

# Legislative Assembly,

Thursday, 31st October, 1912.

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

## BILL—WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT AMENDMENT.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

## BILL—MONEY LENDERS.

Report of Committee adopted.

## BILL—TIMBER RAILWAYS AND TRAMWAYS.

Report of Committee adopted.

## BILL — PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE.

### Second Reading.

Debate resumed from 29th October.

Hon. FRANK WILSON (Sussex) : With reference to this measure, a proposal to establish a public works committee, members will remember that last session I strongly opposed legislation in this direction, and since then I have had no reason to alter my views. I think a committee of this description is unnecessary, that it will be costly, and that it will not redound to the advantage of Parliament or the people. Therefore I propose on this occasion to strenuously oppose the passage of the measure, as I did last session. If I remember aright, the Minister for Works in introducing the Bill, claimed that it would put Parliament and the people in possession of much more information with regard to proposed public works and that it would give them fuller

control in regard to such works. I am sorry that I cannot agree with the Minister in that opinion. First of all I do not believe it will give Parliament any better information than we can get at the present time. We have always had the means for getting this information from advisory boards composed of experts of various departments.

Mr. Monger : That does not apply to two recent railways.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: There has been no occasion up to the present to which it does not apply with the exception of the question of the route of two railways. Of course I admit they have ignored the advisory board's recommendation, but otherwise all the works projected as far as railway construction is concerned, at any rate in Western Australia during the last three or four years, have been constructed on the advice of those advisory boards who have inquired into the necessity and advisability of the works. The Government have of course carried out these works as commenced by the Government with which I had the honour to be connected. I was arguing that Parliament could not have any better control, and certainly would have no greater information through having this suggested Parliamentary standing committee on public works. I submit, notwithstanding what the Minister said, that this is so, and the experience of New South Wales all tends to support my contention that it is unnecessary. I know full well that the working of that committee has not given entire satisfaction and nothing like it. I have had that from members of the committee themselves. I remember an occasion when a Federal member who had been on that committee—I think he was a Labour member, though I cannot remember his name—in discussing the suggestion to appoint a Federal public works committee, said he had had quite sufficient experience in New South Wales to warn him to have nothing to do with such a proposal. Of course I can conceive there is a considerable difficulty in getting rid of a committee of this sort once it has been appointed. I can conceive, notwithstanding that there may possibly be a majority in the New South

Wales Parliament who are dissatisfied with the working of the committee, they might be reluctant to repeal an Act and do away with it, feeling that possibly they may get some undue criticism over an action of that sort, or perhaps it may be through natural reluctance as it is with all Parliaments to repeal legislation when once it is put on the statute-book of the country. How is Parliament to get any better control of public works by a committee of this description? We now have Ministers responsible to Parliament and the country. They have to formulate their programme; they have to state publicly what works they deem necessary for the advancement of the State and the welfare of the people. It is part of the policy on which they are elected, especially in a new country like Western Australia, and they have to take the responsibility for that policy. Then in addition they have their expert officers whom they can call upon at any time to inquire fully into suggested works and advise them as to the best position for the works so far as railways, harbours, docks or works of that description are concerned for which sites have to be selected. Therefore, Parliament has absolute control. First of all the Government are elected probably on the public works policy, then they have to go to Parliament to get that policy endorsed either by way of measures, or if not by measures by votes on their Estimates for the works they suggest. Parliament controls the whole position. It can refuse to pass legislation in the form of Bills and later on, even though legislation may have been accepted by a majority in some instances, if it deems it has made a mistake Parliament can turn round and refuse to sanction supplies. So Parliament has absolute control of the position, unless, as our friends opposite have done, the Government take a lot into their own hands, take the public funds and embark on schemes without going before Parliament, accepting the responsibility as they have done for State enterprises, the purchase of steamships and things of that description. I admit that in such cases Parliament has lost control. But evidently, although Parliament has lost control, the

Government have caucus behind them, which is more important to them than the approval of Parliament.

Mr. Lander: Caucus seems to hurt a little bit.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: It does very often and I advocate strongly that Parliament should have control over these works and that the people themselves should know what is going on. My complaint, so far as my friends opposite are concerned, is that they do not take the public into their confidence.

Mr. Turvey: Would not the appointment of such a committee do away with your many requests for select committees?

Hon. FRANK WILSON: No.

Mr. Lander: Do you think the Fremantle dock would have been started if there had been a public works committee?

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Yes, certainly.

Mr. Lander: No fear. Why your experts were against it.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: I do not know where the hon. member gets his information. If he asks his Ministers to turn up the reports he will find that the experts were not against the construction of the dock.

Mr. Lander: Your own officers were.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Our own officers were not; they considered that it would be successfully carried out on the site chosen by the expert who was brought out from Great Britain to advise the Government. It is idle to say that the Fremantle dry dock and the Bullfinch railway would not have been constructed if a Parliamentary committee had been in existence. They certainly would have been constructed just the same. I am sure of it because there was a majority in Parliament that supported those works. According to the Minister's remarks Victoria has confined its public works committee to recommendations in regard to railways and railways only. It will be noted in this measure that it is sought to place the responsibility upon the committee, if appointed, of all works exceeding £20,000. I wonder how we are going to advance the development of Western Australia if we are to have an inquiry into every work

which exceeds £20,000 in cost. Time is the essence of the contract so far as a new country like Western Australia is concerned, where we are moving rapidly; at least we were moving rapidly, and I am bound to admit at the present time we are rather at a standstill. But time, as I have said, is always the essence of the contract in the development of a new country like Western Australia, which is vast in its area and with all the numerous requirements of the people, and the facilities to develop its resources, and if we are to shackle the movements of the Government or Parliament by a committee of this description, which can only do a moderate amount of work in the 12 months, then we are simply going to postpone the development of the country, to retard the expansion of the railway system and other public works which are so necessary in the interests of the people. I can quite understand in Victoria it might be deemed necessary, in that State's stage of existence and history, a State which has a comparatively large population as compared with that of Western Australia, to go cautiously with regard to railway expansion, and this comes home to us more particularly because we know that they had a boom in railway construction and then they had their bad times and many of their railways were lying idle.

The Minister for Lands : Some of them were pulled up.

Hon. FRANK WILSON : I believe one or two were. That is the experience of Victoria, which is small in area and which has a congested population, comparatively speaking, and where every new railway proposal must of necessity find not only many supporters amongst the public but also a great number of opponents. It must always be a battle of the routes in Victoria and hence there is a great necessity, at the stage of history at which she has arrived, for delay. But in a new country like ours, where virgin land has to be opened up and served by railway construction, where there can be no opposition because we ought at any rate to be sending our railways ahead of our population and settle-

ment, where there can be no real opposition to the construction of these railways, we shall be retarding our progress and only shelving responsibility which Ministers themselves ought to carry. The responsibility rests with the Government of the day and I cannot help but think that in introducing this measure again, and hoping that it may pass both Houses on this occasion, Ministers are looking for a pretext on which to hang their public works policy because of the financial stringency of the times. I hope, however, that is not so. Much odium was thrown upon our advisory boards as they were constituted and appointed during our term of office to advise the Government with regard to new railway construction, but the result of their work, wherever we travel, is to be seen in the increased land settlement and in the increased area of land under cultivation and increased export of cereals from our shores year by year. I am sorry to think that any Minister would condemn the work of these Advisory Boards. Their work was excellent. Time after time I announced in this House how beneficial the results of the Advisory Boards' reports were and the assistance that had been given and how directly they had tended to assist in the development of the land. It is claimed now by the Minister for Works that we were unduly hampering the Public Works officers by making them serve on Advisory Boards, that they were prevented from carrying out their ordinary duties. The Government is not so concerned in this respect when they appoint their boards with regard to workers' homes, for instance, which provide much more continuous work for these officers than the work of advising with regard to the construction of railways.

Mr. Gill: They do not have to get about the country.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: Have they not? The Minister did not show so much concern when the Engineer-in-Chief was made to serve on the Tender Board and on the Fremantle Harbour Trust. If the Government practice more what they preach and relieve these officers of work

which really can be performed better by outsiders, they will be doing a service to the State and will be conserving the valuable time of such public officers to the State service. But we are told that while they cannot assist as to the advising of the proper way of opening up our country by the construction of railways, that they can assist on these boards which take up so much more valuable time. It seems to me, when I point out that if we have a Parliamentary Committee of this description, it would be principally engaged in examining the expert officers of the different departments in order to come to a decision on their evidence; then the House will agree with me that the work will practically be done twice over. How can Parliament have any more control with a committee appointed by the two Houses than it can have with the reports of the experts direct to the Minister, and through the Minister to Parliament. Then again, when the committee will frame its report, whatever it may be it must be upon the very evidence of the men who otherwise would send in that report direct. I do not see that it is going to benefit us one iota to transfer the responsibility of the public works policy. I think it is going to be a retrograde step. It will give Ministers the excuse to say that they are in the unfortunate position of not being able to grant certain facilities until the Parliamentary Committee has reported, and even when the Parliamentary Committee does report, in many instances they will turn round and say "Yes we would have done so but the committee is against us." At the present time we should conserve all our expenditure as much as possible. We are faced with financial stringency and it is our duty to see that every penny that can possibly be saved is saved in connection with the public expenditure. But Ministers do not seem to concern themselves much in that direction. We hear of new departments being established and they are already outlined in the Budget speech and in the Estimates. Again, we have this committee which is a new department and which will cost a considerable sum of money each year.

The chairman is to be a Minister of the Crown and if the Minister is not present, whoever is acting as the chairman will receive a fee of one and a-half guineas for each sitting, and the members are to receive one guinea for each sitting. Naturally their expenses must also be paid. They will have to travel round the country wherever public works are necessary and inspect, and that will run into a considerable sum of money. In New South Wales, when I turned up the figures last year, I found the expenses of the Public Works Committee alone amounted to something like £6,000. I cannot conceive for one moment that in Western Australia we are going to have much less expenditure than that.

*[The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Holman) took the Chair.]*

Mr. Gill: They pay more than a guinea there.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: I am referring to the expenses, in addition to the fees paid. I cannot imagine Western Australia, a country of such magnificent distances as ours is, where you have to travel at great expense to outlying portions of the State, that the expenditure of the committee would be much less than in New South Wales at the time I am referring to. Therefore we may look forward to the expenditure of anything up to £6,000 or £10,000 per annum in expenses.

Mr. Thomas: They are limited to £500 per half year.

Hon. FRANK WILSON: That is the fees. The expenses would go into much more than £1 a day. It is not the personal expenses of members but the travelling expenses, the conveniences that would have to be put at the disposal of members in the shape of special trains, accommodation, steam boats to take members up to the North-West coast if there are works to be carried out there. The "Una" I understand is being converted into a yacht so as to carry the engineers on trips to the North-West. Then there will be materials to cart round for the committee. They will have to be properly provided for and catered for and you bet your life they will not travel if

they are not looked after. They will have their secretary, and their staff and their shorthand writer, and all the attendants necessary in keeping with the dignity of the work undertaken, and in order that the work may be properly carried out I think I am safe in saying that it will take from £6,000 to £10,000 per annum. If work is to be inquired into at all in Western Australia that will be the expenditure on this committee.

Mr. Harper: Do you think there will be any work to investigate?

Hon. FRANK WILSON: I said "if." On the score of cost alone we are not justified at the present juncture in supporting this measure. The country is not going to get the advantages out of that committee, the country will not get any better control over the public works policy. The country, if the Bill be passed, will have Ministers sheltering themselves behind the measure, sheltering themselves behind the committee instead of taking the responsibility of their own policy. During my term of office I think members will admit that we were always prepared to take the responsibility of our public works policy. We were always prepared to move quickly and give Parliament every line or shred of evidence in connection with public works, together with our own reasons why they should be carried out, and in every instance we got a majority of Parliament to support us in our policy. I go further and say that we got a majority of members in opposition to support us in every instance. In regard to the public works policy the Government need not fear any other treatment, as far as this House is concerned at the present time, and they can if they wish, as they have done on many occasions, ignore the Opposition if they vote against their policy. They have sufficient numbers to carry out their policy. I am opposed to the measure; it is not in the best interests of the State, nor is it in the best interests of the people. It will be of no assistance to Parliament, and I hope Parliament will think twice before they pass the second reading.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. T. H. Bath): The leader of the Opposi-

tion has entirely missed the point in connection with this measure before the House, in that he declares that the Government of which he was the head, or at the time Sir Newton Moore was Premier and of which he was a member, were always ready to take the responsibility for measures embodying expenditure on public works, and I need hardly assure that hon. gentleman and the members of this House that the present Government are just as much prepared to accept the responsibility, but this measure seeks to add to the responsibility the result of fullest investigation. We want responsibility, and at the same time we want responsibility with that additional fullness of detail which will enable us to avoid the blunders of the past. And if the expenditure is involved no one will dispute for a moment that in the constitution of this committee it only requires that we should avoid such an expenditure as in connection with the attempt to establish a dock on the present site in the Fremantle harbour, or the expenditure in connection with public works and railways which represent a departure from the fixed policy, to not only justify that expenditure, but to represent a sound investment from a financial standpoint. The leader of the Opposition states that he cannot understand how it will be possible for a committee of this kind to secure fuller information than that which has been supplied on previous occasions before such a committee was contemplated. But I presume the Minister for Works in introducing the Bill and in advancing that argument was basing his statements on the facts as we know them in New South Wales and Victoria. In New South Wales, for instance, anyone who peruses the reports submitted by the Public Works Committee on public undertakings in the shape of railways and other works will realise that the information and details supplied are infinitely fuller and much more useful to the Administration having to form their judgment and support a measure before Parliament than the meagre details that from time to time have been supplied by Governments in submitting railways and other public works to this

House. I do not wish to contend for a moment that they may not have much fuller information at their disposal represented in the matter supplied to them by departmental officers, but so far as hon. members of this Chamber are concerned, and I think they can all justify this statement, what we are concerned with is not the information that may be supplied to Ministers, but the information that Ministers supply to this House.

Hon. J. Mitchell : Surely Ministers gave full information, did they not ?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS : If the contention of the hon. member is correct that they gave full information—I suppose he means all that was made available to them—then we have been asked repeatedly to pass public works with the most meagre information at our command. That places members in an invidious position, in a difficult position. On the one hand we are entrusted with the development of the State, and are not desirous of placing obstacles in the way of public works for the development of the State, but it is unfair to ask us to vote on public works involving the expenditure of thousands of pounds for each individual work—tens of thousands, and in some cases hundreds of thousands of pounds for each individual work—on information which has been supplied to us. That is a matter I have always regretted in the works policy pursued in the past. That is why we ought to give this proposal a fair trial if only to rectify that condition of affairs. It is wrong to place members in a false position; on the one hand to ask them to vote blindly on the strength of the assurance of members of the Ministry that we think it is all right, or, on the other hand, run the risk of being branded as members opposed to works for the development of the State. It is a wrong position entirely, and as I said before, it is a position I have always been desirous of avoiding, and this measure embodies our desire to try some new means, by the constitution of a standing committee as in the case of New South Wales and Victoria. The leader of the Opposition has been drawing on his imagination to a very con-

siderable extent this afternoon, and building up a case entirely on that imagination. In the first place he presumes that the members of Parliament in New South Wales are dissatisfied with the system there, and the constitution of the Public Works Committee, and on that presumption he says it will be difficult for them to effect a remedy. We have no evidence of that dissatisfaction. Surely if the fact be conceded that it might be difficult to alter or repeal it, that would not prevent members from voicing their objections in Parliament. But on my perusal of the reports of the debates of the reception of the reports from the Public Works Committee in New South Wales, I have read no evidence of this presumed dissatisfaction with the work of the Public Works Committee. In the second place the leader of the Opposition is entirely drawing on his imagination when he estimates the cost of this committee at between £6,000 and £10,000 per annum. I am of opinion that a couple of thousand pounds will cover the cost of this committee, and if the expenditure of a couple of thousand pounds per annum will effect a saving, as might have been done in connection with the works already mentioned, which already runs into hundreds of thousands of pounds and is admittedly a failure, then £2,000, or even if it amounted to £5,000, would be a sum well invested. The constitution of this committee means that the members of this Chamber will in a much larger measure be taken into active partnership with the responsible Minister for the time being in the active control of public expenditure on large public works, and it is in that direction that I anticipate the reform of the unsatisfactory condition of things I have referred to and that has previously existed. It will be the duty of the committee by reason of their sense of responsibility to members as a whole to secure much fuller detail, and that there is that sense of responsibility will be evidenced to hon. members on both sides of the House if they take up any individual report that has been submitted by the Public Works Committee in New South Wales, or for that mat-

ter in Victoria, and peruse that report and gather some idea of the evidence which they consider necessary on a public work in Victoria, and peruse that report, to Parliament. Their evidence and their report is infinitely more exhaustive than anything ever presented in this House in connection with a public work. Then there is the further evidence in favour of such a committee, at least from what is available in Victoria, that there has been a strong public protest against the action of Governments from time to time who have evaded the reference of contemplated public works to this committee, by the process of building them in instalments involving the expenditure of less than £20,000. Hon. members will probably recollect that when Sir Thomas Bent engaged in the construction of the railway to Brighton that railway was built in instalments, each one involving the expenditure of less than £20,000, although the whole work when completed involved a cost greatly exceeding that amount. There were very strong protests in Victoria against that action, evidencing the fact that, so far as that State is concerned, opinion in Parliament and public opinion outside is strongly in favour of the work of such a committee. Then we are told that this committee is going to shackle the movements and the energy of any Government in power in carrying out a public works policy, and that it will probably involve the postponement of these works. I need only refer hon. members to the fact that in New South Wales railway construction is proceeding apace—big works such as the North Coast railway, the building of branch lines from the main trunk lines into the wheat-growing country which is now being opened up, and the construction of such a colossal work as the Burrenjack irrigation reservoir, and the channels running from it, which will result in the conversion of a large area of New South Wales from a hot and dusty inland desert into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Mr. Harper: If they can get the money.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member may not know it, but a perusal of the Eastern papers will inform him that Burrenjack is in a very advanced stage of construction. The North Coast railway is being constructed at a substantial rate of speed, and other railways are being built.

Mr. Harper: The trouble will be with the future works.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member at once furnishes me with an argument that any delay will not be occasioned by the fact that the committee have to report on it, but by a condition of affairs which causes delays in all countries of the world where they are dependent for the time being on borrowed moneys for the carrying out of any public works policy. That is not due to the fact that a public works committee reported on them; as a matter of fact, the history of New South Wales since the constitution of that committee, shows that in no sense has there been a break in the progress of that State, but on the contrary the committee has been an advantage, inasmuch as each work is the outcome of deliberation and full investigation, and, therefore, the risk of mistake is to a large extent minimised. To me, however, the greatest advantage in connection with this committee will be that the influence of the committee will be used in the direction of carrying out our public works upon definite lines, and upon a policy approved both by the Ministry and by the Legislature; and it is particularly because of the lack of such a policy, the lack of consideration for the future development of the State, that complaint has been raised against the system hitherto pursued in Western Australia. Take for instance the position of those settlers between the eastern gold-fields railway and the Dowerin-Merredin line. We have there a belt of country, embracing such fertile areas as Ucarty, East and West Yorkrakine, North Baandee, and the country between Nungarin and Naugeenan, to a large extent isolated, making the development of the farmers difficult by reason of the fact that there was no policy in connection

with the construction of the Dowerin-Merredin line. Had the Government had in view what should be the distance separating railways in order that those situated between might not be placed at a disadvantage by reason of their isolation or through their unfair distance from railway facilities, then probably the Dowerin-Merredin line would have been constructed in a different direction, and later on a line further north could have been built with the same end in view. With a committee representative of this Parliament laying down at the outset something like a definite rule as to the distance between railways, and a definite plan in regard to the development of our various districts, we might have avoided what will be inevitable in the future, viz., expense in railway construction in order to serve those situated between lines which, if properly set out in the first place, would have served those people without any additional expenditure. Reference has been made, too, to the fact that while we complain that such a duty as the examination of railway propositions takes away our important public officials from their ordinary duties, on the other hand we have caused them to serve on boards which have the same effect. But there is a very vital distinction between serving on a committee of this kind, with its consequent loss of time in travelling over the country, and serving on a board such as that controlling the workers' homes scheme, or the Tender Board, or the Fremantle Harbour Trust. Incidentally, the criticism by the leader of the Opposition of our action in placing public officials on such boards and his advice that we should go to people outside is not evidence of any great patriotic principles on his part, because I deem it neglect of duty on the part of any Government if they decide to constitute a board to control a work on which large sums of public money have been expended, unless they have direct representation on that board. What a fatuous policy it would be to hand over the control of large public works, such as the Fremantle harbour, to a board entirely composed of

outside persons. It would be absolutely suicidal, and I am astonished at the leader of the Opposition, with his public responsibility, advocating such a step. However, that is beside the question. I merely wish to emphasise the fact that there is a difference between calling upon public officials to spend a considerable portion of their time in travelling through the country, and in asking them to devote portion of their time daily or weekly to sitting on a board which meets in the city. There is very little in the argument of the leader of the Opposition in that respect.

Hon. J. Mitchell: Do you think the chairman of the Harbour Trust can do all his work merely sitting in committee?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No, I do not think so, but I think that his work on that Harbour Trust is linked up to a great extent with his work as Engineer-in-Chief.

Mr. Male: Oh, dear no.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Undoubtedly. That Harbour Trust is, to a large extent, the constituted guardian of the public funds invested in the harbour works.

Mr. Wisdom: The duties of the chairman are not of an engineering character.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: But does any hon. member wish to say for one moment that we would undertake any extension of the Fremantle harbour works without obtaining the views of a body like the Harbour Trust? It is absolutely unthinkable.

Mr. Taylor: But the chairman is your Engineer-in-Chief.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Does the hon. member wish to suggest that the Harbour Trust is not interested in the engineering future of the harbour?

Mr. Taylor: But it is not necessary for the chairman to be the Engineer-in-Chief.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: If the hon. member does not wish to get a reputation for absolute banality, he will close up on that argument. It is absolutely absurd. Do hon. members think that we would undertake any such proposal without consultation with a body



like the Harbour Trust? Of course we would not; it would be absurd.

Mr. Male: It is a disadvantage having simply an engineer as chairman of the Harbour Trust.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Hon. members may hold their opinions in that respect, but I hold entirely different views, and I say that on all future works for the improvement of the Fremantle harbour involving the need for expansion from time to time to meet the improvements in connection with the advances in shipping, it is absolutely incumbent upon us to have a Harbour Trust constituted in such a way that its advice will be of utility to the Government in power for the time being.

Mr. Male: That is a very different thing.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It would be a disastrous condition of affairs in Western Australia if we ever constituted a Harbour Trust which had not the requisite ability to give us that advice. I am surprised at hon. members advancing any view to the contrary.

Mr. Wisdom: The chairman of the Harbour Trust recommends works to the Engineer-in-Chief, that is, to himself.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I am not for one moment contending that they should represent works, but the question of harbour extension has many other aspects than the mere question of works, and all these aspects have to be taken into consideration before a work involving the expenditure of millions of money is embarked on. That is very apropos to expenditure which in a few years time will have to be renewed in connection with the existing harbour works at Fremantle, and which a committee of this kind would have enabled us to avoid. I am not referring to the dock now, I am referring to the repairs which have been effected from time to time involving a large expenditure, and which run the risk of being rendered useless within a comparatively short space of time.

Mr. Wisdom: Would you have the Engineer-in-Chief chairman of this Public Works Committee?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member, if he reads the Bill, will see for himself how the Public Works Committee is proposed to be constituted, and he will know that a Minister of the Crown for the time being is to be chairman of the committee.

Mr. Wisdom: Why not appoint the Engineer-in-Chief?

Mr. Male: Or have the Minister a qualified engineer, to follow up your line of argument.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: One finds it difficult to understand what hon. members are driving at; they seem to be obsessed with their own ideas on the question. The point I am emphasising is that no great call, or any call to the same extent, on the duties they are now performing is involved, as was the case where their time for weeks and months at a stretch was occupied in the country in reports on railway propositions. So far as sitting on the Tender Board is concerned, the leader of the Opposition inferred that this was done by the present Government; but, as hon. members know, it was done long before we assumed office. The appointment was made years ago, and it was characteristic of the accuracy of the statements of the leader of the Opposition.

Hon. J. Mitchell: Who is the chairman?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: He was not appointed by us, but he has been on the Tender Board for years. The leader of the Opposition inferred that the appointment was made by us; he referred to appointments made by us, while at the same time he was arguing that these officers had not sufficient time to carry out these duties. In addition to the more exhaustive investigation of a committee of this kind, we will still be able to obtain the advice and assistance of officers, and whatever knowledge is at their disposal, in connection with the investigation of proposed public works. In these circumstances I am convinced that the constitution of this committee is going to place hon. members in a much better position in the future in deciding on public works proposals, and it is certainly going to eliminate from all future discussions the unsatisfactory position that has obtained

in the past, in that we are asked to pass, yearly, expenditure involving hundreds of thousands of pounds on meagre information supplied for the time being by the Ministry in power. I think that is altogether unsatisfactory, and that it is time that this condition of things was altered. I believe that it will be altered for the better by the enactment of this measure.

Hon. J. MITCHELL (Northam): I have listened with considerable interest to the arguments put up by the Minister for Lands. To begin with, he knows as well as any member of the Chamber that while the Advisory Board were out in the country they were not only getting information for the purpose of reporting as to railways, but they were also doing duty in their particular offices. Take the Manager of the Agricultural Bank; it is very necessary for him to travel through the country, and every mile he travelled with the Advisory Board was useful to him. He wanted to learn how the farmers were doing, and he got information that was of the utmost use to him, which probably he could not otherwise have got. Then also the Surveyor General was gaining information in the conduct of his business as Surveyor General in addition to special information for the help of the Government and Parliament. Probably he would also have to travel over the same country to direct the surveyors. Then take Professor Lowrie; how better could he get a knowledge of the country than by travelling about as a member of the Advisory Board? I know that towards the end he objected that it took up a good deal of his time, but in the early stages he agreed that it was necessary. It is not necessary to tell the House how requisite it was for Professor Lowrie to have that experience. Then Mr. Muir, the engineer for construction, he also was getting information that was valuable to him when engaged in his work. These officers were specially chosen; first because they were particularly well qualified to do the work that Parliament wanted done, and that the country wanted done; and secondly because in doing this work they gained knowledge that would

be of so much advantage to the State. The Advisory Board made no mistakes; they reported to this House quite fully on every measure they were called upon to consider. When they were appointed they were asked to mark the map showing all the railways needed to open up all the land in the South-Western division of the State. Of course for a time it was a big undertaking, very big. I doubt if any body of men was ever called upon to take the same responsibility, or undertake a work that meant so much to this State. Just imagine being told, "You have a hundred million acres in the South-Western division which needs to be brought within easy distance of railway communication."

Mr. Gill: It used to be 600,000,000 acres; what have you done with the other 500,000,000 acres?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The Premier and his colleagues have got it on the Trans-Australian railway route. The Advisory Board were simply given a commission to mark a map; they were not limited or restricted by unnecessary instructions. It is true that from time to time they were asked to report on some special line, but generally their duty was to examine all the country and tell us where to lay down our railways, and to mark these lines in order of preference.

The Minister for Mines: Has every line they reported on and recommended been justified?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I think so.

The Minister for Mines: Then why did you not support the Esperance line?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Because there was not a unanimous report.

Mr. Harper: The best man on the board opposed it.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The Advisory Board had an enormous commission and undertaking no committee of Parliament would be capable of. They had a responsibility to face and work to face I venture to say no body of gentlemen consisting of members of this House could have satisfactorily undertaken.

Mr. Thomas: Why not?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Because they have not the special knowledge that is needed for this purpose.

Mr. Taylor: They think they have.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No doubt. It has been said that the Advisory Board did not answer the requirements of the country; I assert they did. They cannot be pointed to as an excuse for any change in the system we have followed. Reference has been made time and again to the Dowerin-Merredin railway, and to the country between Nungarin and Nangeenan not being served. But Nungarin is on the railway.

The Minister for Lands: I was referring to the country in between, at Yorkrakine.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The railway runs nearly north and south between Nungarin and Merredin, and Nangeenan is quite close to Merredin.

Mr. Heitmann: But what about the Yorkrakine district?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I am just endeavouring to show that the Minister's information is incorrect.

The Minister for Lands: I have been from Nangeenan to Nungarin.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Do you know that Nungarin is on the railway line?

The Minister for Lands: Yes. I was referring to the country in between.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Then the Minister deceived the House. The country in between Nungarin and Nangeenan is near the railway, because the line runs north and south just there.

Mr. Heitmann: You know very well there is a lot of country not served.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I know there is a great deal of country 15 miles away from a railway, and that there is some more than that.

Mr. Heitmann: That is all the Minister said.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: But the Minister gave details that were not correct. The Bill for the construction of that railway was brought down to the House and received the approval of Parliament, but we allowed for a deviation, and unfortunately that deviation goes to the north instead of to the south.

Mr. Green: Near the hon. member's friends.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member is not in order in imputing motives.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: It would have been better to bring the line nearer to the Eastern Railway. As it turned out, in some places it is a little more than the 15-miles limit. It is strange that the Minister for Lands should tell us that we had no policy with regard to distance. The Government of which he was a member appointed a Royal Commission which cost a lot of money, and on that Commission were the present Premier and the late member for Northam, Mr. Watts, and the advice of that Commission was that a 30-mile limit should be accepted. That limit became the accepted idea of the country because of the report of the Immigration Commission to which I have referred. We were wrong in fixing that limit. I think it was too great. We have had experience since that the Commission made a mistake in regard to the distance. It will be an easy matter in the future to remedy the mistake in regard to the Yorkrakine people, because the country in between the two existing railways, as the Minister for Lands has said, is good country, and by splitting the two lines we can build another line of railway running through Yorkrakine east and west. If we had had this Parliamentary Committee at the time that Royal Commission sat I venture to say the distance would not have been reduced from the 30 miles. With regard to the appointment of officials to various offices, I agree that if we take them from their work, and give them duties to perform that will divorce them from their office work for the time, we of course do considerable harm to the administration of the department. It was wrong to appoint Mr. Thompson, the Engineer-in-Chief, to the position of Chairman of the Harbour Trust. I do not know why Ministers did that and where they found justification for it. That is an appointment which should be in the hands of a capable business man who has the time to devote to it.

Hon. W. C. Angwin (Honorary Minister): He was appointed on account of his engineering abilities.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: But his engineering abilities have nothing to do with the filling of a position like that. I admit that Mr. Thompson is a capable engineer, but the position ought to have been filled by a competent business man. When it comes to controlling a business concern, Mr. Thompson cannot be regarded as the right person. The point is that taking an officer who fills an important post such as Engineer-in-Chief, and whose duty it is to look after various harbours and all the engineering works of the State, and putting him in a position that must absorb much of his time, is altogether wrong. It is altogether a different matter from the appointment of such an officer to a seat on an advisory board. The arguments used by the Minister who introduced this Bill do not find much favour with me. The Minister said that the expenditure would be limited; I think if the members sit on that board and receive only a guinea a day the expenses will be limited, but I think the remuneration fixed is not adequate, if we are to have such a committee.

Mr. Taylor: It is not much of a job if it is only worth a guinea a day.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The Minister says that the experience of the past convinced the Government that this Public Works Committee was necessary; if it is necessary he should have produced stronger arguments in favour of the Bill; he should have provided also for a much bigger fee for those who are to give up their time to this work. I suppose, however, that the expenses will be on a generous scale. The Minister said that through this Committee Parliament would control the expenditure, but I would point out that every proposal for expenditure comes before Parliament now, and that Parliament will have no greater control through the Public Works Committee than it has at the present time. It is true that if the Ministry have to refer all works of an important character to the Public Works Committee, the Ministry may be prevented from bringing their

measures down to Parliament, or prevented from putting their ideas into operation. In that way of course we may have better control of the expenditure; but I venture to say if a vote of the House be taken, and even if the report of the Committee be taken, the position will be as it is now.

Mr. Taylor: The vote will be on party lines.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Most assuredly. It is provided that the members of the Committee shall be elected on party lines, that is proportional representation. The Minister said too that the select committees in the past had not been satisfactory. I do not know how far the Minister is justified in making that statement. The work the select committees have done, I think, has been very satisfactory.

Hon. W. C. Angwin (Honorary Minister): I was on one at Kojonup which your supporters would not sit.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I believe the select committees do excellent work, and I think it would be a pity if this House were deprived of the right to appoint them. Notwithstanding the Public Works Committee, however, we shall still have the right to appoint select committees to inquire into any matter that we think may need investigation. The Minister, by way of interjection, stated that the select committees started on prejudiced lines; that was a strong remark to make, and I think the Minister should not have used it. He said that the mover was generally interested, but that goes without saying. I hope the Minister did not use the word "interested" in a personal sense; if he did, the remark was entirely wrong. I realise that the Bill will absolve the Ministry of responsibility; it will make it impossible for outside influence to be brought to bear on the Ministers to any great extent. I am well aware, of course, that "Premier" McCallum will not have the influence that he has to-day, and I am aware that Ministers will be glad indeed to be relieved of pressure from outside, and will be glad to exercise, through this committee, an absolutely free hand. I am going to oppose the Bill because I think it is unnecessary. The House is

quite capable of deciding whether public works are to be carried out, and where money is to be expended and members will be quite capable of criticising the Minister if he does not bring down the information, and it will be quite competent also for select committees or Royal Commissions to conduct investigations. Time and again we have adopted this course, and it has given satisfaction. Many millions have been spent in this State, and Ministers cannot point to a single instance where money has been wrongly spent. Repairs to the Fremantle Harbour will have to be undertaken soon.

The Minister for Lands: They have been going on.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Probably some bolts have wanted replacing, but I know that the Ministry spent £54,000 last year on the Fremantle Harbour.

The Minister for Lands: We had to provide that amount on the Estimates for expenditure incurred by your Government.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I know that £54,000 was spent on it and not charged to Revenue.

The Minister for Lands: Your Government did it.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: We did not produce the last Estimates.

The Minister for Lands: We had to provide the money.

Mr. Heitmann: You must admit that the dock is a sad political job.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: What the hon. member calls a political job was undertaken on the advice of Sir Whately Eliot.

The Minister for Mines: You would not accept the advice of your own responsible officers.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: It is easy to impute motives, but I repeat that we sought the advice of an expert who was brought here from England.

Mr. Dwyer: You did not follow it.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Yes, and we put the dock where Sir Whately Eliot advised it should be put. The engineers worked at it for nearly a year after we left office, and then suddenly it was discovered that owing to a fault it could not be completed. Of course it is very unfortunate that this money has been expended, but could the Public Works

Committee have determined against the site? The present Government spent a good deal of money on the dock after we left office, so that it must be admitted that the discovery of a fault was quite a recent affair; it could not have been foreseen. The best that was possible was done. This site was not chosen because Ministers thought it was the right place; it was chosen because the expert told us that it was the right place.

Mr. Taylor: The late Mr. C. Y. O'Connor predicted exactly what happened.

Mr. Dwyer: Give us what the dock has cost and there will be no deficit.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I will remind the member for Perth that this has nothing to do with the deficit. Even if the money had not been expended, the deficit would not have been less, and I venture to say that if three times that amount were given to Ministers there would still be a deficit at the end of the year. I hope the Bill will not find favour with members. It is a paltry affair, and unworthy of our consideration.

Mr. HARPER (Pingelly): It is my intention to oppose the Bill.

Mr. Gill: It is unnecessary to tell us that.

Mr. HARPER: But I am going to give substantial reasons for my opposition. The advisory boards which have been dealing with the construction of railways in the past were composed of the best trained men it was possible to secure in Western Australia, and I would like to say that there is no man's opinion in Western Australia that I would esteem or regard more than that of Mr. Paterson, who was Chairman of the Advisory Board. Each of the members of that board was an expert in his own line. We had Mr. Muir, Inspector of Engineering Surveys, Mr. Johnston, the Surveyor General, and Professor Lowrie, all highly competent men to advise the House in regard to railways. I oppose the Bill for the reason that the committee are to be selected from both Houses of Parliament. In looking round I see no members in either House competent to fill the position. In my opinion hon. members are totally unsuited for such a position. I would not object to a committee appointed from experts out-

side political influence; that would be a different matter altogether.

Hon. W. C. Angwin (Honorary Minister): The Kunjin railway would never have started from Brookton.

Mr. HARPER: The Kunjin railway is one of the best spur lines to be built in Western Australia, and I can say the Honorary Minister knows nothing at all of what he is talking about, or he would not make such an ignorant interjection. The hon. member knows very little of Western Australia at all outside of Fremantle, and his views are very narrow and very shallow. I strongly protest against hon. members being on the public works committee. I think such a committee composed of hon. members would be altogether unsuitable to inquire into the public works proposals of the State. It would amount to a farce taking members of either House, for they are not in any way suited for the position.

Mr. Green: Why has it not been a farce in New South Wales?

Mr. HARPER: It has been. With regard to the pay of members of this committee, I understand they are to have a guinea a day. I think that is totally inadequate for men fitted for the position. On the other hand, I think it is quite sufficient for men selected from either House of Parliament, indeed it might be too much. The Minister for Lands made out a pretty good case from a very bad one, because there is nothing at all to warrant the Bill at the present time. I interjected at the hon. member when he referred to New South Wales. New South Wales is having great difficulty in borrowing money at the present time. We read in the newspapers this morning that the money lenders subscribed only one-half of the loan floated by New South Wales. If that is the case in regard to New South Wales at the present time, what is going to be the position in Western Australia? Experiments of this kind are inopportune just now. It is undesirable that we should experiment during the present financial crisis, because it seems to me it is going to be very difficult to borrow sufficient money to carry out the authorised public works, and I am sorry to predict that

our public works will not be very extensive until the money market is easier than it is at present. For that reason it is inopportune at the present time to pass a Bill of this description. It does not seem to me to be a practical measure. It would merely land us out of the frying pan into the fire. The advisory board are eminently better suited for carrying out this important work.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: It is not in existence now.

Mr. HARPER: I regret that, because I esteemed their opinions very much. They sometimes differed from mine, but practically they were right in nearly every case. I would not like to contradict so able a man as the chairman of that board. I have nothing more to say other than that I sincerely hope this special measure will be relegated to the waste-paper basket.

Mr. THOMAS (Bunbury): I have been deeply impressed by the eloquent address delivered by the member for Pingelly. Although I have been always a strong advocate of this public works committee, yet the impetuous torrent of the hon. gentleman's tempestuous eloquence almost convinced me that I was wrong; but I managed to sustain my convictions through it all. I want to say seriously that I am a very strong advocate of this public works committee, notwithstanding the forcible arguments brought forward by the hon. member who has just resumed his seat. While I have very great respect for the gentlemen who have constituted the Advisory Board and while I have always been prepared to accept their recommendations, with some modifications. I am still of opinion that the system which has been in existence is not the best for Western Australia. I claim, without any reflection upon those particular gentlemen, that any body composed principally of Government servants sent out to act as an advisory board would have in some measure an unconscious bias in favour of what they knew to be the wishes of the Ministry who sent them out.

Mr. Harper: Well, what about members of Parliament?

Mr. THOMAS: It is to be remembered that in a committee composed of members of Parliament both sides of the House would be represented, and if it should happen that the committee as a whole were not unanimous, I presume it would be competent for them to introduce a minority report showing to the House that there was a division of opinion. Now, in the few reports which it has been my privilege to peruse, the information given by the Advisory Board has been of a very meagre description. It has not, to my thinking, been sufficient to enable us to form an absolutely definite opinion upon the works they recommend. Secondly, we have been compelled, in a measure, to accept their advice in the dark, so to speak. That is not advisable. One great point, in my opinion, in favour of this Parliamentary Public Works Committee constituted of politicians is that in addition to any report which they may prepare to be laid on the Table, those members from both sides of the House will be here to supply the House with the fullest possible information on every detail, and to iterate and reiterate if necessary the strong points in favour of their particular contention. But it would be a very strange thing if, finding the information supplied by the present Advisory Board was insufficient, we were to continually bring them before the bar of the House to supply us with further information. It would be of enormous assistance to members in arriving at a conclusion which involves vast expenditure to have the members of the committee here, members who have gone through every detail and every phase of the proposals, to give us the benefit of that information. Further than that, if at the commencement of a Parliamentary session the committee is appointed and holds office for three years, during the course of that time they will have an opportunity of becoming experts in their particular work; and if they are fortunate with their constituents, and return here again, and have done good work for the State, it is not unreasonable to assume that, irrespective of party, they would again be appointed to the same

office. And so, by and by, we would have growing up amongst us a body of experts whose advice would be invaluable in connection with this particular work. It seems curious to me in view of the fact that in Federal politics the Liberal party are advocating the establishment of a public works committee on similar lines, I presume, to what we are advocating here, that the West Australian Liberal party, which I suppose is an inferior branch of that great organisation, seems to differ from its leaders, from its grand old chief, from those who have made the Liberal party what it is. These juniors in the work have departed from the principles laid down by the older members, and that would lead one almost to suppose that the opposition raised by the eloquent member for Pingelly (Mr. Harper) and the member for Northam (Hon. J. Mitchell) and others is really done for party purposes rather than from any sound conviction. Otherwise those members must differ from their Federal colleagues. It seems to me rather a peculiar position. Now, while agreeing with the principle of this particular measure, I take strong exception to the question of the allowances that are to be made for members. The leader of the Opposition said, I think, that he anticipated this would cost the country from £6,000 to £10,000 per annum. A little careful consideration would have led him to the knowledge that it probably will cost not more than half of £10,000.

*Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.*

*[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]*

Mr. THOMAS: I was speaking on the question of the cost of this Public Works Committee, and I was pointing out that the leader of the Opposition, when he said that the committee would cost something like £10,000, was very considerably wide of the mark. When we take into consideration the miserable allowance that the Government have provided for the members who are to sit on the committee it can hardly by any stretch of imagination be worked out to cost anything like half that amount. I think the framer of

the measure erred considerably in his judgment when he decided to offer any member in return for his services one guinea per day. I have never been an advocate of a poor return for one's labour, and I think that when the people select 50 individuals to represent them in Parliament they have sufficient confidence in them to believe that their services when given to any special work are at least worth more than the salary that is offered.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: That is in addition to their ordinary salary and travelling expenses.

Mr. THOMAS: An hon. member when he is sent to the House has to carry out certain duties for which he receives a fixed remuneration, and if he does work beyond that he is as much entitled to extra remuneration as any other member of the community. I am of opinion that we will never get good work for a poor salary. If it be thought that the members of the committee should serve for the honour and glory of the thing, then let us do away with the salary altogether, and let us understand that they are doing this work as a duty to the country. But if we let the country think we are paid then let the members who sit on the committee have decent remuneration. It may be that a man will need to travel to and from a sitting a day's journey each way.

The Minister for Works: Travelling expenses are provided for.

Mr. THOMAS: But for this travelling he will get nothing. In reality he will be paid one guinea for three days' work. In addition to that, a member sitting on the committee will not only have to work on days on which the committee sits, but if he intends to put his matter carefully and systematically before the House, he will need to sit many days in his own room considering the report that he will make, and the attitude he will adopt. I say the allowance is a very poor one indeed, and I think the Minister in charge of the Bill would be well advised to provide a more adequate remuneration for the members of the committee; either that, or let them do it for nothing and get the credit for it. The leader of the Opposition said that the object of the Bill was to relieve the Minister or Ministry of a certain amount

of responsibility. I do not believe for one moment that such will be the case. I cannot conceive of any Act that will relieve Ministers of their responsibility, but if by the passing of this measure we place more responsibility on the shoulders of members of this House we will be doing a very good thing indeed, because I hold the opinion that not only in this State but in every State of the Commonwealth there is too much government by Ministers and too little government by Parliament. I do not say it as any reflection on the present Ministry; it is the result of custom.

Mr. Taylor: One of the results of party politics.

Mr. THOMAS: Possibly, but if this measure will result in placing more responsibility upon the shoulders of members of Parliament, and giving them an opportunity of taking a more intelligent interest in the public works of the country, it will be doing an immense amount of good. Reverting to the question of expense, I have calculated that if we have a public works expenditure of two million pounds per annum, and we spend £5,000 per annum on this particular committee, that expense will work out at something like a quarter per cent. on the money to be invested. Surely that disposes of the argument as to expense.

The Minister for Works: Would you spend two million pounds on works of over £20,000 each?

Mr. THOMAS: Well, we will assume that we spend one million pounds per annum, and the cost of the committee will be one-half per cent. Is there any financial institution in the world about to make a large and important investment which would consider that expenditure too great to ensure the success of its undertaking? The leader of the Opposition was good enough to say that the result of the committee would be that Parliament would lose control of the business. I am sure I cannot follow the hon. gentleman in his course of reasoning. No matter what committee is appointed or how it is constituted, Parliament never loses its control, because the majority have the power to direct it as they will; so where is the foundation for the hon. member's argu-



ment? Of course the hon. member trotted out the time-worn, hoary-headed gag about caucus, and said that "of course these things would be controlled by caucus." Nobody knows better than the hon. gentleman that the accusation is untrue and without foundation. Caucus is as old as the history of Parliamentary government. Hon. members opposite hold their own little caucus, which is only a meeting of the party, and they would not submit a matter of this kind to caucus. I think that gibe about caucus is made against the Labour party a little too often.

The Minister for Lands : If it goes on much longer we will have to call in Dr. Montgomery.

Mr. THOMAS : Yes, and it shows a paucity of ideas, and a lack of legitimate argument to bring against a measure when we have this old wheeze trotted out time after time as something of an accusation against the Government. We have had members of the Opposition frequently advocating the appointment of select committees, and on those occasions it would seem to be the opinion of hon. members that these Parliamentary committees are very desirable.

Mr. Monger : Name one last session?

Mr. THOMAS : Hon. members desired several; they desired one on the Irrigation Bill. I do not carry a select stock of these things in my mind to remind hon. members of them, but if the member for York would attend the House a little more often he would have an opportunity of hearing these things.

Mr. Nauson : One has been suggested on your Pharmacy Bill.

Mr. THOMAS : If it is wise to urge the appointment of these select committees on various important measures, and if members attach some weight to the reports of those committees, then why would it not be satisfactory to have a permanent committee; because, if the deliberations of select committees appointed on special occasions are valuable, it must of necessity follow that another committee which is appointed for a lengthy period will arrive at much more valuable conclusions, for as time goes

on, the members will become much more expert in the work they are undertaking. Of course, as has been pointed out by others, the members of the committee will have the benefit of all the expert advice that can be had under existing conditions. The leader of the Opposition or the member for Pingelly (Mr. Harper), I am not sure which, said that Ministers were putting forward this measure as a pretext for hanging up public works. Surely any fair-minded member must repudiate any such insinuation as that. Surely any measure brought in by this or any other Government is not going to be faced with such groundless charges as that. Surely even if the Labour Government are in power, it is only fair and legitimate to give them credit for good intentions. If members disagree with the object of the Bill, why hurl a charge against the Government that they are indulging in political trickery, that they have something to hide, and that they are using this as a cloak in order that they might deceive the public? I consider such an accusation is very unjust to say the least. In regard to the statement that civil servants are neglecting their own duties in serving as they have been doing on these advisory boards, it must be remembered that the cost per day of their salaries while engaged on that work must be considered; the salaries of clerks, travelling expenses, and other costs must be totted up, and probably when all these things are inquired into the new system will prove very little more expensive than the old one. In New South Wales, I understand, the cost has gone up to a very considerable figure, but it must be remembered that whilst we propose to put only five members on the committee they have seven or more, and it must be said in their favour that at least they are paying a decent remuneration to the men engaged on that particular service. I have very little more to say on the Bill. I do not suppose that any amount of advocacy is necessary to secure the passage of the Bill through this House, for I have not the slightest doubt that whatever the argument may be, members on this

side are thoroughly convinced that we are in the right, and, notwithstanding all that may be said to the contrary, I think it hardly likely that a majority will be found against the Bill. I certainly trust that when this Bill reaches another stage some amendment will be secured and that the question of the remuneration on which I have spoken will be taken into serious consideration, and that a decided increase on the amount provided will be consented to by the Minister in charge of the Bill.

Mr. GILL (Leederville): The leader of the Opposition, in opposing this measure, did not advance many very strong arguments or reasons that I could hear in opposition to the proposal of the Government to establish a Parliamentary works committee. Neither did the member for Northam (Hon. J. Mitchell). One reason advanced to which the leader of the Opposition evidently pinned most of his faith, was the statement that in New South Wales the Public Works Committee is very expensive and has proved very unsatisfactory. Well, the expense, according to the leader of the Opposition, was undoubtedly somewhat extreme. He told us that the expenses in connection with the committee, not the remuneration for their services, but the out-of-pocket expenses or whatever they might be termed, amounted to about £6,000 per annum. If such is the case they must have done a great deal of travelling or have been very extravagant. The leader of the Opposition said he was of opinion also that if we appointed a Parliamentary committee the expense would be very little if anything less than the £6,000 incurred in New South Wales. I am not surprised at that statement coming from the hon. member, because we all know full well that he is one of the lavish kind. I give him credit that when he does a thing he does it thoroughly. We had evidence of that during his trip to the Coronation. I think he proved up to the hilt that he believed in doing the thing properly.

Hon. J. Mitchell: Fisher knocked him out easily.

Mr. GILL: I do not think so. Taking a line from the trip of the leader of the

Opposition, I can understand the hon. member coming to the conclusion that the expense in connection with a committee of this kind will be very considerable. However, I personally cannot see any reason for an expenditure such as he indicated, because, in the first place, the committee in this State would consist of five members only instead of seven as in New South Wales, and I cannot possibly see any reason why their expenses should amount to £1,000 per annum for each member. That is a considerable item in the way of expenditure, and I cannot possibly see any reason for it. Consequently I am not taking that reason advanced by the hon. member as being of a very substantial nature.

The Minister for Works: It is his usual extravagance, that is all.

Mr. GILL: It would be possible if the committee indulged in extravagance, but no Government or Parliament would consent to such a thing.

The Minister for Works: But his statements are usually extravagant.

Mr. GILL: Yes. The leader of the Opposition said someone told him, perhaps it was a Labour member, though he was not certain, that the results of this public works committee in New South Wales were of a most unsatisfactory character.

Mr. Heitmann: No, he said somebody else had told his informant.

Mr. GILL: He was not certain whether it was said or not, but still he understood or believed that a statement of that kind was made. He did not know who made it, but he thought that perhaps it was made by one of the Labour members. It was not of a very definite nature, anyway, to hang an argument upon. That is one reason which was advanced by him for opposing this Bill—not a very substantial reason. Then he went on to deal with Victoria, which has instituted the same system as the Ministry are advocating here, that is the establishment of a public works committee.

The Minister for Works: In Victoria it is limited to railways.

Mr. GILL: Yes, it is the same system with that exception. The hon. member pointed out the necessity for the committee in Victoria. He admitted the necessity for it in that State for various reasons. He said Victoria was a small State, and in the past there had been boom times, and railways had been constructed which were not paying propositions, and in some instances were not brought into use.

The Minister for Works: We had a Bullfinch here.

Mr. Monger: It has paid for itself.

Mr. GILL: It is surprising how members of the Opposition bite at the mention of the Bullfinch railway. Reverting to the statement of the leader of the Opposition, seeing that Victoria had her boom time and that the politicians of that State were led away by the boom or some of those interested in the boom, is it not just possible that if they had had a Parliamentary committee they would never have indulged in the political jobs which undoubtedly were indulged in.

Mr. Nanson: A committee might also have been influenced.

Mr. GILL: A committee might have been, but how could they have put the responsibility on some one else's shoulders? At present no one is responsible and that is the whole trouble with regard to political railways or political works of other kinds.

Hon. J. Mitchell: Do you accuse Hudson?

Mr. GILL: I am not accusing anyone. If the committee had been established years ago, it is possible that Victoria might have reaped great advantages and saved a considerable amount of money in connection with public works and on her railways in particular. When we look at the position in Western Australia fairly and squarely, everyone must admit that there is a need and more, an absolute necessity, for some different method in connection with our public works from that adopted in the past. Taking our railways in particular, what do we find? The practice at present and for a number of years past has been that a deputation of residents from a certain

district wait upon the Minister and advocate a railway. The Minister hears their request, a good case is put forward, he will give a favourable reply, and it all depends on circumstances which must be taken into consideration—the locality, time, the area to be served, and the question of a general election—all these matters must be taken into consideration if we are to judge from the past.

Mr. Monger: Is that your policy?

Mr. GILL: I am talking of the past.

Mr. Monger: I thought you were talking of the future.

Mr. GILL: To continue what I was saying, oftentimes a favourable promise is given upon the evidence adduced by these deputations, everyone of the persons being interested. I am not taking exception to those who attend deputations. They are justified in attending and asking for a railway if they consider it is needed, but I am objecting to Ministers giving replies, more often than not favourable replies, to all intents and purposes committing the Government to build a railway in some particular locality. How often do we see this done, and the Advisory Board are then sent out to report, not whether a railway is an absolute necessity for the development of the country, but as to how a railway can be constructed in a certain locality.

Mr. Monger: Name one instance.

Mr. GILL: Every instance. The hon. member will have an opportunity of naming some instances where that has not happened. Then, after this Advisory Board have been through the district, and presented their report, the Government bring down a Bill for the construction of a railway, and the information given to this House is most meagre. There is not the slightest doubt about that.

Mr. Monger: A nasty insult to the gentleman who occupy positions on the Advisory Board.

Mr. GILL: I am not speaking of the Advisory Board. I am speaking of the system. If the hon. member does not understand the difference between the system and the Advisory Board, it is not my fault.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: They condemned some railways before they got the Advisory Board's report.

Mr. GILL: I am dealing with the system which has been in force. I am condemning it and I say it should be altered. A Bill is brought down and the information we get is not of very much importance in assisting this House to arrive at a right and proper decision. We do not get the report of the Advisory Board, the result of their inquiries. We get a few lines of typewritten matter, stating that in the opinion of the board a railway is justified in a certain direction, and that so many thousand acres in that direction will be brought under cultivation. I noticed during last session a fact given in previous years was omitted, and that was that the average return for that country would be fifteen bushels or whatever the quantity might be. That is, generally speaking, the sum total of the evidence from the Advisory Board. It is not much to assist any member in arriving at a decision. The information has been so scant that we have had to accept in good faith the statements of the Minister, and that is most unsatisfactory. Mention has been made of two or three places in particular in which hardship has been inflicted on the people, and which would not have happened if this House had had fuller information than that supplied by the Advisory Board through the Minister. Mention has been made, and it simply supports my statement, that the information received in the past has not been as great as it could have been, particularly in connection with the Dowerin-Merredin railway. There is an instance in which, if the full information had been available, this House undoubtedly would not have agreed to the construction of that line on the route on which it has been built. In consequence, a permanent hardship has been inflicted on a great number of settlers between the Eastern Goldfields railway and the Dowerin line. The suggestion of the member for Northam (Hon. J. Mitchell) that we can construct another loop line between the two is ridiculous. Are we to have loop lines every half dozen miles? There is not sufficient

money in the universe to enable that to be done. My chief reason for supporting the Bill is that I feel confident we shall get much better results if a committee are appointed to investigate and report on public works, not only on railways, but on other matters also, and I think we shall have not only much better results, but perhaps cleaner results. That is another insinuation, I suppose.

Mr. Monger: Give an interpretation.

Mr. GILL: I will give an interpretation. That was my intention when I made the remark. When I say cleaner results I am alluding to statements often made by Ministers on the eve of the general elections. No Minister has a right to go out on the eve of a general election and commit the country to expend a quarter of a million of money on his own words without consulting Parliament or without the evidence of experts as to the advisability of the work.

Mr. Monger: Give the name.

Mr. Heitmann: The present leader of the Opposition promised £600,000 for public works.

Mr. GILL: I am referring to the statement of the present leader of the Opposition on the eve of the last general election, when he went to Bunbury and, on his own initiative without consulting Parliament and without any report that I know of, told the people he was justified in starting a work down there and incurring an immediate expenditure of £20,000 without any authority from anybody.

Hon. J. Mitchell: That is not a quarter of a million.

Mr. GILL: That is only the initiation of the work. I did not attach much importance to it at the time because I did not consider he intended to go on with it. However, suppose we take him seriously—and the statement being made we should take it seriously—and suppose that work were initiated to the extent of £20,000, and it will be a very considerable item when it is completed, I say no member of the Government had a right to make a statement of that kind. If we had a public works committee appointed from this House, or the two Houses of Parliament, no Minister would dare to make such a statement.

Mr. Monger: What have your crowd promised?

Mr. GILL: They have never promised anything of that kind. However, that is my reason for saying that I think we would have much more satisfactory results if works of that kind went before a public works committee. They undoubtedly would have to do so before a Minister could proclaim that the initiation of such a work would be an accomplished fact. We would have much better results also in connection with works recommended by the committee. In the past we have had difficulty in getting information. Often when we desired information we simply had a brief report from the Advisory Board and a statement from the Minister introducing the Bill, and that is all we could get; but if we have a committee from Parliament, when a proposal is brought forward for the construction of certain works, hon. members will be on the spot to give information to the House and the full information gained by them in going through the country investigating the works. That will be a great advantage to every member in arriving at a right conclusion in connection with our public works policy. It will be in the interest of the country to have a public works committee consisting of members of Parliament to thoroughly investigate any large public works needed in Western Australia. I believe the results will repay any small expenditure that will be incurred in connection with any such committee.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON (Williams-Narrogin): I intend to support this measure, but I wish to say I appreciate the work the Advisory Board have done in this country. I am sure that if the members of the board had no other work to do, if their services were not required all the time in their offices in Perth, and if they were members of this Parliament so that their views could be obtained by Parliament first-hand, probably the necessity for this Bill would not have arisen; but under the improved administration of State departments, which has taken place during the last 12 months, the services of the permanent heads are required in their offices to control their

departments. The increased activity of the Agricultural Bank, owing to the fact that to-day very much larger sums are being lent to the farmers than was the case when the late Administration were in power, makes it more than ever necessary for the manager of the institution to be in his office looking after the interests of the bank. In this connection I would like to say how wholly the member for Northam has missed the idea of what the duties of the bank manager and the duties of the Advisory Board should be. The hon. member pointed out that it was a good thing that the Manager of the Agricultural Bank should go out looking for the routes of new railways, so that he could see the farmers and at the same time see how the Agricultural Bank money had been spent. I believe it is the policy of the present Government—it should be if it is not—to have the routes of new railways fixed long before the land is sold, and long before the farmers are put on it, and before bank advances are made. We ought to have a defined policy years in advance of settlement, and I hope we will get it through this new Public Works Committee. For a year past I have been trying to get a report on a new railway in the Great Southern District. There are many new propositions that should at once be referred to experts; and as it is not possible for the members of the Advisory Board to neglect their departments, I hope this Public Works Committee will be appointed for the purpose. For a year past I have been urging the Government to send a committee, or experts, to the Quindanning district to report on the question of a railway there, and I hope this Public Works Committee will be appointed without any delay, so that this and other urgent proposals in the Great Southern District will be considered quickly. It was a bad thing for the agricultural districts of Western Australia, and a bad thing for the State as a whole, that last year this Bill was lost. If it had been carried I am quite satisfied that Parliament to-day would have a mass of valuable information about new railway proposals, which information, unfortunately,

is not available. I look forward to a vigorous public works policy being maintained, and I hope this committee will be appointed at once, so that it may play its part in advising Parliament as to these works.

Mr. MONGER (York): I do not support this Bill. Recently I had a little experience of a select committee appointed by this Chamber during this session. If the members of this Public Works Committee are to be gentlemen calibre of those who sat on that select committee—

Mr. Heitmann: Yourself included.

Mr. MONGER: Myself included—and which brought into this Chamber the report I am referring to on the evidence that was then adduced—

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member cannot refer to that.

Mr. MONGER: I was only going to say how I differed from those gentlemen who were appointed by this Chamber, and was only trying to say that if the members of this Public Works Committee were similar gentlemen they would adopt the same attitude as they did on that particular occasion.

The Minister for Works: We do not propose to put you on this committee.

Mr. MONGER: At this stage the hon. gentleman will have the absolute selection of the committee.

Hon. J. Mitchell: We will appoint one.

Mr. MONGER: What is the good of one to four?

Mr. Heitmann: There will be one from the other Chamber.

Mr. MONGER: That will mean two to three, the position we occupied on that select committee to which I have referred. We have heard a lot to-night in regard to the Advisory Board. I want to pay one tribute of respect to that board, on this, perhaps, the last occasion I may have of speaking to a public Bill dealing with these gentlemen. A fairer and squarer lot of men were never appointed by any Government than the gentlemen who occupied positions on the Advisory Board; but how often of late have their recommendations been turned topsy-turvy by the Minister for Works. And for what reason? Not on the ground that their recommenda-

tions were not all that could be desired, but from purely party or personal motives the Minister agreed to disagree from the recommendations—

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member is out of order. He cannot discuss the personnel of the Advisory Board except by way of making a comparison that inspections and reports by the board are better than reports by a body such as is suggested by the Bill.

Mr. MONGER: That is what I am desirous of coming to. Every recommendation that has previously emanated from the Advisory Board might well have been given honest effect to by this or any other Administration. For reasons—I will not say of a personal nature, but for some reasons—these recommendations have not been given effect to. A little time ago the Advisory Board recommended the construction of a line of railway from Yillimining to Kulin and thence to Kurrenkutten to junction at that point with the Wickiepin-Merredin railway. We have never heard up to the present moment the reasons for deviating from the recommendations of the Advisory Board for the construction of that railway.

The Minister for Works: Did not Daglish tell you why?

Mr. MONGER: But for party and personal motives the line was foisted and blustered and bluffed through Parliament last session from Yillimining to Kondinin; and why? In order to carry out a platform pledge and a platform promise of a young and inexperienced fledgling to Parliament.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: The best agricultural railway in the State.

The Minister for Works: I think Daglish should have been condemned for not adopting the Advisory Board's report.

Mr. Foley: Which line? Because they had three.

Mr. MONGER: When members have finished I shall go on. Now we are told that this board, if appointed, consisting of four members from this Chamber and one from another place, is going to give better effect to the public works policy of this country than could be given to it by the gentlemen who have for so long a

period given the best of satisfaction to the general public of the State. I am going to say in my opinion, and I believe I am echoing the sentiments of every member on this side, that this is another desire on the part of the gentlemen who occupy Ministerial positions to once again give spoils to the victors. I wonder who is to be chairman of this committee; some friend of those in power "who has done big service to our party." If that is their intention, let them announce it to us straight away by saying, "We desire that the member for Narrogin-Williams (Mr. E. B. Johnston) and others who have rendered yeoman service to our party are to be the gentlemen to be placed in these positions." Just now the member for Cue asked me to give some explanation about the attitude I adopted in regard to the Greenhills-Quairading line.

Mr. Heitmann: I did not mention your attitude.

Mr. MONGER: In the course of the interjection, I inferred something of that kind. My attitude in regard to that line of railway, though very shortly reported in *Hansard* at that time, it gives me great pleasure to say differed from the attitude of the present Premier when he read a letter from an interested party who desired that the route should be taken to a point eight or ten miles north and within about fifteen miles—

Mr. SPEAKER: That matter is not under discussion.

Mr. MONGER: I am replying to an interjection.

Mr. SPEAKER: I cannot help the interjection.

Mr. MONGER: During the course of the debate we have heard of boom railways, and we have heard remarks made against the previous Government for building the Bullfinch railway. I think it would be only fair for me to say to those who are constantly referring to that Bullfinch proposition that under the circumstances, it was a fair and legitimate procedure on the part of the then Government to construct that line. Up to the time the present Government came into power, that railway had not cost the

country one shilling, because of the sale of land, hotel sites, and mining leases, and these items had given back to the previous Government every penny that had been expended. I hope that this Chamber in its wisdom will not agree to the desire of the Minister for Works to find further emoluments for a section of his party and his party's friends, those who did great service on the 3rd October, 1911. I hope the good sense of the House will say that the services that are capable of being rendered by those gentlemen occupying the highest departmental positions should be availed of for occasions of this sort and that this Chamber will therefore refuse to carry the second reading of the Bill.

Mr. GREEN (Kalgoorlie): I am not surprised at the attitude taken by the rogue-elephant of the Chamber, the member for York, who is opposing the Bill mainly owing to the fact that the party on this side are prone to give emoluments, as he stated, to their friends. I think I am safe in saying that there is no member in this Chamber who is more loyal to the idea of party Government than the member who has just resumed his seat. I cannot remember an instance where he has voted against his party on a measure of any kind. It really goes to show, so far as taking a broad survey of any question at all is concerned, that his extremely reactionary views always commend themselves to what is extremely reactionary in this Chamber. I am pleased to say that I believe this measure is a good one, taken entirely apart from any party political view, and I take that stand because at the beginning of this year, during a trip which I made to the other States, I made some first-hand inquiries with regard to the way the public works committees in the other States were operating. In Victoria the work of these committees is limited to railway construction, and my inquiries were made not only from Labour men—I interviewed Mr. Mark Hannah—but also members on the other side of the Chamber, and they assured me with one accord that they would never dream of returning to their old position with regard to determining

the method of railway routes. In New South Wales the Public Works Committee has been an unqualified success, and I was assured there that it had been the means of saving several hundreds of thousands of pounds in the construction of railways which might otherwise have been foisted on the people. Just lately we have the spectacle in South Australia of a measure being introduced into the Parliament of that State which does not propose to go as far as ours. It will be seen, therefore, that the Minister for Works, in submitting the measure to this House is asking us to pass something that has been well tried in the other States. We cannot say that our system, which is isolated to Western Australia, has been a success. I have in mind the case of a railway which was surveyed as going from Dowerin to Merredin. Some friends of mine selected land from a map which showed the route that it was proposed the railway should take, but when they had taken up their land, they found that not only was the Advisory Board's report not followed, but that the gentlemen who thought they would be eight miles from the line found that by the time the railway was pushed through they were 16 miles away. I spoke to the Minister for Lands with regard to the matter, and pointed out to him that it was common report up there that the reason the railway was shifted was that two very intimate and wealthy friends of the then Government had land in the particular vicinity towards which the route was altered. Be that as it may, the late Minister told me that he thought the line was going along the original route and that he had no idea that it was being altered in the direction I have stated. What I want to say is that if a railway under the advisory board system can be constructed in this loose manner, it is time for the members of the House, as practical men, to try and improve that condition of things and to endeavour to inaugurate something superior. In this Bill I think we have something that will be an improvement on the old condition of things. Our proposals cannot be honestly opposed on the score of expense

because the cost is limited under the present measure. The emoluments of the chairman and the members of the committee are such that I am satisfied the members of the Opposition will not scramble to announce themselves as candidates, and the proviso that the members of the Committee will not be able to hold two sittings on the one day, will ensure that the men engaged on this work will have to carry out their duties for a moderate amount of money indeed. In the past the Advisory Board's reports, unconsciously perhaps, have been coloured by the views of the Government in power. I am not going to say that the members of the Advisory Board have not been honourable men, but the temptation of the Government of the day who have the control of such a body of men is too great, and it is doing too much to place in the hand of such a board the control which they undoubtedly had in the past. The method of the election of the proposed committee, it appears to me, does not commend itself to the Opposition at the present time because they have not a majority in this Chamber, but I would like to point out that if they themselves get back into power, as they are continually assuring us they will do in the near future, that objection ought to be removed, because this committee is to be appointed by every new Parliament, and we at any rate are satisfied that whatever party Government are in power, the selection of the committee can be well and honestly made by this Chamber so far as its quota is concerned, by the proportional system of representation. We are prepared to let it go at that. But this committee will do away with the temptation of the different heads of Government, when out on the stump, on election campaigns, to give promises to their constituents, irrespective of the amount of money to be secured on the London market, of enormous public works to be carried out in their respective electorates. We had the spectacle last session of the then Premier, when in his electorate, foreshadowing a railway to Nornalup Inlet at a cost, including improvements to a harbour never heard of till



then, of a quarter of a million. Talk about frenzied finance ! The hon. member probably took upon himself the mantle of prophecy and foresaw that he would not be in power to carry out that work, but that he would be able to say to the Government that came after his, "Why do you not give effect to the proposals of the past Government ?" or "You are only doing what we proposed to do."

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member is out of order.

The Minister for Mines: He could not have made that promise if there had been a Public Works Committee in existence.

Mr. GREEN: Of course he could not; that is what I say.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member must discuss the Bill.

Mr. GREEN: I was trying to prove that under a proposal of this kind, even the farmers of the South-West, who have to depend for their information upon biased weekly newspapers, would come to learn that it was not in the power of any particular Government to promise any railway, that these matters were now left to a public works committee. It would prevent any fooling of the people as to what they might expect if any particular Government came into power. Given a public works committee the recent trouble over the Wickepin-Merredin railway would have been impossible, and we would not have had the spectacle of a Minister condemning the proposed Esperance railway long before the Advisory Board's report was submitted.

The Minister for Mines: Before the Board went down to the district?

Mr. GREEN: Yes, it would have been absurd for a man to say in effect, "It is impossible for this particular country to get a railway, because the tops of the trees do not look too good in the dark."

Hon. Frank Wilson: Are you going to give the committee a roving commission to go round recommending works?

Mr. GREEN: The committee would be on a footing with the Advisory Board.

Hon. Frank Wilson: The Advisory Board only report when asked to do so.

Mr. GREEN: That is what the Advisory Board do; but there would be this vital difference, that whereas the Advisory Board have to report to the Government in power, and are responsible only to that Government, and the reverse side of the picture is not presented to the Chamber, the Public Works Committee will report direct to Parliament, and the report may be elaborated by the individual members of that committee. Any objections the leader of the Opposition may urge are entirely dissipated by the fact that they are only of a supposititious character, because already in Victoria, and in New South Wales, they have committees of the same character which it is proposed to establish in Western Australia. I trust that even the leader of the Opposition, although he went against this measure last session will show that he is open to reason on an occasion such as the present, when the interests of the country are at stake. I have much pleasure in recording my sympathy with, and will vote in favour of the measure which has proved such a boon in other parts of Australia.

Mr. McDOWALL (Coolgardie): I have listened very attentively to this debate, and have endeavoured to find arguments against the appointment of this committee; but I must confess that I have been quite unable to find any in the speeches delivered. The leader of the Opposition bases his opposition to the proposal largely on the score of expense. He tells us that it will cost from £6,000 to £10,000 to work this committee, and he further tells us that he believes in the Advisory Board. Now he knows perfectly well that it costs a certain amount in expenses and fees, and in salary also, to run the Advisory Board. Yet he admits that the Advisory Board is necessary, and he must admit that the board requires to be paid. Still he bases his objection to the establishment of a public works committee on the score of expense. It is remarkable to hear the leader of the Opposition talk like that, because, to give him his due, he usually talks sensibly. However, on this occasion I certainly cannot commend him for being:

sensible. He has only to look at it to see that the fees to be paid in any six months are limited to £500. Travelling expenses are to be fixed by regulation, and by no stretch of imagination in dealing with works of the value of £20,000 or over, is it possible to reach the figures mentioned by the leader of the Opposition. Then why use arguments of this kind to defeat a measure which, in my opinion, will undoubtedly be of much use to the House?

Hon. Frank Wilson: It costs £6,000 per annum in New South Wales.

Mr. McDOWALL: There is no comparison between the two States. We have a population of only 300,000, and we have a revenue small in comparison with that of New South Wales, which enables that State to carry out so many more works, thus rendering it necessary to have so many more committee meetings. Moreover, New South Wales pays the members of the Public Works Committee decently, and not in the way we propose to pay our members; for I agree that a guinea a day is a ridiculous sum to offer any man sitting on such a committee. The member for Northam (Hon. J. Mitchell) tells us that he is in favour of the Advisory Board. Boiled down, his argument is that we should have the Advisory Board to report on these railways—for what purpose? What was the burden of the argument, the trend of thought running right through it? It was that we must educate these officers up to the requirements of the State. We must send the manager of the Agricultural Bank out into the country to consider railway routes in order that he might be educated up to his business as manager of the Agricultural Bank! Surely no more ridiculous proposal than that could be made. Then there are the Engineer-in-Chief, and Mr. Muir, Inspector of Engineering Surveys, who are also to be taken out to be educated, while all the time they are high salaried at the rate of £750 and £1,000 per annum, and their work is delegated to others. In face of this the hon. member tells us that the expense of this proposed committee, the members of which are to be remunerated by the handsome fee of

one guinea per sitting, is going to ruin the country. His arguments are simply ridiculous.

Mr. Allen: Some of them would be dear at half the price.

The Minister for Mines: That would be true if the hon. member were on the committee.

Mr. McDOWALL: It depends, of course, as the Minister for Mines has suggested, upon the members on the committee. If members with intelligence, energy, and ability are placed on the committee I have no doubt it will be found most useful and valuable, so far as saving of money to the country is concerned. The member for Pingelly (Mr. Harper) declared that each member of the committee would expect a railway in his own district; and the hon. member went on to tell us that the Public Works Committee of New South Wales had not been a success. But I have not yet found anyone who has brought forward evidence to that effect. There has not been a tittle of evidence to show that the New South Wales committee has not been a success. Of course we can get dissatisfied people in any community. It would be a remarkable thing if, in a State of the population of New South Wales, we did not find a number of persons opposed to the Public Works Committee. That being so, it is ridiculous to simply say that some proposal has been made by some person that this committee should be abolished. The fact remains that the committee has not been abolished, and also the further facts that a committee on similar lines is proposed in Victoria, and that the Federal Government are looking in the same direction. When we realise these facts it will be seen that a committee of this sort must be of some value. Boiled down, the arguments that have been advanced so far go to show that some system is necessary; that is admitted on all sides, but the speakers on the Opposition side have plumped for the advisory board system. I think they are entirely wrong in that respect, for the simple reason that by that system we are taking our chief public officers away from their duties, having their work carried out by persons at a lower salary, and using their time in

collecting about the country evidence that could be obtained by intelligent members of Parliament. On the other hand, we say that the system proposed by us, a committee of five continually at work in connection with these matters, and becoming expert from the fact that they are constantly gaining information, is undoubtedly superior to the advisory board. It is my opinion that in the end it will be proved to be better. Another important feature that cannot be overlooked is that whilst the Advisory Board can certainly send in a report to Parliament, there are a dozen and one things that occur during a committee's investigations that cannot be placed in such a report. The great advantage of the Public Works Committee would be that the members of Parliament on the committee, with their minds fresh with the information obtained would be in a position to give that information to Parliament, and submit facts that could not possibly be obtained from an Advisory Board. In those circumstances, it is my intention to heartily support this Bill, and I sincerely trust that it will become law. I would like to say, however, that I do not think the Bill is liberal enough in its remuneration. The idea of men sitting for a guinea a day in connection with a Bill of this kind seems to me an absurdity. The hon. member for Pingelly (Mr. Harper) made a great song about spoils to the victors. Just imagine a person giving his labour for a guinea a day and that being called spoils to the victors! It is ridiculous from stem to stern to bring such an argument against a Bill of this kind. There can be no spoils to the victors if men sit on a committee of this kind for a guinea a day, because they would have to be very poor men indeed if they could not give value for that money. I have very much pleasure in supporting the Bill.

Mr. NANSON (Greenough): I hardly intended to intervene in the debate, but to oblige the Minister for Works, who evidently is not ready to reply to the criticism that has been advanced against the Bill, I propose to make a few remarks.

The Minister for Works: I have nothing to answer.

Mr. NANSON: Then I will help the hon. member. We have been told by members on the Government side that the Public Works Committee in New South Wales and a somewhat similar committee in Victoria have been a great success, and although I should be willing to accept that assertion if it was backed up by evidence which would convince me, there has been an entire lack of evidence to show in what direction either committee has been a success. I should have thought it would have been possible—and perhaps the Minister will give us the information when he replies—to have told the House what works had been turned down by the committee in New South Wales, what are the great blunders from which the country has been saved by the operations of that committee, and what is the enormous saving in the expenditure of loan funds that the committee has accomplished. If it can be shown that various public works of a sort of “wild cat” description would have been carried out in New South Wales but for the restraining influence of that committee, then undoubtedly, there would be a very strong argument for establishing in this State a committee of that description.

The Minister for Works: Is it not sufficient argument that successive Governments have adopted it?

Mr. NANSON: By no means. Anyone who has had any lengthy experience of public life must know that where the payment of public moneys to individuals is concerned, whether in the form of a board or a committee, or members of Parliament, by way of emolument for their services, it is a very much simpler matter to get Parliament to consent to a payment of that kind than to get Parliament to consent to its removal; and when once we have established a public works committee composed of politicians, unless there should happen to be passing over the country a tremendous wave in favour of retrenchment and economy, it is almost impossible to secure any saving that will mean the cutting down of the emoluments of men who are in public life. That is not peculiar to one party more than to another, but is

peculiar to public life throughout Australia, and we must all know that to raise the cry of retrenchment in these days is by no means a popular proceeding. Years ago the cry of the Liberal party in the Mother Country was for peace, retrenchment and reform, but democratic parties in Australia and in other parts of the world, however much they may be in favour of reform, are uncommonly good at increasing public expenditure; and we will find, therefore, that if we establish a committee of this kind, whether it be of very much value or of no value at all, it will probably continue to exist for many years after it has ceased to be useful. The Minister may yet be in a position to show that these committees in New South Wales and Victoria have been instrumental in preventing the waste of public money and preventing the initiation of works to which Parliament would otherwise have given its assent. What reason is there to suppose that in Western Australia, if we had had a committee of that kind in the past, any particular work that has been constructed would not have been constructed?

The Minister for Works: The dock.

Mr. NANSON: I asked the question hoping that the Minister would give that reply. I am one of those members, who, perhaps, may feel some amount of melancholy satisfaction in the fact that I voted against the construction of that dock in the river, and I well remember that the division was not on purely party lines. There were members supporting the Government voting against the dock, and members of the Opposition voting for it.

The Minister for Works: You and I were together on that occasion.

Mr. NANSON: And if the Minister would follow my lead more often he would be saved a good many mistakes. In connection with that dock, if we had had a public works committee in existence, does any member expect that the committee would have taken a view different from that taken by the majority of the Chamber?

The Minister for Works: Undoubtedly. The experts advised against it.

Mr. NANSON: No. An expert, in the person of Sir Whately Eliot, was brought from England, and I am inclined to think his report was not hostile to the dock.

The Minister for Works: A certain proposition was submitted to him that a public works committee would not have submitted. He had no alternative but to recommend that site.

Mr. NANSON: That dock was constructed on a certain amount of evidence favourable to it. There were two schools of opinion, one for the dock and another against it.

The Minister for Works: There was only one opinion and that was a political opinion.

Mr. Lander: It was to win the Fremantle seat.

Mr. NANSON: Not at all. There is no reason to suppose that a large number of members in this House who had no connection with Fremantle would have voted for the dock purely for political reasons. There was an immense amount of trouble taken, and it is quite likely that the committee would have merely reflected the opinion of the majority in this Chamber. If we turn to the method of electing the committee, I do not suppose for one moment that it will be elected on other than party lines, whether there happens to be in the Chamber a Labour majority or a Liberal majority. If the committee be appointed while the present Government are in office, hon. members opposite will see, as they are entitled to see, that they have the preponderating voice on that committee, and if we happened to be in office we should do exactly the same thing. If it could be pointed out that this committee would have special sources of information, or would be endowed with special wisdom, or would be composed of men who were expert in the particular work required of them, something might be said in favour of it; but, even admitting that some sort of body is required, who will furnish data to the House, can it be said that a committee chosen from Parliament is necessarily the best body than can be chosen? Is not the area of

selection very much restricted, when four members are to be chosen from this Chamber, and one member from another place? Although we may have gentlemen in Western Australia far better fitted to investigate the various problems that would come before such a committee, yet willy-nilly, we must choose four members out of fifty in one House, and one other member out of thirty in another place. I do not find any fault with a Government, who before making up their mind in regard to a particular work, say that they must have a body to produce evidence as to whether the work is justified. I am perfectly at one with the contention that individual Ministers who give a proper amount of time to the work of their departments, cannot be expected to go into the country and collect evidence in favour, or against any particular public work. I quite see that so far as the Ministry are concerned they have done their duty if, having set in motion the machinery for the collection of the necessary evidence, and that evidence having been obtained, they carefully weigh it and decide whether the public works under consideration shall become part of their policy or not. But that course is open to the Government at the present time, and it is simply the policy that was followed by the late Government with the Advisory Board. While it may be urged that some particular Government servant, owing to the press of the duties of his special office, cannot be spared to undertake the work of the Advisory Board, yet I contend, if that be the case, rather than limit our choice to a committee composed of members of this Chamber, it would be much better to choose for the Government, if they require a board, from Western Australia as a whole and not confine ourselves merely to politicians. I myself do not attach tremendous importance to the cost of a committee of this kind provided we can be satisfied that the committee were doing really good work; but if the committee is merely a sham and a delusion, if it merely reflects the prevailing opinion of a majority in the Chamber, if it goes out into the country and ascer-

tains merely the desire for a public work—a very simple matter to do—and does not ascertain the strong facts justifying that work, well then the work of that committee cannot be of very much value. As I have already pointed out, we have no evidence yet before us that either in New South Wales or Victoria the work of the committee has been of that peculiar quality that it has obtained information that an outside body could not have obtained.

The Minister for Works: Common sense naturally points to that.

Mr. NANSON: No, it does not. A monopoly of common sense is not vested in members of Parliament; the most we can say of a member of Parliament is that he represents the average common sense of the community. He is certainly not superior to it, speaking generally, and neither can a member of Parliament be expected to be an expert on engineering subjects or on the building of railways.

The Minister for Works: I do not mean it in that sense; I mean that common sense must show inasmuch as they represent Parliament.

Mr. NANSON: I should prefer a non-political body purely existing for the purpose of obtaining information and then leave it to Parliament to decide. It has been stated that if we had a committee of this kind there would be no possibility of Ministers on the eve of an election going before the country and making a declaration in regard to public works. Specific instances were mentioned. The case of the leader of the Opposition including in the policy of the late Government an extension of harbour works at Bunbury was referred to, but does any one really suppose that the moment we had a public works committee in existence it would not be as perfectly legitimate for the Government to declare their policy in regard to public works generally and to any specific public work in particular?

The Minister for Works: It would be absolutely unnecessary for them to do it.

Mr. NANSON: No, the declaration of Ministerial policy would precede the examination of the committee, and it would be understood when a Government announced they were in favour of the construction of some public work, that the

construction of that work was dependent not merely on the assent of Parliament as at present, but on a favourable report from a public works committee. We know that, provided the Government have a substantial majority in this Chamber, they can be almost certain, unless guilty of an unparalleled act of maladministration, of securing the support of a majority of their followers. In perfect confidence of that we have the instance of the present Government in spending large sums of money in buying steamers long before the assent of Parliament had been given, and does anyone suppose for a moment that Governments would be more chary of announcing their policy in regard to public works merely because of the existence of a public works committee? We may be quite sure that when we have clever political manipulators, as we have among our friends opposite, they would take very great care in selecting their members of a public works committee. They would select members who saw eye to eye with the Government, and they would be careful not to select a member if there happened to be one who, though sitting on that side of the House, was continually criticising the Government. We have not developed the candid brain which has yet to come, and I do not suppose it will come until we find from the expressions of opinion outside of Parliament and until perhaps it begins to be thought that the Government are shedding some of their popularity. But any member on the Government side anxious to be appointed to the committee certainly would not improve his chances of election if he were continually in opposition to the Government he generally supported on various questions of public works. That is only human nature. The Government or the party as a whole necessarily have a very considerable voice in the selection of such a committee. Just as the party select the Government in caucus so the party would select the members of this committee.

The Minister for Works: I am afraid you are losing confidence in caucus.

Mr. NANSON: I have never had much confidence in the hon. member's caucus to lose. Caucus would naturally decide who

were to be members of the committee, and anyone who was everlastingly chipping at the Government would not get the support of his party as a whole for appointment to the committee. I employ that argument not as one directed solely against the present party in office, because it is an argument which will apply to either political party, and it is used by me to show that a public works committee under any circumstances must be largely a fictitious safeguard. It would merely reflect the opinion of the majority in Parliament and the most it can do is to collect useful information. It is not necessary to have politicians to collect that useful information. We can go outside, where we have a much wider area of choice, and if information only is required, why confine the choice to men selected from a body of 50 people? Something has been said about the policy of Victoria at the time when the boom was prevailing, and numbers of railways were built which afterwards were shown not to be justified, although I suppose since that time every one of them has, with the progress of the country, justified itself.

The Minister for Works: Some have been pulled up.

Mr. NANSON: I refer to those still in existence. Supposing we had a boom in Western Australia, is there any reason to suppose that a public works committee would be so level-headed that it would escape the infection of the boom when the very essence of a boom is that 99 people out of 100 succumb to it? And it is the fortunate one person, who happens to be a pessimist, who makes money out of it. If we could be sure we could get an all-wise body out of this Chamber, that while the rest were foolish it would be certain to be wise, and while the rest were foolish in other respects we would be wise enough to follow its lead, I would support a public works committee. But I am sorry to say I cannot recognise that we would get a body of that wisdom, and even if the choice were left entirely to the Opposition side of the Chamber, I am with equal candour bound to admit I have not the confidence to believe that the average man at the

time of a boom would be strong enough to avoid succumbing to it. Even supposing the committee were strong enough, does anyone suppose that Parliament would have any time for a committee which invariably reported against a majority of Parliament. The fact is a public works committee would be a sort of useful buffer for the Government; it would enable them to shed some of their responsibility and to divide it up with the public works committee, and enable Parliament to do the same thing. We do not want really to lessen the responsibility of Parliament but to increase it. We have been told that if we had had a public works committee we should have had no Bullfinch railway.

Mr. Harper : You would have had no Southern Cross railway.

Mr. NANSON: Is it not a remarkable thing in regard to the Bullfinch railway that, although there are plenty of members who are now ready enough to talk against it, there was not a single member at the time the Bill was brought forward game enough to vote against it? A few members of the then Opposition spoke against the railway, but although they were very strong numerically in the Chamber and the majority of the then Government was exceedingly slender, yet it is a significant fact that the then Opposition called for no division in regard to that railway, because, evidently, they were doubtful in their own minds whether that railway would not prove a success, and they did not want it recorded, if it did prove successful, that they had voted against it. If we had had a public works committee in existence, and a majority of the members on that committee were chosen from the Government side of the House, I have not the slightest doubt that a report of the majority of the committee would have been in favour of the building of that line. My argument has been mainly directed to showing that a public works committee must in 99 out of 100, if not in the full 100 cases, necessarily reflect the opinion of the majority in the Chamber and therefore will be a fictitious safeguard, will be a committee elected on party lines, a committee that

will act on party lines, and it will not have that independence that we would have if we appointed a board of outsiders unconnected with politics, not expected to give a political decision, but only required to collect the evidence for or against any given work.

On motion by Mr. Taylor, debate adjourned.

#### BILL—STATUTES COMPILATION ACT AMENDMENT.

Received from the Legislative Council and read a first time.

#### BILL—PEARLING.

Returned from the Legislative Council with requested amendments.

#### BILL—LAND ACT AMENDMENT.

##### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 24th October.

Hon. J. MITCHELL (Northam): We are asked to consider a Bill that is probably the most important that has been brought down to this Assembly for a very long time. In this Bill we are asked to consider the question of land tenure, and I venture to say there is no more important question affecting this State than that of land tenure, because the whole prosperity and the whole future advancement of the State depend upon our ability to hold out to the people of the world an attractive form of land title, and not only to the people of other lands, but also to the people who are already here and whom we are endeavouring to induce to become settlers and join in the conquest of the wilderness we have only awaiting men and money. It is true that in introducing this measure having for its object the granting of leasehold titles only and doing away with freehold titles, the Minister for Lands made a good speech from his own point of view, though I did not find his arguments very convincing, and I do not suppose any other member of the Chamber, except, of course, those who are

pledged to the non-alienation of Crown lands, found them very convincing. The Minister stressed tremendously many alleged advantages of the system of leasehold as against freehold, and he seemed to think that in doing so he had done his duty, but it was his duty, when introducing a measure of this sort, to refer to the drawbacks of the system he was supporting as well as its advantages. It is made very clear in this Bill that the Minister holds very defined views. There is no middle course suggested as tried elsewhere, there is to be no experiment, we are not to be allowed to select either under freehold or leasehold as seems to be the case in New Zealand or New South Wales. The Minister says that if we want land we must come under his leasehold system. Then the Minister made a very bold bid to popularise the measure. He said that men who hold leases will have them at 2 per cent. on the capital value of the land. In the first place this capital value is fixed by the Minister. If he sets on the land the value placed on land the year before last, something like 14s. 7d., then the person taking a lease will pay 2 per cent. on 14s. 7d., a very low rental indeed. In addition to this low rental, which is to run for twenty years, there is to be no land tax; this land is to be free of tax for ever; and, in addition to these advantages, the Minister proposes that there shall be reduced improvements; the leaseholder shall not be called upon to improve to the extent the purchaser does now. There is not a man in the House who will agree that the country can at the present time afford to sell its land on conditions which mean that less work need be done. Then also no one need have very much fear as to residence. The Minister provides for residence, of course, but he also provides that residence may be done by an agent, and that even a man may hold without residence at all so long as he gets the approval of the Minister. These drastic reforms hardly mean an advance in the development of our country. It is the Minister's endeavour to make this leasehold system popular that has made him do these things. He declares his desire is to alter the present state of affairs to

make men do more than they have done in the past, and to make men resident holders, and this is how he proposes to do it. But while he has lessened the burdens on those who will take his land on lease, there are to be ever-increasing burdens for those who hold land now. The man who is to be taxed in the future will be the man who has the freehold to-day, or who has conditional purchase land that he refuses to convert. Just imagine in a country of 624,000,000 acres, if the Minister's Bill becomes law, for all time only 20,000,000 acres will be subject to taxation.

Mr. McDowall: You have got back again to the 600,000,000 acres.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I know the figures are too big for the hon. member to understand. The Minister's dislike to freehold leads him a bit too far. The very fact that he has avoided any middle course will probably bring him into trouble even with his own supporters. Of course the Bill is brought down in response to the plank in the Labour platform for the non-alienation of Crown lands with a view to the ultimate nationalisation of all land, but I am not quite sure that the Minister is not anxious that this particular plank should be relegated to the limbo of lost ideals. He must, or he would not have brought down a ridiculous proposal such as this. If we look into the position we find that there has been magnificent development under the freehold system. In 1905 we had 18,523 conditional purchase leases representing 3,479,084 acres and 6,078 homestead farms representing 950,966 acres. In 1912 we had 30,702 conditional purchase leases representing 8,557,269 acres. These leases represent something less than 300 acres each, small enough to please even the Minister's idea of a farm. In 1912 we had 9,697 free farms representing an area of 1,531,424 acres. If the Minister's Bill becomes law there will be no more free farms for people who take up 160 acres now on payment of survey fees. They will not get that privilege under the Minister's scheme, yet this is supposed to be a scheme for the poor men and to settle men without capital on the land. From the



figures I have quoted it will be seen there has been no attempt in this State to build up large estates. Development also has been more than satisfactory during the past seven years. In 1905 we had 327,391 acres under crop with a population of 246,000. We cropped  $1\frac{3}{4}$  acres per head of population in 1905. In 1912 we had under crop 1,072,653 acres or  $3\frac{1}{2}$  acres per head of population. It took us nearly eighty years to reach the  $1\frac{3}{4}$ -acres stage and we got from that to the  $3\frac{1}{2}$ -acres stage in seven years, a magnificent result from so small a population. We have improved or partially improved and got ready for the plough in the same period 18 acres per head of the population as against eight acres. We have not only increased our land under agriculture, but the stock increase has apparently been satisfactory for the past seven years, our sheep in 1905 numbering 3,120,703 and in 1911, the latest figures available, 5,411,542. All along the line in sheep and cattle and fruit and agriculture and in irrigation we have been making strides, but they are not considered when this matter is under consideration by the Minister for Lands. The Agricultural Bank has 7,100 accounts. That means 7,100 small farmers struggling to make homes for themselves. I wonder if in any other State of the Commonwealth they can show such a magnificent work in such a short time. As a matter of fact, the development of new lands in Australia for the past seven or eight years has been largely due to the activity displayed by the small population in Western Australia, thanks to the Agricultural Bank. I believe that a third of the total new area cleared in Australia has been cleared in this State. Members will wonder why the Minister for Lands asks the country to accept a change when everything is going so well and when people are so satisfied with the opportunities to secure land and to secure money to develop it. The Ministry are far too much in the hands of the Trades and Labour Congress; otherwise we should not have heard of this proposal. We have it in Genesis that Abel was the first keeper of sheep and Cain the first tiller of the soil. History is repeating itself. Just as when Cain met Abel the

farmer went to the wall, now we have our squatter friend, the Minister for Lands, seeking to send the farmers of Western Australia to the wall.

Mr. Heitmann: Give us something a bit more up to date.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The Minister is a squatter just as Abel was, and the comparison seems to be appropriate. Of course the squatting or pastoral industry naturally comes before the agricultural industry, and Australia with its sparse population and its enormous area has achieved a magnificent record in being the world's greatest sheep country. Something like 70 per cent. of the wool that goes to the United Kingdom is supplied by Australia. Surely that is no small thing to accomplish in a few short years, and it has proved to the Minister that the land has been put to good use.

Mr. Heitmann: Do you not recognise that wool is grown on leasehold land?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: And it was a much wiser man than the Minister who arranged that the squatter should have a lease of the property because he does not spend nearly so much in improvements as the farmer. As a matter of fact the improvements largely consist of stock. The squatter has been allowed to precede the farmer and use large areas of land under the leasehold system. It is well known that these lands will ultimately be required for closer settlement, and that is an arrangement which was made by the Crown before we had Responsible Government. When we come to the farmer it is quite a different matter. He has to spend large sums of money in improving his holding, and the Government have to spend large sums of money in providing facilities for the marketing of the crop, and it is necessary that the farmer should have some security of tenure as will justify him in devoting his life to the development of his farm. Does the Minister expect that a man will labour in the back country for 20 years if he knows that he has no security of tenure?

Mr. Heitmann: A man who is going to stay in the country for 20 years is not afraid of leasehold.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: A man wants security of tenure, first because he wants to feel that his farm is his home, and secondly in order that he may be able to borrow money against the security which is good. I venture to say that to-day this country realises that security of tenure is necessary in order that money may be advanced to the enterprising farmer. There is no shadow of doubt that in asking this House to agree to pass over freehold in favour of leasehold the Minister is asking us to do something which will be tremendously harmful to the people of the State. Under the leasehold system the farmer will not have that security which will enable him to pledge and he will not have the money to carry out improvements. It must be remembered that the settlement which has taken place in this country has been carried out by people with limited means. Our present Act provides that improvements equal to the full value of the land are to be made in 10 years, and if the land costs £1 a similar amount must be spent in improvements in 10 years. If the land is held under non-residence conditions a man must carry out improvements to the extent of 150 per cent., that is to say, he must do 30s. worth of improvements on the land which cost £1.

The Minister for Lands: We give him the advantage of two years in which he does nothing.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Under our present law residence must be taken up within six months. Apart from that, there is the advantage of the freehold farm to the man with limited means. Nearly 10,000 people to-day own free farms in return for the cost of the survey. A farm of 160 acres is often a very valuable property in the South-West. The Minister provides that there shall be improvements done by the lessee to the extent of 50 per cent. of the value of the land, just half what we provide under residence to-day, and yet we are told that this is a Bill to compel the people to do more work than is being done at the present time. There is to be no penalty for the man who does not reside on his property. The residence conditions may be carried out

with the permission of the Minister by an agent and residence may be deferred for 12 months. We are asked to believe that these new provisions are better for the country than those which are now prevailing, but I think I have shown that the improvements will not be nearly so great as the improvements conditional purchase holders are now called upon to carry out, and it will be much easier for a man to escape residence on his farm than at the present time. This is reactionary and bad for the State. How can the Minister claim that these conditions of improvements are likely to produce better results? There is another peculiar thing, and that is that under the Bill the Minister proposes that the lease rent shall be 2 per cent., under workers' homes 3 per cent., on town lands 4 per cent., and on repurchased estates 5 per cent. We have 2, 3, 4, and 5 per cent. being charged against land sold by the Government. I suppose that the Minister found that the town blocks at 4 per cent. were not popular, and he tried workers' homes at 3 per cent. and now they are down to 2 per cent. The area of land is to be limited to 1,000 acres of first class, and 2,000 of second class. Under our Act a man is permitted to take up 2,000 acres of first-class land, and 5,000 acres of second-class land, and his wife in each case is allowed to select one-half of these areas. I would like to point out that we say  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres of poor land is equal to one acre of good land, and I venture to remark that that is not a generous calculation, but still it is too generous for the Minister for Lands, and he reduces it. I think we long ago determined that 2,000 acres was little enough for a man to hold in the back country in the drier areas, and where a man must have wheat and sheep. In the South-West a smaller area will be sufficient, and probably it will be found that from 320 to 640 acres will be enough. In fact in a great portion of the South-West 640 acres is the limit. Under the Bill a lessee may take 10,000 acres of first-class, or 30,000 acres of second-class land, which is merely a pastoral lease, except that the tenure is more cer-

tain. Here a man may take a lease for 21 years and may safely go on with his work of improving knowing that he will have the farm for that time. Whilst I approve of the grazing farm outside the limits of cultivation, I do not approve of the idea of 10,000 to 30,000 acres being given away in the South-West for 21 years. The land to-day might not be used, but it will be needed in the near future. If the Minister lets these grazing areas in the midst of the farms of the South-West he will surely land himself in trouble before long. It is true that there is a very low rental proposed, and it is true that there is to be no taxation, but it is true that there is to be a revaluation. When a settler has struggled hard for 20 years and developed the country the Minister's valuers will come along and put up the rent. The Minister cannot under the Bill increase the rent but he can and will increase the value. It is this fear of revaluation that forms the chief objection to the measure. If it were a perpetual lease on the valuation fixed now, then the matter would be simplified, and I dare say that there would not be so much objection to it, although there is a strong objection to anything but the freehold. It is this fear of revaluation that the people have in mind, and it is well that they should remember that the Minister will come along and raise the value to the value given to the area by the very men who are occupying the blocks. The Minister quoted what was done in New South Wales, and he said that in that State the Labour Government had re-enacted the leasehold system recently. The Minister was good enough to give me the Act he quoted from, but I find that it is merely an Act that permits the Government to set aside areas to be leased in places where they propose to irrigate. The Minister was wrong when he led the House to believe that the leasehold system had displaced the freehold system in New South Wales. I have here a telegram from the Deputy-Leader of the Opposition in New South Wales, which was sent in reply to an inquiry from my leader, and it says, "The Act merely provides that the Min-

ister may set aside Crown lands for disposal under leasehold tenures; provisions as to sale in existing law practically unamended."

The Minister for Lands: What I said was that the position is that all areas made available had been set apart under that provision.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The impression gained from what the Minister said was that New South Wales had adopted the system of leasehold entirely, whereas Parliament has only given permission to the Government to set aside areas that may be leased in small blocks which are supplied by water. We know that Sir Joseph Carruthers introduced a Bill which provided for the leasehold system, but even that Bill did not say that it should be leasehold entirely. Mr. Wade's Government put through a Conversion Act by which the people could convert leasehold into freehold, and we know of the trouble in the New South Wales Parliament, in the Labour ranks, when the Government sought to repudiate the Conversion Act. We know that so strong was the feeling that there was a split in the party, and one or two resignations were handed in. I would like to read what was said by Mr. Horne, a Labour member in the New South Wales Parliament, in justification of his action. Mr. Horne said—

At least four-fifths of the people who support Labour would, if a referendum vote was taken on the subject, vote for the restricted freehold as against the leasehold system, minus the right of conversion. The whole history of land tenure, especially in countries where land monopoly is practically non-existent, like France, goes to show that the freehold tenure is one of the chief essentials of effective land settlement. Someone has said, "Give a man possession of a rock, and in a few years it will be transformed into a garden; give him a lease of a garden, and in a few years it will become a wilderness." There is sufficient truth in that statement to put the whole army of leasehold theorists to flight, and while human nature remains as it is, sentiment and prejudice will count as no

inconsiderable factor in the land development of a country. If the national safety depends upon immigration, as is often asserted, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the success of immigration depends on the offer of a freehold title. Land seekers are not likely to be attracted by any other form of tenure. The Government's leasehold policy, if carried into effect, will, while it lasts, put thousands of pounds into the pockets of some of the large land holders of the State. Those who want freehold titles will have to go elsewhere than to the State, and private subdivisions will afford the only opportunity in this respect. As a result the property of every man who now owns a freehold will be aggrandised in value, and the settlers forced to buy from them will suffer in consequence.

[*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. McDowall) took the Chair.*]

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I have said that the split in the party in New South Wales was caused by the trouble over the Conversion Bill. Mr. Wade thought the people ought to have the freehold, and he put through the Conversion Bill. The Labour Government, when they came into office, sought to repudiate, with the result that two of their members broke from the party. I would like to point out to the Minister that the New South Wales system, which says Crown lands may be set aside, is very different from his proposal which says that all Crown lands shall be leased. In New Zealand the dual system was given a trial, but it was found to be very unpopular. In 1911 the land applied for under purchase conditions totalled 140,528 acres, whereas the land applied for under leasehold was only 5,477 acres.

The Minister for Lands: You are absolutely wrong there.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No.

The Minister for Lands: The official *Year Book* will show that you are wrong.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Then the official *Year Book* must be wrong. The system was abandoned. It caused Sir Joseph Ward considerable trouble during

the last days of his administration. The leasehold system has now been abandoned in New Zealand altogether. A commission was appointed in New Zealand to inquire into this very question of land tenure, and the commission reported, amongst other things—

It is evident that any sense of insecurity in the minds of settlers must seriously injure rural progress. Stability of tenure is of necessity, a condition antecedent to and inseparable from, the energetic development of the colony's resources. Revaluation of present or future leases would, it is considered, exercise a very harmful effect upon settlers. It is questionable if the remaining Crown lands, which are chiefly of a rugged character and remotely situated would find occupiers under a system of lease providing for periodical revaluation.

Mr. Thomas: What is the length of the lease they give there?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I am not sure.

The Minister for Lands: Sixty-six years, with renewal.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Then, too, they found that the main difficulty was in obtaining money on the security of the lease. I think the lease in New Zealand was 999 years.

The Minister for Lands: It was at first, but it has now been altered to renewal.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Well, that is practically the same thing. This commission reported also—

If a title can be granted to-day and repudiated to-morrow by either the State or its tenants, we fail to see how any stability can exist, or solid progress be made.

That is perfectly true, because a producing country must always be a borrowing country. This year a crop of two million acres will cost a million and a quarter to put in. A million and a quarter has to be found by the banks or some other institution, or the Government, in order that the crop may be put in. That is no inconsiderable sum to be found in a State like this. The Government hold to the extent of £50,000 this year, but the other people have

had to find the balance until the crop was ready to harvest. We must regard the industry as one needing money. We must make it easy for the farmer to borrow money. The Minister knows that, in addition to this enormous cropping cost, which is an annual obligation, there is the cost of improving and developing the holding, buying stock, implements, and so on, and if we can help our people in this direction by providing a safe security, it is our duty to do it. If we turn to the history of France we find there are there something over three million holdings, two million of them being under twelve acres each, one million of from twelve to twenty-five acres, and fifteen hundred above one hundred acres. Of the people, 750,000 cultivate their own freehold, 850,000 cultivate as tenants, and only 50,000 employ hands.

The Minister for Lands: That is entirely due to the inheritance laws in France.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: But it does not affect the people.

The Minister for Lands: Yes. The inheritance law sets up a defiance to the supposed freedom of the freehold law.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Then there are Denmark Norway, Sweden, Italy, all divided into small freeholds. The Minister did not go to France for his argument in favour of leaseholds. Hon. members know that the resources of those people who have the freehold in France are enormous. France was able to pay Germany £200,000,000 as an indemnity, largely because of the prosperity of her small freeholders. I have shown that in New South Wales the system does not obtain, as it is proposed it shall obtain here. The system has been tried in New Zealand, found wanting, and abandoned.

The Minister for Lands: No.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Yes, it has been found wanting and abandoned. The system in New Zealand has been abandoned, and to-day they have gone back to freehold tenure. There can be no argument in favour of leasehold, nearly so strong as the argument that is put

up by the experience of freehold country. There would have been no Conversion Act in New South Wales if the leasehold system had been popular. The Minister cannot argue that greater development followed the leasehold system in New Zealand than has followed the freehold system in Western Australia. We have made more rapid strides than any State in the Commonwealth, and our magnificent results have been brought about largely by the fact that we offer the inducement of freehold. The Minister proposes, apparently without giving the matter thought, that the system which has done so well in the past, the system which is so well understood, is to go by the board, and that this leasehold system shall find a place on our statute book. Then there is the financial aspect of the question. The Minister is absolutely reckless in his proposal. He proposes that all holders of conditional purchase land may convert into perpetual lease under these conditions.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Your rent racked tenants will have a chance then.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The hon. member would say that I introduced the speculator and at the same time increased the value of the land. It is scarcely possible that both can have occurred. The hon. member himself once had an opportunity of reporting as to values. When the Dorakin area was being discussed he reported that it was of considerable value indeed.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: That is absolutely untrue. I recommended a reduction of your values.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No. The hon. member reported that the area was worth £1 an acre.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: That is absolutely untrue.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I ask that the hon. member be made to withdraw those words.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: If the hon. member takes exception to the words, I must ask the hon. member to withdraw.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: I withdraw.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: When the hon. member thought so well of Dorakin he was very wise indeed. Lands have never been sold in Western Australia except at a policy price. People have been allowed to acquire Crown lands at a low value in order that they might be induced to become settlers. We have always sold our lands at a policy price and have offered an allurements to draw people from all parts of the world. Hon. members must know what happened in Perth, how the people were so desirous of becoming land holders that they pestered every member of Parliament to induce the Government to cut up more land. We could not cut up new areas fast enough. How then can it be said that we have fixed too high a value on our land? As a matter of fact the land has never reached its proper value in Western Australia, but has always been sold at a very cheap rate. The revenue received last year from land now in process of alienation and paying five per cent. was £356,000, but if we had leased that same area at two per cent. the £356,000 would have become only £142,400. It costs more than £142,000 to run the department, so that there would be an actual loss in connection with the transactions of the Lands Department under this two per cent. leasehold principle. Just imagine it; we are going to let lands at two per cent. and it is going to cost us more than we get in return to carry out the inspections, which, we must not forget, will be very much increased under this system. Have the Government considered how they are going to make up this £212,600, the difference between the two per cent. and the five per cent.? Is it of no consequence? Is the Premier so flush of money that it does not matter?

The Minister for Lands: At the end of 20 years you will get no five per cent.; you will get nothing.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The time will never come when we will get nothing from our land. We get five per cent. for 25 years, but I venture to say that the land will never be paid for, because there will always be taxation to meet the needs of government. Since we gave up our

right to indirect taxation, taxation on land and income is practically our only means of revenue; how then can the hon. member say that after 20 years we will collect nothing? It is true that we charge five per cent. for 20 years, and then give the selector a freehold title, as against the two per cent. leasehold rent which the Minister proposes. But it is equally true that if we had done this for the last 20 years, we should be getting £142,000 instead of £356,000, as I have already pointed out. In the early stages of settlement an enormous amount of money is necessary to provide facilities; the Minister knows that he has had to spend an immense sum on roads, water supplies, and the provision of other facilities. Will the Minister say how he proposes to carry on all these works should the people who have conditional purchases be allured by this temptation of his to convert their holdings into perpetual leases? The Government would immediately lose a revenue of £50,000.

The Minister for Lands: You cannot call it loss of revenue, but you may suffer a depreciation of capital.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: It is not depreciation of capital, because the Minister knows that he can continue to tax the land after 20 years.

The Minister for Lands: It is very difficult.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: A tax would have to be paid sufficient to cover the needs of government; does the Minister want more than that? At the present time the revenue is not in a position to stand any strain at all, and if it is reduced by £50,000 it will be a very serious thing for the Treasurer.

The Minister for Lands: It is not revenue.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: But it is used as revenue.

The Minister for Lands: It is used as revenue but it is not revenue. If the hon. member sold his farm and used the proceeds of the sale that would not be revenue but depreciation of capital.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: When a private man sells land he is done with it; he cannot tax it and get revenue from it;

he does not get the advantages of produce for railways and wharves, and the hundred and one other advantages that come to the Government from the settler. The Government benefit by every bit of work done by the settler and it is because of these contingent advantages that we can sell the land as cheaply as we do. The Minister knows that and he cannot argue that a private man is in the same position as the Government.

The Minister for Lands: That is payment for services rendered, not taxation.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: It is a decided advantage to the State, and, of course, there is the right to tax. A man never owns land as he does anything else. It is always subject to the will of Parliament. Will the Minister say that the revenue will stand any strain at all? If the people avail themselves of this leasehold fad of his, the revenue will be depreciated very seriously during the next five or six years.

The Minister for Lands: A temporary loss can always be faced for an ultimate permanent advantage.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: There is no permanent advantage, but there are disadvantages all along the line. In order to make this system popular the Minister proposes to reduce the conditions and make them easier. The advantages under the freehold system are a thousand times greater than under the leasehold system.

The Minister for Lands: There is no reduction of conditions when you take into consideration the expenditure on rent.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have allowed a lot of latitude, but I must ask the hon. member to confine himself to the Bill.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The Minister argues that there is no reduction of conditions if we take into consideration the expenditure on rent. If the Minister sells a block for £500 the rent will be £10 per annum. Under the Minister's system that sum will have to be spent in improvements, but under our system the expenditure is twice as much and

under non-residence and freehold three times as much. The conditions are made very much easier in order that the people may be induced to try this system which the Minister proposes. Then I would like to know if the Minister has considered the question of State loans, when he proposes that there shall be no right to tax any land leased from the Crown, when he knows that the Government must borrow and must offer security, and that security must be the land if the Government fail to meet their loans. Any interference with titles is a serious thing indeed. When the Minister introduced his regulations he interfered with the borrowing of money. Although he has been very obliging and has registered transfers without any trouble, and done all he possibly could, yet nevertheless his regulations have had a damaging effect. Before those regulations were issued, the banks were offering money at a very cheap rate, but the minute the regulations were brought out these institutions thought their security was being attacked and refused to lend money. In fact they called up advances, as the Minister must know, with the result that many people have been very seriously inconvenienced indeed.

The Minister for Lands: That is wrong.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Money is dearer and more difficult to get because people's titles are being interfered with.

The Minister for Lands: They took their action in August as soon as they knew there was to be a bad season.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: They took it because the Minister compelled them to do so.

The Minister for Lands: I was not Minister in August, 1911.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: No, but the hon. member was Minister in October.

The Minister for Lands: In August, 1911, I heard one manager give instructions to shut down on all loans east of Dowerin.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: But they have shut down on all loans west of Dowerin. The determination of the Minister to

refuse a transfer until after five years residence, or the whole of the improvements have been performed, interfered with the right to sell, and interference with the right to sell interfered with the right to borrow.

The Minister for Lands: They did exactly the same thing in Victoria.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: That is no reason why we should do it here. It has been contended that speculation in land is absolutely bad and that increase of land values is bad.

The Minister for Lands: Speculative increase.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: The very life of the business was in the fact that one could sell a farm before the Minister's regulations were introduced, and because one could sell people did lend money. That is no longer the case, although probably the bad season had some effect. I pointed out to the Minister in regard to his regulations that the speculator lives just as well to-day as ever he did and that there was no need to run a steam roller over all selectors in order to get at the few who are speculating. The Minister should know the value of a certain form of title that gives security of tenure and is not subject to continual disturbance. I have told the Minister that the freehold title is a safe and convenient form of security, and I also pointed out that a producing country must be a borrowing country. I think it is very unwise to interfere with this form of security that suits our conditions so well. Let the people have the right to borrow undisturbed by these restrictions.

The Minister for Lands: What drives them off the land?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Want of money drives them off the land. The Minister knows that he raised the limit of loans from the Agricultural Bank, believing that institution would do just as much as all the other banks put together; he raised the limit to £2,000 but he found all the banks closed immediately. It is true that the bank lent more last year than ever before, but that is not a very great performance seeing that

the limit was raised from £750 to £2,000, and simultaneously the screw was put on by the private financial institutions. Before this hundreds of thousands of pounds were paid off to the Agricultural Bank by the private banks. They actually took over the business of the Agricultural Bank to relieve it of the necessity of carrying the farmer, and immediately this change in the security came they asked the Agricultural Bank to take the farmer back. It was not easy to get money and in consequence there is trouble to-day. I repeat that notwithstanding that the Minister administers his department sympathetically enough as regards transfers, he is not able to undo the harm he did when he varied the condition on which the land was held. I would like to point out several important matters which it is necessary to consider when dealing with this measure. There is of course the financial aspect as it affects the individual and the State, and I have endeavoured to show that as the land is the basis of all enterprise, so it is the basis of all investment. We are asked to rescind an Act which is popular, the freehold system, an Act which provides for compulsory improvement to a greater extent than the system proposed under this Bill, which limits the area under conditional purchase conditions to a reasonable area, which provides opportunity because freehold forms a convenient and safe means of security and enables money to be brought into contact with the land through the man of enterprise. The freehold system provides opportunity of taxation to meet the State needs, whereas under this Bill there is to be no taxation. Under our present law development is guaranteed, private investments too are encouraged, and the State's creditors are secured. If we accept in lieu of these advantages the proposal contained in this measure, we will do something which is unpopular and which will cause endless trouble, and people will have to wait until they can get a change to the freehold conditions again. This Bill does not provide for development as required by the present Act. It will limit the area



to less than a fair acreage, it will provide a poor form of security indeed for individual and State, it will prevent the lending of money to farmers and thrust upon a Government who cannot find money for authorised Government works the responsibility of finding money for individual farmers' wants. The Bill will deny the Government the right to collect taxes on leased lands, and will thereby reduce the State's credit, and it will reduce the land revenue at once. What this House has to consider is whether it will stand by the system of the past or adopt the system now proposed which will bring in so much less. The Minister knows full well that the doctrine of supremacy of private rights in land finds no place in the minds of Australian people. Nearly every session we assert the rights of the Crown and of the people in this regard by passing laws and imposing taxation and adopting legislation for the taking of property for public and even for private use. We have passed a Rights in Water and Irrigation Bill which provides that land may be taken from one private holder and leased to another. We pass Bills to restrain and control owners of land. We do not say that because a man owns a freehold the people have no right to approach him. The right of freehold reserves to the Crown the right to regulate and restrain and control the owner of the land and that being so, what more do we want?

The Minister for Lands: It is so difficult and costly.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: It is not difficult and it will not cost nearly so much as the supervision under this Bill, and it will have not only the same effect as this measure, but all the effect that can be necessary to preserve the rights of the State in the interests of the people. In conclusion the Minister said we told the people that there would be non-alienation of Crown lands with a view to the nationalisation of all lands. I venture to say that the people will realise to-day that we told them nothing but the bare truth. Here we have a Bill which provides for no further

alienation of Crown lands, a Bill which will put upon the man who has land all the responsibility of taxation in future. It will thrust on the land holder the whole of the burden of taxation, and the burden of meeting in connection with the people who pay taxes on income the whole of the additional taxation. The Minister asks us to believe that this Bill treats fairly the man on the land, when it is proposed to relieve six hundred million acres of land owned by the State of all taxation.

The Minister for Lands: What about the rental?

Hon. J. MITCHELL: Two per cent?

The Minister for Lands: That is economic taxation.

Hon. J. MITCHELL: I have shown the Minister that it will cost the two per cent. to administer the department. It costs that to-day and will cost it to-morrow and after this Bill is passed as well. There never was a measure so designed to injure the man on the land as this Bill. There never was a truer statement than the one we made to the electors that there would be no further alienation of Crown lands and that the nationalisation of Crown lands would follow. It is provided for in this measure, and I hope that the people who own land will appreciate the action of the Government who thrust on them the full responsibility as far as land tax in the future is concerned. I have nothing more to say in regard to this measure. I regret that the Bill has been brought down. I believe it will disturb land settlement and will cause a disinclination on the part of people to become farmers and this at a time when we can ill-afford to do anything which will retard settlement and development. It is possible that our goldfields might not flourish quite so well in the near future and if they should not be able to absorb the vast population living upon them, these men should be encouraged to come down and settle in the agricultural areas. I hope the House will take into consideration the needs of Western Australia and the wisdom

of providing for sure and certain development in future, and that the House will reject the Bill.

On motion by Mr. Thomas, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 10.24 p.m.*

## Legislative Council,

*Tuesday, 5th November, 1912.*

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

### BILL—INDUSTRIAL ARBITRATION.

*As to Recommittal.*

Hon. J. E. DODD (Honorary Minister) moved—

*That the Bill (reprinted as amended in Committee) be recommitted for the purpose of further considering Clauses 41, 53, 87, and 92.*

Hon. T. H. WILDING moved an amendment—

*That Clause 4 be added to the motion.*

Hon. J. D. Connolly: It would save time to have the whole Bill recommitted.

Hon. J. E. DODD asked leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion by leave withdrawn.

Hon. J. E. DODD moved—

*That the Bill (reprinted as amended in Committee) be recommitted for general consideration.*

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: After one or two clauses had been disposed of progress ought to be reported so that members could look through the reprinted Bill.

Question passed; the Bill recommitted.

*Recommittal.*

Hon. W. Kingsmill in the Chair; Hon. J. E. Dodd (Honorary Minister) in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1, 2, 3—agreed to.

Clause 4—Interpretation:

Hon. T. H. WILDING moved an amendment—

*That after paragraph (c) in the definition of "Industry" the words "provided that agricultural and pastoral industries shall not be included in this definition" be added.*

Hon. J. E. DODD: As this matter had already been thoroughly fought out in Committee it was useless to repeat the arguments already used. He opposed the amendment.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: When the arguments were put up previously in connection with this question he was not present. He supported the amendment. In nearly every clause of the Bill he saw entanglement for all concerned in the agricultural industry. It would work untold harm to the industry if the Bill was made to apply to it. The agricultural industry differed from other industries because it was one in which added difficulties or costs could not be passed on. A system of grading or combination among the hands would work untold harm. There were many who objected to join unions, there were many not allowed by the unions to join, and there were employers who objected to employing unionists. To those who did not want to join unions, or could not join unions, or who wished to retain their freedom, the only outlook was the agricultural industry. He could imagine men ploughing or drilling in one field and stock breaking into a standing crop in the adjoining field, and the ploughmen or the drillers not taking steps to save the farmer's crop because they were not classed as stockmen, and it was no busi-