

Mr. LAMBERT: To mix up the gallon licenses, the evils of which it is desired to curtail, with the retailing of wine by the glass, and also to allow the wholesale sale of liquor under gallon licenses is objectionable, and I hope the Minister will not accept the proposal.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The Act to which the member for Swan refers has been in force for a couple of years. A combination of the wholesale license with the glass license is certainly very dangerous. The bench has discretionary power in the matter, and it might, had it not been for the section quoted by the member for Swan, have granted the two different classes of licenses to the same man. I see no reason, unless whisky, beer and the like are classed as other goods, which I presume was the ruling of the Bench, why the two licenses should not be held together, but once that case has brought the matter under the notice of the legislature members look at it from a different point of view, and foresee a difficulty in its being possible to hold a wholesale license and a retail license together. The view of the Government is that the amendment should be opposed.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: I move an amendment—

That the words "may in its discretion" be struck out and the words "shall not" inserted in lieu.

Amendment put and passed.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: I move a further amendment—

That all words after "premises," in line 3, be struck out.

Amendment put and passed.

New clause, as amended, put and passed.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Bill reported with amendments.

House adjourned at 12.4 a.m. (Thursday).

Legislative Assembly,

Thursday, 25th January, 1917.

	PAGE
Questions: Railway Construction, Wagin-Bowelling	1520
Industries Assistance Board	1520
Powellising Patents, validity	1521
Lands repriced	1521
Leave of absence	1521
Return: Industries Assistance Board, Insurance of Crops	1521
Bills: Sale of Liquor and Tobacco, recom.	1521
Electoral Districts, 2R.	1523
Agricultural Lands Purchase Act Amendment, 2R.	1539
Agricultural Bank Act Amendment, 2R.	1542
Industries Assistance Act Amendment, 2R.	1543

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

QUESTION—RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION, WAGIN-BOWELLING.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON asked the Minister for Works: 1, Is it intended to proceed with the construction of the Wagin-Bowelling railway from Bowelling, where a large quantity of rails are now stacked? 2, How soon do the Government expect that railway facilities will be available for the settlers in the district between Bowelling and the Arthur River? 3, When is it anticipated that the Wagin-Bowelling railway will be completed?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS replied: 1, Yes. 2, Depends upon labour available. 3, Depends upon No. 2.

QUESTION—INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE BOARD.

Fire Insurance of Crops.

Mr. PIESSE asked the Minister for Industries: 1, What is the amount of fire insurance premium paid by the Industries Assistance Board last year to the several insurance companies in Western Australia on behalf of clients? 2, What is the amount of losses incurred and paid to farmers through the board from these companies?

The MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIES replied: 1, £22,216 16s. 8d. 2, £2,475. (For 1915-16 harvest.)

QUESTION—POWELLISING PATENTS, VALIDITY.

Mr. SMITH asked the Premier: Do the Government intend to test the validity of the powellising patents with the view of abrogating the present agreement?

The PREMIER replied: The question is under consideration, and action will be taken immediately the advice sought enables it to be done.

QUESTION—LANDS REPRICED.

Mr. GRIFFITHS asked the Minister for Lands: What were the original prices of the following locations, and what are the new prices fixed under the re-pricing legislation, respectively:—Victoria Location 5491, Victoria Location 4082, Avon Location 15090, Avon Location 15099, Avon Location 14548, Avon Location 14549, Avon Location 16145, Avon Location 18164, Williams Location 10158, Williams Location 10140, Williams Location 10770, Williams Location 9744, Williams Location 9185?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS replied:

			Original Price.	Reduced Price.
			s. d.	s. d.
Victoria Location	5491	..	19 0	14 0
"	4082	..	22 0	13 0
Avon Location	15090	..	21 0	15 6
"	15099	..	22 0	14 0
"	14548	..	24 0	14 6
"	14549	..	18 0	10 6
"	16145	..	24 0	13 6
"	18164	..	20 0	15 6
Williams Location	10158	..	17 0	as priced
"	10140	..	12 0	
"	10770	..	Vac.	12 0
"	9744	..	15 0	as priced
"	9185	..	20 0	19 0

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by Mr. HARDWICK, leave of absence until the end of the present session granted to the member for South Fremantle (Mr. Bolton) on the ground that he is on active service in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth.

RETURN—INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE BOARD.

Fire Insurance of Crops.

On motion by Mr. HARRISON, ordered: "That a return be laid upon the Table of the House showing—(a) the total amount

of cover against fire of crops under the Industries Assistance Board; (b) the total amount of premiums paid; (c) the total amount of claims paid by insurance companies on the 1915-1916 harvest."

BILL—SALE OF LIQUOR AND TOBACCO.

Recommittal.

Order of the Day read for consideration of Committee's report.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. R. T. Robinson—Canning) [4.43]: I move—

That the Bill be recommitted for the purpose of further considering Paragraph (d) of Clause 3, and Clauses 5, 12, and 13.

Mr. S. STURBS (Wagin) [4.44]: I move an amendment—

That the words "and Clause 10" be added to the motion.

Amendment passed; the motion, as amended, agreed to.

In Committee.

Mr. Carpenter in the Chair; the Attorney General in charge of the Bill.

Clause 3—Dealing with gallon licensees to be recorded, and books, etc., to be produced:

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: On the previous evening a new paragraph was added to the clause reading "Any police officer or inspector of liquor may on demand search the cart or vehicle of any licensee delivering liquor and compare the liquor therein with the sale notes or invoices." That in itself did not disclose any offence, and it was now desired to add to it these words "and the person in charge of such cart or vehicle shall permit such examination and produce sale notes and invoices." Then if the person in charge of the vehicle refused, an offence would be committed. I therefore move—

That the following words be added to the paragraph: "and the person in charge of such cart or vehicle shall permit such examination and produce the sale notes and invoices". Penalty: Fifty pounds; also that the paragraph stand as Sub-clause 2.

Amendment passed; the clause as amended agreed to.

Clause 5—Australian wine license:

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The clause was amended on the previous evening by the addition of the word "newspaper" but in the print which was submitted to the Solicitor General subsequently this word did not appear. The object of the clause is to provide that no Australian wine license shall be granted except in respect of premises used for the sale of Australian wine and in which no goods of any other kind except aerated waters, cigars, cigarettes and tobacco are sold. The desire is to add "newspapers" to this list. I move an amendment—

That in line 4 of Subclause 1, after the word "tobacco" the words " and newspapers" be added.

Amendment passed; the clause as amended agreed to.

Clause 1—Tobacco not to be sold or supplied to children:

Mr. S. STUBBS: At the previous sitting I endeavoured to amend this clause by increasing the age of children to whom cigarettes and tobacco should not be sold, from 16 to 18 years, but the amendment was defeated on the casting vote of the Chairman. Now that the Bill has been recommitted I desire again to test the feeling of the Committee on this question.

Mr. Taylor: Why not prohibit the sale of cigarettes altogether?

Mr. S. STUBBS: If any hon. member cares to ask the medical fraternity whether the effect of cigarette smoking is harmful to young people, he will be informed that the effect on persons of tender years is to dwarf their stature. Therefore, it is in the interests of the community that we should increase the age from 16 to 18 years. I move—

That in line 3 the word "sixteen" be struck out with the view of inserting another word.

Mr. E. B. JOHNSTON: This amendment is identical with one which was moved at the previous sitting. Is the hon. member in order in moving it again?

The CHAIRMAN: The amendment which was moved at the previous sitting was to strike out the word "sixteen" and that was defeated on the casting vote of the Chair-

man. The member for Wagin is in order on the recommitment in again submitting a similar amendment.

Amendment put and passed.

Mr. S. STUBBS: I move an amendment—

That in line 3 the word "eighteen" be inserted.

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

Ayes	19
Noes	12
Majority for				7

AYES.

Mr. Chesson	Mr. Piesse
Mr. Collier	Mr. Scaddan
Mr. Gardiner	Mr. Taylor
Mr. George	Mr. Thomas
Mr. Harrison	Mr. Thomson
Mr. W. D. Johnson	Mr. Varyard
Mr. Lambert	Mr. Walker
Mr. Mullany	Mr. Wansbrough
Mr. Munis	Mr. S. Stubbs
Mr. Nairn	(Teller.)

NOES.

Mr. Cunningham	Mr. Lefroy
Mr. Green	Mr. Mitchell
Mr. Hardwick	Mr. Robinson
Mr. Hickmott	Mr. Willmott
Mr. Hudson	Mr. F. Wilson
Mr. E. B. Johnston	Mr. O'Loughlin
	(Teller.)

Amendment thus passed; the clause as amended agreed to.

New Clause 12:

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: This clause is already provided for in the Licensing Act of 1911. Owing to its being in a peculiar position in that Act it could not be found last night. I move—

That the clause be struck out.

Question put and passed.

New Clause 13:

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Paragraph 1 of Clause 13 has already been printed in the amendment moved by the member for Swan (Mr. Nairn), and appears as a subclause, but the print not being before me last night I did not notice that we had already passed it as Clause 3. I move an amendment—

That Paragraph 1 be struck out.

The CHAIRMAN: In the new drafting of the Bill the clauses are placed as 13 and 14 respectively.

Amendment put and passed.

New Clause 14:

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: It will be remembered that this clause was embodied in a larger clause moved by the member for Swan. As his amendment was affected he had to move this as a substantive new clause. It deals with wine licenses, and therefore would appear in its proper place under Paragraph 5. To effect this transposition I move—

That Clause 14 stand as Subclause 4 of Clause 5.

Amendment put and passed.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: It will now be necessary to provide for the two-gallon licenses. I move an amendment—

That after "gallon licenses" the words "or two-gallon licenses" be inserted.

Amendment put and passed; the clause as amended agreed to.

Bill again reported with further amendments.

BILL—ELECTORAL DISTRICTS.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 2nd November.

Mr. PIESSE (Toodyay) [5.12]: In principle the Bill is a good one, but material alterations are necessary and, when in Committee, I will move certain amendments, the effect of which I believe will be to make the measure more adaptable to existing conditions. Few will deny that certain anomalies exist, and that the time is ripe for an honest effort to make adjustment of the boundaries of certain electorates. Some of the electorates are extremely unwieldy, and to those justice should be done, having due regard to community of interests. Our party claim that, in consequence of the increased productiveness of the agricultural districts, we are entitled to greater representation than we at present enjoy. Probably strong objection will be offered by our friends opposite to the amendments we propose to move in Committee, but I sincerely hope that sufficient forceful argument will

be adduced to convince them that the amendments are reasonable and just.

Hon. J. Scaddan: And then you wake up.

Mr. PIESSE: We claim that, in view of our increased material worth to the State, we in the agricultural districts are not receiving the consideration and right which is our due.

Hon. T. Walker: You have not material wealth of men.

Mr. PIESSE: We are the wealth-producing section of the community, and our faith in the country is greater than that of any other section. We are the greatest tax-paying body, and taking the number of individual voters among farmers and workers, I think the average worker carries less of the State's responsibilities. I shall not take up the time of the House further at this juncture.

Mr. Green: You should have lived in the time of the Ark.

Mr. MUNSIE (Hannans) [5.18]: I am somewhat surprised at the statement made by the deputy leader of the Country party who has just resumed his seat. In effect he asks us to vote in the dark insofar as this Electoral Districts Bill is concerned. He has told us that it is his intention to move an amendment, but has given no indication of the nature of that amendment.

Hon. J. Scaddan: The conference was held in secret; he is not allowed to say.

Mr. MUNSIE: I recognise that. The Bill now before the House is in my opinion absolutely unjust to the electors of Western Australia, and I shall vote against the second reading. The Attorney General, when introducing this Bill, supplied the House with certain statistics, given to members as being correct or as nearly correct as it was possible to obtain them at the time. On the second day after this document had been placed before members, the attention of the Attorney General was drawn by the member for Pilbara (Mr. Underwood) to an inaccurate statement contained in the paper.

The Attorney General: It was not inaccurate.

Hon. J. Scaddan: It was.

Mr. MUNSIE: I maintain that the statement drawn attention to was false—"The

1913 Bill provided for only three seats for the present four seats." That statement is incorrect absolutely. That Bill provided for four seats where three seats are now provided for.

The Attorney General: Gascoyne was to be cut up.

Mr. MUNSIE: When the Seaddan Government introduced the Bill they realised, and I want to say that personally I realised then and realise still, that Gascoyne should be classed with Murchison rather than with the three other North-West seats. I hold that it is better to place Gascoyne in with Murchison than with Pilbara and Kimberley. The statement given by the Attorney General to this House was certainly incorrect, but what I am more surprised at is that after the controversy which took place in this House, and after the leading article devoted to the subject in the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, the Attorney General should have given an interview to the *West Australian*, making exactly similar misstatements to those to which his attention had already been drawn. That proves it was an attempt to mislead the people of Western Australia with regard to their true position and their representation in this House, which is a serious thing. The Attorney General will not deny that he did reiterate the statement in an interview with the *West Australian*.

The Attorney General: And I reiterate it again now.

Mr. MUNSIE: Still, the statement is not correct. I have looked up the old Bill and there is no shadow of doubt but that the statement as supplied to members was incorrect on the evidence of the Bill introduced in this House.

The Attorney General: That Bill was amended.

Mr. MUNSIE: It is quite true an amendment was moved in another place, the effect of which was to leave the four North-West seats intact. That amendment was eventually accepted by this House. But that was not the statement produced to members here. The statement was, "The Bill provided for only three seats for the North-West district." That is not correct.

The Attorney General: You are bringing this up merely as a red herring across the track.

Mr. MUNSIE: I repeat that although the amendment was accepted by this Chamber, the statement as given to us on the introduction of this Bill was incorrect.

The Minister for Railways interjected.

Mr. MUNSIE: I am not prepared to allow the hon. member for Northam the right to represent 80 people at Northam, or rather to give those 80 people at Northam the same voice in the government of the country as 80 people at Meekatharra. The Minister desires to create pocket boroughs in the agricultural areas, in which 80 people at Northam would have the same voting power as 100 at Hannans or Kalgoorlie. That would be unfair. Particularly is it unfair for this reason, that the further away a constituency is from the seat of Government the less opportunities there are of getting the ear of Ministers. If I can prevent it, I shall not permit the member for Northam to form his little pocket boroughs to the detriment of the rest of the State. Under the Bill as it is before this House, taking the boundaries of the central gold-fields division, I would represent a constituency 400 miles from the seat of government, and having at least 1,500 more electors than Northam. And I should have greater difficulty in getting over my electorate than he. The entire principle, in my opinion, is wrong. In the first place there is no necessity to go to the expense of appointing commissioners if we carry the Bill as it is at present before us. Already the State is divided up into four separate districts, and I believe Mr. Stenberg, the Chief Electoral Officer, and his staff to be quite as capable of defining the boundaries within those districts as the best board of commissioners who might be appointed. There would be nothing for the commissioners to do if the Bill be passed as it is now before the House. Personally, I do not think the present a reasonable or fair time for the introduction of a Re-distribution of Seats Bill, particularly in view of the unsettled state of the electors generally throughout Western Australia owing to war conditions. And I hold this view more particularly because of the action of

the Attorney General, who was responsible for the introduction of this Bill and also for the introduction of a Bill which has already passed this Chamber, with the object of enabling soldiers on active service to maintain their names on the electoral rolls. The Attorney General denied the soldiers the right of transferring their vote while in the State. After the first statement had been issued it was discovered, after a canvass had been made, that in different localities in the metropolitan area there had been a large increase of population. The reason for that increase was primarily that the wives and families of those men to whom the Attorney General refused the right of transfer had come to the metropolitan area to reside whilst the husbands were absent fighting at the front. The intention of the Attorney General was to take advantage of the votes of those wives and families, though he did eventually agree to an amendment which gave the soldier the right to transfer after his return to the State. I am in accord with the Attorney General in sticking to the principle that the interests of the soldier on active service lie in the electorate from which he enlisted; but I am not prepared to say that when he leaves the district on enlistment and his wife and family also leave the district, it is any disadvantage to the country district that he should transfer his interest in the representation in this Chamber. In my opinion that is absolutely unfair, but that is the intention of the Government as expressed in the Bill, for otherwise they would not have submitted the second statement of proportions. The proposal is unwarranted, and has not been demanded by the people of Western Australia. I am not arguing that a Re-distribution of Seats Bill is not required. I admit that there are anomalies which need rectification. But the Bill now before us does not afford, by any manner of means, the best means of rectifying those anomalies.

Hon. T. Walker: It will create new anomalies.

Mr. MUNSIE: I quite recognise that. The Attorney General, when replying, might give us some reason for the reduction of one-fourth which the Bill proposes to make in the central goldfields representation. I see

no reason whatever for such a reduction. On the one hand we have electorates such as Northam, situated on the main line of railway about 60 miles from the seat of Government and served by two or three trains daily; and on the other hand there are electorates 400 miles distant from the seat of Government. Yet the proposal is to give to 80 people in Northam the same amount of representation as to 100 people in Kalgoorlie. If it can be proved that a resident of Northam is 20 per cent. more intelligent than a resident of, say, Kalgoorlie or Boulder, I will support the Bill. In all seriousness, that must be proved in order to justify the Bill. I know the argument is advanced that Kalgoorlie and Boulder are compact electorates. But the people of Kalgoorlie and Boulder are deserving of representation. They are situated at a considerable distance from the seat of Government.

Mr. Thomas: They produce more wealth than the people of any similar area in Western Australia.

Mr. MUNSIE: Yes; or in the Commonwealth.

Hon. P. Collier: And they have gone to the Front in larger numbers, proportionately.

Mr. MUNSIE: As regards the division of the State into four districts, I recognise that the present or any other Government must grant special representation to the North-West. I do not think any member either of this or of another place will object to such special representation.

Mr. Thomson: Do you suggest that, on a population basis, the electorates should be equal all over the State?

Mr. MUNSIE: Nothing of the kind. The people of the metropolitan area, and especially those in and about Perth, not only have their Parliamentary representatives, but have the ear—and use it—of every other member of Parliament in this State. I certainly consider these people should give way somewhat for the benefit of those residing far from the seat of Government. Next, I wish to protest against the division under this Bill as compared with the division under the Bill of 1913. The latter measure gave three seats to the North-West—not four, as has been stated—but included Gascoyne among the 47 seats for the remainder of the

State. From the point of view of community of interests I consider Gascoyne should be classed with the Murchison seat rather than with the three North-West seats.

Mr. Butcher: Nonsense.

Mr. MUNSIE: That is my opinion.

Mr. Butcher: I happen to know the country, and you do not.

Mr. MUNSIE: I know something of the Murchison country, and am prepared to back my opinion even against that of the member for Roebourne (Mr. Butcher). The carrying of this Bill will mean that Murchison, with 2,841 electors, would return one member, whilst Gascoyne would return one for 959 electors. These are two electorates with a dividing boundary running almost right across the State, and both are principally pastoral areas. Omitting Meekatharra, the mining centre of the Murchison electorate, the greater proportion of that district is pastoral country and is being used for pastoral purposes.

Mr. Butcher: Take Cue.

Mr. MUNSIE: Cue is represented by Cue, and not by Murchison.

The Attorney General: The small electorates will be again considered by the commissioners, and equally divided.

Mr. MUNSIE: I have demonstrated that the proposed redistribution is not fair. It is from the point of view of the outback districts that I principally object to the proposed central goldfields division. A deputation of three from my own electorate, Hannans, would be involved in an expense of £13 16s. 6d. for railway fares alone, to come to Perth; whereas a similar deputation from Northam would need to spend only £2 4s. 9d. in railway fares. Again, let me take the most thickly populated portion of the Murchison district. A deputation of three from Meekatharra to interview a Minister in Perth would have to pay £23 6s. 3d. in railway fares, as against the £2 4s. 9d. for a deputation from Northam.

Mr. Hudson: And the Meekatharra deputation would spend a week in travelling.

Mr. MUNSIE: Yes. And still the Attorney General contends that an elector in Meekatharra, or even one residing 100 miles the other side of Meekatharra, should have only the same consideration in respect of distance

from seat of Government as the Northam elector, who has two or three trains a day.

Mr. Thomas: What about the Swan electorate?

Mr. MUNSIE: I am not dealing with the Swan electorate, although a stone might almost be thrown into it from this building, because that electorate is much more scattered than the Northam. It is unfair to class Murchison, Cue, Mt. Magnet, and Leonora as here proposed. The Bill professes to have regard to community of interest. What community of interest has Menzies with Northam, or Leonora with Swan? And yet they are classed in the same division.

The Attorney General: It is not alleged that they have community of interest.

Mr. MUNSIE: Menzies, Leonora, Murchison, Northam, Swan, Geraldton, Bunbury, and Albany are all classed in one division—agricultural-mining.

The Attorney General: That is not because of any community of interest. We could make two classes of them, calling one mining, and the other agricultural, and treat them both alike.

Mr. MUNSIE: For the life of me, I cannot see why it is laid down as a principle in this Bill that the commissioners should take into consideration community of interest and then an endeavour should be made to drive into the minds of the commissioners that there is community of interest between Bunbury and Leonora, or between Swan and Menzies.

The Attorney General: Nobody seeks to do it, except you.

Mr. MUNSIE: The Bill seeks to do it. If the Attorney General, in replying, can explain that away, I shall be very pleased. The two points which, in particular, I wish the Attorney General to justify to the House are, firstly, why the central goldfields division is reduced by one-fourth as against Northam—which I instance because it is on the main line of railway—and, secondly, why the Bill lays it down as a principle that the commissioners must take into consideration community of interests and yet inserts in the same category Bunbury and Mt. Leonora. I should like the Attorney General to be explicit on these two points. I hope the Bill will not even pass the second reading stage. As it has been introduced, it is an insult to

the intelligence of the representatives of the people in this Chamber. It is anything but fair and in my opinion, while the principles outlined in the Bill are allowed to remain in it, it is not possible by amending the details to make a decent measure of it.

Hon. J. SCADDAN (Browhill-Ivanhoe) [5.50]: May I be permitted to express my disgust at the attitude adopted by the Government in connection with this measure. In the first place, the Attorney General introduced a Bill with certain figures in order to prop up his rather unique measure for what he terms a redistribution of seats.

The Attorney General: I call it an Electoral Districts Bill.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It is true that might be anything, in fact, that is what this Bill is. If the Bill means anything it means a desire on the part of the Government to, at this stage, when we hear so much about the necessity for dropping party warfare, dish their opponents. On the other hand, we hear even the Attorney General's own colleagues, through the Press and in other directions urging all the time that there is one interest, and one only, to which we must apply ourselves at the present time, and it is to assist in winning the war. Yet hon. members opposite have declared party war in a fashion that has probably never been excelled except by the previous redistribution of seats measure. The Attorney General proceeds to withdraw the first lot of figures which he supplied, and submits what he terms supplementary statistical figures, and then he opened the eyes of members sitting on the cross benches. Those gentlemen discovered that under this Bill they were going to centre all political power in the metropolitan area. Then they woke up. I understand there was something in the nature of a conference and the member for Williams-Narrogin apparently was the only member sitting on the right of the Speaker who was absent from that gathering. They were anxious to know how he was going to view this measure.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: I will tell you presently.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not worrying about the attitude of the hon. member, but I may be permitted to state what occurred. Eventually it was pointed out that the hon.

member had sent along an apology for his non-attendance which, in itself, was evidence that had it been possible he would have been present to discuss this Bill, a Bill submitted to Parliament at a time when the leader of the House, as well as most of his followers, told the public repeatedly that there was only one thing necessary at the present time and it was to drop party warfare and do everything that was essential to win the war. A Bill of this nature is likely to engender party feeling, especially when in connection with such a measure all the cards are not placed on the table. The Bill might mean anything. Even the Country party are not quite certain of their ground.

Mr. Taylor: I think they are now; they were not before.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: They had a conference but did not come to any agreement. They certainly were in a quandary as to how the Bill would affect the representation of the country districts if it was passed on the basis of the figures supplied by the Attorney General in his supplementary return.

Mr. Hudson: Were you not here when the Deputy Leader of the Country Party made his explanation?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It was the most astounding attitude for the party to adopt. We have on the cross benches opposite, a distinct party in politics in Western Australia, a party which claims that they are prepared, when the opportunity presents itself, to carry the responsibility of Government in this State. They have a recognised leader. The House consists of three parties. The tail wags the dog but I think there is a flea on the tail of that dog. The fact remains that we have a distinct party with a leader and here now there is a most important political matter presented to the House and we have the whip, or the deputy leader of that party, making a pronouncement on behalf of that party. And what sort of a pronouncement was it! "The principle of the Bill is all right, but we are not satisfied with the details and when we reach the Committee stage we propose to move certain amendments, Amen." What is the principle of the Bill? I have been trying to find it but up to date I have not been successful.

Hon. T. Walker: The principle is, "Dish our opponents."

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That would be a detail. But what I want particularly to draw attention to is that if the party sitting on the cross bench are justified in making the claim that they are a party and prepared to carry responsibility, if they are not prepared to accept a Government measure of this kind and they want something else, they ought to tell us what it is that they do want. The leader of that party must be satisfied with some undertaking given to him by the Government, and it is up to him to tell the House what the arrangement is which has been arrived at. Did the Government agree at the conference to accept amendments to the Bill which might be submitted by the Country Party? Will the Attorney General answer that question? Silence gives consent. We have had submitted a Bill, which, according to the real leader of the Government, the Colonial Secretary, is the acme of perfection as far as representation is concerned, and the Government have accepted a mandate from the third party in this House that they shall be permitted to make amendments.

The Attorney General: I propose to submit that notice be given of amendments.

Hon. P. Collier: Do the Government intend to stand by the Bill? What is the good of wasting time over it if the Government propose to accept amendments?

The Attorney General: If the amendments go to the root of the Bill we will not accept them.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am drawing the attention of the House to the position we find ourselves in. The Attorney General knows well the amendments which the Government are prepared to accept.

The Attorney General: I am aware of certain amendments which are going to be moved.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That is an admission, then, that the member for Toodyay, the deputy leader of the Country Party, has a definite understanding with the Government as to how they are going to treat certain amendments which he will move. Is that the case?

The Minister for Works: Oh!

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I would be much obliged if the Minister for Works would for once allow his colleague, the Attorney General, to look after his own Bill. I would

not expect the Minister for Works to know more about it; I am looking for light in regard to the subject. The Attorney General is in possession of certain amendments which are to be moved. How long is it since the agreement was arrived at between the two parties with regard to the amendments it is intended to move? Was it arrived at at the conference in the Premier's office? Was it then that the arrangement was made, and if so why were the people of the State not told about it? After all, it is the people who have to be considered, not the members of Parliament. Why were not the people taken into the confidence of the Government and told what was proposed regarding their future representation in Parliament? If the arrangement was not arrived at at that conference, was it arrived at at the conference held at Parliament House.

The Attorney General: I am not here to be cross-examined.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Attorney General is in charge of the Bill, and therefore he is in the box to be cross-examined. We want to know what his Bill is and what he means by it. What I want seriously to draw the Attorney General's attention to is that this Bill is not for the present representation in Parliament; it is for the future representation of the people in Parliament, and if anyone is to be taken into the confidence of the Government it should be the people. Will the Attorney General tell the people what the Government propose to do in connection with the measure? We seem to have got back to the old gerrymandering tactics of the previous Government. The Premier told the House and through the House the country that a Bill of this nature had nothing to do with the people.

The Attorney General: Who said that?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member's leader. It is a good thing for the hon. member that he did not hear all that was being said by his chief at that time, or he would not have been able to tolerate it. Does not representation in Parliament concern the people? Evidently, by the attitude now adopted by the Attorney General, in conjunction with the third party, the Minister himself is coming to think that it is not the people's concern.

The Attorney General: I so often hear contradicted by you statements made by my chief that I sometimes scarcely know what to think.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I do not expect the hon. member to accept every statement I make. If he were a loyal colleague, he would never doubt his chief, but would stand by him, whatever his personal opinion. Let me seriously appeal to the hon. member to let the House know what we are discussing. The Bill now before us is not the Bill the Government are going to accept.

The Attorney General: It is. I have said from the beginning that when reasonable amendments, in respect to the allocation of the quotas, come forward, I shall be willing to listen to them.

Mr. Carpenter: And you have arranged to have some moved?

The Attorney General: No.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Attorney General certainly would not listen to any unreasonable suggestion, of that I am sure. Let me make the reasonable suggestion that the Government, having found that they have floundered in connection with this question, should reconsider it, that while preaching a certain doctrine, they should agree to practice it, and recognising the turmoil we in this State are in to-day, and the inevitable shifting of our population in consequence of war and drought, the Government should, first of all, get a mandate from the people for a Bill of this nature. Obviously, such a Bill affects the people, first, last, and all the time. This side of the House will take no exception to the appointment of a Commission left free to report as to how people shall be better represented in Parliament. If the Attorney General will bring down a one-clause Bill, providing for the appointment of a non-party Commission to report to the House as to how the people can be better represented in Parliament, and if he will permit Parliament to devise from that report a just arrangement of electoral boundaries, we will offer no objections.

The Attorney General: A good suggestion, if suitable commissioners could be found in Western Australia.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not prepared to admit that we have no one in Western

Australia who without party bias could handle such a question.

The Attorney General: You suggest three of them.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The probabilities are that, under existing conditions, there is in the State a number of prominent men dissatisfied with the tactics of the Government in this regard, men who would not be allied to this side of the House, and who would be prepared to deal with this matter perfectly free from party bias. We have something here which, I should imagine, the Government have employed the Government Actuary to work out.

The Attorney General: The return is merely a matter of calculation, to save your time.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I challenge the Attorney General to tell me how the commission will allot the boundaries in the metropolitan area.

The Attorney General: They have to take the basis of the quota. When I reply I may tell you that the quota is in the neighbourhood of 5,000 odd. The Bill provides that that shall be the basis, and the metropolitan area will have to be divided into electorates having each 5,000 odd, and so the commissioners will have to divide the metropolitan area into electorates containing that number, having regard all the time to the four considerations mentioned in the Bill.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: And after all that it will be signed by the Attorney General, "E. & O. E." Let me draw the attention of the Attorney General to this: he takes the metropolitan area, but for the purpose of this return he takes the existing electoral boundaries of that area. Does he not realise that one of the metropolitan districts, namely, Balkatta, embraces a portion of what might be termed an intense farming area to the north of the metropolitan area.

The Attorney General: I recognised that instantly, and therefore you will find in my Bill a special provision.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: A few minutes ago the Attorney General said he knew exactly how the commission would arrange the metropolitan boundary.

The Attorney General: No; I have provided that the commission may take part of

the metropolitan area and throw it into some other area.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Can the Attorney General tell me how many such areas will be taken out of the metropolitan area, each increasing or reducing the quota? Of course he does not know. The Attorney General cannot tell us what will be the quota in the metropolitan area, yet not two minutes ago he said he could.

The Attorney General: I said I could tell you the method.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Any school child could work out the method. Take another glaring anomaly: provision is made for the agricultural-mining group. In the true sense of the term they are not one area, yet for the purpose of the Bill they can be altered by cutting out any part of an existing agricultural area and putting it in the mining area.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Westonia, for instance.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am coming to that. We have Avon, with 4,066 electors, shown in the agricultural and ports group. Here the Attorney General has used Avon with its full electoral strength for the purpose of arriving at the quota of the agricultural and ports.

The Attorney General: No; I only give that by way of illustration.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Then let the Attorney General adopt the methods of the Minister for Works and mark it "E. & O.E."

The Attorney General: There are no errors or omissions.

Mr. Hudson: The figures are right; it is the use made of them.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Attorney General tells the House and the country that, under this proposed redistribution of seats, a definite number of electors will be given to each area.

The Attorney General: Each time I have drawn attention to the alterations the commissioners may make.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Then we do not know where we are. For the purpose of arriving at the quota for the agricultural and ports group Avon is set down as having 4,066 electors. The Attorney General knows that when the mining portion is excised from the Avon electorate, and put into mining, the agricultural total will be decreased by

anything from 1,200 to 1,500 electors.

The Attorney General: No; I have had it calculated.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: You cannot put a ring round Westonia and lift it out of the electorate without taking away at least 1,200 voters.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: There will probably be one more mining seat than is shown in this return.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: No, but there will be one more metropolitan seat.

The Attorney General: No.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It will all depend upon what the Ministers term the metropolitan area. The Ministers may cut out all the wings of the metropolitan area and call them country seats. They may still designate as Swan, the electorate which includes Armadale, one of our suburbs, but may classify the electorate as a country seat. Imagine the people of Armadale being placed on all fours with those of Leonora or Meekatharra!

The Attorney General: Ministers will not interfere with the commissioners.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We have had experience in the past. Ask the member for Williams-Narrogin (Mr. E. B. Johnston) how they cut up his seat. Why he won his election in consequence of the way in which his seat was dealt with.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: That is so.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: When a late hon. member represented Williams, and his interests had to be considered—he being a supporter of the then Government—they so worked the boundaries of his electorate as to take in the whole of his most distant relatives and their friends, representing approximately 350 votes.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: We must avoid any gerrymandering in this measure.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We may avoid gerrymandering of that nature in one electorate.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Let us have no gerrymandering in any electorate.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Bill will permit gerrymandering of areas, which is just as bad as the gerrymandering of electorates. None of us can foresee what the next 10 years has in store. What is the use of our passing a redistribution of seats Bill now

which will, within three years time, create anomalies just as great and as numerous as exist to-day?

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Before tea I was endeavouring to explain to the House, and to the Attorney General in particular, the unfair position in which he placed members on this side of the House in having arrived at some understanding with the third party with regard to an amendment of this measure without the terms of that amendment being divulged to the House for the information of members generally. That is just what one might expect from the present Government, because we have had a previous experience of their endeavours to arrange electoral boundaries in order to suit them for party purposes. On that occasion of course a denial was given by the Government. No Government ever introduced a Redistribution of Seats Bill except for the purpose of damning their own chances in the electoral districts; they never endeavour to arrange electoral boundaries to suit their own purpose—that is well known throughout the history of party government.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: This is not a Redistribution Bill; it is a Bill for the appointment of a Commission.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member is quite wrong. It is true the Bill provides for a Commission, but it definitely sets out the powers of the Commission and so ties the hands of the Commission that all that is required to be done could be done by the merest school-child. It is merely a matter of getting the number of electors in any district as supplied by the Statistical Department and dividing them into certain districts in a prescribed form. The Bill does not give any of the powers which in my opinion are essential to the making of recommendations to Parliament for the better representation of the people in Parliament. I am prepared at once to admit that so long as we have the party system and the present methods of arranging electoral boundaries, gerrymandering will undoubtedly occur in the future as it has in the past. To assert that an attempt at gerrymandering is being made on this occasion would, of course, only call forth

a denial from my friends opposite. They have always denied that charge, and it is to be expected they will keep on denying it. If evidence be required that the previous Act was a gerrymandering one, it is supplied in the Premier's own constituency, because the Attorney General himself had recently to admit, when in a portion of the Collie electorate, that he had not the remotest idea that the place he was then at was attached to the Collie constituency. And neither would any other sane man, unless he had previous knowledge of the methods of the Attorney General's chief, when he was putting through a Bill for the gerrymandering of the boundaries. We have heard a lot about community of interests in connection with this Bill. How can community of interests be defined as of any value in arranging electoral boundaries? Taking the present electoral laws, let me ask the Attorney General how he can secure any electoral system which would recognise community interests in the case of the squatter whose interests are primarily in the North but who resides in the metropolitan area, and side by side with him the policeman working in the metropolitan area and the policeman who resides in the North-West. In the one case the squatter would have no vote in the district in which his interests are centred, because he is resident in the metropolitan area. On the other hand, the policeman who resides in the North has about ten times the electoral power of a policeman who resides in the metropolitan area, although their interests are identical. Let us take the question from the miners' point of view, from the point of view of the man who is producing wealth from the mines in Kalgoorlie and the miner residing at Leonora. The man following the occupation of miner at Leonora has five times the electoral power of the miner at Kalgoorlie.

The Attorney General: He has about four times the electoral power now.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not arguing on that. I am endeavouring to point out that community of interests, which is talked about so glibly in connection with this matter, does not mean so much after all, because interests, even in the metropolitan area itself, are so diverse. It must be admitted that there should not be greater electoral

power to the merchant carrying on business in Northam than to the merchant in Kalgoorlie. As a fact, from the point of view of means of communication, the merchant in Kalgoorlie is in infinitely the worse position. That is the explanation why, under our present system, people resident in remote parts of the State have to bear inequitable charges—merely because the electoral power is centred near the seat of government.

The Attorney General: The electors of Canning to-day have not the same electoral power as the central goldfields constituencies.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member does not propose to correct that in this Bill; but we have here an admission I have been looking for for a long time. Evidently what was intended is to take everything on the other side of the Swan River and call it a country district. We have the same electoral power existing between the metropolitan-suburban areas and the goldfields suburban areas at the present time.

The Attorney General: No; it is something like two to one.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I do not think so. Let me take the figures supplied by the Attorney General, if they are not altered by an alteration of boundaries. These show that 5,000 electors in the metropolitan district, including Canning, would, under the amended arrangement, remain at 5,000, but at the same time the Government propose to reduce the number in the central goldfields areas to something like 4,000, at present some of these have nearly 6,000. Therefore there is no great disparity between Canning and the goldfields areas. I do not think the Attorney General himself would claim to introduce a Bill for the purpose of providing an equal voting strength throughout the State.

The Attorney General: Nor would you.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I would not. It must be recognised there are certain industries in this State which are responsible for our existence as a State, and principal amongst these are agriculture and mining. Members on the cross benches will, I think, admit that whilst agriculture has become an important industry to-day, it was made possible by our mining industry.

Mr. Piesse: How made possible?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Does the member for Toodyay not realise the fact that it was only the mining industry which made agriculture possible in this State?

Mr. Piesse: Only by providing a market.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Not only that. Does the hon. member not recognise what everyone has admitted until to-night, that not only by the provision of markets but by the introduction of tremendous capital, the circulation of that capital and the building up of a demand for certain commodities, the mining industry has made it possible for men to go out into the agricultural areas and build up the agricultural industry to its present position. The Minister for Industries (Hon. J. Mitchell) has admitted in this Chamber the fact that it was only through the advent of the mining industry here that the agricultural industry became possible in this State.

Mr. Piesse: I admit that mining brought population to the country.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not decriing the agricultural industry. My friends on the cross benches will admit that what they ask for is adequate political power for the country districts, so that their representation in this Chamber shall be effective. It is no use having representation of the mining industry unless that representation is sufficient to enable the industry to be effectively represented; and notwithstanding anything which may be said to the contrary, I maintain that hitherto the mining industry has not had effective representation in this House. What do we find. In this very House every mining electorate is represented by members of one party, the party sitting on this side. Those members have never yet been able to pass a law for the regulation of the mining industry which is effective from the point of view of the men engaged in that industry. It is very well to say that the agricultural districts want sufficient representation to obtain effective help for agriculture. The member for Toodyay (Mr. Piesse) uses his political power, as an agricultural representative, to deprive the men working in the mining industry of fair protection from the law.

Mr. Piesse: No.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It is so. Though every goldfields electorate has its member on this side of the Chamber, that does not make up the whole party on this side. Notwithstanding our strength, we have not been able to pass a single Bill—even while we were supposed to be in power—that was of much value to the men in the mining industry.

The Attorney General: The last Arbitration Act passed is the best Arbitration Act ever passed in the world.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Attorney General forgets that all the laws passed by the Labour Government had to run the gauntlet of a second Chamber more strongly imbued with party feeling than even hon. members sitting opposite.

Mr. Nairn: But why blame the member for Toodyay?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Members sitting on the cross benches desire such representation for the country districts as will secure effective assistance to the agricultural industry.

Mr. Piesse: As will save the country.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Heaven help Western Australia if the Country representatives cannot do a little better than they have done in the past. Agriculture being important, and therefore worthy of effective representation, surely it is also essential that the equally important mining industry should likewise have effective representation. But has the industry such representation?

The Premier: It has more than effective representation.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: From the point of view of application to their duties and of being able to understand what is necessary for the advancement of the mining industry, the representatives of that industry are more than effective. I do not disagree with the Premier there. Nevertheless, although the mining representatives as a united body urge certain reforms which they consider essential to the industry, the representatives of other industries not primarily interested in mining block the passage of effective legislation.

Mr. Nairn: Not in this House. You had control of this House for five years.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The member for Swan (Mr. Nairn) forgets that there are three parties in this House and that this Parliament consists of two Chambers. The

passage of this Bill would mean that the mining industry would never be able to speak again with an effective voice either here or in another Chamber.

The Attorney General: It would be able to speak much more effectively than under your Bill, which you thought so equitable.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Once more the Attorney General does not know exactly what he is talking about.

The Attorney General: Unfortunately for you, I do.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Attorney General may assert all sorts of things, but let me point out to him that the difference between his Bill and our Bill was that we allowed the commission a free hand outside the North-Western seats, in the same way as is done by the Commonwealth and by the democratic States of Australia. A quota is fixed in order to enable the more remote parts to have special representation in the popular Chamber. Under our Bill our friends then sitting on this side could see no opportunity of advancing their party interests, and they attempted, by amendments here and in another place, to gerrymander our Bill just as they gerrymandered the Bill of 1907.

The Attorney General: What does "gerrymandering" mean?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: "Gerrymandering" means the introduction by a Minister of a Redistribution of Seats Bill so framed as to enable him, with his majority in Parliament, to arrange electoral boundaries in such a manner as to prevent the people from expressing their will except from the point of view agreeable to the Ministerial party. And that is exactly what the Attorney General is attempting to do by this measure. I again urge the Premier, if he is prepared to drop party politics and bury the party hatchet in these trying times and to make the one issue that of winning the war, to recognise that the present turmoil is not conducive to a sound arrangement of electoral boundaries. None of us can foresee what will happen when the war is over. Most of us imagine things will progress rapidly. A good many people believe there will be no change. I declare, however, that no arrangement of electoral boundaries effected under present conditions can be of any value in five years' time.

Mr. Taylor: In three years' time.

The Attorney General: I suppose you will admit they are not of much use now?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: They are not so useful as they might be; otherwise our friends would not be sitting on the Treasury benches. Why not bring down a Bill which will deal with the question on a basis free from party strife? Why not provide for the appointment of a commission of representative men, who can easily be found, notwithstanding the assertion of the Attorney General?

The Attorney General: Do you propose to name them? Have you any in mind?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I could mention hundreds of men in whom I have sufficient faith to believe that they would carry out a redistribution from the point of view of the people and not from the point of view of sitting members. One cannot possibly expect members of Parliament to arrange electoral boundaries without having in the forefront of their minds the question how the redistribution will affect them individually. The first thing a member does on taking up an electoral Bill is to consider how it will affect his particular district.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: Your criticism is not from that point of view?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Bill does not affect me.

Mr. E. B. Johnston: In that case your position proves your statement to be incorrect.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Nothing of the kind. The first thing I did on taking up this Bill was to see how it dealt with the four Eastern Goldfields seats. The first thing the member for Williams-Narrogin (Mr. E. B. Johnston) did, in the same circumstances, was to apply to the Electoral Department for the latest enrolment figures, and then to see how the electoral strength of Williams-Narrogin stood. After that, the hon. member ascertained whether this Bill meant a reduction or an increase for his district. And the same thing applies to every member. But surely outside Parliament we can get men not looking for political honours who will view the matter from the only standpoint it should be viewed from—that of effective representation of the people in Parliament. A simple Bill could be brought down for that purpose.

Mr. Willmott: Could this Chamber ever agree on the personnel of such a commission?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I have no doubt of it.

Mr. Piesse: How would it suit you if each party in this House nominated members of the commission?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: That is exactly what I object to. Parties view a Redistribution of Seats Bill only as it affects party interests, not as it affects the people's interests. The Federal Parliament has adopted the course I suggest for the fixing of its electoral boundaries. A population basis is fixed, and boundaries are altered automatically by a commission according to the growth or decrease of population in each district. Thus, in addition to electoral boundaries being altered, the representation of the States is increased or decreased.

Mr. Nairn: But the Commonwealth Parliament does not honour the recommendations of the commission.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Commonwealth Parliament may send the recommendations back to the commission. This Parliament could do the same. I do not claim for a moment that commissioners could be secured who would prove infallible. Therefore, there must be opportunity to refer recommendations back to the commission for further consideration.

Mr. Nairn: This House could go on doing that indefinitely.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Under the existing conditions the member for Swan is representing a handful of people adjacent to the metropolitan area.

Mr. Nairn: That statement is not right; there are 5,000 constituents in that electorate, and that is not a handful. That number is three times as many as the member for Kanowna represents.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member has a suburban service almost throughout his electorate, and the number of his electors is 3,634. When the Bill is passed he will have 2,684, all suburban residents, and they will have equal power in this Chamber with the 4,739 electors in Kalgoorlie, Hannans, Brownhill and Boulder, 400 miles away. Yet this is supposed to be an equitable rearrangement of electoral boundaries. I suppose we shall be told by the representatives of a Liberal organisation in another place that the Bill has nothing to do with them, and

therefore they will not offer any criticism to it. That will be totally different from the attitude adopted towards the Bill which was sent up by the Labour Government, to which Bill they made amendments which had the effect of destroying the whole principle. Could we not get a commission to report to Parliament in regard to the position of the different electorates? The electorate of the member for Swan cannot be called agricultural. If it can be so called and side by side with that we call, say, Albany and Geraldton, ports, what will become of Fremantle? Will that be called metropolitan? There is nothing consistent in the Bill. A port requires representation on the same basis as an agricultural constituency, but here we propose to exclude our principal port. Agricultural and horticultural districts are to be called agricultural, but at the same time we have Balcatta, which takes in Wanneroo and Osborne Park where agriculture is carried on, and that is called metropolitan. The Attorney General, I was going to say has the impudence, but I will say instead, has the courage, to tell the House and the people as well that to get proper representation, his is the only way in which it can be brought about. He proposes to appoint a commission, tie their hands behind their backs like school boys, and in that way he hopes to bring about proper representation. Let us have a commission of inquiry, but let us not instruct that commission to make a recommendation to do certain things. Will the Attorney General agree to an amendment of the Bill to provide that the commission, notwithstanding any instructions in the measure, may submit recommendations to Parliament for the better representation of the people?

The Attorney General: I am prepared to consider any reasonable amendment.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Is that a reasonable amendment?

The Attorney General: I am not going to declare off hand whether it is or not.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: All I ask is that the commission should be empowered, notwithstanding any instructions contained in the Bill, to recommend to Parliament whatever they may consider to be necessary for the better representation of the people in Parliament.

The Attorney General: I will give that consideration.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: When may I expect a reply?

The Attorney General: Quite soon.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I have no further criticism to offer. As I said at the outset, it was extremely unfair on the part of the Government to adopt methods in regard to this Bill which eclipsed everything else they have done.

The Attorney General: What have we done?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: In the first place, this Bill was kept at the bottom of the Notice Paper until the last few days, and it was left to everyone to arrive at the conclusion that the measure was dead. Then the Government after conferring with the third party decided to introduce a new Bill. Lately the Government discovered that two or three members were absent from this side of the House and they deliberately took advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to try and bludgeon the Bill through.

The Attorney General: When will those members return?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I venture to remark that those two members went to the Eastern States at the request or with the concurrence of the leader of the Government.

The Attorney General: I will undertake that the Committee stage will not be taken until the return of those members.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Surely the Attorney General will agree that those absent members are entitled to express their opinions on the second reading? There is sufficient business for the Government to go on with, business of a non-contentious nature and important as well.

Mr. Willmott: What do you call important?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Judging by the attitude of the hon. member towards this measure nothing is of importance to him. Looking down the Notice Paper we find that there are many measures which could be taken into consideration at the present stage.

The Attorney General: I have told you that I will meet you so far as the absent members are concerned.

Hon. P. Collier: Yes, in Committee, but what about their views on the second reading?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I do not expect for a moment that the Attorney General will concede the point. The spirit behind this measure is a party one, and if ever there was evidence required to settle that point definitely, we have it in the attitude of the Government in endeavouring to force the second reading through during the absence of two members of the Opposition.

The Attorney General: What have you done in the past? You have said "There is the Bill on the Table, take it or leave it."

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The members for Geraldton and Roebourne (Messrs. Heitmann and Underwood) went to Melbourne in order to discuss matters of national interest, the abolition of party strife, and because of their absence the Government are endeavouring to force this Electoral Bill through. The Bill was on the Notice Paper long before the Christmas adjournment. The meeting between the two parties was held and a decision was arrived at before the adjournment, but the Bill was kept down. The member for Kimberley (Mr. Male) left the State for the remainder of the session and the Government kept the Bill in the back ground. But as soon as the member for South Fremantle (Mr. Bolton) volunteered for active service and went into camp, and the members for Geraldton and Roebourne went to the Eastern States, the Government took advantage of their absence to try and bludgeon the Bill through. I think I am entitled in my capacity as leader of the Opposition to draw the attention of members and the country to the manner in which the leader of the House is conducting the business. Perhaps he does not know that two hon. members went to Melbourne.

The Premier: I know as you know; why do you not wire to bring them back if you want them?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The Premier is afraid of them coming back and that is why he wants to get the Bill through.

The Premier: I am very much afraid!

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Perhaps he will deny that he is taking advantage of the

absence of the member for South Fremantle?

The Premier: Stick to the Bill.

Mr. Green: You sent them away with your benediction.

The Premier: What will you do when they come back?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am entitled to draw public attention to the attitude adopted by the Government over this matter. Particularly in face of their repeated declaration that the time has arrived when we should drop party strife, and think only of the interests of the State and the Empire in winning the war. Let me ask the Premier how we shall assist the Empire in winning the war by passing the Bill.

The Premier: Of course we will.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: It reminds me of the election candidate who, when asked whether he was free trade or protection, replied, "I am." How is the Premier going to avoid party strife when, in the absence of two members from this side, who, with his concurrence, went to Melbourne on national business, he suddenly brings up this Bill from the bottom of the Notice Paper? The Bill might easily have been held over until we again reach normal times. If there is a desire to change part of our electoral system, and all our electoral boundaries, let us wait until times are again normal, and the State once more settled in point of population. Under existing conditions men from outlying districts go off to the Front and their wives and families flock into the metropolitan area, where they can live more cheaply and under improved conditions; and the Government would take advantage of that state of affairs to force the Bill through. The Attorney General shakes his head, but I say it is so. How is it to be avoided? Is the Electoral Registrar to go to every house and ask the occupants whether they are permanent residents of the metropolitan area? Are our electoral boundaries to be arranged on such a basis? I would urge the Premier to show practical evidence of his alleged desire to avoid party strife. When on this side of the House, he was continually urging us to drop party measures. When the war was declared we dropped at least a dozen Bills of a party nature, with no other end in view than the avoidance of strife.

The then leader of the Opposition persisted in urging us to deal with none but measures concerning the welfare of the State and the Empire, yet one of the first Bills which he, as Premier, introduces, has for its object the gerrymandering of electorates. And he goes on to hold secret conferences with another party, and now, by way of climax, deliberately takes advantage of the absence of members of the Opposition, who are away with his knowledge, to bring up from the bottom of the Notice Paper a Bill not essential to the development of the State, and one calculated to introduce party strife of the bitterest nature; and to-morrow, in the Press, as like as not, the Premier will once more declare that he is earnestly desirous of bringing about a national form of Government.

Mr. Wansbrough: You missed a splendid opportunity of avoiding this strife when your party turned down the proposition for a national party.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I have never heard of it. I know that the member for Avon (Mr. Harrison) moved a motion a little while ago and got but little support from either side.

Mr. Wansbrough: You were approached with a view to the formation of a national party.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Never. The member for Avon may have said something about it in the corridor, but if he did he was not authorised by his party to speak. I have not been approached either by any member of the Government or by the leader of the Country party. It is up to the Government to give evidence of their alleged desire to conduct the affairs of the State without the introduction of party strife. Of course there there must always be some difference of opinion, but that is not necessarily party strife. Nearly all the other Bills on the Notice Paper could be proceeded with without danger of creating any feeling such as we must have on this Bill, which to-night represents a deliberate attempt to take advantage of the absence of several members from this side.

Mr. WILLMOTT (Nelson) [8.22]: After listening to the leader of the Opposition for the last hour, I am more than ever of opinion that this is a necessary measure. I am now

convinced that the Bill is a good one, providing that certain amendments, which I intend to move in Committee, are carried.

Mr. Taylor: What are they?

Mr. WILLMOTT: Given an opportunity, I will outline them. It has been freely admitted during the last hour that, at the present time, the goldfields are over-represented in Parliament. The leader of the Opposition has admitted it, and, apart altogether from his admissions, it is a well known fact.

Hon. T. Walker: Better represented than other districts, but not over-represented.

Mr. WILLMOTT: I say they are over-represented, especially Kanowna. On the other hand, the farming industry is not sufficiently represented. Therefore, the electoral districts require adjustment.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: And this is a good time, when the trenches are filled from Western Australia.

Mr. WILLMOTT: They are filled as well from the farming industry as from any other. All this bluff of 98 per cent. of the men at the Front being miners is mere rubbish. Let the hon. members come down to the Nelson district and learn how many men from there have gone to the Front. The timber men and the farmers have gone to the war as readily as any of the miners. Indeed I am proud to say that all sections in Western Australia have done their duty remarkably well.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Have any married men left the agricultural districts for the Front?

Mr. WILLMOTT: Unfortunately, yes.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: And have their wives and families come to the metropolitan area?

Mr. WILLMOTT: That is not the point. After having carefully considered the Bill I intend to support it, if certain amendments are carried.

Hon. T. Walker: That is the bargain.

Mr. WILLMOTT: In the Bill it is proposed to give the metropolitan area more than a fair share of representation. The number of electors is to be reduced by two-fifths. I intend to move that the number of electors be reduced by 50 per cent., for the reason that any one man in a country electorate is carrying six men in the City on his back. If we were to give equitable repre-

sensation we would allot six votes to the country elector for every one to a voter in the City. Of course we do not expect to get that proportion, but I intend to move for a reduction of 50 per cent. Furthermore, I hold that at the present time the metropolitan area should not have more than 13 representatives, and I intend to move in that direction also.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: You are a pearl.

Mr. WILLMOTT: Of great price.

Mr. Taylor: And you got your price at the conference.

Mr. WILLMOTT: Under the Bill the number of electors in the goldfields central area is to be reduced by one-fourth. I will move to reduce the number by 25 per cent. That will then work out as follows:—The metropolitan area 13 representatives, central goldfields 4, mining 6, agriculture 23. Thus, the metropolitan area will gain one, mining will gain two, and the whole of the rest of the State will gain—what? Hon. members can work it out and they will find that the proposition, as a whole, is fair and equitable.

Mr. Green: The mining community will not be satisfied to have any less representation than the cockies.

Mr. WILLMOTT: Compare the figures and see what the miners have got. Take Nelson, with 3,263 electors, and Leonora with 1,100, and see if you can still talk about equitable representation. The commission will deal with the question of boundaries. If we are to appoint a commission we must give them some basis to work upon. If, on the other side, we are to give the commission a free hand, then, as the member for Bunbury (Mr. Thomas) interjected a little time ago, we may turn that down forever and a day, because the commissioners will never satisfy all parties.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: If you prepare the Bill on party lines, why have a commission at all?

Mr. WILLMOTT: The Bill is not drawn on party lines, nor are the amendments as proposed by myself.

Hon. T. Walker: Will not the Bill benefit your party?

Mr. WILLMOTT: Not at all.

Hon. T. Walker: Will you not get over-representation?

Mr. WILLMOTT: The Bill seeks to ensure that the metropolitan area shall not become the octopus it is to-day in New South Wales, where the city has 30 members out of a total membership of 90. It is absurd that one city should dominate the Legislature as Sydney does; and if I can put a sprag in the wheel of the city of Perth to prevent its attaining that position I shall do so.

Mr. Green: Why do you propose to affect the central goldfields?

Mr. Hudson: Does the Attorney General consider the amendment reasonable?

The Attorney General: Mind your own business.

Mr. WILLMOTT: The Attorney General will let me know his views on my suggestion when I move the amendment. If members will think the matter out carefully they will find that the amendments to be moved by me are fair and equitable to the whole of the community.

Member: What is the use of having commissioners?

Mr. WILLMOTT: The commissioners' duties are defined in the Bill, and these figures are something for them to go on. If the amendments I intend moving be carried, the commissioners should be able to send up to the House such recommendations as could be adopted by all sides of the House, and thus do away with what we have heard so much about, party strife.

On motion by Mr. Carpenter, debate adjourned.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. R. T. Robinson—Canning) [8.33]: I wish, Mr. Speaker, before the next business is proceeded with, to make a personal explanation, with the permission of the House, with reference to the remark made by the member for Hannans (Mr. Munsie) that I had made a deliberate misstatement when submitting certain information regarding the Bill to members.

Mr. HUDSON (Yilgarn) [8.34]: Is the Minister in order in seeking to make an explanation at this stage? Before giving your ruling, Sir, I should like to say that I have one objection to make to the Minister being

heard now. Is it necessary that I give my reasons immediately?

Leave not given.

BILL—AGRICULTURAL LANDS PURCHASE ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. H. B. Lefroy—Moore) [8.35], in moving the second reading said: In 1909 an Act was passed for the purchase of lands suitable for immediate settlement, making better provision for land sold and for facilitating settlement on the land. The Agricultural Lands Purchase Act was passed for the purpose of facilitating settlement on the land, but I regret to say the Act has not achieved its object. We have large areas of repurchased estates which have not been settled in the way it was intended.

Member: What are the reasons; are not the prices too high?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: In 1915 the late Minister for Lands introduced an amending Land Bill providing for a reduction of the sale price of land in certain cases. He was asked whether he would provide for a reduction of a similar character in respect of the price of all land, and he promised that a Bill would be introduced affording similar relief to holders under the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act. I have no doubt that had the hon. member remained in office he would have introduced a measure which, if not exactly similar to the one which I am now placing before hon. members, would at any rate have the same object in view, namely, to relieve those who have settled on repurchased estates, in the same way as relief was afforded to settlers on other Crown lands. Early in the present session I was asked the question whether it was my intention to introduce a Bill to amend the Agricultural Land Purchase Act, and if not, whether I would indicate what my intentions were regarding the deferred rents on settlers' holdings under the Act. I replied it was admitted that very high prices had been charged for the land in some of the repurchased estates, that the annual payments were excessive and that I would take the earliest opportunity of re-

commending the introduction of an amending Bill, providing for an extension of time for payment. The reply of the member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) to a question of a like nature was that the matter could only be considered after a report had been submitted by the Re-pricing of Lands Board. The same question was asked me in the early part of this session, and I replied that it was my intention to bring in a Bill to give relief to those settlers on repurchased estates, and also to make better provision for the pricing of all agricultural land. Under the Act of 1909, power was given to reduce the price of land below what the land had cost with all improvements, survey charges, etc. That is to say, in cutting up repurchased estates the Government had to take into consideration the amount paid for the estate, add to that the cost of surveys, not only of the blocks but also of roads and of any improvements that the Government might effect, and add five per cent. to the total. But it was provided that the total price of the block had to be not less than the aggregate price to be paid by the selector. That provision has been found to inflict hardship in many cases, and many people, I understand, are unable to fulfil their obligations owing to the high price they have had to pay for their land. In this measure the desire is to make provision that the sale price of the land may be reduced. It simply gives power to the Minister for Lands to reduce the price in certain cases when selling repurchased estates. As I have explained, the aggregate price is now fixed by Act of Parliament. In Clause 2 of the Bill it is provided that notwithstanding the provision contained in Section 12 of the principal Act—which provides as I have just explained—if it appears to the satisfaction of the Governor in Council having regard to the quality and productiveness of the land, the distance of such land from a railway station or siding, the sale price of such land may be reduced to such price as appears equitable to the Governor. As hon. members are aware, a minimum price was prescribed by the Act of 1915. Our chief concern in this State is to settle people on the land and make it productive, so that the assets we hold in repurchased estates may be realised. The desire of the Government is to be placed in

such a position that, if settlers are not prepared to buy the land at prices fixed by the existing law, the Government can reduce those prices sufficiently to tempt the people to go on that land and make it reproductive.

Mr. O'Loughlen: This should be a warning to all future Governments in purchasing estates.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Undoubtedly. We all learn by experience, at times very bitter experience. The Government now have the large estate at Yandanooka, the Avondale estate, and the Harvey estate; and I am sure all of us desire to see people settled on those lands.

Mr. O'Loughlen: But you have not yet tried to dispose of the Harvey estate, have you?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes.

Mr. O'Loughlen: It would be rushed if you offered it.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It has never been thrown open.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I wish to see the repurchased estates settled and made productive. It is almost better to give the land away than have it lying idle. The settlers on the land become consumers and taxpayers, and thus the revenue of the country benefits. I trust the House will give the power I ask under this Bill.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: What will be the approximate loss to the State?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It is impossible to say until the prices have been fixed. I do not think we shall sell these estates to any better advantage by holding them indefinitely.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It is an extremely serious matter. The loss might run into £100,000.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I do not think that is possible.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: You are asking authority to reduce the price from £3 and £4 per acre to 15s.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The price shall not be below 15s.

The Premier: It is not likely that we will come down to 15s.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: When I introduced a Bill dealing with the repricing of land, I got the accountant of the Lands Department

to prepare an estimate of the loss of revenue involved, and the estimate was £30,000. The loss amounted to that within a few pounds, in actual fact.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: If we can get the estates settled, the gain to the people will be enormous. The Bill to which the hon. member refers did not fix prices.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: But it would be as well to give Parliament an approximate figure in connection with this Bill. The measure is not one which can be supported in the dark.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I could obtain approximate figures showing that if the land were sold at a certain price, say, 15s. or £1 or £2 per acre, the total reduction would amount to so and so much. But I do not think for a moment that there will be a loss of £100,000.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: The Government have a large number of these estates.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Even if the State loses considerably over the transaction, the eventual gain from the settlement of a large number of people on these lands will be very much greater. I am sure the member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) will admit that the State should not hold the lands indefinitely. I believe the late Government made an attempt to sell portions of the Yandanooka estate, but there was very little bidding. When purchasing that estate the late Government had not, I think, any idea of embarking on State farming there. Being unsuccessful in selling the Yandanooka lands, the late Government began farming so that the estate should not remain idle. That was a businesslike way of meeting the situation; but I am sure it was never the intention of the late Government to hold the estate unoccupied for ever.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: I would not like the hon. gentleman to think that we did not intend to hold any portion of the Yandanooka estate. We did intend to hold some of it for special stock breeding purposes, and I hope that will be continued.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The Bill consists of only one clause, but that clause gives extended powers. The principal Act was introduced with the view of repurchasing land which settlers could be induced to take up for the purpose of supplying the

requirements of Western Australia. Unfortunately, in many cases the result has been unsatisfactory. Much of the land in the Bowes estate and the Oakabella estate was over-valued; that is to say, the settlers agreed to pay more than they were able to pay for it, with the result that many of them have a millstone hanging round their necks, and must be given some relief if they are not to be swamped. Further, I consider the people who have bought land on the repurchased estates have, legitimately, reason to expect that they should be given some relief corresponding to that which has been granted to their brother settlers in other parts of Western Australia. I know for a fact that many settlers in the Bowes area have suffered very severely during the last few years. They had two bad seasons; I do not think any part of this State suffered more than the district about Geraldton. The settlers there had a drought in 1914, and when the crop was, so to speak, at their lips last year, the profit was swept away in rust. Many of them are now having a very hard time; and I think it is our duty to give assistance, if we can legitimately do so, where assistance is merited. It is to meet those cases that I am desirous of having this measure passed. I hope it will meet with the approval of the House, and I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM (Greenough) [8.59]: I support the second reading, because the question of the repurchased estates has been brought prominently to my notice for some time. Three of these estates are situated in the Geraldton district. The purpose of the principal Act was to allow of the repurchase by the State of large properties acquired in earlier times by the older settlers. The first property so purchased by the Government was secured at a much lower rate than those purchased later. We find that on that account the settlers who got these repurchased lands in the first instance have done fairly well, whilst those who have taken up some of the dearer lands, which were comprised in the repurchased estates, later on found it difficult to carry on even under normal conditions. The price they have had to pay for the land has, therefore, been responsible for a good deal of their trouble. I travelled through the Bowes

area last summer, and saw there hundreds of pounds worth of grass going to waste because many of the settlers had no stock to put upon it. Their crops also were a failure. I asked some of them why this was so, and they said that the conditions under which they held the land were so stringent and the price of the land was so high that they could not afford to purchase stock, and that they found it difficult to meet their obligations. Naturally these settlers had to raise their voice in order to make their position clear. It was thought by some that the leases should be extended. With the high price of land and the extra interest that would have to be paid if the leases were extended they would not after all get very much relief. The only way, therefore, is to reduce the price of the land. Those who were fortunate enough to take up their land as Crown lands got it at 10s. an acre. There was very little difference in the class of land, and they did not make any very great fortunes after holding it for 10 years or so. We also find people in the same district occupying the same class of land who in some cases have had to pay up to £4 an acre for it. Of course there are small improvements which were made on the land when it was held as large pastoral leases, but though these had to be paid for by the settlers they were not all that they could desire. The improvements did not suit the farmers in the way that they suited the pastoralists. The pastoralist erected his fences in a zigzag fashion along the borders of the poison in order to take in the good land and leave out the poison land. The selector, however, must have his fences put along certain boundaries. In other cases, the pastoralist lessee had sunk wells at points where he had stock water available. This suited him but does not suit the settler. If we take all these things into consideration we find that the settler is in a bad way. No doubt some of the settlers who have money of their own to start with may manage to struggle along if they have some good seasons. Even the Crown lands in some instances were priced at more than their value. This was recognised, and a measure of justice was meted out to those who had taken them up and found themselves in difficulty. Nothing, however, was done for those who held the repurchased land, and had to pay

sometimes five times as much as the other man had to pay. It is only reasonable that these people should ask for something of the same nature as that which was given under the repricing measure last year. It may be said that the Government having purchased the land at a given price should not lose upon it by disposing of it to the selector at a lower figure. I would point out, however, that these lands have been held on a lease from the Crown for many years, and that the Crown has had a revenue from them instead of their being allowed to lie idle. If that policy of leasing these lands was a wrong one, I do not think it is right that the selector who comes along afterwards should pay for the mistake. I hope the House will see its way to give unanimous support to the measure.

On motion by Hon. W. D. Johnson debate adjourned.

BILL—AGRICULTURAL BANK ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS AND INDUSTRIES (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [9.7] in moving the second reading said: This is a small Bill to provide for an alteration of the Agricultural Bank Act. At the present time we are forced to hold abandoned securities, but have not so far the power that the mortgagee has under the Land Transfer Act, and cannot foreclose. It is often necessary for the bank to have power to enter into the possession of a property, and carry it on for a time until there is a chance of selling it at a reasonable price. It is realised too, that we want power to protect our securities, particularly in the South-West. Under the present Act we have not that power. Where money is advanced for clearing in some districts, the suckers grow quickly and the bank wishes to have power to keep the scrub down in order to protect the security which falls into its hands. It will often be unfair to make a sale hurriedly, because frequently men have done a considerable amount of work on the land apart from that for which they have been paid by the bank. We want power not only to enter into possession under mortgage, but also power to lease the land for some time in

order to make as good a sale as possible in the interests of the bank and in the interests of the settler. We ask for power to lease these lands for any term we think wise up to seven years. We sometimes do lease lands now, but have no statutory authority to do so. We have provided for an increase in the interest rate, where we have to pay more for money than the rate existing when the Act was put into operation. We ask for power to charge a selector one per cent. more than the money cost the Government. At present it is very difficult to borrow money at all at a low rate of interest, and it may be that we will have to pay a higher rate in the future than we pay now. It is undesirable that the farmer should not be helped, and we ask for power to charge any rate of interest which may be necessary so long as it does not exceed one per cent. of what it costs the Government to get. This clause is only intended to operate temporarily. It is really a war time clause. I am sorry to have to ask the House to pass it, but there seems to be no other way out of it. This increased rate would only apply to mortgages made now, and not to mortgages existing previously. It would only apply to money that we loan now and which costs us more than it did before to get. We will have power to reduce this rate of interest as soon as we can borrow the money more cheaply. Sometimes the Government borrow money on a short term, probably on Treasury Bills for three years. When the next period of three years expires I hope that the war will be over and that money will be cheap again. I desire to assure the House that whoever may be in power the interest will be reduced to a reasonable amount when possible. I do not suppose there will be any objection to the Government getting one per cent. more than they have to pay for their money, because that is to cover the cost of management and provide against loss. We also take power to charge to soldier settlers a rate below five per cent. In the early stages this money is to be loaned to the soldier settler at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., increasing year by year by one half per cent. until the amount paid by him comes into line with that paid by other people. It is necessary, since the money advanced for that purpose will be advanced by the bank, that we should

have power to make this reduction in the case of the soldier.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Where do you provide that?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: In Clause 4.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: You do not limit it to the soldier.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I think it will be necessary to add a few words here to make it clear—

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It is too wide.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: And add such words as "except under the provisions of Clause 5." The Solicitor General says that this will cover it. I propose to make the alteration in Committee. The Bill provides that we may by regulation make provision for the assistance of the soldier settler before the mortgage is signed. Under the scheme, by which it is proposed to settle the soldier settlers we are to prepare the farms, and to do this we must use the money advanced by the Federal authority. The bank can only advance after a man has applied for the loan and the mortgage is signed. This clause will make it possible for all the work that is necessary to be done in the preparation of the farms to be done through the Agricultural Bank.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Clause 5 does not contain the provision you have referred to, giving you power to prepare the land in anticipation.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes, by regulation we can provide for that.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: I do not admire the drafting of the clause.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I think it is perfectly clear. If it does not provide what I wish, we will have it made clear in Committee.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: So far as I can read it, it does not provide what the Minister says.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: We desire to exempt the farms that have fallen to the Agricultural Bank from the payment of rates. Of course, where we can pay, and where a farm is used, we will endeavour to pay the rates; but when some of these farms are forfeited, they are farms of very little value, because very little work has

been done on them. It is just possible that the bank is responsible until the forfeiture is made absolute, and the general manager has asked that his position should be made clear. There is no desire to evade payment on the part of the bank, but we do desire to protect the bank's funds, where rates should not be paid.

Mr. Thomson: Suppose the bank sold the land?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: That would be a different thing. It often happens that the land is forfeited to the Lands Department and it is thrown open again for selection.

Mr. Thomson: And is the man who selects it liable for the arrears?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: He will not be responsible. I think the roads boards are fairly treated by the Government, and it is unreasonable to expect us to pay rates on land that has not been used, and which has been forfeited for the non-payment of rent.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: One great mistake we have made is to establish roads boards too soon.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The Bank has no intention of behaving unfairly to the roads boards. That is all I need say at the present stage, and I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. W. D. Johnson, debate adjourned.

BILL—INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS AND INDUSTRIES (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [9.20] in moving the second reading said: The object of the Bill is to put the administration of the Industries Assistance Act on a legal footing. Under the original Act the functions of the board were advisory only and the administration was by the Colonial Treasurer. The Treasurer has, of course, still to find the money, so that he really has control. When the Act was first introduced, it was almost impossible to expect it to be made a perfect mea-

sure, and it was not surprising to find that it had to be altered from time to time. It was a difficult measure to draft, and naturally there were found anomalies which had to be rectified. One of these is in connection with the procedure which sets up the claim of the board against the farmer. The statutory charge will now arise by reason only of the assistance rendered. On application for assistance, and advances being made, the holding, crops, etc., of the applicant, are charged with repayment. Under the present system we ask for a simple form of acknowledgment when the goods are sold. The application is made, the goods are supplied, and we have to get an acknowledgment from the farmer that the goods have been received. This procedure was set up in substitution for the former instrument of mortgage. When the measure was introduced to the House by the member for Guildford we approved of it, but it has not been possible in every case to get the acknowledgments. It is difficult to do so in some parts of the back country.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Some of the farmers' organisations advise the farmers not to send them in.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: This will get over the difficulty. They should, I think, have responded to the generous treatment of the department. But I think it is due more to carelessness than to anything else that we have not been able to get these acknowledgments. The member for Guildford knows that a good deal of correspondence and delays have resulted, and that these were costly to the department and of no earthly use to the farmer. The procedure will be that the debt will have to be proved by the board, but, so long as the debt is there, and it is a just debt, it will be secured as effectively as if there were a mortgage over the holding. In consequence of this amendment, we have had to recast Section 15 of the Act, which contains the provisions relating to the board's security for advances. We take there a first charge on the selector's interest in any land that is held or occupied by him for agricultural purposes. It is provided that the board may grant exemption under this clause. That is to say, that if an

owner is under the board, and if he is getting advances from the board, all property must be secured to the board. Many selectors, unwittingly perhaps, have sown crops on adjoining holdings. They have drawn superphosphate and seed wheat, and probably had assistance from the board, and they have sown on neighbour's land on the share system, and it has been the board's money that has gone into the cropping, and there has been really no security over the crop. Fortunately, there was a provision in the original Act which protected us to a great extent. The clause says that the receiver of any goods supplied by the board shall be equally liable to punishment with the man who receives the goods from the board and hands them over to another. It would be rather drastic to put that clause into operation, and we shall never do it so long as the owner of the land realises that the board have a claim against the crop. There is no desire to limit the activities of farmers. The board may have a client with two farms, one farm mortgaged to a private bank and the other to the board. Before he can put a crop in he will have to get permission. Of course it is very unlikely that permission will be refused. When these blocks adjoin, the board's block may yield five bushels and the other 15: we must, therefore, protect ourselves. This has occurred, and it is our desire to protect ourselves. It has to be remembered that we not only have money to collect for outside creditors, that we are responsible to the creditors to some extent, and it is necessary that we should protect them as well as ourselves. We propose to debit up all Government claims to the various accounts up to the 1st March, and we propose that the repayments to the Government shall be spread over a term of five years. This will mean that if a million of money is owing to the Government, the Government will get £200,000 annually. The surplus proceeds will be used, first, to make provision for the putting in of the coming crop. If £500,000 is required for this purpose it will be retained in order that the farmers may be carried on over the coming year. In addition to that, we make provision for the current roads board rates, for interest and taxes and insurance, and any other requirements

deemed necessary. After that we make the balance available to the outside creditors, to whom there is owing a sum of £550,000. My desire is to see the last of those creditors as soon as possible, so that when the farmers leave the board they will be free, except for any debts owing to the Agricultural Bank. There seems every possibility of paying off a considerable amount this year. The new clause reduces to eight per cent. the rate of interest that may be charged by any creditor of an assisted farmer. The merchants and storekeepers will realise that, since we are protecting their interests to the extent I have outlined, this is a fair maximum rate to charge. We shall have to make provision for the carrying on of the Act beyond 1918 if this clause is agreed to. It is also provided that the mortgagor cannot redeem his security without the consent of the board. That is, so long as he owes money to outside creditors the board will have the right to say that he may not pay off his mortgage and take away his security. It is also provided that the equity of redemption cannot be assigned by the settler, nor can it be taken from him by execution. Thus, there is provided the same protection for the selector and the board as would be afforded by a moratorium. All the creditors will have to depend on the board for the payment of their accounts from the proceeds of the farmers' crops. It protects the board also, because if we are to do this work it is necessary that we should carry on the farmer, and undesirable that any of the creditors so protected should enter on a farm and take away horses or machinery which do not happen to be specially secured to the board. This is another provision which I am sure the member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) will regard as a wise one.

Mr. Harrison: Will that eight per cent. be retrospective?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Of course there is £550,000 owing. If part of that money is for interest the interest shall not be more than eight per cent. We will not pay more than eight per cent. for any portion of the time during which the debt has been owing, no matter over what period. It has been found necessary to alter our powers under Clauses 5 and 6. Clause 5

is the drought clause, and Clause 6 is the provision which the late Minister had inserted in order that he might help people who, although not affected by drought, were still in difficulties owing to other causes. In both those clauses we make slight amendments. Purposes for which advances may be made are slightly enlarged. If the clause is agreed to, the board will be able to advance for any farming purpose. It is not intended that this shall in any way overlap the Agricultural Bank, but it is occasionally necessary to provide some small requirements not contemplated in the Act. Again, this has to be enlarged because we have always paid in cash, notwithstanding that the Act does not provide for dealing in cash. When a measure of this kind is introduced for special purposes it is bound to become necessary to recast it after a short experience, and apart from the distribution of surplus proceeds, the small amendments which I ask the House to agree to to-night are all introduced here on the experience of the past twelve months.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: The amending Bill is almost as large as the original Act.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes, because it substitutes entire clauses for the sections in the Act. The actual amendments are not large. The third schedule will no longer operate if the proposals here set out in regard to the surplus proceeds are agreed to. All the creditors will be paid on a pro rata basis. Experience has shown that this is advisable. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. W. D. Johnson debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 9.40 p.m.