

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

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

Amendment put and negatived.

Clause put and passed.

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

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

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

Clause put and passed.

Title—agreed to.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Bill reported without amendment; and the report adopted.

House adjourned at 10.24 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 31st January, 1917.

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

QUESTION—WAR LOAN, SUBSCRIPTIONS BY LOCAL GOVERNING BODIES.

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

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

QUESTION—AGRICULTURAL ROYAL COMMISSION, COST.

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

The MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIES replied: 1, £1,850 5s. 5d. 2, No. This sum includes £148 10s. for railway passes, and £404 12s. for purchase of two motor cars. The use of the cars dispenses with the necessity for railway passes, as occasional rail journeys only are made, which are paid for as they occur. The purchase of cars is estimated to effect a considerable saving on the expense involved in hiring cars, members of the Commission acting as their own chauffeurs. The estimated cost from now to date of departure for Eastern States (March 3rd) is, on a *pro rata* basis, about £350. 3, £150, plus ordinary fees and travelling allowances.

QUESTION—POTATO INSPECTION.

Hon. J. SCADDAN asked the Minister for Agriculture: 1, Is he aware that the department has notified exporters of potatoes that they must arrange for local inspection and pay a fee of 2s. 6d. per ton, together with the cost of opening and rebagging? 2, Is he aware that the reason given by the department is the prevalence in the State of potato moth and grub? 3, In view of the fact that imported potatoes are subject to inspection and rejection because of the implied intention to prevent the introduction into this State of the moth and grub, and in view of the now admitted prevalence of the pest, will he cease this farce and remove this no longer necessary restriction, and thus reduce the local cost of an essential commodity?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE replied: 1, Exporters were notified that they must submit consignments for local inspection, but no fee is charged. 2, Yes. 3, Moth and grub exist at present, but in some localities in normal seasons this is not so. The Eastern States require that we should inspect potatoes prior to export. It is deemed advisable, in order to minimise the spread of disease, not to admit potatoes without inspection, otherwise disease may be introduced to districts already clean.

BILLS (2)—THIRD READING.

- 1, Sale of Liquor and Tobacco.
- 2, Agricultural Lands Purchase Act Amendment.

Transmitted to the Council.

BILL—AGRICULTURAL BANK ACT AMENDMENT.

Third Reading.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS AND INDUSTRIES (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [4.40]: I move—

That the Bill be now read a third time.

Mr. THOMSON (Katanning) [4.41]: Before the question is passed, I should like to ask the Minister in charge of the Bill if he will recommit it so that members of this House may have an opportunity of further considering Clause 5, and the amendment thereto which I moved last night. I have discussed this matter to-day with several members of the public, who admit that I am perfectly correct in my interpretation of Clause 5. This clause distinctly states "who have been," and I was desirous of having the words "or are" inserted, so as to make the clause applicable to those on active service. I was merely desirous of having the Bill brought into line with the conditions at present existing under which land can be taken up and money advanced by the Agricultural Bank, namely, the ordinary conditions prevailing. I have one case in view of a man who has gone to the Front. The case I refer to is that of a tradesman who, if he returns disabled, will be prevented from following his usual calling. I cannot see why the Minister should object to these words "or are" being embodied in the Bill.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I do not think the hon. member would serve any good purpose by asking the Minister to recommit the Bill for the purpose of the consideration of a new clause, because the Standing Orders provide that no amendment shall be made in and no new clause shall be added to any Bill recommitted on the third reading unless notice thereof has been previously given. No notice has been given in this case.

Mr. THOMSON: I am going by what was done in connection with the Sale of Liquor and Tobacco Bill. Would I not be in order in moving for the recommitment of the Bill?

Mr. SPEAKER: No, because notice must be given. I suggest that the hon. member should endeavour to secure the adjournment of the third reading, and he can then give notice of his intended amendment.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [4.45]: As I explained to the hon. member last night, the words are not necessary. I am still of that opinion, but I will consult the Parliamentary draftsman, and if the words are required in order to include men who are on active service I will move that the Bill be recommitted for the purpose of the necessary amendment.

Mr. S. STUBBS (Wagin) [4.46]: I move—

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion put and negatived.

Question put and passed.

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

MOTION—WHEAT POOL, TO APPROVE ARRANGEMENTS.

Message from the Governor received, recommending appropriation in connection with the motion.

The PREMIER (Hon. Frank Wilson—Sussex) [4.50]: I move—

That, the Prime Minister having agreed to advance the necessary money, this House approves of a payment of three shillings per bushel as a minimum price for the purchase of all f.a.q. wheat grown by the farmers during the season 1917-18 on delivery at a railway siding. Such wheat to be subject to the conditions applying to the present Wheat Pool, and to the provisions of the Wheat Marketing Act, 1916, and any amendment thereof.

As I briefly outlined when giving my report of the proceedings at the recent Premiers' conference, the question of next season's wheat crop received very full consideration there. The Prime Minister was emphatic in placing before the conference the necessity for encouraging all farmers throughout Australia to put in as much wheat as they possibly could for the harvest of 1917-18. Mr. Hughes pleaded that it was a matter of national moment, representing great assistance to the Empire. With that statement every member of the conference was perfectly in accord; and we next discussed how we could best encourage the farmers in our various States

to act in accordance with the Prime Minister's wish. It was suggested by the Prime Minister that the Commonwealth should find sufficient money to make, through the wheat pools in the various States, a payment of 3s. per bushel to the farmers of Australia for the harvest of 1917-18.

Mr. Harrison: As a minimum price?

The PREMIER: Yes.

Mr. Harrison: Had that not better be stated in the motion? Would it not be well to describe the payment as an advance?

The PREMIER: No. If "advance" were substituted for "payment," the farmer would be responsible for any deficiency. The Prime Minister explained that he was perfectly agreeable, on behalf of the Commonwealth, to find the money required to make to the farmer a minimum payment of 3s. per bushel on delivery at railway sidings. After that, of course, the wheat will be handled through the wheat pool in the ordinary way. Facilities will be arranged if possible, to get the wheat to market, and to get it there as quickly as may be, and to realise it to the best advantage. If the wheat should produce a return allowing a margin over and above the payment of 3s. per bushel, that margin will go to the farmer by way of dividend. In other words, the farmer will be assured of getting at least 3s. per bushel for his wheat, no matter what happens. If there is a loss, the loss will be borne by the people of this State; if there is a profit, that profit will go into the pocket of the farmer. From the farmer's standpoint there could not be a better proposition than that which is being transmitted through me to this Parliament to-day. The Commonwealth finds the money and makes the payment, and if there happens to be a loss on the 3s. per bushel the State will have to reimburse the Commonwealth. The position is very little different from what it has been during the past two years. We have already had two guarantees under the wheat pool. But in this instance it is specifically stated that the State is to guarantee the payment of 3s. which is proposed to be made by the Commonwealth. I shall not be committing any breach of confidence in stating what was

my attitude towards this proposal at the conference. I said that the matter was one of great moment to Western Australia, but that as Western Australia produces a greater quantity of wheat per head of the population than any other Australian State, the risk in her case would be very much greater. I further said that, as the Prime Minister put forward his proposal on national and Imperial grounds, perhaps the Prime Minister and the Premiers would agree to a Commonwealth guarantee, of which we in Western Australia would bear our due proportion according to our population. Thus, if a loss did happen, Western Australia would be quite prepared to come in and share that loss on a per capita basis. To this proposal New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria took exception, as also did Queensland and Tasmania—the two latter because they were not wheat producing countries, and wanted to know why they should be called on to guarantee the farmers of Western Australia a price for their wheat. Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia, being much larger producers of wheat than we are, were at once prepared to accept the Prime Minister's suggestion. I declined to give any definite reply off-hand, saying that I would consult Cabinet when I returned to Western Australia, and that in my opinion it was a matter that Parliament also should deal with, because, after all said and done, a guarantee of this nature might possibly mean a heavy strain on the finances of the State. It is possible, though not probable—I express the hope the event may turn out thus—that this war may end many months before the 1917-18 harvest can be placed on the market. It is just possible that the Dardanelles may be opened and that thus Russian wheat may reach European markets. There is also the possibility of a bumper harvest in the Argentine, the United States, or Canada, which would seriously affect the price of wheat. To put it another way, there is just the possibility that the bottom might fall out of the wheat market, and that the guarantee of 3s. might involve a very serious loss. If we are to have another harvest equal to the estimated harvest we are now garner-

ing, say 20 million bushels, this guarantee, as hon. members will see for themselves, might plunge the State into loss. I am taking the very blackest view in outlining what may happen. Suppose the return was only 2s. 6d. per bushel instead of 3s., the loss to the State on a 20-million bushel harvest would amount to half a million sterling. If the price realised were only 2s., the loss on the same quantity would be a million sterling. Having considered the matter, however, as far as we are able, the Government have come to the conclusion that, whilst we ought to seek Parliamentary sanction for entering into a guarantee of such dimensions, the risk of loss is, in our opinion, so small, and the advantages resulting to all who depend, either directly or in a secondary degree, on agriculture—which, indeed, means the great majority of the people of this State—so great, that we are justified in recommending to Parliament the acceptance of the proposal. With my colleagues I have viewed the matter from all aspects, and in our opinion it is up to the State of Western Australia, seeing that the Eastern States have fallen in with the Prime Minister's suggestion, also to come into line and give this guarantee. We consider that this course should be adopted, not only from the point of view of the people of this State, but also because of the undoubted benefit which will accrue to the British Empire. It is of the greatest importance to the British Government to be assured that the farmers of Australia are doing their utmost to provide the largest possible quantity of wheat, or in other words of food supplies, for the use of their relatives in the Motherland. In the meantime the Prime Minister was authorised, and he has already conducted negotiations with the Imperial Government, to try and effect the sale to the Imperial Government of the 1917-18 harvest. It is proposed to endeavour to dispose of the whole of the crop, roughly estimated at three million tons. If this deal is brought about, then, of course, our guarantee will not be required. The advance will still be required because undoubtedly the Commonwealth will not be able to get payment in time to provide for the farmers receiving their money at the siding. That.

however, can easily be arranged. There are strong grounds for hoping that a satisfactory arrangement will be come to in connection with the negotiations that the Prime Minister is now carrying on, and I think it will be more satisfactory to all concerned if a deal of that kind can be brought about. We also have to take into consideration the other view that if we refrain from giving relief of this sort to our farmers they will undoubtedly be discouraged. No man can foretell what the operations of the wheat market 18 months hence will be, and if this advance is not provided for, our farmers will not be likely to put in the area they will otherwise do. Under all the circumstances I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that we ought to enter into this agreement notwithstanding the gibe of one of my friends opposite that I am becoming socialistic. I am quite prepared to be socialistic under the circumstances now appertaining when the needs of the Empire are at stake and the requirements of the British soldiers have to be taken into consideration.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Force of circumstances.

The PREMIER: Circumstances of course alter cases, and I do not think even the leader of the Opposition would argue otherwise.

Mr. Hudson: The farmers are advocating a continuance of the pool.

The PREMIER: Undoubtedly, and I see no reason why they should not.

Mr. Munsie: You did a little while ago.

The PREMIER: The facts which I have related are briefly the reasons for bringing forward the motion. The Eastern States have adopted the suggestion; they are quite willing to guarantee their own farmers to this extent. I hope the House will consider this matter and realise that in protecting the interests of our own people and our own State we are taking what is a legitimate risk, and that in the interests of the Empire itself the risk is one we might fairly be entitled to take, remembering the many blessings we enjoy owing to the protection the Motherland gives us. In conclusion I would say that the price it is proposed to guarantee our farmers, namely, 3s. a bushel at the siding, and added to that the cost of taking to the port of shipment another 8d. or 9d. a

bushel, gives an equivalent of the average price which has been obtained for our wheat during the past 10 years. We must therefore come to the conclusion that this is a fair sum we are guaranteeing, and that the farmers will be induced to do their part in Western Australia as they are likely to do in other parts of the Commonwealth, and that they will sow as much wheat as possible in order that the food supplies of the Empire may be benefited. I have much pleasure in submitting the motion to the favourable consideration of the House.

Mr. WILLMOTT (Nelson) [5.5]: I am pleased indeed that the Premier has moved this motion. We must all be of the one opinion and that is, that it is absolutely a national duty that we should grow all the wheat we can in the 1917-18 season. Unfortunately the world's markets and the whole of the trading system generally are so upset that the ordinary channels of commerce are not available to us. Therefore something must be done, otherwise many of our farmers will not be in the financial position to take the risk of growing a crop.

Mr. Carpenter: Do you think this proposal will satisfy them?

Mr. WILLMOTT: I think that many of them will not be satisfied with 3s. and that they would like 4s. I would very much like to see 4s. guaranteed, but at the same time I am a great believer in fair play and I think that 3s. is as much as we can expect a small community like Western Australia to guarantee under the circumstances.

Mr. Carpenter: Can they work under that?

Mr. WILLMOTT: I think so. I do not take such a gloomy view of the position as the Premier.

The Premier: I did not.

Mr. WILLMOTT: The Premier took the rather gloomy view that the Dardanelles might be opened and that there might be a bumper wheat crop in the Argentine—

The Premier: I said there was a possibility.

Mr. WILLMOTT: There is that possibility; but even if the Dardanelles are opened, and I hope they will be, and even if the Argentine does get a bumper harvest, the stores of grain have been so depleted in

the last two years that every grain of wheat which can be grown will be required.

The Premier: You want to be able to transport it.

Mr. WILLMOTT: When we read in the papers how our mercantile marine is diminishing in spite of the efforts of the British Government to rebuild it, we cannot but come to the conclusion that the position will be seriously affected. I hope most sincerely that the Prime Minister will be successful in making a straight out sale. If that is done, it will relieve the State of the guarantee, and as the Prime Minister was so successful with this year's crop, let us hope that he will be equally successful with that of 1917-18. The matter should be settled as quickly as possible so that the farmers might know how they stand and then they can immediately get to work and put in as much wheat as possible.

Mr. Hickmott: Do you think the guarantee of 3s. a bushel will induce them to put in a big crop?

Mr. WILLMOTT: The wheat farmer is in a much better position than the fruit-grower who has no guarantee. I am a fruit grower myself and this season I have struck a particularly bad market. Unfortunately, however, the fruit growers are in the position that they cannot urge the Government to fix a minimum guarantee for them. At the same time, that section of the community is not of the dog-in-the-manger type and will not say because they cannot be assisted they object to the wheat farmers being assisted. I have much pleasure in supporting the motion.

Hon. J. SCADDAN (Brown Hill-Ivanhoe) [5.10]: I am not going to raise any serious objection to the motion because I recognise that it means a great deal to this State as a whole that we should encourage production, and the first essential of life is wheat. I think, however, that we should take into account just how it is likely to affect the State in the event of the Commonwealth not being as successful as we at this stage anticipate. It is all very well to anticipate the future and risk all one has in a venture, but we must at the same time appreciate the fact that others may suffer by that venture. A matter like this is simple enough for a Government to undertake because they

can always get relief by retiring if the pinch is a bit tight, and while the Government may at this stage be able to make good fellows of themselves by promising something, it may be that the future will be of such a nature that they will not be able to recoup the State, in which case the general taxpayers will be called upon to foot the Bill. Already during this session I have had to point out on more than one occasion what we are building up by way of a gamble without the general taxpayer being consulted. It is not the wheat farmer who will carry the burden, because he is to be guaranteed. It is a simple matter for the Prime Minister to undertake to raise money so long as there is a guarantee from someone for the repayment of that money together with the charges for raising it. We propose to guarantee 3s. per bushel—

Mr. Hickmott: Has wheat in normal times been below 3s.?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Times are not now normal; they are abnormal and I defy anyone in this Chamber to foretell what the future holds in store for us. It may be all right, but on the other hand it may be all wrong. I want to tell hon. members on the Ministerial cross benches that while it may be satisfactory from their point of view to get this guarantee it may not be so satisfactory from the point of view of the general taxpayer, for he will be called to foot the Bill.

The Minister for Railways: He will benefit.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Not at all. How can the hon. member tell me that the general taxpayer will benefit if we make this guarantee and wheat when placed on the market will only return 2s. 6d.? Where is the benefit when the taxpayer has to buy bread based on the market price of wheat at 3s. a bushel at the siding and at the same time he has to contribute to the Treasury the difference between the 3s. we guarantee and the 2s. 6d. we obtain when the wheat is placed on the market. We have not yet awakened to the fact that by our action in the past we have compelled the general taxpayer to contribute a large sum of money to the wheat producer. We have had wheat in plenty during the past two or three years

and the benefit to the consumer in Australia has been nil. As a matter of fact, the consumer has been at a disadvantage. In providing transports for the conveyance of wheat to London, we have placed the fictitious London parity on wheat in Australia because we have provided transports at less than the market rate and the consumer in Australia has been compelled by his own action to pay a greater price for his bread than he pays in normal times, notwithstanding the fact that we had wheat going to ruin, that we had wheat dropping through the cracks on the wharves, and being eaten by mice in the stacks. And now, irrespective of what next year's conditions may prove to be, we are going to saddle the consumer with an altogether fictitious price.

Mr. Butcher: That must occur when prices are arbitrarily fixed.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member is prepared to agree to the fixing of prices so long as the fixing benefits those in whom he is interested; but when it comes to the fixing of prices to prevent rings, combines and trusts from robbing the community, the hon. member withdraws his support. On a previous occasion hon. members declined to give commissioners power to fix the price of wheat.

The Minister for Railways: You fixed it at 4s. 6d.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: No, the commission had no power to fix it.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: You fixed it at 7s. 4d. in the drought year.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Only for seed wheat. The hon. member is prepared to fix high prices when they will benefit his constituents, but when, under the fixing of a price, his constituents will have to pay, he at once objects. In that year when some were clamouring for high prices for wheat, the member for Pingelly (Mr. Hickmott) very wisely remarked that, while there were a few fortunate enough to hold wheat for sale, there were, unfortunately, a great many who were compelled to buy wheat. Now, as it chanced, we have wheat sufficient to carry us over next year's local requirements, and it is proposed to offer special encouragement to the farmer to do what other business men have to do of their own initiative.

Mr. Hickmott: The wheat you imported that year cost more than the wheat for which you fixed the price.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We had to import the wheat to keep the industry going, and we fixed the price below the market rate. The farmer when he is selling insists that he should not be the loser of a single penny; when he is buying he resents any interference whatever. The general taxpayer has had to make good over £40,000 loss which occurred as the result of the assistance the Government rendered to the farming industry.

Mr. Hickmott: Our farmers have been too modest in their requests. The New Zealand farmer is getting 6s. 6d. on trucks, while our farmers are getting only 4s. 9d.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I shall have to find a new definition of modesty.

Mr. Hickmott: And our wheats are superior to both the New Zealand and the English wheats.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Premier has said it is necessary that we should give this guarantee in order to induce the farmers to put in as much as they can next year. Apparently, if they cannot get a guarantee from the general community that their farming operations shall be profitable, they will not carry on. The Canadian farmer did not ask for any such guarantee from either the Canadian or the British Government. All that was said to the Canadian farmer was, "We require every grain you can produce. It is in the interests of the Empire. The present outlook is that the market will be all right, but we can give you no guarantee. We want you, in a patriotic spirit, to produce every grain of wheat that you can." And how did the Canadian farmers respond? They increased their yield nearly two-fold. Notwithstanding any guarantee we might give them, I do not think it will be suggested that our farmers would increase their yield two-fold.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: They have done all they can, and they are doing it at a loss.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That is absolutely incorrect. The hon. member should obtain from the Minister for Industries a return showing the financial position of all those who came under the Industries Assistance

Board when it was first inaugurated, and contrast the position of those men still under the Industries Assistance Board with those others who have been able to get out of the clutches of the board.

The Minister for Railways: They will make a very fine profit this year.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: No doubt. I have heard those of my colleagues who are farmers say, "This will get us out of our difficulties." Why should not we adopt the attitude that every man producing an essential commodity should be given a guarantee similar to that which it is proposed to give the farmers? Is not the horticulturist entitled to the same consideration? Yet what guarantee has he that he shall be rewarded with a fair price, or even with a market? To-day in the market one can buy peaches at 6d. per case. This guarantee is to be for the farmers alone. There is nothing of the sort for any other producer. Boiled down, it apparently amounts to this: if we cannot get our farmers to view the matter in a patriotic spirit as did the Canadian farmers, then we must give our farmers a guarantee. Three shillings at the siding is a better price than the farmer got in normal times.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: The expenses of production are much heavier now than before.

Mr. Hickmott: Wheat has never been much below 3s. at the siding.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Here, in Western Australia, it has been as low as 2s. 2d. at the siding. If the hon. member will search the statistics of normal times he will find that the average price at sidings has been 2s. 7d. to 2s. 10d.

The Minister for Railways: For 10 years before the war the average price at sidings was 3s.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: If it should happen that the war ends after the spring campaign, what will be the position?

Mr. Thomson: It is worth the risk.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am prepared to take the risk, but I want the position to be thoroughly understood. I want representatives of the farming community to realise that this advance is a generous action on the part of the community. The farmers

ought to wake up and relinquish their favourite attitude as expressed in the phrases, "We are the people," "Whatever you do for us, is not sufficient," and "What we want you to do you must do; we will compel you to do it." The time has arrived when farmers should recognise that this advance represents a most generous action.

Mr. Willmott: It is wise generosity.

Mr. Hickmott: The people you represent are always craving for more.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Can the hon. member cite a single instance of any Australian Government giving a guarantee in respect of any goldfield, or any other industry save farming, that it should not be run at a loss?

Mr. Willmott: Western Australia ran a pretty big risk in the early days of the goldfields.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: In those days, owing to the general influx of capital, the State Treasurer had an overflowing Treasury. That was all due to the goldfields. However, I have no wish to set the mining industry against that of agriculture. I am trying to explain to the farmers' representatives how much the general community is doing for the farmers, and that it is up to them to cease whining. During the last six years the farmer has been the spoilt child of the State.

Mr. Thomas: He has become a political mendicant.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not prepared to depart from the belief that what we have done has been in the best interests of the credit of the State, but I want those who are receiving the benefit to be generous enough to admit that something material is being done for them by the general community. Let us look at the possibilities of the position. Suppose the war should end to-morrow. We must remember how we are situated in Australia. Owing to the loss of tonnage, owing to the trade of the world being in a turmoil in consequence of the war, it will be two or three years, perhaps five or ten, after peace is declared, before trade on the high seas will get back to normal. It is all very well to imagine that, if peace were declared to-morrow, all our transports would be immediately available

to carry wheat. Not for years. And the further fact must be remembered that trade has changed tremendously throughout the world; Japan has captured much of it, and America has also captured some. Does the hon. member imagine that immediately the war is over the British shipowners who have proved themselves the most unpatriotic men in the wide world, are going to turn their ships to Australia in order to pick up our wheat? Members need not have that idea on their minds. The British ship-owner is the most grasping individual on earth, and after the war he will continue to supply his ships to those ports where he can get the best money, can get dividends. Again, when peace is declared we will be so overtaken with joy—I am not speaking of this State only but of the Empire—that we shall lose sight of many things we should keep a close hold on for years. But taking it that a fair amount of shipping tonnage will be made available for the carriage of products from one part of the world to another, we are told that Germany is on the verge of starvation, and if that be the case, immediately peace is declared the Central Powers must be supplied with necessary commodities to feed their women and children. That will result in a further demand on shipping tonnage. Can members imagine British ship-owners coming to Australia which will take three months to get one cargo, when their vessels may go to America, to Russia, and other ports where commodities are awaiting shipment, that the British ship-owner will leave all that and display a patriotic spirit, which he has failed to display during the greatest crisis the world has ever seen? Is it likely he will say to Australia, "I will not land you, I will shift your wheat"?

Mr. Willmott: You forget that there will be an immense amount of tonnage released after the war.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Let me assure the hon. member that there will not be such a tremendous amount of tonnage released for a long time after peace is declared. The vast number of troops who have been taken oversea by transports will have to be brought back again. Let the hon. member ask the Minister for Defence for an opinion on the question.

The Minister for Works: The transports will take wheat on the return voyage, they will not go back empty.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We have thousands of tons of wheat stacked in Australia, and even though a fair amount of tonnage will be released, still we are not the only people with commodities awaiting shipment. There are others, and those others will get preference. Why is it that Canada has been able to ship her wheat notwithstanding that submarines have been operating in the Atlantic, and we have our wheat stacked up, although there has never been any danger from submarines? Notwithstanding that danger, Canada has increased her output twofold. And how has it been possible for America to ship her wheat, while at our ports wheat is stacked up? Other ports, neutral ports, have been able to get British shipping, even while we have been at war, yet only occasional ships are sent to Australia. If we think we are likely to get patriotic treatment from the British ship-owner when peace is declared, then I say we are in for a great disappointment. I want to urge that those representing the farming community, who after all are the persons who will get the direct advantage from the guarantee given in this Bill, should be prepared to consider the interests of those who are making that guarantee.

Mr. Harrison: You seem to forget that new ships are being built.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member apparently reads only British newspapers. It is a well-known fact that we are not keeping up the output in ships. I am prepared, and the general community in Western Australia are prepared, to give this guarantee, but what is it proposed shall be done by way of return to the general community for the guarantee they are now asked to give?

Mr. Harrison: You will fix prices.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The price will be fixed on the London parity, which is against the interests of the general community.

Mr. Harrison: You fixed fictitious prices.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We have not fixed fictitious prices. The farmer has been getting the equivalent of the London par-

ity, and the general public have had to pay in order that he should get that advantage, nobody else has paid but the general community.

Mr. Harrison: What did you do when the railways were not paying, did you fix prices?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The railways are not paying now. And why? Because those railways which have been constructed in the farming districts are not getting the products taken over them that they should have. Again why? Simply because the land is not utilised, and our farming friends on the cross benches will not help us to compel the owners of large holdings to put them to proper use. Until those holdings are put to proper use the railways will continue to lose money. If the general community are prepared to give a guarantee that come what may they will pay 3s. per bushel to the farmer, against their own interests, are the farmers prepared to give back this guarantee, that notwithstanding the minimum price the price for flour for home consumption will be 3s.? I think that a fair return for favours received.

The Premier: The pool will control that matter.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The pool will not. When we were discussing the Wheat Marketing Bill I objected that the fixing of prices would be doing an injustice to Western Australia. Now we are going further than that. We are giving a guarantee that come what may the farmer will get 3s. net at the siding; and I am asking the representatives of the farmer whether they will give a guarantee that 3s. per bushel will be the price of gisting wheat.

Mr. Hickmott: Are the Government prepared to give a guarantee that if the yield is not ten bushels to the acre they will make it up to the farmer in price?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not raising any objection to the guarantee of 3s., but when a representative of the farmers asks for a guarantee against Providence I think he is asking too much. We must remember where we might land ourselves were we to give any such guarantee. A farmer would get to work and instead of putting in, say, 200 acres, he might scratch in a

larger quantity up to 2,000 acres; and, suppose his average was only five bushels, he would collect on the guarantee. Let me remind the hon. member that the Industries Assistance Board is still in existence and likely to be. We are giving a guarantee that for every bushel a farmer brings to a siding next year we will pay him 3s. The general community gives that guarantee, not the Government, for the Government merely act in such matters as a board of directors. That guarantee is given in respect of every bushel of wheat brought to a siding notwithstanding what might happen. I am asking on behalf of the general community will the farmer say, "That is generous treatment, because anything above 3s. we get, and anything below 3s. the general community pays"?

Mr. Hickmott: Three shillings a bushel will not pay to grow wheat.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It depends on the yield.

Mr. Hickmott: The average yield is ten bushels.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: In normal times it is something like 13. The man who takes on farming and says he cannot make it pay with an average yield of 11.5, which is the average for the two or three lean years, at 3s. per bushel at the siding, should shut up business, because he has never got more than that at any time during the past 20 years.

Mr. E. B. Johnston interjected.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Premier touched on that point last night, and explained that the failure in a good many instances was due to the fact that people without money and without experience had been encouraged to go on the land and had not succeeded.

Mr. Hickmott: The evidence given before the Royal Commission on Agriculture goes to show that wheat cannot be produced profitably under £2 per acre. Are you prepared to accept that?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not prepared to accept evidence tendered to the Royal Commission from the farming community as being reliable. I want to tell the Minister that the evidence the farmers are giving refers only to the difficulties under the Gov-

ernment, not a word about those who are bleeding the farmer outside the Government. If we accept that evidence, the position is that the only people fleecing the farmers are the Government. What about the manure manufacturers, are they not bleeding the farmers; and the merchants, the dealers in bags, twine, and other commodities? I assert that when it is all boiled down it is the dealer in commodities received from outside the Government that has put up prices throughout Australia, and it would be a good move were the Government to undertake the supply of bags, twine, and other farmers' requirements.

Mr. Holman: And fertiliser.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Yes, and fertilisers, so as to protect the farmer against these outside blood-suckers. But that is beside the question. The position is that come what may under this Bill the farmer will be guaranteed 3s. per bushel, notwithstanding that the market may be 2s. 6d. f.o.b. only. I am asking the representatives of the farmer to undertake that the general community, which proposes to treat the farmer so well, shall not be suffering a disadvantage. Will the farmers undertake that the miller shall be permitted to get his wheat at 3s. per bushel at the siding? Remember, the market price may not be 3s. per bushel.

The Premier: They should get the market value.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Certainly; but should they get any more than the market value?

The Premier: No.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Under the undertaking in this Bill they may.

Mr. Holman: It has not often been less.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It has been as low as 2s. 2d. a bushel at sidings.

The Premier: No.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It has been so.

Mr. Willmott: It must have been poor stuff. That, however, is only an assertion.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: No, it is not.

Mr. Holman: The general price has not been less than 3s. a bushel.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We have to bear in mind that there are possibilities in connection with the matter. We are guaranteeing on behalf of the community that the farmer shall get 3s. a bushel at sidings for all the

wheat he produces, and that this shall be the minimum, and that if the market is something higher he shall get the benefit of it. At the same time, we are telling the general community that, come what may, they shall at least pay for bread based on wheat at 3s. at sidings, and nothing more than the market price at the time.

Mr. Hickmott: That ought to be fairly cheap bread.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I do not say that it will be dear bread. I only ask why, in view of the guarantee which the general community are making, the farmers could not say, so far as the gristing of wheat for local consumption is concerned, "We will accept this generous treatment and be equally as generous in return by guaranteeing to the millers wheat out of the pool at 3s. a bushel for local consumption."

Mr. Willmott: How can this be done?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The pool has done it before and can do it again.

Mr. Piesse: At market rates or at valuation?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The pool reduced the price of wheat by 6d. a bushel to the local millers, not only for local consumption, but for the export of flour.

The Premier: That was practically at cost.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I recognise all that.

Mr. Piesse: Do you want the farmers only to get a little, then?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I do not want the pool, as acting for the farmer, to be as generous as it was on a previous occasion. The hon. member is perhaps not aware of the fact that the present Colonial Secretary, when at Moora, made the deliberate assertion that the then Government, which had nothing to do with the matter, had deliberately bribed the metropolitan bread consumer at the expense of the farmer.

Mr. O'Loughlen: It was not an election campaign.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It was a compromise campaign. He was trying to bring about an arrangement between the two parties, and stated that we had bribed the metropolitan electors at the expense of the farmer.

The Premier: We or you?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That we had.

The Minister for Works: Is that not so?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It was not so. The reply to that is that the metropolitan consumer, together with the other consumers of the State, had to suffer by paying a higher price for the bread consumed than was necessary under the conditions prevailing. I heard the member for Leederville (Mr. Veryard) asking certain questions about bran and pollard. The issue at the Canning election was the question of the price of bran and pollard.

The Minister for Works: Which were you, bran or pollard?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I was not in it. It was asserted that we must grist more wheat than we had been doing for the purpose of getting more bran and pollard for our poultry farmers. When the Attorney General made that statement he practically pledged himself and his Government to bring about a reduction in the price to the local consumer as a result of a greater quantity of wheat being gristed for local consumption and for the export of flour. How can he provide the metropolitan consumer with cheap bread if he is going to demand the highest market rate, based on a fictitious London parity, for the wheat that is put into our mill?

The Minister for Railways: What has that to do with the Bill?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It has everything to do with it. Every bushel of wheat produced in Western Australia next year, under this motion, must come out of the pool, and every bushel of wheat sold out of the pool will be sold at the market rate, and we are guaranteeing that the pool shall pay 3s. a bushel.

Mr. Willmott: If it is not that price you need not worry about the public.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member is wrong. In the past when fixing the price to the local miller, we fixed it on the London parity.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: At about 6d. a bushel less than the London parity.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We are going to say that next year, if the price is below 3s. a bushel, we will make up the difference, and charge the public for their bread on the basis of a price which is not the market rate at the time. I do not object to the market rate,

but we have no right to guarantee what it will be. I am not concerned, either, about the man who is consuming our flour elsewhere. Our farmer friends may say that the general community are conserving their best interest by guaranteeing them 3s. a bushel at sidings and that they will guarantee to the millers sufficient wheat for local consumption at 3s. a bushel. Then everyone will know that he will get his bread based on wheat at that price. If the war does not end before this time next year a similar guarantee will be made by the Government, and if it does not come to an end the following year it will again be made, and the chances are that the general community will fall in. In view of the risks we are taking, should not the farmers be prepared to take a little risk as well?

Mr. Hickmott: Is not the London parity 5s. 5d.?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It is not the true parity. We are not getting our freights at the usual rates. The Minister may be able to tell us the amount of wheat required for local consumption. I think it is about two million bushels.

The Minister for Railways: That is so.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We may estimate, in giving this guarantee, that we shall not decrease our last year's output, but that we shall probably increase it, and we can say that our output for the following year should be 20 million bushels. Taking the figures on this basis, if every farmer sold 10 per cent. of every 100 bushels of wheat he produced to the State Government at 3s. a bushel, and for all wheat over and above that, accepted the market rate, it would be a fair arrangement from the point of view of the general community who are, in fact, making the guarantee.

Mr. Harrison: It would be very fair if you could guarantee the cost of producing that wheat.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The farmer is not the only person who is without a guarantee as to what the future market will be for his produce. Have we not induced people to put their money into the horticultural industry and into the dairying industry? Who is going to guarantee that the fruit production for next year, for instance, will pay the producer for his labour?

Mr. Munsie: It is not doing it this year.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: And it may not do so next year. This is, after all, a generous action on the part of the general community.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: In the interests of the general community.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It is directly in the interests of the farmer. If the farmer does as I suggest and agrees that for local consumption the price of wheat shall not exceed 2s. per bushel it will be in the interests of the general community, whatever happens.

The Attorney General: Why should the general community have the farmer's wheat at absolute cost? Why should not the farmers have the same profit on their labours as anyone else?

Hon. P. Collier: Why should the general community pay more than the actual value of it?

The Attorney General: The farmers say that to put wheat on the market at 3s. is to put it there at below cost.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That may be so; I do not deny it. The Attorney General must recognise that we have been paying the farmer for wheat to be gristed into bread for local consumption something above what would have been the price had it not been for general community action. Suppose the general community said, "We are not here for the purpose of giving an advantage to one section of the people, but are here to look after our own interests." Under existing conditions the farmers could not get their wheat away and without general community action they would have sold it in Australia at 2s. a bushel during the year before last, and during last year as well. By combined action on the part of the Federal and State Governments we have been able to give the farmer London parity, notwithstanding the difficulty there has been in putting our product on the market. By that action we have prevented the farmer from selling his wheat at 2s. a bushel, which he would have done had he been left to himself.

Mr. Munsie: And which some of them have done.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: And the general community would have got their bread gristed from flour based on wheat at 2s. a bushel instead of 4s. 6d.

Mr. Cunningham: For a little while.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: For the present, anyhow. If the general community are doing something directly in the interests of the farmer, it is surely not too much to ask the farmer to say, "We are not going to ask the general community to suffer something for our advantage." So far as the local community are concerned, in return for the risks they are now taking, they ought to get their wheat at 3s. a bushel for home consumption while the farmer would get upon the balance whatever the market price might be.

Mr. Piesse: And if the wheat was sold at less than 3s.?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The local consumer would get his bread based on wheat at 3s. a bushel.

Mr. Thomas: Either way he has to pay.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The general community take a great risk in having to carry a pretty heavy burden, and in return should be guaranteed bread based on wheat at the price I have mentioned.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: If the local price were 5s. per bushel, the local consumer would get a distinct advantage.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The bargain is in the interests of one section only of the community, and is utterly one-sided. To judge from the attitude of the member for Avon (Mr. Harrison) and those supporting him, it requires something in the nature of pounds, shillings, and pence to stir the patriotism of the farmer.

The Minister for Railways: You ought not to say that.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That is the inference from the interjections of the member for Avon.

Mr. Hickmott: The farmers got no guarantee last year, and yet they put in more crop.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That is an argument tending to prove that no guarantee is required now.

Mr. Hickmott: It shows that the farmer has patriotism.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member should argue with the member for Avon, who takes the opposite view. With the continuance of the conditions now prevailing, the prospects of the farmer are not bright,

and therefore, from a business point of view, it is desirable that he should be given this guarantee. But I object to a guarantee giving a direct advantage to those engaged in an industry, while involving a disadvantage to those not engaged in the industry.

Mr. Harrison: You know perfectly well that if the farmer gets very little for his wheat the whole State is affected.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: If the farmer really is not able to produce wheat at less than 3s. per bushel delivered on the railway, then, in view of the results of the past few years, we had better stop trying to induce people to come here and take up land for wheat growing. Possibly a realisation of that has caused the Minister for Industries (Hon. J. Mitchell) to give his attention to the South-West instead of to the drier areas.

The Minister for Railways: Why did not you give some attention to the South-West?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Because during our five years of office we were fully occupied in helping the poor fellows whom the hon. gentleman had settled on the drier areas.

The Attorney General: Is that where you threw away your fifteen millions?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: How much has the Attorney General done in the way of reducing the prices of bran and pollard, or in the way of extending the tramway system?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! All this is entirely foreign to the motion before the House.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am prepared to support the motion, which, so far as it goes, represents a business proposition. But I want to know where the general taxpayer, who after all is the guarantor, will come in. I want something in return for the guarantee; and what I want is that the consumer here shall get his bread gristed from wheat supplied at 3s. per bushel.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [6.7]: I am indeed surprised at the remarks of the leader of the Opposition. We have heard a good deal from the critics of the wheat-growing industry, and I think most of their utterances have been entirely unjust. I ask the House to take a broad view of the situation, and to consider what wheat and wool production means to Western Australia. It

is all very fine and large to say that the wheat farmer is of no value to the general taxpayer. Let us be fair to the farmer, and to the country we live in. Political capital should not be made on each and every occasion out of the difficulties of the wheat-growing business. I have no objection to anything said against my actions in this connection. I am willing to be politically annihilated if hon. members opposite will treat the wheat industry decently and fairly. If wheat is not grown in this State, Hay-street will put up its shutters. Wheat and wool are keeping the State going to-day. Without the production of wheat and wool there would be no work for the people of the State.

Mr. Green: What about gold?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: What would happen if the two and a half millions of money now being distributed for wheat were not available? What would happen to those friends of ours who control businesses, if the wheat industry were not flourishing? Certainly, the industry is not helped by being continually damned. The leader of the Opposition said that in return for the guarantee of 3s. per bushel to the farmer there should be a guarantee of bread gristed from 3s. wheat to the consumer. If wheat next year is worth what it is worth this year, this would mean asking the farmer to pay £175,000 for the State's guarantee. That guarantee will not cost the general taxpayer a farthing. On the other hand, the general taxpayer will make a great deal of money out of the wheat.

Hon. P. Collier: You do not know that.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Starting with the lamper at Fremantle, every trader and worker in the State will make money out of the guarantee. Is that fact to be ignored?

Hon. P. Collier: If this guarantee will bring prosperity to every part of the State, let us extend the principle of guarantee to all other industries and so create universal prosperity.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Is there any other industry that so generally benefits trade and commerce as wheat growing does?

Hon. P. Collier: Yes; the timber industry and fruit growing.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: If it can be proved that such a course would be desirable, let us extend the principle to the man who makes clothing and to the man who makes bread, and so all along the line. But there would be no industries to extend the guarantee to if we did not start with farming. Let the hon. member formulate a scheme of guarantee for every trade and every industry. I daresay that would be a good thing from a national point of view.

Mr. Green: Your socialism stops dead with the cocky.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: No, I realise, and I wish the House to realise, that it is very good business indeed to guarantee the farmer 3s. for his wheat. If it were possible to guarantee him 5s., it would be still better business for the community.

Hon. P. Collier: Let us do it, then.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: No.

Hon. P. Collier: Why not?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Because we do not know that the wheat will realise 5s.

Hon. P. Collier: You do not know that it will realise 3s.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes; we do know that.

Hon. P. Collier: If you know that, why is any guarantee necessary?

The Minister for Works: To put confidence into the farmer.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The hon. member knows full well that wheat is worth 4s. 9d. to-day. The guarantee, however, means the raising of the cash by the Federal Government. Finance is so strained that private traders cannot guarantee 2s. 6d. For years past wheat has been worth 3s. per bushel at country sidings. For only a few brief periods has it brought less. Something has been said about the risk of a fall in price through the opening of the Dardanelles, which would free the Russian wheat. But if the Dardanelles were opened to-morrow, the Russian wheat would not be available until April next. Probably, when the Dardanelles are opened, the quantity of Russian wheat available will not be so large as some

hon. members think. I do not believe any member of this House has an idea as to what quantity of wheat the Russians have at their wheat port of Odessa.

Hon. P. Collier: It is a very large question.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I know that; but we need have no fear of the Russian wheat for a long time yet. There is no risk about this guarantee, but the guarantee is necessary in order that the farmer may know that when his wheat has been grown and brought to the siding he will receive 3s. per bushel for it.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Everyone knows that the wheat farmer does not enjoy protection; he pays to guarantee nearly every other industry. If we take the farmers' requirements, we find that he pays duty on almost everything and that he pays far more for his goods than he really should do. Yet, when we come to the House, and ask for this guarantee, and not for protection, we are met with opposition. We have already told the Prime Minister that we are willing to guarantee the amount if he will borrow the money for us. Let us analyse what the State will make out of this. First of all agriculture is the greatest industry in the State to-day. There are six million pounds worth of wheat owned by the farmers to-day, all produced as the result of their labour. It is the industry with the greatest possibilities and we must foster it if we are to make this country what we desire to see it become. If we want to turn to an industry which will help us to put our soldiers back at work, it is the agricultural industry, and yet when we ask for a guarantee, and a moderate one at that, one that does not presuppose a very great risk, if any risk at all, we are faced with opposition from people who are everlastingly trying to advocate higher protection. We pay to the protected industries year by year enormous sums of money, and far more than it would be possible to lose as the result of this guarantee. The lumpers who handle the wheat on the wharves are protected. Do they not demand high wages, and a guarantee of those wages before they embark

on their work? These men are protected by their union.

Mr. Foley: The agricultural industry debars the men employed in it from joining a union, so that they might protect themselves.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Any man can join a union. The hon. member and others tried to form a union for farm labourers some time ago, but they failed. All the same, agriculturists are getting better wages to-day than are paid probably in any other industry. We hear of men getting up to £3 a week and their keep, which shows that agriculture is still a live industry. We are not now asking for protection for all time; we are asking merely that Parliament should approve of this guarantee. Are not all workers protected through the unions to which they belong?

Hon. P. Collier: That argument is far fetched if you are applying it to the present instance.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: All along the line the wheat is handled by men who are well paid. No one is grumbling about that, but still there is no certainty as to what the farmer is going to get. I ask members to take a broader outlook. This industry has been decried year in and year out and the people are still at it. This attitude is not adopted so much by members opposite as it is by people outside. We know it to be a great industry and we should foster and encourage it. Many mis-statements have been made lately in condemnation of the industry, and these statements have come from people who profess to support it. Whilst I was in the Eastern States a good deal was said about agriculture and the value of wheat. One gentleman was particularly active and, as the result of that activity, thousands of bags of wheat were sent to market and auctioned, and the farmers lost a considerable sum of money thereby. If they had waited a few days they would have received the pool price. Men sold their certificates for 3s. 4½d. Only yesterday, at the Chamber of Commerce meeting in Perth, a good deal was said about the industry by Mr. McGibbon, and I have no doubt that some members will be influenced by what he said. Mr. McGibbon said that

there were 2,300 assisted farmers, and if those farmers made a loss the taxpayer would have to meet it, and he thought he was safe in saying that most of them were making a loss. Mr. McGibbon was wrong because most of them are making a profit.

Mr. Munsie: The member for Williams-Narrogin made the same statement in this House.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: I said over a term of years.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The gross production by the farmers this year will be twice the value of the money that was used in producing that crop.

Hon. P. Collier: The farmers are doing very well.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: And the State will do very well. When the figures are published, and the cost of production is revealed, the lie will be given to a lot of the damaging statements which have been made. If the farmers had been allowed to carry on their work without this criticism from people who had their own ends to serve, political ends probably, though these people were not in the House, the industry to-day would be in a very different position.

The Minister for Works: They are irresponsible people.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: They call themselves responsible to the farmers. The result of this attitude of theirs is that we are obliged to come here and ask for this guarantee. Everyone knows that it is not possible to go to a bank and raise money on a farm to-day. We would be able to, though, if the true value of the land was recognised, and the full value of the industry was accepted. But, of course, whilst there are people who claim to represent a section of the farmers decriing the industry in the way that Mr. McGibbon has been doing, securities will never become any better than they are to-day. Mr. McGibbon declares we should have got 5s. 5d. for our wheat. No man in Australia could have got for us the freight to England, or could even have named the price which we would have had to pay for shipping a million tons of wheat. It would have been quite impossible for us to ship wheat at all if it had not been for the

sale to the British Government. Instead of getting 4s. 9d. for our wheat, we should have had to take a very low price for it, if indeed we had managed to dispose of it at all. On the basis of freights, 4s. 9d. was a generous price for the British Government to pay. It is altogether wrong for Mr. McGibbon to tell the farmers that they have not got fair value for their wheat.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Do you not think you are taking Mr. McGibbon a little too seriously?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Probably I am.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Ignore him.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Still it is wrong that this statement should be allowed to go abroad unchallenged. He should not be allowed uncontradicted to say that the British Government made millions of pounds out of their purchase of wheat from Australia.

Hon. P. Collier: I think we should bring that statement under the notice of the Commonwealth authorities. It is an infringement of the War Precautions Act.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The farmers of this State are loyal enough in their desire to help the Mother country but Mr. McGibbon has endeavoured to discourage production.

The Minister for Works: Who is Mr. McGibbon?

The Premier: Just an amateur farmer.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It is our bounden duty to produce food for Great Britain and her allies. If we leave it to neutrals to supply the Mother country with food, they will squeeze England to the last degree. Surely, if we cannot fight, it is our duty to endeavour to produce the foodstuffs necessary for our soldiers. I hope that next year we shall produce twenty million bushels of wheat in this State. But, in order to secure this result, we must make an effort to show the farmer that when his wheat is produced he will get for it enough to render his venture profitable. A little encouragement just now will increase the production up to or even beyond the 20 million mark. It must be remembered that in encouraging this industry we encourage every section of the community.

Mr. Green: That applies even more particularly to gold mining.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Certainly not. Gold has a fixed standard value, and therefore needs no protection.

Mr. Foley: What about the extra cost of winning it?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: This encouragement is not being given to the farmers on the score of extra cost of farming. Still, if the hon. member can show that the gold mining industry is in need of special treatment, there is no reason why he should not appeal to the House. If he should do so he will not be met by the agricultural members with the cry of "If you do not do the same for agriculture we will not do anything for your industry." In this State gold mining has always been encouraged by special means, and probably no member has ever had anything to say against that policy. Let me appeal to hon. members to take a broad view of the question before us, and consider its value to the community. We are taking little or no risk in giving this guarantee, because wheat will not be worth less than it has averaged during the last 13 or 14 years.

Mr. Mullany: Then the guarantee is of no value.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes it is, for unless the guarantee is given, the Federal authorities will not raise the money with which to pay for the wheat, and unless the money is raised in that way there will be no chance of the farmer being paid for his wheat at the siding. The ordinary channels of commerce are closed, and we must face this responsibility.

Mr. Munsie: How are the British Government going to ship the wheat?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: They have control of British shipping and have also chartered an enormous quantity of neutral shipping. If we had to ship our wheat by neutral boats we should not get anything like 4s. 9d. for it. In Melbourne I found that the neutrals were charging 275s. from Madras to the most favoured ports in the British Empire. On that basis, freight on wheat from this country to England would be nearly 10s. a bushel. Hon. members should realise that Great Britain has treated us generously and has taken the responsibility of

carrying the wheat Home. I hope the House will favourably consider the motion. It is essential to the interests of all the people of the State. We are taking no risk, yet the carrying of the motion will do a great deal for the encouragement of production during the coming year.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [7.57]: I quite agree with the Minister that we should take a broad view of this question, and not confine ourselves to the point of view of the individual farmer. We should consider how it is going to affect wheat production throughout the State. While it may be true that it will not be of any real monetary value to the farmer—since the price of wheat is not likely to go below 3s. and consequently there will be no need for the farmer to take advantage of this guarantee—yet we must recognise that even if it does not result in any actual advance to the farmer, the fact that he is guaranteed 3s. per bushel will give to him a feeling of security which, no doubt, will stimulate production for the coming harvest. In that respect I think we ought to consider how it is going to affect the State as a whole. If the State can produce wheat to the value of five or six million pounds, we have just reached the stage in Western Australia where the value of the harvest has for the first time exceeded the value of the gold output of the State. Previously the gold yield has run to about five millions of money. Nobody can deny that a harvest which gives us a value of five millions in one year is an industry of value to the State, because the resulting money from the harvest circulates throughout the channels of trade and commerce of the State. I do not oppose the proposal to give this guarantee. I believe it will give the farmers a feeling of security which they would otherwise not have, and that it will be to the ultimate advantage of the State. I also think, however, that if the State gives the farmer this guarantee, the consumers of the State should get something in return.

The Minister for Railways: What about the other protected industries?

Hon. P. COLLIER: I do not agree entirely with what the Minister has said regarding other protected industries. He enumerated several articles in respect of which he pointed out the farmer paid duty, and he did so as though the farmer alone paid duty

on those articles. That, of course, is not so. Every individual in the community pays that duty which is considered to be necessary for the protection of Australian industries, and the farmer pays no more than anybody else. I maintain the consumer should come into this question as well. We are giving the farmer protection to the extent that if the price of wheat were to fall one penny per bushel below 3s. the State would, taking a 15 million bushel harvest, have to find and pay the farmer £62,500. If the price fell 3d. a bushel below the amount guaranteed, that is to say to 2s. 9d., the amount the State would require to find is £187,500. If it fell to 6d. below the guarantee, which is not an impossibility if the war were to terminate early and the large quantities of wheat now locked up became available in the world's markets—

Member: Where is it locked up?

Hon. P. COLLIER: We are justified in assuming that large quantities of wheat are locked up in Russia. I know we are largely in the dark on the question, but having regard to the large quantities of wheat formerly produced in Russia, we are justified in assuming that they have gone on producing in anticipation of the termination of the war. At any rate large quantities of wheat will be made available in the markets of the world when the war terminates. That being so, is it unreasonable to assume that the price of wheat in Australia may fall to 6d. below the guarantee? If wheat has been sold here in normal times at less than 3s., surely it is not an unreasonable assumption that on the termination of hostilities, when the large quantities of wheat now locked up are made available, that the price here will slump 6d. a bushel. In that event, Western Australia would be called upon to pay under the guarantee no less a sum than £375,000, equal to £1 per head of the total population of the State. To my mind it does not matter very much whether you give assistance to the farmer by the means now suggested, by way of guarantee, or by the direct means at present adopted. In the event of what I have suggested occurring, namely, the price of wheat falling to 2s. 6d. per bushel, what would be the result were there no guarantee? The result would be that the farmers would obtain an equivalent amount through the Industries Assistance Board, and the burden

of that assistance would be thrown back on the Government, to enable the farmers to put in their next year's harvest. Therefore, it is as short as it is long. If we do not give the farmers assistance in this way and the price of wheat comes down abnormally, then the farmer must be assisted through other channels, as has been done in recent years. If the people of this State are to guarantee the farmers the amount I have indicated, then the least the farmers can do would be to give something in return to the general community.

Mr. Thomson: You guaranteed the copper mines.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I wish members to understand that I am not opposing the guarantee to the farmers. I have already said I think it is a good thing, calculated to give heart and confidence to the farmers, as well as to the commercial community trading with them. In reply to the hon. member's interjection, I wish to say that I did guarantee those engaged in producing copper, on what I conceived to be a safe margin. The price of copper was £87 per ton, and it went up to £123. The Government consequently were not called upon to make good that guarantee, but the fact that I did guarantee enabled men to proceed to the work, whereas had there been no guarantee, they could not have gone on.

Member: It is the same thing.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It is not exactly the same thing. There is a difference between the metal market, particularly the base metal market, and the wheat market. I propose moving an amendment to the motion, which I think the Minister and those supporting him should accept, providing that all the wheat required for local consumption shall be sold at a price which will enable consumers to get their bread at $3\frac{1}{2}$ d.—roughly, I believe, that means about 4s. a bushel.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Will you make the guarantee 4s. a bushel?

Hon. P. COLLIER: I am quoting only an approximate figure. Only an expert could say whether 4s. is correct, probably the member for Leederville (Mr. Veryard) would be a better authority than I. I think the proposal in the amendment is fair. Assuming that the price of wheat, owing to the close of the war, falls below 3s., say, to 2s. 6d., I

think it fair that those taxpayers who, after all, are the consumers and who will have to pay this difference between 2s. 6d. and 4s., or between 3s. and 4s., as the case may be, should be able to obtain their wheat for gristing at 4s.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: But they will get it at 3s.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Even that is a fair proposition. I had in mind at first to move that gristing wheat for local consumption should be obtainable from the farmers at not more than 3s. per bushel. That would be a fair proposition if this guarantee is to be of assistance to farmers, and undoubtedly it is, otherwise it would not have been advanced. It is only fair that in return for that assistance the general community, who will have to find the money as taxpayers, should get something in return, and all I ask for them is a guarantee that they shall be able to obtain wheat at a price which will permit of bread being sold at $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. per loaf in Perth.

Mr. S. Stubbs: Why in Perth?

Hon. P. COLLIER: Because, I take it, there will be a corresponding increase where railway freights increase the cost, and by fixing the price in Perth I practically fix it for all parts of the State, with, of course, a proportionate increase according to the cost price of commodities in any particular centre. According to the Minister's own words, the farmers have done fairly well in recent harvests.

Mr. Thomson: Many of them have not.

Hon. P. COLLIER: According to the Minister many of them have done well, and he should know. When referring to Mr. McGibbon's figures, the Minister said that farmers generally had done pretty well. If the coming harvest be as good as the last one, and if prices be maintained as they will be if the war continues. Then the farmers will have done well, not only last year, but during the last two years, and probably the last three. At least they will have done well enough to permit the sale of gristing wheat for consumption at the price I have indicated. This will involve about one-tenth of our total wheat production. Say a farmer has 200 acres in, and obtains an average of 10 bushels per acre. We will require for home consumption about one-tenth of the

total yield, which means that that farmer will have to sell one bushel in every 10 for 4s. instead of for 4s. 6d. or 5s. he may obtain through the pool.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: What if he gets only 3s. 3d.?

Hon. P. COLLIER: He could not expect to get more for wheat for local consumption than he could get through the pool. I have never raised my voice in opposition to genuine assistance to farmers, nor have I ever raised my voice to set the mining industry against the farming industry. Those are our two greatest primary industries, and I believe one to be as essential as the other. The mining industry has produced a market for our farmers and in return the farmers have produced those commodities which the goldfields require. We cannot build up one industry in this or in any other State by decrying another. Both are necessary to us, therefore let us give both reasonable and fair assistance to enable them to increase the productiveness of the State. I do not know the gentleman referred to by the Minister—Mr. McGibbon—but I understand he is, or was until recently, a member of the executive of the Farmers and Settlers' Association.

Mr. Taylor: He is one of the bosses.

Hon. P. COLLIER: If so, he should know what he is talking about. If a man occupying a prominent position in the association and who has occupied a good deal of the public eye through the newspapers, gives out statements to the public not consistent with fact and calculated to work detrimentally to the farming or any other industry, he should be corrected at the earliest possible moment. I would go further and say he should be suppressed altogether. In voicing my support for the farming or other primary industries I always feel strongly upon the point that in our desire to assist the farmers—and no one can question the fact that Western Australia in recent years, since Parliament was first taken seriously, has been most generous in its assistance to the farmers—we cannot deny the fact that the farming industry generally has received more generous assistance in this State than has been the case with farmers in any other part of the world that we know of. Unfortunately, too often the assistance

given by the State does not result in anything going into the pockets of the farmer. I should not be so seriously concerned about the high price of bread to the consumer if I knew that the whole of the results of this high price was going in that direction. It is not, however, going there at all, because it is being filched from him in so many avenues and channels in its intermediate course. Between the farmer and the consumer there are always a few middle men who grasp a greater profit than they are entitled to receive. That has been the case in regard to the concession granted to farmers by way of a reduction on the freight on fertiliser. Is it not a fact that immediately after the freights were reduced on fertilisers the price was put up to the farmer by the companies manufacturing this commodity?

The Minister for Railways: The overseas freights had increased.

Mr. Thomson: Western Australia is not the only place where the price has been raised.

Hon. P. COLLIER: That may be so. Have we no guarantee that these people who are supplying the farmers with fertiliser are not getting an abnormal profit? As a matter of fact, we know they are. There is nothing, except their generosity, as it were, to prevent this, because there is no competition between the two firms in this State, or indeed in Australia, who are supplying the farmers. The worst feature of the whole thing is that in recent years competition has been entirely eliminated, not only in regard to this matter, but in regard to most other things which the farmer requires in carrying on his business. These people have by coming to honourable understandings, and creating rings and combines, been able to raise the price, and thereby fleece the farmer so that the net result of the assistance given by the Government to him is that it goes into their pockets instead of into those of the people for whom it is intended.

The Minister for Railways: I do not think you are doing them justice.

Hon. P. COLLIER: I am very short of doing them justice. I do not say they are rooks. I do not even say that the men who

combine to put up prices are doing anything more than business men would do, that is, taking advantage of the conditions of society which permit them to do this.

The Minister for Railways: In war time?

Hon. P. COLLIER: In war time and in peace time.

Mr. Taylor: Never mind about the time; they only want the opportunity.

Hon. P. COLLIER: They are undoubtedly making larger profits to-day in war time than they were doing in times of peace. They are making these profits as a result of the war. Some of these men are loudest in their talk about patriotism and helping the Government, and winning the war. The individual or the company who raises the price particularly on goods which are necessary for the carrying on of our primary industries, and does this needlessly in war time in order to take advantage of the position now obtaining, is worse than the Huns the Empire is now engaged in fighting. I admit that there are very few industries or businesses now carrying on their work in this State which have not had their costs increased as a result of the war, but I doubt very much whether the increase in the cost of production has been equal to the increase in the selling price placed upon their goods by these people.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: The increase is to maintain their profits at pre-war rates.

Hon. P. COLLIER: Yes. We have the position that whilst in war time the great majority of the people have suffered a reduction in their incomes, and have been content to so suffer, there are still a few individuals who if they have not increased their profits have taken steps to see that they have not been reduced.

The Minister for Railways: There are many people who will not be hurt at any cost.

Hon. P. COLLIER: It is the duty of the State to take this matter in hand. I have here an article which appeared in the *Daily News* on Friday last. It is most illuminating as to the attitude of patriotic shipowners in the Old Country. It is shown here that in war time the profits of these people in one year have risen from 200 million pounds to 500 million pounds, that is to say the ship-

owners of Great Britain have increased their profits during war time to the extent of 300 million pounds.

The Minister for Railways: What about their losses in shipping?

Hon. P. COLLIER: They may be losing a few ships, but these are always covered by insurance.

Mr. Green: They allowed for such a loss.

Hon. P. COLLIER: As stated by the leader of the Opposition, these men are not likely to consider the shipping of Australian produce so long as they can do a couple of trips across the Atlantic for every one they can do to Australia. I do not entirely blame them, because that is all right from their point of view. What I do object to, however, is the fact that too often when the State goes to the assistance of the farmer or our other producers these middlemen come in and reap the benefit. I do not know whether this guarantee that we are giving to the farmers of 3s. a bushel will have the effect of stimulating the man who is selling them their fertiliser. I would not be surprised if this person did not sit back and say, "The farmer is certain of getting 3s., and I might as well add a little to the price of my fertiliser." If he does not do this he will be a much reformed man, and will be failing to take advantage of opportunities which he has never failed to take advantage of in the past. I ask the House to carry my amendment because it is a fair proposition that the farmer, in return for the assistance he has had from the State, should at least have some consideration for the consumers, and that the price of wheat for home consumption should be a reasonable one. Four shillings a bushel even in these times is a fair price for wheat, particularly in view of the fact that he is getting this because ships have been commandeered at a much lower price, something like half the rate, than that at which they would have been obtainable if the Home Government had not stepped in; and because this has been brought about through the assistance given by the Home Government in obtaining these ships and taking the wheat from Australia, in the assistance given by the Commonwealth and the State Governments in the formation of the wheat pool, and in the assistance we

are given by guaranteeing 3s. a bushel. In return for all these things, which have been worth millions of pounds to the farmers—

The Minister for Lands: It costs us nothing.

Hon. P. COLLIER: We are asking the farmer to sell his wheat for the gristing of flour for home consumption only at 4s. a bushel. I ask even the most enthusiastic supporters of the Farmers and Settlers' Association to deny that this is a fair deal. In the words of the illustrious Chairman of Tattersall's Club, all we want is a fair crack of the whip. In my amendment this is all that we aim at, and all that we desire to achieve in the interests of the consumers of the State. I therefore move an amendment—

That the following words be added to the motion:—"Provided, however, that the Pool shall provide wheat for milling local supplies of flour at a price which will allow bread to be sold retail at Perth at a price not exceeding threepence halfpenny per 2lb. loaf."

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

Mr. LAMBERT (Coolgardie) [8.27]: I have much pleasure in supporting the amendment moved by the member for Boulder (Hon. P. Collier). If the farmers expect a wholesale guarantee as to the price of their wheat, then the consuming population of Western Australia are justified in expecting something in return. As rightly pointed out by the hon. member, owing to the generosity which we have shown towards the Old country, and which I feel was fully justified, there has been an inflation in the price of wheat for home consumption, and some reasonable effort should be made on the part of the House to endeavour to regulate the price so that the local consumer, at all events, would be able to secure a loaf of bread at a reasonable cost. A good deal has been said with regard to the position of the farmer, and I would like to say a word or two in relation to the mining industry. This must be realised even by those who represent the farming industry. At the present time the position of some of the leading mines of Western Australia is undoubtedly serious, because of the inflation of prices of general commodities and mining stores. On account of this inflation some of the mines are finding it necessary to close down,

and many others to curtail operations. I ask the Government to consider that phase of the question closely. Two or three of the large mines on the Kalgoorlie belt are verging on the border line of profit and loss, and anything Ministers can do to assist the mining industry should be done.

Mr. Thomson: Fixing the price of flour for the consumer will not assist the mines.

Mr. LAMBERT: The lessening of the price of the loaf will certainly benefit the local consumer. As pointed out by the member for Boulder (Hon. P. Collier), generally the farmer is not the man who benefits by the assistance which a beneficent Government afford. That hon. member also pointed out that the moment fertiliser rates were lowered by the present Administration, the price of fertilisers to the farmer went up.

Mr. Thomson: Fertiliser prices were raised in the Eastern States at the same time.

Mr. LAMBERT: Admittedly. But outside the combine controlling superphosphates in Australia, there was only one firm operating Japanese superphosphate. That firm imported Japanese superphosphate to Australia, and there was a hue and cry, on the patriotic "stunt," that the Japanese commodity should be shut out. The importer in question, whose name is Hassell, was practically forced out of the Australian superphosphate trade until he went to Sydney and there formed a syndicate to operate the Australian product.

The Minister for Railways: What do you say about Japanese superphosphate?

Mr. LAMBERT: That it is just as good as Australian so long as the chemical contents are the same.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: The importer offered to guarantee that.

Mr. LAMBERT: There was some absurd quibble about sulphate of lime. Without desiring in any way to decry locally manufactured superphosphate, I say superphosphate is superphosphate all the world over. The firm of Cuming, Smith & Co. are bringing pyritic ore from Ulamina, and that ore has about 1½ per cent. of copper contents. The sulphur contents in the same ore, however, are worth £3 or £4 per ton. Sulphur has doubled or trebled in price here; but the railway rates on pyritic ore carrying that percentage of sulphur have not been increased, notwithstanding the fact

that the rates on superphosphate and sulphuric acid have been raised. The ore I refer to is brought here from Ulamina for 10s. per ton.

The Minister for Railways: In any quantity?

Mr. LAMBERT: In the quantity necessary to manufacture superphosphate at Cuning, Smith & Co's. Works.

The Minister for Railways: I do not think so.

Hon. J. Scaddan: I warrant no one gave that evidence before the Royal Commission on Agriculture.

Mr. LAMBERT: The matter is not one which specially interests me as the representative of a mining constituency; but I am telling the Minister for Railways, for his information, of something that the Government of this State are doing for the superphosphate manufacturers. The Minister knows well that the superphosphate companies have time charters, running over periods of five years probably, and that they all buy phosphatic rock at the one price from William Crosby & Co., of Sydney. For my part, therefore, I fail to see where the increase of 10s. per ton comes in. The large superphosphate works at Guildford and on the Swan, as well as those in the Eastern States, have all been built out of the farmer. It is only a few years since the Mt. Lyell Company started with a little experimental plant for the manufacture of superphosphates. All the rest has undoubtedly come out of the farmer's pocket; and it is just as well for the farmer and his representatives to know it. So much for that phase of the question. I should like the Government to consider seriously the contentions put forward by the member for Boulder. In our generosity—which is admittedly justified at the present time—towards the Imperial Government, in our desire to supply the Mother Country with wheat, let us still remember that we owe a first duty to our local consumers. So long as we do not unduly interfere with the interests of the farmer, I feel that effect should be given to the amendment, and that the interests of our own consumers should be protected.

Hon. T. WALKER (Kanowna) [8.35]: Certainly the House has been treated to a

series of extremely interesting and instructive speeches on this subject; but I venture to think that a good deal of the matter, valuable as it is, is scarcely relevant to the question. I do not see any use at all in decrying the farming industry, or in making complaints about the avarice, or the greed, or the grasping qualities of the representatives of the farmers here. It may be that the farmers' representatives are anxious to get all they can for the industry. It may be that a complaisant Government are anxious to do all they can to aid the farmers and win their political support. It may be that a good deal of help has been given, sometimes in unwise directions, to the farmers, in order to obtain their political support in this Chamber. But that is not the question under discussion. I submit that the proposition put forward to-night, that there should be a guarantee of 3s. per bushel at the siding to the farmer for his wheat, is not only a general national question, but an Imperialistic one at the present time. The proposition is not made with a desire merely to keep the farmer going in funds. The proposition is not confined to Australia. Its mainsprings are behind those considerations. The basis of the motion rests in the centre of Empire itself.

Mr. Thomas: Rubbish.

Hon. T. WALKER: I have no doubt whatever that the hon. member is an authority.

Mr. Thomas: But to try to make a thing like this an Imperial question!

Hon. T. WALKER: I cannot be at all responsible for these frivolous interruptions, nor for the little view, or brief perspective, the member for Bunbury (Mr. Thomas) seems capable of taking. This may not be a win-the-war question, but it has a good deal to do with the war, because the necessity for food supply to Britain and her armies cannot be gainsaid. It is a most material question, and the great forces of the enemy of Great Britain are aimed at destroying her food supplies and thus starving and famishing her. But if we do not go so far as Britain and her necessities, her desire to obtain our wheat for the supplies required by her armies and her people, if we come only to Australia, only to Western Australia, this is more than a farmers' ques-

tion. There is no doubt whatsoever that, were it not for some species of guarantee in these war times, in the impossibility to obtain transport, either the farmers would be ruined by the impossible prices which would be offered by the local wheat buyers, or the farmers would have to cease to produce.

Mr. Thomson: We cannot afford to risk that.

Hon. T. WALKER: If transport is unobtainable except at most prohibitive rates of freight, the wheat buyers will not take excessive risks, nor will the farmers themselves take the risks involved in the cultivation of their land.

Mr. Thomas: The farmers will not take any risk at all.

Hon. T. WALKER: There are numbers of people who will not take risk.

Mr. Thomas: We have to pay the farmers to be patriotic.

Hon. T. WALKER: No. But everyone in the State who does not want the farming industry to disappear, or to see the farmer absolutely ruined; everyone who recognises the benefit which the farming industry confers on the State as a whole, not only in the production of wheat but in the opening-up and settling of our lands, must desire to see the farms going in full swing.

Mr. Thomas: All the farmers will be ruined unless the State guarantees this 3s.?

Hon. T. WALKER: That is an absurd statement to put forward as an inference from my argument. I submit that the question is one of national importance in this sense: it concerns every citizen of Western Australia that either we make provision for the transport to foreign markets or our overplus of wheat, or that we are to give stagnation to the farming industry. The farmers themselves cannot ship their wheat, and the usual wheat buyers cannot command the bottoms.

Mr. Mullany: But this guarantee has nothing to do with shipping.

Hon. T. WALKER: The hon. member is making a great mistake. The guarantee is based on shipping. The contract is between the Commonwealth and the Empire. That is to say, Britain is to provide shipping if the wheat can be secured. It is not to benefit the local farmer but to ensure a constant

supply of wheat to the home markets where wheat is necessary. That is the object. If the farmer benefits by it, well and good.

Hon. J. Scaddan: What about the general consumer?

Hon. T. WALKER: What will become of him if our wheat remains stacked and goes to waste? This proposal is distinctly in the interests of the general taxpayer. It is for the purpose of getting rid of our surplus supplies of a valuable commodity and to bring money for circulation into the State, and generally to keep the wheels of every avenue of industry going in Western Australia. The proposal is simply for the transshipment of our commerce in times of unprecedented difficulty. Without something of the kind in these trying times, with the enormous stacks of wheat waiting to be removed, the heart of the farmer would sink and he would not put under cultivation the area he would do with this stimulus. With the circulation of money in every branch of enterprise and industry, every citizen will derive an advantage from it.

Hon. J. Scaddan: But what about protecting the interests of the general consumer?

Hon. T. WALKER: The general consumer derives a benefit by the wealth which is circulating in the community.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Suppose we do not get 3s. for the wheat next year?

Hon. T. WALKER: If the men in the wheat areas do not get 3s. a bushel there will be no wheat cultivated in the following year.

Hon. J. Scaddan: But who is to pay the difference?

Hon. T. WALKER: Who is to pay the farmer his wages? It is not a matter of individual payment. The whole State gets a benefit from the enormous production of wheat.

Hon. J. Scaddan: We are paying 3s. for it and it might fetch 2s. 6d.

Hon. T. WALKER: There is a benefit in getting wheat produced, and what is sent abroad comes back in wealth. My objection to the amendment is that it does not guarantee that if the farmer sells it cheap to the miller the consumer will get his bread at a different rate. We leave it as open a ques-

tion as ever, and we leave the consumer as much at the mercy of the miller as ever.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Under the motion they are not allowed to sell a bushel to the miller; we say that the pool shall sell to the miller for local requirements at a price which will not cause bread to be more than 3½d.

Hon. T. WALKER: How will that be done? We must remember that everything has gone up in price. Wages of farm labourers have gone up 100 per cent.

Mr. Thomas: It is new to find the hon. member complaining about the increase in wages.

Hon. T. WALKER: I am not complaining; I am only stating that everything has gone up and that an extra charge must be placed on the production of wheat. Machinery too has gone up in price. Therefore I think that 3s. is a fair estimate of the cost of the production of wheat, and it is just enough to enable a farmer to live upon and pay the demands made upon him owing to the exigencies of the period. That being the amount necessary we gain an advantage by keeping the farmer at his work and the fields under cultivation. The amendment will not control the miller, and that is the objection I have to it. Such control as there is brought about by the machinery now existing. But that is not the point I am objecting to; I am objecting to making it a sectional advantage to one portion of the community and one only. I shall support the motion, which I not only think a wise one but an absolutely necessary one in the interests of Western Australia.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Mr. THOMAS (Bunbury) [8.55]: It can be said of the hon. member who has just resumed his seat that he is interesting if not convincing. He has treated us to a number of conflicting arguments. He started off upon a false basis and led himself astray in various directions. I followed him closely and tried to arrive at some conclusion as to what he really meant, but after a display of oratorical pyrotechnics there was very little left. The hon. member went so far as to say that this proposal was in the interests of the general taxpayer, and when the leader of the

Opposition suggested that he should support the amendment which would provide for some protection for the guarantors, the hon. member could not see any need whatever for the people generally of Western Australia having any protection in return for their guarantee. The hon. member's heart bleeds for the toilers of Western Australia, but it does not matter to him apparently if the price of the loaf goes up so long as the farmer gets a guarantee without having to offer a return for the high price paid him for his wheat.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: That is rather ungenerous.

Mr. THOMAS: I do not think it is. I am trying to disentangle some of the arguments which the hon. member put forward and to arrive at some conclusion in the matter. Many supporters of the motion appear to be under the impression that the farmers are not in the least patriotic, are not seized with the needs of the Empire, and that we should stimulate their patriotism by paying them for it, that we should take the risk of guaranteeing a fixed price. Yet no provision is made for the general taxpayer, who takes all the risk, getting anything in return. When twitted on this point, the member for Kanowna (Hon. T. Walker) waved his hands and said, "It is the very heart of the Empire that is in danger, and the farmers of Western Australia should rally round the grand old flag." That is to say, we should pay them for rallying. And, in order to give them all that can possibly be given, we must put up the price of our own product to our own people. I am prepared to accept the amendment, which indeed I think does not go quite far enough. But some return should be made for the guarantee, so that the people suffering to-day on account of the rise in the cost of living will have some assurance in regard to the price of bread. The farmer is not the only one suffering, yet the hon. member does not care a tinker's benediction what happens to the others so long as we guarantee the farmer 3s. a bushel for his wheat.

Hon. T. Walker: You know how utterly unjust that is.

Mr. THOMAS: The hon. member drew a red herring when he said the guarantee

was necessary in order that the wheat might be shipped to London. The guarantee has nothing to do with that. It is merely to encourage the farmer to be patriotic. I do not think so poorly of the farmer. I do not think his patriotism requires that stimulant. The farmers of Canada were appealed to without any offers of protection. They responded nobly without any guarantee at all, and in my opinion the farmers of Western Australia are prepared to do the same. If we must give them a guarantee, why not exact in return some assurance in regard to the price of bread to the poorer of our people? It has become the custom to refer to the wheat farmer as the farmer; but the real farmer is the mixed farmer, while the man growing wheat is the wheat-grower. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent upon the wheat areas, but what are we doing to help the real farmers? What is being done for the mixed farmers and the fruit-growers? We are not offering them a guarantee to grow produce for the grand old Empire. The proposal before us is more serious than most people are aware of. Its object is to provide an immense 1917-18 harvest. Suppose this gamble in wheat goes on, and the war peters out suddenly, releasing Russian, American, and Canadian wheat, in consequence of which there occurs a big fall in price. What will be the position in Western Australia? We have heard this afternoon that wheat has been known to fall as low as 2s. 2d. Assuming by this proposed guarantee we stimulate a gamble in an enormous production of wheat, and the bottom falls out of the market, it is possible that we might lose 1s. a bushel on the wheat. What a burden for Western Australia to carry! Anything up to a million pounds is at stake. Yet one member of the Country party said he thought we ought to extend the protection up to 4s. a bushel. It appears to me that we are giving to a section of the community a most unfair preference. I realise that legitimate assistance should be given to the wheat-grower, but if he is going to absorb all the available cash held by the Government, every other section of the community will have to suffer.

The Minister for Works: Does not that money circulate throughout the community?

Mr. THOMAS: Not any more than does money produced in other industries. I do not hear the hon. member advocating the claims of other sections of the farming community. Yet he represents a section that needs assistance just as much as the wheat-grower, notwithstanding which, to suit his party purposes, he is silent on this question. I appeal to the member for Swan (Mr. Nairn), who represents another section of the farming community whose requirements should be voiced in this Chamber. To listen to the representatives of the wheat farmers, one would think that those farmers were becoming a body of political mendicants, for ever waiting on the doorstep of the Government begging for this, that, and the other. I refuse to believe that the honest toiler on the land wants half the assistance his representatives are continually asking for. The whole of the energy and power of Parliament seems to be given to one thing alone. No other industry is getting any assistance. The South-West is just as capable of producing the wants of the Empire as is the wheat-growing area, yet no voice is raised.

The Minister for Works: It is wheat that is wanted.

Mr. THOMAS: Does not the Empire require mutton, butter, cheese or bacon; do they not eat those things in England? The soldiers at the Front are not living on wheat alone. A few thousand pounds is required to establish jam factories and canning factories, so that we might send tinned fruits and jam to England, but nothing is said about this. Hon. members wave flags and talk about the danger of the Empire, and the blow struck at her heart, because we are not or willing to give everything to one section of the community.

Hon. T. Walker: This is eloquent rubbish.

Mr. THOMAS: The hon. member treated us to a lot of flapdoodle and flamboyant trash. I have no objection whatever to supporting the motion, provided that in return for the guarantee the people, those who, after all, are the guarantors, shall have some reasonable protection. We must be sure

that the people of Western Australia, as the result of this gigantic deal, will be able to get their bread at a reasonable price.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON (Williams-Narrogin) [9.14]: I congratulate the member for Kanowna (Hon. T. Walker) on the views he expressed on this subject, in contradistinction to other speeches heard from that side of the House.

Hon. P. Collier: What was wrong with mine?

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: Your amendment. It appeared to me that the member for Kanowna had some knowledge of the subject, and I could not help thinking it would be a good thing if we could persuade all members on that side to acquire a thousand-acre block of land; because if they knew the difficulties that the newer settlers have to contend with in dry areas they would adopt a different attitude when questions of vital importance to the agricultural industry, such as this, come before the House.

Mr. Mullany: What would you expect?

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: I would expect the views expressed to be of a different nature. The leader of the Opposition carries his own contradiction, for after criticising the motion at considerable length he stated that he was not opposed to it and would not vote against it.

Hon. J. Scaddan: None of us are opposed to the motion.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: I am pleased to hear that, but the hon. member's speech certainly appeared to me to be in a hostile vein.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Your lack of understanding is responsible for that.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: I regret the invidious comparison which the members for Brownhill-Ivanhoe (Hon. J. Scaddan) and Bunbury (Mr. Thomas) introduced into the debate by comparing the Canadian farmers with the Western Australian farmers to the disparagement of the Western Australian farmers. From my knowledge I can say there is no more reasonable and patriotic section of this community than the Western Australian farmers; and when his difficulties are taken into consideration I venture to say the farmer of Western Australia has done as much, if not more, than the Canadian farmer for the country and the Empire

generally. In any case I can see no necessity for the comparison.

Hon. J. Scaddan: You made it.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: I have not made it. You made the comparison and I resent it, that you should have made a comparison to the disparagement of the local farmers.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Do you know what Canada has done?

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: I venture to think I know as much on the subject as the leader of the Opposition.

Hon. J. Scaddan: I think you know very little of the subject. It is evident you have not considered the matter at all.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: With regard to the amendment moved by the member for Boulder, it is absurd that Parliament, without any knowledge at all of the subject, should be asked to turn itself into a price-fixing commission.

Hon. P. Collier: Are we not doing that in the motion itself?

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: No. What is proposed in the motion is in the interests of the whole of the community; but the hon. member's amendment seeks to fix an important matter up on the spur of the moment without proper consideration.

Hon. P. Collier: We want to fix the price of bread, the motion seeks to fix the price of wheat.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: The subject is one requiring consideration. In this House I have always supported, and will continue to support, the appointment of a tribunal to go into such matters thoroughly so as to protect the interests of the whole of the people in war time. That is a policy I have subscribed to. To my mind, it would be foolish to think of fixing a maximum price for wheat, as desired by the member for Boulder in his amendment, unless we are prepared to go a long way further into the matter and take into consideration every factor in the production of wheat. Machinery, super, boys, and everything else the farmer uses in producing wheat should be fixed at a minimum cost so as to protect the farmer. If the member for Boulder brought forward a comprehensive proposal of that nature, and it was workable, I venture to say Parliament would be justified in appointing a board to carry out its proposal. His amend-

ment also lacks the merit of consistency. If the member wished to be consistent, and if the finances would stand it, I could understand him proposing to increase the 3s. per bushel mentioned in the motion to 4s. and asking that that price should apply to all our wheat.

Hon. P. Collier: You move that, and perhaps I will support it.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: I would move it if it were not that it would interfere with arrangements already made.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Then you would wake up and find yourself out of order.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: But in the circumstances, it would render the motion out of order, therefore I do not propose to move it. It must be remembered that the amount which it is proposed this House shall guarantee, 3s. per bushel, barely covers the cost of production even in a good season under existing abnormal conditions. The cost to the farmer of machinery and everything else used on the farm has increased and in these circumstances we are not guaranteeing the farmer an amount which would enable him to do more than recover the bare cost of production. In the newer districts, at any rate, the cost of production will not be covered by 3s. a bushel. Railway freights are another factor in the cost of production. The most pleasing feature of the Premier's very interesting address was the statement that the Prime Minister is in negotiation with the British Government with a view to placing the whole of our forthcoming wheat crop with the British Government.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Before the British Government is able to release last year's harvest it is proposed to force them to buy our next harvest. Apparently they have not enough trouble at Home.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: The Premier made a most interesting statement on that point. I hope the Government will be able to carry that proposal through. It will be a relief to the hon. gentlemen opposite who have criticised this small guarantee, and also to the general taxpayer, if the efforts of the Government in this direction are successful.

The PREMIER (Hon. Frank Wilson—Sussex) [9.24]: I desire to say a few words regarding the amendment which has been

moved by the member for Boulder. The Government cannot accept the amendment for the simple reason that it is impracticable. First and foremost, permit me to point out that we have joined with New South Wales and the other wheat producing States of the Commonwealth to give this guarantee of 3s. per bushel. We have to find the money, or rather the Commonwealth will find the money and we must guarantee them against loss. The money will be found through the pool which, as members know, controls the harvest. The only question to be decided now is whether we shall or shall not give the proposed guarantee. Three of the States have already decided that they will do so.

Hon. J. Scaddan: We are not objecting to that.

The PREMIER: If any amendment of the conditions be introduced I warn the House we shall be complicating the issue. We cannot stipulate with the Commonwealth that we will join in this compact by way of guarantee provided wheat is sold at a certain price to our millers. We cannot make a condition of that sort. If it is desired to pass a resolution governing the price of wheat to millers, we must go further and fix the price at which flour shall be sold by millers to bakers, and go even further and fix the price at which bread shall be sold by the retailer to the consumer.

Hon. J. Scaddan: That is done now.

The PREMIER: If it is desired to do that, it should be done by independent motion after due consideration. I ask the House not to complicate the issue we have before us to-night by adding the conditions stipulated in the amendment. It will complicate the issue, it is impracticable and it is unjust to the consumer.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Oh, no.

The PREMIER: Will the hon. member permit me to proceed without continuously interjecting.

Hon. J. Scaddan: I once used a retort you did not like. I will use it again if you go on like that.

The PREMIER: The hon. member may use any retort he chooses; I have heard his retorts for years. Give me the retort; let us have it at once. I say the House will be complicating the issue—

Hon. J. Scaddan: That is what—

The PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, may I not get some relief against this continuous interjecting. I think I have the right to address the House.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! If the Premier will continue his address, I shall endeavour to see that he is not interrupted.

The PREMIER: When I was interrupted I was endeavouring to point out that the amendment was impracticable and that the only question to be decided now was either that we shall give this guarantee or that we shall not. I say the amendment is impracticable for the reasons I have given. Firstly, what does "2-lb. loaf" mean? It is very hard to say. The amendment asks that the farmer shall supply wheat for milling at a price which will allow of bread being sold at Perth at a price not exceeding $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. per 2-lb. loaf.

Mr. Holman: Why Perth?

The PREMIER: Yes, why Perth and not other centres? What does it mean? How can the House come to a conclusion on a matter of this kind?

Mr. Munsie: It is because you do not want it to.

The PREMIER: Who can vouch for what the price will be that will enable bread to be sold in Perth at $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. for a 2lb. loaf? No conclusive argument can be put before the Chamber to support that proposition. If the House did carry it, what guarantee is there that bread will be sold at that price? The millers are not bound to retail their flour at a price that would enable this to be done. They may be bound by the Federal Government, who have power to fix the price of wheat and bread. We have not that power in this State.

Mr. Munsie: They are exercising that power in regard to wheat now.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

The PREMIER: Let us deal with the question later on by resolution, and if it is desirable carry one appealing to the Federal Government, in view of the position that we are guaranteeing to the farmers throughout Australia a certain minimum payment, to fix the price of flour from the millers in the first instance to the bakers, and, in the second instance, the price of bread to the consumer at a reasonable figure based on these considera-

tions. Do not let us to-night fix a hard and fast price of which we do not understand the meaning, and so complicate the issue in that direction. It is unjust to the consumer and a dangerous thing to do. My honourable friends say by interjection that this means the selling of wheat at 4s. a bushel. I doubt very much whether that is the true meaning of it. Presuming it is, suppose that in the next harvest sales wheat is sold at 3s. a bushel, or 3s. 3d. or 3s. 6d. a bushel, what right have we to stipulate to-night that our consumers shall pay at the rate of 4s. a bushel? That is what this means they are going to do.

Hon. P. Collier: Does the Premier argue that they will get a higher price for bread than they would for flour for export?

The PREMIER: The export price may only realise 3s., and yet they are going to bind the pool to fix the price to millers at what may be 4s. or 4s. 6d. Instead of doing the consumer a good turn, we will be doing him an injustice, and create a dangerous position. I oppose the amendment for the reasons I have stated, and ask the House to reject it and pass the motion. I have not the slightest objection to a subsequent motion, if it is deemed desirable to protect the consumer, being addressed to the Federal Government for them to take action in that direction. I have, however, a decided objection to complicating the issue that we are asked to decide, and which was put into my hands at the Premiers' Conference, by adding amendments which I am sure will cause delay. The Prime Minister wants this matter settled at the end of the month, though we cannot get it settled until next week, in order that the benefits involved may be derived, and that influence may be brought to bear upon our farmers to proceed at once with their new crop. The chances are that if the Prime Minister does consider the contention which is set up in the amendment, he would then have to refer the whole matter to the other three States I have mentioned, to see whether they would agree to it or not.

Mr. Munsie: They have nothing to do with the price in this State.

The PREMIER: The hon. member does not understand the position. This is a joint operation. We must all abide by the same provisions. I am satisfied that, even if the Prime Minister considered an amendment of

this sort, he would immediately send it to the other States to ask if they concurred in it. The Premiers' Conference entered into a compact with all concerned, and not with one State only. I do not object to action being taken after due consideration, in order that the consumer may not be unduly penalised, and may be protected. I do object, however, to the issue which is now before the House being complicated, and perhaps the object we have in view defeated by the addition of this amendment to the motion.

Hon. J. SCADDAN (Brownhill-Ivanhoe—on amendment) [9.35]: I should like to say a few words in controversion of some of the statements and arguments used by the Premier, and because of his clever method of trying to mislead members—

Mr. Green: Intimidate them.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: In connection with the matter.

The Premier: I did not attempt to mislead any hon. members. I hope the hon. gentleman will withdraw that. It is rather offensive.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I accept the Premier's assurance in the matter.

The Premier: I hope the leader of the Opposition will withdraw the remark.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I withdraw it. In the first place, the hon. gentleman asked members of the House not to agree to the amendment on the ground that it would complicate matters. If that was correct I would of course withdraw any opposition I have to the motion, or any support I am prepared to give to the amendment. I am not desirous of complicating the position at all. In what way does the Premier tell us we are going to complicate the position? He says we will do so because the Prime Minister would disagree with the proposal and would not permit it. What has it got to do with the Prime Minister?

The Premier: You cannot get the money without him.

Mr. Holman: Who would make the deal if the Prime Minister did not?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I will come to that phase of the matter.

The Minister for Railways: He has fixed the price.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: He has not. He has nothing to do with it. All that the Prime

Minister is doing in connection with this particular proposal is to give a guarantee to the State that, if we are prepared to undertake to give so much against the wheat produced next year, he will find the money.

The Minister for Railways: He fixed the price of bread.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Prime Minister said, "You take the responsibility for the payment of the amount which I advance to you upon the wheat, and I will find the money." I admit that if we proposed in the amendment that the local miller should get all his requirements at any price, the Prime Minister would raise objection, on the same ground that he did when he previously insisted that the millers should obtain their supplies from the pool and not elsewhere, as such a proposal would enable the miller to get his wheat at a lower price than millers in the other States, and thus gain an undue advantage over them in the world's market. So far as local requirements are concerned, it does not affect any of the other States whether we sell bread at 2d. or 6d. a loaf. The Prime Minister, therefore, could not be interested. He is not responsible. The general taxpayer of Western Australia finds the money and no one else. We do not complicate the position; we merely provide that the pool in Western Australia, in return for the guarantee that we give that the farmers shall not get less than the cost of production next year, shall provide the miller with his requirements for local consumption alone at a price that will enable the baker to sell his loaf at the Perth parity of 3½d. for a 2-lb. loaf. The Western Australian pool is a separate pool from the Australian pool. The wheat board, it is true, operates in the different States and consists of representatives of each of the wheat producing States, and is formed in order to bring about uniformity and to prevent one State laying off against another. Now the Premier says we do not know what this price per loaf would mean, what the price of the miller for the baker's flour would be. His colleague, who is in control of the Wheat Marketing Committee in Western Australia, can tell him exactly what every farthing reduction, or increase, in the price of wheat will mean in the price of bread

to be paid by the consumer in this State. It has been worked out long since. The old commission went into that question with the millers, the bakers and the merchants, and fixed it definitely. Approximately, a 2-lb. loaf sold in Perth at $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. would mean the selling of wheat to the miller at something like 4s. a bushel. To-day it is up to 4s. 9d., I believe. If we accept the present price of 4s. 9d., and that is the most the farmer can expect next year, even if the present conditions prevail, the most he will lose will be 9d. a bushel on one-tenth of his production. On every acre from which he produces an average yield of 10 bushels he will sell 1 bushel at 4s. and 9 bushels at 4s. 9d., that is if the condition of things now existing continues. If wheat falls below 3s. he would sell the whole of his 10 bushels per acre crop at 3s. to the general community, for, although he may only get 2s. 6d. on the market, the general community makes up the difference. The thing is not impracticable, because, while the amendment does not provide that the miller shall sell the flour gristed from the wheat at any particular figure to the baker, the Federal Government already have control to the extent of providing that flour shall be sold to the baker at so much per ton, and that the baker shall sell his bread at so much per loaf to the general consumer. All that we, therefore, arrange is, that if we give this guarantee on behalf of the general community, we will safeguard the interests of the general consumer by providing that a loaf shall not exceed $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. for a 2-lb. loaf. If the wheat fell to 2s. 6d. a bushel at the siding, the general community would have to find £375,000 under this guarantee. Even if we get a continuance of the present conditions, and 4s. 9d., which may be expected next year for wheat f.o.b., and this amendment was carried, the total loss to the farmers under this proposal would not exceed £75,000 as against the loss to the general community, on the other hand, of £375,000. If that is not a reasonable proposition I should like to know what is. If the Government like to draw a red herring across the trail, in order to influence some of their supporters, who recognise the unfairness of it from the point of view of

the consumers they represent, and so get them into difficulties, well and good. If their supporters cannot see that the interests of their electors are at stake in this matter, but are prepared to accept the dictum of the Premier, that the Prime Minister might interfere and say it was not practicable, then they must answer for it. Why anticipate the attitude of the Prime Minister? If he does interfere, and says it is impracticable, and it is found to be impracticable, it would be a simple matter for the Premier to bring down a resolution dealing with the matter, which would be quite acceptable, and which would be far better than anticipating that any particular attitude would be adopted by the Prime Minister when the Premier does not know that he would adopt such an attitude. I venture to say that if the Prime Minister only had it explained to him what we are doing in the matter, there would be no quibbling about its being impracticable or undesirable. The Federal Government would say that in view of the fact that the money of the general taxpayers is being staked, and in view of the fact that the farmer is not being deprived of anything, the proposition is a fair one to apply to wheat gristed for flour to be consumed in Australia.

Mr. TAYLOR (Mt. Margaret) [9.46]: I consider it is necessary for members to express their opinions on this motion, more especially after the Premier's statement on the amendment. That statement was only a clouding of the issue, an attempt to lead members to reject the amendment, by means of a red herring drawn across the trail. Reference has been made to-night to the assistance given by Western Australian Governments from time to time to the farmers. Before closing I shall state to the House the exact amount of the assistance the farmers have obtained since the 30th June, 1907, to the 30th June of last year, as tabulated in the *Statistical Abstract*. I listened to the member for Kanowna (Hon. T. Walker) trying to make the House believe that this was a national question and a burning question; that this motion was almost inspired by the Empire, and that this inspiration was the reason for the pre-

sending of the motion to the Chamber this evening. I heard, too, the argument of the member for Williams-Narrogin (Mr. E. B. Johnston), who said that this Parliament should not attempt to fix prices.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Not without the fullest evidence.

Mr. TAYLOR: That is something added since the hon. member spoke. This motion is a price-fixing motion for wheat; and therefore, according to some hon. members, it is perfectly right and justifiable. But the moment this House attempts, by price-fixing, to protect the consumer, the House is absolutely wrong. According to the member for Williams-Narrogin, the fixing of prices for the protection of the consumer is altogether too insignificant a matter. We are, however, perfectly right in pledging the general taxpayer of this country in order to protect the farmer. The farmer has been assisted to the tune of over four and a half millions sterling during the last ten years. That is the amount which has been devoted from Loan funds to help the farming industry. Another industry, quite as important as the farming industry, and more important to this State in the past—and I hope it will be more important in the future—has been helped by Parliament to the extent of only one and a half millions during the same period of ten years. I refer to the gold-mining industry. Three times as much has been done by the Government for agriculture as for mining during those ten years.

Hon. P. Collier: And what has been the return in each case?

Mr. TAYLOR: In actual money value, there is no comparison whatever. Gold mining has been a paying concern, and of great money value to the State, from its very inception. On the other hand, how long has Western Australia been producing wheat for export? For two years; this is the third year. Until three years ago we were not producing enough wheat for home consumption. And now this Parliament is asked to pledge the people of Western Australia to a large sum of money all in the interests of the farmer. The member for Kanowna (Hon. T. Walker) says this is a question of patriotism and of Empire. In

opposition to that contention it is said that Parliament is asked to pay for the patriotism of the farmer. I am inclined to think the farmers of Western Australia do not require payment for their patriotism. I believe they are patriotic enough to grow wheat without any guarantee from the present or any other Government. The only respect in which they possibly require a guarantee is ocean freight. They are prepared to meet the open competition of the world with their product; but the difficulty during war time is to get their product to the markets of the world. In that respect the Federal Government, in conjunction with the Imperial Government, have made the necessary arrangements. The Federal Government will guarantee the farmer 3s. per bushel delivered at the railway siding. If that price is not realised, the State is to be responsible for any difference. The amendment asserts that, in view of the extent to which the general taxpayer will be pledged for the farmer's benefit it is necessary that the consumer should be safeguarded against the farmer, who shall be allowed to charge only a certain price for wheat consumed locally. That is a fair proposition. No member of this Chamber can oppose the protecting of the people as a whole, especially when the money of the people as a whole is to be used to protect one section. I appeal to the farming representatives in this House to take a fair view of the matter. Notwithstanding the generosity of this Parliament to the farming community during the last 16 years or more, the farmers thought they should have direct representation in Parliament, and accordingly they formed the Country party. Now, apparently, they believe they are to get, not what is fair, but practically anything they care to ask. While other industries do not receive the proper amount of consideration from the Government, I am not prepared to allow the farmers anything more than their fair share. The member for Williams-Narrogin should cease arguing that Parliament ought not to fix prices. The Parliament of this country embarked on price-fixing two years ago, when a board were appointed for the purpose.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: It is a different thing when price-fixing is done by a board.

Mr. TAYLOR: The prices were worked out to fractions of a penny. The information, I have no doubt, is now to be found on the files of the Government departments. The board decided what the cost of flour should be when wheat was put on the market at a certain price. The scheme was so arranged that the farmer and the miller and the baker each received a fair profit in their respective avocations.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Would you fix the price of super and bags and machinery as well?

Mr. TAYLOR: If this motion dealt with superphosphate and bags and machinery, I would take those matters into consideration when dealing with the motion. But if I begin to deal with the prices of superphosphate and bags and machinery in this connection, I am afraid that you, Sir, would check me. There is no necessity to import into the discussion any matter that is not covered by the terms of the motion. We find hon. members representing the farming industry opposing the attempt to protect the consumer. We also find the Premier rising to tell us that the proposal contained in the amendment had not been considered by the Premiers' conference and that he has every reason to believe the Prime Minister would reject any amendment of this nature, which would mean that Western Australia would have to stand out of the pool altogether.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Guarantee us 4s. per bushel, and we will consider your proposal.

Mr. TAYLOR: The hon. member is practically saying, "Give me a sovereign, and I will give you 10s." Remarks have been made about the avarice of the farmers in this State. I do not wish to touch on a subject of that kind, but if the member for Williams-Narrogin and some other members who represent farming districts are a reflex of their electors, then some of their electors must be avaricious. Apparently they desire to drain every taxpayer of Western Australia for their own advantage and enrichment. It is about time we took a strong stand against such attempts. After all the assistance Parliament has given to farmers, how grateful are they now?

Mr. Thomson: The farmers have had to pay for the assistance.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Six per cent.

Mr. TAYLOR: The State would not be in its present deplorable position if the farmers paid the bills they owe to the Government. Apparently, they are prepared to owe those bills all their lives rather than do the State out of its money. I hope the amendment will be carried, and I trust hon. members will not be led away by the notion that the Prime Minister will reject any amendment of the kind moved by the member for Boulder.

Mr. GREEN (Kalgoorlie) [9.58]: I support the amendment. I have sat in this House for some time, and I have consistently supported every measure for the benefit of the farming industry. But a time comes when a man must reconsider his position, and must recognise that one section of the community may, in the words of Shelley, be likened to the daughter of the horse leech, continually crying, "Give, give." To compare one industry of the State with another is invidious; but by way of reply to the remarks of the Minister for Railways, who said that farming occupied the paramount position, it is necessary to point out what the gold-mining industry has done for Western Australia. In comparison with that industry, farming must take second place. Let me point out that from 1907 to 1916, both years inclusive, the value of the production of gold has been 59 millions sterling, while the value of farming products has been 13 millions. That is to say, that for every £1 produced by the farming industry the mining industry has yielded £4 10s. These figures are from the *Statistical Abstract* and from the *Year Book*.

Mr. Thomson: Have you taken wheat only or the whole of the farming produce?

Mr. GREEN: Wheat.

Mr. Thomson: I thought so.

Mr. GREEN: We are dealing with the question of an advance to the farmer and I protest against it, especially when we consider the comparative insignificance of the farming industry beside that of gold mining. What has the gold mining industry received in the period 1907 to 1916? A sum of only £528,167. On the other hand, the farming industry has received £3,816,178, or over seven times as much as the gold mining industry. In providing this guarantee we are

taking an immense risk, for the reason that the war may terminate unexpectedly during this year. Let me remind hon. members that in 1914 Russia was the second largest producer of wheat in the world. As against 179 millions produced by Australia, Russia accounted for 573 million bushels. Should the war end this year the price of wheat may go down to 2s. a bushel.

Mr. Thomson: Let us hope so.

Mr. GREEN: Then for every bushel for which we have guaranteed 3s. we shall lose 1s. The amendment provides for the protection of the producer. The Minister for Industries has repeatedly told us that wheat at 4s. 6d. a bushel means bread at 3½d. a loaf. I stand here in the interests, not only of the farmer, but of the consumer as well. The member for Williams-Narrogin (Mr. E. B. Johnston), who displays remarkable perspicacity in dealing with this question, has told us that the reason why farmers should be given a blank cheque is because farmers' requirements, such as machinery, super, bags, and twine, have gone up in price. Whoever heard the representative of a self-reliant community say that because certain articles are going up in cost, we should ask the rest of the State to pledge itself to pay a certain price to the farmers, although that may mean a loss of hundreds of thousands of pounds to the State?

Mr. E. B. Johnston: I said those facts ought to be considered.

Mr. GREEN: Just so, and this guarantee has to be given by all the people of the State. A small farming community of 8,000 people is to be guaranteed by everyone else. I am not prepared to support a recommendation of that kind. It would be just as decent for me to suggest to the Minister for Mines that, because there has been an increase of from 50 to 200 per cent. in the price of the commodities used in connection with gold mining, he should guarantee that the amount paid for every ounce of gold should be so much more than is paid by the Royal Mint. No one has ever suggested anything of the kind. The proposal of the Government has been supported enthusiastically by the representatives of the third party, and also by the fourth party of one, and it would not have been listened to if it had emanated from the mining community,

a community which has made this country what it is, and which is prepared to stand on its own feet. A paltry amount of £19,000 has been set apart this year for the development of gold mining, and this in a country which has produced no less than 130 million pounds' worth of gold. The mining industry is decadent, and now requires assistance in the direction of the prospecting of outback areas.

Mr. Hickmott: How much has it cost to produce that?

Mr. GREEN: The money which has been embarked in the industry has not come from the Government. As soon as a man goes on the land he loses the backbone he formerly had and he requires to be spoon-fed immediately. That has become a national calamity. We as Labour representatives, are prepared at all times to see that the Government of the country embark in certain industries, but do we find that the farmers' representatives are prepared to go the whole gamut upon those lines? No. We find, for instance, that they are prepared to become State socialists when the question of the abolition of the State Implement Works is involved, or when the Government are prepared to carry super below actual cost, but when it comes to other State enterprises which will solely benefit other portions of the community they are not prepared to give this side of the House their support. This shows inconsistency to the farmer. I intend to support the amendment.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON (Guildford) [10.10]: I would have spoken earlier if I had taken the motion as seriously as some hon. members have done. I look upon it as one of those moves by a Government which, while they will not do any good, will not do any harm, and I was prepared to let it go at that. From my experience of farming I contend it will not do any good. Farmers do not grow wheat because they imagine they will get only 3s. a bushel for it. They grow it because they calculate they are going to get more, and at the present time they have already prepared their land for this year's seed. Then to demonstrate that the Government are not going to do any good, we have to realise that the present Minister, and all

his expert officers, have over and over again advised the wheat farmer not to sow wheat unless he has previously fallowed the land. Consequently we have our land fallowed, and when I say "we," I mean the farmers of the State. This motion will not assist in the fallowing of the land; it will encourage farmers to do that which the experts have told them they must not do. Therefore, their minds as to what they will crop this year? The farmers have already made up their minds as to what they will crop this year. Practical farmers have already ordered super for the area they are to crop, and generally all arrangements have been made.

Mr. Thomson: You will admit that the farmers are anxious to know what the position is.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: If farmers thought they were going to get 3s. or less they would not grow wheat. This guarantee of 3s. will not give them any encouragement; it will not be of any value to them. Hon. members will ask how it is that we have never had a guarantee that wheat would command more than 3s., and that yet farmers went on growing it. Practical farmers know that they have to go on growing wheat if they want to remain farmers. It has been stated that 3s. has been guaranteed in the Eastern States, and because of that, we should pass the motion. There is no comparison between wheat growing in Western Australia and in the Eastern States. The amount of 3s. here is different from 3s. in the other States. We in Western Australia have to grow wheat because we have to cultivate our land. I am speaking generally of the farmers in the eastern wheat belt. If they do not cultivate the land it becomes over-run with suckers. Farming is different here, because in order to carry our stock over our trying period, we in Western Australia must have our stubble. And when we hear people say that 3s. a bushel does not pay the farmer we must admit that, speaking by and large, it does not. If he were to depend solely on the sale of his wheat at that price he would not last very long. But those farmers who have arrived at a position enabling them to hold stock, get a good deal out of their stubble, and so they can afford to go on growing wheat. It is the only thing

they can grow, and they continue to get their land cultivated and sweetened in order to get a sufficient area under crop to enable them to carry stock. So, from a practical point of view, the 3s. guarantee is of no value at all to the farmer. Without the amendment the motion is valueless, but with the amendment it acquires some value at least. It is a fair proposition that in Western Australia, with an export trade in wheat, the people in the metropolitan area should be able to get their 2lb. loaf at 3½d. In my association with the wheat pool I endeavoured to get a lower price fixed for the local sale of wheat, so that bread might be cheapened to the consumer. There can be no doubt the pool has had the effect of increasing the price of bread to the consumer. The amendment is a reasonable proposition, for undoubtedly the Government should see that the prices are so fixed that the consumer in Perth is not asked to pay more than 3½d. for his 2lb. loaf. Under the amendment, the consumer will get some practical benefit, but the farmer will get no encouragement and no advantage from it. I had intended to submit an amendment, but the Speaker pointed out to me that it would be out of order, on the score that it increased the responsibilities of the Government. My proposed amendment provided that in order to minimise the cost of production the Government should take immediate steps to acquire the total fertiliser, jute goods, etc., to provide for the requirements of the estimated area to be sown. The guarantee is of no value to the farmer who, after all, is forced to go on growing wheat. If we desire to render some practical assistance to the farmer we require to tackle the question of manures, which is to the industry just as essential as water supply. The consumption of fertiliser is going up year by year, yet although the production has increased enormously there has been no reduction in price. By the increased price they have imposed upon the farmer this year, the fertiliser manufacturers have endeavoured to maintain their pre-war profits. I tried to get the Royal Commission on Agriculture to realise that the work they are doing will be of no practical use to the farmer, and certainly will not result in any permanent reform. As an illustration: one might find a Govern-

ment silly enough to reduce water rates to some farmers and increase them against others. There would result a public outcry, and a succeeding Government might endeavour to undo the mischief. We all know that when a Government attempts to undo anything of the sort they usually make it worse than it was originally. Therefore, I say these things cannot represent permanent reforms. The motion is of no practical value, but if the Government would tackle the questions of fertilisers, the supply of jute goods and the high price of insurance of the crops, they would probably end in reducing the cost of production and so assist the farmer. To imagine that he can be assisted by the motion before us and by the work of the Royal Commission on Agriculture is to perpetrate a huge mistake. The Royal Commission has not secured any new evidence whatever. We are paying them to gather up the same old stuff we have had for years past. I will support the amendment as a practical method of assisting the farmers without jeopardising our position as a partner in the Australian wheat pool. As I have said, the motion will not increase by 50 acres the area any farmer intends to crop.

Mr. THOMSON (Katanning) [10.24]: I have been surprised at the arguments brought forward in opposition to the motion. Indeed, I had regarded it as a merely formal motion. The Prime Minister, in guaranteeing the farmers of Western Australia 3s. a bushel for their 1917-18 harvest, was giving a good deal of encouragement, not only to the farmers but to the whole of the people of the State. Several members opposite cannot extend their views beyond the metropolitan area and the goldfields. They continually indulge in chatter about spoon-feeding the farmer. Whatever assistance the farmers may have had from successive Governments, good care has been taken to see that at least 6 per cent. is charged on it.

Mr. Green: What about the railway freight on super?

Mr. THOMSON: It has been repeatedly stated that when the Government reduced the freight on super the local manufacturers immediately increased their price to the farmers; but we are not told that the

price rose in the Eastern States at the same time.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: In the Eastern States the price was raised long before it went up in Western Australia.

Mr. THOMSON: That refutes the contention that the manufacturers raised their prices simply because the West Australian Government reduced the railway freight on fertiliser. The member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) has said that the motion is of no value to the farmer, but that the amendment will be of benefit to the consumer. Surely the producer, as well as the consumer, is entitled to protection. Hon. members cannot decently argue that because there is a surplus of wheat in Western Australia, the farmers should accept the lowest price offered for it. If it so happened that there was a great deal of surplus labour available, would hon. members argue that therefore the employers should take advantage of the surplus workmen by offering a reduced wage? Seeing that the price guaranteed is only the average price of the last 10 years, surely Parliament will not be going beyond the bounds of reason in giving that guarantee at no risk whatever.

Mr. Munsie: At a possible risk of £700,000.

Mr. THOMSON: A very remote possibility. The member for Kalgoorlie (Mr. Green) gave us a dissertation on the claims of gold mining. I have never opposed any vote to assist gold mining. We are all agreed that the gold mining industry of this State is a very valuable one, but the hon. member tells us that gold mining has produced 59 millions, while farming has produced only 13 millions; and he objects to my inquiring, by interjection, what his figures are based upon.

Mr. Green: I told you.

Mr. THOMSON: Only after I had repeated the question.

Mr. Green: But you make so many silly interjections.

Mr. THOMSON: Yes, as silly as that which the hon. member has just made, and as silly as when he alleged that I, as a contractor, am not entitled to speak for the farmer. The hon. member is a bricklayer.

Is he, then, competent to speak on behalf of the gold miner?

Mr. Green: I am here to speak on behalf of my constituents in the gold mining industry.

Mr. THOMSON: And I am speaking on behalf of the farming industry. I would not debar him speaking on behalf of the mining industry, but he should remember, no matter what calling I follow, I represent an agricultural constituency and I have a right to voice their opinions.

Mr. Green: What was wrong with my figures?

Mr. THOMSON: I am not arguing that your figures were wrong, but that you dealt only with one feature of the industry.

Mr. Green: That is the feature we are dealing with to-night.

Mr. THOMSON: I agree that is the only feature so far as this Bill is concerned, but we have heard to-night a speech by the late Minister for Lands in which he has pointed out that there are other features.

Mr. Green: You are dealing only with the wheat farmer.

Mr. THOMSON: The member for Kalgoorlie may not be aware that the bulk of the farmers of Western Australia—I would be safe in saying 95 per cent.—grow wheat, consequently the majority of the farmers of this State are affected by this Bill. With regard to this guarantee. The Premier has made the statement that if there be a loss the State will bear that loss, but we know very well there will be no loss.

Mr. Munsie: If you know that, why not accept the amendment?

Mr. THOMSON: That is a totally different proposition. The member for Kalgoorlie said this Bill amounted to a case, so far as the farmers are concerned, of heads they win, tails the other fellow loses. That is exactly the proposal in the amendment—heads, the consumer wins; tails, the farmer loses. I take it the farmer is worthy of consideration. We have heard much about what the goldfields are doing. If the member for Kalgoorlie will turn to the report of the Commissioner for Railways, he will find that on wheat alone £170,902 was paid into railway revenue, and that, as a matter of fact, the total paid in respect of various farm products was £332,000, more than one-

fourth of the whole of the railway revenue. I have no desire to decry the mining industry but I wish members opposite to stop their everlasting cry about spoon-feeding the farmer. The farmer has paid for everything he has received from the Government; he pays interest on it.

Mr. Munsie: He has not paid interest, let alone principal.

Mr. THOMSON: The hon. member does not know what he is talking about when he makes a statement to that effect. He does not realise the number of people depending on the farming community. Take the Great Southern line, the whole of the people in that area are dependent entirely on the farming industry. If you wipe out the farming community, then you may as well knock out your agricultural railways. The member for Bunbury made a great speech, but it was like many other speeches he has delivered in this House, when it is analysed there is nothing in it. He made one statement regarding the patriotism of farmers, that it had to be supported by payment. No more unfair statement than that has ever been made in this House. There is no more patriotic section in this community than the farmers. From my own constituency we have sent away 1,000 men, and they are still going to the front. Yet we hear it said by members opposite that only one section is going to the war. Thank God that over there, there are no sections, they are all soldiers of the King. We should follow their example and drop party politics, and not take sides on every trivial debate along party lines.

Mr. Munsie: Who started it?

Mr. THOMSON: The hon. member who has just interjected.

Mr. Munsie: No; it was the Minister for Railways. He always does it and I intend to have a go at him over it, too.

Mr. THOMSON: The member for Bunbury has complained that the South-West has been neglected, and pointed out that we do not live by wheat alone. May I point out that the member for Bunbury and his constituents displayed considerable anxiety in their desire to get a large stack of wheat at Bunbury, in order that it might be exported through their port—and rightly so. And now they are worrying for the comple-

tion of the Wagin-Bowelling line, in order to get more wheat shipped through their port. While the hon. member says practically that instead of helping the farmers we should pay more attention to the South-West, he evidently did not realise that portion of his constituency and a large number of his constituents are reaping a direct benefit through the wheat grown in the Great Southern areas.

Mr. Thomas: I said we should assist farmers generally; be fair.

Mr. THOMSON: So far as members on this side of the House are concerned, they are prepared to assist not only the farmers but every section of the community.

Mr. Thomas: They might be prepared to, but they do not do it.

Mr. THOMSON: Had the present Government not been turned out of office in 1911, they would, under the policy then enunciated of dealing with the dairying industry, have placed this State in a position of supplying the whole of the butter used in Western Australia. But they did not get the opportunity, and the Government which the hon. member sat behind, and was a strong supporter of, was in office for five years, and I have been seeking to find what they have done. One thing rather amuses me. When it comes to interjections, the member for Bunbury is very free, but while he is speaking everyone else is supposed to be silent. Much objection has been raised in this debate to the price of bags. Admittedly, this is an important question, but I wish to point out to the House that the bags we use for our wheat have to be made to a certain standard to meet Australian conditions, and consequently proportionately more has to be charged for them. Further, a duty was placed by the Commonwealth Government on those bags. That duty was a most iniquitous one. If members of Parliament are desirous of assisting the farmer, here is one direction in which they can do so. If I import a motor car and use it for a certain period and desire to go to New Zealand with it, I can, by making application to the Customs Department, have a rebate given to me of the duty I have paid upon that motor car. I maintain that we should be entitled to a rebate of the duty upon the bags that we have imported into

Western Australia when the time comes for us to export them out of Western Australia.

Mr. Foley: What would be the good of bags after two years?

Mr. THOMSON: The hon. member does not understand the matter. The amount involved might not be very great, but would afford some little help to the farmers. I oppose the amendment and support the motion, because it will give great benefit to the farming community and will give farmers courage to go on with their operations. It will also be of benefit to the metropolitan area. If the farming community are suffering the metropolitan area will suffer correspondingly.

Mr. NAIRN (Swan) [10.45]: I rise to support both the motion and the amendment. I hope I shall not import into my remarks so much bitterness and feeling which have apparently been found necessary on the part of some of our friends on the other side of the Chamber. I understand that the amendment is to be withdrawn. I hope, if it is withdrawn, that something will remain in its place and that some guarantee will be given to the House. I cannot believe that the amendment was not moved in good faith, for it is in that spirit that I support it. It seems incredible that in such a case and in a matter of such consequence and importance to the people of Australia, some protection should not have been considered in connection with the four millions of consuming population in the Commonwealth. It is out of all proportion and out of all bounds that every man, woman and child of the State should have been asked to give protection running into some three or four millions of pounds, and that the same sense of consideration could not have been given to those people with regard to the consumption of this commodity with which we are concerned at the present moment. It seems incomprehensible that this aspect of the case should have been overlooked. The only reason I can assign for it is that it was left to the intention and will of Parliament. In this State during the last year or two we have had strange experiences in dealing with our foodstuffs. We have seen millions of bushels of wheat lying at our ports in various parts of the State, some of it in a con-

dition of decomposition, and the ultimate fate of it being entirely unknown. Yet side by side with that, we have seen the people of the State buying bread at a price out of all proportion to its surroundings. It is in that sense that I want to make myself clear as to what my attitude on the question of the food stuffs of the people is. A great deal has been said about the farmer. The member for Bunbury (Mr. Thomas) even went so far as to describe him as a political mendicant. So far as I know, the farmer has made no request that he should have protection to the extent of 3s. a bushel. It was those who thought they were working rightly in his interests who believed that he could get that protection. I do not agree with the member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) that 3s. per bushel is of no value to the farmer. Such an argument would not stand the light of day, in view of the statements which have been made in the House that 3s. is the average price of wheat in this State for the last ten years. The argument is illogical to say the least of it. If the amendment is withdrawn I hope some undertaking will be given to the people that the interests of the consumer will not be lost sight of.

Mr. S. STUBBS (Wagin) [10.49]: I desire to compliment the various speakers for the earnestness they have displayed and the views they have expressed. I cannot follow the argument of the member for Swan (Mr. Nairn), and would like to tell him and other members of the House something about the position which the farmer found himself in a little over 12 months ago. At that time it was uncertain what their position was in regard to the planting of wheat for the harvest which is now being garnered. The views and arguments put forward in letters to the Press, and at various meetings which were addressed by people supposed to be authorities on the subject, differed vastly. Shipping tonnage could not be procured, and it was quite on the cards that no wheat whatever would leave the shores of Western Australia. Eventually the Federal Government and the State Government sought to induce the farming community to renew their efforts and even to plant larger areas than ever previously. They endeavoured to convince the farming community that the

British Government and the Allies would support them by furnishing the ships required to lift the Australian harvest. Has it ever struck the member for Swan (Mr. Nairn), or any other member who has spoken to-day, that whereas four or five years ago 10 bushels to the acre paid, under present conditions such a return would not, so to speak, pay for axle grease? I can convince any hon. member who cares to go into the question with me, that with the present cost of production 10 bushels to the acre at 3s. per bushel would not be a payable proposition. The cost of labour has increased by nearly 100 per cent., and the price of food of every kind has risen enormously. Where the board of an employee cost the farmer 12s. a week before the war, it costs £1 now.

Mr. Foley: That is absolutely your party's fault.

Mr. S. STUBBS: That statement, I think, is absolutely incorrect.

Mr. Foley: It is absolutely correct. The Control of Trade in War Time Act prevented the putting up of prices.

Mr. S. STUBBS: I assure the hon. member, whom I have always found very fair and reasonable, that he is making a mistake. I should like to mention that the member for Leonora (Mr. Foley) is one of the few goldfields members who during the last few years have taken the trouble to make themselves conversant with the conditions of life in the agricultural districts. Let me remind goldfields members generally that in the constituency I represent there are scores of former goldfields residents who have left the mining districts to make their homes in the wheat belt. If the cost of production of wheat approaches the amount which the Government ask the House to agree to as a guaranteed minimum price, those men will continue to have a hard struggle. The House would be doing no more than its duty in simply agreeing to the motion. If a further motion is needed to safeguard the interests of the general taxpayer, I will give it every consideration; but I think it would be unwise in the extreme to allow the amendment to be embodied in the present motion.

Mr. Munsie: Why?

Mr. S. STUBBS: Because, as the Premier stated, at the conference all the States except Western Australia agreed to the Prime Minister's proposal without any suggestion such as that contained in the amendment. In my opinion, the Premier would have been justified in falling into line with the other States as regards the Prime Minister's proposal. The Premier, however, thought it best to consult the House on the subject. I therefore support the motion and oppose the amendment. At the same time I give the mover of the amendment every credit for honesty of purpose. I hope he will agree to withdraw the amendment. If, later, it is proved to my satisfaction that in the interests of the consumer a motion in the nature of this amendment should be carried, I will support such a motion.

Mr. MUNSIE (Hannans) [10.56]: I have listened to the entire debate, but since the amendment was moved I have not heard an argument used against it. At the outset let me say that I am in accord with the motion. It was my intention to vote for the motion, but after hearing the whole of the arguments which have been used I cannot vote for the motion unless the amendment is embodied in it. Although we have a considerable number of people interested in farming in this State, and more especially wheat growing, this House should not take the responsibility of possibly penalising by far the larger proportion of the community for the sake of the farming industry. I asked both the member for Katanning (Mr. Thomson) and the member for Wagin (Mr. S. Stubbs) why they opposed the amendment. Neither hon. member had any reason to give. The only reason advanced by the Premier against the amendment was that the Prime Minister might object to it. What is the Prime Minister to object to? In submitting the motion the Premier gave the House details of the scheme proposed by the Prime Minister to the various State Premiers. The hon. gentleman further stated that the Premiers of the Eastern wheat-growing States on that occasion pledged themselves to the 3s. minimum. Our Premier, on the other hand, said that he was not prepared to give such a guarantee without first consulting Parliament.

What difference will the carrying of this amendment make to the agreement? The Parliament of Western Australia will still be giving the guarantee required by the Prime Minister. How is the Prime Minister affected by the fact of this Parliament carrying a further motion in the same connection? The Premier objected that "we do not know what the amendment means." In reply, I suggested to the hon. gentleman that he should consult his colleague, the Minister for Railways. I well remember a statement repeatedly made by that hon. gentleman, when sitting on this side of the House, in connection with the first wheat pool and control of trade in war time, that wheat at 4s. 6d. a bushel meant bread at 3½d. per 2lb. loaf in the metropolitan area.

The Premier: I think he said 3s. 6d.

Mr. MUNSIE: He said 4s. 6d., and I am taking his word as that of a man who knows. Suggestions have been put forward as to what is the average yield of our farming areas, and the figures have been set down as 10 bushels. I am prepared to admit that the average for several years past has been 11 bushels and that it has reached 12 bushels. But taking it at 10 bushels, what will it mean to the farmer if the amendment is carried? It will mean that instead of getting for his wheat—if he has a 10-bushel yield—the current price of 4s. 9d. which will return him 47s. 6d. per acre, he will receive 47s. 3d. Are we asking the farmer too much to say that providing the wheat goes up or remains at 4s. 9d., he should take 47s. 3d. per acre for his yield instead of 47s. 6d., when we as the consumers are, on the other hand prepared to say, irrespective of whether it goes down to 2s. 6d., that we are prepared to guarantee that he will not receive less than 3s. The amendment appeals to me as being reasonable, more so on account of the fact that not one hon. member has given any reason why it should not be carried other than perhaps the reason put forward by the Premier that the Prime Minister might object. That is a very poor argument indeed. If the amendment is carried and is put into operation, the Prime Minister need never know whether it was ever carried or not so long as he gets the assurance from the Premier that this Parliament on behalf of the peo-

ple is prepared to guarantee him against loss for the money he might raise to enable the farmers to receive 3s. per bushel for their wheat at the railway siding. A good deal has been said about goldfields members always opposing matters affecting the coastal districts. The hon. member responsible for that statement this evening was the Minister for Industries. He was the first member in this House to start the controversy, the goldfields versus the coast. In my humble opinion while I admit that the agricultural industry is of great value to Western Australia, I do not forget that if it had not been for the discovery of gold there would not have been any agricultural industry, and indeed very few others. The mining industry has never come along to this House to ask for any kind of guarantee. I am not objecting to a guarantee being given to the farmers, but what I do say is that what is proposed by the amendment is not impracticable as has been suggested by the Premier, because to all intents and purposes it is in operation already, not only in Western Australia but throughout the Commonwealth. Unless the amendment is carried it will be wrong for the House to give any guarantee that the farmers will receive 3s. for their wheat, a guarantee which will possibly land this State in a loss of £700,000. All that we ask is if the wheat brings 4s. 9d. per bushel next year the farmer must sell one bushel out of every 10 that he produces to the local miller for 4s. 6d. instead of 4s. 9d. Surely that is not asking the farmer too much. If we put the proposition before the millers they would unanimously support the amendment. They are sufficiently sincere and patriotic to realise that when a service is being done for them by the community they should recognise it by giving the community something in return. I trust the amendment will be carried and added to the motion.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [11.10]: In view of the fear expressed by some hon. members that the addition of the amendment to the motion might cause delay and complications in regard to the final adoption of the proposals of the Prime Minister, I will ask leave to withdraw the amendment, provided the Premier will give me an opportunity for attaining the object I have in

view by a specific motion. I understand that private members' day has been done away with, and therefore it will be necessary for the Government to afford me an opportunity for bringing forward a motion. Given an assurance on that point, with the permission of the House I will withdraw the amendment.

The PREMIER (Hon. Frank Wilson—Sussex) [11.11] Yes, I will give that assurance. I am quite willing to confer with the hon. member and arrange a time for having his motion submitted to the House. I will go farther and say that if the motion he proposes to submit is handed to me, I will have it referred to the wheat board for their consideration, in order that we may arrive at the true value involved. It is of no use our attempting to settle what 3½d. per 2lb. loaf means to the farmer for his wheat at the siding. If we can agree on a motion which will convey what the hon. member wishes, and what I am in accord with, namely, that the retailed price of flour and bread shall be fixed at such rates as will return not more than 4s. per bushel to the farmer, I shall be quite willing, not only to afford the opportunity the hon. member wishes, but to support his motion, and to make a request to the Prime Minister that action be taken accordingly.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Question put and passed.

On further motion by the Premier, resolution transmitted to the Legislative Council and their concurrence desired therein.

House adjourned at 11.12 p.m.