price competition at all.

I suppose all the oil companies would argue that they sell their products at the lowest possible price consistent with the reasonable profitable operation of their concerns. However, there is a suspicion—and not a small suspicion either—in the minds of a great many users of petroleum products that the prices which they pay for those products are made higher than they should be and higher than they would be if there were some reasonable measure of price competition among the oil companies. That would be one of a number of fields which the proposed select committee could investigate.

However, if the select committee takes on that particular investigation it would find that it would not be able to report back to Parliament this year unless, in the meantime, the report of the Royal Commission on one-brand marketing of petroleum becomes available and offers some quick method of dealing with an investigation into the operations of the oil companies on the basis of the uniform price which they all charge for the product they sell. I think the select committee might find also that there are some vicious arrangements operating in some directions in trade and commerce in regard to systems which are enforced by one group—it, of course, would be the stronger group—upon other sections in the field of trade and commerce which are weaker and which have to submit, against their will and better judgment, to the practices which are exercised upon them by the stronger organisation.

There is, of course, in this field a great deal of subtle pressures, I should imagine. Those who operate the pressures and who force the agreements against the will of others, would do so, I should imagine, always within the existing laws. That would not necessarily make them right in point of merit or fair trading because we have not any up-to-date legislation in this State to deal with practices of that kind. I think it would be found—I think the mover of this motion mentioned this fact—that other countries, including Great Britain, are operating much more up-to-date legislation than most States in Australia in connection with this sort of thing.

On the surface, at any rate, it would appear that an investigation is well warranted because of the modern developments that have taken place in trade and commerce, and I think it might be found by the committee that some of the associations which exist and some of the practices which they operate are detrimental to the public interest. I understand from what I heard in a radio talk the other evening, that at least one member of the Liberal Party section of the Opposition in-

tends to support this motion and therefore it might appear that there will not be any great disputation about the move to appoint a select committee.

I have already indicated that members of the Government intend to support it, our only qualification being—as I mentioned at the beginning of my speech—that our support of the motion and the carrying of it—if that takes place—is not to be interpreted as justifying a move by members in this House or in another place to oppose the Profiteering and Unfair Trading Prevention Bill or justifies them in holding that Bill up or in suggesting that further consideration of the measure be postponed until this proposed select committee has carried out its investigations and presented its report to this House. I support the motion.

MR. COURT (Nedlands) [8.18]: I rise to support the motion which, as members well know, is in two parts. Firstly it is to inquire into and report upon the extent to which restrictive trade practices or agreements detrimental to the public interest operate in trade and commerce in Western Australia and, secondly—and this is probably the more difficult part—to inquire into whether any, and if so, what legislation should be passed in this State in regard thereto.

As members probably know, I spent a great deal of time last session researching this very vexed subject and it really boiled down to the fact that we have a choice between a system followed in the United States for many years, a system followed in Canada, a system followed in Sweden or, a conglomeration of those three systems. The people in the United Kingdom have spent many weary years trying to examine this problem and a great deal of Government money has been spent on that research. They had their monopolies commission operating, which was a very large and influential body so far as its power to investigate was concerned.

It now transpires that, as a result of its deliberations and recommendations, a fair degree of unanimity has been reached on both sides of the British Parliament. This culminated in the Restrictive Trade Practices Bill which eventually was amended and became an Act and, to the best of my knowledge, will operate in England for the first time this year. A study of that legislation indicates the problems besetting the people trying to construct legislation and get something which will be fairly common ground for both the Conservative Party and the Socialist Party of the United Kingdom.

It will be recalled that during the lengthy debates in the House of Commons on the reports of the Monopolies Commission Mr. Wilson, who leads for the

Socialist Party side in the House of Commons, found himself in the predicament that he had to support certain restrictive trade practices—probably the most tight restrictive trade practices—in the United Kingdom, and in particular those related to his own electorate, which have been centered around the calico printing industry since some time in the 1920's.

Members will be interested to note that in the points included in the Act which are regarded as a presumption of being in the public interest, this question that he touched on has been covered, and without labouring the matter I would like to read out the points that have been included in the legislation as being presumptions as to being in the public interest. They are included in Section 16 of the Act which reads as follows:—

(1) For the purposes of any proceedings before the court under the last foregoing section, a restriction accepted in pursuance of any agreement shall be deemed to be contrary to the public interest unless the court is satisfied of any one or more of the following circumstances, that is to say—

- (a) that the restriction is reasonably necessary for the protection of the public in connection with the purchase, consumption, installation or use of goods requiring special knowledge or skill in that connection;
- (b) that the removal of the restriction would deny to the public as purchasers, consumers or users of any goods other specific and substantial benefits or advantages enjoyed or likely to be enjoyed by them as such, whether by virtue of the restriction itself or of any arrangements or operations resulting therefrom;
- (c) that the restriction is reasonably necessary to counteract measures taken by any one person not party to the agreement with a view to preventing or restricting competition in or in relation to the trade or business in which the persons party thereto are engaged;
- (d) that the restriction is reasonably necessary to enable the persons party to the agreement to negotiate fair terms for the supply of goods to, or the acquisition of goods from, any one person not party thereto who controls a preponderant part of the trade or

business of acquiring or supplying such goods, or for the supply of goods to any person not party to the agreement and not carrying on such a trade or business who, either alone or in combination with any other such person, controls a preponderant part of the market for such goods.

The next paragraph is the particular one to which I referred and which was put in to satisfy the fears of some socialist members of the House of Commons. It reads as follows:—

- (e) that, having regard to the conditions actually obtaining or reasonably foreseen at the time of the application, the removal of the restriction would be likely to have a serious and persistent adverse effect on the general level of unemployment in an area, or in areas taken together, in which a substantial proportion of the trade or industry to which the agreement relates is situated.

A further one is to the effect—

- (f) that having regard to the conditions actually obtaining or reasonably foreseen at the time of the application, the removal of the restriction would be likely to cause a substantial reduction in the volume or earnings of the export trade of the United Kingdom either generally or in respect of the said trade or industry.

And lastly—

- (g) that the restriction is reasonably required for purposes connected with the maintenance of any other restriction accepted by the parties, whether under the same agreement or under any other agreement between them, being a restriction which is found by the court not to be contrary to the public interest upon grounds other than those specified in this paragraph, or has been so found in previous proceedings before the court.

From that list, two points become very apparent: One is that dealing with restrictive trade practices, the cessation of which would involve unemployment in a given area or in a given industry; and the other, restrictive trade practices, the cessation of which would adversely affect export income. There are, of course, other points that are more difficult to follow and

more technical in their application, but I think those two points in particular are rather obvious.

It is good to note the two points that have been included in the United Kingdom Act as being presumptions in the public interest because it gives some lead to the problems that confront anyone who genuinely tries to approach this matter of restrictive trade practices. We hear a lot about them but often on investigation the allegations prove to be not of as serious moment as the informant would have us believe. However, this is an inquiry and if any one of us feels that there are not restrictive practices in this State of a serious nature, we should not have any objection to such an inquiry by a select committee. For that reason I support the motion for the appointment of a select committee.

MR. JOHNSON (Leederville) [8.28]: I, too, support the motion for the appointment of a select committee because I feel it indicates a very useful field of inquiry. The need for the inquiry is one for which everyone in public affairs is well aware, namely, the constant stream of evidence, or presumptive evidence, that there are various types of restrictive practices taking place which are not in the interests of the consuming public. This applies to many fields of commerce and is evidenced in many ways. It could be that a strict investigation of some of the matters talked about would prove that they are not in themselves deleterious.

There are indications that some of those that are less known than those that are talked about in public are the more dangerous. The evidence that comes to us from other countries is that even the mouthpieces of commercial interests are aware of the necessity for some form of control of restrictive practices. There have been laws relative to restraint of trade in all the leading commercial nations for a very long time.

The situation in America is bounded in the original by the Sherman Act which was passed in 1898. That Act forbids the following:—

Every contract, combination, in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy in the restraint of trade or commerce among the several States or with foreign nations—

It goes on to say—

Every person who shall monopolise or attempt to monopolise or combine or conspire with any person or persons, to monopolise any part of the trade or commerce among the several States, or with foreign nations, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanour

....

In Ferguson and McHenry's work entitled "The American System of Government" the following appears in relation to this aspect:—

The Clayton Act supplements these provisions by outlawing three specific evils, namely, price discrimination, exclusive agreements and interlocking directorates and purchases of stock among competitors. As amended by the Robinson-Patman Act, the law also made illegal transactions through which chain stores and other large purchasers received discounts, rebates, and other concessions that did not always correctly reflect all legitimate costs. Now such concessions are banned where the effect is to diminish competition and injure competitors. As amended in 1950, the law also forbids the acquisition of assets where the effect is to substantially lessen competition or tend to create a monopoly. The Federal Trade Commission Act condemns "unfair methods of competition" in interstate and foreign commerce while the Wheeler-Lea amendment of 1938 forbids "unfair or deceptive acts or practices."

The law in Britain has been dealt with at some length by the member for Nedlands. It is interesting to note that that law was enacted under an extremely conservative Government. The criticism which rose from the Labour side of the House of Commons was to the effect that it was only a sham and was of no real value, that it covered far too little, there was too much inquiry and too little action. As the last British election political platforms indicated were Labour in power in Great Britain, that particular Act would have been strengthened very considerably and investigations would have gone further.

If, as the extracts read out by the member for Nedlands from the legislation indicate, there have been restrictive practices in Great Britain over a great period of years and if in providing the legislation it was considered necessary to allow for the non-eradication of certain restrictive practices in cases where it was felt they might interfere with overseas trade—Great Britain is having balance of payment troubles much the same as ours—the particular situation in England is one which can be described as making a choice between cutting out a cancer or letting the patient die from it over a longer period. That was the attitude taken in Great Britain. A search of the British Hansard would indicate that it was hoped and hoped even by the Conservatives that it would become possible to get rid of those types of restrictive practices over a longer period.

The subject of restrictive trade practices is one which has already led to a great deal of detailed research and theoretical economic literature. I have one with me

written by a former instructor in economics at Harvard University and published by the Oxford Press in 1949. It is not exactly the latest literature although it is one of the latest in the keeping of the Library Board. This booklet deals with the pure theory of monopolistic competition and general equilibrium theory. Many illustrations are given and they cover a wide field.

In the matter of theory there is something of interest in the conclusions drawn by the author, which is worthy of record. He says—

Monopolistic competition theory is larger but vaguer than pure competition; the consideration of oligopolistic types of behaviour, of separation between control and ownership, open additional degrees of freedom. The present stage of pure theory appears undoubtedly very formal, lacking in concrete content and practical significance. As compared with the social philosophy of Smithian economics, the ethical neutrality and barrenness of our conclusions may well be appalling.

That indicates in the finest of indefinite language, of which the economist is a master, that very little is known of the subject. At least in the ideas of this particular writer, it is barren of moral content. It would appear that if this subject of restrictive trade practices is to be examined, it has to be examined against a background of practical application, but it has to be measured against a theory which will indicate what is and what is not moral, what is and what is not in the public interest.

This leads me to the important point that if the inquiry is to take place, it will be one of very great length and depth. I find it impossible to believe that such an inquiry could be usefully carried out and completed even against the small commercial background of Western Australia in a period as short as two years. I would like to suggest to the mover of this motion that the best way of dealing with the subject is by legislation setting up a permanent committee of inquiry from this House, giving it the powers of inquiry which lie in Parliament, to inquire and to report at all times to the House so that as each form of misuse of public commercial values comes to light it can be legislated against by Parliament in detail to deal with one particular practice at a time; otherwise, I feel we will get nowhere but just inquire for years, and years, and years.

The matter is one of grave importance. The theory is obscure. The practice is also obscure. We are all well aware of the natural tendencies to monopolise which are the actual outcome of the theory and practice of competition. After all, the objective of competition is monopoly.

People compete for the right to monopolise all trade which is within their competence. That is the whole object of competition. The move from minor competition to monopolistic competition is of natural growth from the background against which we have been thrown.

We come to the point of monopolistic competition which indicates that the point of competition is likely to be the substitution of the various facilities which are available. Take, for instance, the petrol industry that was referred to by the Premier. The control point on that is the point at which users of liquid fuel will turn to other types of fuel. For example, in the war we saw people turning to producer gas. If the price of petrol rises to a level beyond the means of the users, they will naturally turn back to producer gas, particularly if someone can introduce a better, a cleaner and a more comfortable method of using producer gas fuel. That is the point beyond which the monopolies controlling petrol cannot go. Similarly, the monopolies which control such items as soap are controlled by the possibility of the introduction of other forms of cleaning, or possibly the small boys' pleasure of not being clean. I feel the matter is so big and wide that, whilst supporting it, I suggest that a select committee which is appointed by the rules of the House to expire with this Parliament would not have time to go the full distance. If the mover is in agreement to change the form of the committee to something more permanent with wider powers, he will have my support.

MR. LAPHAM (North Perth) [8.42]: I do not want to take much time of the House on this subject, but I feel I should rise to support the motion and indicate my own personal experience in regard to the restrictive practices. There are three big firms operating in this State which, besides being constructional engineers, are also distributors for B.H.P. heavy section products. Heavy P.S.J.'s. of 7½ x 3½ are very expensive and, as a result, small constructional engineers never carry them. They never keep stocks, and rely on the distributors for B.H.P. When a tender is called, it is the usual thing to look at the plant to find out what is stipulated from the point of view of steel and then, of course, endeavour to ascertain whether that steel is available.

It is my experience, and the experience of other people, that when a tender is called which stipulates certain sizes in R.S.J.'s., the distributors, who are also in competition, tender for those particular jobs, and always indicate that the steel is not available.

I feel that, as they are distributors for B.H.P., they should make up their minds as to whether they are going to continue

as distributors and act as such, or continue as constructional engineers, because it is a most unfair practice for them to take up the dual position. The result is that the smaller people are squeezed out when they ask for a certain line of steel in order to compete for a tender. These three big firms—and the Minister for Works would be possibly interested—have more or less a complete monopoly over the tendering; and as most big works are of a governmental nature, I feel that the Government is being penalised by the actions of these people.

As I said before, an inquiry is completely overdue. I am satisfied that if we hold an inquiry, quite a lot of information will be garnered from all sources. No harm would come from it, but only a lot of good.

HON. D. BRAND (Greenough) [8.45]: Like the member for North Perth I do not propose to delay the House in regard to this motion for a select committee, which we propose to support. It would seem to me, after listening to the various speakers who have quoted cases, that such an inquiry could do a great deal of good. It has been mentioned on a number of occasions, especially since this subject was raised in the House last year, that in the United Kingdom, as a result of an inquiry, legislation was introduced and a commission set up which has, as its object, the control of the alleged restrictive trade practices.

However, it is evident from their experience that there was a deal of opposition to the legislation, because it was found to be economically necessary to maintain certain of those practices. It was in the interest of certain large industries that the restrictions—restrictive trade practices—had to be maintained in the interest of the economy. Therefore, because we believe that there should be competition, and that it is in the interests of the economy that there be free and open competition, then if there are any doubts and a case can be put forward, an inquiry of this nature should be very welcome.

As pointed out by the member for Nedlands, the most difficult part of this motion is that which deals with the suggested legislation as a result of the inquiry. It is to be hoped in a young State such as Western Australia every consideration will be given to the problems associated with trade and commerce.

I think the mover of the motion pointed out that he was not aware that restrictive practices in trade had developed to any great extent in this State, but he felt it was in the interests of all that an inquiry should be held in order to prevent any such developments. I should imagine that the committee, which would be representative of all parties in this House, would take evidence, and that the complaints which we hear so freely in the

street—the complaints of restrictive practices as between firms and, indeed, practices about which we as laymen feel something should be done—would be thoroughly inquired into.

As a result of the investigation, a lot of the fears which the common man—John Citizen—has, will be allayed, I hope; because I feel that whilst recognising that there must be some effort to prevent the build-up and tie-up between firms in respect of prices or any other restriction, it will be in the interests of the economy of the State. Therefore I support the motion and hope that when the recommendations are made they will be in the interests of all concerned.

HON. A. F. WATTS (Stirling—in reply) [8.50]: It is not my intention, in speaking in reply, to take any great time, because there is nothing of importance that needs controversial argument from me. I would, however, like to make one or two comments. First, in regard to the Premier's observations: It should, I think, be clear to him and to other members that this proposal has nothing to do with any legislation that is now before the House. It will be remembered that I interested myself, to some degree, in similar matters last session, and that I gave notice of this motion before the Bill, to which the hon. gentleman referred, was offered to the House for consideration.

I appreciate that if the inquiry to be made by a select committee is to be worth while, it will take some time and will have to be carefully planned. Opportunities will have to be given to those persons who may be most concerned to have a reasonable time within which to answer the questions which the committee may wish to place before them. Therefore it is not the type of committee that can be hurried.

All I am anxious to do, if it is necessary to do it—and this the committee will have to discover—is to prevent any practices of the nature that have been discussed here this evening—that are contrary to the public interest—from obtaining too great a force or strength in the State. I think members will agree that it is the duty of every member of Parliament, within the limits of his ability and according to his lights, to do his best to ensure that laws are passed in the public interest and that things do not take place which are contrary to the public interest.

This, I suggest, is the whole purpose for which the great bulk of our laws have been passed; and it is only with that object in view—the object of ensuring that nothing is done in the future which will be detrimental to the public interest—that I venture upon the inquiry into this problem. I thank the House for its reception of the motion and express the hope that it will be carried, as I feel sure it will.

Question put and passed.

Select Committee Appointed.

On motion by Hon. A. F. Watts, select committee appointed consisting of Mr. Perkins, Mr. Court, Mr. Lapham, Mr. Heal and the mover, with power to call for persons and papers, to sit on days over which the House stands adjourned; to report on the 14th November.

MOTION—LIQUID FUEL PRICES.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

Debate resumed from the 12th September on the following motion by Mr. Ackland:—

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

THE PREMIER (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [8.53]: The motion asks members to agree to appoint a select committee to inquire into ways and means of obtaining uniformity in prices to be charged for liquid fuel throughout the State. I must say at the outset that I much admire the objective at which the hon. member aims in his motion. As the prices of petroleum products have increased from time to time, the cost of transport, particularly in country areas, has increased considerably.

Motor transport now plays a big part in the activities in all parts of the State. Because of the greater distances which have to be travelled in country areas, the cost of petroleum products—or liquid fuel as they are described in the motion—is an important factor in the affairs of those who have to carry out any considerable volume of transport involving the use of motor-vehicles.

It has to be admitted that the motion is most restrictive in that it proposes to deal with only one commodity or one group of commodities. It could be argued—and fairly effectively, I think—that there are other commodities which play an important part in the affairs of those communities which are located away from the metropolitan area, and which also play a part in the cost-of-production structure of those engaged in producing wealth in the country areas.

The objective at which the hon. member aims is one which has been achieved already in connection with some products. I understand that rubber tyres, for instance, are sold at the same price in all areas; although I am not in a position to vouch for the absolute accuracy of that statement. If that be so, then the distributors of rubber tyres have so developed their selling system as to establish a uniform price basis throughout the State; and no doubt the same system is operated by the same firms in all the other States of Australia. We know, too, that this system operates, at least in regard to all the

capital cities of the Commonwealth, in relation to steel and sugar. It may operate in connection with some other products as well.

Hon. D. Brand: That arrangement has existed for many years, almost from the inception of organised trade, I should imagine.

The PREMIER: Yes. Nevertheless, the fact that it does exist shows that the firms concerned have organised their selling systems on that basis; and as far as I know, they did it initially on a voluntary basis. It could be argued quite logically that what one firm or group of firms can do another firm or group of firms can do also. I am not aware of the reason or reasons which the oil firms have for operating differential rates as between the metropolitan area within a State and the other zones removed from the metropolitan area in the same State. Presumably the oil companies consider that the prices at which their products are to be sold are to have relationship to the cost, or the approximate cost, of putting their products into particular areas.

They appear to operate a system in this regard which lays it down that their products shall be sold more cheaply in the metropolitan area because it does not cost as much to put their products there. On the basis of plain straightout commercial practice there is any amount of logic to justify that argument if that, in fact, is the argument of the oil companies in connection with this question. I understand that at least personal representations have been made to the oil companies by some individuals in an endeavour to persuade the companies that they should operate a uniform price for their products all over Western Australia, irrespective of the actual cost of landing those products into, say, the metropolitan area as against landing them in, say, the Kalgoorlie district.

Mr. Evans: Hear, hear!

The PREMIER: However, those who have made personal representations along those lines have so far received only a sympathetic hearing. I do not know whether the member for Moore, who has moved this motion, has made such representations to the oil companies. However, I do know that the Minister for Health who, I think, represents the biggest State electorate in point of area, has made approaches to the oil companies on more than one occasion.

Mr. O'Brien: The purchasing figure.

The PREMIER: He has, on each occasion, been given a very sympathetic hearing and has been told that the oil companies have a desire to help people in distant areas as much as possible but that they cannot see their way clear to introduce into Western Australia a uniform price system for the whole State. Undoubtedly the establishment of uniform

prices throughout the State for petroleum products would be a great help to people in country districts, provided the uniform prices represented a reduction in those which now operate.

Under the prevailing system those people removed the greatest distances from the metropolitan area pay the highest prices for their petrol, oil and other liquid fuels. In most instances, people in those areas pay the highest prices for everything. So the cost of living to them, and their cost of production, too, if they happen to be engaged in the production of any wealth, is the highest operating anywhere within the State.

Naturally they have felt the burden considerably during more recent years with the constant increase in prices and costs of production which have been occurring. Therefore, if the suggested select committee could achieve success as a result of making an investigation into the problem of uniform prices for petroleum products throughout the State it would most certainly be worth while.

I suppose the oil companies would claim very strongly that they are not, overall, making more than a fair profit at present. They would therefore most likely argue that the acceptance by them of a uniform prices system throughout the State would necessitate increasing the prices for petroleum products probably not only in the metropolitan area but also in some of the nearer country districts—nearer, that is, to the metropolitan area.

However, that is a part of the whole question which would require consideration, and close consideration, by the members of this select committee in the event of the House agreeing to establish it. I quite agree that the cause of decentralisation would be considerably advantaged if ways and means could be found of establishing uniform prices and charges for all commodities and services within the State. That would encourage decentralisation as it applies in the general sense, as between country districts and the metropolitan area, and it could also encourage decentralisation as between the districts closer to the metropolitan area and the country districts far removed from it.

I know, for instance, that on the Goldfields and in the North-West, petrol prices are very substantial. It was brought out, by way of question and answer in this House, recently that petroleum products as a whole are landed at North-West ports at the same price as they are landed at the port of Geraldton. That means that people in the coastal towns along the North-West coast receive their petrol at the same price as that at which the people in Geraldton receive it—or I hope it means that. I am not positive whether it does; but if it does not, it seems to me that it should mean that.

In any event, should that be so, it certainly does not mean that people far removed, or removed by any substantial distance, from North-West ports, should receive their petrol at anywhere near the same price as those in Geraldton or reasonably close to Geraldton. Road transport is the only inland method of transport in the North-West; and consequently, once petroleum products are landed at North-West ports, they have to be transported at great cost to the inland areas up there and the ultimate final price of petroleum products to people any distance inland in the North-West is very high indeed.

The only doubt that I raise in connection with this motion is whether it is comprehensive enough to meet the circumstances. I suppose it could be argued that it does represent a move in the right direction. In the event of the select committee being appointed and succeeding, it could be argued that ways and means have been found for the equitable establishment of uniform prices for a particular group of products, and upon that basis a similar system might be found which could be used to deal with other products of importance to people in the country districts.

The Government offers no objection to the motion; and, in fact, members of the Government propose to support it, because they consider that an investigation of this kind could have considerable value, even if the investigation finally shows that the objective aimed at cannot be achieved except possibly by legislation. At this stage, my own view is that that will be the final result. The committee will find that the objective sought by the member for Moore is one which could be achieved only by legislation introduced into this Parliament and subsequently passed by it.

I give the member for Moore some friendly warning in that regard in advance. He would find, I think, that if such legislation were to be introduced by him at a later date, he would be leaving himself open to severe condemnation. He might even be accused of trying to set up a police state; of trying to introduce communistic methods into Western Australia; of making unwarranted interference with the freedom of private enterprise and be accused of all the other heinous crimes and offences with which the members of this Government have been charged recklessly in recent days by those who seek to clothe the unfair methods of trading and unfair methods of competition with all the sacredness imaginable. However, having offered that friendly warning to the member for Moore, I now indicate the support of the Government for the motion.

HON. D. BRAND (Greenough) [9.15]: In dealing with the final remarks of the Premier first and the friendly warning that he issued to the member for Moore. I, too, would like to say to the member for Moore that whilst I do not oppose the motion I do not feel that a great deal will be achieved in the long run by the appointment of a select committee. I believe that he will come up against the same problems, in seeking a uniform rate for petrol, as he would if he applied to the Government for a uniform rate for water. In that regard he would probably get a friendly hearing but that is as far as it would go.

The Minister for Health: We have had a great reduction in the price of water in the country districts because of the advocacy for a uniform rate.

Hon. D. BRAND: I know that the Minister for Health has always advocated a flat rate for water. For a long time he has been a Minister in a Government which has, as one of its points in its policy, a flat rate for water. I have no doubt that the Government sincerely hopes—as we all do—that such a rate will be introduced, but for obvious economic reasons a flat water rate has never materialised. Therefore, I think that the member for Moore will meet with a similar problem in the course of his inquiries to obtain a uniform flat rate for petrol.

We who represent country electorates would hope that he is successful in finding ways and means to put forward a reasonable case for the establishment of such a uniform charge. I know that the member for Moore has cited—the Premier has also by way of interjection—the uniform price for tyres and the uniform rate for sugar and steel, but I ask him: How long has this system existed? I should imagine that the price of steel, as sold in all the capital cities, was established right from the beginning of the organised trade and perhaps the same could be said of sugar. I suppose that, for many years, the tyre companies have sold tyres at a uniform rate and therefore the people who buy them in the metropolitan area know of nothing different.

The problems in this regard, if we are seeking the establishment of a uniform rate for anything—and we talk of a flat rate with our tongues in our cheeks—is that we omit the fact that we are going to load someone—it might be the city dweller or it could be the electors in the Moore electorate—with a rate that is higher still and they are the practical problems that beset a Government or anyone else who seeks to establish uniform rates. I would imagine that in the inquiry, if it goes forward—forgetting the oil companies for a moment—the member for Moore will find that where the cost of distribution or freight is able to be absorbed, in the distribution of petrol throughout the State

and the fact that it is unloaded at Carnarvon, Geraldton, Bunbury and Fremantle at prices not substantially much greater than those ruling in the metropolitan area, people in the country districts will be paying a greater amount for petrol than hitherto.

I do not think that is what the member for Moore desires. What he seeks is that the large metropolitan population shall be loaded to some extent in order that we people in the country might get cheaper petrol. Speaking for myself—and no doubt for all members—I should think that if I can get something for myself cheaper than the other fellow and I do not have to take the responsibility for getting it cheaper, it is a very happy arrangement.

For my part, I am wondering whether the cost of conveying petrol from the metropolitan area or the refinery might not be reduced if the Government could see its way clear to allow road transport to operate freely and not direct, in the interests of the community generally, that the railway deficit shall be reduced by insisting that it be carried on the railways. I should imagine that road transport for the transport of liquid fuel, be it petrol, kerosene, or diesel fuel, is the most economical and if the Government is anxious that something be done about this, it has at least one means of contributing towards the problem of cheaper petrol, fuel and other commodities in the country as compared with the metropolitan area.

It has also been pointed out that in the event of the establishment of a flat rate for fuel in the metropolitan area there would be an increase in the cost of petrol. Members will recall that during the last election great play was made with respect to the imposition of the tax on petrol and it was said that it would severely affect the cost of living because it would increase the cost of transport, of transport associated with production and so on. I imagine that there is a very worth-while point to be considered there, namely, that it is an approach that should be made by a responsible authority.

So, while wishing the member for Moore every success in his inquiry I believe he will not get very far. I am certain that the oil companies will be quite willing to co-operate. People have to buy petrol; they must have it. Accordingly, if there is a case put forward to the oil companies for the sale of petrol throughout Western Australia at a flat rate, I do not suppose it will concern them a great deal. But there are a great many economic problems, not the least of which is the cost of transport. It is in this direction that the Government of the day must surely have a very real interest. Like the Premier, I do not oppose the inquiry but trust that out of it will come something worth while.

MR. EVANS (Kalgoorlie) [9.23]: I listened with much interest to the comments made by the Premier and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and I feel sure that both of them have contributed greatly to this debate. It gives me great pleasure to support this motion for the appointment of a select committee to inquire into ways and means of bringing about at least partial uniformity in the price of petrol in Western Australia.

In my speech on the Address-in-reply debate, I voiced the case of petrol sales in Kalgoorlie, and at the risk of repeating myself I would like to quote a few salient figures which I feel sure members will find interesting. A few weeks ago I asked a question in this House as to the freight of a tanker of petrol from Fremantle to Kalgoorlie. I was told that the freight was £175 8s. The capacity of the tanker, I was informed by the secretary of the Railways Commission, was 5,504 gallons. It is a matter of simple arithmetic to convert £175 8s. into shillings; it is 3,508 shillings. Placing that as a fraction over 5,504 gallons we arrive at a figure which shows that one gallon from Fremantle to Kalgoorlie costs 7½d. Now let us have a look at the price of petrol in Kalgoorlie and in the metropolitan area.

I checked these prices and can guarantee that they are 100 per cent. correct although they are not 100 per cent. justified. The price of standard grade petrol in Kalgoorlie is 4s. 9d. while the price of the same petrol in the metropolitan area is 3s. 8½d. The price of super grade petrol on the Goldfields is 5s., and the price of super grade in the metropolitan area is 3s. 11½d. These figures will not agree completely with those put forward by the member for Moore, but the difference in price in both grades of petrol between the metropolitan area and the Goldfields is 1s. 0½d. per gallon.

In the "Sunday Truth" of the 5th August, there was published an advertisement for a brand of petrol sold in the Eastern States. We do not have it here. It is a brand put out by the Anglo United Petroleum Limited, Sydney, and the bowser is "Total". It makes very interesting reading and I propose to quote from it. The relevant portion reads as follows:—

These eye-catching red, white and blue money boxes are free to everyone who pulls up at a Super Total pump. Collect one for your kiddy—drive away on this power-packed motor spirit that costs 1d. a gallon less—and let junior bank the change.

There is an interesting point there. I know the particular oil company is not directly represented in Western Australia but it seems that it can sell its petrol at 1d. less than other grades in the Eastern States, and at the same time it can give away attractive red, white and blue money boxes to everyone who buys a gallon of

petrol. There is a wide margin of profit on petrol and these people must be receiving a smaller margin than the other companies.

So it seems that while there is a certain amount of overhead to be considered, there must be a great amount of underhand also, and I feel sure that an inquiry of this nature will unearth a lot of the facts. A move in this direction is commendable. It is a sound tribute to decentralisation, and I am sure if our late Governor of Western Australia, Sir James Mitchell, were alive today, he would be one of the first to advocate a flat rate for petrol particularly when we recall his advice to "Go on to the land, young man; go on to the land".

I would like to conclude by wishing the committee as a whole, when it is appointed, the very best of luck. I would like to assure that committee that it will carry the strongest possible support from country people and we trust that a very successful finding will be reached. I do not intend to anticipate what the findings will be, but I only hope they will bring forth fruit and be of benefit to the people in the country and, finally, to the people of Western Australia.

Mr. Court: Are you having any luck?

HON. A. F. WATTS (Stirling) [9.30]: In supporting this motion moved by my colleague the member for Moore, I want to say that the subject matter is one which has been discussed by many organisations and at public gatherings in many parts of this State over a considerable number of years. The mover is to be commended on bringing the matter at last to a place where, if the motion is carried, some answer can, at least, be provided to the people who say that the proposal in his motion is a workable one.

If, as a result of close and careful inquiry into this matter, it is found, as suggested by the member for Greenough, that it is not a workable proposition, then it will be the duty of the committee to inform this House of the reasons and of the facts on which their conclusions are based. If, on the other hand, it is found that the matter can be dealt with by applying a flat rate, or by some contribution made towards that end, then I have no doubt it will confer an inestimable benefit on many people in Western Australia, particularly those living in the far-flung out-back areas.

Indeed, it is apparent to me in the drafting of this motion that the mover has already considered that if he gets this inquiry he is not facing an easy problem, because he is not advocating complete uniformity. That is not the only aspect he wishes to inquire into because he says in the motion "that a select committee be appointed to inquire into and report upon ways and means of obtaining uniformity,

or at least a substantial degree of uniformity." So it may be that the second proposition in this motion is the one which will come forward after inquiry as being practicable and possible of being put into operation at an early date.

Even that would make a very substantial contribution to the betterment of people who live so many hundreds of miles away from the city, and whose industry is undoubtedly hampered and overloaded so far as costs are concerned by the fact that the use of liquid fuel is ever increasing, is ever becoming more essential for the carrying on of industry, and therefore any reduction in the price must, to some degree, overcome difficulties which they face in their production as well as living costs.

It may be, as the member for Greenough suggested, that it will be impracticable to reduce the charges within a reasonable radius of Perth. He mentioned the electorate of Moore as being the possible place because if the reduction applied everywhere, the cost would be excessive. If that is so, it would be possible to assume that where they are reasonable, the charges would be left as they are and no greater burden would be imposed but considerable relief to areas further afield where the costs are so much greater would be given. I do not know what the answer to this question is. Anything which one says is based entirely upon supposition.

As I mentioned, a committee of this nature would be under the authority of Parliament. That seems to be the only way to provide an answer to those people who have been concerned over this matter for a considerable number of years as to what extent relief can be given to them, or whether there is some transcendent reason why it is impractical, which, of course, I cannot believe. But again my belief is not based upon complete knowledge by any means. It is that complete knowledge that this committee ought to seek and inquire into.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Could not the other select committee into unfair trade practices detrimental to the public interest also inquire into this matter?

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I do not think so. There is no trade practice in this motion which is detrimental to the public interest. If the hon. member looks around Western Australia, he will find in some places away from Perth, because of circumstances that exist and arrangements that have been made, the price charged for liquid fuel is little different from that charged in Perth.

It will be apparent to the hon. member that the great part of the differential cost between Perth and Kalgoorlie is made up of the railway freight for the long haul. I asked a further question consequent upon the one asked by the member for Kalgoorlie about the insurance charge, and that is not included in the railway freight. I do not know to what extent insurance

accounts for the difference between the 7d. mentioned, or the 8d. under my calculations, in the price of petrol in Kalgoorlie. It makes some contribution towards the difference in price, although it does not cover the whole difference. That is one of the things which the select committee will discover quite readily.

There is bound to be a very substantial difference between the price charged in the metropolitan district and that charged at places 400 miles away because of the railway freights, irrespective of any question of insurance or other charges which may have to be met. We know that insurance cannot be avoided with a highly inflammable cargo such as that. So all these things will have to be taken into consideration. But above everything else my desire in supporting this motion for a select committee is to find out the answers to those things.

I can rely upon five responsible members of this House doing their best and I think reasonably succeeding in getting to the root of the matter and forming their conclusions based on the evidence which they have extracted. Then it will be possible to give a conclusive answer to these people to this effect, "Either this much can be done, is to be done, or the whole thing can be done for you" as the case may be. At the present juncture, we do not know. The present position is unsatisfactory as far as production costs in many of our industries are concerned. If it is possible to improve them it is our duty to do so; if it is not possible, it is our duty to state why, so that the public will be as well-informed as ourselves. I think the appointment of a select committee is the proper method to go about these things to deal with them effectively. I have pleasure in supporting the motion.

MR. HEARMAN (Blackwood) [9.44]: Like the Leader of the Country Party I think the motion is worthy of support because the select committee will clear the matter up. In country districts I know the question of a flat rate for petrol has been discussed for a number of years. All sorts of estimates have been made of how much the price in the metropolitan area would have to go up in order to bring the price down in the country. Very few of the ideas that have been put forward in that respect were soundly based. I do not think anybody had the opportunity for gaining sufficient information to know what the effect would be.

In going into this matter, most people have more or less based their calculations on freight charges, that is to say, the transport cost alone, which is very considerable. There are also the other costs which are considerable. The Leader of the Country Party mentioned insurance. There is, of course, the cost of maintenance of the country depots, the spillages

and leakages caused by the extra handling. All these things must be taken into account in an inquiry of this nature. I think the member for Moore is well aware of the difficulties. He knows that the problem is not an easy one and I do not think he is necessarily prejudging the issue in any way. I am sure he is well aware that the inquiry could result in any one of a number of different conclusions.

There has been some talk on the question of flat rates throughout the State on other products, but it does not necessarily follow that because one product can be distributed satisfactorily on a flat rate basis, another can. A great deal depends on the actual amount of the total cost of an article including freight. Obviously, if freight makes up 5 per cent. of the retail price, it is possible to sell at a flat rate basis throughout the State, but, on the other hand, if freight comprises 30 per cent. of the retail price it is considerably difficult to establish a flat rate throughout the State. These are some of the problems which I feel the member for Moore knows and doubtless the inquiry will bring them to the fore.

It has been suggested that oil companies would not agree to any such proposal and would not co-operate. My own opinion is that some would and some would not. Obviously, a new company with little trade connection in the country would welcome the flat rate to enable it to market its products there. However, a company already established with distributing facilities in the country probably would not be so keen on the matter.

There is one point I wish to mention to the member for Moore—I mention it not in a spirit of carping criticism, but primarily because I feel certain that the motion will be carried and the select committee will become an accomplished fact—and that is when he replies to the debate, I would like him to clarify one or two points. I feel that the actual wording of this motion is slightly ambiguous inasmuch as it says—

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

That wording could be interpreted to mean petrol, distillate and kerosene at the one price because they are all different types of liquid fuel. I do not think it is the intention of the member for Moore or for that matter any other member of this House, but I draw the attention of the House to it because I think we should make it quite clear that that is not intended. What we have in mind is a uniform rate for petrol, a uniform rate for kerosene and a uniform rate for distillate. I am sure that is what the motion means.

The Minister for Health: That is what the motion means.

Mr. HEARMAN: Yes, that is what I understand it to mean, but if anybody wanted to be difficult, it could be translated the other way. I am only attempting to assist. I support the motion because I think it is a very good proposal that the member for Moore has brought before the House.

MR. O'BRIEN (Murchison) [9.47]: I rise to support the motion and commend the member for Moore for his initiative in introducing it to this Chamber. The select committee, in my opinion, will go a long way towards assisting to achieve decentralisation and will be a step in the right direction. If the people of the metropolitan area and suburbs are really sincere in their wish for decentralisation, now is the time to have an inquiry to test that feeling. It will also assist, although not to a very great extent, the goldmining industry and it will help the people who are living in parts of the lower, and also in the remote, areas of the Murchison.

When travelling through the Murchison one notices that the price of petrol increases from one town to another, both north and east, and, as members know, the Murchison is the largest electorate in the State. I had in mind to visit the eastern part of the electorate and also to accompany the member for South Perth, if he so desired, to the Warburton Ranges, but the price of petrol is a big factor to consider. As I said before, a small increase to the price paid in the metropolitan area will assist greatly in reducing the price outback. If we want to retain the people outback and get others to go there, it is up to the people of the metropolitan area to help in a small way. It gives me very great pleasure to support this motion and I trust that the select committee will be successful.

MR. NALDER (Wagin) [9.48]: I, too, would like to support the motion which has been introduced by the member for Moore. I think the member for Moore has received possibly more laurels over this motion than in respect of anything else he has introduced in this House. It appears that everybody in the Chamber is very much in favour of it.

I would like to have heard the comments of some of the metropolitan representatives in order to see their reaction to it because I do not think there will be any doubt that if there were to be an increase of 3d. or 4d. per gallon, there would be a hue and cry. We might find that the people in the metropolitan area would be up in arms for allowing the country folk to have any suggestion of an advantage over the metropolitan area in this way.

The figures submitted by the member for Kalgoorlie are extremely interesting and if they are correct, as no doubt they are, they show that possibly some advantage may be gained by the oil companies under the differential charges. That, of course, is supposition, and an inquiry of this nature might go to prove that some of the oil companies are making money out of the differential price charged on the freight, and on the amount charged at the bowsers to the people in the country.

Possibly the difference between the consumption in the metropolitan area and that in the country is about 50 per cent., but that is another guess. Members, however, might find that that would be about the difference in the amount of petrol used. I do not know about other fuel. I suppose power kerosene would be used to a much greater extent in the country than in the city, and the same, perhaps, with diesel oils, although there would probably be a number of diesel engines in the metropolitan area. But a large number of tractors and engines using diesel fuels are in operation in the country and would probably outweigh those in the metropolitan area. The main fuel, however, is petrol.

All members of the Government should support the motion because it could mean a great influx of money to the Treasury through the amount of petrol hauled by the railways. This is an important point because if the price of petrol was equal throughout the country districts, it would not be necessary for many of the farmers to bring their trucks to Perth. This would result in an enormous increase in the income of the Railway Department. Also because of that there would not be as much wear and tear on the roads as there is today; and, in addition, we would find that the storekeepers in the country would get much more income from their shops because not so many country people would be induced to go to the city.

I would say that more country people come to the city for the purpose of getting fuel than for any other reason. If by this motion we could help the position, we would assist in having more people in the country, and we would also increase the value of town properties in the country. If the member for Moore is successful in being able to get the oil companies to agree to what he suggests, he will have achieved one of the greatest measures towards decentralisation that has come about in this State.

When he spoke to the motion, the Premier suggested something which I believe will have to be dealt with, and that is the introduction of legislation. I take the opposite view to that of the member for Blackwood, who suggested it would be an advantage to new companies coming to the State. I think that the new companies

would take advantage of the position and would sell petrol in the metropolitan area only, rather than go out in the country, because the companies operating in the country must be put to more expense in setting up installations and so on, than those that would operate only in the metropolitan area. So I say that legislation would have to be introduced to cover those who already service the country by their present installations.

I commend the member for Moore, and I hope he and his committee are successful. I feel sure that the country people throughout the whole of the State, if the inquiry is successful, will gain by the bringing about of a State-wide equality in the price of petrol. I support the motion.

MR. ACKLAND (Moore—in reply) [9.55]: I thank members for the support they have given to the motion. The Premier, with his long political experience, has not minimised the difficulties that will face the committee, and I am appreciative of his contribution to the debate. Before the member for Greenough finished, he nearly had me in tears because he told me how difficult the position was going to be, and what the committee would be up against. However, he is going to support the motion. The Premier mentioned that sugar, steel and tyres had a degree of uniformity in price—sugar and steel with reference to the capital cities, and tyres throughout the length of Western Australia.

The Minister for Health: Also Singer sewing machines.

Mr. ACKLAND: I am grateful to the Minister for including them in the list. Tyres and Singer sewing machines, however, are a little easier to distribute than is petrol. But I am hopeful that we will be able to do some good by means of this committee if it is appointed. I am not unmindful of the difficulties; I think they are many. For a long time there has been a lot of talk about uniform prices for petroleum products, and I thought it was high time that we had an inquiry to see whether such uniformity was a practical proposition.

When the Premier answered the question which I put to him last week, with reference to freight charges to the North, he told the House of the extent to which petrol was being subsidised by the State Shipping Service to the North-West ports. I was surprised to find that although Geraldton is only 1½d., more than Fremantle, Carnarvon is plus 9½d.; Broome 1½d. and Wyndham 1½d. The Government subsidises the carriage of the fuel to those ports. There did not seem to me any justification for the cost of fuel in those places to be so much higher than in the metropolitan area.

Mr. Court: Is it not road transport from Geraldton to Carnarvon?

Mr. ACKLAND: I do not think so. If I remember rightly, the Premier referred to the State Shipping Service when he gave me the figures; it was the State Shipping Service that was providing the subsidy. The distribution price at Kalgoorlie is so much higher than the freight charged by the railways that it seems, because of this instance alone, there would be some justification for the appointment of the committee. I thank those members who took part in the debate. I am under no illusions as to the difficulties that will face us, but I am pleased to move the motion.

Question put and passed.

Select Committee Appointed.

On motion by Mr. Ackland, select committee appointed consisting of Mr. Cornell, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Moir, Mr. Sewell and the mover, with power to call for persons and papers, to sit on days over which the House stands adjourned, and to move from place to place; to report on the 21st November.

House adjourned at 10.2 p.m.

Legislative Council

Thursday, 20th September, 1956.

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

BILLS (2)—THIRD READING.

- 1, Plant Diseases Act Amendment.
- 2, Albany Lot 184 (Validation of Title).
Passed.

BILL—COMMONWEALTH AND STATE HOUSING AGREEMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. A. F. GRIFFITH (Suburban) [4.34]: This Bill ratifies the agreement made between the Commonwealth and the States in connection with finance for the building of homes within those States. It is interesting to note that under the agreement which has just expired 96,000 houses have been erected throughout the Commonwealth. Of that number approximately 12,000 have been built in Western Australia, representing an expenditure of £26,850,000. In the expenditure of this amount approximately 50,000 people have been housed in this State. Over the period of the agreement which has just expired, the total Commonwealth expenditure in all the States has been in the vicinity of £200,000,000.

While I am sure that members will agree that those figures reflect very creditably on the activities and achievements of the State Housing Commission here, to me it is alarming to a degree to realise how much of the State's finances has gone into the provision of houses of which the State is the landlord. I am not suggesting for a moment that one of the objectives of the State for the present should not be—and over a period of time should not have been—to house its people; but it is alarming to think that the State is becoming a landlord of such magnitude, both as to the number of houses and the amount of capital involved in erecting them. I know that some of these houses have been, and are being made available to people who want to purchase them.

The agreement that has been made on this occasion between the Commonwealth and the State Governments, despite assertions made to the contrary, will create, to my mind, a much more favourable opportunity for people to own homes, and will relieve—to some extent anyway—the ever-increasing tendency for the State to become a landlord, and for the people to occupy the State houses and to pay rent.

Of the money allocated to the State under the agreement, for the first two years 80 per cent. is to be used by this State at its discretion, either for rental homes or houses for sale; and 20 per cent. for two years is to be allocated to building societies or other organisations, including the Rural & Industries Bank, which are nominated and approved by the Minister. After the expiration of the second year, and for the remaining three years, 30