

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 26th September, 1956.

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

QUESTIONS.

HOSPITALS.

Contributions by Country Local Authorities.

Hon. A. F. WATTS asked the Minister for Health:

(1) Is the Government now asking country local authorities to make a contribution of one-third or some other fraction to the cost of erection of, or additions to, country hospitals?

(2) If so, when was it decided to reinstate this system which was abandoned by the previous Government?

(3) Has it also been decided to ask for a contribution from metropolitan local authorities towards cost of additions to, or erections of, hospitals in the metropolitan area?

(4) If not, why not; and how does he justify the differentiation in these two cases?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) and (2) It is still Government policy to provide the whole of the cost of major hospital construction in accordance with priorities and as loan funds become available.

In several country districts hospital boards and local authorities have realised that, because of the shortage of loan funds, there is little likelihood of additions to hospitals in their areas being proceeded with in the near future and have decided to raise money with the hope that local effort will be subsidised on a £ for £ basis by the Lotteries Commission and the Government.

(3) and (4) No local authority has been advised that it is required to find any money towards the cost of hospital buildings. Where a local authority indicates its interest or enthusiasm to assist in hospital construction, the Government will encourage it to do so as far as practicable.

STATE PUBLIC SERVICE.

Christmas and New Year Holidays.

Mr. HEAL asked the Minister for Labour:

Can he indicate the holidays that will be granted by the State Public Service Commissioner for the following periods—

- (a) Christmas holidays, 1956;
- (b) New Year holidays, 1957?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (for the Minister for Labour) replied:

Holidays are not granted by the State Public Service Commissioner, but Section 57 of the Public Service Act provides that the following days shall be public service holidays throughout the service:

- (1) Christmas Day (the 25th December, 1956—Tuesday), the 26th December (Wednesday — Boxing Day).
- (2) New Year's Day (Tuesday, the 1st January, 1957).

Section 57 also provides for Public Service holidays on all days which the Governor may appoint; and with the approval of Cabinet His Excellency to Lieut-Governor and Administrator has appointed the following additional days:

- (1) Monday, the 24th December, 1956.
- (2) Monday, the 31st December, 1956.

TRAFFIC.

Accidents Caused by Pedestrians.

Mr. JOHNSON asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) In the analysis of the causes of fatal accidents, what proportion is blamed upon pedestrians?

(2) What proportion of prosecutions under the Traffic Act is against pedestrians?

(3) Does it appear that, in the interest of pedestrians, a stricter application of traffic regulations to pedestrians would reduce the number of accidents occurring to this group?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Thirty-five per cent., being averaged over the past three years.

(2) Less than 1 per cent.

(3) The answers to questions Nos. (1) and (2) would indicate that stricter observance of traffic regulations could prevent fatalities involving pedestrians.

The statistical returns for the twelve months ended the 30th June, 1956, show that of 32 pedestrians killed, 19 were either walking or running across a roadway, and four were passing behind or in front of a vehicle.

It is virtually impossible to control that type of movement, particularly as the majority of these accidents occur outside the city area.

The majority of these fatal accidents involve elderly people of over 60 years of age, or young children under seven.

FORESTS.

Albany Pine Planting Experiment.

Mr. HALL asked the Minister for Forests:

Would his department be prepared to experiment with pine planting six miles to the south of Albany harbour and along the coast line running north-east from Emu Point?

The MINISTER replied:

Such experiments do not appear to be justified at present. The Forests Department is, however, watching closely the results being obtained by Mr. Menegola in a private pine plantation on the Kalgan River.

RAILWAYS.

(a) Sleeper Passengers on Albany Line.

Mr. HALL asked the Minister representing the Minister for Railways:

(1) What were the number of first class sleeper travellers from Perth to Albany and Albany to Perth for 1954-1955 and 1955-1956?

(2) What were the number of second class sleeper travellers for the same period?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT replied:

(1) First class—

	1954-55	1955-56
Perth-Albany	1764	1381
Albany-Perth	1303	1238

(2) Second class—

Perth-Albany	3687	3299
Albany-Perth	2707	2731

(b) Collie Marshalling Yards and New Bridge.

Mr. MAY asked the Minister representing the Minister for Railways:

(1) Is the marshalling yards project at Collie to be proceeded with as a whole, so as to enable the present loco building to be removed?

(2) If the loco building is to be removed, when will steps be taken to commence the work on the proposed new overhead bridge?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT replied:

The marshalling yard project is in abeyance but work on the new locomotive depot is proceeding and is planned to be completed this financial year. When the new locomotive depot comes into use and the present depot is discontinued, the proposed new bridge could be built. The building of the bridge will be contingent upon the availability of funds.

WOOL SALES.

Albany Date and Information on Venue.

Mr. HALL asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Will wool sales be held at Albany late this year or early 1957?

(2) Will he supply information as to name of the lessee and the conditions of lease of the Commonwealth building constructed for wool sales?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No decision has yet been made.

(2) The building has been leased by the Commonwealth to the State Government, and, in turn, sublet to Albany Wool Stores Pty. Ltd. Both lease and sublease, which express the conditions, are lengthy documents, which can be made available to the hon. member for perusal, if he so desires.

ROADS.

Reconstruction of Guildford-rd.

Mr. TOMS asked the Minister for Works:

(1) What is the total length of works (road and drainage) proposed to be done in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Guildford-rd?

(2) What distance has been completed?

(3) Is it proposed to carry out further works on this project during the year 1956-57?

(4) If the answer to No. (3) is "Yes", to what extent and where?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Walcott-st., Mt. Lawley, to Johnson-st., Guildford (6½ miles) in stages consistent with the amount of funds made available from time to time.

	miles
(2) Ninth Avenue, Maylands to Slade-st., Bayswater	1.55
Kennedy-st. to Briggs-st., Bassendean ....	.55
Total	2.10

(3) Yes.

	mile
(4) First Avenue-Central Avenue, Maylands ....	.4
Slade-st.-Katanning-st., Bayswater (Whatley deviation) ....	.6
Total	1.0

LONG SERVICE LEAVE.

Legislative Provision for Private Employees.

Mr. EVANS asked the Minister for Labour:

(1) In what States is legislation now operating, providing long service leave for employees of private industry?

(2) What was the latest State to grant such long service leave and when?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (for the Minister for Labour) replied:

- (1) New South Wales.
Queensland.
Victoria.
Tasmania.

(2) Tasmania. The Act was assented to in May, 1956.

VERMIN.

Yearly Rate Since 1945.

Mr. BOVELL asked the Treasurer:

What was the total revenue from the vermin rate for each year from the 1st July, 1945, to the 30th June, 1956?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (for the Treasurer) replied:

	£
1945-46	22,834
1946-47	23,091
1947-48	30,859
1948-49	36,169
1949-50	35,547
1950-51	37,673
1951-52	38,954
1952-53	63,230
1953-54	72,983
1954-55	79,437
1955-56	87,919

EDUCATION.

Additions to Collie High School.

Mr. MAY asked the Minister for Education:

Is he in a position to say what proposed additions will be carried out at the Collie High School during the present financial year?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (for the Minister for Education) replied:

The carrying out of additions to any school is entirely dependent on the amount of loan funds available.

DRAINAGE.

Cheetara Area at Collie.

Mr. MAY asked the Minister for Water Supplies:

Has any finality been reached in regard to the drainage of the Cheetara area at Collie, in conjunction with the State Housing Commission, the Collie Coalfields Road Board and the Public Works Department?

The MINISTER replied:

No.

WATER SUPPLIES.

(a) Kalamunda Scheme.

Mr. OWEN asked the Minister for Water Supplies:

(1) What amount has been allocated out of loan funds for work on the Kalamunda water supply during this financial year?

(2) When is it likely that work will be resumed on this project?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The loan programme for this financial year has not yet been finalised.

(2) Answered by No. (1).

(b) Midland and Wongan Line Areas Scheme.

Hon. D. BRAND asked the Minister for Water Supplies:

(1) What progress can he report on the provision of a comprehensive water scheme to serve the Midland and Wongan line areas?

(2) What proposals has the Government for the provision of the necessary water supply for such a scheme?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Investigations covering the following are still in course:—

- (a) Gingin Brook as a possible source of supply;
(b) other possible sources of supply;
(c) present and future district requirements.

(2) Use of water from Gingin Brook, augmented by any suitable local supply, is being considered.

NARROWS BRIDGE.

Cost of Work.

Hon. D. BRAND asked the Minister for Works:

(1) What sum of money has been spent in connection with the Narrows bridge on—

- (a) reclamation and filling;
- (b) preliminary tests;
- (c) any other works;
- (d) total spent to date?

(2) What is the estimated cost of all other intended associated work with the bridge (including road approaches)?

(3) From what fund is payment being made for this work?

The MINISTER replied:

	£
(1) (a) Reclamation	130,000
(b) Preliminary tests	45,000
(c) Any other works—	
Land resumptions	9,000
(d) Total expenditure	£184,000

(2) Round figure estimates of work associated with the construction of the Narrows bridge would be:—

	£
Narrows bridge	1,750,000
Road from the Narrows bridge to Canning Highway, including resumptions, reclamation, subways and improvements at Canning Bridge	1,000,000
North side of Narrows bridge reclamation, roadways, and fringe park	750,000
Total	£3,500,000

(3) Current work is being financed from petrol funds.

MIDLAND JUNCTION ABATTOIR BOARD.

Tabling of Minutes and Correspondence.

Mr. NALDER asked the Minister for Agriculture:

Will he table minutes of meetings and all correspondence outward and inward of the Midland Junction Abattoir Board for the 12 months ended the 31st August, 1956?

The MINISTER replied:

Minutes as requested.

The request for all correspondence over a twelve-months period, involving the private and confidential business of possibly hundreds of people, is unreasonable.

I suggest the hon. member ask specific questions to elicit the information he requires.

CATTLE T.B. TESTING SCHEME.

Administration, Compensation and Contributions.

Mr. I. W. MANNING asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) What has been the cost of the administration of the dairy cattle t.b. testing scheme for the following years:—1951, 1952, 1953, 1954 and 1955?

(2) What amount of money has been paid out in compensation for the years 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954 and 1955?

(3) What sum of money was contributed by dairymen to the scheme for the years 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954 and 1955?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The dairy cattle t.b. testing scheme comes under the general administration of the Milk Board which pays a fixed annual sum of £2,500 to the Department of Agriculture towards the cost of testing. It has recently been estimated that the cost of testing by departmental officers involves an annual expenditure of approximately £3,600.

(2) The following amounts of compensation were paid by the Milk Board:—

Year ended the 30th June.	
1951	14,609
1952	6,757
1953	6,210
1954	7,410
1955	6,570
1956	8,180

(3) Contributions by dairymen were as follows:—

Year ended the 30th June.	
1951	9,532
1952	9,316
*1953	5,985
*1954	3,587
*1955	2,373
*1956	1,894

*rate reduced.

IRON ORE DEPOSITS.

Control by Broken Hill Pty. Co. Ltd.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY asked the Minister for Mines:

On the 13th September, 1956, in reply to a parliamentary question the Minister for Education, for the Minister for Mines, stated "The best three iron ore deposits, namely Koolan Island, Cockatoo Island, and Koolyanobbing, are under the control of Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited, by virtue of the provisions of the Broken Hill Pty. Steel Industry Act, 1952"; on the 19th September, 1956, in reply to a parliamentary question, he stated: "This company (i.e., Broken Hill Pty. Co. Ltd.) has no rights over iron deposits in Western

In view of the apparent conflict between the above two statements, will he inform the House as to the exact position regarding iron ore deposits endowed to the company referred to?

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

The Broken Hill Proprietary Steel Industry Agreement Act reserves the iron deposits at Koolyanobbing within temporary reserve 1258H for a period of 10 years from the passing of the Act. The Minister may remove from mining reserve number 1258H at any time and from time to time during the period, an amount of ore not exceeding fifty thousand tons in any one year.

The Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited has been granted the rights to iron ore deposits on the islands at Yampi Sound by the agreement which was ratified by the Act.

SHOW WEEK.

Sittings of the House.

Hon. A. F. WATTS (without notice) asked the Minister for Works:

Has the Government decided what sittings of the House will take place during Show Week? If so, will he advise the House; if not, will he take steps to ascertain a decision and advise the House as early as possible?

The MINISTER replied:

A decision has not yet been made. Very early consideration will be given to the question and the House will be advised of the result.

BILL (3)—FIRST READING.

- 1, Traffic Act Amendment (No. 2).
- 2, Criminal Code Amendment (No. 2).
Introduced by Mr. Oldfield.
- 3, City of Perth Scheme for Superannuation (Amendments Authorisation).

Introduced by Mr. Heal.

MOTION—CARE OF WARBURTON RANGE NATIVES.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

MR. GRAYDEN (South Perth) [4.47]:
I move—

That a select committee be appointed to inquire into all matters appertaining to the health and general welfare of, and future plans for, the aborigines in the Laverton-Warburton Range area.

At the outset may I say that I do not wish to imply any criticism of the Minister for Native Welfare who is charged with the administration of native welfare matters in this State. Everyone on this side of the House will concede that the Minister is kindly disposed to the natives in Western Australia and he will undoubtedly carry on in an extremely able way the work of his predecessor, the present Minister for Education. The Minister, however, has only held office for a few months. During that time I understand that he visited almost every mission in the North-West, and I understand also that it is his intention very shortly to visit the Warburton mission with a view to becoming familiar with the position of the natives in that area.

The native problem in Western Australia is extremely complex and difficult and the Minister will have all his available time occupied in attending to the routine day-to-day administration of the department. He certainly will not have the time to carry out a detailed survey in connection with the matters I want to raise this afternoon, which are really peculiar to the natives in the Warburton area. These are the main reasons why I am asking for the appointment of a select committee.

Successive Governments in this State have always, as far as possible, practised a policy of non-interference where bush natives have been concerned; but during the last few months, in the area to which I refer, that policy has been departed from. We have interfered with the way of life of the natives there, and are making no attempt to provide them with a satisfactory alternative way of life. Since the atom bomb experiments at Maralinga are to a large extent responsible for this interference with the way of life of the natives, the responsibility for providing a satisfactory alternative mode of existence for them must be shared by the Commonwealth Government. We in this State are therefore in a position to ask that the Commonwealth provide finance for the welfare work which has now become necessary largely as a consequence of those experiments.

In addition, the Native Welfare Department has in hand plans to remove all the children of school age from the Warburton Ranges area, without the consent of the parents, and to take them 400 miles away across an area most of which is barren, waterless country, to Cosmo Newbery, the parents being left in the ranges. This enforced separation of children and parents, particularly having regard to the other circumstances obtaining, is a violation of human rights which I believe is without parallel in this State. It is certainly contrary to Labour principles, and therefore to the policy of the present Government. It is contrary to the United Australia other than those which cover deposits at Koolan and Cockatoo Islands."

Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Those, then are the main reasons why I believe a select committee should make an inquiry into the state of affairs which exists in the area referred to.

May I say very briefly, for the benefit of members, that this area is about 400 miles east of Laverton and about 150 miles from the South Australian border. There is some dissension as to the number of natives in the area. In reply to a question which I asked the Minister recently, it was stated that in the Warburton area there were 400 to 500 full-blood natives; and, at Laverton, between 150 and 200. In other words, the total in the two areas was between 550 and 700. There is some divergence of opinion about that, because the missionaries at the Warburton mission state that at least 800 full-blood natives visit the mission each year. In addition, there are quite a number at Laverton.

I would like to say, also extremely briefly, that these natives are living in their natural conditions. They exist on the little game to be found in that area and the nuts and a few lizards and such like that are available. The bulk of the natives are living the way of life they have led for generation after generation. But in the last 20 years we have had the mission at Warburton Ranges which has provided for the children and for indigent natives—people too old and infirm to find an existence elsewhere. In other words, these natives are virtually untouched and receive no assistance at all from the Government, except the children and the indigent ones.

They have existed on this native reserve which is extremely big and is adjacent to the Western Australian, South Australian and Northern Territory borders. In the past we have practised a policy of non-interference with them. I think every member will agree that that is far better than going out and interfering with the way of life of the natives, unless we are prepared to offer something which is, without question, better. That has been our excuse for failure to provide medical attention and that sort of thing. But at least we have had the excuse that we have let them be until such time as we were really prepared whole-heartedly to do something for them.

That has been the policy of successive Governments. But in the last few months, there has been considerable interference with the natives' mode of existence. For instance, the Commonwealth Government has asked that a large area—more than 250,000 acres—of the Warburton native reserve be ceded to the Commonwealth in order that it might establish a weather station and use it for other purposes. In reply to a question, the Minister for Native Welfare said:

No area has yet been excised for Commonwealth defence purposes. Application was made for approximately

285,000 acres and the request is receiving the consideration of the Lands Department and the Commonwealth Property Office. The Native Welfare Department has concurred in the excision.

Possibly, from the natives' point of view, this area is the most suitable in the whole of the Warburton native reserve.

The Rawlinson Range area up North is barren sandy country into which the natives seldom venture. At Sladen Waters, the area taken up by the Commonwealth, there is a regular water supply and a reasonable amount of game. The Commonwealth decided to establish its weather station there for those reasons—that it is a picturesque spot; that there is an assured water supply; and that there is a plentiful supply of game offering recreation for the people who will be stationed there. This area is possibly the only one in the northern part of the reserve which is of any consequence to the natives in the Warburton Range reserve but it has been virtually ceded to the Commonwealth. If that has not already been done, it is going to be.

Recently we had an opportunity of visiting the Warburton mission and the natives there were extremely concerned with a shooting they alleged had taken place at the weather station. They had left in a great hurry and travelled in a few days to the mission. They alleged that some natives were more or less encouraged to hang around the station and one either stole or borrowed a razor and, when he returned it, was shot. They gave various details and explained how the shooting took place. However, the brother is supposed to be at the Warburton mission.

The missionaries are extremely concerned with this because the report—whether it had any foundation or not—broke down the confidence the missionaries had established with the natives over a period of 20 years. They were most reluctant to wire Laverton and advise the Western Australian Police Department of the shooting because they realised that Giles was only 200 miles away and that they listened to these reports on the air and so would be prepared for any investigation. The Warburton missionaries said that the natives in the camp near the mission station waited for several days as a consequence of the shooting and that fact, more than any other, convinced the missionaries that the shooting had taken place.

Also, a native woman at the mission was said to have had shots fired near her and another native was told that if he did not get out of the area by the following Sunday, which happened to be two days later, he would be shot. So there was a mass exodus of natives on the Warburton reserve from this area of the Giles weather

station to the Warburton mission. The result is that natives will certainly be most reluctant to go back to that particular area. Whether the Commonwealth is prepared to allow them to go back is of no consequence because the natives are too frightened to go back in any case.

I leave that particular area, which has been taken from the Warburton reserve and shall return to another area which has been applied for by a mining company. This company has applied for 4,798,700 acres and wishes to search for nickel. It is a South Australian company, apparently, and it has come across the border and has applied for an area just east of the Warburton Ranges. When asked what area the company applied for, the Minister emphasised that the natives would not be deprived of the use of the area and I am quite convinced that that was the intention when the Government agreed to allow this prospecting area to be given to this company. But the fact is that these natives are living in the primitive state and they are extremely cautious even under normal conditions.

During normal times it has been possible to travel over that area and see fires on the horizon. But when one drives over to them one might see a few spears or a couple of puppies, or something like that, in the native camp; but nothing else. There are no natives about but if one has natives in the party they will call to these other natives who are obviously in the area and they will emerge from behind trees or sand dunes. As I have just said, even under normal circumstances, it is almost impossible to contact these natives but with the shooting which is alleged to have occurred at Giles they will obviously not go anywhere near this prospecting area. I would say that if the area which has been ceded to the Commonwealth, or which is about to be ceded to it, is the best area for natives in the Warburton reserve, then the area which has been giving to this mining company is the second best.

Now I wish to discuss the question of the atomic tests which are taking place at Maralinga. I do not think for one minute that anyone would suggest that these tests should not be carried out. Everyone will agree that they should be carried out, but I think that they will agree also that if they interfere with the natives' way of life, we have a clear obligation to provide those natives with an alternative way of life.

During the Address-in-reply debate, I took the opportunity of pointing out the concern that some people have for the natives as a result of what might happen following these A-bomb tests. The reason I mentioned the matter was because in "The West Australian," at about that time, a statement was published giving details of the proposed tests. One of the statements, which was more or less official, was that perfect weather for the Maralinga

firing would require a wind to take the radio-active cloud into the uninhabited inland or out to sea.

Subsequently I asked the Minister for Native Welfare some questions on that aspect, and they read—

(1) Is the Maralinga testing site sufficiently close to the South Australian-Western Australian border to constitute a danger to nomadic natives on the Western Australian side of the border?

(2) If the answer to No. (1) is "Yes," what precautions are being taken to ensure that nomadic natives are completely cleared from the danger area?

(3) If precautions are being taken, does he feel that such precautions are adequate?

(4) In view of the fact that natives from the Warburton area frequently journey well into South Australia, what precautions are being taken to ensure that they do not enter the danger zone after the tests have been completed until the area is deemed safe for them to do so?

The Minister replied as follows:—

(1) No.

(2) No nomadic natives are or will be in the danger area. A native affairs officer has been given assistance in patrols and staff and keeps continuously in touch with tribes to ensure that they do not enter the danger area.

(3) Yes.

(4) Constant ground and air patrols will ensure that nomadic natives do not enter the danger area after the tests are completed or enter areas of low level radio activity until it is safe for them to do so. The Australian Atomic Weapons Tests Safety Committee has made a special study of the problem of natives and is taking particular steps to ensure that they are not exposed at any time to harmful radiation.

I think that the Commonwealth could, and should, have come out in the open and simply said that these atomic tests are not on a scale which will constitute any danger to the natives; because I believe that is the position. If it is not the position, then all the replies to the questions that I have asked are, to say the least, extremely misleading. We have had assurances from the Commonwealth, through the Minister for Native Welfare, that this area has been thoroughly patrolled. But I found, on going to the mission, that there is one Commonwealth patrol officer in the area and he is stationed at the weather station at Giles.

His area covers a large portion of the Northern Territory, the portion of Western Australia affected by the trials, or which

could be affected by them, and a large portion of South Australia. As a consequence it is completely and utterly hopeless for him to attempt to contact any natives other than those who are hanging around, or who were hanging around the Giles weather station, at the Warburton mission or other points of civilisation in that area.

We have had assurances that this officer has cleared the danger area and yet we read in tonight's paper that within 10 miles of Maralinga two parties have been lost in the last few days. This report in tonight's "Daily News" reads—

Twice in the past week men have been lost in the saltbush desert near Maralinga village. On Sunday night an R.A.F. leading aircraftsman went for a walk in the bush and had not returned by nightfall. When a ground search failed to find him by midnight, a searchlight was mounted on the village water tower. The L.A.C. saw the light, hiked back with apologies, "Sorry, hope I haven't inconvenienced anyone."

The following night two scientists with an Army driver in a radio-equipped jeep went to inspect a saltpan 10 miles away. The radio became unserviceable as night fell. An all night search failed to find them, so a helicopter was called in at dawn. The missing men had lit fires and were seen from the air.

Those are two happenings within a few miles of the Maralinga testing site. The Warburton mission is possibly 300, 400 or more miles north of that area. These people who were lost at Maralinga were trying to re-establish contact, but the natives are going out of their way to avoid that contact. What chance would anyone have of clearing natives from thousands of square miles of country.

The patrol officer went to the Warburton mission last May and he told the natives there not to go east of the mission and he told others to go back to Cosmo Newbery. As a result of these warning, the natives have tended to hang around the Warburton mission. Some have disobeyed the warnings and have gone out into parts which are apparently in the danger area. Others, even those at Cosmo Newbery are extremely concerned lest this atomic bomb be dropped near them. They have not the foggiest idea who is dropping the bomb; they seem to think that some other country is doing it and to try to convince them that the Australian Government is dropping a bomb for testing purposes is almost hopeless. The point is that many of these natives have completely ignored these warnings and the patrol officer has made no real attempt to warn them.

These are some of the instances of the interference which has taken places as far as these natives are concerned. All this has happened on the Warburton

native reserve, an area which we have set aside for natives to occupy in the same way as their forefathers had lived for ages.

There is another feature too. The Native Welfare Department has suddenly decided to remove all the children from the Warburton mission and take them to Cosmo Newbery. This is because the department feels that after their education has been completed, they will have greater opportunities for employment at Cosmo Newbery. The position at Warburton is this: The mission educates the children up to the age of about 14 years and after that they have no means of providing employment. In addition, under the present Native Welfare Act, they are prohibited from giving the natives rations in return for labour and they certainly have not the funds to pay their wages. As a consequence, all the mission's assistance stops when the natives leave school and does not commence again unless or until the natives are incapacitated or become too old to work.

The position at Cosmo Newbery, however, is certainly not much better because there is a great number of natives—and always has been—unable to obtain work in the Cosmo-Newbery-Laverton area. I cannot understand why the Native Welfare Department believes for one minute that when these children are educated they will then be able to find work in the Laverton area.

The Department of Native Welfare has virtually said to the missions, "Notwithstanding the fact that you have been in that area for 20 years, we are not going to permit you to do anything for the welfare of the natives. We will allow you to carry on providing for their spiritual welfare but not for their physical welfare." This mission was founded 20 years ago by the missionaries under great difficulties. There were several camel expeditions to establish the missions and some of the missionaries on those expeditions nearly perished.

The missions received no assistance from the Government until after the last war. Since the war the Department of Native Welfare has given them rations for the old people and a ration subsidy for the children. Five years ago the Government assisted them on a £ for £ basis in buying a truck. Last July the Government offered to subsidise the cost of goods transported from Laverton to this mission on that truck at 1s. a mile.

Notwithstanding the fact that they have existed until the last war without any Government assistance at all, and have provided the only aid the natives on the Warburton reserve ever received, the department has said, "You must cease all this welfare work and send all the children and indigent natives to Cosmo Newbery. You can stay at Warburton only on sufferance and attend to the spiritual needs of

the natives." Members may recall that I asked the following question of the Minister for Native Welfare:—

(1) Is there any substance in the reports that the Government intends to move all natives in the Warburton area to Cosmo Newbery, near Laverton; and if not, will any natives be required to go to Cosmo Newbery?

(2) Is any large scale change in Government policy contemplated in respect of the natives in the Warburton area?

The replies given by the Minister were as follows:—

(1) and (2) Children and indigent natives now at the Warburton Ranges United Aborigines Mission will be transferred to Cosmo Newbery United Aborigines Mission as proper facilities at the latter can be prepared. The Mission Council has agreed to this change in the interests of the natives.

The Warburton Ranges area provides no economic outlet for the children now being educated there, whilst at Cosmo Newbery there is ample scope for educational and training facilities, with avenues of gainful employment and integration into the Australian way of life.

Subsequently I asked another question, namely—

(1) Does the Department of Native Welfare intend that the Warburton mission should continue to endeavour to provide for the spiritual and physical welfare of the natives in the area, or is it the intention of the department that the mission should confine itself to religious work and that the welfare work should be the responsibility of missions closer to Laverton.

(2) If the answer to the above question is "Yes," what are the reasons for the new policy?

The replies I received were—

(1) The United Aborigines Mission Council has indicated its intention to maintain a spiritual service to natives in the Warburton area. The welfare of the children and adult indigents can be more satisfactorily attended at Cosmo Newbery mission.

(2) Cosmo Newbery mission provides a better scope for educational and training facilities for children with avenues of gainful employment.

The main point that arises from these questions is that the missionaries and the others at the Warburton reserve have been told that they must cease the work they have been doing for 20 years under the most difficult conditions, because the Department of Native Welfare is going to look after all the natives who, in its opinion, require that attention, at Cosmo

Newbery. The able-bodied adult natives will be left at the Warburton mission. There is no doubt that the department is going to compel all the children of school age to go to Cosmo Newbery. The missionaries have been told that they will have to go and it is apparent that the Department of Native Welfare cannot get the native children by any other means.

At the present time, notwithstanding the fact that their parents are in the vicinity, the greatest difficulty is experienced in keeping the children at the mission school. In any large group of natives one comes across in that country, one usually finds one or two children who have been taken away from the Warburton mission by their parents and have been kept in the bush to ensure that they do not go to school. What chance has the Department of Native Welfare of getting those native children to go 400 miles. Cosmo Newbery is outside their tribal boundary and usually the penalty for natives crossing the boundary is death at the hands of the adjacent tribes.

The department has directed that no welfare work shall be carried out at the Warburton mission. If any children are to remain there, surely they would not be left without rations or without educational facilities or that sort of thing. So it is quite apparent that it is the intention of the Department of Native Welfare to make a clean sweep and to compel children of school age to go to the Cosmo Newbery mission. Another fact that makes it obvious that there is no intention of taking the parents is that no facilities are provided for the parents at Cosmo Newbery, and no assistance is given by the Government to adult natives.

I repeat that I am convinced the Minister has not had time to look into this matter, and it is the Commissioner of Native Affairs who intends to take these children and exile them 400 miles away across this barren, waterless country at Cosmo Newbery. This is to be done under the powers given the commissioner by the present Native Welfare Act. Section 8 of that Act reads as follows:—

The commissioner shall be the legal guardian of every native child notwithstanding that the child has a parent or other relative living, until such child attains the age of 21 years except while the child is a ward according to the interpretation given to that expression by section four of the Child Welfare Act, 1947; and the commissioner may, from time to time direct what person is to have the custody of a native child of whom he is the legal guardian, and his direction has effect according to its tenor.

Section 69 of that Act provides—

The Governor may make regulations for all or any of the matters following, (that is to say):—

- (c) Providing for the care, custody and education of the children of natives;
- (d) enabling any native child to be sent to and detained in a native institution, industrial school or orphanage;
- (e) for the control, care, and education of natives in native institutions, and for the supervision of native institutions.
- (f) prescribing the conditions on which any native children may be apprenticed to or placed in service with suitable persons.

Obviously the Commissioner of Native Affairs has power under the present Act to ensure that all children of school age are taken away from the natives in the Warburton reserve and sent to the mission at Cosmo Newbery. I would like to point out, however, that this was never the intention of that Act. The following section was originally inserted in the Aborigines Act of 1905:—

The Chief Protector shall be the legal guardian of every aboriginal and half-caste child until such child attains the age of 16 years

In 1911 that section was amended and the following words were added:—

To the exclusion of the rights of the mother of an illegitimate child.

In 1936 the section was again amended to read—

The commissioner shall be the legal guardian of every aboriginal and half caste child notwithstanding that the child has a parent or other relative living until such child attains the age of 21 years.

Recently, in 1954, another provision was added but that portion of the section remained the same. I want to emphasise that when that section was amended in 1936 the intention of the Government of the day was that power should only be used in isolated and particular cases. For instance, when the Minister introduced the Bill he made no reference to that particular section, but the late Mr. Coverley, who was then member for Kimberley and who was the main supporting speaker from the Government side, had this to say in Vol. 2, page 2376 of Hansard of 1936—

The Bill also proposes to give power to the department to take charge of all the natives in the State until they reach the age of 21 years. I suppose in that the Bill is like other laws; there are special occasions when the Chief Administrator will want that

power in order that he may take control of certain coloured children. At first reading, it appeared to me to be harsh treatment that any person should have the power to take charge of children irrespective of the opinions or wishes of the parents; because, after all the aborigines have just as much affection for their offspring as have the people of any other race.

On reading the commissioner's report I found that the commissioner had recommended to the Government that an institution should be provided for the care of half-caste and quadroon children. If the Government has any intention of carrying out the Royal Commissioner's recommendation, this proposed power will be necessary so that the Chief Protector can take charge of children and place them in an institution where they will be educated and taught to be useful. So I am prepared to support that amendment. Like most other members I could quote many instances where there are half-castes married and living under decent conditions. Of course they should not be interfered with

But I know the Chief Protector has had considerable trouble in trying to remove children who were living in very bad environment. He has taken them away and placed them in institutions if we are to do anything by way of uplifting the half-castes and improving them, it will be necessary for the Chief Protector to have this power to be used in certain circumstances.

So it is obvious that the provision was placed in the Native Administration Act to be used in extreme cases and particularly in relation to half castes. It was never intended that the Commissioner of Native Welfare should go into a native reserve and take all the children of school age away from the area while leaving their parents, and exile those children at a place separated from their tribal grounds by country which, in normal circumstances, they could never hope to traverse.

I think members will appreciate the position of these children. They are educated at the mission, and unquestionably that is in their interest, but many of them take every opportunity to get away from the mission school. What are the reactions of these children going to be when they are taken away from their parents, and are sent 400 miles away from them until they reach 21 years of age, when they will be required to work on stations in the vicinity? In other words, they will not see their parents again unless they are prepared to walk 400 miles back to the mission.

This enforced separation of the children from their parents is contrary to the universal declaration of human rights which

has been agreed to by the United Nations Council, and of which Australia is a signatory nation. There are several articles in that Declaration of Human Rights which are relevant to this case and I will take this opportunity of reading them. Article 2 reads—

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status . . .

Article 3 reads—

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.

Article 5—

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 9—

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 12—

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 25—

Clause (2).—Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26—

Clause (3).—Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

The action of the Native Welfare Department in taking these children away from their parents—400 miles away—is completely contrary to the spirit of all these articles of this universal Declaration of Human Rights. Whilst on this subject, I shall give Webster's Dictionary definition as to what is "exile." The definition is as follows:—

Banishment; the state of being expelled from one's native country or place of residence by authority, and forbidden to return, either for a limited time or for life.

To banish, as a person from his country or from a particular jurisdiction, by authority, with a prohibition of return, either for a limited time or for life; to drive away, expel, or transport from one's country.

In other words, it is quite clear that these children are being sent into exile.

However, what is the position of the parents? Firstly, they are to have all of their children taken away. Then they will have to live on the Warburton native reserve and be deprived of the few services which the Warburton mission had supplied to them in the past. The parents of those children and every other able bodied native will be left on the reserve to fend for themselves. There is no permanent water on that reserve, and they will be constantly travelling from one small water hole to another in order to survive. In addition, there is practically no game on account of there being no permanent water supply.

No attempt is to be made to give them any medical attention, yet there are blind people, cripples and people in great numbers who require dental assistance. For many years, one of the missionaries extracted teeth at the mission without any anaesthetic. The only experience this missionary had was given him by a city dentist with whom he conferred for an hour. He told the dentist that he lived in an isolated place and asked if he could be shown how to extract teeth. The dentist showed him and he has been extracting teeth at the mission since it was founded until recently. The adult natives will get no assistance of any kind, even though their children will have been taken away from them.

We always raise the question of decentralisation and say, "Populate our remote areas." Yet we are taking these people away from their own country, country which they like and to which they are accustomed and acclimatised. They are to be virtually dumped on the rubbish tips of Laverton and other mining towns in that area. We are going to put them on the labour market at Laverton. The Native Welfare Department has said the parents can follow the children if they can or want to, but there is nothing there for them. They are not going to get any assistance from the Cosmo Newbery or Mt. Margaret missions or anyone else. They will be, as I say, dumped on the rubbish tips of Laverton.

There is also the question of assimilation. I do not think everybody agrees with that policy. It has repeatedly been shown that these natives possess certain qualities which our white race does not, such as more recuperative powers. They can have their skin burned from their backs or their heads split open in tribal fights, and their wounds will heal within a few days. It could well be that these powers which they possess in that direction alone could be of benefit to medical science and mankind in the future, providing this race is preserved. Surely at this stage we could preserve a small pocket until we know more about assimilation. We go out of our way to protect a rare bird, so why not go out of our way to preserve natives in a small pocket, particularly as they may have something to offer to humanity later on?

What are the alternatives to this proposal which has been made by the Native Welfare Department? Firstly, we could, if we wanted to, do something for the natives in the Warburton reserve in order to preserve them in their natural state. We could provide water catchments or wells in order to supply them with permanent water, which in turn would attract game. We could also provide them with medical attention. These would be the basic requirements but, if we wanted to, we could go further. We could do what is being done in the Northern Territory, where all natives out of work are supplied with the essentials of life. They obtain issues of rations and clothing.

Men receive four issues of clothing per year and the women six, and these issues are quite generous. The men receive trousers and shirts, jerseys and overcoats, and blankets, while the women receive dresses, jerseys, handkerchiefs, towels, calico and blankets. The experience in the Northern Territory has been that to issue natives with this clothing encourages assimilation, and the bulk of the natives keep their clothes scrupulously clean. Children are also issued with clothing and blankets. All natives in the Northern Territory are issued with food.

The Native Welfare Department reimburses pastoralists for any natives living on stations but not working. The amounts are £1 6s. 11d. per week for an adult and 14s. 9d. per week for a child. In other words, if of 15 natives on a station two were working and receiving wages from the pastoralist, the balance would be provided for by the Government.

The Minister for Native Welfare: Which Government?

Mr. GRAYDEN: The funds are naturally paid by the Commonwealth Government.

The Minister for Native Welfare: That Government spends £1,000,000 on 4,000 natives while we spend £500,000 on 10,000 natives.

Mr. GRAYDEN: I agree. There are natives on one side of the border of the Warburton reserve receiving nothing from this Government or any previous Government because of lack of funds, but on the other side the natives in the Northern Territory are looked after in the fashion which I have described. In addition, they get free medical attention. The Native Welfare Department makes routine inspections of all natives several times a year. In addition, they have survey units which from time to time inquire into blindness, etc., and they also provide dental attention.

The native in the Northern Territory is even issued with false teeth if required. They are issued with artificial eyes, and wooden legs if necessary. There is no compulsion in regard to schooling such as we have in this State. Every child that goes to school goes with its mother's

approval and the mother is required to sign a form of consent before her child can go to school. If she cannot sign her name, she puts her mark on the paper.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! There is too much conversation going on.

Mr. GRAYDEN: In the Northern Territory the Native Welfare Department has reached agreement with the unions and has obtained the consent of these organisations to a lower standard for the natives so far as the various trades are concerned. In other words, if a native is serving a motor mechanic's apprenticeship, he does not have to do what a mechanic would do in a city such as Perth; and that applies to all the other trades. The unions there realise that the natives are only going to work in isolated areas and that they would not require the qualifications that tradesmen do in other parts of Australia.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: A lot of unions have that under-rate workers' clause in their awards.

Mr. GRAYDEN: That is the position there, and it has been found to be most satisfactory. That is an alternative plan, and another is this: For many years practically since the Warburton mission was founded—the missionaries have been endeavouring to establish a pastoral industry at the Warburton Ranges. They have a flock of sheep and the country is eminently suitable for pastoral pursuits. In addition, the natives are particularly keen on that type of work and it is the sort of industry that could be quite economically established out there. It would, therefore, seem a great mistake to require the mission to close down its work at this stage; on the contrary, it should be encouraged and assisted to build up the flock and, possibly by amendments to the Native Welfare Act, be enabled to give rations to the natives for the work done. That would enable the mission to sink bores and carry out other work necessary in the establishment of a pastoral industry.

It will be realised that at the Warburton Ranges no fences are necessary. The flock is simply let out each day and the natives shepherd the sheep, and each night the flock is brought back and put into a pen or yard to ensure that the sheep will not be molested by dingoes. Adequate water is available not far from the surface, and in every way the area is eminently suitable for the pastoral industry. It would seem, therefore, that the Government, rather than bring the children from the Warburton Ranges into Cosmo Newbery, should concentrate its efforts on establishing a pastoral industry in the Warburton Ranges as this would be much more satisfactory for all concerned.

I wish to touch on one other aspect and that is that under the Native Welfare Act the Commissioner of Native Welfare has certain powers to stamp out any practices

amongst the natives which are considered undesirable. Section 67 of the Act provides—

Whenever the Minister on the recommendation of the commissioner is of the opinion that any tribal practice of the natives or any section of the natives in any district is injurious to the natives or any section of the natives, he may give all such instructions as in his opinion are calculated to minimise or stamp out the practice.

All sorts of atrocities are being practised on the Warburton native reserve. Members may recall that a few weeks ago a native woman was taken from the mission to Laverton and thence to Kalgoorlie where she was charged before a resident magistrate with having tortured a baby. The facts were that a native woman had had a baby and she had then left the hospital at the Warburton mission and returned to the native camp fire from which she had come. She left the weeks-old baby with another woman for a few minutes, and when she came back the baby was obviously not well, and it died about 18 hours later.

Subsequently it was found that the woman with whom the baby had been left, had put a red-hot coal into the baby's mouth so that it could not be suckled by its mother and would eventually die of starvation. In addition, this particular woman had pressed a needle into the veins of the baby and, wherever the punctures showed, she had touched the skin with a red-hot stick and so had more or less covered up the wounds caused by the needle. The baby lived for about 18 hours before dying, because it could not be suckled by its mother.

This is not an isolated instance or something that happens only once in years. This particular practice is happening constantly at the mission and it springs from other days when the natives had to keep the population down. They practised, naturally, many methods of birth control, but, in addition, as the country was so impoverished that it would only support a certain number of natives, they also used the method that I have just described to control the growth of the coloured population.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: It is a pretty hard way of doing it.

Mr. GRAYDEN: Strangely enough, they think it is the kindest way. They will not kill the baby outright because they feel that if they do it this way the baby simply dies from natural causes. The Commissioner of Native Welfare has powers under the Act to prevent practices of that kind, but naturally they are extremely difficult to stamp out. A lot, however, can be done.

This woman was brought into Kalgoorlie, and was cautioned by the magistrate and sent back. Such happenings undermine

the influence of the missionaries; particularly in view of the fact that this woman has apparently killed many babies in exactly the same fashion. Again the missionaries make no secret of the fact that from time to time these natives kill the babies and feed them to the three and four-year olds in the belief that the spirit and strength of the babies will help to guard the older children against evil.

These are the sort of things that are happening, and they could very easily be prevented. Those practices are peculiar to the aboriginal, but some of the things that we do are not far removed. I have already instanced the plan to take all the children from the parents and send them 400 miles away. The missionaries themselves from time to time have to dispose of some of the innumerable dogs which the natives bring to the mission. They get rid of them simply by walking along and dropping a bait containing strychnine alongside the dog which eats it and is dead within seconds. As soon as the dogs die, the natives carry them off and eat them. The dogs, which are poisoned with soluble strychnine, are eaten immediately by the natives.

The Agricultural Department has officers who fly over native reserves and other areas frequented by the natives in Western Australia. They drop dingo baits consisting of a piece of fat containing soluble strychnine, which is wrapped in a piece of paper and looks like a minty. How many native children have, in the past, eaten these baits I do not know. The baits are dropped indiscriminately where natives congregate, particularly at waterholes. In conclusion, may I say again that I ask for a select committee simply because I think it offers the best method of investigating some of the matters that are perturbing the missionaries and other people. If a select committee did make this investigation, I believe it could put forward recommendations which would be of great assistance to the Minister.

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

BILL—RURAL AND INDUSTRIES BANK ACT AMENDMENT.

Returned from the Council with amendments.

MOTION—UNECONOMIC RAILWAY LINES.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

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

That in view of the obvious problem of uneconomic railway lines, a select committee be appointed to inquire into and make recommendations on—

(a) the establishment of an experimental test road to determine the lowest attainable

cost of providing a road, and operating road transport vehicles in country areas of low traffic density at present served by uneconomic railway lines;

- (b) a suitable length of road or roads for the establishment of such an experimental test road;
- (c) the type of authority considered most suitable for the conduct of such an experiment and research into related questions;
- (d) the types of vehicles and equipment and operating conditions best suited to the several requirements of giving satisfactory service to the areas likely to be affected;
- (e) to make any other relevant suggestion.

MR. O'BRIEN (Murchison) [5.56]: I rise to oppose the motion. Back in 1946 the railways and tramways paid their way as far as wages, etc., were concerned. Furthermore, when the railways were first laid down, they were established in difficult times and by the pick-and-shovel, and wheelbarrow methods. They cost considerable sums to establish. Today we have improved to the stage of dieselisation on many lines. The dieselisation plan was put into operation a few years ago by the McLarty-Watts Government. Now is not an opportune time to move this motion, before the diesel trains have had an opportunity to be proved.

It is true that our predecessors in Parliament were expected to encourage the building of railways that would never pay, and also the construction of roads that would be little used. In Western Australia we have large areas which we wish to populate, and by decentralisation we can and will improve the State. Why, today, are we confronted with the fact that the railways in the remote areas are not paying? In the early days we had migration from the Eastern States. The miners came here from Ballarat and other mining towns in Victoria, and they used these railway lines as they were laid and moved out to the goldmining towns. Unfortunately, with the gold they won from this State, a large percentage of them returned to the Eastern States and thus were of no assistance in paying off the great initial expense of laying these lines.

It is the cause we must look to. What has been the cause of these railway lines becoming uneconomic? It is that over the years high railway costs have prevented these outback towns from being adequately served by the railways and also the system has had to compete with road transport. Today, because of high maintenance

and increased costs, the railways are continuing to build up a huge deficit. What we need is to improve the areas through which these railways run, not by the pick-and-shovel methods used in bygone days but with modern mechanical appliances which are now put to good use. With the help of this equipment, the land could be improved and so it would produce greater wealth. If we subdivided the large tracts, through which these uneconomic railway lines pass, into properties of approximately 20,000 acres we would be able to produce more wool and, with the advent of irrigation works, we would improve agriculture in the outback centres.

To pull up railway lines which initially cost a great amount of money to put down would in effect be cutting the lifeline of the people who live in the outback. With up-to-date methods and the use of diesel locomotives which, as yet, have not been fully proved but which have cut railway running costs to a great extent, and with the improvement of the surrounding country, many settlers could be encouraged to go to those parts and they would assist in reducing the huge railway debt.

Hon. D. Brand: What about the Wiluna line?

MR. O'BRIEN: The Wiluna line has been referred to by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. For the information of the House I would point out that at present there is an application before the Mines Department, from a company that intends to mine for minerals, for the granting of a huge acreage, and if this application is successful, the company will cart its minerals to a railway siding known as Paroo. Further, we have large copper deposits north and east of Wiluna and, in fact, at a place called Kathleen Valley there are unlimited quantities of copper. Today, out from Meekatharra, there is a small syndicate experimenting with great success. On the information I have received, I venture to suggest that that small syndicate has high hopes of being able to mine and treat copper. Also, at Gabanintha that same syndicate will be able to treat the sands that were previously extracted from the treatment of gold.

Hon. D. Brand: Will that mean more freight for the railways?

MR. O'BRIEN: It will mean that more people will be anxious to go to these outback centres to mine and to treat copper, provided that adequate transport facilities exist to cart their product. As we move to the east more and more, we can see people opening up land on station properties and cultivating irrigation blocks which they sincerely hope will, in the not-too-distant future, carry a great many more settlers.

When the railway line serving Sandstone was pulled up, that act proved that, when these uneconomic railway lines cease

to operate, the lifeline of the people of the outback is cut. At that time we were told by the Government that it was obliged to pull up that line because of the urgent demand for rails. However, we are in a different position today. The previous Government ordered a large tonnage of new rails which we now have on hand and the present Government will have to meet the payment for them. They will strengthen the track for many years because several of these lines have not deteriorated.

Hon. D. Brand: This motion shows no intention to pull up railway lines.

Mr. O'BRIEN: This motion reads, "That, in view of the obvious problem of uneconomic railway lines"

Hon. D. Brand: Go on!

Mr. O'BRIEN: I am endeavouring to give a reason why these lines have become uneconomic, and to show that in the near future they can be made economic.

Hon. L. Thorn: You are doing a good job! Keep going!

Mr. O'BRIEN: Every year I travel no less than 25,000 miles by road and, speaking of experimental roads, I consider that the only decent road surface is the one that is sealed. One of the roughest roads I have ever travelled over is that between Mullewa and Mingenew.

Hon. L. Thorn: Why don't you get them all sealed?

Mr. O'BRIEN: That road, which is in my electorate, requires urgent attention. Throughout the Murchison we have good gravel roads, but, as I have said, there is only one road surface and that is the road that is sealed and bituminised. The time is opportune—

Hon. D. Brand: For more sealed roads!

Mr. O'BRIEN: —for the Government to commence work on the sealing of many of these roads in outback centres, especially through the areas I have mentioned and on to Mt. Magnet.

Hon. D. Brand: Fix up that Mullewa-Mingenew one first.

Hon. L. Thorn: Start on the Red Hill road at Toodyay.

Mr. O'BRIEN: Therefore, we can take our story back to the early days when we produced a great deal of gold in this State. Instead of that wealth remaining in the West to foster the goldmining industry and also secondary industries, it was taken back to the Eastern States by many of the miners. Last year we imported from the Eastern States goods which were valued at £60,000,000 more than those we exported. That is the problem that is confronting us. The time is not opportune for the implementation of this motion, and therefore I oppose it.

MR. LAPHAM (North Perth) [6.12]: The motion moved by the member for Blackwood is extremely embracing and it opens up a wide and interesting field. In brief, he is asking for the appointment of a select committee to inquire into the whole of our railway system and to differentiate between paying and non-paying lines. He then seeks to ascertain the cheapest method of constructing a test road by an authority to be decided. Going further, he seeks to consider the types of vehicles and equipment best suited for that experimental road with a view to displacing uneconomic railway lines with road haulage vehicles, having in mind the provision of a satisfactory service to the areas likely to be affected and, to make any other relevant suggestions.

Such proposals cover a terrific field and the ambit is the complete railway system. In regard to the first proposal, namely, to differentiate between paying and non-paying lines, it is intended, having found that information, to apply the knowledge acquired to questions which in this State are so complex and of such magnitude that they warrant a separate inquiry in themselves. All this investigation is to be undertaken by a select committee. Members realise, of course, that the period of time available for a select committee is extremely limited. If such a committee was to take advantage of all the time available to it, it could meet for a full day on Monday and on Friday and half a day on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. LAPHAM: Prior to the tea suspension I dealt with the very wide field envisaged in the motion and the limited time available in which a select committee could deal with the variety of subjects involved. I would like to indicate that I am very sympathetic towards the member for Blackwood in bringing forward this motion. If by any chance—I do not think there will be any—the appointment of a select committee is agreed to, the information to be gathered from all sources would be worth while; even though I am now on two select committees I would not mind being on a third, seeing it deals with transport.

My opposition to this motion is due to the fact that the time is too limited and because I feel the inquiry should be made by an independent body, preferably an independent transport body on a full-time basis, a body unhindered by departmental worries, and one which is not biased whether consciously or otherwise. I say that because it is understandable that when members of different departments are appointed to a committee, there must be an unconscious bias towards their own departments. That is why I say it

is preferable when dealing with controversial subjects such as this, to have a committee comprised of persons who will not be biased under any circumstances.

Even though I am opposing this motion, I consider at the same time that the member for Blackwood should be congratulated upon bringing it forward. I consider that the expression of opinion by members on this subject can assist the Government materially in making up its mind on the transport problems of the day. We all realise that those particular problems facing us are of great magnitude. I would like to make myself clear on this subject. Whilst I have a full realisation of the part played by the railways in the development of the State, I feel the time has come—as a matter of fact, it is overdue—for a reorientation of thought in that regard.

We should have a full appreciation of the times in which we live, the method of transport available to us, its comparative cost structure, its flexibility and its adaptability to the vastness of the State. We should also remember that an economic tragedy could overwhelm us if we continue to allow the railways to stifle the finances of this State. The Minister said the other evening that we had entered into a transitional stage in regard to transport. With that statement I entirely disagree. I think the transitional stage had been reached many years ago. As a matter of fact, time has engulfed it. We have reached a stage where it is economically impossible to carry on with the present transport system. We cannot carry a railway system that has been starved financially for many years and which has ceased to be capable of doing the job for which it was created, while at the same time it continues to provide an indirect subsidy for the mining and agricultural districts by way of freight charges which are not commensurate with cost.

To substantiate those remarks, I would like to quote some figures taken from the Australian Transport Advisory Council's report on the cost of transport operation in Australia. This is a comparative statement setting out the operating costs paid by a community which, in effect, is the loss of each transport system in Australia. It also shows the total revenue received from the railways and indicates the percentage loss which the community would be required to meet to cover operating costs. In New South Wales the community there had to pay £5,000,000, in round figures, and the total revenue of the railways was £71,000,000, so what the community had to pay was 7 per cent. In Victoria the loss was £4,800,000, and the total revenue was £35,000,000, so the loss was 13 per cent. In Queensland the loss was £2,500,000, the revenue received was £29,000,000, and the loss was 8 per cent. In South Australia the loss was almost £4,000,000, the total revenue received was

£12,000,000, and the loss to the community was 30 per cent. In Western Australia the loss was £5,500,000, the total revenue was almost £11,000,000, and the loss to the community was 50 per cent.

That amply shows that Western Australia is in a very difficult position where 50 per cent of the operating costs of the railways has to be paid by the community, which costs cannot be recovered by the normal operations of this type of transport system. I feel the time is far too late to try to rehabilitate the railways on a large scale. To do that millions of pounds would be involved. We need not be clairvoyant to realise the position of the finances of the State. The sum of £58,000,000 was originally invested in the railway system of this State, but, of course, today it is only worth a portion of that. The policy which has brought that about was "too little and too late." Admittedly millions of pounds have been spent on the railways, but those sums were spent in financing deficits, not in rehabilitation. The fault is not altogether attributable to the commissioners or the commission, although in many quarters it has been popular and very convenient to lay the blame on those people. If there is any blame—we all realise that post-mortems are odious—it is on this House for not accepting its responsibility over the years.

For years past the commissioners have indicated the alarming drift in railway affairs. If any member is interested in reading the records, they are available. They indicate the disability under which the railways were suffering, the years of financial neglect, the inadequate maintenance of the railway system, the worn-out equipment, the condition of the rail tracks, the ballasting, how unsound the lines were, the need for reduced speeds, the derailments, the lack of drainage, and so on. Those things can be found in the report of the railways commissioners.

Although the commissioners reported year in and year out the disabilities, expediciencies were adopted, expediciencies which gave no money; and only money could have brought the railways up to the state of efficiency which was necessary for their true and effective operation. But what do we find? No money was made available, so expediciencies were introduced. In my opinion, the first of these was the protection given to the railway system by the "railways protection board," which was misnamed the Transport Co-ordination Board.

Its prime duty under the misnomer of co-ordination was to crush all opposition from other types of transport, and, by devious means, to channel all freight and transport back into the railway system, a system which had been forced to work inefficiently through lack of money. By these means the commissioners were stripped of their efficiency. They were

stripped of the ability to do the job which they should have been doing. They were held along a road which was not of their own choosing, but which was the choosing of this House.

It was the way dictated by law through an enactment—no money and expediency. To my mind, that was the beginning of the end. It continued relentlessly and foolishly until today we are in a sorry mess. It would take millions of pounds to rehabilitate the railway system, in which millions and millions of pounds have been forced over the years; but forced not for the purpose of making the system more efficient, but for the purpose of meeting deficits.

Of course, inefficiency is reflected from the top to the bottom of our railway system. It is reflected in the dingy surroundings of their buildings. It is reflected in the lack of efficiency which exists today. Years ago, employees were proud to be associated with the Railway Department. I remember 30 years ago when the employees who were working for the railways were quite proud of their association with that system. But what do we find today? Their pride has been replaced with a feeling of despair. They can see the end is coming; and it is very obvious.

We should curtail the railway activities. I do not want members to get the impression that I desire to dispense with the railways entirely; far from it. I want to preserve as much as I can of our assets; to save as much money as possible. But to do that it is necessary to curtail its activities; or, in effect, to dispense with the bad and keep the good until such time as we are better able financially to rectify our asset by putting finance into it which would place it on a competitive basis—a basis truly reflecting the cost of freight haulage, and not the charge for freight haulage, so that then we could have a true appreciation of competitive costs and could assess the cost between rail and road.

But we must realise that today our railways are outmoded. They are not fulfilling the duties that an investment of £58,000,000 warrants; and from what I have read of this question in Hansard, I am satisfied that quite a lot of people are thinking along the lines on which I have spoken. Recently the Minister said there were 1,500 miles of lines which were returning less than 50 per cent. of their operating costs. He referred to 15s. per ton mile as the railway operating cost. Admittedly, when I referred to that figure, I cited the worst case. Be that as it may, it seems a colossal amount when one considers that road services can operate for about 1s. per mile.

Under those circumstances, even the most ardent supporters of our railway systems could hardly justify their continuation and the stifling of road transport in

certain areas. The cost is too great; this State cannot bear it. It appears to me that the alternative is to terminate the non-paying lines or those that we feel could not be made to pay, and to revert to road traffic in those areas. Whilst I feel that the State should protect as much of its £58,000,000 asset as possible, I feel also that road transport should be encouraged to take over what the railways have proved they are economically incapable of handling. That would assist us to protect what is left financially in our railways and, at the same time, give road transport an opportunity of showing what it can do.

I feel that some members might be opposed to that point of view, but I consider we should not allow the capital expenditure on our railways to dominate our thinking. We must realise that continual deficits have to be borne by the community; and in consequence of that, money that has to be paid into the railway system to cover a deficit cannot be used for other services; and I feel there are plenty of services on which we could use £5,000,000.

Any examination of our railway system will bear out the fact that the railways incur huge expenditure to industry due to the fact of their peculiar nature. For instance, firstly, an article that has to be railed is loaded on to a motor-vehicle and taken to a ramp at the railway yard. From there it is handled again on to a railway truck. Later, at its point of disembarkation, it is taken from the railway truck on to a ramp, ultimately, of course, to be man-handled again on to a motor wagon and taken to its destination. All this goes on when many handling charges are at least 2d. per minute. Is it any wonder the position is so difficult?

Not only must we take into account railway freight charges, but we must also take into account what railway usage means as an on-cost to industry. We must also consider the question of demurrage. Under a road transport scheme, demurrage would not apply; under a railway system it does. Demurrage is quite understandable from the point of view of our railways. It might be justifiable from their point of view; but it is quite easy to realise the hardship suffered by the consignee on account of demurrage.

I feel there are many obvious advantages that could be derived by using road services where railways are proved to be uneconomic. We must take into account that road vehicles must be licensed. They use petrol or diesel fuel; and that, of course, is a disadvantage to a certain extent, because it is something that we must import. If we were fortunate enough to find oil in Australia, I would have no hesitation whatever in recommending road transport in preference to rail. But we

must consider the aspect that it is necessary to import petrol or diesel fuel for the operation of motor-vehicles.

Petrol or diesel fuel which is used for the operations of road transport is taxed fairly heavily by the Federal Government; and, as a consequence, the road hauliers are indirectly making a considerable payment to the exchequer. Each year they also pay sales tax, and in many other ways contribute to the finances of the nation. Quite recently I read an article in which it was estimated that if all the taxes paid by road transport operators over a period of 12 years were placed in one pool, they would pay for the whole of the railway systems throughout Australia.

From the Western Australian point of view, it must also be remembered, that the Grants Commission views with disfavour our railway losses, and that is understandable also. It becomes very pointed when we realise we have suffered to the extent of £150,000 as a consequence of that. I feel that the railway systems suffer from an enormous capital expenditure which, of course, is Government money; by inflexibility; by a static point to point haulage, irrespective of convenience, they induce undue manhandling with resultant cost; they have fixed schedules which are difficult to alter; and they have a very high ratio of supervisory expenditure to wage expenditure.

It is rather difficult to get this type of information from the railways as to just exactly what is the ratio between clerical and wage expenditure. While the normal amounts in any trucking concern is about 33 per cent., I understand that in the railways it is as high as 66 per cent.

Road transport has these advantages: It provides flexibility and convenience; it needs no enormous capital expenditure by a Government; it obviates unnecessary man-handling; it provides quick transport and greater services; it pays taxes, such as sales tax, petrol tax, road tax and licence fees. Then it assists decentralisation by going further afield than the railhead. It does not altogether need a road; a track will do at times. It contributes payroll tax; and, last but not least, it relieves the Government of immediate heavy financial commitments.

I am of the opinion that if we do not dispense with our non-paying lines, we will be in difficulties. What alternative is open to us? I cannot see much. Perhaps if we more rigidly enforced the State Transport Co-ordination Act we might get a little more in haulage rates. But it is doubtful, even if the volume of traffic or the volume of haulage were increased, whether it would make a great deal of difference. We must also consider the traffic maintenance and repair costs, which must be carried out on the railways immediately—and, of course, we all realise that we have no money. On the other

hand, if we closed down the non-paying lines, it would reduce the revenue to a certain extent; but I do not think it would reduce the supervisory cost to any great extent. Only a certain amount of wages expenditure would be reduced, and the normal overhead would carry on. Depreciation, interest charges and so on would be much the same although depreciation would come down slightly.

Even with that disability, I think it is worthy of a trial and I believe we should close uneconomic railway lines and give road transport an opportunity. To sum it all up, as I see it we are in this position: The cost of keeping our uneconomic lines open is huge and the saving in closing a lot of them would not be very great. What can we do about it? I cannot see much alternative. Of course, if we close those lines, what policy are we to adopt in regard to road transport? Are we to subsidise road transport? I hope we do not.

Mr. O'Brien: The Government is at present.

Mr. LAPHAM: I do not think it is necessary to subsidise it.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Some of the previous Governments thought it was.

Hon. L. Thorn: No, they did not.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: You paid out £100,000.

Mr. LAPHAM: I do not think it is necessary to subsidise road transport; but I think it is necessary to have a better appreciation of it. In a lot of our outlying areas road transport could be used to feed the railways and bring goods to the railhead. Instead of subsidising road transport, I think we should allow vehicles to carry a greater load. A standard has been laid down for use throughout Australia. It was decided at an Australia-wide conference.

Mr. Nalder: That would not work with livestock.

Mr. LAPHAM: Perhaps not. The hon. member has cited one instance where it would not work, but it could work with a lot of other commodities, and the vehicles could be overloaded so long as they were not using main roads and not a great deal of damage would be caused to our roads as a consequence. Of course, where livestock are being carried, it raises a different question altogether.

I think all these matters should be treated on their merits and we cannot lay down any hard and fast policy with regard to them. A charge could be arrived at in relation to each commodity. Then, of course, we must also consider, if we are to close some of these lines down, whether we are going to have an open go for all road hauliers or whether we will license some and give them a monopoly over a certain section. Also, are these road systems to operate from the outlying areas right through to the city or are they to operate purely as feeder systems? They

are all problems which a select committee would have to consider and consequently it would have a very big job to do. Ultimately all these and associated problems must be considered.

Today I received a most interesting letter in relation to a matter which was mentioned by the member for South Perth recently. It concerned the building of a road between the Warburton mission and the Western Australian border to link up with the road to Alice Springs. If that were done it would give us a through-road from Perth to Darwin. I happened to be discussing that aspect with the manager of Commonwealth Industrial Gases Ltd., and I received the following letter from him today:—

At the present time this company is responsible for the maintenance of supplies of oxygen and acetylene to all industrial undertakings using this material throughout the Northern Territory and because the supply from other capital cities in Australia is too costly and extremely difficult, this branch has been called on to use its endeavours to maintain this very important industrial life-line.

At the present time we use the State Shipping Service facilities, but as you will fully appreciate this is not a very reliable means of transport and has, on many occasions, been responsible for a complete breakdown in activities in the Territory.

To overcome the supply difficulty when the State ships' normal services fail, we have endeavoured to build large stocks of cylinders in a depot in Darwin, but this is only part of the answer and from our point of view a very costly method because whilst on many occasions we have been able to feed our Darwin depot with full cylinders out of all proportion to their usage rate, we have not been able to get our empty cylinders out and in consequence have had many hundreds of cylinders lying around Darwin empty for very long periods.

That is one of the difficulties confronting Commonwealth Industrial Gases. Their cylinders are very costly and when they are lying around empty, they are holding up everybody's progress. The letter continues—

If it was possible to have a direct link between Perth and the Sturt Highway, we could, without any trouble at all, arrange for our own overland transport to carry gases to Darwin either as a permanent method of supply or to meet the emergencies which occur only too frequently when trouble is experienced by the State Shipping Service.

Our normal turn-round of cylinders to the Darwin supply centre amounts to close on 8-10 tons per week, and as

this weight factor would be of a two-way nature, you can see that this company would be wholeheartedly behind any proposal which would enable us to have a permanent link between the capital city of Perth and the supply route in the Northern Territory.

It is signed by the manager and there is a p.s. which reads as follows:—

Other industries whom I feel sure would be interested in your proposal are—

- (a) the cement industries;
- (b) the breweries;
- (c) building material supplies;
- (d) livestock operators.

So I think that the member for South Perth raised a good point the other evening when he suggested that a road should be built over the 170 miles of no-man's land between the Warburton mission and the road just over the South Australian border. From memory, I think he said it would cost about £3,000 and if that were done, it would give us the opportunity of utilising a feeder service from that area to Laverton where a railhead now exists. It would mean, of course, that Commonwealth Industrial Gases could route their gases from Laverton to Darwin and could bring them back from Darwin to Laverton and by that means we would be giving our railways a certain amount of haulage. Admittedly, it would be only 10 tons a week from this firm, but as the manager said, quite a lot of other avenues could be explored if this road were built.

In view of all the problems and difficulties associated with transport, I think that the select committee would be too limited by the time at its disposal to deal with the whole matter and consequently I must oppose the motion. Nevertheless, I thank the member for Blackwood for introducing it and I am satisfied that a general debate on this question is good for this House and as a consequence for the community.

MR. PERKINS (Roe) [8.10]: I am inclined to agree with the Minister that most of the information which the mover of the motion suggested that the select committee should or might obtain is already available to the Government. Members will notice, in looking at paragraphs (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the motion, that technical questions are involved. Although sometimes we in this House may disagree on items of policy, I think we all agree that our Government departments have some very good technical officers available to advise the Government, and I believe that in this instance the select committee, in any investigation which it might undertake, would very largely depend upon the evidence given by those technical officers, particularly the officers of the Main Roads Department.

Also, I am inclined to agree with the member for North Perth that even if the select committee were appointed, and if it were to cover all the ramifications which have been discussed by various speakers, there would be a difficulty in regard to the time available. In addition, looked at from a practical point of view, we already have four select committees appointed and the appointment of a further one would not only tax the time of members of this House but it would also seriously interfere with the various other services which have to be available for these inquiries. In all the circumstances, I do not feel inclined to support this proposal for the appointment of a select committee.

I would like to commend the member for North Perth on the very thoughtful speech he made on the subject. Obviously, he had given a lot of time to obtaining the detailed information he gave us this evening and I agree with him that the whole of our transport system is due for an overhaul. In the past I think the Transport Board in particular has regarded its main function as being to restrict road transport in favour of the railway system. I do not know that it has done the railway system much good in the process, but I am certain that the ultimate effect has been a very much poorer service for the people of Western Australia as a whole.

Had the Railway Department not depended to such a degree on the restrictions which have been placed on its competitors by means of the State Transport Co-Ordination Act in particular, there might have been some greater urge for efficiency within the Railway Department itself. When anybody is protected, there is a tendency for inefficient practices to creep in. I think that by the proper use of both road and rail transport, a better service could be provided for the producers and the people of Western Australia as a whole and it would also probably bring about a cheapening of transport costs generally.

I feel inclined to agree with the statement which I think the Minister made; in any case, it has been made in this House on many occasions and has been published elsewhere—for heavy haulage no system of road transport can compete with an efficiently-run rail service, particularly for heavy transport. But over the years we have had the very anomalous position in Western Australia of the railways attempting to transport all sorts of odds and ends; little parcels, livestock and all sorts of other things, while at the same time they were unable to transport what I think is probably their most profitable line, namely, the grain traffic.

Members who have been here for some years will recall the criticisms I made at the time when we were carting vast tonnage of wheat from the country over the

roads. This was causing great congestion on the roads and serious damage to those that were more lightly constructed. At the same time the Railway Department was insisting on carting all those odds and ends. If there is any realistic system of accounting in the Railway Department, I believe that section will agree that bulk cartage, whether it be of grain or some other commodity, where full train loads can be hauled and where there is a minimum of handling by the Railway Department is the most profitable side of the department's activities.

The Minister for Transport: It is hauled at about half the actual cost of hauling it.

Mr. PERKINS: In reply to the Minister for Transport, I would say that some of us disagree with the manner in which the Railway Department arrives at its actual costs. Some of them are actual physical costs incurred in the haulage. But there are innumerable overhead costs of one sort or another, and it is a matter of opinion which of those costs properly relate to that class of traffic. For instance, if the Railway Department only had to haul this heavy grain traffic I mentioned and were not concerned with parcels, passengers and the like and the sundry other traffic, only portion of the staff at present employed at country stations would be required. It would also make some pruning of staff possible elsewhere throughout the railway system. I think the Minister will agree that there is a great deal of specialist staff employed by the Railway Department dealing with passenger traffic, perishable traffic and the various other odds and ends, which are impossible to enumerate.

The Minister for Transport: In a lot of the items you enumerate, the freight is 1s. a ton mile and for wheat it is 3d. a ton mile.

Mr. PERKINS: If the Minister had a careful investigation made, he might find some of this parcel traffic was costing him several shillings a ton mile. We have the ridiculous position where trains are run to cope with a small quantity of miscellaneous traffic, and that increases the cost of running these trains. Added to that, we have the costs involved in carrying the sundry other items which I shall not enumerate at this stage.

I do not wish to be dogmatic on that point; it is a matter of opinion. I have been concerned with inquiries in relation to evidence given by accountancy officers of the Railway Department, and I know there is some room for a difference of opinion. It is difficult for even a trained accountant investigating this position to come to an exact finding. I am merely setting out my belief in this matter. I believe that the Minister, in the course of investigating certain costs of the Railways Department, might very well give his particular attention to that aspect.

The Minister for Transport: I think there is some merit in your point of view, but it only partly bridges the gap.

Mr. PERKINS: If each of us is partly right, we will eventually arrive at a more sensible allocation of the various branches of transport serving the people in Western Australia.

One other point with which I wish to deal refers to the statement made by the member for North Perth about it not being necessary to subsidise road transport if some of what are called uneconomic railway lines are closed down. I use the expression "uneconomic" because there again it is a matter of opinion. I repeat that the Railway Department is able, in my opinion, to haul that heavy traffic cheaper than road transport appears to be able to carry it at the present time. I have some particular knowledge of this matter because there is a considerable area where a railway line was originally promised to the settlers but where that proposal was subsequently cancelled. I refer to the Lakes district and in particular to the area extending down to Ravensthorpe where a considerable amount of grain and livestock as well as other miscellaneous commodities are produced.

The position there is that the Government assumes responsibility for ensuring, through the Transport Board, that those people do not receive a more expensive service than if the railway line had been provided in that area. The procedure is that from time to time the Transport Board calls tenders from road haulage operators interested, asking for a quote for the provision of a full service in this particular area for the haulage of grain, the back cartage of super and the provision of a general service in the area concerned.

Actually the sections providing for the general service and that providing for the wheat and super sections are kept somewhat separate. In some cases separate contractors provide that service. But the Transport Board has found that it has been necessary to provide some subsidy for those road haulage contractors carting grain into Newdegate railhead and carting super on return in order to provide a through freight equivalent to that which those people would enjoy if a railway line had been provided in the area.

Mr. O'Brien: The Government is doing the same thing from Mt. Magnet to Sandstone.

Mr. PERKINS: I am aware of that. It is also operating in other parts of the State. But the position is not as simple as the member for North Perth would have us believe. If any of those lines are closed down, it will be necessary to see that those producers who happen to be located in some area where the department has closed down the railway line,

are not given a more expensive or a poorer service than if they were served by a railway system similar to other producers in the State. They all pay their share of taxation and they develop those particular districts in good faith. Unless those people are treated in the same manner as their more fortunate brethren, I fear there will be some very strong protests made by those of us representing such areas.

The Minister for Transport: You will probably find that the total subsidy will be greater than the present railway losses.

Mr. PERKINS: That is the sort of thing that the Minister may be able to tell us. That is the point I want to get at. I suggest that most of the information which the proposed select committee could obtain is probably available to the Government in one shape or another now. I think this is a matter of Government policy and as soon as the Government can decide what its policy is going to be, it should make a statement to this House as to the position. If some of us do not agree with the Minister, I take it we will have the opportunity to criticise him or commend him as the case may be.

The Minister for Transport: And no doubt you will exercise that right.

Mr. PERKINS: I am sure the Minister will think there is something wrong with me if I did not.

Mr. Nalder: The Minister himself has done so before this.

The Minister for Transport: And will do so again.

Mr. PERKINS: There is one other point relating to this question of uneconomic railway lines that has been referred to. I believe it is possible for a great deal of argument as to what actually is an uneconomic railway line, and what is not. The Railway Department has a peculiar method of arriving at the proper amount of revenue that should be allotted to a particular length of railway line out of the freight that passes over that line.

The Minister for Transport: But surely you will agree that a railway which transports only 40 tons a week cannot be a sensible proposition?

Mr. PERKINS: I do not wish to enter into an argument with the Minister over details, but I might give him an instance of one of the branch lines extending eastwards from the Great Southern line. Let us for example, take one from Tambellup to Ongerup. That is not in my electorate but south of it and is represented by the member for Stirling. It is a line extending out and the railhead at Ongerup serves an area a long way eastwards. The Government is vitally interested in a portion of it, and, of course, the whole of the soldier land settlement area is served from the railhead at Ongerup.

If one asks what the revenue from a particular railway line is, one finds that under the accounting system of the Railway Department if there is, say, 100,000 tons of wheat to be railed from Ongerup through to Bunbury, Albany or Fremantle—wherever it may be going—the only portion of the revenue which is credited to the length of railway line from Ongerup into Tambellup is that which would be derived from transporting wheat from Ongerup to Tambellup, notwithstanding the fact that the actual revenue is collected back at the extreme point of the line. The branch line is given no credit for having provided the freight on 100,000 bushels of wheat from Tambellup to Albany, or from Tambellup to Bunbury, or from Tambellup to Fremantle, as the case may be.

Mr. Hearman: Freight on 100,000 tons would not make it an uneconomic line.

Mr. PERKINS: There could easily be a lot of freight on the Ongerup line, but I am trying to give a resume at the moment. The Minister does not dispute that is the method of railway accounting. Credit is given only for the transport of a particular kind of produce over the length of the section in question.

The Minister for Transport: I think you will agree I was dealing entirely with the volume of goods.

Mr. PERKINS: I am not concerned with what the Minister said. I am only concerned with railway economy and some of the branch lines. I have no idea as to which lines the motion is intended to deal with in particular. I have not seen a list, but I have heard rumours. I do not know whether it is the one from Lake Grace to Wubin or any other line. I am using a particular illustration. I believe in a realistic system of railway accounting and that these branch lines should receive some credit for providing freight over main lines. That is what it boils down to.

The section from Spencer's Brook to Midland can show a very handsome return, if all produce is funnelled from the eastern and north-eastern areas over that line. But if we are going to have the payable sections, we will have to have the unpayable sections, too. What is the alternative? I will be interested to know of the proposals indicating how this is going to be done. I remember suggesting to a former Minister for Railways in a particular year that he should agree to the Government paying a subsidy in the case of short-length railway lines. I asked him if he would give the right to producers to carry their own produce if they wanted to, and the Minister would not agree.

Mr. Hearman: That is what the experimental road test is for.

Mr. PERKINS: I am not interested in the experimental road. The Minister could obtain that information without having to get it from a select committee. I am not so much concerned with that. I think the most important part of the proposals for a select committee are contained in paragraph (e), which reads, "to make any other relevant suggestions." I have no doubt of course, that that will keep the select committee busy for a long time to come if its inquiries are to cover all these points. However, I am content to leave the position at that. I believe that most of this information is available to the Government already. What it has not got, it could easily obtain. I believe the formulation of proposals is a matter of policy which the Government should make known to this House as soon as possible so that they would be open to the light of day. This would give us an opportunity to either compliment or condemn the Government. Personally, I cannot see that the select committee is going to do a great deal of good and I very much doubt whether it is justified.

MR. COURT (Nedlands) [8.34]: I feel that the motion put forward is a constructive one. It is one of the occasions in the House when one can approach a matter in an objective fashion without having to argue on various matters of party political policy. I feel that some of the speakers have missed the main point put forward by the member for Blackwood.

As I understand the motion, and as he explained it to the House, it is not a select committee to make recommendations for the closure of lines, and furthermore it is not a select committee to actually undertake and supervise the construction and the operation of an experimental road. It is proposed for the purpose of inquiry only and to make recommendations respecting the provision of an experimental test road. Then the motion goes on to expand on that and to demonstrate that it should make recommendations on such phases as suitable lengths of road, the type of authority that should carry out the test, and the types of vehicles, etc. that should be used. If we examine the motion purely on its merits and what it seeks to do, I feel it is difficult to do other than support it.

I gather from the Minister's approach to the motion that he regards it as superfluous, because, as a result of his investigations and other departmental inquiries, he has almost arrived at a decision as to certain action to make the railways more economic, or at least, less of a losing proposition. He did convey also, if I understood him aright, that the department has all the information necessary at its disposal to engage in an expansion of road transport or other alternative systems.

We know that the sixty-four dollar question as to which uneconomic railway lines are to be closed is yet to be asked and answered. I think road transport will come whether we like it or not, and it is really amazing in a State of this nature that we have not been more progressive in our approach to this form of transport. There are many arguments, of course, that there is a distinct compartment for road transport, another for rail transport, another for sea transport and another for air transport. I feel that in a State such as this with terrific distances to be dealt with, and some rather unusual problems not met in other parts of the world, in some directions we have to be a little more elastic in our approach to road transport.

One reads of amazing developments in other parts of the world. In the Middle East a vehicle was produced to enable the construction of a pipeline to be undertaken without having to wait for roads to be built. It could be operated completely regardless of roads and it was able to haul big loads. Economics did not enter into it as they do with a permanent transport system which the Government has to operate in this State. In snow-bound countries they have to have special types of snowmobiles that can negotiate the snow covered areas.

I was interested in an attractive brochure put out by one of the well-known motor-vehicle manufacturers, and it is really amazing to see the number of uses to which road transport can be put. It is a most fascinating book because many of the types of transport depicted are not to be found in this country. I have not yet seen in this State a flour transport vehicle which transports 8½ tons of flour in bulk. It has the advantage that it goes direct from the flour mill to the factory.

That, of course, presupposes bakeries of a bigger type than we have in this State. However the time will come. In the Eastern States, with the advent of the Western Group, some bakeries have just about got to the size when they could use bulk transport and so reduce costs and eliminate a lot of handling. There are other vehicles depicted in the book such as a special purpose 750 cubic foot grain carrier with underfloor discharge chutes. I have not seen one here yet. The development of special forms of road transport is not beyond the ingenuity of the people in this country. The book goes on to illustrate transport, both light and heavy types.

It was interesting to note from "The West Australian" this morning that one of our major transport firms is undertaking research and the heading is, "Local Haulage Firm Undertakes Research. Road Vehicles to Carry 100 Tons." It reads as follows:—

The need for specialised equipment for heavy haulages and for haulages over long distances had prompted Kiernan Transport Ltd. to undertake research, the chairman (Mr. B. C. Kiernan) told shareholders at the annual meeting in Perth.

Transporters capable of hauling single packages weighing 100 tons are now being constructed for the company. Firm orders had been received for the transportation of 75-ton packages to arrive shortly from overseas.

This just demonstrates that in our very midst we have a firm which is sufficiently enterprising to examine the problem of the expanding demand for specialised types of road transport, as distinct from the type of transport this motion deals with. I feel that one of the great advantages of a test road would be to permit an actual opportunity for road transport to demonstrate its worth. There is a lot of prejudice in certain areas against road transport because in times of emergency such as a railway breakdown or an extended strike, it has been necessary to draw on emergency forms of transport.

I know the former member for Kalgoorlie, when Minister for Transport, was critical of the services given by some road transport operators in emergency conditions. At the time I tried to reason with him that it was not a fair test, either as to the service they gave or as to the condition in which they delivered the goods. We know that at that time there was a surplus of heavy road transport which was never built for carting the type of goods that had to be forced upon it during the emergency, and the goods often arrived in a damaged condition.

This aroused a certain amount of resentment, but it was not a true test of an efficient road transport system. This proposal of the member for Blackwood would give a reasonable trial to a properly organised system of transport conducted for the particular use of the area involved. I have in mind that on this occasion it will provide an excellent opportunity for private industry, in the many spheres involved, to make a contribution. American industry has led the world largely because it has been prepared to spend money without leaning heavily on Governments. Huge sums of money are paid by American industry for post-graduate university work.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: They prefer to lean on the Government here.

Mr. COURT: In addition, large sums of money are paid by American industries for technical education and for experiments that are conducted in conjunction with the Governments of the day. These experiments naturally prove what can be

done, and the industries concerned have a just and proper claim to receive the fruits of their experiments. On this occasion I feel we should be prepared to seek the support of the transport agencies, the best engineering brains we can get, the people who are interested in supplying the vehicles, those who supply the tyres and fuels, and the people who are interested in road construction. If they made a positive contribution to this experiment, naturally they would deserve to receive special consideration when a plan was ultimately adopted for an approved transport system in the State.

A further point is that if this experiment is effected, it is important that it shall be made outside of any controversial areas. In this State we are in the fortunate position that there are great expanses of country needing efficient transport, which are not at present served by railways. There is no need to put down an experimental road in a contentious area; it can be put down in a district which would be greatly advantaged by having this experiment carried out in its midst. There would be no prejudice against it from the first. It would get off to a clean start both in respect of the departmental people concerned—the railways in particular—and the local inhabitants. In other words it must not run parallel to an existing railway line.

If the committee was able to determine an area suitable for the construction of such a road and the holding of such an experiment, I feel we would be doing the State a great service, not only in respect of the areas yet to be developed, but also in respect of those areas which, at the moment, are very controversial in regard to their non-paying railways.

Mr. Nalder: Practically all the main arterial roads at present run parallel to the railways.

Mr. COURT: There are still areas where this experiment could be conducted that are not in competition with the railways. If an experimental road went into an area where a sword of Damocles was hanging over the people in connection with their railway, there would be great local prejudice. They would not be human if that was not so. Therefore it is essential that the committee recommend an area that is non-controversial in order to obtain the best results from the experiment. For these reasons, I support the motion.

Mr. CROMMELIN: I move—

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	....	....	....	14
Noes	....	....	....	21
				—
Majority against	....			7
				—

Ayes.

Mr. Ackland	Mr. Mann
Mr. Bovell	Mr. W. Manning
Mr. Brand	Mr. Nalder
Mr. Court	Mr. Owen
Mr. Crommellin	Mr. Perkins
Mr. Grayden	Mr. Roberts
Mr. Hearman	Mr. I. Manning

(Teller.)

Noes.

Mr. Andrew	Mr. Lapham
Mr. Brady	Mr. Molr
Mr. Evans	Mr. Norton
Mr. Gaffy	Mr. O'Brien
Mr. Graham	Mr. Rhatigan
Mr. Hall	Mr. Rodoreda
Mr. Heal	Mr. Sewell
Mr. W. Hegney	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. Hoar	Mr. Toms
Mr. Jamieson	Mr. May
Mr. Johnson	

(Teller.)

Motion thus negatived.

HON. D. BRAND (Greenough) [8.54] There might have been some misunderstanding about the adjournment arrangement with the Minister. The member for Blackwood informed me that after we had had two speeches we could get an adjournment. I do not want to embarrass the Minister in any way.

Mr. Bovell: He has a brutal majority.

The Minister for Transport: A beautiful majority.

Hon. D. BRAND: The motion for a select committee to inquire into this vexed question of road transport and uneconomic railway lines, has met with the approval of most members even though they have not all intimated that they intend to support it. The motion has certainly given members an opportunity to express their opinions in more forthright terms as to the possibilities of road transport than I had heard previously during the 10 years I have been in the House.

It is heartening to learn that at last there is an appreciation by members, on both sides of the Chamber, that road transport is here to stay and that no matter what legislation or regulations may be passed, it will continue to develop as an integral part of the transport system of the State. It remains for us, as a Parliament—and particularly the Government—to decide just what percentage or proportion of our overall transport system will be represented by road transport.

The Minister for Transport: It will probably be Parliament that will make the decision.

Hon. D. BRAND: That is so. The member for North Perth pointed out that the blame could be placed on this House because for many years the railway system had been limited in finance. There was a great deal of cheeseparing in the period prior to the war. The railway system did not develop and it was not an efficient unit. During the war years finance was not

available except to keep the system going. I would say it would be fair comment to suggest that during the war the whole railway system rapidly deteriorated.

Following on the appointment of a Royal Commission and the recommendations made by it, many millions of money—I think £20,000,000 or £30,000,000—have been spent to rehabilitate the railway system, but at this stage we still have a very inefficient railway organisation. It will not become efficient until many more millions are available to modernise it. Many of the troubles facing the railways at the present time might emanate from the opposition it is receiving from road transport, in spite of the fact that the Transport Board has as its prime purpose the direction of goods and services from road to rail transport. As the member for North Perth said, it is rather a railway protection board than a transport board.

The Minister for Transport: The Act, of course, says that the board must have regard for existing systems.

Hon. D. BRAND: I realise that the board is working in accordance with the Act, and I am not criticising the board, or its personnel. It is for the Government and this House to make amendments to the Act to bring about a different policy in respect of road and rail transport. There is an urgent need for the rationalisation of the whole system, and, in my opinion, the member for Blackwood, in moving for a select committee to inquire into the various things mentioned in his motion, is to be commended. Some members have said they will oppose the motion on the ground that the information is already available. I think that can be said of most select committees. The job of a select committee, of course, is to get the information together, put it into a report and make a recommendation.

I think that many misunderstandings and the woolly thinking that is shown in regard to the transport problem in this State is due to the fact that we have no information in a concise report before us. Road transport has grown extremely rapidly. We hardly know what progress it has made. As the member for Netherlands has pointed out, in countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom and in many others on the Continent, there are vehicles of every conceivable shape and size which are made specially to transport particular classes of goods.

An inquiry such as the member for Blackwood is proposing would give to the public—and, no doubt, to the Minister himself—some concrete information as to what road transport could really do. It might be suggested that the road from Wubin to Miling and through to the north-eastern Goldfields and from there

on to Meekatharra should be the one to be used as an experimental road. That is only a suggestion. I do not care where the road is. Nevertheless, I think it is necessary that it should be laid down, watched carefully and the test made on an experimental basis.

I am not one of those who advocate the pulling up of railway lines because they are uneconomic. I am one, however, who believes that if there is an efficient road transport system operating on an all-weather road that, in the long run, people will use the most efficient and modern system. There is also no doubt that road transport has always had the advantage of being able to take goods from the place of manufacture to the point of consumption, and that very operation eliminates a great deal of handling and the resultant cost involved in transporting goods to the stations and in calling at the station, all of which means double handling.

In spite of our reluctance to tackle the problem, I believe that we will have, in the not too distant future, a rail system composed of only key lines—lines that run from one important centre to another—but perhaps, unlike the member for Blackwood, I believe that if there is to be a road used, it has to be a good one. It has to be a highway. I consider that once we get that highway laid down and a road transport system using it, it could be put to the best advantage. It should be used to assist and feed the railway lines and, as suggested by the member for Roe, maintain them as paying propositions.

I support the member for Blackwood in his motion. There has been a reluctance on the part of political parties, shall we say, to come out into the open and commit themselves to a policy that is not very popular in the country, especially when they talk about pulling up railway lines. However, that is the wrong outlook to adopt. The day is fast approaching when the railways will simply fade out because we will not be able to run them any longer. Therefore, before that happens, let us put our house in order. Let us have a plan and work to it—not a plan involving the total rehabilitation of all our railway lines, but one that covers a gradual build-up of what I believe is the most modern form of transport, namely, road transport.

The Minister for Transport: But apropos of that point, the position is that the Government has made an inquiry and has all the information it requires. It is now ready to make a decision and an inquiry as proposed by the member for Blackwood will only delay such decision.

Hon. D. BRAND: I am glad to hear that. When the member for Blackwood moved his motion, the Government had

given no intimation that it had this information at hand. If one has considered the articles appearing in the Press and the speeches that have been made at conferences and meetings of farmers' unions, I think one would have to agree that few people, including the Government, knew where it was going in regard to this problem. Therefore, it is indeed heartening to know that at least it is in a position to make a decision on this vexed question.

The Minister for Transport: It has taken a lot of investigating.

Hon. D. BRAND: If for no other reason, we should commend the member for Blackwood for having brought about this decision so early in this new session of Parliament. I think the Minister might agree with me if I were to say that this motion has hastened him to make an announcement. The Minister shakes his head, but I know differently.

The Minister for Transport: About three months ago it was announced to the Farmers' Union, apart from being announced in other places.

Hon. D. BRAND: If it was, I am sure it was not announced very clearly because I am positive that such a vital announcement would have hit the headlines in the Press and it would have been conveyed to the public, no matter what our opinion of the Press might be or the attitude of any Minister towards it. If the Minister feels that the motion by the member for Blackwood is unnecessary, he should, in greater detail, tell us how he is going to tackle this problem of the rationalisation of all forms of transport.

The Minister for Transport: I mentioned the details when speaking for about three quarters of an hour about a fortnight ago, but apparently the Press is not anxious to publish those details. I explained that this inquiry had been made, and mentioned that we had received the report, but the Press apparently was not interested.

Hon. D. BRAND: I am pleased to hear that, but I still say that any inquiry with respect to road transport in this State with a view to relieving us of the problem of continuing with an uneconomic railway system is well worth while. In spite of what the Minister has said—and I am very glad to hear what he has said—I hope that he will make another effort to give a precise statement to the Press and so advise us what the intentions of the Government are and not merely tell us that this proposed inquiry is not necessary. I support the motion.

On motion by Mr. Bovell, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 9.10 p.m.

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 27th September, 1956.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 2.15 p.m., and read prayers.

QUESTIONS.

TRAFFIC ACT AND REGULATIONS.

Chauffeur-driven Vehicles.

Mr. OLDFIELD asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) Is it a fact that chauffeur-driven vehicles not governed by the Traffic Act and regulations may be hired?

(2) Is it also a fact that such vehicles carry ordinary private vehicles licence plates and are assessed for licence fees as private vehicles?

(3) If so, is it intended to amend the existing Act in order to bring such vehicles under the control of the Traffic Act and regulations?

(4) If not, why not?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No. All vehicles are covered by the Traffic Act and regulations. The hon. member evidently has in mind some "Drive Yourself" vehicles, which may at the option of the hirers, be hired with drivers.

(2) These vehicles carry private plates, but pay a higher insurance rate.

(3) The question is being investigated.

(4) Answered by No. (3).