

Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 30th January, 1917.

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

PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the Minister for Lands: By-laws of Public Cemeteries and Commons.

By the Minister for Railways: 1, Returns of Receipts and Expenditure of the Government Tramways for the quarter ended 31st December, 1916. 2, Reports and Returns in accordance with Sections 54 and 83 of "The Government Railways Act, 1904," for the quarter ended 31st December, 1916.

QUESTION—WHEAT SOLD TO LOCAL MILLERS.

Mr. CARPENTER asked the Minister for Industries: 1, Under what terms or conditions of payment is wheat sold to local millers by the Government? 2, What sum is due to date by millers for wheat supplied?

The MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIES replied: 1, Millers buy from the pool and the arrangement for payment agreed upon is that the wheat should be paid for weekly as gristed. 2, £50,329 15s. 2d. to date fully covered by the value of the resultant flour which is vested in the Crown under "The Wheat Marketing Act, 1916."

QUESTION — WHEAT MARKETING BOARD AND APPOINTMENT OF Mr. SIBBALD.

Mr. GARDINER asked the Minister for Industries: 1, The names of the members of the board controlling the Wheat Marketing

Scheme? 2, The total remuneration paid them? 3, Are they a competent board? 4, Were they consulted before Mr. Sibbald's appointment was made? 5, Did they concur? 6, Is Mr. Sibbald a servant under the board? 7, If not, from whom does he take instructions? 8, What will be the total expense of his employment, including office rent, travelling expenses and staff? 9, Who pays this extra cost?

The MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIES replied: 1, There is no board controlling the Wheat Marketing Scheme. Under Clause 4 of "The Wheat Marketing Act, 1916," which reads, "The Governor may, if he thinks fit, appoint a committee of not exceeding five persons to advise the Minister upon matters relating to the administration of this Act," Messrs. T. E. Field, H. S. Bickford, and J. Deane Hammond have been appointed as an advisory committee. 2, None. 3, They are not a board. They are a competent committee of advice. 4, No. 5, Answered by No. 4. 6, No. 7, The Minister for Industries as provided by Clause 6 of "The Wheat Marketing Act, 1916." 8, Salary £1,000 per annum. Travelling allowance to date £2 1s. 3d. Rent of office occupied by Mr. Sibbald, £1 per week. The staff is the same as last year, with the exception of two additional inspectors at £252 per annum each, whose appointment is not a consequence of Mr. Sibbald's employment. 9, The pool, which will benefit by his expert management. It is expected that in this way his salary will be saved many times over.

QUESTION—PERTH TRAMWAYS.

Holiday Traffic and Workmen's Cars.

Mr. SMITH asked the Minister for Railways: 1, In reference to his reply regarding the tramway service, can he quote one instance during the past two years when the management were able to successfully cope with holiday traffic? 2, What steps did the department take to procure the necessary material for the new cars? 3, What is being done at present to overcome the alleged difficulty? 4, Why cannot the department obtain car wheels from any other reputable manufacturer instead of from Strelitz Bros. company? 5, Will he arrange to have all

workmen's cars prominently labelled as such?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied: 1, The department claim that the Tramways have successfully coped with the holiday traffic on every occasion, except during certain periods of the evening, when the available cars are insufficient to accommodate the crowds of passengers who desire to return home about the same time, and this applies to an extent on all tramway systems on similar occasions, otherwise excessive stock would be required which, in normal times, would have to stand idle. 2, Tenders were called and orders placed for the material required, in accordance with the recognised procedure. 3, The Agent General has been requested by cable to do all possible to expedite delivery. 4, Car wheels are not being obtained from or through Strelitz Bros. The tender was let to a firm of British manufacturers. 5, It is considered undesirable to label workmen's cars, but particulars of the cars on which workers' tickets are available will be advertised for the information of the public.

QUESTION—EXPEDITIONARY FORCES.

Soldiers and Sleeping-berths on Railways.

Mr. MUNSIE asked the Minister for Railways: Why were soldiers in the various camps, who had obtained leave at Christmas time, refused the right to book a sleeping-berth in the second class of the goldfields express, prior to the date on which they intended to travel, when other citizens have that privilege?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied: No one having a voucher or ticket entitling him to book a sleeping-berth has been refused when berths were available.

QUESTION—RAILWAY FARES, PERTH TO KALGOORLIE.

Mr. MUNSIE asked the Minister for Railways: 1, Is it true that on 23rd December, 1916, special fares were charged from Kalgoorlie to Perth (£2 2s. 6d. return, second class), and that from Perth to Kalgoorlie on the same date the return fare was only

£1 11s.? 2, If so, will he in future grant the same concession to the people on the fields to visit Perth, as was given the Perth people to visit the goldfields?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied: 1, At the special request of the Kalgoorlie local representatives, special cheap fares were issued both in 1915 and 1916 from Perth to Kalgoorlie. The coaches used had to be returned to Kalgoorlie for the "Up" traffic, otherwise they would have run empty. The ordinary excursion fare to Perth from the fields is £2 3s. 6d., and fares on the same basis are in force from all inland stations, the exception being the special cheap excursions from the fields to the coast for women and children, which are as follows:—Adults, 30s.; children not exceeding 14 years, 12s. 6d. 2, It is not proposed to further reduce the fares from the fields.

QUESTIONS (2)—HOSPITAL FOR INSANE, CLAREMONT.

Annual reports.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON asked the Premier: 1, Are the Government aware that the last report of the Inspector General for Insane presented to Parliament is for the year 1914? 2, Why have not reports for the years 1915 and 1916 been presented to Parliament in accordance with the provisions of Section 89 of the Lunacy Act, 1903, which expressly provides that an annual report on our hospitals for the insane, and the care of patients, shall be presented to Parliament within 21 days of the commencement of each session of Parliament? 3, Will the Government have the law complied with in this respect without delay? 4, If so, when may the reports for 1915 and 1916 be expected to be laid upon the Table of the House?

The PREMIER replied: 1, Yes. 2, It has been customary to include in the calendar report of the year just past the six months of the current financial year ending 30th June. The 1916 report will not therefore be available until after next June. The 1915 report is now ready. 3, Yes. The matter is now being inquired into with a view to altering the practice which has caused this delay. 4, Answered by No. 2.

Patients admitted and discharged.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON asked the Premier: 1, How many patients are there at the Hospital for the Insane at Claremont? 2, How many patients have been discharged during each of the past three years? 3, Are certain patients detained at Claremont, who consider that they are sane, afforded proper opportunities to apply for discharge? 4, Are such patients given facilities to apply to a judge for an examination for discharge, under Part 3 of the Act? 5, Who are the official visitors to the Claremont Hospital for the Insane? 6, How many reports have the official visitors made to the Minister during the past year, under Section 94 of the Act?

The PREMIER replied: 1, 1,052. 2, 1914, 98; 1915, 81; 1916, 85. 3, Yes. 4, The Supreme Court will not consider any application unless Section 107 of "The Lunacy Act, 1903," is complied with. 5, Dr. W. P. Birmingham, Mr. B. G. Darbyshire, and Mrs. A. Casson. 6, Four, one every three months.

BILL—SALE OF LIQUOR AND TOBACCO.

Reports of Committee adopted.

BILL—AGRICULTURAL LANDS PUR- CHASE ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 24th January.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON (Guildford) [4.46]: I trust hon. members will not judge the importance of this Bill from its size. True, the Bill is almost one of but a single clause; but that single clause is so far reaching, and means so much to the revenue of the State, that I hope hon. members will peruse the measure carefully and study the proposal closely before giving it their support. The measure is another proof of the debt which Western Australia has to pay for what was called during the years 1909 and 1910 the optimism of the then Minister for Lands. That so-called optimism has kept Parliament busy for the last five or six years putting right the wrongs created during the period in question.

The Minister for Railways: There were no wrongs created.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: I myself introduced a Bill dealing with the price of conditional purchase lands. That measure was rendered necessary by the fact that numbers of people had been settled on land and promised all sorts of things which could not be fulfilled. In fact, one case has been brought under my notice only to-day by letter. A settler, after many years' struggles against impossible conditions, has had to leave his holding; and when that man took up his land the then Minister for Lands promised him a railway within 12 months. That is eight years ago.

The Minister for Railways: Nothing of the sort ever occurred.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: I have known of such promises being made in this Chamber, and I have read of their being made elsewhere.

The Minister for Railways: You are absolutely reckless in your statements—reckless and ungenerous.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: The evidence in this case is such as to justify me in taking the word of the settler.

Mr. Thomson: You yourself occasionally promised railways.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: That is true. The lines which were promised by me have either been constructed, or are under construction to-day.

Mr. Thomson: I wish they were.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: Any difficulty arising out of slow progress with the construction of those railways is due to the war. The Bill deals with repurchased estates, and no doubt we shall be told that the estates were acquired by the Government on the advice of an expert board. It must be borne in mind, however, that the expert board consisted of departmental officers, and that departmental officers are largely influenced by the policy of the Government for the time being. When one gets what is called optimism prevailing in the office of the Minister, the departmental heads take their cue from him, and from his pronouncements and declarations of policy.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: That is a very important admission.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: No doubt it is.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: It applies to the repricing measure.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: There is a vast difference between the two measures. The expert board, influenced no doubt by the policy of the then Government and by Ministerial views, advised that certain estates should be repurchased at prices far beyond those at which they can be resettled. However, the land was purchased and subdivided, and quite a number of settlers have been induced to take it up at the prices which the principal Act provides shall be charged for repurchased estates. The settlers were not long on their holdings before realising that they could not possibly farm them successfully and pay the capital cost they had undertaken to pay, with the result that from time to time there has been agitation for relief. I was disappointed that the Minister for Lands, when introducing this Bill, did not endeavour to give Parliament some indication of what the measure, if passed, would cost the State. The Bill is a proposal to write off a proportion of the capital expended in purchasing the estates; but there is no indication of the amount to be written off. The amount is left absolutely to the discretion of the Minister, and Parliament has no information on the subject. In passing this Bill Parliament will be signing a blank cheque, as it were, allowing the Minister for Lands to use his discretion. One would not object to that so much if there were any intimation of the amount of the probable loss, or if the Bill contained a proviso limiting the repricing to amounts approximating the original cost of the estates. But the measure goes to the very extreme in the opposite direction. It states that the Minister for Lands shall have power to reprice, adding that the altered prices shall not be less than the minimum under the measure for repricing conditional purchase lands as introduced by myself last year. Thus it would be possible—though I admit it is not likely—that the Minister might reduce the price of repurchased estates land to 3s. 9d. per acre. In order to show hon. members the seriousness of the matter, let me instance some of the repurchased estates. The Avondale estate, which is constantly referred to, consisted of 9,635 acres, and its total cost was £50,764, or slightly over £5

per acre. That estate has not been resold; it is still on the hands of the Government; and under this Bill the Minister will have power to reduce the price of that estate to 3s. 9d. per acre. That fact in itself, surely, is serious enough to cause members to reflect before giving the measure their unreserved support, unless further investigations are made or unless the Minister supplies further details of the prospective loss to the State. Altogether there are 25 or 26 of these estates. The Bowes estate contains 38,233 acres, and its cost was £56,314, or about 30s. per acre. Yet this measure proposes to empower the Minister to reduce the price as I have stated. Then there is the Jellacubine estate, of 6,000 acres, which ran into a sum of £3,523. I mention that estate in order to show that some were bought comparatively cheap. The Mount Erin estate, of an acreage of 58,000, was bought for £9,959. Evidently a fair amount of that property was leasehold and pastoral country. The Narrattarra estate, of 23,000 acres, cost £23,350, or about £1 per acre. The Okabella estate, containing 44,000 acres, cost the State £23,955. Then there is Yandanooka, of 140,000 acres, which ran into £142,000, or about £1 per acre. A large proportion of the Yandanooka estate was leasehold and pastoral country. Taking the whole of the estates, there is a gross area of 446,804 acres, which has cost the country £478,629. Thus, in dealing with this Bill we are dealing with a proposal to give the Minister for Lands power to reduce the price of assets which have cost the State close on half a million sterling.

Mr. Thomson: How many acres in all of these estates have been taken up?

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: About 160,000 acres are still available for selection, but the Bill proposes to make the repricing retrospective, dealing with all the land in repurchased estates. The question does not arise how much has been selected and how much remains available. If the measure passes, the whole of the lands contained in all the repurchased estates will be subject to review as regards price. The original Act makes it perfectly clear that the Minister shall add 5 per cent. to the cost of the land repurchased, and then that amount shall be the purchase price, divided into 40 half-yearly

payments to be made by the selector. The proposal now is to apply to these lands the provisions of the measure dealing with conditional purchase lands which was passed in 1915. In reply to an interjection I stated that there is a great difference between the measure dealing with conditional purchase lands and the present Bill, which deals with repurchased estates. The measure repricing conditional purchase lands was introduced as the result of an agitation, and that agitation was supported by the fact that during recent years the price of conditional purchase land had been raised by almost 50 per cent. Until about 1910 conditional purchase land was generally sold at 10s. per acre. From that period onward, however, conditional purchase land was increased in price until it reached £1 and even 30s. per acre. The settlers who took up land as from 1910 were, generally speaking, selecting land more remote from railway communication, and further distant from ports and markets. Consequently they claimed that their land, instead of being higher in price, should have been lower, than land more favourably situated from these aspects. The amending legislation, therefore, merely brought conditional purchase lessees from 1910 onwards into line with those who had selected holdings prior to that year. When we deal with repurchased land, we deal with a different thing altogether. It is land which has been offered to the Government.

Mr. Piesse: You are dealing with the same error.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: I will admit that; but we are dealing with land which has been offered to the Government and which has been reviewed by an expert board, which board recommended the purchase and the actual payments for which have been made to individuals. Therefore, we are in the position that the land has been acquired by the Government, the private owner has been paid for it, and now after a few years it has been discovered that a mistake has been made by the expert officers who advised the Government to buy, the result being that we are now asked to reduce the price so as to give relief to the settlers. Unfortunately, however, we have no power

to get a refund from the man who was paid too much for it originally. It will be seen, therefore, that there is no comparison between conditional purchase lands and these repurchased estates.

Mr. Piesse: You admit that we paid too much for those estates?

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: Unquestionably. I do not want to be misunderstood. I have said over and over again that people who are on these lands cannot farm profitably, and pay the capital cost they are called upon to find. They are trying to do the impossible, and they never will do it. When Parliament is dealing with the subject, we want to realise the importance of it, and see that we go into it with our eyes open, and not have such little information as has been placed at our disposal in connection with this Bill. There is another important matter. I have emphasised over and over again that some relief should be given, and I stated that I considered the time for the repayments should be extended. I realised that to write off capital, after it was paid to the individual, was so serious a matter that I was not quite sure whether Parliament would review it with favour; neither did I think that it was a practicable proposition which should be submitted to Parliament. A Minister's function is to overcome a difficulty by giving relief to the individual, and at the same time not rob the State. I am satisfied that we could have given a good deal of relief by extending the payments over a period. I do not wish to convey that a certain amount of the capital cost should not be wiped off, but I would not agree to wipe off the amount proposed in this Bill. I would not introduce a measure asking for extended powers such as this Bill seeks to give. In any case the Bill should provide for an extension of the time for repayment. In regard to the conditional purchase lands, it was proposed to make the payment 6d. per acre per annum and the Minister had the power to extend that up to 30 years. In this Bill it is not proposed to alter the time of repayment. I think some relief should be given in that regard by extending the time, and not make such a drastic reduction in the price of the land. The Bill does not deal with that at all; all it does is to ask power for the Minister

to reprice land and not go below the minimum of 3s. 9d., and setting out that any payments made in excess of the repricing shall not be refunded, but shall be paid to reduce the term of the lease. I think that the Bill is of such importance, running into what might be an enormous sum of money, that it might be advisable to appoint a select committee to investigate it.

Mr. Mullany: Why not appoint a Royal Commission?

Mr. Hudson: Why not get a report from the existing Agricultural Commission?

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: I think it would take too long for a commission to deal with the subject, but it would be possible for a select committee to investigate it and give Parliament some information as to what the cost will be. In regard to the provisions of the Bill dealing with conditional purchase land, an indication was given as to how it was proposed to reprice. We did not provide in our Bill how it was proposed to do that, but, in order that Parliament should have some idea as to what it would mean to the farmers and also to the State, we prepared a schedule showing the zones where the different prices would apply, and where the zones existed, and in that way we were able, by rough calculation, to estimate what amount of revenue would be lost to the State per annum. After getting the figures carefully compiled by an expert officer, I estimated that it would cost £30,000 a year, and the actual results have worked out to within a few pounds of that amount. Parliament was not asked to vote on the blind; it was told what the farmers would have to pay. We should now have information of this description, and, failing that, I consider that a select committee should be appointed to investigate the matter. I will not vote against the second reading, but I would like to see a committee of investigation appointed. I hope that before the Committee stage is reached, the Minister will agree to what I suggest, so that we may have more information at that stage than we have at the present time.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN (Forrest) [5.9]: Unlike the last speaker, I am not prepared to support the appointment of a select committee, but I think it is the duty of members to vote against the second reading of the Bill

and to defeat it. It is an old and hackneyed phrase that "time is not opportune." That phrase emanates from Tory minds, but on this occasion I am prepared to subscribe to it and to say that the time is not opportune for the introduction of this Bill. If we have any wares to sell, it is no use putting them on a falling market; we must wait for a favourable opportunity. The very introduction of this Bill is a serious indictment against Parliament and all Governments. Looking at the figures running into half a million sterling, which we have paid for estates, we have to ask ourselves whether that expenditure was justified. We have to admit that abnormal conditions have prevented the successful subdivision and settlement of those estates. But it is incomprehensible, in a State such as this, when Ministers for Lands have boasted that we have millions of acres of undeveloped country, that past Governments should have found it necessary to repurchase private estates. We have spread it broad east that we have millions of acres of land awaiting settlement, and yet, during the last decade, we have paid half a million to acquire the 25 properties in Western Australia which are the subject of review at the present time. If we continue this policy, we shall have a repetition of what occurred in South Australia. Many years ago the Government of that State repurchased large areas of country within the Goyder line of rainfall. They had to do that because, if they went beyond that line, the rainfall would have been so limited that settlers would have met with disaster. The Government parcelled out those areas, and it was only after a short period that many of them got back into the hands of one owner. The result was that the Government again had to come along and repurchase many of those estates. The member for Guildford said that this was the debt the Government had to pay. It is incomprehensible to me why the late Government persisted in this policy, initiated by the present occupants of the Treasury bench. I fail to see the necessity for purchasing the Yandanooka estate, when we remember that we had millions of acres of land awaiting settlement. Yet we acquired that and other properties and paid huge sums for them when we were hard up, and afterwards found it impossible to dispose of

them. The member for Guildford enumerated some of those estates, to some of which we may give passing attention. Take Denmark. That was acquired for £48,000. Certainly that property had 30 miles of rails of an indifferent quality upon it. Denmark is in a favourite locality and from all over the State came inquiries as to when it was likely to be thrown open.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It was not repurchased in the same sense as the others.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: Well, nearly £50,000 of public money was paid to the people who owned it, and, I take it, that the Denmark settlers will come under the provisions of the Bill we are now discussing. That being the case, it is no use locking the stable door after the horse has been stolen. But the present Minister for Industries erred at the time in not putting that estate on the market when the public appetite had been whetted. The position in regard to Denmark was that the people from the goldfields were anxious to acquire land where they could cultivate a small area. The preparations for the disposal were dragged over a period of some eight months and the result was that those who wanted land there got tired of waiting and, when the auction sale was held, it was almost a fiasco. Denmark has been a struggling settlement ever since those people missed the opportunity of investing their money there, and the outcome is that it is now on a par with many other of the acquired estates. Take the Avondale estate, which has been the subject of discussion on numerous occasions. We have it on the report of departmental officers that in that estate there are 1,700 acres of granite rock, which would not be worth the minimum of 3s. 9d. per acre. That means that if we are to take the poorer quality of the land on that and some of the other estates, and assess it at the minimum rate allowed by the price-fixing board, the good land will be charged for at such a rate that it will be a burden on anyone who might take it up. It is quite impossible for the ordinary settler to go on the Avondale estate and try to make a success of farming, if he has to pay £4 an acre for the land. I am not going to say that the Government should go down to the limit, but even if they made a reduction of 50 per cent. on the capital cost of those estates, such a

reduction would mean a serious blow to the revenue of the State. The main thing is to get the land brought under a state of development, but the present time is not opportune. If next year the Minister brings forward his Bill, I will be prepared to support it, because I think that the demand will then be a little keener than it is at the present time. We can hope, at any rate, that some of our difficulties will have passed away, and the Minister can be trusted to make the best bargain possible with those who might be looking for land, without seriously jeopardising the finances of the country. The position of the estates is deplorable and a distinction has to be made between those which failed to find purchasers and those which have been taken up and partially developed. The Bowes estate has been mentioned, and whether the Bill passes or not I believe some more facilities and greater consideration will have to be shown to those settlers heroically struggling to make successes of their holdings.

The Premier: All that you say is in favour of the Bill.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: Not at all. Some discrimination must be made between estates with settlers on them and those with no settlers. If we give the Minister increased power just now, he may seriously affect the revenue of the country by, perhaps, fixing too low a minimum, owing to there being no demand for the land at the present juncture.

Mr. Thomson: Are not the settlers on the repurchased estates entitled to redress?

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: Yes, and I think the Minister could meet them without a Bill giving him unlimited power to reduce the price. While those settlers have had serious difficulties to overcome, we must admit that the present Government—and in this I would bracket the late Government—do not seem to be making any great attempts to settle some of these estates which have been in their hands for some time. The Avondale estate was hawked all over the country, and flamboyant advertisements were published to induce settlers to take up blocks. But it was put on the market too late. The present Minister dangled the Denmark estate for months.

The Minister for Railways: I was not the Minister then.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: You were.

Hon. P. Collier: Avondale was declared a special settlement area.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: Yes, and the only prospective settlers who came along were a couple of Nor'-Westers.

The Premier: Of course—you and your party damned the Avondale estate.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: We did nothing of the sort. The Liberals turned it into an experimental farm for the edification of the countryside. Although they advertised their settlement scheme all over Western Australia, none but two solitary settlers could be induced to take up any blocks.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: The Nor'-West squatter left it some time ago.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: The price paid for the estate was altogether too big. No less than £55,000 was paid by the then Government to one of their supporters for the property.

The Premier: Your Government could have had the money back long ago.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: What reply has the Minister to make regarding the delay in throwing open the Harvey estate? People are hungering for those particular blocks, situated in a favoured region, where the rainfall is ample. Since those blocks were cleared, twelve months ago, they have been allowed to go back to their virgin state, and the Minister is making no effort to throw them open.

The Premier: Yes, he is. He is pushing them all he knows. Your people would not move in the matter.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: The late Government repurchased the estate and put on 120 men at clearing. When the clearing was finished the estate should have been placed in the market.

The Premier: Well, why did not your Government see to it?

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: Because it was not ready until a little while after the late Government went out of office. It is now being allowed to revert to its virgin state. I have heard of some land being earmarked for returned soldiers. That is a very proper policy, which all must endorse; but if returned soldiers are not available for those blocks, it must not be put forward as a

reason why development of the South-West should be retarded. There are no difficulties about the Harvey estate. It is the one estate which will show good results. In regard to the others, the Bill simply means giving the Government a blank cheque, giving them the power to reduce prices to an inordinate extent. Under it we shall be putting our wares on a falling market. If, twelve months hence, our troubles are over, and prospective settlers are looking for a home, it will then be a good time to give the Minister the power he asks, when Parliament shall have become possessed of all the facts. And we may then seize a real opportunity for disposing of some of these estates, hanging like a millstone round the Treasury. In the case of Avondale, Yandanooka, and other repurchased estates, it is absurd to expect them to be profitable, considering the purchase price paid for them. The very introduction of the Bill will serve to lay it down that for many years to come no Government shall be justified in purchasing estates from either political friends or political enemies. After all, where is the necessity for repurchasing estates? I am not going to blame the present Minister for his optimism; he was led away, indeed we were all led away, and we thought the land of Western Australia better than it is.

The Premier: It is excellent land.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: The hon. member does not take it on. The experience of some of those on this side who have taken it on has not been very encouraging.

The Premier: Because they know nothing about it.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: Here we have speaking a walking encyclopedia on agriculture. He has made a success of all the farms he took on in the past, but he is not likely to take up a selection at the present time.

The Premier: I have kept clear of land selection, because I do not understand farming.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: Apparently the inference is that you, Mr. Speaker, and others who have taken up land, knew nothing about the business. It would be interesting to get a record of the experiences of yourself, Sir, and others on this side who have been patriotic enough to launch all their savings into the land of Western Australia. I admit they

have had a variety of difficulties to overcome.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It would not be so bad if we had overcome the difficulties.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: I think the hon. member is pretty well out of the wood this year. It would be hardly fair to condemn land settlement in Western Australia, for we must take into consideration the abnormal conditions under which farming has had to be carried on during the past few years. Still, this policy of repurchasing estates is the most inconsistent I have ever known. We advertise to the world that we possess millions of acres of splendid land, and are not able to dispose of it. Then, side by side with that, we find paternal Governments prepared to buy from political supporters or others large estates which have been hawked all over the country. I hope that policy will not continue, and I trust the Minister will take prompt action in making available the Harvey estate, situated as it is in a particularly favoured region, and consisting of blocks that could be put under cultivation straightaway. If the Minister has any reason for further holding up the Harvey estate I hope he will give it to the House. It is imperative that something should be done at once, because the vegetation is growing afresh, and if we could put settlers on those blocks now the threatened difficulty would be removed. I suggest to the Minister that he withdraw the Bill, and that, if he be still in office this time next year, he re-introduce it then in all seriousness.

Hon. J. Scaddan: This is not serious; it is only electioneering.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: It may be, but I hardly see the point, because there are not many votes to be caught on the Avondale estate. In respect to one estate, I have some conception of what the settlers thereon have had to put up with—I refer to the Bowes estate—but there is a possibility of giving relief to them without such a Bill as this.

Hon. J. Scaddan: The Beverley people are interested in Avondale.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: If the townspeople of Beverley are prepared to advocate a reduction in price from £5 to 30s. per acre they should be able to make out a fair case to the taxpayers before they deplete the Treasury to that extent. Of course, some of

the money will come back, but we cannot hope to get much of it unless we have a demand for the land, and that demand cannot be created within the next few months. The Bill is premature. It would be in ample time next year, when the prospects, it is hoped, will be more buoyant. The revenue might, conceivably, be considerably enhanced if these estates are submitted at a time when people are looking for them, but not now, when land is virtually a drug on the market.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. R. T. Robinson—Canning) [5.25]: The hon. member has advanced many arguments in support of the Bill. I quite agree that we must have ample lands for settlement purposes, without going in for any more repurchased estates. Personally I was not concerned with any of the Governments that made these purchases, so I am free to make that statement. I certainly think no more estates should be purchased by the Government while there is land available for settlement. But a second proposition following that must be this: the land that has been purchased must not be held. Holding land and doing nothing with it is a loss to the holder, and in this instance the holder is the State. It is not the concern of the House which Government bought the land or which did not sell it, or whether the Labour Government held up the Avondale estate in order to make political capital out of their opponents. That does not concern me, but what does concern me is that to-day we have a number of repurchased estates that have been sold under an Act which fixes the price higher than we ought to charge for the land, and higher than settlers can pay for it if they are to make a living off it. Then comes the corollary to that, namely, that many men who have purchased at high prices are in difficulties to-day and require to be assisted. Without a Bill of this description those men cannot be helped. No reduction in price can be made, nor can the land be put on the market. In answer to the principal objection by the member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loughlen) that this land is proposed to be placed on the market at a bad time when there is no demand and when we may reasonably expect to obtain low prices, I venture to say the House may trust to the good sense of the Minister for Lands

in fixing the prices for the various resumed estates to do the best he can for Western Australia and at the same time to do a fair thing by those settlers who buy the land. I hold it is almost a criminal offence for a Minister for Lands to sell land to intending settlers at a price above its value. To do so not only takes the heart out of a man, but it takes also his cash and throws him back for years. I agree with the member for Forrest that we should encourage the settler in Western Australia, and in some cases it would pay Western Australia to give people the land. We want to advance development and production, and if we would be assisting the production of wealth by reducing the price of land so that it may produce more wealth, the State would get its money back a hundredfold. I ask the House to forget which Government it was which purchased these estates and which it was that failed to sell them. Let those considerations go. We have the estates to-day, which could be made available for those who desire to settle on the land, and we should be prepared to sell those estates at a price which would be fair to the settlers and enable them to make a living on the land, and at the same time be fair to Western Australia. Members on every side of the House will agree that we have to-day in the Minister for Lands a man who will not play ducks and drakes with the interests of the State insofar as these estates are concerned.

Hon. J. SCADDAN (Brown Hill-Ivanhoe) [5.33]: I must at once admit that the Attorney General has made out a good case from a legal point of view, but he has overlooked the fact that the Bill does not provide merely for reducing the price of the land on the estates to future settlers, but includes also those at present purchasing the land from the State. If it were the case that future purchasers only were being considered, we might agree that it is desirable to allow the Minister for Lands to fix prices that would ensure the early settlement of the balance of the estates held by the Crown, and thus increase production. But the Bill goes further. It enables the Minister, when considering the question of the reduced price, to also make a reduction in respect of land already sold by the State.

The Attorney General: Why should not it?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: For various reasons. Let me ask the member for Katanning (Mr. Thomson) whether the private owner of a large estate—take the Attorney General himself, for example—would in reconsidering prices, review the price of land already sold, simply because times are bad and because purchasers are unable to keep up their payments?

The Attorney General: He might.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: He might. But it is much more likely that he would do as the Crown does, that is defer payments, pointing out to the holder of any block that if he had not become an original purchaser someone else would have. He would probably say to the man, "You are asking me to re-adjust the price of the land without considering the man who would have taken it up had your application not been successful." The private owner will not dispose of land in that way, and yet it is suggested that the State might, because in the case of the State it is the general taxpayer who pays, and the transaction can be covered up. I admit that many of those men who selected on repurchased estates are undoubtedly suffering, but it must be remembered that when those men applied for the land the eyes of the estate were picked out. The best part of the land is gone, and it is now proposed in this Bill that we shall do something for those who selected under favourable conditions in order that we may be in a position to do something to induce others to take up the remainder of the land. It is not proposed only that we shall do something to increase production by offering inducements which will enable us to dispose of the balance of the estates. It is also a matter of reducing the payments by those who were successful applicants. Is it not a fact that some of these estates, if they have not reverted back to one holder, have reverted into family holdings? Could not this occur again?

Member: Each case will be dealt with on its merits.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We have repeatedly heard that statement, but in my opinion the basis upon which the desired reduction will be asked will be that adopted by this House

in the amended Land Act passed last session. In that Act zones were established and prices reduced 10s., 15s., and even 20s. per acre. I agree with the Attorney General that the time has passed when we need quarrel on the question as to which Government purchased and which failed to sell these estates. The fact remains that a fair proportion of the estates remain on our hands. But to me it is a question whether the present is a time when we should endeavour to dispose of the land, and if so, whether we are likely to get a fair price. The fact is worth remembering that a number of improved holdings have reverted to the Agricultural Bank, and these cannot be disposed of. I do not see, therefore, the need for hurry in this instance. It has been represented that if this Bill be passed it will help production. In my opinion the effect will be to help those who have already selected to make less cash payments to the Government.

Mr. Thomson: How about those who cannot carry on?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Why did not the Minister say that it was the desire of the Government to give relief to those already on the holdings and not put up his colleague, the Attorney General, to tell the House that this is a Bill for the purpose of disposing of the remainder of the land in these estates to help production?

The Minister for Lands: I did make that statement.

The Attorney General: He did not put me up at all; I never discussed the matter with him.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Minister now says the reason for the Bill is to give relief.

The Minister for Lands: That is one of its purposes.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: What are the other purposes?

The Minister for Lands: That is really what brought the Bill about. There has been an agitation in favour of those people for years past.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I do not know one holder of land from whom an agitation could not be secured for a reduction of price, even from private sellers. Every one always tries to get land as cheaply as pos-

sible. Has the department made any inquiries?

The Minister for Lands: Yes.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: And as a result of those inquiries, the department is satisfied that these reductions should be made?

The Minister for Lands: Yes.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Then I admit that is one ground for the Bill, to give relief to those who had the opportunity of picking the eyes out of the estates.

Mr. S. Stubbs: They gave too high a price in the first place.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The trouble is we are allowing our sympathy with the farmers to run away with our discretion. So far as our lands are concerned, if they are worth anything they are worth their value calculated on the basis of production in normal times and not on the bad seasons of the last four or five years.

The Attorney General: I agree with that.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Will the Attorney General admit that assuming these selectors paid 21s. or 22s. per acre for their land, they should get a reduction of 3s. per acre because we have had difficult times?

Mr. Thomson: What was the extent to which you reduced the price of Denmark land?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I believe the price was further reduced recently. One of the reasons for the reduction of price in that case was the foolish policy adopted by the Government of clearing the land and afterwards allowing it to revert to its original condition.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Worse.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That is so, to a worse condition; that is exactly what the Government are doing in regard to Harvey. We shall never succeed in developing the South-West if we adopt a policy of clearing the land without taking the precaution to see that the land is immediately settled upon in order that it shall not revert to its original state. The same conditions obtained at Denmark at the start. But that is apart from the Bill. While we are of necessity compelled to consider those people who have taken up land on the repurchased estates, it is desirable we should consider the question of disposing of the balance of those estates under exist-

ing conditions. I am doubtful whether we are in this Bill considering the best interests of the State. At the present time private owners are not forcing their properties on the market. Millars' Combine appear to be content to sit down under existing conditions and hold their land awaiting the return of normal times. The Premier tells us to-day that no man who has not had experience of farming has a right to go on the land; yet his colleague, the Minister for Industries, has been telling, not only the people of this State, but the whole world to come along, that we have vacant places which we want filled up, and no matter whether a man has money or has had experience he must succeed in Western Australia. And now it is proposed we shall offer further inducement by reducing the price of this land, thereby involving the State in heavy loss. And this in a time when we are talking of economy. I do not think this is a period when we can afford to lose revenue, and it must not be forgotten that under this Bill the State will lose revenue. The man who has paid a high price for his land will not, I presume, be given cash, but he will get exemption from payment and will be given credit for what he has paid over and above the price of the land as fixed by the Minister under this Bill. Therefore at a time when the State requires every penny of revenue, we will be losing revenue which we cannot afford to lose.

Mr. Thomson: The State will lose far more if those people go off the land.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Does the member for Katanning remember the number of estates which have gone back into their virgin condition owing to the pressure by Government for payments of rent? The bad seasons we have experienced during the past four or five years have had the effect of causing the settler to be back in his payments and not only that, but he has also been going back in other directions. I would sooner see the rent cut right out in certain areas.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: All through the dry areas.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: If the rents are too high that matter should be adjusted. But it must be remembered that we purchased those estates with the public funds at a price which we believed, and which we were told,

represented the value of the land. The land was supposed to be then worth the money paid for the estates, but it is now discovered that it was not worth so much.

Mr. Harrison: How has that been discovered?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am taking what the Minister said when he introduced the Bill. It was the present Minister for Industries (Hon. J. Mitchell) who fixed the sale price for these blocks, and he said the price at which the land had been fixed represented its value; and now his colleague tells us it is not worth so much.

The Minister for Works: How about the Harvey estate, was that worth the money?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I think so, but it will need to be handled differently from the Denmark estate. The Minister will need to wake up if he would prevent the land reverting to its original condition. The point I am making is, that in this Bill the Government are being asked to give a permanent relief in order to tide the farmer over a temporary difficulty. The State cannot afford to do it. We can give temporary relief, but to say that because a farmer has passed through a trying period we are going to give him relief for the next 25 years, when during the interval he may have had very good seasons, and have been able to sell out at a profit which would enable him to live in luxury, is something which I cannot support.

Mr. Thomson: I hope that day will come.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I do not object to the good times coming for the farmer, but I do object to the general taxpayer being asked to make it possible for the farmers to do this, for the general taxpayer in fact to be called upon to bear all the expense. Whilst we are talking all the time about reducing the payments to be made by the farmer to the Government, do we reduce the payments made by the farmers to others? Side by side with the reduction of the price of land and the relief given to the farmer, the superphosphate merchants have increased the price of their goods to the farmers.

Mr. Piesse: You kept all you had advanced to him and left the other creditors to get what they could.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That is absolutely incorrect. The action of the Government in taking over so many of the farmers positively saved them from ruin.

Mr. Piesse: Quite right, but you took all you could out of the first crop.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: If we had allowed them to use the funds of the Treasury without let or hindrance they would have been ruined, and the State would have been ruined with them. I hope the present Government are not going to do this, notwithstanding the pressure of our friends, the Country party, who for political reasons have brought that pressure to bear upon them.

Mr. Piesse: Be generous.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Those hon. members, as representatives of the general taxpayers, are not entitled to view the conditions now prevailing in the farming districts merely from the point of view of what has happened during the last five years, and apply them to the next 25 years, because that is what is being done under this measure. Whilst giving temporary relief, do not let us make it a permanent contribution by the general taxpayer to those who have passed through a temporary trying period.

Mr. O'Loughlen: To adjust the errors that were made.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: If we sit here until we adjust all the errors that were made as a result of the breezy optimism of the present Minister for Industries (Hon. J. Mitchell), in the words of an hon. member of the Country party, there will not be a general election for the next 10 years. I do not say, of course, that Governments are infallible, and do not exempt the previous Government. Why do not the members of the Country party admit that we are asking the general taxpayer to carry an additional burden in order to adjust an error made by the man they are now supporting, and who is a Minister of the Crown?

Mr. Piesse: They are not.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Do the members of the Country party deny that they are responsible for the fact that the member for Moore (Hon. H. B. Lefroy) is at present holding the portfolio of Minister for Lands and Agriculture?

The Minister for Works: And a very good man too.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It is not because they desire that hon. gentleman to occupy this position, but because they laid it down as part of the bargain with the Liberal party that the member for Northam (Hon. J. Mitchell) should not occupy it. They did not particularly want the member for Moore to occupy the position.

Hon. P. Collier: The member for Northam is getting his finger into the agricultural pie already.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Why did the Country party do this? They did it because they asserted in season and out of season, and continue to assert it through their official journal the *Sunday Times*, that the member for Northam, when Minister for Lands and Agriculture, was responsible for the difficulties at present prevailing in the farming areas.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: It is only consistent that the member for Moore should now set to work and remedy these errors.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That is true. The member for Northam has displaced the member for Moore in the control of the agricultural industry.

The Minister for Works: What about the Bill?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: This is about the Bill. The Bill is made necessary because of the blunders perpetrated by the member for Northam, when Minister for Lands and Agriculture, on the admission of the members of the Country party, as representing the districts affected. This is a measure which affects the general taxpayer. Would our friends on the cross benches support a motion brought forward by the Labour Government to compensate a man who had not succeeded when he put down a mining shaft, who had struck a duffer, and who had then asked to be relieved of the payment of rent and to be repaid the money that he had put into the mining lease?

Mr. E. B. Johnston: You renewed the leases on the Golden Mile.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We renew the leases every year. In any case there is surely no analogy between renewing the leases on the Golden Mile and the proposal of the Government that a man who did not succeed as a farmer should be relieved, although when he becomes a wealthy man we must call upon

the general taxpayer. The Premier asserts that people on the land who have failed, have failed because they had not the necessary knowledge, not because the price of land was too high, or because of the difficulties imposed upon them by Government charges.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Through bad seasons.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Are we entitled to do something of a permanent nature for the purpose of rendering only temporary relief? If the farmers have a run of five years under the same conditions as have existed for the last two years, and are able to dispose of their wheat as satisfactorily as they have been able to do, and there is a reduction in the handling charges, the bulk of the farmers would be able to pay their rent without difficulty, and some would be able to retire.

Mr. Harrison: The whole of the community will enjoy a bigger spending power.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The member for Avon (Mr. Harrison) must bear in mind that we do not live by wheat alone. We are practically all producing something for the community. I want the farmers' representatives in this Chamber to get out of their heads that the farming industry is the sole support of the country.

Mr. Harrison: It is the root system.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: And the mining industry represents the tree itself, the foliage and the fruit.

Hon. P. Collier: You would have all been bankrupt but for the mining industry.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Let us bear in mind that in the Perth Mint we are producing something like 300,000 to 350,000 sovereigns per month from Western Australian gold, and that a sovereign is as essential as a grain of wheat.

Mr. Harrison: And a sack of wheat is as essential as a bag of gold.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: One is as essential as the other. Is it a fair proposition to take the temporary difficulties of a particular industry as the ground for making a permanent alteration?

Mr. Harrison: If it is going to effect a permanent increase in production.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: There is a temporary depression in the mining districts. Is the hon. member prepared to support a proposal that we should lavish money upon

that industry to assist a few men who happen to have struck a duffer?

Mr. Harrison: If you have any proposition to bring forward for increasing the production of gold I will favour it.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Surely, the hon. member has become Under Secretary to the Attorney General. Have we said to ourselves, "Here is a man who has passed through a trying time, pressure has been brought to bear upon him by his creditors, those creditors having forced machinery upon him which he did not require, the storekeepers have put up their prices 25 per cent., and this man has been brought into such a condition that he is almost compelled to leave his holding, and the State must therefore render him assistance"?

Mr. Harrison: Does that not prove that all branches of the community have benefited by the operations of the farmer?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not discussing the question of economics now. The farmers' representatives, and I suppose they are justified for political reasons in doing this, for their very existence in this Chamber demands it, are making the best possible use of bad seasons, in order to get permanent advantages for the industry, and I object.

Hon. P. Collier: Rooks.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I would not say that they were rooks, but crows, as we would call them in South Australia.

Mr. Harrison: We want to stimulate production.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: And yet members on the cross benches are supporting the Government who are closing down industries, and those members are responsible for their coming into power.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: The bookmaking industry, for instance.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Members on the cross benches view this State entirely from the point of view of agriculture.

Mr. Harrison: The root system.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I would ask them to remember that other industries also require attention. We cannot ask for permanent alterations because of temporary difficulties. We are, however, going to ask the general taxpayer to put his hand into his

pocket to pay permanently the interest and sinking fund on the heavy losses that will accrue under this Bill.

Mr. Carpenter: They call it squaring the finances.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It was the *Daily News*, I think, which used the words, "The long years and the short months." The newspaper did not realise how true they were. It is long years, it is true, but the months are pretty short from the financial point of view, and they are getting shorter every four weeks.

The Minister for Works: They were long years when you sat over here.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: They were all too short from the point of view of benefit to the State.

The Minister for Works: And the general taxpayer is paying for it now.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The general taxpayer has not yet been heard in regard to the five years, in comparison with the five months during which our friends opposite have been in power. I ask the Minister, has he considered the question how this proposal will affect the finances of the State? Has he considered how he will apply the measure, if it is placed on the statute-book? Or is it just merely a matter of his saying, "These men want relief, and I will get authority from Parliament to do what I choose to do, and I will make a good fellow of myself"? What is it going to cost Western Australia?

The Minister for Lands: One cannot tell. How can one tell?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Is it a case of taking one's chance? Where is the Bill going to land us? The Minister for Lands does not know.

The Minister for Lands: I do know.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Then the House ought to know. We are asked to pass this law, and we are responsible to the people.

The Minister for Lands: You do know.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I have not the slightest idea. The Minister is asking authority to do something—he does not know himself what. If laws of this description are to be passed, we may as well close down Parliament and say, "Here is the Ministry of eight men; let them govern the country."

Mr. Piesse: Did you consult Parliament when you bought the steamers?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Whether we consulted Parliament or not, we did something wise in purchasing the steamers. Acts of Parliament such as have been passed here year after year are not required at all, if such a measure as this is to be passed authorising a Minister to do whatever he pleases to do. Why could not the Minister come down with a definite proposal to repurchase repurchased estates land? It is not Crown lands we are dealing with now. The repurchased estates represent the money of the general taxpayer, who must be looked upon as a shareholder in these estates. The Government should tell the shareholders that the proposal means a loss of £50,000, or whatever the amount may be.

The Minister for Lands: Why did not your Government do what you now propose?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We did do that in connection with conditional purchase lands. Parliament had the fullest possible information in connection with that measure. Cabinet, before considering the measure, insisted that that information should be available.

The Minister for Works: Why all this mock indignation?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It is not mock indignation at all. Can the House reasonably be asked to pass a Bill giving a Minister unlimited power to deal with the moneys of the people, whom this House represents? The general taxpayer is affected by this Bill, and is therefore entitled to consideration. The member for Beverley (Mr. Wansbrough), so far as this Bill is concerned, is merely interested in seeing the Government get rid of the Avondale estate. That is political pressure. The townspeople of Beverley are forcing the hands of the hon. member to insist that anything whatever shall be done in order to settle the Avondale estate. But the Bill goes further. It goes to the extent of affecting the lands of existing holders.

Mr. Wansbrough: Make the repurchased estates available for the settlement of returned soldiers, if you like.

The Minister for Lands: The repurchased estates will not be disposed of unless this Bill is passed.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: To a certain extent I agree with the Minister for Lands, but let us not go to extremes. I suggest that the Minister be directed by Parliament to look into the question of the repurchased estates, with a view of relieving the settlers, and that he be also instructed to review the prices of repurchased estates lands still held by the Crown. But to leave lands representing the general taxpayers' money to the absolute discretion of the Minister for Lands is going to the extreme.

Mr. Hardwick: You kept the general taxpayer pretty busy for five years.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We should not place in the hands of the Minister the power to dispose of these estates in any way he pleases. "Trust the Minister for Lands," says the Attorney General. There is no Minister to-day who holds the respect of members generally more firmly than does the Minister for Lands. But that Minister is only one of six. I am prepared to trust the Minister for Lands, but not to trust the Attorney General or the other colleagues of the Minister for Lands. In matters of this kind the Cabinet cannot be trusted. I believe the Minister for Lands would do justice to all; but he would be compelled to submit his proposals to Cabinet, and there Northam would weigh in with its voice. I am not prepared to grant unlimited powers of this nature to any Government. The political complexion of the present time is of such a nature as to influence our friends opposite. If the general election were over, I doubt whether they would rush along with Bills of this nature. They have no mandate for this Bill. They are a minority Government. In that respect the position here is even more intolerable than the position in the Federal Parliament. This present proposition means an inducement to the people in the country districts to give their support to our friends opposite. I venture to prophesy that this measure, if passed, will not be put into operation before the general election. The Government will dilly-dally with it. They will say to the electors, "We have this Act, and you must return us to office to administer it."

Hon. P. Collier: The cry will be, "Return us to office, and see what we will do."

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Ministers will say that they will put the Act into operation at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Harrison: Repeated experience gives us definite knowledge.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: As the member for Mount Margaret (Mr. Taylor) would say, I know our friends opposite. I have been here 12 years. I have seen this kind of thing done previously, and I expect to see it done again. I assert that this measure, if passed, will not be made operative before the general election.

The Minister for Lands: Where did you get that information from?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Like the member for Pilbara (Mr. Underwood), from instinct. However, I wish to place on record my protest against the granting of such a power to any Ministry. No Government should have power to deal with the money of the general taxpayer in the way proposed by this Bill. The Minister for Lands himself I am prepared to trust, but I am not prepared to trust his colleagues, who have been responsible for bringing about a condition of affairs which has made it incumbent on our friends to compromise by undertaking that the hon. gentleman most directly responsible for that condition of affairs shall not have further control of the Lands Department.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. PIESSE (Toodyay) [7.35]: I appeal to hon. members on both sides of the House to give support to this measure. It seeks to give power to the Minister to do justice to a few struggling settlers who have laboured long and honestly in their efforts to successfully work their holdings.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: What about justice for the State?

Mr. PIESSE: I will refer to that. We have the testimony of the late Minister for Lands, the hon. member who just interjected, that these men are deserving of every consideration, but whilst he admits they are suffering severely in a pecuniary way, and one might also say in health—

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Their wives and families are.

Mr. PIESSE: Notwithstanding that, he claims that they should not receive any con-

sideration because of the possible loss of revenue that the State will have to bear.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: I did not say that, but that the revenue must receive some consideration.

Mr. PIESSE: If the hon. member will follow me, I will endeavour to show that the State will not lose by reducing the annual burden in the shape of rents which these people have to carry. I maintain that each individual settler or farmer who is a progressive man is worth anything from £50 to £100 yearly to the State, particularly in the matter of railway freights and the general expenses of working a farm. I am speaking on a subject of which I have an intimate knowledge. I know of a case where land returned nothing to the State until it was occupied by a particular individual. I made out the income tax returns and found that the railway freights paid by that farmer amounted to between £50 and £60 a year, and it is safe to say that indirectly that particular settler was worth £100 per annum to the country. If the reduction of the price paid, which is reasonable and proper, be brought into effect, that particular settler will be granted relief, and it will ensure his being kept upon his holding. The member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loughlen) stated, and I believe he was sincere when he made the statement, that it would pay the Government to give away the land to the people. I am convinced that such a policy would be a good one. It is population that we want, and it would be a sound proposition for the State to give a man land, provided of course that he lived on it and developed it. Previous speakers have criticised the system of repurchasing and subdividing large estates, but I claim that the venture, on the whole, has been satisfactory and profitable to the State. Many of these repurchased estates have been subdivided, and are to-day fully settled by a prosperous body of people. The State has made a profit out of several of the estates, and if we debited the loss on some of them and took to credit the profits from some of the others, I venture to say that the State would be found to have gained. More than that, it must be remembered that a large number of holders are now occupying land which was originally held by one or two

people for merely pastoral purposes. I might mention in particular the Norman estate in my district, which is situated six miles from Toodyay. There is now a prosperous community on that estate, and it has proved a splendid investment.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Would you reduce the price of that land?

Mr. PIESSE: It is now almost freehold. I would go this far with the hon. member, that the Bill might have declared the estates it was intended to operate upon. A select committee, as suggested by the hon. member, is a reasonable idea and probably worthy of some consideration. But the hon. member, when he was Minister for Lands, took the precaution to satisfy himself as to the condition of these people, otherwise he would not have spoken in the manner he did this afternoon, which proves that he is fully conversant with the position.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: I intended to introduce a Bill to relieve them, but I would not introduce a Bill at this time.

Mr. PIESSE: This Bill gives power to the Minister to reduce the price of the land, and I feel sure he will exercise the powers granted to him in a fair way, and deal equitably with each individual case. We have for some time, and more particularly during the present session, heard some severe comments from members opposite about the unprofitableness of farming. This afternoon it was mentioned that many members opposite had embarked on farming and had not been able to make a success of it. It is clear, however, to any practical man that the success of farming depends upon close personal supervision. Farming is a sound proposition within a reasonable rainfall belt, and provided the rents are not excessive. The leader of the Opposition sought to belittle the aims and objects of our party, and he claimed that this was a political move. There is no foundation whatever for such a statement. The measure will not affect my district. The late Minister for Lands, however, will admit that a genuine grievance exists and that that grievance is worthy of speedy attention. The circumstances under which the people suffering under that grievance have laboured are not of one year or two, and neither are they due to drought or

war, but they are long-standing, going back even as far as six years. I appeal to hon. members, therefore, to give support to this measure, and I feel certain that if it is passed it will be administered with all due regard for the interests of the State, while at the same time it will afford relief to a deserving body of settlers.

The PREMIER (Hon. Frank Wilson—Sussex) [7.45]: I have not much to say, beyond entering a protest against the attitude of the leader of the Opposition. In his usual manner that gentleman has been dealing out abuse to the Government for having introduced the Bill. According to him, everything we do is in the interests of party, especially designed to forward the interests of our party in view of the general elections, and so forth. The Bill is an honest endeavour to take into consideration the situation of those settlers who have selected on repurchased estates. It matters little who actually repurchased the estates, nor is it any sound argument against the Bill that we have half a million invested in those estates. What we have to consider is whether the settlers on those estates can make a success of it at the prices they have been called upon to pay for the land. No amount of abuse hurled at the Government will alter that position. The power proposed to be given to the Government will not be abused, for each individual case must be thoroughly inquired into before the relief is granted, and the interests of the taxpayer must be properly protected and preserved.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Do you think any Government ever introduced a proposal with the intention of abusing it?

The PREMIER: I have heard accusations of that sort hurled at this side. What would the hon. gentleman have? How would he propose to safeguard the position? As a matter of fact, this is his own Bill; it was left to us as a legacy, and I am surprised to find him and the leader of the Opposition condemning the measure.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: That is distinctly incorrect.

The PREMIER: The Bill is drafted in accordance with the hon. member's instruction when he was acting as Premier. The Cabinet minute bears his initials, Cabinet

approving of a Bill being drafted on the lines of the amending Land Act dealing with the repricing of conditional purchased land. The Bill is drafted on those lines.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It is not.

The PREMIER: It provides that the prices shall not be reduced below those fixed in that Act. It has been left to us as a legacy, and now hon. members opposite come here and condemn the measure, condemn their own policy.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It is drafted on lines that were never agreed to by the previous Government.

The PREMIER: The hon. member has not proved that; he is condemning the measure, notwithstanding it is drafted in accordance with his own instructions, approved at a Cabinet meeting over which he presided. Some hon. members may feel sore at not having made a success of their farming operations. Most men, when they go on the land, think all they have to do is to take up holdings to be on the high road to success. But there is a very long interregnum between starting operations and bringing them to a successful issue. I have been accused this afternoon of wanting in patriotism because I did not tackle farming myself, because I refrained from indulging in a pursuit of which I knew nothing at all. If we are to help the men settled on repurchased estates the Government must be given excessive power, must be trusted to have proper inquiries made into each individual case and to see that relief given is not undue. It is far better that Western Australia should have her lands settled than that they should be kept locked up. It is far better to make available for settlement repurchased estates more or less improved than to allow those estates to revert to their original condition. What we require above all things in Western Australia is that our lands is every direction should be settled under such conditions that the settlers may make a decent living, to the end that the whole State may benefit by their efforts. I understand that some of my friends opposite have suffered rather than benefited by their farming operations. It seems that they are prepared to blame everyone but themselves. The member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. John-

son) raised a hue and cry against the Minister on the score that he had been optimistic. To my thinking we require all the optimism that we can bring to our help in dealing with the difficult problems with which we are faced. The same hon. member talked about the half-million we have invested in these estates. The inauguration of that sum dates back to Sir John Forrest's time, and each succeeding Government have had something to do with building up that sum by the repurchasing of estates. The late Government were responsible, I think, for nearly half the amount. It is idle to blame one Government or another. I believe the late Government acted in good faith when they made those repurchases, intending and hoping to help the State forward. We have found ourselves in difficulty because the estates have not been disposed of as rapidly as was expected. If the late Government had followed the policy we carried out during our previous term of office, they would have disposed of a large proportion of the repurchased estates. I am quite sure the Avondale estate would have been disposed of to the last block if they had not hung it up.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: You had it for two years.

The PREMIER: It was thrown open in 1911, but the late Government closed it up and refused to sell a single block, although there were then sufficient buyers to purchase the whole estate.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: The sooner the Yandooka estate is thrown open the better.

The PREMIER: I agree. Instructions have gone forward to put it up for sale, and the Minister is now engaged in that problem. I cannot understand why we should have this opposition to a Bill which our predecessors left to us, the object of which is to grant relief to those who are overburdened on those repurchased estates. If members of the Opposition think they can tie the Government's hands absolutely, possibly they are justified in the attitude they have taken up. When they were in office we willingly passed measures to enable them to make reductions in the price of certain lands. The Cabinet meeting that authorised the drafting of this Bill in April last, insisted on its being on the lines

of the amending Land Act dealing with the repricing of conditional purchase lands.

Hon. J. Scaddan: That is incorrect.

The PREMIER: I say it is correct. I have the papers in front of me now. It was signed by the member for Guildford, in the absence of the Premier. This is the Bill.

Hon. J. Scaddan: That Bill was never sighted by my Cabinet.

The PREMIER: It is drawn on the instructions laid down by the hon. member's Cabinet, and therefore, I cannot understand the opposition.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: I say it is not.

The PREMIER: All we ask is that power shall be given to readjust these prices, and that the Government should be trusted to do what is a fair thing, just as we trusted the late Government in respect to the reduction of prices of conditional purchase land. It is only right that the Minister, supported by his responsible advisers, should have the power to adjust the price in each individual case. Both the Denmark and the Harvey estates were acquired under authority other than that contained in the Repurchase of Estates Act. They are both open now, and I believe reductions have been made at Denmark since the prices were first fixed. The Government have ample power to do this in respect of the Denmark lands and those of the Harvey estate. If this be right, it is also right that the Government should have the same power to deal with the other repurchased estates. It is not right that members on the opposition bench should indulge in personal accusations.

Hon. J. Scaddan: What about yourself six months ago?

The PREMIER: The leader of the Opposition never rises in his place except to deal with every measure on party lines. I repeat I would ask members of the Opposition not to indulge in these charges, and I ask members of this House to pass the second reading of the Bill in order that we may be able to give that relief which our friends opposite, when they were in office, thought to be necessary.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. H. B. Lefroy—Moore—in reply) [8.1]: I am surprised at the tone adopted by hon. members opposite, for the reason that in introducing this measure I am doing merely what

the late Government expressed an intention of doing twelve months ago.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: But in another way.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I shall prove to the hon. member that the Government are not proposing to do this in any other way but are endeavouring to carry out the views of members opposite. I had thought when introducing this measure I should have their support. In April, 1916, Cabinet approved of a Bill being drafted on the lines of the amending Act dealing with the repricing of conditional purchase lands. That amending Act was already in existence, it was not a Bill on the stocks to be drafted. That Bill provided that in the case of land open for selection under Parts V. or VI. of the principal Act—Parts V. and VI. deal with conditional purchase—or held under conditional purchase granted under either of the said parts before the 1st January, 1910, if it were shown to the satisfaction of the Governor-in-Council, having regard to the quality and productiveness of the land, its distance from a railway, market or port, or other circumstances, the price of such land, prescribed by or under the principal Act is excessive, the Governor may, in his discretion, reduce the price of such land to not less than 3s. 6d. per acre. Hon. members will find the same words used in the measure now before the House, so that when I say I am carrying out what I considered were the views of hon. members opposite I am perfectly correct, and my friends should take care not to contradict me.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: But you have only carried out those views in part.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson), in his criticism of the Bill, said it seemed to him that the power given by the Bill was to reduce the price of land to 3s. 9d. per acre. That is so, that power is given on the same lines as in the Act of 1915. There is the same reason and the same justification for reducing the price of some of the land on repurchased estates to 3s. 9d. per acre as for reducing the price of ordinary Crown land to that figure. The prices fixed in regard to some of those es-

tates, Avondale, Yandanooka, the Bowes, Oakabella, and Narra Tarra, ranged from 138s. per acre to 3s. 9d. per acre. In the case of Avondale, from 96s. to 138s. Is there any member of this House bold enough to say that anyone buying that land at those prices could make a living off it.

Hon. J. Scaddan: It must be poor land.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Fancy asking a man to settle on land at 96s. per acre.

Hon. J. Scaddan: They are paying up to £15 per acre for wheat land in South Australia.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I do not care what is being done in South Australia, we cannot do it in Western Australia. I am not blaming anyone. This has been going on for the past 20 years, it started in Sir John Forrest's time. Every Government in this State has purchased estates, and I think the Labour Government can be credited with more land repurchasing than any other Government. The member for Guildford knows perfectly well that representations have been made to the Government for a long time by electors interested in land around Geraldton, pointing out that the price asked for the repurchased estates was too high and that selectors are unable to bear the burden. One member who has been continuous in urging me to do something in this matter is the member for Geraldton (Mr. Heitmann) who is not present to-night, but who, I am certain would, if he were here, be prepared to support me. Those estates were repurchased some years ago after a succession of seven fat years, and at the time we were led away with the idea that land was more valuable than it is. Since then this State has experienced a number of lean years and we have learned by experience that the price fixed on the land at Bowes was higher than it should have been. The member for Northam (Hon. J. Mitchell) is frequently twitted by hon. members opposite regarding the price he placed upon that land. It appears to me that Northam breathes optimism. My old friend and colleague, the late Mr. Throssell, was one of the greatest optimists in Western Australia regarding land settlement. No one in this House at that time was better able to impress members than that gentleman regarding the great possibilities

of Western Australia. And it has been proved that we have great possibilities in Western Australia. When I ask members to give the Government power to reduce the price of land in repurchased estates, I do not wish it taken in any way as an indication of want of faith in Western Australia on my part. Members of this House have been heard to say all too frequently, "You will never take up any more land," and so on. I would not for a moment suggest that anyone would be sorry for taking up land in this State. As a rule, the cause of failure by people who have taken up land in this State is that in a great number of instances they have gone on the land without knowledge or experience or that aptitude for agriculture that must be possessed by a man who would make a success as a farmer. Many men even who have gone on the land without knowledge and experience, but who have had the necessary energy and aptitude, have been successful. I know many of them and so also do members of this House. I would not care for it to go out to the people of this State or the world that there are not great possibilities before Western Australia. I do not claim that every man who goes on the land will make a fortune there; but they will be able to make comfortable homes on the land and to feel that their work is done for themselves. They would feel that pleasure always felt by a man who is able to look on successful work. The man who holds securities only and simply sees the interest rolling in to him must be in a miserable position, in my opinion.

Hon. J. Scaddan: I would like to change places with him.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: But the man who sees the wilderness, as a result of his labours, turned into smiling cornfields is able to say he is doing something not only for himself but for his country as well. Those are the people we desire to help by this Bill. Those selectors who took up land in the repurchased estates around Geraldton paid too much for it, and I think it only fair and reasonable that where too high a price has been paid for land the people should be relieved of some of the burden. The Bill is not to apply at all, but to only a few areas in Western Australia. Most of the estates

purchased in the early days have been settled and successfully developed. Why? Because primarily the settlers did not pay very high prices for the land. The estates were acquired by the Government at a reasonable price and the Government were consequently able to sell at reasonable prices. With reference to the land in the Bowes estate, members must not make the mistake of supposing that this land was cleared as in the case of Yandanooka, which was all cleared when purchased by the Government. The Bowes estate was not cleared. It was an ordinary sheep run divided into paddocks. There was no large amount of improvements done on the property, and even the fences were very little use to the settler, and probably would not work in with the holding. These properties are valued at from 11s. to 80s. an acre. The man who is paying 80s. an acre for agricultural wheat land in Western Australia is paying too much, that is 80s. for the unimproved value of the land. It has often been said that the Midland Railway Co. land was sold at perhaps a higher rate than any other land in Western Australia. I am certain that there is no purely agricultural land in the Midland area that was ever sold at £4 an acre. I do know of excellent first class land being sold at £2 and £1 an acre, and the people who have bought land at that price have been able to do well on their properties. Had they paid £4 an acre for the land, I am quite certain they would not have been able to make good. It is to relieve the people who have paid too much for their land that I ask hon. members to pass this Bill. The member for Forrest (Mr. O'Loughlen) both agreed and disagreed with the Bill. He said this ought to be done, and then he said the time was not opportune. It is never inopportune to do the right thing. It is not opportune to sell some of these estates at the present moment, and the Government have no intention of placing them on the market, because we would never get purchasers at the present time. It would be a suicidal policy to endeavour to dispose of any of these estates at this juncture. I regret to say that it will fall to my lot to endeavour again to make as much as I can out of the Yandanooka estate. It would also be inopportune for that estate to be sold.

Mr. Gardiner: If they are not reduced in price they will eat their heads off in interest.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Certainly. I am sure that the Premier would not purchase an acre of land at the present time if he could avoid it. There may be some occasions when this would be forced upon the Government, but with all the enormous areas of Crown lands still available in Western Australia, we should think well, and think many times, before we offered to repurchase estates just now, more especially when we have already so many repurchased estates on our hands. Something has been said about the Denmark and Harvey estates, but these have nothing to do with the Bill. Neither of these estates was purchased under the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act. In the case of the Denmark estate, the price of the land has been reduced enormously, and I was astounded at the recommendation of the Land Pricing Board in this respect. The land was reduced from, I think, £12 an acre to £4 an acre and less. There appears to have been a lot of trouble over the Harvey estate, and no one seems to have known to whom it belonged. The Agricultural Department had a go at it at one time, and the Lands Department, the Water Supply Department, and the Public Works Department have all had a turn at it. I was impressing upon the Under Secretary to-day the need for getting this land on the market as soon as possible. I said, "Hurry up with this land, and let the people have an opportunity of taking it up." I am surprised at the attitude adopted by the leader of the Opposition. I always think when I listen to him that he is perfectly marvellous. I think he really believes in the Bill himself.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Oh, yes.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I am sure his sense of fair play, with which I know he is brimming over, induces him to believe that some relief ought to be given to those people who have paid this high price.

Hon. J. Scaddan: I want to know what the relief is going to be, but the Minister cannot tell us.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It is impossible to do so. The hon. member says that I ought to have come

to this House and said what this was going to cost the State, but how could I do that?

Hon. J. Scaddan: You could have had an inspection made, as we did.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: What is the use of having an inspection made before the Bill is passed? Did the hon. gentleman opposite, when the Bill reducing the price of Crown lands to 3s. 9d. was introduced, have an inspection made first?

Hon. J. Scaddan: We had a report first.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: We have had a report on the estates made by our land officers, and they all agree that the land has been priced too high, that there was a mistake made in the first instance. It would be a very simple thing to say that if an estate cost £40,000, and we reduced the price of the land by 25 per cent., there would be a loss to the State of £10,000. It is impossible to say, however, what is involved until we have had the land reclassified.

Hon. J. Scaddan: You could say that there is nothing to prevent that land reverting back into a large estate after the State had lost £10,000. Some of the land has been repurchased more than once.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I do not know of any case in which the land has so reverted.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Some of the land has been repurchased twice.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Does the hon. member mean to say that the land has reverted to the original holders?

Hon. J. Scaddan: Not the original holders, but it has reverted to large estates and has had to be repurchased.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No doubt, in the earlier days, some of the smaller holdings were purchased by different people, became large estates, and the Government repurchased them afterwards. I cannot recall any estates which have been twice repurchased by the Government.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: The Bowes estate was resumed as a pastoral lease, thrown open for selection, and subsequently repurchased from the selectors.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The Bowes estate was a pastoral lease, and I do not call that repurchasing.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Yes.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: You paid compensation for the improvements and bought the land afterwards.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It was purchased by the original owner, and then the Government bought it from him; that is all.

Hon. J. Scaddan: That is all! You would not like to go on practising that.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That is what has always happened. Crown lands cannot be purchased except from the Crown. Those people who acquired areas of land originally purchased it from the Crown, and when they sold the land back to the Crown they would have been selling land which originally belonged to the Crown.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Why did the Crown take the Bowes estate from the original leaseholders, and why was it resumed?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It was not a case of resumption. There is no need to resume a pastoral lease.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Yes, if it is required for agricultural purposes.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The Government may, at any time, go on to a pastoral lease and lay out an area for agricultural purposes. Of course they have to pay for improvements. It is not necessary to pay the pastoralist any compensation for the remainder of his lease.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: This area was resumed for subdivision. One man eventually got the lot, and sold it back to the State.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That is beside the question. If the land has been priced too high and these people are overburdened by what they have had to pay for it, it is only right and just that the House should give the Administration power to review the position. No doubt, in those cases where hardship is involved, and relief can be given, it should be given.

Hon. J. Scaddan: If you do this, and it means a loss to the general taxpayer, he should have some protection. What is to prevent these estates reverting back to large estates?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: They are more likely to go back into large estates under present conditions than if we improve the conditions. If we get men on the land,

who feel that they are overburdened and that they would rather leave the land, there is more likelihood of the land reverting into large estates. The great thing, when people have been placed on the land, is to root them there by making them successful. This cannot be done if the men on the land are overburdened with the capital price of their holdings. I ask the House to give the Government power to afford relief in certain cases. It is not as if the Minister was going to do this merely with a scratch of the pen.

Hon. J. Scaddan: I should not care if the Minister was going to do this, but he is not.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The Minister will be careful to select those officers to do the work in whom he has the greatest confidence. I find that the officers of the department are not disposed to under-value the land.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Quite the reverse.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: They are good officers, and go out in the country in the interests of the State. They are not there in the interests of the individual. They think that, by putting a good price on the land, they are doing more good to the State, and perhaps lose sight of the fact that the individual will suffer hardship by their doing so. The officers who are most capable of dealing with matters of this character will be put to do this work. I shall give them a basis to go on. I shall tell them that I value such and such a piece of land at so much per acre, and I shall tell them to take that as a basis above which, or below which, they may go. I hope hon. members opposite will help me with this Bill. At any rate, I am much obliged to them for the friendly criticism they have extended to the measure; but, as I have said, I am merely carrying out instructions which I thought had already been given to the Lands Department. Moreover, I have used in this Bill the very words of the repricing measure of 1915, so making the minimum 3s. 9d., which I consider right. There is no maximum fixed. Certainly there are cases in which the land is not worth more than 3s. 9d. Indeed, I find that certain land on the Oakabella estate is valued at 3s. 9d., although other portions are valued at 80s. It is a fair inference that there must be some other land on repurchased estates worth only 3s. 9d.

Mr. O'Loughlen: What did the State pay for it?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Three shillings and ninepence was the price fixed for some portions when the estate was valued. I am sure that whatever Minister may be in power is there to do what is right according to his lights; and I am certain that the Minister, whoever he may be, called on to administer this measure, if it becomes law, will do so with the desire to protect the interests of the State as far as possible, and at the same time to be fair to the individual. If we are to get people to occupy our lands, nothing is more essential than that they should be afforded facilities for production. Some persons may laugh at the unfortunate man on the land, the cocky; but I say the so-called cocky is the bulwark of Western Australia. I have the greatest admiration for the miner and for the good work he has done for Western Australia. But the man who goes on the land gets rooted there, and is bound to the country, and cannot pack his portmanteau and clear out in 24 hours. He is the man who rears a family in the country. He is the man who will help to make Western Australia a source of strength not only to the Commonwealth but to the Empire. That is the class of man I wish to assist.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

To refer to Select Committee.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON (Guildford) [8.35]: I move—

That the Bill be referred to a select committee.

I have already intimated my intention to move in this direction, and now merely wish to point out once more that as regards a Bill of this description we should have an estimate of the loss which the passing of the measure will entail on the State. When the previous Government introduced a repricing measure, the Bill was accompanied by a map showing the zones into which the State had been subdivided for the purposes of the proposed legislation, and the prices in view were submitted in the form of a schedule. The fullest information was given to Parliament on that occasion. That information was prepared at the direction of Cabinet,

because Cabinet decided that Parliament should not be asked to pass such a measure without knowing exactly what would be the cost to the State. We showed exactly what the loss of revenue would be under that Bill. To-night we have had two statements indicating that it is possible to obtain similar information regarding the present measure. Firstly, the member for Toodyay (Mr. Piesse) said that the Bill would not apply to all the repurchased estates. He said that for his part—and he is deputy leader of the Country party—he merely wishes it to apply to some of those estates. Those particular estates ought to be specified in the Bill. The Bill, as it has passed its second reading, imposes no limitation whatever, but applies to all repurchased estates. Since we know that it is not to apply to all of them, Parliament should limit its operation by specifying the estates to which it will apply. Then, the Minister said that for the general operation of the measure he would take one typical piece of land and fix the price of that as a basis for repricing. What would be easier than that the Minister should specify the various estates to be affected and say to Parliament "We want power to reprice these estates on this basis"? Thus, the House would have been given an approximate idea of the cost to the country. However, since the Government will not furnish the information, I appeal to the House to obtain it by means of a select committee. It has been stated that the previous Government intended to introduce a Bill of this character. It is true that we intended to give relief to the settlers concerned, and it is true that a Bill for that purpose would have been introduced if—

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member is not in order now.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: A Bill of this character, which does not indicate to Parliament the cost involved, would not have been introduced. The only way to obtain the necessary information is to refer the Bill to a select committee.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. H. B. Lefroy—Moore) [8.39]: I am unable to support the motion. I do not see that any good purpose would be served by referring this Bill to a select committee, which

course will merely result in delay. Even if a select committee sit, we shall be no further forward than we are at present.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Is the measure urgent?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes. The member who sits beside the hon. member interjecting—I mean the member for Geraldton (Mr. Heitmann), who is absent—could inform the member for Forrest that the measure is urgent. The Bill does not deal with the whole State. Its provisions show that it is intended to deal with individual cases of hardship. It will be impossible for anyone to tell the select committee what the cost to the State will be. In order to obtain that information it would be necessary to go through the whole of the repurchased estates, and inquire into every individual case, and thus ascertain where relief is needed. I consider this measure represents purely a question of administration.

Hon. J. Scaddan: That is not so. It affects the general taxpayer.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I hope that sympathetic administration of this measure, without reference to a select committee, will result in protection of the individual and also in protection of the State.

Question put, and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	12
Noes	17

Majority against	..	5
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Ayes.

Mr. Carpenter	Mr. Mullany
Mr. Chesson	Mr. Munste
Mr. Collier	Mr. Scaddan
Mr. Green	Mr. Taylor
Mr. Holman	Mr. O'Loughlen
Mr. W. D. Johnson	(Teller.)
Mr. Lambert	

Noes.

Mr. Allen	Mr. Mitchell
Mr. Cunningham	Mr. Nairn
Mr. Gardiner	Mr. Plesse
Mr. George	Mr. S. Stubbs
Mr. Hardwick	Mr. Veryard
Mr. Harrison	Mr. Wapsbrough
Mr. Hickmott	Mr. F. Wilson
Mr. E. B. Johnston	Mr. Thomson
Mr. Lefroy	(Teller.)

Question thus negatived.

In Committee.

Mr. Holman in the Chair; the Minister for Lands in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Power to reduce selling price:

Mr. CUNNINGHAM: I move an amendment—

That in Subclause 2 the words "for a term commencing on or after the first day of January, 1909" be struck out.

Hon. members are aware that most of the repurchased estates were secured comparatively recently, and if the date limit is permitted to remain, these estates will be cut out. The date limit could well be omitted and then the matter might be left to the discretion of the Minister in the same way as it is proposed to leave the pricing.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member is under a misconception; we do not desire to go back too far. If we go back to 1909, as the Bill proposes, the Government will be in the position to afford relief in those cases where it is needed at the present time. The Oakabella estate was thrown open in 1909, the Narra Tarra estate in 1910, and the Bowes estate in 1911, and all these will come under the provisions of the Bill. I am sure the hon. member is thinking of these estates.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM: In view of the explanation of the Minister for Lands I desire to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Clause put and passed.

Title—agreed to.

[The Deputy Speaker took the Chair.]

Bill reported without amendment, and the report adopted.

BILL—AGRICULTURAL BANK ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 24th January.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON (Guildford) [8.55]: There is not a great deal in this Bill that one can devote attention to on the second reading; it is, however, a measure that should receive some consideration in Committee. I agree with that portion of the Bill which desires to extend to the trustees of the Agricultural Bank power to lease

land which reverts back to the Bank. We have found from experience in Western Australia that our land depreciates very rapidly if it is not under constant cultivation, and that a considerable area would have gone back and depreciated in value had not the trustees of the Bank, realising the urgency of the matter, leased certain areas, although they did not have the legal power to do so. When we see it is necessary for the trustees to take action of that description it is sufficient proof to demonstrate to Parliament that the law requires to be amended. I think though, it is only right that Parliament should realise that it is proposed to give the trustees of the Bank additional power which will enable them to advance money to lessees. It is fair to assume that if a man leases a block, he takes it for a limited term, and his object is to use the cleared land; in other words he devotes his attention to cultivating and cropping, and consequently he is not likely to go in for permanent improvements in the shape of clearing and fencing or water conservation, unless perhaps to a limited extent. If we pass this Bill the lessee will be able to get an advance to enable him to renew improvements already made. I am inclined to think under that power the trustees will have the right to advance money for what is known in ordinary farming parlance as sucker-bashing. We know that suckers grow rapidly and a lessee will be likely to take up land on condition that the Agricultural Bank clears the suckers. That means that in a majority of cases money has been advanced for clearing the land and then over and above that we are going to make a further advance to a lessee to enable him to re-clear. Unless great care is exercised we shall load the land to such an extent that it will never be possible to sell it. In other words, we make capital cost too great. By adopting a policy such as this we will ultimately make it necessary for the Government to come to Parliament for authority to write off certain advances made by the Agricultural Bank. The passing of this measure will render that procedure imperative at some time in the future, because we shall be advancing money on securities against the full value of which we have already advanced. That is the most serious phase of the Bill. Another provision, which

the Minister says is only temporary, is that prescribing the interest. The Minister says that if the interest charged is more than 5 per cent. only 1 per cent. can be added, regardless of what the money may have cost the State. Apparently, if it is less than 5 per cent. more than 1 per cent. will be added for administration and recoup; but if the interest be over 5 per cent. only 1 per cent. can be added, and so the State will have to carry some of the burden entailed by the higher price paid for the money borrowed that it might be advanced. To my mind these are the only features in the Bill deserving of consideration on the second reading. In regard to the clause dealing with advances to returned soldiers, I think the Minister will have to amend it before it expresses what he really desires. It is questionable whether power should be given to the Minister to frame a policy in regard to the assistance of the soldier settlers without first obtaining the approval of Parliament for that scheme. The proposal is to allow the Governor-in-Council to prepare the scheme, and permit the Agricultural Bank to carry it out. To my mind Parliament should have a say in any such scheme. In a general sense one cannot take exception to the Bill, because it provides for certain things which require attention.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Mr. Holman in the Chair; the Minister for Railways and Industries in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1, 2—agreed to.

Clause 3—Power to lease:

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: The Minister might explain Subclause 2, which proposes to make further advances to the lessee for improving land already improved.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Great care will be exercised in the administration of this provision. It sometimes happens that the property has been lying idle. In such a case it may be deemed advisable to advance something against scrubbing and minor clearing. Again, some of these holdings will have but small areas of cleared land, and it may be advisable to allow the lessee to do

a little clearing. As another alternative, it may be that the holding will be without water, in which case it will probably be wise to allow the lessee to put down a dam.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 4—Rate of interest:

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: The Minister said he would look into this. Has he any explanation to offer?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The desire of the hon. member was to make it quite clear that we could advance money down to $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. to returned soldiers. The Solicitor General says that we shall be able to do so.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: What does the proviso mean?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It was added to meet the objection raised by the hon. member on the second reading. We here take power to charge 1 per cent. more for money than we have to pay for it. If we have to pay 6 per cent., the borrower will be expected to pay 7, but immediately we can get the money more cheaply we will bring the mortgage down.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: The proviso may mean what is intended, but I cannot see it. However, if the Minister himself and the Solicitor General are both satisfied with the provision, I will offer no opposition to it.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 5—Advances in aid of the settlement on the land of returned soldiers:

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The clause provides that advances may be made by the bank under and subject to regulations in furtherance of any scheme approved by the Governor-in-Council. That, of course, means Ministers. I take the strongest exception to the funds of the Agricultural Bank being used in furtherance of any scheme not approved by Parliament. We do not know what may be the proposals of the Government in regard to the settlement of soldiers.

The Minister for Railways: Special funds are to be provided by the Commonwealth.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Yes, but the Minister must not think that because the Commonwealth Government propose to make available $2\frac{1}{2}$ millions of money it does not concern all of us to see that it is wisely spent. The credit of the State is pledged for the repayment of the amount, and we shall also

be paying a portion of the interest, so it will be seen that the general taxpayer is concerned in a dual sense. It is proposed to make the interest charged to soldiers only $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. The difference between that and the interest paid to the Commonwealth has to be made up by the taxpayer. I am not objecting to that, but I do not agree with a proposal which would enable the Government to use money provided by the Commonwealth on some pet scheme of certain individuals, when the State would have to find the difference between $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. and the cost of the money obtained from the Commonwealth. In this clause is a proposal empowering the Government to spend that money without reference to Parliament. The question of the settlement of soldiers on the land requires close consideration by the departmental officers, with the assistance of those in a position to render advice. In the second place, it requires the closest consideration by Ministers and finally, for the assurance of the taxpayer, any scheme before adoption should be approved by Parliament. The present Ministers have been asleep on this question for a long time, and the only scheme drawn up was prepared by us before leaving office.

The Premier: Why did not you submit that scheme to Parliament?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Probably the Premier is unaware that a scheme for the repatriation of soldiers was prepared by Mr. Morris of the Lands Department. If the Premier has not seen it, I can supply him with a copy. I do not wish the Premier to infer that Parliament will prevent anything being done for those men who are risking everything; but by passing this clause the Committee will be giving the Government an open cheque. For what is Parliament constituted if not for the deliberation of matters of public concern?

The Minister for Railways: Why are you stonewalling?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Mr. Chairman, I object to that; I am not stonewalling. I am merely asking the Government to declare their policy, which members are entitled to know.

The Minister for Works: What do you want to know?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Whether it would be in the best interests of the community to give the Government the power they ask for, to spend five or six millions of money, for which the taxpayer has to find the difference between $3\frac{1}{2}$ and probably $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. I am not prepared to give Ministers that power, as I hold that any scheme in which the general taxpayer has to contribute should be submitted to Parliament. The repatriation of soldiers is by no means a simple matter, but one requiring the best information available from every quarter, and, finally, approval by Parliament. If the Minister undertakes that the expenditure of any money received by way of loan from the Commonwealth will first be submitted to Parliament, then I will be satisfied. While I have no desire to unduly detain the Committee, I am not prepared to formulate a scheme. The present Government have no scheme prepared, and though the Minister for Industries is prepared to make a statement now, I should not care for him to do that as the question is one requiring very serious consideration. I have no objection to power being taken by the Government to make advances to settle soldiers on the land, but I do object to money being used, a proportion of which has to be found by the general taxpayer, for schemes of which Parliament is not in possession of the details.

The Premier: You would not hang up a big scheme of this sort until something had been formulated to which you could give your approval? It gradually builds itself up.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Parliament should be consulted in a case of this kind. It may not be necessary to consult Parliament in regard to schemes for the settlement of ordinary citizens on our land, and to enable the Agricultural Bank to give them financial help, because advances made in these cases are burdens upon the particular citizens concerned only and not upon the general taxpayer. In this case we are dealing with a privileged citizen, who is entitled to the privileges to be extended to him, but in view of the fact that the general taxpayer has to make up the difference between $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. in the first year and the actual cost

of the money, which may be $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., then the general community, through their representatives in Parliament, should be consulted before a huge sum of money is splashed about on some pet scheme of Ministers. The ordinary mortgagor under the Agricultural Bank Act is responsible for the interest as well as the principal of the money loaned to him. In this case he is only responsible for the $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., the balance being found by the State, with the result that the general community are more particularly interested. There should be no difficulty in formulating a scheme and obtaining the approval of Parliament. Is the Minister prepared to agree to Parliament being consulted before any scheme is finalised?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: For months the Government, of which the leader of the Opposition was the head, did nothing, although they had the scheme in hand. In the interests of these soldier settlers it should have been started 12 months ago. Unless we get some work going there will be very little for the soldiers to do when they return. If the war ended to-morrow and 30,000 soldiers came back to Western Australia they would be hard pushed to get any employment. The arrangements made by the late Minister for Lands, when he attended the conference in Melbourne, are much the same as the present arrangements so far as money is concerned. He offered to take a large number of returned soldiers in this State and to join in lending the money at the rate of $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. The responsibility of the taxpayer of this State will not be more than three-quarters per cent. for the first year, and will be reduced each year. Is there a man in the community who would not be glad to give the soldier settlers, in the early years of their work, money altogether free of interest? All we ask is that we should be allowed to prepare these farms, at any rate to some extent, ahead of settlement. There is really no scheme. There is an undertaking to settle so many of these soldiers and to provide them with land so long as the Federal Government raise a certain amount of money for the purpose. We propose that the Agricultural Bank shall, when the Minister for Lands hands over the land to the bank and has selected and surveyed it and had it prepared

up to the stage when the approvals can commence, take it over and make improvements on the blocks ahead of settlement.

Mr. Thomas: And have ready-made farms.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: To some extent.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: You have not the power under this clause.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It gives power to clear. We propose to clear 20 acres on each of the blocks, and erect a cottage and fencing. We cannot get a mortgage signed by a man who is fighting in France, but we can prepare for his home-coming. That is the only difference between the system to-day and what we propose to do. If we had to formulate a scheme that would satisfy the leader of the Opposition we would not get it before Parliament this session, and the work would be held up. Parliament will meet in June or July, and by that time we shall not have been able to spend very much money on the work.

The Minister for Lands: Some of the Harvey estate has been set apart for the soldiers.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: We have not sufficient land surveyed now on which to settle any large number of soldiers, or upon which we can spend any large sum of money during the next few months. If we are not permitted to spend this money, which the Federal Government have provided specially for this purpose, the Committee will be taking a very grave responsibility. We now have an opportunity of developing the South-West, and at the same time assisting our soldiers. The money is not going to be wasted, but will be used wisely and well. I cannot agree to the amendment suggested by the leader of the Opposition.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: My desire was not to obtain from the Minister a premature statement. Apparently, he wants to spend £10 by way of ascertaining whether a scheme involving millions will prove a success. Let him submit his complete scheme to Parliament. He talks of a scheme to be financed at a cost of $\frac{3}{4}$ per cent.; but the Premier has said that the State will have to pay $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. or 6 per cent.

The Premier: The cost under the scheme is the difference between $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. and the actual cost of the money.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Money is not getting cheaper. To-day we are paying about $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., and the chances are we shall have to pay 6 per cent. The difference between 6 per cent. and $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. is $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., which will have to be divided between the State and Commonwealth. Why mislead the public? It is essential that the question of the development of the South-West should be carefully considered before any plan is finally adopted; otherwise the State will find itself in the same difficulty as exists at Denmark. The Denmark settlement was in a mess before the last Liberal Government left office. This Bill represents an attempt to introduce party politics into the settlement of returned soldiers.

The Minister for Works: I deny that absolutely.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The party in power for the moment are to be authorised to make advances without question from any quarter.

The Minister for Works: The Government can do that now in the case of any private citizen.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: But the ordinary private citizen is responsible for payment of interest and repayment of principal, whereas under this Bill the general taxpayer is responsible in the first instance. The measure provides for the adoption of any scheme which may be approved by the Governor-in-Council, and that means the Ministry happening to be in power. The scheme must be removed from the sphere of party politics if it is to be a success.

Mr. THOMSON: I do not agree with the leader of the Opposition. It is time something was done towards placing returned soldiers on the land, and Clause 5 makes a distinct proposal to that end. I consider that we have a duty to the men now on active service, as well as to those who have returned. Moreover, the wife of a man on active service should share in the benefits of this measure, by being permitted to take up land for her absent husband. Otherwise there is a probability that the eyes of the scheme will be picked out by the men who have already returned, to the detriment of

those now at the Front. I move an amendment—

That in line 3, after "have been," there be inserted "or are."

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: There is no necessity for the insertion of the words. The clause as it stands covers every man who has been, is, or may be on active service.

Mr. Thomson: Will you allow the man at the Front to apply for land by an attorney?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I do not see how the amendment will improve the clause, and I ask the hon. member not to press it.

Mr. THOMSON: I do not propose to withdraw my amendment, which, if it does not improve the clause, will certainly do no harm. The farms of men now at the Front are being carried on by attorneys, or in some instances by their wives. If the wife or relatives of a soldier, who may be returning late, are desirous of taking up an adjoining block so that they may work in partnership with the returning man, the clause as it is will prevent that being done.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Who says so?

Mr. THOMSON: I say so. I want to make sure that it will be possible to carry out what I have suggested.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The hon. member assumes that the men who are fighting will have the worst of the deal. In that he is entirely wrong. It will not be wise to go further than it is proposed to do. If the amendment is made, hundreds of men at the Front will be able to say to their friends "Just select blocks for us."

Mr. Thomson: Why should they not?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Because we want these farms settled quickly, and we want the intending selector to make personal application.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Prior to a man going to the Front, a card is placed in his hands containing a number of questions, one being as to whether he is desirous of taking up land on his return, and if the answer is in the affirmative the card is filed. If it is found that the intending selector is a suitable man, his interests are looked after. If he does not know anything about agriculture, it is proposed to interview him, because

there is no desire to place men on the land who might be unsuitable. That would only be courting failure. It would not be desirable, in their own interests, to place many of these men on the land. Everyone is desirous of seeing that these men get every possible benefit which can be conferred on them, but we should not allow our desire to help them to run away with reason. In this case we have made all the provision that is necessary, and I think the Minister is right in adhering to the Bill as it is printed.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Hon. members are losing sight of the fact that this is an amendment of the Agricultural Bank Act and does not deal with the question of finding land for soldiers. There was a land settlement committee appointed by the War Council and they went into the whole question. Schemes for the settlement of men on the land were proposed and the late Minister had areas in his mind's eye upon which to settle these men. The unfortunate part, however, was that there was no money then. Now I am glad to say we have the money, and we shall shortly be able to start a scheme which I hope will benefit the returned soldiers as well as the State.

Mr. S. STUBBS: I think the member for Katanning in his desire to see that the clause is made perfectly clear has touched an important point regarding the position of the dependants of soldiers. If the Minister can assure us that the dependants will be safeguarded, that will get over the difficulty which the hon. member fears. For instance, there is a family near Lake Grace, the head of which is fighting in France. Before leaving he selected 500 acres, a block which was altogether too small, and his position is that he will have to sell that and secure a larger block. Am I to understand from this clause that the wife of a soldier can apply for a block which may be adjoining the one already held? In the instance to which I have referred I understand that the Minister has an idea of cutting up some land adjoining that held by the soldier in question.

Mr. WILLMOTT: I fail to see what the clause has to do with the land at all. It is simply a matter of advances, and the question of the land has nothing to do with the provision.

Mr. THOMSON: I am not convinced that what I am aiming at is provided for in the Bill. As the hon. member says, we are dealing, not with the land, but with the advances to be made. It is said that the returned men will have to be medically examined before being permitted to go on the land. I know several instances of the wife and children carrying on the farm while the husband and father is at the Front. In the case of a man who comes back physically incapable of carrying on farming, and whose wife or son, or other reliable person, is prepared to accept the responsibility of working the farm for him, provision should be made for such arrangement. I appeal to the Committee to pass the amendment.

The Premier: The Commonwealth authorities would not agree to it.

Amendment put and negatived.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 6—Term "owner" in Roads Act not to extend to Agricultural Bank:

Mr. THOMSON: Will the roads board have to lose the whole of the rates which have accrued on the property, or will the man who buys the land from the Agricultural Bank have to pay the accrued rates?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: In the case of indifferently improved land forfeited to us, we hold that we should not be compelled to pay the rates; and we desire also to protect against the payment of roads board rates; the man who takes over the land. The bank should not be made responsible for the payment of rates on every block that comes into its hands. Still we have no wish to deprive the roads board of any revenue to which the board is entitled.

Clause put and passed.

Title—agreed to.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Bill reported without amendment; and the report adopted.

House adjourned at 10.24 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 31st January, 1917.

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

QUESTION—WAR LOAN, SUBSCRIPTIONS BY LOCAL GOVERNING BODIES.

Mr. CARPENTER asked the Premier: 1, Has his attention been called to the fact that local government bodies in Great Britain are subscribing to the British War Loan? 2, Does he favour the granting of similar powers to municipalities and roads boards in this State to enable them to subscribe to Australian war loans should they so desire? 3, If so, will he introduce the necessary legislation?

The PREMIER replied: 1, No. 2 and 3, Under our laws local authorities have no power to invest their funds, their functions being limited to the raising of sufficient revenue from the ratepayers for the ratepayers' requirements only. I am not aware of any local authorities having funds for investment, and at the present juncture I can see no necessity for an alteration to our laws in this regard.

QUESTION—AGRICULTURAL ROYAL COMMISSION, COST.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON asked the Minister for Industries: 1, What has been the total cost up to date of the Agricultural Commission, including fees, travelling expenses, railway fares and freights, motor hire, etc.? 2, Is it expected that this average will be maintained until the Commission leave for the East. If not, what will the cost be? 3, What is the estimated cost of the Eastern trip?