

to come. Another matter which the report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission refers to is that of subsidies or creating credit to keep settlers on the land. We should do something in that direction. During the last depression, hundreds of our soldier settlers had to go off the land. I do not think that at that time there was any guarantee in regard to a home consumption price. They were settled when there was no guarantee in regard to prices such as we have today. I think we all agree on the principle that there should be a home consumption price.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: That cannot be done now that the Referendum has been defeated.

Mr. Seward: It would not have been done if the Referendum had been carried.

Mr. McLARTY: If we do insist on a home consumption price and methods of subsidising primary production where necessary, I believe that will go a very long way indeed towards encouraging the success of soldier settlement. In view of the fact that Ministers from the various States are meeting at Canberra today and that we were told an agreement will probably be reached before the conference breaks up, I do not think there is any need for me to say more at this stage. The member for Toodyay is to be commended for having brought the motion forward, because we cannot afford any further delay and must be ready to proceed with a scheme as soon as hostilities cease.

On motion by Mr. Marshall, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 9.29 p.m.*

## Legislative Council.

*Thursday, 5th October, 1944.*

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

### QUESTIONS (2).

#### POULTRY FOOD.

*As to Ingredients and Effect of Mashes.*

Hon. G. B. WOOD asked the Chief Secretary:

(i) Is the Government aware that poultry farmers are very dissatisfied at being compelled to buy mashes made up by firms out of certain ingredients?

(ii) Is there any control of this industry by the Government?

(iii) Are these mashes subject to any standard, or analysis, as laid down by the Agricultural Department?

(iv) If not, will the Government immediately take steps to force the manufacturers to supply information to the poultry producers as to the ingredients of mashes?

(v) Is the manufacture of poultry mashes contributing to the acute shortage of bran and pollard?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(i) Commercial poultry farmers are not compelled to buy proprietary mashes.

(ii) Yes, under the provisions of the Feeding Stuffs Act, 1929-42.

(iii) No standards have been prescribed but manufacturers and importers are required to submit analyses of their stock foods for annual registration under the Feeding Stuffs Act.

(iv) Answered by No. (iii). The compositions of registered stock foods are published in the Journal of the Department of Agriculture.

(v) Not so far as the Government is aware.

### **HAY AND CHAFF.**

*As to Export to Eastern States.*

Hon. G. B. WOOD asked the Chief Secretary:

(i) Has the Government's attention been directed to the Commonwealth Government's proposals to assist in the transfer of chaff and hay to the Eastern States?

(ii) In view of the fact that Western Australia's production, owing to seasonal conditions, is likely to be inadequate for local needs, does the Government concur in the Commonwealth Government's action?

(iii) If not, what action does the Government intend taking?

(iv) Is it a fact that hay merchants are now actively engaged in obtaining chaff and hay on Eastern States account?

(v) Will the Government state what action it contemplates taking to preserve the interests of the producers and consumers of chaff over the next 12 months?

(vi) Has the Government any proposals for encouraging the maximum amount of hay being cut this season, having regard to the unsatisfactory state of affairs which existed after the 1940 season?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(i) Yes.

(ii) and (iii) The State Government has not yet received a proposal from the Commonwealth Government.

(iv) It is understood the usual business transactions between produce merchants and farmers direct are being followed.

(v) Farmers have been advised to make every effort to cut sufficient hay for their own requirements and to contact one or other of the chaff merchants with a view to making available all surplus hay.

(vi) It is anticipated that the Premier and the Minister for Lands will be in possession of considerable information on these questions and upon their return the whole matter will receive immediate consideration.

### **BILL—LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL (POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTION).**

Introduced by the Chief Secretary and read a first time.

### **BILLS (3)—THIRD READING.**

- 1, Financial Emergency Act Amendment.
  - 2, Testator's Family Maintenance Act Amendment.
  - 3, Plant Diseases (Registration Fees) Act Amendment.
- Passed.*

### **BILL—FRUIT GROWING INDUSTRY (TRUST FUND) ACT AMENDMENT.**

*Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 20th September.

**HON. W. J. MANN** (South-West) [4.40]: This Bill seeks to amend the Fruit Growing Industry (Trust Fund) Act and the amendments sought have, I am pleased to know, the general approval of the people engaged in the fruitgrowing industry. The amendments deal mainly with the definition of "dealer." Hitherto a person who came within that category was permitted to sell fruit without making contribution to the original levy which was voluntarily paid by fruitgrowers for the purpose of establishing a fund so that they might have a reserve to combat orchard pests at any time. There have been occasions in the past when that fund proved of immense value, and through its application the fruitgrowers and orchardists in different parts of the State have been saved from heavy loss. Had certain pests not been quickly tackled, some orchards would have been decimated. It has been found necessary to extend the operations of the fund, and this amending Bill covers what is required. I took the opportunity, a few days ago when the fruitgrowers' conference was held in Perth, of discussing the Bill with a number of growers, and I found that, taking it by and large, they regard it as satisfactory. In these circumstances I think the House can safely pass the second reading.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*In Committee.*

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

### **BILL—NURSES REGISTRATION ACT AMENDMENT.**

*Second Reading.*

**THE HONORARY MINISTER** [4.43] in moving the second reading said: This is

a small but nevertheless somewhat important Bill, by which it is proposed to raise the status of nurses engaged in attending to persons who are insane or mentally infirm. At the present time general nurses, children's nurses, and infant health nurses are registered by the Nurses Registration Board constituted under the Nurses Registration Act, and midwifery nurses are registered by the Midwives Registration Board under the Health Act. These two boards are comprised of different personnel, excepting that the Commissioner of Public Health is chairman of both. They operate, however, in almost the same sphere. Those engaged in nursing mental patients do not enjoy any registration.

Representations have been made that these nurses should be provided, in common with other nurses in the State, with registration in a similar way to that operating in the Eastern States, one main objective being to secure reciprocity as between the States. It is considered that these representations are reasonable and just, and it is proposed by this measure to revise the constitution of the Nurses Registration Board to enable one board to deal with the registration of the various types of nurses. By the Bill, therefore, the two existing boards as set up under the existing legislation are cancelled, and one board with a wider membership is established. It is proposed that this board shall consist of nine members, as follows:—

- The Commissioner of Public Health (ex officio);
- The Inspector General of the Insane (ex officio);
- Two medical practitioners, one of whom is practising as an obstetrician, nominated by the British Medical Association;
- Two senior registered nurses in active practice as such, one of whom shall be trained and experienced in midwifery nursing and infant welfare nursing;
- A general trained nurse, a mental nurse, and a midwifery nurse who are registered in accordance with the requirements of this Act and who are nominated respectively by the general trained nurses, by the mental nurses and by the midwifery nurses who are also registered as aforesaid.

It is proposed that the members of the board, other than the two ex officio members, shall each of them hold office for such term not exceeding three years from the date of his or her appointment as the Governor shall, when making the appointment, determine.

In determining the terms of office of the members first appointed, the Governor may fix varying terms of office in relation to the said members respectively, with a view to creating a rotation for the retirement of members of the board.

There is a proposal in the Bill which sets out that those who already hold a certificate for mental nursing, issued by the Mental Hospitals Department under the Lunacy Act, shall be qualified to obtain registration by the new board. The registration certificates of nurses already issued under the existing legislation are not jeopardised by any proposals in the Bill. In respect to future registrations it is proposed that the Nurses Registration Board shall draw up suitable requirements in this connection, and the necessary examinations will be held to enable nurses to qualify.

Another proposal is included in the Bill by which an appeal can be made to a judge against the decision of the board either for refusing to register or to re-register, as the case may be. There are other matters dealt with in the Bill, mostly of a machinery nature, and if any further information is desired I shall be only too pleased to supply it during the Committee stage. I commend the Bill to the House, and trust that Parliament will approve of the principle of giving to those engaged in nursing mental patients the same status and privileges as are enjoyed by their sister nurses.

Hon. J. Cornell: The Bill does not affect the standard of the nurses at all.

The HONORARY MINISTER: It will help to improve their standard. The special feature of this Bill is that it will enable mental nurses to register, and everyone must agree that a step in that direction is long overdue. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. J. Cornell, debate adjourned.

## RESOLUTION—COMMISSIONER OF RAILWAYS.

### *As to Extension of Appointment.*

Debate resumed from the previous day on the motion by the Chief Secretary to concur in the following resolution received from the Assembly—

That the appointment by His Excellency the Lieut.-Governor of Mr. J. A. Ellis as Commis-

sioner of Railways for five years commencing on the 15th January, 1944, in the terms of Executive Council minute laid on the Table of the Legislative Assembly on the 12th September, 1944, be approved.

**HON. A. THOMSON** (South-East) [4.51]: The resolution deals entirely with the re-appointment of Mr. Ellis as Commissioner of Railways for the ensuing five years. This is simply in accordance with the provisions of the Government Railways Act, but it is typical of many Government actions that the Government first decides upon a certain course, carries it out and then asks Parliament to approve of it. I am one of those who for many years have advocated the appointment of a public works committee to investigate many matters of public importance. If we had such a committee in existence today Parliament or the Government could refer the question of the general working of the Railway Department to it for consideration and advice.

It is regrettable that the resolution as presented to the House does not permit of any amendment being moved; otherwise the amendment submitted in another place might have been adopted with benefit. The amendment in effect suggested the creation of another form of management for the railways with a view to strengthening the position of the man occupying the responsible post of Commissioner. On a board of that sort I consider that the business community could very well be represented and certainly the primary producing section, which provides at least 75 per cent. of the traffic carried on the railways, should also be worthy of representation in an advisory capacity. This is a period of changes, and it has become an accepted principle—though it is one of which I have not approved—that employees of a large concern such as the railways should have representation on the board. Those of us who have used the railways for many years know that the average railway employee extends courtesy and consideration to the customers of the department. Country members know that various improvements suggested by them have been brought about by the men employed in actually running the trains. The matter of appointing a board to control the railways is certainly worthy of serious consideration by the Government.

I will reserve to myself the right to vote against the motion, not because I have any

fault to find with the gentleman who holds the position of Commissioner, but as an indication to the Government that something should be attempted and something should be done to remedy the serious position in which the department finds itself. Interesting speeches have been made by various members. Mr. Craig was one of the first to extend sympathy to the Commissioner on the position in which he finds himself. I can also offer the Commissioner my sympathy. If any man charged with the duty of administering the Railway Department of this State and making the railways profitable were in a position to raise the freights or pass on increased costs to the users of the railways, there would be a danger of this public utility rendering it more difficult for primary producers to get their commodities to the world's markets. It remained for Mr. Seddon to direct attention to that fact. The position of the primary producers must be considered and they must be assisted to get their produce to the world's markets at the cheapest possible rates.

I regret that there is no opportunity to move an amendment to the motion, but later on I may move along other lines. I consider that the Government should appoint a Royal Commission of experts to ascertain what amount in fares and freights the users of the railways can reasonably be expected to pay while enabling them to compete with their products in the world's markets, and to help also in a genuine policy of decentralisation by encouraging and assisting the establishment of secondary industries outside the metropolitan area. If such a Royal Commission, after inquiry, arrived at a satisfactory decision, it should recommend to the Government that only the capital sum upon which the railways can provide interest and sinking fund should be charged against the department, and all capital above that sum should be written off. We have been told in this House that the railway systems of Queensland and New South Wales are showing substantial profits. Queensland set an example years ago by reducing the capital charged against its railways. The same thing applies in the case of the New South Wales railways.

I cordially endorse Mr. Dimmitt's remark to the effect that our railways were built to open up and develop the country. He also indicated that in the last five years

we had gone back £1,000,000 by way of deficit on the railways. I have been in Parliament for over 30 years and have continued to advocate—in another place as well as in this House—that the financial position of the Railway Department was long overdue for an overhaul. As has been indicated by other members, the Commissioner has over him, as it were, the Arbitration Court, which lays down the rates that are to be paid to his employees. From that there is no escape for him. Members of this House have rightly objected to an increase in railway freights. We are now asked to confirm the appointment to an important position of a man who is hamstrung before he really starts out on his job. Let us take a body of directors in charge of a company, the interest charges on the capital of which far exceed the earning capacity of the undertaking. We can well believe that efforts would at once be made to reduce the capital to enable the management to carry on satisfactorily and render it possible to convert the business into a paying proposition instead of allowing it to be killed by over-capitalisation.

That is virtually the position with the Government railway system. Members of this House as well as of the Government say, "You cannot do that sort of thing with the Railway Department." Some members contend that if the capital charge against the railways is reduced, the employees will immediately become unreasonable; if the railways show a profit, they will at once ask for better conditions. We do not hear that argument used in the case of a private company whose capital has been reduced. I would impress upon members that the railways are a national asset. Half the people of the State live in the metropolitan area, and not a big percentage of them use the railways. Under the present system, owing to increased costs imposed as a result of arbitration awards and the rise in the price of coal, some members contend that the Commissioner is obliged to increase freights to enable him to pay his way. That would be all right if we were then going to place the Commissioner on a proper businesslike footing. Every penny that has been expended on the railways since their inception over 50 years ago is still a charge against the system.

Our duty is to see whether it is possible to bring the Railway Department into line with big business methods. Many of the State trading concerns have shown a loss to the taxpayers, and nothing has been done about it. We know that millions of pounds have been written off by the Agricultural Bank and the Industries Assistance Board, as well as through group settlement, and a great deal of the loss was entirely the result of mismanagement. No objection is taken to that. Why, then, should objection be taken to reducing the capital charge against the railways? We should get down to bedrock and drastically cut down the capital, even if it means reducing it by half, to enable the department to give better service than it is giving now. At present it is overloaded and top-heavy through having to pay too much interest on its large capital. There is no sinking fund. I wonder what shareholders of a private company would say to their directors if they continued to make no provision for depreciation in the value of their stock or machinery, but kept on charging up the full amount that had been paid for the plant, although it was obsolete, worn out, and fit for the scrap heap. That is really the position in which the railways find themselves today.

Members should look at the railway map in the Chamber. They will see that the railways have not been built according to a properly co-ordinated plan, but, like Topsy, have simply grown up. I propose to refer to one or two anomalies which affect country residents to show how necessary it is that consideration be given, not only to visitors to the country, but also to the residents there. The town of Williams is 100 miles by direct road from Perth. Because of the existence of the State Transport Board, which was founded to assist the railways, the people of Williams are faced with two alternatives, either to send their goods via Narrogin by rail which means freight on a distance of 183 miles, or via Brunswick Junction, and pay freight over a distance of 194 miles. From Perth to Wagin the distance is 193 miles, and from Wagin to Lake Grace 74 miles. From Lake Grace to Hyden the distance is 58 miles, making a total of 325 miles.

The Great Southern line was built as a matter of expediency at a time when the early settlers were prepared to accept almost anything. It was then a matter of

pushing the line out 30 or 40 miles at one time, and 30 or 40 miles at another time. The result is that the mileage over which people are compelled to send their goods today or to travel themselves in order to reach Perth is beyond all reason. From Wagin to Albany the distance is 147 miles, and from Lake Grace to Wagin 74 miles, making a total of 221 miles. I pay a tribute to the Transport Board as it is constituted today. When it was first established Mr. Munt was appointed chairman. Unfortunately he was imbued with the idea that he had only one answer to give to all requests, namely, the word "No" written in capital letters. No matter what request was made to him it was turned down. In the present occupant of the position of chairman, Mr. Millen, we have a man who has had outside experience, who has lived in the country, and realises the difficulties that people have to contend with there. As soon as that gentleman took over the reins, country districts received very much more sympathetic consideration than they ever enjoyed before.

I have referred to the distance from Lake Grace to Wagin and from Wagin to Albany, because I wish to state that we waited on the Minister in charge of transport to ask him to grant permission to producers to send their lambs by road from Lake Grace to Albany, a distance of 130 miles against 221 by rail, and place them in the freezing works there in about five hours, compared with three days' travel by rail. Members will see how important that would be to those engaged in the export trade. I wish also to point to the disabilities that so many people in the country are suffering, and to stress why it is necessary to have a thorough overhaul of the railway administration. I also wish to draw attention to the freights people have to pay through sending their stock over circuitous routes to port when they should be able to send it to the nearest port available for oversea shipment.

It was pleasing to hear Mr. Seddon refer to Esperance. That port is certainly entitled to consideration and because of the growing export trade from that district it is ever becoming a more important centre. The hon. member also referred to Geraldton. I think the Premier is well able to take care of the requirements of that district. Neither he nor his colleagues have been negligent in ad-

vancing the claims of the port of Geraldton. True, we are up against shipping difficulties, but we have to look ahead and be prepared after the war to provide facilities for the export of our commodities and to assist primary producers in every way. Perhaps I may be pardoned for making some reference to Kojonup, the district in which Mr. Roche lives and for which he has done so much. By train from Perth to Kojonup via Donnybrook the distance is 239 miles; via Katanning along the Great Southern it is 258 miles but direct, by road, it is 160 miles. From Kojonup via Katanning to Albany it is 148 miles and by road approximately 90 miles. I mention those figures to indicate that the Commissioner will have to look ahead and see whether it would not be in the interests of his department and of the people resident in country districts, seriously to consider establishing road transport, as has been done in South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria.

Through the activities of my colleague, Mr. Roche, the Railway Department, with the assistance of the Transport Board, was induced to inaugurate an omnibus service from Perth to Kojonup. That has proved a boon to the people along the route. Not only that, but it has also been a financially successful investment for the Railway Department because, if my memory serves me right, in reply to a question asked by Mr. Roche, the Chief Secretary stated that a profit of something like £3,800 has been made on the venture. I have had the pleasure of inspecting and riding in a motor coach which is running from Perth to Scarborough. It would do the Railway Department a great deal of good and would perhaps be an incentive to the officials to think away from the two sets of rails over which they have control—and unfortunately their view seems to be circumscribed; they cannot look beyond the railways—if they, too, inspected that coach. This trailer motor-bus runs from Perth to Scarborough and can carry 60 passengers. I am sure that the comfort provided in that bus is superior to the comfort afforded country travellers on our railways.

I do not condemn the Railway Department at present, because I realise it is up against very great difficulties. But it is illuminating to find, from the figures quoted by Mr. Seddon, that despite the lack of manpower and the deplorable condition of our rail

ways, we are now employing more men than we did in 1938. A close examination of the railways is required from that point of view. When the Chief Secretary replies to the debate I would like him to answer this question: Is the Government prepared to recommend to the Railway Department that consideration be given to the possibility of providing road transport? The department would earn the goodwill of the public if it took time by the forelock and did as that private citizen has done in the metropolitan area in providing the most up-to-date method of transport in existence in Australia. The department could perhaps provide a coach of a similar type for the Kojonup route. The public has become used to travelling that way and I can see great possibilities for the department if it will only have sufficient foresight to provide decent, comfortable travelling accommodation for passengers. I have referred to various routes with a view to pointing out how unfair is the present method of compelling people to pay railway freight on their goods over a distance of 183 to 192 miles when the direct route to their nearest market is only 100 miles. The same applies to those supplying products from the Lake Grace-Hyden Rock area.

The views of Mr. Cornell on the construction of the railway from Lake Grace to Hyden would be interesting. The opinion of many is that the line should have been linked up with the Kondinin line. However, the railway has been built, and that is one of the disadvantages from which many people are suffering. If primary producers in country areas are to be able to compete on the world's markets, it is absolutely essential for them to have cheap transport, which is in effect the lifeblood of trade. Even this House to a certain extent very materially contributed to the disadvantages from which the Railway Department is suffering. Many railways have been constructed and extended purely for the purpose of opening up the country. Years ago—I think it was about 1928—this House rejected a proposal to construct a railway from Pemberton to Denmark. Had that project been undertaken we would have had a line constructed at a cheap rate because we were then getting money, with the assistance of the Commonwealth and the Imperial Governments, at

one and a half per cent. for the purposes of group settlement. Unfortunately the line now goes only from Denmark to Nornalup and there is a line from Pemberton to Northcliffe. There we have two dead-ends. We have so many of those dead-ends in our railway construction that it is hopeless for the Commissioner to make them pay under present conditions.

I do not wish to labour the question, as I have dealt with it for many years, but I would point out that the Commissioner has charged up against him no less a sum than £26,082,078 and that he has to find interest totalling £1,014,776 each year. The only time I think that he ever received a credit was when the Commonwealth Government paid £100,000 odd for the engines, trucks, etc., which it took over from the department. Reference has been made to the deviation now being carried out around the tunnel at Swan View. We have no estimate of the cost of that work. Reference has been made to the antiquated way in which the work is being done. However, we need to be just and fair to the engineers who have tackled a very difficult job. So far as I can see, the great bulk of the work that has to be performed consists of blasting and cutting out thousands of tons of solid rock. I cannot see any point in the engineers being charged with inefficiency through not using bulldozers. We have to realise it is impossible for them to shift solid rock until it has been blasted.

Whatever the cost of the project, I presume it will have to be borne by the Railway Commissioner without his deriving one single additional benefit. I strongly endorse the remarks of Mr. Dimmitt, who suggested that a certain sum should be allocated to the Commissioner on terms similar to those in New South Wales, £800,000 per year being granted as a set-off against the Commissioner's having to control many railways which I am sure that, as a business manager, he would have refused to accept and the construction of which he would not have approved had he been given the choice. Failing that, the suggestion of Mr. Seddon is well worth the Government's serious consideration, namely, the writing-off or not charging up of the amount of interest now being levied against the Commissioner, thus giving him a reasonable chance of doing a good job.

Hon. G. W. Miles: That is the simplest way.

Hon. A. THOMSON: Yes. We are asked to re-appoint the Commissioner for a period of five years but he has no more hope of making the railways pay their way than I have of amending this motion. It is time that the Government did something. It has been in office for over nine years. In fact, I think that when it concludes its present term it will have occupied the Treasury Bench for 12 successive years. In these circumstances the Government is rightly to blame for the present situation of the railway system. It is time we grappled with the position and, instead of looking to the users of the railways to pay increased freights, fixed rates that will enable the primary producer to compete successfully in the world's markets. If we were to do that and give the Commissioner a free hand, the position of the railways would be vastly improved. To impose freight rates that the producers cannot possibly pay merely tends to drive more people into the cities. Members are probably aware that the Commissioner has power to charge special rates if he so desires. The Government has given some indication of a desire to establish secondary industries outside the metropolitan area. We hope that effort will be carried to fruition.

If industry is to be made successful along those lines, special consideration in freight charges should be extended so as to place them on a footing comparable with industries already established in the metropolitan area. The Government should reduce the capital cost of the railways or at least not charge interest to the extent that is apparent today. In any criticism I and other members have voiced regarding the railways, sympathy has been expressed with the Commissioner with respect to the task confronting him, particularly his inability to meet rising costs. I trust that the Chief Secretary, when replying to the debate, will give the House an assurance that it is the Government's considered opinion that the time is long overdue for writing-down the capitalisation of the railway system, thereby enabling the Commissioner to make provision for interest and sinking fund payments and also for depreciation, which item is not allowed for now. That is a most unbusinesslike procedure, for the inauguration

of which the present Government is not, of course, responsible.

Despite the fact that some of the railways affected have not been in operation for many years, the Commissioner still has to pay interest on account of those undertakings. For instance, the Hopetoun-Ravensthorpe line was pulled up long ago but still it represents a charge against the railways. The same applies to certain lines in the gold-fields areas, which were pulled up long ago. Why should the Commissioner have to make provision for interest and sinking fund payments on railways that no longer exist? I trust the Chief Secretary will be able to tell us that consideration has been given to representations made by members of this House. For many years I have been advocating the re-assessment of railway finance and I hope that before I cease to hold a seat in this House I shall see at least some of my objectives duly attained. As I remarked earlier, I reserve to myself the right to vote for or against the motion. I sincerely wish that the Government would grapple with the situation and adopt effective measures to place the railway system on a better basis so that it can operate for the welfare of the State.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, debate adjourned.

## **BILL—SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION ACT AMENDMENT.**

### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 20th September.

HON. C. F. BAXTER (East) [5.36]: It is rather remarkable that the House should be asked to give consideration to this Bill following upon the speech delivered by the Chief Secretary yesterday afternoon. On that occasion the Minister charged this House with being obstructive when the present Government is in office and with not being obstructive when a Government of another political brand has had charge of the Treasury bench. Seeing that the Chief Secretary has occupied a Ministerial seat in this House since about 1933, he should display a little more sympathy for those who formerly held the position he now occupies. I can assure him, as members are fully aware, there has been plenty of opposition indulged in by this House when legislation introduced by a non-Labour Government was under discussion.



Some of the biggest fights that have been waged in this House regarding legislation concerned Bills introduced by a non-Labour Government. In this instance, however, the Bill represents one of the vexatious measures of the type that the Chief Secretary referred to as not receiving reasonable consideration. I intend voting for the second reading of the measure with a view to amending it in Committee, but I certainly ask the Chief Secretary if he considers this is the time for amending an Act in order to make one section of the workers more comfortable when the other section concerned, which has to pay, is still suffering from every disadvantage it is possible to encounter after a succession of drought years. The pastoralists have been holding on to their leases in an endeavour to keep the industry afloat. They should be looking to the Government for assistance rather than for the introduction of special legislation that will have an adverse effect upon them.

Never before were pastoral conditions in this State more parlous than they are today. Surely a Bill of this description should not be introduced to add more vexation and worry to men engaged in the industry. When he moved the second reading of the Bill, the Honorary Minister said that its provisions had been discussed with the Pastoralists' Association and the suggested amendments had been agreed to in the main. The Honorary Minister further said that the Bill had received the approbation of the Pastoralists' Association and the A.W.U. I suppose there is no doubt about the approval of the latter organisation, but I can assure the House that the Bill has not the approval of the Pastoralists' Association—hence the amendments on the notice paper.

Surely a Bill of this description could have been held over until the position of the industry was more satisfactory and there was some prospect of success ahead. As it is, the pastoralists can expect no relief from the standpoint of rain until early next year. Their losses have been tremendous over a long period of years. Of course, a Bill of this description is typical of those respecting which the Legislative Council takes a harsh view. This House has never hesitated to do what it could to relieve the position of wage-earners generally; but here is a Bill that is indeed one-sided. It will work a grave injustice on the industry to which it applies.

Instead of improving matters, it may induce unemployment. The industry can stand up against burdens, but it can be crushed out of existence if the burdens become too heavy. This is the sort of thing to which the Legislative Council has been objecting for the past ten or 12 years.

Hon. J. Cornell: My objection is to the Bill seeking to put more work on the Police Force.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: The Bill is wrong there, too; but, of course, police inspections have always been provided for. The Honorary Minister said that the Bill would not mean increased costs or additional trouble for the pastoralists.

The Honorary Minister: Very little.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: That is typical of the Honorary Minister—the amending legislation will mean “very little.” A number of the amendments in the Bill are not very vital. That is quite true, but I find that the measure is an exact copy of the South Australian Act and partly of the New South Wales Act. Have we not officers in this State capable of framing legislation that will be suitable to our own conditions? Some of the amendments in the Bill do not apply to conditions obtaining in Western Australia. For instance, one clause sets out that the accommodation for the men must be a certain distance from the wool scour. Where is the wool scour referred to? There are not any here. In another clause, reference is made to striking out of the Act the word “tent.” If members look at the Bill they will see that it is wrong to strike that word out of the Act because it is included in another section. If tents are not to be provided in connection with pastoral work, what about shearing the stragglers on the run? And what will be the position during a drought when the sheep cannot be brought in.

Hon. J. Cornell: What is wrong with living in a tent?

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Nothing. If I were up North I would sooner live in a tent than in a building. Yet here the Bill contains a provision to strike out all references to “tent.” Another amendment is that the station-owner must provide pots and urns. Where can those articles be procured today? They cannot be obtained.

The Honorary Minister: He does not have to get the articles straight away.

**Hon. C. F. BAXTER:** The station-owner has to get them as soon as the amending legislation is in force. Then take the position regarding accommodation in the sheds. To-day we have provision for three men in a room. That is all right. For the future, however, accommodation must be provided for two men only in a room. Anyone that knows anything about shearers will appreciate that if the men go to one station where accommodation is provided for two in a room and they then go to another place where the accommodation provides for three men in a room, the trouble will start.

**Hon. J. Cornell:** I have slept in a room with 40 shearers.

**Hon. C. F. BAXTER:** So have I. Then again, an endeavour is being made to bring our Act into conformity with the South Australian legislation and the Bill provides that the Act shall apply to stations where the number of shearers employed is six instead of eight as hitherto. I remind members that under the definition section, a shearer means "any person employed in or about a shearing shed." That is the definition of the word "shearer," so that personnel employed on a farm where a two-stand plant is operating will be included. Let me turn to the accommodation. In that connection I submit examples of alterations which would be necessary if the Bill were passed as printed—

- 12 Shearers.
- 12 Shedhands.
- 1 Presser.
- 25 Employees at present occupy 7 rooms accommodating 4 men; 3 to a room would require 9 rooms or 2 new rooms; 2 to a room would require 13 rooms.
- 8 Shearers.
- 8 Shedhands.
- 1 Presser.
- 17 Employees at present require 5 rooms accommodating 4 to a room; 3 to a room would require 6 rooms or 1 new room; 2 to a room would require 9 rooms.
- 6 Shearers.
- 6 Shedhands.
- 1 Presser.
- 13 Employees at present require 4 rooms of 4 men to a room; 3 to a room would require 5 rooms or 1 new room; 2 to a room would require 7 rooms.

In each example only the minimum number of shedhands has been provided for, and no presser's offsider.

If the present four-men rooms are to accommodate only three men, the air space per man

will be 480 cubic feet as against the present requirement of 360 cubic feet.

If the present four-men rooms are to house only three men, additional two-men rooms must be built. Thus at the one shed employees would be housed in two-men and three-men rooms, and friction would be caused. All rooms should be for three men.

Notwithstanding the Minister's assurance that the pastoralists are to a large extent in agreement with the Bill, the fact is that they are not. The measure contains one clause for which I do not know the reason. The matter has been provided for in the previous Act, and the clause in question should be deleted from the Bill. In my opinion, the present time is one in which the Government could find something better to do than legislate for better accommodation for shearers, the industry being at its lowest ebb as the result of drought. These proposals should not now be inflicted on the industry, causing irritation and involving cost in money, material and labour. It is hard now to get labour on stations. I shall agree to the second reading of the Bill, but I have on the notice paper amendments which I intend to press.

**HON. F. R. WELSH (North):** I wish to briefly define my attitude on the Bill. I feel a certain degree of antagonism to it, although I fully acknowledge that the shearers, like any other man in the community, is entitled to good housing and living conditions. Those things the shearers already has under the present Act. I have had experience of shearers for the past 30 years, and have never heard from them any complaint regarding the accommodation provided for them under the 1912 Act. It should be borne in mind that the housing accommodation for shearers is in use only over a period ranging from three weeks to a month each year. As soon as the shearing is over, the accommodation and chattels are locked up, and not used for about 11 months. Occasionally there has been some discontent, but there is no doubt that the buildings erected in accordance with the 1912 Act are perfectly adequate. They are often situated a quarter of a mile from the homestead and the wool shed.

The Bill sets out that shearers' accommodation must be away from pigsties, and removed from wool scours. There are no pigs on stations, and I do not think there is a wool scour near a shed in Western Aus-

tralia. That stipulation has probably been taken from the South Australian Act. In answer to a question whether any complaints have been received from shearers, the Minister in another place said, "We do not wait for complaints." That is an extraordinary position to take up while the industry is passing through one of the most trying periods in its history, just as is the agricultural industry, and great difficulty is experienced in making ends meet. To impose some of the demands mentioned in the Bill on a struggling industry is wrong.

I repeat, I do not deny for a moment that the shearers are entitled to decent living conditions. He is entitled to them, and he gets them. No complaints, except of a minor nature, have been made by shearers to my knowledge; they have their remedy under the present Act, and shearing has run smoothly. During last night's debate on the railways mention was made of the accommodation provided for fettlers, who are practically permanently stationed on the railway lines. The Government might set its own house in order as regards the fettlers, before introducing such a Bill as this. Again, the accommodation provided at State batteries is bad; the accommodation for shearers will compare more than favourably with anything the State batteries have for their employees.

Hon. J. CORNELL: There is no argument about that.

Hon. F. R. WELSH: Some amendments should be made in the Bill. I have never had a disagreement with shearers regarding quarters; and I resent the allegations made against pastoralists generally in the Bill. I shall vote for the second reading, but hope that amendments in Committee will put the Bill into decent shape. I fail to see how the Honorary Minister could state that the Pastoralists' Association had agreed to the Bill, and shall be glad to have that matter explained.

HON. J. CORNELL (South): Many members may not think that I am an old shearers, but such is the fact. I can produce what I think no other member of this Chamber can produce—a Shearers' Union ticket 53 years old, having been issued in 1891. I agree with what has been stated by Mr. Baxter and Mr. Welsh. I stood behind the Act of 1912, and on that account several times got into trouble with Sir Ed-

ward Wittenoom, who thought I knew nothing about shearing, but ultimately admitted that I did. That Act has stood the test of years, and now, when we are in the sixth year of the greatest war in history and manpower and materials are almost unprocurable, when the pastoral industry is suffering from a serious drought, the Government asks this Chamber to impose onerous conditions on Australia's greatest industry, which has worked out its own destiny without ever a subsidy.

The pastoral industry has done more to put Australia on the map of the world than all other Australian industries combined; I worked in that industry from the age of 15 years; and although there were strikes and all that, I found that the employers, with very few exceptions, were always amenable to reason with regard to domestic arrangements, having no wish to see their employees live like pigs. An objection I have to the Bill is that it requires the pastoralists to make extensive structural alterations within 12 months. I venture to say that not ten per cent. of the pastoralists of Western Australia are now failing to supply what the Bill says should be supplied.

Shearers are a very independent and individualistic lot. I have slept in a hut that held not only four but 50 men. But those days are past, and I am going on for 71 years. The Bill talks of pigsties and wool scourers, but they do not exist in this State. Will the Bill apply to the farming community, to a farmer with one or two shearing stands? If that is so, then let the sponsors of the Bill have a look around the province which you, Mr. President, and I represent, and see what the people there live in.

Hon. H. L. ROCHE: That does not matter!

Hon. J. CORNELL: It is like the Geneva Conference, where a man gets a bath every night. As the Mayor of York said, "You have to give up your drinking water for a bath for the men." There is a qualification now, because the Bill provides that if water is not available the bath need not be supplied. But a man can have a bath, even if he has it in a trough. Reference has been made to the shacks in which permanent-way men live on the Norseman-Esperance railway line. One finds the men living in sleeper-houses which they have built themselves. Must a pastoralist be compelled to

provide the accommodation set out in this Bill when the Government is not prepared to say that its own workmen shall live under reasonable conditions, and not pig it as they are doing today? This trouble is not confined only to the State Government; the Commonwealth Government is even a bigger offender in this respect.

I take off my hat to Eddy Ward, who is making an honest endeavour to improve the lot of the railway workers. One must have respect for him because of this, even though he may be a bit erratic. The objection I have to the measure is that it provides that structural alterations shall be made. Even the Chief Secretary said, when speaking last night on another Bill, that some of our most excellent citizens in this State are deprived of a vote for this Chamber because they have not a home to live in. They cannot get homes at present; and we find often that two or three in a family are compelled to live in one room. Yet this Bill proposes to enforce the making of structural alterations. I feel inclined to vote against the second reading.

The Chief Secretary: The Bill does not give those persons a vote, unfortunately.

Hon. J. CORNELL: But it gives the shearers a place to lay their heads. I think Mr. Drew and the late Mr. Dodd put the parent measure through in 1912. It is a great tribute to them that the Bill has stood the test of 32 years and given general satisfaction. But I ask whether at this time it is right to press for structural alterations. I think it is altogether wrong.

HON. G. B. WOOD (East): I shall support the second reading of the Bill, although I consider it will require much hammering out in the Committee stage. I do not know who could possibly have framed the Bill.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: It is copied from the South Australian Act. It was not framed here at all.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I have a faint suspicion that it originated with a president of a trade union, or the president of a district council of a trade union who formerly was a shearer. I do not think I am far out.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: You are probably right.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: The Honorary Minister knows whom I mean.

The Honorary Minister: I do not.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: I will tell the Minister the man's name afterwards. Most of the remarks that have been made on the Bill appear to be about what the pastoralists think of it. I point out to members that the measure concerns many farmers, too.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: It does.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: The Bill proposes to reduce the number of shearers for whom accommodation must be provided, and we must bear in mind that the term "shearer" includes shedhands.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: Every worker about the shed.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Many farmers today employ four shearers. I have only 2,000 sheep, but I employ four shearers, who come along and complete the shearing in about three days. I hope the number will be amended to eight. It is generally considered that there will be eight shearers at a station, and no one would object to that number. The Bill also contains many provisions with respect to the buildings. One relates to the distance that the sleeping accommodation must be from a stable. I can assure members that many farmers live within 50 ft. of stables. What harm is there in that? Many stables today are not now used for horses and have not had horses in them for many years. Again, what is the harm of the sleeping accommodation being within 50 ft. of a shearing shed?

Hon. G. W. Miles: The latrines must be 100 ft. away.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: Can any one imagine shearers walking that distance to a latrine?

Hon. J. Cornell: They did in my day.

Hon. G. B. WOOD: There are many such requirements. I intend to read the definition of a shearer. It is as follows:--

"Shearer" means any person employed in or about a shearing shed in the shearing of sheep or in work connected therewith.

I can visualise much trouble arising in the farming districts if we pass the Bill as it stands. Nevertheless, I support the second reading because I believe there are some points in the measure which are desirable.

HON. SIR HAL COLEBATCH (Metropolitan): I only wish to make one remark on this Bill. Its success must necessarily depend—as the success of all legislation does—upon how it is administered. It will depend chiefly on the inspectors. It will be essential that the inspectors shall be men

not only of discrimination, but men who are entirely free from even the slightest suspicion of bias towards either of the interested parties, the employers and employees. The inspectors proposed to be appointed are members of the Police Force. I know of no more fitting people to act in that capacity, but I do suggest that this Bill may make us wonder whether it is not unwise that the members of the Police Force should be associated with any outside organisation, either political or industrial.

On motion by Hon. W. J. Mann, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 6.11 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly.

*Thursday, 5th October, 1944.*

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

### MOTION—URGENCY.

#### *Hay Crops and Harvesting Problems.*

Mr. SPEAKER: I have received the following letter from the member for Pingelly:—

I desire, with your concurrence, to move the adjournment of the House today to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, viz.: the need to make provision for an assured supply of labour for handling the hay crop, and a Government assurance that those who cut hay crops will receive payment for such surplus hay that they have at the stipulated price, as published in today's "The West Australian."

Unless action on these lines is taken within the next few days much hay that it is possible to cut will be lost for such purposes, and serious difficulties may later on arise.

It will be necessary for seven members to rise in their places to support the hon. member's proposal.

Seven members having risen in their places,

MR. SEWARD (Pingelly) [4.34]: I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

I would not intrude this matter on the time of the House were it not for the seriousness and urgency of the position as set out in my letter to you, Mr. Speaker. In case there should be any members not au fait with hay-cutting matters, and in view of the statements one hears from time to time in this connection, I would like to point out that hay-cutting is different from other farming operations as it has to be carried out on the day the crop is ready to be cut. A crop may be a hay-cutting proposition today, whereas next Saturday would be too late to cut it. Therefore the matter has to be treated as urgent. I saw it stated only last Monday that a decision had to be made on the question within the next month or two. That is obviously far from being the case. In an average season another month would probably be time for making a decision in late districts in the Great Southern, but I would remind the House that it has been the practice in the past in districts north of Moora to cut hay before the Royal Show, which used to be held in the first week of October. As a matter of fact, hay-cutting is in progress in those districts now and in some it may be too late to cut. Consequently the decision cannot possibly be allowed to be made as late as within the next month or so.

The urgency is the greater this season because good hay crops in the State are few indeed and, as far as I can learn, the majority are from Northam northwards. Therefore, in the early districts, the crops will have to be cut earlier than would normally be the case. Then again much depends on the weather. If we get cold, showery, wet or dull weather, hay-cutting is delayed, but we have been getting the reverse. We have been having unduly hot weather, with the result that unless definite action is taken before this week-end many crops that could be cut for hay will be lost for that purpose and will have to be left to be harvested for grain. There is a need to cut as much hay as possible this year. Members may recall that we had a long dry summer last year, and that that was followed by a fairly severe winter in which feed was abnormally short. The result is that all our reserves are depleted. Only today I learnt of a big firm in Perth