

Bill as it appears to me. The measure has to be divided practically into three parts. There is the continuance of the present affairs, there may be the addition of others, and there is the putting of the bookkeeping and financial affairs under a proper form, while there is also the question which hon. members may debate amongst themselves regarding the disposal of those concerns.

Mr. Foley: Which hat is the pea under?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I do not know what the hon. member means.

Mr. Thomas: He reckons you are playing the political thimble and pea game.

Mr. Heilmann: It is the first time you have been beaten.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I do not know anything about it. The Bill is there for hon. members to consider. I have tried to make a clear statement of the position. I move—

*That the Bill be now read a second time.*

Mr. ANGWIN (North-East Fremantle) [10.5]: I move—

*That the debate be adjourned to Tuesday, 21st November.*

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

Ayes	..	..	..	14
Noes	..	..	..	15

Majority against .. 1

#### AYES.

Mr. Angwin	Mr. W. D. Johnson
Mr. Carpenter	Mr. Munsie
Mr. Chesson	Mr. Scaddan
Mr. Collier	Mr. Thomas
Mr. Foley	Mr. S. Underwood
Mr. Green	Mr. Taylor
Mr. Heilmann	(Teller.)
Mr. Holman	

#### NOES.

Mr. Butcher	Mr. Plesse
Mr. Connolly	Mr. Robinson
Mr. Gardiner	Mr. Smith
Mr. George	Mr. S. Stubbs
Mr. Harrison	Mr. Wansbrough
Mr. Lefroy	Mr. F. Wilson
Mr. Male	Mr. Hardwick
Mr. Nairn	(Teller.)

Motion thus negatived.

On motion by Mr. Scaddan, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 10.10 p.m.*

## Legislative Council,

*Thursday, 16th November, 1916.*

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

### PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the Colonial Secretary: 1, Return of Insurance Companies. 2, Mines Regulation Act new general rules.

### BILL—WHEAT MARKETING.

#### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

Hon. C. SOMMERS (Metropolitan) [4.36]: The excellent speech delivered by Mr. Baxter on this Bill last night, I think, made the measure thoroughly familiar to members. Mr. Baxter pointed out many defects in the Bill and put forward a good case for a select committee. I have much pleasure in supporting the appointment of one. The dealings of the pool with the last harvest disclosed many defects, and we wish to avoid the mistakes of the past. As it is impossible in the time at our disposal to deal with this Bill in ordinary Committee, I think the only way to meet the wishes of the producers, and also those of the consumers who are interested in the establishment of the pool, is to refer the measure to a select committee. These pools, I may remark, seem to have come to stay. I understand it is the desire of the producers generally that there should be some uniformity in the agreements existing in the various States. I support the Bill, and shall have pleasure in supporting also the appointment of a select committee. I know the Government are anxious that the measure should go through as quickly as possible. The Minister for Industries (Hon. J. Mitchell) is now in the Eastern States in connection with this matter, and he, naturally, is anxious that the Bill should go through.

If a select committee be appointed, I know that those hon. members whom the House is likely to appoint to sit on it will deal with the question expeditiously. There is not a great deal of evidence to be taken, but the expert advice of the committee will enable a workable Bill to be produced.

Hon. A. SANDERSON (Metropolitan-Suburban) [4.38]: If, as we are told, this Bill is to go to a select committee, there will be a real opportunity of dealing with the subject; and, as evidently the Government want to get the measure through as quickly as possible, I will follow the previous speaker in the brevity of my remarks. Those not intimately acquainted with all the ramifications of this difficult and perplexing problem of the wheat must be suspicious and alarmed at the procedure which has been adopted. There was on our Notice Paper a notice of motion that the Standing Orders were to be suspended in order to permit of this measure passing through all its stages at one sitting. The Bill passed through another place in the same hurried fashion. Without being intimately acquainted with the procedure of another place, one must recognise that it is unusual, if not irregular, for a Bill to be referred to a select committee after it has passed all its stages. Three members of the public closely interested in the measure appeared within the precincts of the House to discuss the question with hon. members. I frankly admit that so far as I am concerned I was not in a position to discuss with them the details of their objections; but they were able to establish without any difficulty whatever a *prima facie* case for delay and consideration. The particular clause of the Bill which concerns them is Clause 7. Owing to the delay which was, apparently, forced on the Government in another place, we have all had an opportunity of looking into the matter; and if there is to be a further opportunity of examining the measure through the select committee it may be best to postpone one's remarks or criticisms until after that stage has been passed. I really think, however, that the Government are to be, if not blamed, then criticised, for the extraordinary procedure they adopted. I recognise the difficulty and the perplexity of the problem, and the importance, doubtless, of getting the matter adjusted as rapidly as

possible. But the procedure adopted of attempting to suspend all the Standing Orders in both places for the purpose of rushing the Bill through, has completely failed and has not only failed, but has made people like myself, who do not pretend to be intimately acquainted with all the details, suspicious and alarmed, particularly in connection with Clause 7 of the Bill and paragraph 14 of the agreement. I hope the Colonial Secretary will realise that I do not wish to delay the proceedings in any way. It may not be his fault, but this attempt to rush important legislation through Parliament without consideration, without debate, must be highly prejudicial to the interests of the country. A Treasury Bills Act Amendment Bill is on the Notice Paper, and the same remarks apply to that measure. It appears to me to be of the utmost importance at the present time, in dealing with large interests, that we should have the fullest discussion and the fullest opportunity of considering matters. I protest strongly against the carrying through of measures practically without discussion, and shall continue to do so as long as the Government try to rush legislation through which ought to receive the most careful consideration. The Wheat Marketing Bill is one recent illustration, and the Treasury Bills Act Amendment Bill promises to be another.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM (North) [4.44]: I wish to preface any remarks I may make on this Bill by saying that I am absolutely opposed to any Government undertaking industrial enterprises of any kind whatever. Whether it be the marketing of wheat, or the selling of bullocks, or the arrangement of shipping, I do not consider it is the function of any Government to undertake industrial enterprises. No Liberal Government are fitted to do it, because they have had neither the experience nor the training to discharge duties which can alone be carried out satisfactorily by experts.

Hon. J. W. Kirwan: The hon. member did not oppose the freezing works.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I do not remember supporting them. Even if I did, they were proposed, I believe, by a Government not now in power. No Liberal Government should take hold of these en-

terprises, because they have not had that special experience and training necessary for the purpose; and to a much lesser degree are any Labour Government fitted for the task, because every employee working under a Labour Government is the master of the employer. The employers know perfectly well that any Labour Government are kept in power by the employees and, therefore, unless the employer does what the employees want him to do he cannot stay there. How could business be conducted under circumstances of that sort? Therefore, as a broad principle, I think no Government should undertake industrial enterprises. The vocation of a Government is to administer laws made by the Parliament composed of members selected by the people. It is not for any Government to undertake industrial enterprises requiring expert knowledge and special training. If they do, such enterprise can only be attended by that failure which has been so conspicuous in nearly every enterprise so undertaken. The only justification I see in the Bill for the Government taking this matter in hand at all is contained in the first few words of the first paragraph as follows:—

Whereas owing to great scarcity of the means of transport.

We all know that owing to exceptional circumstances of war the means of transport are so limited that it would be impossible for any private individual or company to command them and, therefore, in these circumstances it was thought wise that the Government should take this wheat business in hand. What has been the result? There is an accumulation of wheat all over the country, on which the Government have made advances, and instead of paying the rates of freight which any commercial man would have paid to get the wheat away, the Government have declined the freight, with the consequence that, instead of the wheat having been sold, it is rotting away in stacks in different parts of the country. We have heard accounts of how it is being destroyed by mice and damp and weevils. Only about one-third of it has been shipped, because the Government would not pay the rates of freight. Any commercial man who bought the wheat, even if he made some loss on it, would turn it into money as soon as he could.

But here we find the wheat taken over and left rotting in stacks. One of the objections to the Bill is that it means another set of committees or conferences. In Clause 4 we find that the Governor may appoint a committee not exceeding four persons to advise the Minister. If we go on much longer the whole of the community will be on some conference or Royal Commission of one sort or another.

Hon. J. Cornell: The hon. member is on a few.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I am not on any. Indeed I am beginning to think I have been left out. This is another excuse for appointing people to committees or conferences. Taking the Bill altogether, I have come to the conclusion that, instead of advancing money against wheat, it would be far better, if we are going to handle wheat at all, to purchase it right out and be done with it. Instead of paying these advances we should appoint a strong committee to settle the price and then let the Government put the whole thing in the hands of a reliable commercial man and purchase it. They are just as likely to lose money one way as the other. Let them buy the wheat right out and the farmer will know where he is. If the Government make anything out of it, all the better, and if they lose money on it, it would be no more unsatisfactory than losing the money by having the wheat destroyed. If the question is to go to a select committee, I would suggest that, instead of advancing money against the wheat, the wheat be purchased right out. It would have the advantage that the Government would know definitely that they possessed the wheat and had to get rid of it. They would not then allow it to rot. At present they say, "We cannot get ships at a certain price, so the wheat must stay there."

Hon. J. Cornell: The hon. member knows that it is impossible to get it away.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I do not know anything about it. I only understand that it was possible to get it away if the Government had agreed to pay the freights offering in the early part of the year. I am certain that if the Government knew the wheat belonged to them and they had to get their money back, it would be a greater in-

centive to them to get the wheat away. Therefore, I suggest that the members of the select committee take into consideration the question of a straight-out purchase instead of advancing against the wheat. The Government have my sympathy in the matter. It is not a question for any Government to handle. But under the exceptional circumstances, due to difficulty in getting freight—and we know that the Government's influence in this respect is very much greater than would be the influence of any individual—I suggest that it would be better for the Government to purchase the wheat straight-out. Certainly it would give greater satisfaction throughout the country.

Hon. J. M. DREW (Central) [4.54]: I am glad the Colonial Secretary did not insist upon the suspension of the Standing Orders with a view to getting this measure through the House in one sitting. It is far too important a measure to be rushed through. It gives tremendous powers to the Government, powers which no Legislature would grant except under the extraordinary conditions of to-day. But we must remember that this is a war time Bill. That, after all, is its only justification. One of the clauses contains something more than the investment of extraordinary powers, namely, Clause 7, which has been alluded to by Mr. Sanderson. That clause is an interference with a compact already existing and is distinctly prejudicial to one of the parties to the agreement. It aims at removing doubts as to the meaning of the second paragraph of paragraph 14 of the agreement. But in the removing of doubt process everything is done in favour of one party to the agreement. The various millers affected are protesting against this particular clause and I have received a letter from Geraldton, from the Victoria District Flour Mill. It is a co-operative concern and the overwhelming majority of the shareholders are farmers. They inform me they stand to lose £1,000 if the clause is passed. The letter is as follows:—

Geraldton, 4th November, 1916.—Dear Sir,—*Re* Wheat Marketing Bill: We understand this Bill will be coming before the Legislative Council on Tuesday, the 7th inst., and as we are affected under the Bill as it now stands, we wish to place our position before you. If the Bill goes

through as it now stands, this will probably result in a serious loss to us. We have not had the opportunity of going through the Bill, but we understand it contains a clause repealing any advantages miller agents now have under Clause 14 of their agency agreement, insofar as it relates to wheat for flour sold for export after the 1st December last. Clause 14 of our agency agreement with the W.A. Government is as follows:—

There is no occasion for me to read the paragraph; it appears in the Schedule. The letter continues—

There appears to be a great deal of confusion over this clause. Our position briefly is this: On the request of Mr. Sutton of the wheat board, the writer went to Perth last December to finalise matters in connection with our agency agreement. Owing to the very late date at which this matter was dealt with a number of millers had to buy wheat on their own account, to make sure of their supplies, and the Government acquiesced in our action. As far as we could then judge, the value of wheat for flour to be exported to the East was about 4s. 3d. per bushel, and we bought some 16,000 bags at from 4s. to 4s. 3d. per bushel on rails Geraldton. The greater portion of this was at 4s. 3d., and in no case did we give under 4s. for f.a.q. wheat. Owing to the uncertainty of the position we did not commit ourselves to any sales, preferring to wait and see our position. At the request of the Government we put this wheat into the pool. Prior to signing the agreement we stated to Mr. Sutton that we did not want any unfair profit from this wheat, and that we only wanted at the least a guarantee against any loss, in putting the wheat into the pool. We had no connection with the drafting of Clause 14 nor were we conjoined with the Associated Millers in their representations to the Government. We told Mr. Sutton that we were not committed to any sales of flour up to that time. On the 31st December last the agreement was duly signed by ourselves and the Minister. We frankly admit that we were a little surprised at the liberal nature this contract wheat was dealt with, so far as it related to local consumption.

We understand that the York Flour Milling Co. and the Peerless Flour Mill had some 100,000 bags each, which they bought much cheaper than we did, and up till recently they had not exported a bag of this in flour, so that while mills are paying 4s. 9d. for wheat these two mills would make a very large profit, if they kept it for local consumption. After the agreement was signed we found it was impossible to export flour to Singapore at the rate charged for wheat by the Government, and as we then had the Minister's signature that we would be allowed our contract wheat, we set to work and sold portion of the flour from this wheat at the ruling rates in Singapore. This only allowed us a fair margin of profit on wheat at 4s. 3d. When we had sold some 300 tons to Singapore at cheap rates the price there fell much lower, owing to American competition, and we were unable to sell flour that would repay us for wheat we bought at 4s. We have since at different times managed to make sales for export at very cheap rates to enable us to keep the mill going. We recently sold a parcel to South Africa at £10 5s. per ton aboard Fremantle, and if you work this out you will see our margin of profit is very small. On top of this the Government now draft a Bill which we understand will mean a direct loss to us on these export orders, only entered into when the Minister had given his signature for permission to do so. If the Bill is not amended it will mean to us a loss of at least £1,000 on export flour. We understand, under the proposed Bill, mills are still to be allowed contract wheat for flour contracts which they had entered into prior to December 1st last. This is not sufficient as we have been allowed to go on selling for export at cheap rates, and any concession should apply to sales up to the time the Bill was brought before the Lower house . . .

The Secretary of the company points out that if the paragraph is rejected the company will lose at least sixpence per bushel on all wheat exported in flour. The fact that there is a protest and that it is the intention of the Government, through Parliament, to give a meaning to the paragraph, should be factors to induce us to give a great deal of considera-

tion to the measure before passing it. I think the Bill should go to a select committee. I had intended saying more on the subject, but as I understand it is the general desire of members that the Bill shall be referred to a select committee it is not necessary for me to express my views any further at this stage.

Hon. J. CORNELL (South) [5.1]: I desire to say a word or two on this Bill, though I shall not detain the House long. I have no intention of going into the technicalities of the Bill, but I desire to say, with all due deference to Sir Edward Wittenoom and to the old fashioned ideas he has promulgated with regard to private enterprise being able to accomplish practically anything in the face of impossibilities, that, as I said at the inception of the wheat pool, it has come to stay. That prediction has been borne out in concrete form by the Government of the day giving legal enactment to the operations of the pool. I repeat that the pool has come to stay in Australia. Sir Edward Wittenoom has said that no Liberal Government can manage the pool, and by reason of that fact, having consideration for the business acumen of Liberal Governments generally, it becomes an absolute impossibility for a Labour Government to control the pool, for the reason that a Labour Government cannot possess that business acumen of which the Liberals have a monopoly, and also because they are not masters of their own souls.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: I did not say anything like that. I said nothing about their not being masters of their own souls.

Hon. J. CORNELL: At any rate I am master of my own soul. That is the inference I took from the hon. member's remarks. It stands to the undoubted credit of the Labour party in Australia that during this great crisis three out of the four States which are represented in the wheat pool were governed by Labour Governments, as well as the Commonwealth; and the strongest man of the one State not controlled by a Labour Government, Mr. Hagelthorne, is representative of some of the greatest interests in the East, more particularly in New South Wales, where a number of

large estates were some years ago cut up and sold on time payment system to hundreds of farmers in the Riverina district. That was one of the reasons which prompted Mr. Haglethorne to go into the wheat pool heart and soul as he did. Mr. Haglethorne not only saved himself by his attitude in regard to the wheat pool, but he saved hundreds of farmers in the Riverina. I was through the Riverina district seven months ago, and that was, I found, the general impression on the question amongst the farmers there. Sir Edward Wittenoom has drawn a glowing picture in endeavouring to show that what has been done could have been done by private enterprise. I claim that private enterprise could not have done more than the wheat pool has done. Yet the hon. member would leave the matter in the hands of private enterprise.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: I rise to a point of order. I never said anything of the sort. I asserted that the Government's action was justified in existing circumstances, seeing the difficulty in the matter of transport, but that I thought they should have adopted proper rates of freight.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I accept the hon. member's statement. I happen to have three brothers in the Riverina, who are among the largest wheat buyers operating in New South Wales. They operate as agents for the wheat pool. Two are connected with James Bell & Co., and the other with Dreyfus & Co. Between them, within a radius of 30 miles, they bought in the vicinity of two and a-half million bushels of wheat last year for the wheat pool. One of them imparted this information to me, that as a buyer for Bell & Co., the original orders he received from Bell & Co. were that he might buy up to 150,000 bushels and not one bag more. He immediately replied that he could double or treble that. He was instructed that as buyers and shippers, the firm could not see its way reasonably to purchase one bag more than the amount stated in his instructions. That position applied generally to all wheat buyers in New South Wales, and was the position which faced the farmers in that State. Yet we find that when the wheat pool was created, this buyer was informed by Bell & Co. that he could go on buying as much as

he could get hold of, and he bought one and a-half million bushels. Is it not an ample justification of the wheat pool, that one of the largest wheat buyers in New South Wales was originally instructed to buy up to a certain limit, but when the pool came into existence that limit was extended? I venture to say that the industry in which Sir Edward Wittenoom is interested—wool—had it not been for the intervention of the Federal Government along similar line to the wheat pool by shipping in troopships, would have been in a poor position to-day.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: That is absolutely wrong.

Hon. J. CORNELL: Then, that is the only industry in Australia to-day which has not received some direct benefit as a result of the efforts of the Federal Labour Government. One factor seems to have been totally lost sight of in the debate in this House in regard to the Bill. It has been said that the farmer has not received a lot of money. Who finds the money, who takes the risk of the wheat pool?—the people of Australia, through the Consolidated Revenue. They will have to find the money if there is a loss on the wheat. Yet not one word has been said on their behalf. Had it not been for the backing of the people of Australia the wheat pool would have been an impossibility. It has been recognised in the speeches of hon. members who have preceded me that private individuals or private concerns could never have found the large amount of money necessary for the establishment of the wheat pool. Therefore the only institution upon which to fall back in order to create the pool was the Government. I have had it on the best authority from New South Wales wheat buyers and from New South Wales farmers, members of that trusted institution, the most Tory institution of Australia, the Upper House of New South Wales, that had it not been for the wheat pool the farmer would not have been able to realise his wheat on the markets of the world for a return equal to the amount he has already received from the pool. I am pleased that some hon. members have altered their views; and after the fulsome eulogy paid by the hon. Mr. Baxter to the wheat pool of New South Wales, I am inclined to think that his condemnation of it

in its initial stages was owing to his having been misinformed, or to his not knowing what he was talking about.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: I rise to a point of order. At no time have I had any objection whatever to the wheat pool. I have always been in favour and always supported the scheme.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I accept the hon. member's assurance, but I charge the party with which he is identified, when the Federal Price Fixing Commission fixed the price of wheat, flour, and bread in this State, with raising a cry throughout the length and breadth of the land that it was an interference with their enterprise and that the wheat pool was not created for that purpose. Senator Pearce, as Acting Prime Minister, pointed out to those individuals who were howling the loudest and had no logic on their side, that by the creation of the wheat pool and by the backing of the general taxpayer of the State, the farmers had been placed in a position of receiving a decent measure of financial assistance and support, and that he therefore thought it only right that some consideration should be shown the consumers of the State by providing a decently cheap loaf; that it was not any great interference with the rights of those on whose behalf their cry was raised that something should be done for these people who had made it possible for the wheat pool to continue. There has been a proposal to refer this Bill to a select committee. I understand that another place has already referred one clause of the Bill to a select committee.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: No. We have the clause here. They cannot be dealing with it by select committee since we have it here.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I was under the impression that inquiry by a select committee was being made in another place with regard to a particular clause of the Bill, and that it was understood that when the Bill went back to another place they were prepared to deal with the recommendations of that select committee. I am opposed absolutely to submitting the Bill to a select committee. I have been consistent in opposing the appointment of select committees since I have been in this House, and I will

continue to do so because I have had experience of them. In connection with the work of a select committee any individual can come along and make a statement; that statement can be accepted or rejected, and my experience is that we require some method of at times taking to task individuals who make statements before select committees. Another thing I would like to know is from which part of the House is the pressure coming in connection with the reference of this Bill to a select committee. Is it coming from the party with which I am associated? I do not think it is. It seems to me that the pressure is coming from the Farmers and Settlers' Association, and I resent it.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: Nothing of the sort.

Hon. J. CORNELL: In another place the representatives of the farmer are backing the Government, therefore, why is it asked in this Chamber that the Bill should be referred to a select committee. They will not do it here if I can prevent it. After the brilliant effusion on finance to which we were treated by Mr. Baxter last evening—

Hon. C. F. Baxter: I am glad you enjoyed it.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I did not; it hunted me out of the Chamber. After that brilliant effusion, I am perfectly sure that anything he may be able to do in the way of assisting the Government through the medium of a select committee will be of very little value.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: I do not pretend to be a constitutional authority like you.

Hon. J. CORNELL: It is all very well to refer outside matters to a body like a Royal Commission, but Parliament itself should deal with questions like the present one, and as the Colonial Secretary has pointed out, it is highly desirable that this Bill should go through, and if I can assist the Colonial Secretary to put the Bill through and to make the amendments which I think are necessary, I shall do so, not because I have any particular leaning towards the present Government, but because of my desire to see the Bill on the statute-book. Despite the opposition that was exhibited during the initial stages against the wheat pool, and despite the hostile criticism levelled

against it, not by the general taxpayer but by the men who are getting most of it, I am out to assist them. The reason I support the Bill and oppose the appointment of a select committee is that the pool was brought into being by two parties whose politics are as far apart as the two poles. They brought forward a scheme which will go down to posterity as one of the greatest acts during the war. They have reached the stage that they are of the opinion that that scheme should have its basis laid down by legislation, and Parliament itself should deal with the matter without any undue influence being brought to bear from any section in politics or from any section of the community. In view of the experience of the work of select committees appointed by this House, I trust members will rise to the occasion by declining to appoint a select committee and that they will on the floor of this House remove any anomalies which may exist so that the measure may soon be placed on the statute-book.

Hon. E. M. CLARKE (South-West) [5.20]: I plead guilty to knowing nothing whatever about this measure and, therefore, I welcome the proposal to refer it to a select committee of gentlemen who understand the business and who have had considerable experience of it. Those gentlemen will be well fitted to investigate the matter and present a report to Parliament which will enable members to pass the Bill in such a way that the whole issue will be successful. I admit again that I know nothing at all about the subject and will support the appointment of a select committee.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. H. P. Colebatch—East—in reply) [5.22]: I do not intend to traverse the arguments which have been advanced by different members in regard to this Bill. I should, however, like to say I do not consider that the criticism by Mr. Sanderson and Mr. Drew was altogether justified. It did for the moment appear necessary to the Government that the Bill should be put through as quickly as possible before the Minister for Industries proceeded to the conference in Melbourne. Directly I was acquainted with that fact I put a notice on the Notice Paper so as to give members due warning and also arranged that the Bill should be circulated

before it was submitted to the House. Directly the necessity for rushing the Bill through disappeared I withdrew that motion so that hon. members would have as much time as possible to devote to it. It will never be the desire of the Government to rush legislation through the House, and I think Mr. Drew will agree with me that on several occasions, particularly since the war began, his Government found it necessary at times to ask both Houses to suspend the Standing Orders so as to get urgent matters through. The suggestion made by Sir Edward Wittenoom that the Government should buy the whole of the wheat, is, I am afraid not quite practicable, because in this matter we have to be guided by the decisions of the Commonwealth and of the other State Governments. The Western Australian Government could not very well proceed on its own in a matter of this kind. In the first place it would probably find great difficulty in securing freight and in the second place there would be the question of price. Mr. Baxter has told us that it would cost 4s. a bushel to produce the wheat. I am inclined to think that that estimate is rather high.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: I said 40s. an acre; I never mentioned 4s. a bushel.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I am sure if the Government contemplated purchasing the wheat, they could not suggest giving the farmer less than 4s. a bushel. If we had to take over fifteen million bushels at 4s. a bushel, it would mean we would have to provide three millions of money for the job. For that reason alone I think we should fall in with the arrangements made between the Commonwealth Government and the Governments of the other wheat exporting States. The Minister for Industries is at present in Melbourne attending the conference, and when he returns we shall know more about the position than we do at the present time. Mr. Drew has referred to Clause 7 of the Bill. I purposely avoided debating that clause for the reason that a select committee appointed by another place—whether regularly or irregularly does not concern me—has taken a mass of evidence regarding the clause which no doubt, together with their finding, will be available for this House, but I want to remove any impression caused by Mr. Drew's remarks that Clause 7



represents an attempt by the present Government to interfere with or in any way repudiate the agreement which was made by our predecessors. Clause 7 has been inserted in the Bill at the desire of the previous Minister for Lands, Mr. W. D. Johnson, who made the agreement. Mr. Johnson intimated to the present Government that this clause was necessary in order to give a just and proper interpretation to the agreement which he made. I am not arguing whether the interpretation is just or not, but I want to remove the impression that the present Government have done anything in the way of interfering with an agreement entered into with the millers by our predecessors. This clause has been inserted on the assurance given by Mr. Johnson that it is necessary in order to give a proper and just interpretation to the agreement; it is because of that assurance that the clause has found a place in the Bill.

Hon. H. Carson: Who prepared the Bill?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I do not know whether the Bill was prepared by the late Minister for Lands or not. I know, however, that the measure is founded largely on the Victorian Act. It has been suggested by Mr. Baxter that a select committee should inquire into this Bill. To that course the Government have no objection to offer. Mr. Cornell wants to know from which side pressure for the select committee is coming. The Government need no pressure whatever in the direction of appointing a select committee if it appears that the Bill can be improved by close investigation on the part of those representing the people who are intimately concerned. The Government welcome any assistance that may come from the appointment of such a committee. I would like to point out, however, that it may be dangerous to unduly delay the passage of this Bill, and for that reason I would ask the hon. member when he moves for the appointment of a select committee to arrange that the select committee shall report on Wednesday next. If by that day it is apparent that there is no hurry for another day or two to get the Bill through, then assuming the committee have not finished their labours it will be an easy matter to secure an extension of time. The Government's only desire is to make the measure the best possible one in

the interests of the growers of wheat. They have no other idea except that the interests of the people must be protected. I am sure that Mr. Baxter's intention in moving for the select committee is to assist the Government in that direction.

Hon. J. Cornell: What about the consumers of the wheat?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I do not think their interests are in danger. The wheat is sold to the millers here at about half the price that it is sold to the millers in London, so I do not think the consumer here is on a bad wicket at all.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*To refer Bill to select committee.*

Hon. C. F. BAXTER (East) [5.28]: I move—

*That the Bill be referred to a select committee consisting of Messrs. Allen, Drew, Greig, Sommers, and the mover, to sit on days over which the House stands adjourned, and to call for persons and papers. (2) That the Committee report to the House on Wednesday, the 22nd November. (3) That three members shall form a quorum.*

*Point of Order.*

Hon. A. Sanderson: On a point of order, Standing Order 273 says—

No member shall sit on a select committee who is personally interested in the inquiry before such committee.

The President: That is so. Do you impugn any of these names as being those of members who are interested?

Hon. A. Sanderson: I think the question had better be raised now than afterwards.

The President: If anyone objects to any of these names that are proposed then when the committee is appointed we can proceed to ballot for the five names that will be required. I will do this then, as there seems to be a question as to the eligibility of the persons mentioned. The question is—

That this Bill be referred to a select committee consisting of five persons with power to call for persons, papers, and records, the decision of the committee to be given on the 22nd November, and that

three of the committee shall form a quorum.

Afterwards I will put as a second question, if this is carried, for the balloting for the five members who shall serve on this committee.

Question put and passed.

The President: Members will now proceed to ballot for the five names.

Hon. J. Cornell: I would like to ask for an interpretation of Standing Order 273, which says that no member shall sit on a committee who has any pecuniary interest in the inquiry before such committee.

The President: That is so; so that persons who are chosen shall have no interest in the matter.

Hon. J. Cornell: Perhaps I would be in order in saying a few words. I take it that "personally interested" would mean persons who had some money in the pool or were likely to have some direct interest in the pool, that is, interest in the wheat within the pool. The point is not being raised as a matter of bias, but I would advise any hon. member who is going on the select committee that he lays himself open to this charge, that if he is now or will be in the future interested in the pool, he does lay himself open to being a person who adjudicates on something in which he has an interest. In pointing that out to hon. members, I do not wish to discriminate amongst them in any way at all. This has not been placed in the Standing Orders for nothing.

Hon. H. Carson: I think we shall find great difficulty in getting hold of a committee if we take any notice of Mr. Cornell's remarks. We have been told that the consumer himself is interested.

The President: Are you asking any question?

Hon. H. Carson: Can you define who in the House is interested in the pool?

The President: I do not see that I am called upon to define that. As taxpayers all individuals of the community are indirectly interested. I understand when the Standing Orders say "interested" it means interested in a pecuniary manner or generally interested in the matter before the House. I shall leave it to hon. members to exercise their own judgment.

Hon. C. Sommers: I do not want to be placed in any false position. I am a grower of wheat. I thought the question was a national one, and that any consumer or taxpayer would be interested in the success or otherwise of the negotiations of the pool. It is hard to define who is interested and who is not interested in this question. I, as a grower, would be directly interested in the pool, and that is why I want this Bill to be dealt with by a select committee in order that the consumers and farmers generally may get the best deal possible. If any motive for my serving on the committee is likely to be attached to me, I do not want to sit on it. At the same time it is very hard to know where to draw the line.

Hon. A. Sanderson: I thought it might be advisable that in a case of this kind, which is of so much importance, a Standing Order like this might be considered before the selection of members to serve on the select committee, rather than have an unseemly wrangle afterwards. So far as I am concerned, I support the motion and the amendments which have been suggested. The only reason I had for raising this point of order was that the matter might be discussed before the event rather than afterwards.

The President: I take it from the hon. member's remarks that the names of some of those members are impugned, and so I decided to make the second question one as to the selection of the committee by ballot. That is now the question before the Chamber.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: As this is a matter of importance, I should like an expression of opinion from you, Sir, as to who you would consider to be those persons who are personally interested. I take it that those who are personally interested would be gaining some personal advantage. As participants in the pool we could not gain any personal advantage. The whole of the vendors to the pool would gain an advantage collectively, and any advantage that would be likely to be gained. I do not think that this applies to them at all.

The President: I am not in a position to give any definition of that. It is a very open question. I think it ought to be left to every man to say. Every individual is indirectly interested in a matter of this sort,

and I take it that the words of the Standing Order means a person who is interested from a pecuniary point of view.

The Colonial Secretary: Would you care to express an opinion, Sir, as to whether a member of Parliament who is a farmer, and who may or may not at some future time have wheat to go into the pool, with which this Bill deals, has any of the disqualifications mentioned in Standing Order 273?

The President: I do not think it does give any disqualification. I think that the personal interest is sunk, and we look for the direct general benefit. That is so far as I can decide now. We want five names, and they must be persons who have no direct pecuniary interest.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: How are we to know which gentleman has a direct pecuniary interest?

The President: I cannot answer that question.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: I rise to a point of order. I have a direct motion before the Chamber.

The President: And I have divided it into two portions.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: I had definite names down, and you have struck them out.

The President: I did that because they were not generally accepted. It has always been the practice of the House for the 20 years I have been here, if there is the slightest objection to any or either of the names, that we should proceed to ballot. To me that seems to be the fairest way.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: I take it that Mr. Sanderson has an objection to some of the names.

The President: He did not object generally. He read Standing Order 273 as a matter of caution to hon. members. As a matter of fact, in a case like that we want persons who are experts, and people who know something about it.

Hon. C. Sommers: I think it would be desirable to mention the names given, because there is some uncertainty as to what names have been suggested.

The President: The ballot will proceed for five names of members to sit on the select committee, who have no direct interest in the subject-matter of the committee.

### *Select committee appointed.*

Ballot taken, and the following members appointed a select committee:—Hon. J. F. Allen, Hon. J. M. Drew, Hon. J. A. Greig, Hon. C. Sommers, and Hon. C. F. Baxter (mover).

## BILL—FRANCHISE.

### *In Committee.*

Hon. W. Kingsmill in the Chair; the Colonial Secretary in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Preservation of franchise:

Hon. J. E. DODD: On the second reading I drew attention to the fact that a large number of soldiers' wives were transferring their residence, and most of them to the coast. Having been unable to devise any scheme of amendment which would fit into the Bill, I do not intend to move in the matter.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Various points were raised during the second reading debate, and for that reason I deferred consideration in Committee. Meantime I have consulted the Chief Electoral Officer. On the point raised by Mr. Cullen, the Bill provides that—

Any person on active service with His Majesty's Naval or Military Forces who at the commencement of such service was enrolled or qualified for enrolment as a Legislative Council elector, as a householder occupying a dwelling-house, shall retain such qualification during such service, whether absent from the State or not, so long as he continues tenant of such dwelling-house, notwithstanding that he does not occupy the dwelling-house in person.

Mr. Cullen said it would be necessary to provide similar protection for the freeholder or leaseholder; but I suggested at the time that it was not necessary, and the Electoral Department share that view. The Chief Electoral Officer writes—

There does not appear to me to be any necessity for specially providing for the continuance on the Legislative Council rolls of freeholders and leaseholders who have gone to the Front, as the qualification is one of possessing freehold or leasehold. as

the case may be, whilst residence in the State is not part of the qualification. The next point raised was that of preserving the qualification of the householder. It was suggested that we might be denying the right of the householder's wife to register as a voter, whilst her husband was away. On this point the Chief Electoral Officer says—

I cannot see that only the wife of a Legislative Council elector enrolled as "occupier" should be regarded as "elector" and have the vote. It seems to me that, if it is good policy and fair to allow the wife of an absent Legislative Council elector to vote for him, this should apply not only to occupiers of dwellings, but also to freeholders, leaseholders, and others. There is also the objection on the ground that the wife may already be enrolled as an elector for the Legislative Council province for which the husband is enrolled, and she would then have two votes for the same province. A further objection might be raised that the vote provided for under the Electoral Act is absolutely personal, and should not, therefore, be given to a second party. There is, of course, always the possibility of the husband's vote, if exercised by the wife, being given in an entirely opposite manner to that in which the husband would have voted.

It is pointed out, too, that the soldier on service retains his qualification under this Bill so long as he continues the tenant of the house, although he may not be in actual occupation. If his wife becomes the tenant of the house, she can, in the ordinary course, apply to have her name placed on the roll. The third point raised was Mr. Dodd's, regarding which the Chief Electoral Officer writes—

Apart from the question of policy, I beg to submit that it has been only with the greatest difficulty and enormous trouble that the department have been able to obtain the names of enrolled soldiers and mark their names on the electoral rolls. Should the privilege of remaining on the roll of the district be extended to the wife of a soldier, who leaves in order to remove to the metropolis, I am afraid very little effect could be given to such a provision; and it appears to me desirable that the onus of claiming to remain on the

roll should be placed on the soldier's wife, as otherwise I can see no ready means available to the department of putting such provision into effect, if passed by Parliament.

In the circumstances, I hope the Committee will agree to the Bill as it stands.

Hon. J. W. HICKEY: The object of this Bill is, of course, to preserve the franchise to the man at the Front; but it seems to me that in endeavouring to preserve that franchise the Bill practically disfranchises some men who are already at the Front. In the case of property owned by a married man, the man alone is entitled to be on the roll; and whilst his name is retained on the roll he is the only person qualified to vote as occupier of the property. While the husband is away fighting, the wife may become the occupier of the premises and may be paying rent in respect of them. Yet she is not entitled to be enrolled as a voter. I feel sure that such is not the intention of the Government, and I hope some way will be found out of the difficulty. It is unfair that, by reason of the husband's enlistment, the premises should lose the vote attaching to them. The wife who has stayed behind and is paying the rent is the sole occupier, and should be entitled to a vote. This sort of thing may possibly obtain throughout the whole of a province, with the result that the province would be disfranchised. I move an amendment—

*That Clause 3 be struck out and the following inserted in lieu:—"Where any person on active service with His Majesty's naval or military forces at the commencement of such service was enrolled and qualified to vote for a member of the Legislative Council as a householder his wife (except where she is enrolled as the owner of the same premises) shall be entitled to vote in his name."*

Alternatively the point could be overcome by regulation if the necessary regulation clause was inserted. As it stands, the clause seems unreasonable. It is entirely wrong that a soldier's wife should be disfranchised because her husband has gone to the war. I hope the Colonial Secretary will see his way clear to accept the amendment.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: The amendment is of considerable importance. The hon.

member's attitude is confirmed by reference to the rolls prepared by the Chief Electoral Officer where it is found that the males on the electoral province rolls total 47,000 and the females 14,000. The hon. member wishes to see the wife put on the roll in the absence of her husband on active service, only, of course, when the question of tenancy arises. It seems to me a very proper suggestion. The point raised by the leader of the House is a difficult and delicate one.

The Colonial Secretary: I was reading the Chief Electoral Officer's remarks.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: For my part I believe that in almost 100 per cent. of cases the husband and the wife vote on the one side. If we pass the clause as it stands we shall certainly keep the absent husband on the roll and keep his wife off it. It is difficult to say whether the amendment will carry out what the mover desires, but I think his proposal is one that should commend itself to the Committee.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I am entirely in sympathy with the desire of the mover of the amendment. It does seem that because the soldier is away we should not specifically enact legislation which would prevent his wife from getting on the roll as occupier of the premises. It was because of this that I got the report from the Chief Electoral Officer. I will move to report progress and will try to get the amendment put into proper shape. It is objectionable to have one person voting for another. If the amendment is necessary to allow the wife to be the tenant and exercise a vote as occupier, I think it ought to be made.

Progress reported.

*House adjourned at 6.8 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly,

Thursday, 16th November, 1916.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 4:30 p.m., and read prayers.

### PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the Premier: Returns in connection with Assurance Companies.

By the Attorney General: Mines Regulation Act; regulation as to testing winding engines after repairs.

### QUESTION—RAILWAY REVENUE.

#### *Increase in goods rates.*

Mr. SCADDAN asked the Acting Minister for Railways: 1, If he is correct in stating that Class 1 rate for 100 miles is £2 4s., whilst for 400 miles the rate is £6 9s., will not the additional impost of 10 per cent. operate as follows:—To carry one ton of goods under this rate for 100 miles will impose on additional 4s. 4d., whilst to carry one ton 400 miles will impose an additional 12s. 10d.? 2, If the present rate on the articles of food and machinery enumerated in my previous question is £1 3s. 8d. to Northam from Perth, will not the additional impost of 10 per cent. increase this by approximately 2s. 4d., whilst the increase if carried to Kalgoorlie would be 9s. to Albany 9s. 1d., to Leonora 12s., and Meekatharra 14s., similarly to Armadale only 10d.? 3, In these circumstances, does he still consider that such an impost is an equitable method of increasing the revenue? 4, If the old class 1 rate, plus district railway charge on one ton of agricultural machinery and the articles of food, enumerated in my previous