

HON. F. H. PIESSE: After looking through the Estimates he could not see any other item upon which he would like to draw attention to a fact he desired to bring under notice. That was in regard to the erection of schools. He wished to know why people were called upon to build schools for the accommodation of the teachers and the education of the children in some localities, whilst in other localities of about the same population they were not so called upon. We might find a locality where a school was built and furniture provided by the Government, whilst in another place that was not done, and this created discontent. Perhaps the Minister would look into the matter. He (Hon. F. H. Piesse) would bring up the subject later on, and the Minister might state some ground upon which to work.

THE PREMIER: If the hon. member would give particulars, he (the Premier) would inquire, and if the circumstances warranted it he would have those schools which had been erected by the Government removed, in order to do away with the injustice.

HON. F. H. PIESSE did not want the buildings removed, but wished the Government to pay for the others.

Other items agreed to, and the vote passed.

Cadets (salaries, subdivision 5), £800:

Item—Staff, £800:

MR. N. J. MOORE: Was this for an instructional staff? As it was hoped that the cadets would eventually join the militia, it was reasonable that the Commonwealth instructors should devote some time to drilling the cadets, thus effecting economy. There were Commonwealth drill instructors in most towns.

THE PREMIER: A list of the cadet staff was not at the moment available; but he would look into the matter to ascertain whether assistance could be procured from the defence officers. It was right that they should give such assistance.

Vote put and passed.

Compulsion (salaries, subdivision 6), £784:

Items (3)—one (chief) at £230, one at £180, two at £170:

MR. NEEDHAM: Did this represent one chief and three assistants?

THE PREMIER: Yes.

MR. BURGESS: Were these all the compulsory officers in the State?

THE PREMIER: Certain other officers, including the police, acted as compulsory officers, but were not permanently engaged at the work. The police did not receive any extra pay for their assistance.

Other items agreed to, and the vote passed.

This completed the votes for the department.

On motion by the PREMIER, progress reported and leave given to sit again.

ADJOURNMENT.

The House adjourned at two minutes to 11 o'clock, until the next afternoon.

Legislative Council, Wednesday, 7th December, 1904.

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THE PRESIDENT took the Chair at 4.30 o'clock, p.m.

PRAYERS.

ABORIGINES PROTECTION BILL.

SELECT COMMITTEE'S REPORT.

HON. W. KINGSMILL brought up the report of the select committee appointed to inquire into the Aborigines Bill.

Report to be considered on the next Tuesday.

PRIVATE BILL—KALGOORLIE TRAM-
WAYS RACECOURSE EXTENSION.
RECOMMITTAL.

On motion by Hon. R. D. McKENZIE, Bill recommitted for amendment of the first schedule.

First Schedule:

On motion by Hon. R. D. McKENZIE, the figures "420" struck out of line 4 and "320" inserted in lieu; also in line 11 the figures "708" struck out and "798" inserted in lieu.

Bill reported with further amendments, and the report adopted.

MUNICIPAL INSTITUTIONS ACT
AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

Resumed from the 1st December.

HON. G. RANDELL (Metropolitan): We had a right to expect some information from the Minister for Lands in regard to several points in this Bill, in consideration of their great importance and the change that the Bill makes in regard to the principle governing municipal bodies. As far as I have been able to gather from the newspaper reports of what took place in another place, no information of a valuable character was furnished to that House as to the consequences likely to result from the change in the law. In a case of this kind, when we get away from the principles that have obtained for many years, we should be given information as to how the Bill is likely to affect the different municipalities of the State. Especially do I think we should have had information in regard to Perth itself, the largest township and the largest centre of population in the State. We received nothing of the kind, except that we were told that some inquiries were made from the different municipalities of the State as to how a rate on the unimproved value would affect them as compared with the 1s. 6d. rate. The replies received were I believe of a startling character. I believe that in some cases it was thought that 1s. in the pound would not be too high to enable the municipalities to obtain an income equal to that provided by a rate of 1s. 6d. in the pound; while on the other hand, Perth furnished a reply that 1½d. or a penny and an eighth would furnish an amount equal to a 1s. 6d.

rate; showing a very great difference of opinion among the municipal bodies as to the effect of the change. I am inclined to think the replies furnished have been more guess-work than the result of searching inquiry as to how the principle would operate under the unimproved rating. I should like the Minister to define the word "unimproved." A good many different interpretations might be placed on the word, but I think we should have been supplied with the meaning that guided the Government in this particular. Is the unimproved value the original price paid for the land to the Crown? That of course would be discounted by numbers of municipal councils, because the whole of their revenue would disappear at once. If it is not the value which these lands had in the early days, when they were disposed of by the Government in the city of Perth for £8 a block in most cases—the highest being £17 in Bazaar Terrace and St. George's Terrace, and at the corners of William Street and Barrack Street—then what is the value? We know the original values are out of the question. I claim that the term "unimproved value" is a misnomer; that there is no such thing, because we see that there is behind it an improved value in a municipality. I have made some effort to ascertain how this is expected to work out, and the replies I have obtained from those who may be supposed best to know what would be the results are very unsatisfactory. I have gone into the question a little bit, and I know it will work out inequitably; it will work out disastrously in the more crowded places, and especially in the business centres of a town or city. Moreover, the rate will be on the improved values after all, because the authorities will take into consideration what is the value of land in, say, the business section of Hay Street, which is of very high value at the present moment. No doubt the amount will be a changing quantity, and will increase as the value of land goes up. A man with a small house on a piece of property would be rated equally with the man who had a large building on a piece of land of similar frontage. I think there is no room for the exercise of common sense and sound principle in the system of rating on unimproved values.

I take it that the unimproved value from William Street to Barrack Street would be pretty much the same. I dare say there is a certain amount of difference in the value of property in the different parts of the streets there. That is an extreme instance which I take, but I dare say that in Kalgoorlie there may be something of the same sort; also in Fremantle and some of the towns that are growing in different parts of the State the same thing would occur. In St. George's Terrace, for instance, there are some vacant allotments. There are others which have large buildings on them and which have to some extent increased the value of the adjoining pieces of land. It may be argued on equitable grounds that a man who has land and has built on it should be charged no more than the man who has a piece of unoccupied land; but if we were to apply that system all round to any town or city, what would be the result? The object is to compel people to improve their lands, but the result would, I think, be almost a disaster. If by any means the owners could be compelled to put on these vacant pieces of land either private buildings or stores, the result must be inevitably to reduce rental value and to reduce actual value. The law of supply and demand comes in here as in other things in life. Although it is sometimes objected to, yet it is a very useful law, and one that asserts itself whether we like it or not. My own opinion is that a very right principle to adopt is to levy rates on property which can afford to pay them. If a man through enterprise on his part is receiving a large rent for his property, he can afford to pay, supposing the owner does pay. The improvement of the property in which a man has invested his money will give him a good return, whether he gets the ground rent or not. I know in some cases a man does not get the ground rent. If persons run up buildings 10, 15 or 20 storeys, as I presume is done in some portions of New York and in other parts of the United States, they will, under what is called the unimproved land value system, pay only the same amount of rates as that paid by a man next door, who has, on a similar piece of ground, a building only three storeys, two storeys, or one storey high. What I complain of is that we are left so

much in the dark as to the taxing on this so-called, I think I can term it mis-called, unimproved value, because after all it is a tax on the improved value in a street. These are points on which I think we ought to have farther information than we possess at present. I think we should endeavour to get all the information it is possible to obtain. The principle has been adopted elsewhere, and we ought to know how it works out as compared with the old system of rental valuation, a system which I am inclined to believe is a good one and right in its operation upon the owners of property in a town. Then there is another great feature to bear in mind, and as far as I can gather from the published report of the discussion which took place in the Legislative Assembly, it has never been referred to, and has never entered the minds of the Ministry or even of Mr. H. Brown, who is an enthusiast on this subject. The effect that this will have upon the Metropolitan Waterworks rating has never entered into their calculations. If we adopt that system we shall be taking from them the very method upon which they are levying their rates on the householders in Perth. I refer to Perth because it is a very large centre of population, and very important on account of its greatness. So far as I can see we shall have to alter the law at once in regard to water rating, because, as I say, we shall be taking away from them the principle upon which they are now levying their rates, that being to make a charge of 1s. in the pound on the annual ratable value. I take it that if this clause were passed it would override the present Act. Persons who have received notices from the City Council will have observed that the unimproved value is set out. I understand that they cannot rate on that unimproved value, but the Act compels them to place it in a column in the notice paper. Vacant blocks in the city within a certain distance from the pipes of the Waterworks Board are rated, and I believe they are rated upon the estimated rental value of the land.

HON. J. A. THOMSON: Capital value.

HON. G. RANDELL: Yes; capital value. That is a point which I think members must bear in mind when they are asked to change the law in vital par-

ticalars, as this measure proposes. I am of opinion that the principle has not received that consideration which it ought to receive by those who would apply it. Therefore I hope members of this House will devote their best attention to the consideration of the provisions of this Bill, some of which, I may say in passing, are good and should in my opinion be at once adopted and placed on the statute book. I propose to indicate as we go along some of the clauses which I consider the House ought to insist on striking out, on one ground or another. I may mention that there are three or four sections of the old Act which are repealed and re-enacted almost word for word. One cannot easily see the object in view in doing what has been done. I need not, I think, refer to those clauses to which I consider very little exception need be taken. The first that meets one's attention is not very important. It is Clause 6. I am not able to discover any alteration in principle from the section of the Act itself which it is proposed to repeal. It puts in the words "or naturalised." That is the only difference as far as I can see for the moment. I think there is no necessity to repeal a section for the purpose of inserting another to the same effect.

HON. M. L. MOSS: They seem to have left out Subsection 2.

HON. G. RANDELL: They have provided for that in Clause 7, so that really they do not alter the law, and one can hardly see why the alteration has been made. The last part of Clause 7 says, "Provided that no person whose name appears on any such list shall be entitled to vote," and so on.

HON. M. L. MOSS: They have left a very important thing out, referring to a man who has not paid his rates. It disqualifies him as a voter.

HON. G. RANDELL: I do not follow the hon. member. They have struck out Subsection 2, but have put it in Clause 7. They have not altered the law in that respect, so I think the provision might as well have remained where it was. I agree with the principle that if a man does not pay his rates he shall not be allowed to vote. Clause 7 requires that all rates due shall have been paid on or before the 31st October preceding the election.

HON. M. L. MOSS: That is true; but there is a disqualification regarding the electoral list.

HON. G. RANDELL: It amounts to the same thing. I draw attention to the matter because it seems unwise to strike a subsection out and reinsert it in much the same words. With regard to voting powers, I believe that in New South Wales the owner as well as the tenant has a vote. I think that an owner having property in several wards should not be deprived of all voting power for those properties; that it should be possible to make some provision by which an owner should be able to vote according to the value of his property in each ward where it is situated, his votes running say from 1 to 4; this being in addition to the tenant's right to vote for the property he occupies. I have had my name struck off the roll as an owner of property in Perth, because the tenant's name was entered on the roll as having the right to vote; and I think an owner should have the right as well as the tenant, because tenants are of ten moving from one house to another, and a tenant may not be there when an election takes place; so that in such case an owner whose name is not on the voting list will be deprived of the right to vote, and that property will be practically disfranchised. I have spoken before on this subject, as one deserving the consideration of the Legislature; for I think it is an act of justice that owners of property should have the right to vote; because we must consider that the municipal law is certainly intended to be a medium for representing property, the owners of property especially.

HON. J. A. THOMSON: Householders also, surely?

HON. G. RANDELL: Owners as well as occupiers, because owners occupy a prominent position in municipal law. I call attention to Clause 7, which restricts the voting power to adults. Any person can see in what direction this tends; for I am certain the persons moving in this direction will not be satisfied to leave the law as proposed in the Bill, but will proceed to one adult one vote; a most inadvisable principle to introduce into municipal elections, and one which I hope will never obtain in Western Australia. I hope the good sense of the community

will see that it is desirable to preserve the right and interests of property to the fullest possible extent. In some countries the voting power goes as high as eight votes to an owner of property. I am not sure whether that is the provision in New South Wales. We know that in some other places the law is as this Bill proposes to make it here; but I hope members of this House are not prepared to follow the precedent of New Zealand. No reasons have been given why the voting power should be reduced in the way proposed in Clause 7. Has the power hitherto been used in a way injurious to the community at large? Has it inflicted any injury on the tenants and occupiers of property in a town or city, or what are the reasons for the reduction now proposed in the Bill?

HON. W. KINGSMILL : Has there been any request for it?

HON. G. RANDELL : Has there been a demand of any kind for this Bill, which practically proposes to revolutionise the law on the subject? I hope the Bill will go to a select committee, where we shall be better able to obtain evidence and see how the alteration of one part of the Bill will affect other parts; and the committee can report to the House in a way that will assist members as a whole. I believe some motion will be made to that effect. I draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that no reasons have been given why the law should be changed in this very important and vital principle of municipal government. That brings us to Clause 8, which is practically the same as section 56 of the Act. Clause 9, to facilitate the alteration of boundaries, will be a useful addition to Section 71 of the Act, by giving the necessary authority without inflicting any injury. Clauses 10 and 11 propose to repeal the provision for voting in absence, and Clause 12 makes a more restrictive provision as to voting in absence. A large number of people who have property in towns do not reside in those towns; so by this provision they will be put to the great inconvenience of having to travel perhaps great distances in order to go to the particular town where their property is, and inform the returning officer after the day of nomination that they will be at a distance of more than 10 miles from the polling-place on the day of election. In

this way they will be able to obtain voting papers, and record their votes before the election takes place. But there is this difference, that voters residing in a town where an election is to be held, and who expect to be absent on polling-day, will not need to travel in order to get voting papers from the returning officer and record their votes before the election; therefore this difference is a serious disadvantage to those electors who reside a distance from the town where their property is. Persons residing long distances from the municipality should not be required to make a journey for this purpose, but should be enabled to vote in absence as under the existing Act. The new provision, however, may well be added to that which is already in the Act, so as to provide a greater convenience for voters. Owners residing in or near the particular municipality could go through this performance by hundreds, but very few owners living long distances from the town could do so. Therefore I would like to see the provision in the Act maintained, in addition to this new provision, particularly as the existing principle applies also in elections for members of Parliament. As to the provision in Clause 13, enabling auditors to be elected for two years, the one having least votes to go out first, that is a useful principle. In Clause 15, giving increased control over brothels, furnaces and chimneys, advertising hoardings, and so on, I think some of the subclauses will require consideration in Committee. Councils have some power already in regard to these things, and we may easily interfere too far by enabling councils to place unnecessary hindrances in the way of developing business. Of course a great deal must depend on the administration of this provision. As to the licensing of shoeblacks, this seems very petty; applying as it does to unfortunate men, many of them cripples, who try to earn a living in the streets. With regard to hawking in towns, I am not much in favour of giving increased control to councils, or enabling them to abolish hawking in parts of a city. I know that hawking in the city does injure some shopkeepers; but on the other hand a large number of people cannot afford to pay the high prices they

have to pay in shops for such articles as fruit, which can be purchased more cheaply from hawkers in the street. The hawking of fish is necessary, and is often a great convenience to householders, as I know it was in the old time in Perth. The whole tendency of municipal control now is to place restrictions and limitations on persons desiring to get a livelihood; and this particularly affects the food supply of our towns. I have already referred to Clause 21 as to the striking of rates and amending Section 323 of the Act; and I need not repeat what I have said, except to complain again of the lack of information and the unreliable information we have so far; also the doubtful results which will accrue, and what I call the inequity of the system proposed to be introduced; especially also the absence of any objection or complaint against the present system. In connection with these provisions, and taking as an instance my own property in St. George's Terrace, I see that on the Notice Paper there is an amendment to be moved relating to the principle of rating on what is called the unimproved value. The effect of rating on that principle up to 2d. in the £ would be that my payment would be nearly doubled for the general rate. Of course it does not affect the loan, health, and sanitary rates. The city loan rate amounts to 9d., the health rate to 2d., and the sanitary rate to 6d., the three amounting to 1s. 5d. and making the total rates in the city of Perth 2s. 11d. in the pound.

HON. J. A. THOMSON: If you expended another £10,000 in buildings, you would have no more to pay.

HON. M. L. MOSS: He does not want to do that.

HON. G. RANDALL: I think all my property is improved, except two little blocks in North Perth. That has been my principle all through, and I think I am a good citizen in that respect. I had the opportunity to compare the results as regards my own property with the property of someone else in a central position across the railway line; and I found, as showing the inequitable nature of the proposed system of rating, that my friend is paying £1 17s. 6d. general rate on one property and about the same for several others; that if he were rated on unimproved value he would pay only

13s. 6d.—a ridiculous rate under the circumstances. He is quite satisfied with the present rate, and thinks it a fair and reasonable rate for his property. This shows how unreliable is the information we have received as to the operation of this principle of rating on unimproved values. I dare say I could have cited a number of cases which would have given more reliable results than these two which I know something about; but I hope I have said enough to induce members to reject the unimproved land value system of rating. I do not think that at the present time we should be asked to try experiments in this direction, unless we can have some solid assurance of the results accruing and of where we are going. I do not at all object to a change if a change is necessary or will do good; but I like to have this clearly pointed out to me before I make the change. I think I am as ready as anybody to adopt a principle of progress, if we may use that term in regard to it; but I am not inclined to take a leap in the dark, and to a large extent that is the position in regard to this new system of rating. I think there is another objection to be taken to what is provided here. Mr. Langsford has already referred to it; but I do not think there is any harm in again drawing the attention of members to the fact that if this system of unimproved values is once adopted there can be no alteration for three years. Supposing it works out, as I anticipate, badly and unevenly, and even disastrously in some cases, it will be a cruel thing on a man to have it in force for three years, no matter what circumstances may arise. If it will tend to increase the funds of a municipality or to decrease them, no alteration can take place for three years. In Perth no doubt there will be an increase. I think the town clerk admits that 1½d. in the pound will give in Perth the same amount as is raised from the 1s. 6d. rate. Several alterations are required to some clauses in the Bill, but I do not think I need weary members at present by drawing attention to them. I therefore draw my remarks to a close by saying that I think it will be desirable to send this Bill to a select committee, and I hope members will do so; but if not, I shall use my best endeavours to make the Bill

as workable a measure as it can be made in passing through Committee in this House.

HON. W. PATRICK (Central): Considering the far-reaching effect that will be likely to result from the passing of a measure of this great importance, I think the wisest course will be, as suggested by Mr. Randell, to refer it to a select committee.

THE PRESIDENT: We cannot refer the Bill to a select committee until after the second reading is passed.

HON. J. W. HACKETT: I am not prepared to go on with this Bill, and I find other members in the same position. I move that the debate be adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT.

The House adjourned at half-past 5 o'clock, until the next Tuesday afternoon.

Legislative Assembly, Wednesday, 7th December, 1904.

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MR. SPEAKER took the Chair at 3:30 o'clock, p.m.

PRAYERS.

PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS AND LABOUR: 1, Papers relating to the appointment of Railway Inspectors Gatherer and Gregg, on motion by Mr. A. J. Wilson;

2, Return showing saving effected by transfer of railway men from Southern Cross, on motion by Mr. Horan.

By the PREMIER: Flour-milling industry, Report moved for by Mr. Nanson.

QUESTION—SHOP HOURS, FRUIT AND COOL DRINKS.

MR. A. J. WILSON asked the Colonial Secretary: 1, Is he aware that the police have been informing certain fruit and cool-drink shop proprietors that they must close their shops on Sundays? 2, Has such action been taken by the authority of the Government? 3, Does he intend to insist upon all such shops being closed on Sundays in the future?

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY replied: 1, Yes. 2, No. 3, I have no intention of making any change in the existing practice. I may inform members that the Early Closing Act is administered by the Minister for Labour.

QUESTION—COMPACT BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND INDEPENDENT MEMBERS.

MR. RASON asked the Premier: 1, Does he intend to disclose to Parliament and the country the nature and terms of the compact entered into between himself and the four formerly Independent members, namely the hon. member for West Perth, Mr. C. J. Moran; the hon. member for Dundas, Mr. A. E. Thomas; the hon. member for Gascoyne, Mr. W. J. Butcher; and the hon. member for Kimberley, Mr. F. Connor, who have so recently joined his party? 2, If so, when?

THE PREMIER replied: If this question relates to the conference which took place on the 29th ultimo between the honorable members named and myself, the full particulars thereof were published in the Perth morning papers on the 30th ultimo.

SUPPLY BILL (No. 4).

SUPPLY BILL (£250,000), introduced by the Premier, and read a first time.

MOTION (PAPERS)—RAILWAY SIDING, WYLEY'S.

On motion by MR. NANSON, ordered that there be laid on the table of the House all papers connected with the