

**Legislative Council,***Thursday, 13th October, 1927.*

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: They have returned a good deal of money this year.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes.

The Premier: They will want less loan money from me this year than ever before.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I do not want the Treasurer to get the idea into his head that we shall not want money. There will always be need for money in financing new settlements. A lot of money is coming in from repayment of loans, but there will be continually expanding settlement, and the bank will need money to finance the new settlers. I am hopeful that the bank will need a lot of money in the near future and that the Treasurer will have to find it.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: You don't want to screw the heads off the farmers by getting money in.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: There have been no complaints from the farmers that we are screwing their heads off in the attempt to get money. Every man who is a decent man wants to meet his liabilities. While he has good seasons, if he is wise he tries to reduce his capitalisation. Many settlers are doing that. Of course there is a tendency amongst some men not to reduce capitalisation, but rather to increase it. That is not laying by anything for the future. The time must come in this country, as it repeatedly does in other countries, when we shall have indifferent seasons. Then everybody will want a little reserve capital. There are good times and bad times in every industry, and I hope the farmers on the Industries Assistance Board or on the Agricultural Bank will continue to make repayments while they can. If at the same time they can develop their properties, well and good, but I am very pleased to think that so large a sum has been repaid to the board, for it indicates a very healthy condition of affairs in Western Australia. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. Sir James Mitchell, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 6.12 p.m.*

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

**QUESTION—LONG SERVICE LEAVE.***Cash Equivalent to Dependents.*

Hon. J. E. DODD asked the Chief Secretary: 1, Is it the intention of the Government to pay the cash equivalent to long service leave to the dependants of those Government workers who have died since leave was promised? 2, If so, when are the payments likely to be made?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1 and 2, This matter is receiving consideration.

**MOTION—TRAFFIC ACT.***To Disallow Regulations.*

HON. W. H. KITSON (West) [4.34]: I move—

That Regulations Nos. 4, 5, 6, 21, and 23, and Routes 7a, 54, and 55, made under the Traffic Act, 1919-26, and laid on the Table of this House on the 11th October, be and are hereby disallowed.

I wish to make it clear that I am not moving this motion in any antagonistic spirit towards the regulations governing the traffic. The people engaged in this business agree it is necessary that there shall be regulations to govern the traffic, and also that there shall be properly specified routes on which buses and taxis shall operate. But, unfortunately, the regulations gazetted from time to time have appeared to those interested to be particularly unfair in certain respects. On this occasion the regulations and routes I am asking the House to disallow affect quite a large number of people in various sections of the metropolitan area, principally those along the Perth-Fremantle route, the North Cottesloe route, and the Dalkeith route. I propose to deal first with the routes,

and afterwards with the regulations. The first route, No. 7a. is that from Perth to Fremantle. There is no particular objection to the route as a whole, the objection being to the terminal point selected in Fremantle. Originally, the terminal point was in William Street, opposite the Town Hall. That terminal point proved satisfactory to all parties, including the Fremantle Municipal Council, who on more than one occasion have confirmed that place as being suitable for a terminal point for the route. The new regulations provides that the terminal point at Fremantle shall be at the intersection of Queen and Adelaide Streets. This intersection is regarded by the people of Fremantle as being perhaps the most dangerous in Fremantle. Queen-street is a new street, recently built by the Fremantle Municipal Council with the object of relieving the congestion that existed at that point. Now, as the result of the taxis being compelled to utilise Queen-street as a terminal point, that street is thickly congested and the position is much more dangerous than it was before; so much so that the Fremantle Tramway Board have instructed their drivers and conductors that when passing this intersection they must slow down and ring their bells continuously. That, I think, will show how dangerous the intersection is. I am advised that there has been a number of narrow escapes from serious accident at that intersection since the taxis have been compelled to use Queen-street as a terminal point. That is the main objection to that route. The Fremantle Municipal Council have dealt with this matter several times, and on each occasion have agreed that William-street is the most suitable terminal point for the route. It seems to me the opinion of the local authority should carry weight on such a question. Those of us who know Fremantle are aware that the streets in the central part of the town, generally speaking, are narrow and that there is a good deal of tramway and vehicular traffic. So, when the local authority is of opinion that William-street is a better terminal point than is Queen-street, we should take some notice of it. The North Cottesloe route has been considerably altered from the route originally used by the taxi drivers on that service. So drastic are the alterations that it is practically impossible for those men to make a living by following the gazetted route. In addition to that, there are objections to both terminals. In Perth, whereas the taxis used to leave St.

George's-terrace, they now have to leave from Wellington-street, on the south side, between a point 250ft. west of William-street and another further westward by 50ft. It requires but a casual examination of that locality to see its unsuitability as a terminal point for passenger traffic of this kind. There is no shelter there, no room for the taxis to turn, no lighting, no accommodation of any kind, no telephone, no designation mark; and in addition horse lorries and carriers' vehicles are usually found there. Compared with the St. George's-terrace terminal point, it might be described as a very dirty situation altogether and most undesirable as a terminal point for passenger traffic of this kind. As to the Cottesloe terminal, the new regulation provides for the corner of Deane and Broome-streets. Previously it was Manton's garage at Cottesloe Beach. The people of that district were used to that terminal point, and they find the new one quite out of the way; so much so that very few of them are prepared to use it. A comparison of the old route with the new route will show that there is little possibility of the taxi people being able to make a living, for the passengers are not there to be carried.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: The taxi people are out of the frying pan into the fire.

Hon. W. H. KITSON: From what I know of the new route I think it must have been arrived at by people who did not take into consideration the necessity for studying public convenience. On the old route, the taxis used to leave St. George's-terrace in accordance with a time-table, and used to run alternate cars, one via King's Park-road and Nedlands, and the other via Nicholson-road and Karrakatta, both routes finishing at Manton's garage, Cottesloe Beach. The third route I am objecting to is that known as the Dalkeith service. The objection to this route is that, instead of the taxis being allowed to run along Bruce-street, Nedlands, they are compelled to go along the Perth-Fremantle-road, then via Broadway and Hillway to Bruce-street. The result of this is that Nedlands residents desirous of using the service must walk from half a mile to three-quarters of a mile to take advantage of it. The residents of Nedlands are so dissatisfied that the existing route is of no use to them that they have signed a protest against it. I have the protest here. It contains the

names of 111 residents in the locality who are objecting to the gazetted route. The position is so bad from the point of view of those who have been running the service that they have ceased to run on the gazetted route. The people of Nedlands are now without this particular service. Quite a number of people in the Nedlands district were induced to build homes there, because they were practically assured that there would be a ready means of reaching town by this taxi service and the tramway service, which also runs through the district. It seems to me that the needs of the residents of the district should be taken into consideration when gazetting a route for that particular locality. Seeing that so many people are living in the Bruce-street area, or are closely adjacent to Bruce-street, I cannot see any reason why there should be an alteration to the original route. I am objecting to regulations numbered 4, 5, 6, 21 and 23. Two or three of the regulations are objected to on the ground that if they are permitted to stand, and the routes are disallowed, the men who are running this service will lay themselves open to charges of various kinds. If the House is satisfied that these particular routes should be disallowed, no penalty should be imposed upon those persons who have been carrying on the service up to the present, and who are quite prepared to continue to carry it on under reasonable conditions. Regulation 4 states—

The use within the metropolitan area of any vehicle as an omnibus elsewhere than along a prescribed route is hereby prohibited.

The point is that if any one of these three routes is disallowed, and the men carry on their business, they will be using a vehicle as a bus elsewhere than along a prescribed route. Consequently, if we are going to disallow the routes, we must also disallow that regulation. Regulation No. 5 is somewhat similar and reads—

The use on and after the 1st day of October 1927, within the metropolitan area of any vehicle as an omnibus is hereby prohibited (a) unless the prescribed route is specified in or indorsed on the license for such vehicle by the Commissioner of Police as the local authority in the metropolitan area, and (b) on any route other than the route so specified in or indorsed on the license.

The consequence would be that if any one of these three routes was disallowed, and the men carried on their business as usual,

they would render themselves liable for carrying on that service on account of the fact that these routes had been disallowed.

Hon. Sir Edward Wittenoom: Who is responsible for the proclamation of these routes?

Hon. W. H. KITSON: I am given to understand that the Minister is responsible on the advice of the Routes Advisory Committee. This Committee comprises representatives of the railways and tramways, the police, the local governing authorities, and the bus proprietors, that is the bus owners apart from the taxi proprietors who have no representation on the board. The result is that before any particular routes are gazetted the bus proprietors are in a position to put forward their arguments for or against them, while the taxi proprietors have no say in the matter and are not considered in any way. It is only when any particular route or regulation has been gazetted that they are able to voice their opinions. Representations have been made from time to time that there should be some alteration in the make-up of the board. No alteration, however, has yet taken place. Representations which have been made to the Minister from time to time have not borne any fruit. It is about time something was done in this direction. If the motor bus people are entitled to representation on the board, the taxi people are also entitled to the same thing. I think the representatives of the local governing bodies throughout the metropolitan area are the people chiefly concerned in matters of this kind, and they should be consulted.

Hon. W. J. Mann: How many taxis are there?

Hon. W. H. KITSON: It is difficult to say how many there are at present in the metropolitan area, but between 120 and 150 taxis are running on the Perth-Fremantle road.

Hon. W. J. Mann: And how many char-a-bancs?

Hon. W. H. KITSON: I think there are 20 or 22 buses running on that road, this number being small in comparison with the taxis.

Hon. W. J. Mann: So that 20 bus proprietors are represented on the board, and the 120 taxi proprietors are not so represented?

Hon. W. H. KITSON: There are approximately 120 taxis running on the Perth-

Fremantle-road, but there are many other buses running services in different parts of the metropolitan area. Regulation 6 reads—

The holder of a passenger vehicle license for an omnibus in force at the commencement of these regulations and having effect in the metropolitan area shall surrender such license, and shall be granted in lieu thereof a passenger vehicle license for such omnibus, to be issued in accordance with these regulations, subject to the payment of the prescribed fees for the present year, if and so far as such fees have not been already paid for the surrendered license.

This means that the taxi proprietors have to pay two license fees. When they have to take out their license for a bus on any of these prescribed routes they have to surrender their original license irrespective of whether it has been in operation for one or two months. They have to surrender it and are not entitled to any particular refund. The worst feature of the matter is that, in effect, it means that once a taxi proprietor takes out his license and operates on a prescribed route, he is prohibited from using his vehicle for any other work whatsoever. In some circumstances the taxi proprietors would not object to that provision. The position to-day is that, owing to there being no limitation in regard to the number of licenses issued for this work, the men are compelled to wait at their terminal point anything from 2½ to 3½, and often to 4 hours, before being able to make the return journey. While they are waiting there, under these regulations they are not able to do any private work. They are prohibited from using their vehicles for any other purpose. If the regulation is taken to its logical conclusion the men are practically prohibited from driving their cars to their own homes, or taking their families out for an airing on Saturday afternoons or Sunday. The taxi proprietors say that if there is to be no limitation, and they are to run to a time table, there must necessarily be these long delays. It will mean that they must be on duty anything from 14 to 18 hours a day, in order to get in sufficient trips to make ends meet. Unless they are allowed to do private work, as in the past, they will not be able to continue the service. If the department or the Minister is prepared to limit the number of cars that are running on any particular route, so that they can conform to a reasonable time table, the men have no objection to that regulation. At present the combination of the two classes of work allows a good many of these men to make a living, but at the best

it is only an existence. Many of these cars are worth anything from £500 to £600. While the owners are spending from 3½ to 4 hours a day idling their time at the end of each trip, the depreciation, etc., is going on all the time, and it becomes almost an impossibility for them to make a success of this occupation.

Hon. E. H. Harris: How many trips a day do they make?

Hon. W. H. KITSON: Very few are making more than three round trips per day. They are working from 8 o'clock in the morning until midnight and 1 a.m. the next morning. It is not fair that any man should be in charge of a vehicle of that kind for an almost unlimited number of hours. The traffic on the Perth-Fremantle-road particularly, at times makes it positively dangerous to travel along that road. The position is made worse owing to the fact that there are many men who have taken out a license to do this work, but who follow some other occupation during the day. They come on to the route at peak periods, say between 5 and 8 p.m. They are out to get every shilling they can during that time. They are not bound by any particular rules and regulations, in the way the majority of the men who are on the road are bound by their association. The result is that, in some cases, they leave just ahead of the man who has to work to schedule time, and who is trying to conform to his time table and run in accordance with the rules and regulations which have been drawn up for his own protection, and by speeding up make an attempt to beat the other man.

Hon. J. M. Macfarlane: What fares do they charge?

Hon. W. H. KITSON: The single fare between Perth and Fremantle is 1s. 6d.

Hon. J. M. Macfarlane: Is there any limit to the number of passengers?

Hon. W. H. KITSON: Yes. The limit is imposed according to the seating accommodation in the bus.

Hon. J. M. Macfarlane: I am referring to taxis.

Hon. W. H. KITSON: Some cars are licensed to carry six or seven passengers.

Hon. J. M. Macfarlane: At 1s. 6d. per trip for three round trips a day it would not provide much of a living.

Hon. W. H. KITSON: It is almost impossible for them to make a living and keep their cars in proper repair. There is no doubt that, with the present number of taxi cars operating along that route, the man

who can make a success of the calling is very fortunate. It stands to the credit of these people that they can claim to be giving to the people of the metropolitan area the cheapest taxi service in the world. I do not know of any other part of the Commonwealth where it is possible for the people to get the service they are getting here. The cars run every three or five minutes during the greater part of the day, and at some hours of the day they run more frequently. The single fare is 1s. 6d., and the return fare is 2s. 6d.

Hon. A. Lovekin: That is very cheap.

Hon. W. H. KITSON: The return tickets are available at any time people like, and not only on the day of issue. These people should be encouraged. They certainly have created a desire for this kind of travel. There are large numbers of persons who now use this particular service, but who previously were never known to leave the metropolitan area. If they had been compelled to go by train they certainly would not have done so. In many ways these people have created a demand for the service. The taxi proprietors do not object to regulation No. 6 provided there is a fair limitation as to the number of taxis operating on that particular route. They would then be in a position to put into operation a satisfactory time table for 16 hours a day. It would be possible for them to so regulate the business that no man would be kept on duty for more than eight hours. If a man has been on duty for 12 or 16 hours, he is really not fit to drive a car along the road, particularly through such traffic as he is sometimes called upon to negotiate. I know of men, really capable and competent motor drivers, who have been compelled in their own interests to get someone else to drive their cars home at night. They have been so completely played out that they did not feel capable of managing their cars through the traffic at that time. The position is that with the limitation of the number of cars operating on that route the men are prepared to see that a proper time table is carried out, and that drivers shall not be on duty more than eight hours. It will mean the same number of men being employed as at present, but a smaller number of cars. The business members of this Chamber will understand what the effect of that will be; it will mean the cutting down of overhead expenses, and will give those concerned in the business a better chance of making a success

of it. Regulation 21 is really the principal one to which we are objecting. It reads—

So far as by any regulation hereinbefore prescribed under the Act, the number of licenses to be granted in respect of any prescribed route is restricted or limited, such restriction or limitation is hereby repealed

I have pointed out what it will mean if the number of cars operating on any particular route is limited, and especially the application of such a regulation to the Perth-Fremantle road. I suppose I have used that road as much as any other hon. member, and I feel safe in saying—and I am not the only member who feels the same way—that there are times when it is positively dangerous, not only to the public on the highway, but also to the people travelling in some of the taxi cars, owing to the speed at which those cars travel, and the traffic through which they have to proceed. These people are in the main organised, and they are prepared to put into operation rules and regulations of their own that will give a guarantee that the state of chaos the traffic is in at the present time will be altered. The majority of those men realise the position and they are desirous of assisting the Traffic Department and not obstructing it. They want to co-operate with the department. At the same time, with the regulations and the routes that have been prescribed, it becomes almost an impossibility for them to carry out their wishes.

Hon. J. Nicholson: Did the Advisory Committee confer with or ask those engaged in taxi driving to confer with them about the routes?

Hon. W. H. KITSON: No. The representatives of the taxi drivers approached the committee after the regulations had been gazetted. Owing to their efforts on one occasion, regulations that had been framed were not put into operation for a period. Now those men have been told that the regulations are to be enforced. Everyone of those on the North Cottesloe route has been summoned. I do not think the cases have yet been heard, and I am given to understand that the Perth-Fremantle drivers also are being compelled to comply with the regulations which are not only irksome to them, but constitute a real danger to the travelling public. Regulation 23 reads—

Any owner of or person in charge of a vehicle who uses the vehicle, or suffers or permits the vehicle to be used within the metropolitan area as an omnibus without a pre-

scribed route being specified in or indorsed on the license, or on any route other than that specified in or indorsed on the license or in a consent granted pursuant to Regulation 7, or on any road within the metropolitan area which is not a prescribed route, is liable on conviction to a penalty not exceeding Twenty pounds, or to imprisonment, with or without hard labour, for not exceeding one month.

The reason for asking for the disallowance of this particular regulation is that in the event of any one of the three routes I have dealt with being disallowed, the men, if they continue the service they are running at the present time, will be liable to a penalty, and I say that if the House is convinced that there is unfairness in the regulations and the routes as they have been gazetted, it is only right that we should take away any possibility of the drivers being prosecuted on account of the fact that they continued the service they have been giving to the public for so long a period. There is no desire to be antagonistic to the Traffic Department on this matter, or to the Minister controlling the department. The men concerned are keenly desirous of continuing the service they have rendered for so long. They want to meet the wishes of the travelling public, and they would rather co-operate with the Traffic Department than work against it. The Traffic Department must, of course, put these regulations into force, but I hope and trust that the Council will support me in my effort to assist that section of the community for whom I am making an appeal by disallowing the regulations. If the regulations are disallowed, it is quite a feasible proposition that alterations can be made in the routes to meet with the approval of all the parties concerned. The question of the limitation is the crux of the matter, and I hope to receive the support of every hon. member. Scores of taxis travel along the Perth-Fremantle road, and one has only to watch the traffic between, say, 5 and 6 and 7 and 8.15 in the evening to realise how heavy it is, and unless there is some limitation to the number of vehicles, sooner or later we shall have a crop of accidents that will prove all I have said regarding the danger to the travelling public. It should be our desire, if possible, to prevent anything untoward happening. I submit the motion.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, debate adjourned.

## **BILLS (2)—FIRST READING.**

- 1, Employment Brokers Act Amendment.
- 2, Stamp Act Amendment.

Received from the Assembly.

## **BILL—MENTAL TREATMENT.**

Read a third time and transmitted to the Assembly.

## **BILL—CLOSER SETTLEMENT.**

### *Second Reading*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

**HON. J. NICHOLSON** (Metropolitan) [5.13]: It is perhaps a coincidence that this Bill should be before Parliament at a time when the State is honoured by the visit of the Rt. Hon. Mr Amery, the British Secretary of State for the Dominions. This fact will at least afford some assurance to the authorities in the Homeland that the Government and the people of Western Australia are sincere—the Government are undoubtedly sincere—in their efforts to bring about the closer and greater settlement of our lands. Whilst I express those views, and whilst other members may express views different from mine, I am sure that whatever is said will not be discounted or be regarded as an indication on the part of any member of this House to retard the progress of land settlement. Personally, I can claim that at all times I have earnestly urged that every effort be made in this direction, and I have given support to whatever was proposed that I thought was deserving of support. In the direction of assuring a closer and better settlement of our lands, a settlement that would be beneficial to the State, provided, of course, that there were always safeguards for the interests of those concerned. The object of this Bill is not merely to settle people on vacant Crown land; it is to enable the Government to acquire land that has already been alienated and is not being utilised according to the provisions of the measure. I ask members to note that the power sought under the Bill would cover not only land having growing timber on it, but even cleared land. I think that fact has been overlooked by some members, judging by the remarks they have made. On the wording of the Bill it does not follow that the board would necessarily have to confine their activities to land that is un-

cleared. They could take even cleared land. If the Bill passes the second reading, amendments should be made to protect the interests of the people concerned. Various arguments have been advanced in support of the Bill and quotations have been made from scripture and elsewhere to endeavour to convince us that the Bill should be passed. One of the principal quotations furnished received some prominence when previous Closer Settlement Bills were before us. It was referred to by Mr. Stewart the other night—the motto over the doorway of the London Stock Exchange, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” I ask hon. members to reflect for a moment on the place, the portals of which that motto adorns. It is the Stock Exchange. If members do reflect, they will probably share my view that the member of the Stock Exchange who induced his fellow members to adopt the motto was decidedly a humourist. We know that members of the Stock Exchange do not deal in land. Their dealings are confined to stocks and shares, and doubtless the stockbrokers would argue that stocks and shares were not included in the motto. But the experience of investors who have suffered loss in their Stock Exchange dealings and who happened to be possessed of land, has sometimes been unfortunate where the land has a realisable value, because the stockbroker would not hesitate to take judgment against his unfortunate client and realise to the full the debt owing to him. The stockbroker would not then acknowledge that the earth was the Lord’s; he would say that the earth, or the land of his client, which he had attached on a judgment debt was his, and that he was going to make the best of it. When we realise that the worthy members of the Stock Exchange do not confine their energies to land transactions, we must admit that they showed a sense of humour in adopting the motto. They said, “Yes, the earth is the Lord’s, but not the stocks and shares. The stocks and shares and the money that we deal in are certainly ours, but we give the other to someone else.” Sir William Lathlain quoted the parable of the talents.

Hon. E. H. Harris: He quoted it incorrectly, too.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Yes; but we may give him credit for having quoted it correctly. Is the parable of the talents applicable to this discussion? I venture to say it is no more applicable than is the Stock Ex-

change motto to which I have just referred. The talent referred to in scripture was an ancient Greek coin. It was money, not land, that was given to those servants, and they probably enriched themselves by charging a usurious rate of interest or by adopting other methods that we, according to our standards and laws, would seek to repudiate.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Perhaps they invested the talents on the Stock Exchange.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: They may have been interested in the Stock Exchange and resorted to some acute methods of dealing that might not appeal to us. Having regard to all the circumstances we may take it that these quotations do not aid us in coming to a decision on this Bill. If a man uses his land profitably, whether for stock raising or wheat growing, he is employing it in a way probably much better than any that would appeal to the board. I refer to this, because it is provided in Clause 3 that the board may inquire into the suitability and requirement for closer settlement of any unutilised land.

Hon. J. R. Brown: If sheep were running on the land it would not be unutilised.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: It would be unutilised in the sense conveyed by the Bill, as I shall show. I believe there is a misunderstanding as to the exact scope of this clause and we should weigh it very seriously. If the Bill reaches the Committee stage, we should see that it is properly framed so that no mistakes may be made and no hardship inflicted. What I have to say should convince members that there is another way of looking at this matter. I have never advocated that land should be allowed to lie idle. When I first entered the House I expressed the opinion that, instead of seeking to open up areas at and far beyond the extreme end of a railway line and then constructing extensions to serve them, it would be much better to secure some of the large areas in the South-West already served by railways and establish group settlements there; the utilisation of such land would be the means of providing revenue for the railways. In voicing my views, I do so with absolute sincerity believing that what I am saying is in the interests of the State and for the benefit of the farming and pastoral industry. Clause 3 goes on to say that land shall be deemed unutilised within the meaning of the measure if in the opinion of the board the land, having regard to its economic value, is not put to reasonable use, and its retention by the owner is a hindrance to

closer settlement and cannot be justified. We are putting the whole responsibility on and giving the whole power to a board to determine whether land is being properly utilised, notwithstanding the judgment and wisdom of men who have worked the land and probably done well out of it.

Hon. Sir Edward Wittenoom: That is subject to the Minister.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The board would have to report to the Minister, but the Minister would be bound to be influenced by the recommendations of the board. I repeat that if a man uses his land profitably for stock raising—ostensibly the primary object of the Bill is to make available land for cultivation—he is probably employing the land to the best purpose. The owner of the land has the experience of years and the question is whether his experience is not better than the judgment of the board. That point should be seriously considered. As the Bill is framed, there is to be no appeal from the decision of the board, but what I have said should provide strong argument for an appeal. I emphasise my remarks about the raising of stock because as a wool producer, Australia holds a premier position in the world, and unless we have a very wise board administering the measure we may easily suffer the loss of that position. As men in the industry know, other countries are taking an interest in the stock that is reared here, notably in our merino sheep, and it is hard to say what the result might be if we weakened the foundations of an industry through which we have gained such a pre-eminent position. Various reports from the Eastern States show that the financial outlook there, owing to drought and other causes, has created a certain amount of anxiety and that it demands care. In this State we, on the contrary, by reason of bountiful rains and good conditions have the promise of an abundant season. However, we are closely allied with our sister States, and whatever affects them must necessarily react upon us in some way. Therefore it behoves us, when legislating, to refrain from passing such laws as will affect or damage the credit of our farmers and others, or even such laws as will hamper them in obtaining financial assistance. All of us know that when financial houses witness the passage of legislation which may affect securities, they hesitate to make advances. An instance of that occurred some years ago, when an amendment of our land legislation was carried at the instance of a Government in which Mr. Bath was Minister

for Lands. The amendment in question so reacted to the detriment of farmers that it had ultimately to be repealed.

Hon. E. H. Gray: What was the provision?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I forget just now. I meant to look the matter up.

Hon. V. Hamersley: It was a regulation in regard to transfers, and it has never been repealed.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: But it does not apply now. It reacted detrimentally on the farming industry, and assurances had to be given that it would not be enforced, and it has not been enforced. It is well to recall those things when we are asked to pass a Bill like the present. I purpose referring later to certain clauses which would react detrimentally in the way I indicate, notably Clause 7. It will be admitted that we should be guided by the experience afforded by similar legislation in other States. I recently read in a journal the reply of the Victorian Minister for Lands to a question as to the amounts expended and owing in connection with land settlement in Victoria. It was rather a short paragraph, and I endeavoured to consult the Victorian "Hansard" of the date—August last, I think—but I could not obtain a copy of the number here. However, the paragraph which I read indicated that the figures included expenditure on soldier settlement. I must make that point clear. We know that expenditure on soldier settlement has been very large indeed, but in the short paragraph I read the amounts were not analysed. Probably the "Hansard" report would analyse the figures, showing how much had been expended on soldier settlement, and how much on land settlement for ordinary citizens, in Victoria. The figures did show that some £19,404,000 had been expended in repurchasing land for closer settlement. However, the expenditure did not finish with the repurchase of estates. The settlers on those estates had to be assisted, and they have been advanced a total of £10,551,000, making a grand total of £29,000,000—nearly 30 millions sterling.

Hon. E. H. Gray: A lot of money would be invested in improved properties.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I cannot say. I tried to get detailed information.

Hon. J. R. Brown: The figures show only one side of the matter.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I hope the hon. member interjecting will at least listen and allow me to put my side of the case. I want to look at the matter

fairly, and I think the Government wish to view it from every angle. I believe the members of the Government to be as sincere as any other members of either House. Ministers want to be guided as well as other hon. members. It is only by each member putting his views before the Chamber in which he sits, that Ministers can have the whole matter thoroughly thrashed out. If the arguments used do not hold water, good and well; but if they do hold water, then by all means let us consider well before we act. Victoria expended close upon 30 millions in closer settlement. A fair proportion to allow for expenditure on soldier settlement as against settlement of ordinary citizens on the land would be two-thirds. Now, though closer settlement in Victoria has been going on for some years, there is still owing to the Government, out of the 29 millions odd advanced, a sum of over 23 millions.

Hon. E. H. Gray: Does a Closer Settlement Act operate in Victoria?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Yes. In New South Wales also legislation of this kind has operated for a good many years, and numerous estates have been subdivided there. I am informed that many of those subdivided estates have now, after a fair run of experience by men who have tried to cultivate wheat and other crops on them, been relinquished and resold by those men, and been acquired by other men, men interested in sheep farming. These are combining several subdivided areas. A man comes along, buys two or three farms, and combines them into a suitable farm for raising sheep.

Hon. E. H. Gray: They would be highly improved.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Of that I have no doubt; and probably the fact would help the purpose of sheep raising, and particularly the breeding of stud stock. Now, if it be the case that lands repurchased and subdivided by the Government are again being purchased by men interested in sheep raising or the raising of other stock, it is evidence that should not be overlooked when the present Bill is under consideration.

Hon. E. Rose: Do not you think the reversion of the subdivided blocks to large estates is due to the fact of the blocks having been cut up too small, just as happened here in the case of closer settlement?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I cannot say, and I refer to the matter now so that inquiry may be made. In South Australia a Royal Commission recently inquired into closer

settlement there, and I think some Bill dealing with the subject is now or was recently before the South Australian Parliament. I refer to these matters because up to the present no information has been given us regarding the results of experience of this legislation in other States.

Hon. E. H. Gray: What about New Zealand?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: As to New Zealand I cannot speak. I for one, and I believe other members also, would appreciate any information the Chief Secretary can obtain regarding these aspects. I purposely refer to them now so as to give our Leader an opportunity to have inquiries made, because further information will aid us in coming to a conclusion. As I have indicated the obvious purpose of the Bill is to make land available for the production of wheat. If the measure passes, the Government will necessarily have to raise money for the repurchase of estates, and also to provide funds for helping settlers.

Hon. H. A. Stephenson: It would be a very wise thing to do.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: But the Government would require to do it; they could not help themselves. We have knowledge of what group settlement has cost Western Australia, but we must remember that, although costing huge sums, the group settlements were established mainly on vacant Crown lands, and that therefore no money had to be found for repurchasing estates, as would be necessary under closer settlement legislation. Have the Government made any estimate of the probable amount of money required to carry out the closer settlement scheme they have in view? If not, it would be well even to defer consideration of the Bill for a little, so that that aspect might be inquired into.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: The Bill has been deferred since 1919, has it not?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: But apparently that aspect has not received attention. The next question I have to ask has already been raised. For a man engaged in rearing stud stock an area of land amply sufficient for the purpose is absolutely necessary. That is a recognised principle in the rearing of stud stock. The business, I have heard, is of great advantage to agriculturists generally and also to the State; but if in the opinion of the board under the Bill, having regard to the economic value of the land, that land, used for the breeding of

stud stock, is not being put to reasonable use, then it may be taken.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: Don't you think land is being put to reasonable use by stock breeding?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: It is just a question whether the board will consider it so. The board is to be composed of three members, two of whom will be appointed by the Government and the third is to be "a practical farmer having local knowledge of the matters under inquiry for the time being." There is no provision for a pastoralist or a breeder of stock being on the board. I think the Chief Secretary will admit that it is most important that such a representative should be included on a board of this description. It will be readily appreciated that a man whose interests are wholly and solely connected with farming, will not possess the knowledge of stock breeding such as a pastoralist or a breeder of stock has, nor will he be interested in those activities.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: But the board will not be composed of nincompoops.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I do not suggest that, but we know that a man's training tends to limit his interest to certain channels. His views in regard to other activities will naturally not be those of persons whose actual training has been in connection with stock breeding or the pastoral industry generally. When dealing with the question of wheat production, we must not overlook the importance of sheep and wool. We must bear in mind that we occupy the premier position in the world in respect of our sheep and wool. We are really the main source of supply of fine wool for the world. We should maintain that position and we should not overlook the importance of Australia's position in that respect being left unimpaired and unchallenged. I agree that we should endeavour to increase our wheat production as much as possible, but whatever steps we take in that direction should be carried out with reason and sound judgment.

Hon. H. A. Stephenson: If we cannot do that successfully we will have to go in for sheep alone.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: We must take all these matters into consideration. The fluctuations of the world's prices for wheat are often very marked. We know that the prices that have been obtained during the last few years would not have been secured

had Russian wheat been available in the markets of the world. On the other hand, according to reports, there is considerable activity in that vast country. We learn that great quantities of farming machinery are being sent to Russia, indicating that the people there are gradually awakening to the importance of wheat cultivation. It is quite possible that in the near future Russia may once more enter the field as a big wheat producer. Should that happen, the price obtainable for our wheat in Australia will be considerably affected. In dealing with such problems we can be assisted by the experiences of past decades. We can have regard to what happened in England after the Napoleonic wars. History shows that during the progress of hostilities the price of wheat soared up, but with the conclusion of the war the position was very different. During the time that high prices ruled there was a scramble for land and many large areas were put under cultivation in consequence. History shows what a dismal experience was gained by the farmers after the war had terminated. Their unfortunate position, owing to the low prices that prevailed for wheat, extended until almost the middle of last century. We have to view these matters in the interests of our settlers and we may be helped in coming to a conclusion by the experience of others in the past.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: We had better stop opening up the wheat areas!

Hon. H. A. Stephenson: Yes, that is what the argument amounts to.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I have not attempted to suggest anything of the sort.

Hon. E. H. Gray: But that is what your remarks mean.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: On the contrary, I agree that we should open up our wheat areas, but we should bear the point in mind that I have been stressing, and encourage our farmers in more than one form of production. We should have regard to the experience of others so that we may decide what is best for the prosperity of the State and for those who settle on our lands. I urge again that there should be at least another member appointed to the board, so that they may have the advice of a man experienced in stock breeding. He could be a well-known pastoralist or breeder of stock whose wide experience would assist the board in their deliberations. As to the powers of the board,

which are set out in Clause 3, I contend that they should be restricted. There should be a more clear definition of what is to be regarded as "unutilised land" for the purposes of this legislation. As it is at present, the provisions of the Bill in that respect are altogether too wide. I urge that there should be an appeal from the decisions of the board to some proper and competent authority. Subclause 3 of Clause 6 sets out that within three months after the service of a notice by the board of their intention to take land, the owner may notify the board in writing of his intention to subdivide and offer his land for sale. I suggest that three months is too short a period and that the time should be at least doubled. A farmer may have his crop in and to cause such an upheaval as is contemplated by the Bill within three months will not be reasonable. Clause 7 deals with the acquisition of land and I have given notice of my intention to move certain amendments to it. I would call the attention of members specially to the provisions of that clause, and particularly to paragraph (a) of Subclause 2, which reads—

Upon publication of such notice in the "Gazette," (a) the land therein referred to shall, by force of this Act, become and be absolutely vested in His Majesty as if the same had been surrendered to the Crown, free and discharged from all leases, contracts, trusts, mortgages, encumbrances, and charges thereon, and all interests therein.

There are instances not unknown in Western Australia, but very well known in other States, of farmers having suffered from the effects of droughts, and of such owners having been assisted by banks and other financial institutions during the time of drought and over subsequent periods as well. Without that assistance many farmers would have failed. Under the Bill it is quite conceivable that the position of such financial institutions would be jeopardised. Banks and other financial institutions have regard to the personal equation. The fact that a farmer has been hard hit by adverse conditions, and that his misfortune is through no fault of his own, has influenced them in the assistance they have rendered to such a farmer.

Hon. Sir Edward Wittenoom: Do you think banks or financial institutions will give a mortgage over land that is not utilised?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: It may not be utilised in the opinion of the board, having regard to its economic value. Land may be worth from £5 to £10 an acre and the owner

may be using it for some special purpose that he may be able to show is profitable to him. The board, having regard to the economic value of the land, may not consider it is utilised within the meaning of this legislation, although the experience of the owner may be far greater than that of any member of the board. It may be decided to resume his land.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: Do you think that much of this "drought-stricken land" would be cut up for closer settlement?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: It is hard to say. The matters I have drawn attention to should be considered, because we must deal with the Bill from those aspects. I do not care whether much of the land may or may not be taken; that is beside the question. The point is, how will the Bill affect the banks and financial institutions in making advances to farmers and others if we leave Clause 7 in the Bill.

Hon. Sir Edward Wittenoom: But is it not the Government who are to make the advances?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I refer to country properties generally. If those in control of our banking and financial institutions see such a provision in our legislation, they may become nervous and refuse to extend liberal help to landowners. We should not pass legislation calculated to make those institutions nervous of securities in the country. I want to see securities in the country holding as high a position as securities in town.

Hon. W. H. Kitson: This Bill will do that.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: If we leave this clause in the Bill it will have the diametrically opposite effect.

Hon. G. W. Miles: Would it not strengthen the security if the Government were taking over the land?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The hon. member has overlooked the important point that the land belongs to a private owner. It is going to be taken under the Act. That land may be the subject of a mortgage. The owner may have gone through a drought period, and so his mortgage may have soared up, whilst the bank may be relying on his repaying his advance when good seasons return. Under this provision the board will come in and take the land, and the price will be fixed as determined in the Act. But it might be found that the amount awarded under arbitration would be less than the amount advanced by the bank.

Hon. G. W. Miles: I should like to see the bank that would advance so much against the security.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: If the land be mortgaged up to the hilt would he not be shoving it on to the Government?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: No. There are many of these institutions that give consideration to the individual. Personal equation plays a big part. The banks will help a man because they believe in him.

Hon. E. H. Gray: But they see to it that they are well secured.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: That may not be. Oftentimes when a sale is made it does not realise sufficient to pay off the mortgage. Under this clause there may be instances of hardship, it may have the effect of curtailing interest on the part of the financial institutions in making advance to owners of country lands. I desire to see country lands holding as solid a position as town lands in the estimation of our financial institutions. But if we leave the clause as it is we shall prejudicially affect the position of the farmer and the pastoralist. I do not think that is wise. It is not in the interests of the country. Rather is it our duty to see that the position is safeguarded. Now I wish to touch upon Clause 11. Under the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act there is a limitation on the area of land that may be retained by the owner. Here it is only such portion of the land as may be agreed upon between the owner and the board. It is a question of sustenance. But what is sufficient for the sustenance of one man may be quite insufficient for another. I overlooked one point in dealing with Clause 3. There is no limitation to the area of land that may be taken. I think there should be a limit. Suppose a man happens to have 1,000 acres. He is just as liable to suffer under the Bill as is another man with 20,000 acres.

Hon. A. J. H. Saw: Well, if he is not using it, why not?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: But if he has acquired the land by performing the conditions of improvement, he is using it. The position here is in direct conflict with the provisions of the Land Act. The Land Act says, "These are the conditions"; this says the board, if it thinks the land is not being put to reasonable use having regard to its economic value, may take the land. This will be applied as much to the man with the small area as to the man with the big area. I think there should be some protection, some security of tenure given to the small man

who is battling along. There is no sense of security here at all. I will listen with great interest to the Chief Secretary, to see if he can furnish some answers to the questions I have raised. Those answers will enable me to decide which way I shall vote.

On motion by Hon. E. Rose, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 6.9 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly.

*Thursday, 13th October, 1927.*

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

### QUESTION—AGRICULTURAL SHOWS, INVITATIONS.

Mr. C. P. WANSBROUGH asked the Premier: 1, Is he aware that apparent discourtesy is being shown to agricultural societies and members of this House by his departmental officers in that invitations for members of the Government to attend and open agricultural shows have in some instances not even been acknowledged? 2, In view of the importance of these functions to the districts concerned and to the State generally, will he see that replies at least are sent?

The PREMIER replied: 1. No; the hon. member has no ground for complaint, as records indicate that his invitation for the Beverley Show was replied to definitely and courteously over five days before the event. 2. Answered by No. 1.