

I think members will realise that I never contemplated that the Address-in-reply would finish this afternoon. I quite expected that it would last a day or two and if that had been so, other business would have been provided to be taken up. Now it will be necessary for members to meet on Tuesday.

Hon. J. W. Kirwan: What business will there be for Tuesday?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Very little business because it will be necessary for the preliminary stages in regard to certain Bills to be taken before we can proceed with them on a subsequent day.

Hon. R. J. Lynn: Adjourn until Tuesday week.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: If we do that we shall be in exactly the same position because it will be necessary to take the preliminary stages of the Bills.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Are these Bills ready?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: They are. It is not my intention to suspend the Standing Orders, I want to take everything in its proper order.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Have a formal sitting to-morrow and deal with the first stages of the Bills then.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: If it is the desire of members to have a formal sitting to-morrow so as to get through the first stages of certain Bills, that will be sufficient. In the meantime we may be able to ascertain some idea of the progress which is likely to be made in another place and have some idea of the wishes of hon. members whether it will be desirable to adjourn until Tuesday next or Tuesday of the following week. If that is the wish of hon. members, I simply move that the House do now adjourn.

Question—that the House do now adjourn—put and passed.

House adjourned at 5.17 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 23rd January, 1918.

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

ELECTION RETURN—KIMBERLEY.

The SPEAKER announced the return of writ for the election of a member for Kimberley, showing that Mr. M. P. Durack had been duly elected.

SWEARING-IN.

Mr. M. P. Durack (Kimberley) and Mr. J. B. Holman (Murchison) took and subscribed the oath and signed the roll.

[For "Questions on notice" and "Papers presented," see "Votes and Proceedings."]

QUESTION — WYNDHAM FREEZING WORKS, AND MR. NEVANAS.

Mr. O'LOGHLEN, without notice, asked the Minister for Works: Seeing that the Minister was chairman of the select committee which inquired into the Wyndham freezing works, would he favour inviting Mr. Nevanas to the bar of the House in order that he may give his version of the whole transaction? Mr. Nevanas was stated to be very anxious at the time to appear before the select committee, and I understand he is in Perth now.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: In reply to the hon. member's somewhat embarrassing question, I should say that any matter connected with Mr. Nevanas had better remain quiescent for the present, or at all events until we know for what purpose Mr. Nevanas is in Western Australia. The hon. member and the public of Western Australia may rest perfectly assured that the Government will endeavour to protect the interests of the State so far as Mr. Nevanas is concerned. With that reply I think the hon. member should remain content.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Second Day.

Debate resumed from the 20th November, 1917.

Hon. P. COLLIER (Boulder) [4.58]: In view of the exceptional circumstances in which the House meets to begin the work of the session, that is to say, with seven months of the financial year already expired, and with a lapse of two months since Parliament first met, I have no intention of wasting the time or the money of the country in debating the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply at this juncture. The Government have been returned from the country with a substantial majority. Theirs is the responsibility of putting forward a policy adequate to the requirements of the desperate condition of the State. So far we on this side do not know, nor does the country know, what that policy is. Consequently I shall reserve criticism or discussion until the Treasurer has delivered his Budget speech, and until the programme of the Government for the session is made known to the House and to the country.

Mr. H. ROBINSON (Albany) [4.59]: I desire to congratulate the Government on having afforded members the opportunity of participating in the last referendum campaign, which campaign enabled Western Australia once more to inform the world that, notwithstanding what our brothers in the Eastern States may do, we here are still prepared to stand by our pledged word.

Mr. Hoeman: Not you.

Mr. Jones: The last shilling?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: We have been enabled once more to proclaim our inflexible determination to send the last man and the last shilling rather than see this war of liberation against tyranny and militarism lost or concluded in an unsatisfactory peace. I wish also to offer congratulations to the Treasurer on having produced for the month of December a surplus. I sincerely hope this surplus will be the forerunner of many more.

Mr. O'Loughlin: Did you find out where he got it from?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. Lambert: On a point or order I do not think it is fair that a new speaker should be interrupted in this manner.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I understand that the Government have not definitely decided upon a permanent scheme of repatriation, and we have to depend on what we can gather or glean from the Press. I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to a leaflet which has been distributed throughout the British Isles apparently from the Agent General's office, but through the Royal Colonial Institute, and with the permission of the House I would like to read some extracts from it. The scheme as set out in this leaflet may and probably will be accepted throughout the British Isles as part of the Western Australian Government's intentions, and I consider it incumbent on the Government either to confirm or correct the ideas and impressions which may be gaining ground in the Home land as to what we propose to do. There is no doubt that as we have in our midst a large number of returned men there will be a far greater number in the Old country, who, on reading the information contained in the leaflet will be only too pleased to take advantage of the opportunity to migrate to Western Australia. I will read an extract from the pamphlet:—

"Western Australia." The Government are at present granting homestead farms to new settlers whilst for British and Australian ex-service men, and dependants of deceased soldiers, suitable land is to be provided accompanied by the following special features: (a) Liberal advances through the Agricultural Bank at cost, plus reasonable working charges, and under special terms of repayment, against improvements, stock and implements. (b) The establishment of a "Repatriation Fund" for making advances, with or without interest apart from those referred to in paragraph (a) for maintenance by way of general assistance to returned soldiers and their families. (c) Ameliorative aid for maintaining returned soldiers, etc., until their lands become sufficiently productive, is to be granted by the Western Australian branch of the British Red Cross Society. Western Australia is arranging to settle on her lands by the end of 1918, some 8,850 ex-soldiers and sailors as under, wheat lands and mixed farming 8,000 men; dairying, fruit growing, and intense culture 850 men. The advances necessary for improvements, etc., are expected to amount to £500 each. The Government are providing educational facilities

for disabled soldiers in certain branches of industry through existing channels and the local War Council has already established a scheme for training men in poultry farming, etc. The question of training men disabled who are unsuited to work on the land is receiving attention at the hands of the Government, who are collecting full information from institutions established in England, France, and elsewhere.

Hon. P. Collier: Who issued that pamphlet?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I have the original document in my hand. It was issued by the Royal Colonial Institute, London, but the contents, I take it, have been gathered from the Agent General's office in London.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That was published in the "West Australian."

The Minister for Works: Is there any date on the pamphlet?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: There is a date, but I cannot give it for the moment. That leaflet which is in circulation in the Home land is absolutely misleading, and I would like the Government to give the House an assurance that it will be withdrawn from circulation at once. I should like to ask where is the £4,425,000 coming from to settle these 8,000 odd men referred to in the pamphlet? I understand that the idea is based on the assistance which has been promised by the Imperial Government through the medium of the Federal Parliament, but I would ask the members of the Government, and particularly the Minister in charge of this scheme, whether he has made any arrangements with the Federal authorities for the loan of that sum of money in one year. I understand that the Government have been doing something in connection with repatriation. We have noticed that they are endeavouring to establish poultry farming in the metropolitan area. I understand that 10 acres of land are being set aside for each returned man, and I would ask whether there is a single man in Western Australia who could make a living from poultry alone on such a small area.

Mr. Collier: And with 20 clucky hens.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I understand the number of hens to be supplied is 200. I hope the Minister in charge of this scheme will not expect a returned soldier to make a living from such a proposal unless the Minister out of the kindness of his heart is prepared perpetually to pay the losses which will be sustained, for I unhesitatingly say that there is not a man anywhere, let alone a returned soldier, who will be able to make a living out of poultry on 10 acres of land. We have instances of 200, 300, and up to 500 hens being kept in good localities, and the owners of them having to go out and earn wages in order to make ends meet. I know of an instance of a man who has 500 hens and whose son is at the war. He has to go out and earn wages in order to keep the farm going until the return of his son from the front. It is generally conceded that it costs about 1s. a dozen to produce the eggs, and for some considerable time past the leading stores have not been able to sell the eggs which have been offering at 8d. a dozen; yet in the face of that we have the Minister spending £5,000 on a small area which was repurchased. The

expenditure of that money will represent about £500 for each block on houses, wind-mills, tanks, and runs. The money is being spent under the provisions of the Workers' Homes Act with the repayments extending over about 25 years. The men are to be supplied with 200 head of poultry now being raised at the poultry farm at Subiaco. I ask the House to say whether it is not an utter impossibility for any man to make a living under such conditions. If we desire to help returned soldiers we should stop such an absurd idea as that which has been put forward in connection with poultry raising. The scheme, I understand, is under way and plans are being prepared. The residents of Osborne Park have expressed the opinion that the scheme has no chance of success and that the men will be away from their allotments in six months. The land in which these men are to be settled has no swamp area, but is all sand with the usual timber to be found on it. I understand that there is a man in the State who has made money out of poultry farming, but he has something like 80 acres, and he has been established for a considerable time and has spent far more on the property than the Government can ever afford to do. I understand that the Minister for Industries is the Minister who is in charge of repatriation, and as I feel that I am under an obligation to do all I can for returned soldiers, I might express the opinion that the Minister for Industries who is also the Attorney General and has control of the Forestry Department—which department by the way runs a nursery to compete against private nurserymen—has far more to do than he can possibly give his complete attention to. There has recently been held in this State a conference on forestry, and while I do not say it should not have taken place, I think that the Government of Western Australia in these strenuous times should not have been expected to find money to defray the cost of such a conference. I object strongly to the Government repurchasing private estates. I think that all Government land should be utilised first. In connection with the estates which were repurchased by previous Parliaments, the prices paid were so high that we cannot for a moment think of settling returned soldiers on them and expect them to make a living. The obstacles which are placed in the way of returned soldiers securing land I think should be removed. I understand that a returned soldier must go before two boards. The first board asks him what is the colour of his hair and whether he cleans his teeth, and before he passes that set of austere gentlemen, he has to go before another board who inquire into his qualifications for settling on the land. Whilst I congratulate the Government on giving us the opportunity during the recent referendum campaign of asking outsiders to enlist, at the same time I have it on good authority that behind the Government petticoats there are 300 or more eligibles, and it is the bounden duty of the Government, and also that of hon. members, to see that these men are made to do their duty, and that occupations are found for those who have returned. So far as I am con-

cerned, I want to assure Ministers that I am prepared to give them all my help, and my business experience is at their disposal, providing I am given a fair and reasonable opportunity of expressing my views, and I am at the same time quite prepared to abide the decision of the House, but I am not prepared to blindly accept whatever any Minister may choose to decide upon by himself alone. If Ministers are still going to adhere to the principle of propounding their own ideas and schemes and issue or confide them to members through the channel of the press, without giving hon. members of this House an opportunity of expressing an opinion or vote upon them, where does the necessity for 40 odd members at £300 per annum come in? It has been said that ordinary business methods do not apply to the Government, and that they have special ways of doing things. I quite agree that the Government have special ways of doing things, but it is almost impossible to get information under these special ways from heads of departments, particularly in regard to the finances. By altering these antediluvian methods and having an up-to-date system instituted, it would mean that the financial figures as placed before us at various times would be more clearly understood by the House. I am of opinion that thoroughly practical men should be chosen in various districts who have a true conception of the settlers' requirements in sheep breeding, cereal growing, orchard work, dairying, etc., who would act as Government advisers and who would classify and report upon the land available and also its adaptability for the several purposes and all within a 12-mile radius of existing railways. I feel sure it would not be an impossible proposition to select and appoint permanent Boards in each separate district of residents who would help and advise settlers until they became acquainted with the conditions under which they would have to work and live and these services would be carried out voluntarily. For I am convinced the man on the land is only too anxious to render whatever help he can to the men who have fought and returned from the firing line. In this respect, I hope Ministers will be able to bring the information before the House in such a way that there will be no necessity for members to go to the heads of departments, and that we shall have at various times a systematised statement. This would give Ministers more control over the heads of the departments, and it would give members greater interest in the actual operations and work of the Government. The working of the finances of the various departments could then be reviewed periodically.

The Minister for Works: Are you going to set the permanent heads of the departments against Ministers, because that would be the effect of it?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I know that alterations will have to be made, and I do not necessarily say that Ministers should come into conflict with the heads of the departments. I am pleading that information should be placed before the House in such a manner

that it can be understood, instead of being in the guise of merely approximate figures, compiled in such a manner that even professional men versed in the latest methods of accountancy would fail to understand it. I venture to say that, in many instances, even the Minister placing such figures before the House is not aware of the real position. At a later stage I will deal more fully with this. It is absolutely imperative in all departments that the antedeluvian methods in vogue for so long shall be altered and some up-to-date system adopted. I sincerely hope that Ministers will bring down Estimates which will give details as to how the money has already been spent, and that, in future, the Estimates will be submitted to the House before the greater portion of the money has been spent. With reference to the engagement of certain public servants, we have a striking example of the extraordinary methods adopted by the Government. I refer to the engagement of the late Fruit Commissioner. I am sorry to have to do this, but we have here an authentic case. The gentleman himself has furnished us with the information, and we may take it that the details are correct. The engagement of the late Fruit Commissioner was made on the following conditions:—1, The position was to be a permanent one. 2, Subject to the Minister for Agriculture only. 3, He was to be permitted to own an orchard and farm property, in addition to carrying on his duties to the State. 4, All expenses of himself, wife and family and furniture were to be paid by the Government. Assuming these conditions to be correct, I venture to remark that no business firm in the State would have engaged any servant, no matter what his qualification were, upon such terms and conditions. It only goes to show the looseness of the system which permits such unbusiness-like arrangements to be made. Notwithstanding that he was to be paid £750 a year, he was to be permitted to own a farm and to farm it. Yet, in the case of a low-wage man on the railways, if his wife starts a little store, he is dismissed. I say the conditions under which the late Fruit Commissioner was engaged would not be tolerated by any business firm in Australia. I know that this is an isolated case, and I trust that no State employees will be engaged on like conditions in the future.

Mr. O'Loughlin: Was there not an object in permitting him to own an orchard?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: He was permitted to own it and work it. In reference to the State trading concerns, although on principle I am opposed to the Government competing with its own taxpayers, yet we have at present a number of State enterprises, and my previous remarks apply to these. I hope the Minister in charge of these trading concerns will bring them up to date and put them on a business footing. Although at present it is impossible to say whether or not they could be sold, the time is not far distant when some of them will be disposed of. If they are put on a better footing, it will be easier to dispose of them at a satisfactory figure. I am not prepared to sup-

port any Government who might propose to increase these State trading concerns. Quite recently we had an instance in which the State Implement Works quoted for some meters, although the works had no machinery available for making them, and no data as to costing to go upon, as against two firms who had installed machinery for this purpose.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: And who wanted to rob the State of 7s. 6d. per meter.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: It has been claimed by the advocates of the State Trading Concerns that the main reason for their establishment was to cheapen living in Western Australia. One cannot but give credit for that desire. But what do we find? It was well known to the Government that, last year, we had an abnormally heavy fruit crop. The State Sawmills' manager must have been aware of the large quantity of fruit cases to be used, and at the beginning of the season fruit cases were quoted 8s. 8d. at Mount Barker. Presently it was announced from the State Sawmills that there were no cases available, and for some considerable time orchardists suffered great losses in consequence, being unable to get cases at any price. Then came the edict from the State Sawmills that the cases could not be manufactured at 8s. 8d. and that the price in future would be 11s. The Fruitgrowers' Association could not afford to squabble over the difference, and straightway they forwarded their orders for cases.

The Minister for Works: You would not have fruit cases supplied at a loss?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: When we remember that these sawmills were established to cheapen prices, it is extraordinary to find that a large sawmilling concern close to the State Sawmills adopted the same price, namely, 11s., and that the price arranged by the State Sawmills for this year is identical with that of the other huge sawmilling concern. If we are to have the State sawmills bolstering up the price at the cost of the taxpayer, it is time somebody moved for an investigation. Notwithstanding that the price was raised from 8s. 8d. to 11s. we have the wonderful return of a profit on this enterprise of less than half per cent. on the capital employed. With reference to the State brickworks, the Minister in charge has stated that every brick being turned out at present represents a loss to the State.

Mr. Green: Nonsense. There was a profit of £800 for the last half year.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I hope the Minister will inform the House whether it is a fact that this loss as stated is correct, and if so whether he will have it rectified at the earliest possible moment. In respect of these State enterprises, I would draw attention to the fact that a great injustice is being done to private enterprise and a loss entailed upon the taxpayer through a clause in the Government contracts which stipulates that in all Government works the materials necessary must be procured from the State departments. Let me give hon. members one example which has occurred in my constituency: A little time ago it was decided to erect a bridge across the

river at Denmark. In the terms of the contract, it was specified that the timber must be purchased from the State mills at a price laid down by the department. The price of this timber delivered at Denmark railway station was £6 15s. per load, to which 3s. per load had to be added for cartage from the station to the bridge site. The manager of the local timber company at Denmark has informed me that his company would have delivered the same quantity and equal quality of timber at the bridge site at £4 5s. per load, and would have made a fair profit at that figure. This means that for the purpose of bolstering up the State sawmills the Public Works Department had to pay on a contract of a few hundred pounds no less a sum than £132 10s. more than would have been the case had local and private enterprise been given a fair deal in the matter.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: How long ago was that?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I cannot say, but I can assure the hon. member that the facts are correct. And yet, with all such unequal advantages, the trading department of the State cannot even make ends meet. Under such conditions is it any wonder that one section of the community is crying out against the other, and confidence becomes shaken? No wonder the deficit has mounted up if the public works of the State have had to carry the burden of these ill-conceived, ill-managed trading concerns, which have been and are throttling the competitive industries of the State by such unsound and unfair methods as I have described. It is not my intention, at this stage, to criticise the Education Department of the State, but there are one or two points I should like to refer to. At the present time I believe it is customary to admit very young children into the primary schools, even mere babies of three years of age. The schools of the State should not be made public nurseries. The teachers' services can surely be more profitably made use of than by teaching babies of such tender years. Surely children of five and six years are quite young enough for the commencement of school days. I think that country district schools, particularly, should include in their curriculum a course of training adaptable to the various primary industries associated with the particular district, and that the principles of agriculture should be inculcated into the minds of the children in such a way as to make them of greater usefulness to their parents, and at the same time give them an interest in their surroundings which may be the means of keeping them from overcrowding our cities and towns. This would mean that the sons and daughters of the farmers would have their training in the particular occupation that is carried on in the district, be the means of keeping them in the district and also of helping their fathers, as well as preventing them from migrating to the city as they do in so many instances now. I hope that where a State farm is established due advantage will be taken of the fact, and that, if possible, weekly lessons will be given to the scholars in the district. With reference to the taxation questions, I understand the Government

are endeavouring to get the State and the Federal Taxation Departments combined under one control. I am sure every member in this Chamber will be only too pleased to do his best to have this desirable amalgamation carried out.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That has been tried for some time.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I hope these departments will be governed under one system, and that this system will be clearly defined. Taxpayers will then have an opportunity of making direct appeals as to their assessments, without having to go to the Court, and I am convinced that in this respect a saving can be effected. A saving could also be effected if taxpayers were permitted to make out returns on their own paper. The forms which are issued by the departments now are so complicated and intricate that it requires a professional man to fill them up in many instances, and this constitutes a double burden upon the taxpayer. In many cases the cost of these services amounts to more than the actual tax itself. I again congratulate the Colonial Treasurer upon the explicit information that he gave recently, with reference to the State finances and his attempts at economies. I hope that every Minister will give to this House the same sort of information, and will go through his departments, try to effect economies, and notify the House accordingly. We must all hope during these strenuous times that Ministers will rigidly adhere to the expenditure that is actually passed by Parliament. If Ministers wish to retain the confidence of the House, at least we should be given an opportunity of voting for or against these various amounts. I would like to draw the attention of the House to the report of the Auditor General. This report has been before members every year, I understand, but I have not heard that very much notice has been taken of it. There are one or two instances which I would like to quote, and which I think members should take serious notice of. Under the heading of "Works and Industries," the Auditor General says—

"The direct collections by Works officers were banked at monthly (or longer) intervals, in lieu of weekly, as directed by the Treasurer."

If these moneys are held by Government officials, where are they held, and who keeps them? What individual in the public service has the right to hold Government money for a month or longer?

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Where are these officers, in what part of the State are they employed?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: Although we are taxed so that we have scarcely any money to spend on production, yet we have the Auditor General telling us in his report for 1916 that we have officers of the Public Service holding Government money for a month or longer. Should we permit these things to go on and take no action when the matter has been brought before us by the Auditor General? We should take action. With reference to the State sawmills, the Auditor General says—

"Although requested, no wages sheets have been supplied for an amount of £1,045 11s. 1d., stated to have been disbursed." That is another glaring instance of the way money is being handled. This money is supposed to have been expended, but there are no vouchers for it.

Mr. O'Loughlen: What is the explanation of the department?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: What would become of a private firm if it could not produce its vouchers for wages? If the Government can insist upon local enterprises doing their business in a certain way, they should insist upon their own employees doing so also.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: He has signed the account as being correct.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: It appears that there are some funny things going on in connection with the State sawmills. I have yet to learn from the Minister for Lands, who has been dealing with this particular matter, or from the Minister for Works, or any other member of the Government, that it is possible in a sawmill to make cases out of fruit trees. We have, however, the glaring instance of an expenditure for fruit trees at the State sawmills amounting to £46 15s. 9d., and of this amount being charged to the vote for "Working expenses, etcetera." Who authorised the planting of this orchard at the State sawmills? Was it for the manager, or was it planted for the then Government? The statement still stands that the taxpayer of Western Australia had to pay £46 odd for fruit trees at the State sawmills. As an experienced orchardist I must say that the purchase of the trees forms a very small part of the cost of production of fruit, because the clearing of the land to receive the trees would probably run into considerably more. I have no doubt we should be surprised if we had before us the whole cost of this orchard. I should very much like to know who authorised this.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Whoever did so did the right thing. It is a lovely orchard.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I should like to make another commentary upon this particular department. The Auditor General says—

"Although requested, the necessary information to enable a check to be made has not been supplied in regard to an advance of £80 paid to the manager of the sawmills for travelling expenses, when visiting the Eastern States of the Commonwealth."

Hon. W. C. Angwin: On business.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: Whether that money was duly authorised or not to enable this gentleman to go to the Eastern States on business, who had the right to pay the money, and why is there no check upon it? With regard to Stores suspense, the Auditor General says—

"The Suspense Stores on hand at 30th June, 1916, according to the Treasury books, were: Government stores, £184,461 19s. 10d.; Railway stores, £320,571 1s. 7d. These have been purchased without Parliamentary authority with money obtained from the public account and not charged

to any of the three funds, namely, Revenue, Loan, or Trust."

In 1916 we had half a million of the taxpayers' money spent without the authorisation of Parliament, and we have a statement that as it is a Suspense Account it cannot appear in the balance sheet. Notwithstanding that these things occurred in 1916, I have yet to learn that they have been stopped since. I bring these matters before the House with an object which I hope hon. members will agree to at a later period. I also notice, in reference to railway stores, that the Auditor General states that stock is only taken once in every three years. Is it any wonder that the railways do not pay, and that we have had placed before us a pending deficit for this year? Another item in connection with the Auditor General's report is that the Stores Suspense Account was charged with an amount of £7,126 16s. 6d. for payments made by the Agent General, but no vouchers have been supplied supporting the charge. If such forms did not come to hand in an ordinary commercial business no money would pass at all, and no law could insist upon money passing. And yet we have the sum of £7,000 passed in us paid, but a considerable time after we have the astounding statement that no vouchers have been produced with regard to it.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The Auditor General says that no vouchers have yet been produced. It takes a long time to get them here in these days. Be honest in your remarks.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I can only read to hon. members what the Auditor General says, and cannot read what is in the hon. member's imagination.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Read what is there.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I have read the statement made by the Auditor General.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: He used the word "yet."

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I give the Auditor General credit for knowing what he is talking about.

Hon. T. Walker: Why do you not read what he says?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: With regard to the Treasury expenditure, the Auditor General says—

"Treasury expenditure return No. 5 also shows 'Excess expenditure' £560 17s. 1d. No excess, however, appears in any book of account in the Treasury."

What has become of that money, and how does that entry come in? The House, I think, will agree with me that I have gone far enough in this matter, because I see I am irritating hon. members opposite.

Mr. Munsie: No, not in the least.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: It is necessary, in my opinion, that more assistance should be given to the Auditor General to enable him to carry out in a proper manner the complete supervision of the accounts of the State.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: We want a new Auditor General.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I think the Auditor General's remarks are so clear and explicit that it would be in the best interests of the

country if the Government would appoint a committee of members of the House to go into the whole of his statements and present a report to the House, and ask the House to give immediate effect to the finding. I hope that if no other plea I have made this afternoon is agreed to, that this particular plea will be given effect to. If these leakages—and I use the word with all due respect—are stopped, and the finances of the State are properly managed, if large sums of money are not paid away without authority, and if goods which are unnecessary are not purchased, the Treasurer should not be obliged to impose additional taxation upon an already overburdened State. If we look into all these matters, we will find that a considerable amount is involved, and we are not in a position to do what we used to do in better days.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: These are not leakages, but just payments.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I hope the Government will appoint such a committee as I have suggested, to go into the Auditor General's report for 1916. With respect to economy, I would draw attention to the Perth Public Library and Museum, the cost of which institution for the year 1916 amounted to the somewhat surprising total of £6,469. During the currency of the war, I maintain, with all due respect to metropolitan members, such an institution should be closed, and a returned soldier placed in charge of it during the currency of the war, when at least £5,000 of the taxpayers' money would be saved annually. In regard to the Stamp Act, the Government have recently been imposing hardships on some City firms by causing them to be fined for issuing unstamped interim receipts, although the official stamped receipts were issued on the same day or on the following day. At the same time there are firms in Western Australia who issue hundreds of cheques weekly without paying the 1d. stamp duty on one of them; they simply have endorsed cheques paid through the bank. If the Taxation Department will look up those firms, they will find that since the passing of the last Stamp Act the revenue of the State has suffered to a considerable extent. With reference to vermin boards, it appears that in most localities the endeavour is to make the residents find the money required to destroy vermin. From the Auditor General's report, however, I find that the settlers in the Gascoyne district have been more favourably treated.

Hon. P. Collier: You are up against another financial expert now. You had better be careful.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: The balance owing by the Gascoyne Vermin Board on the 30th June last amounted to £70,849 3s. 1d. Whilst I am prepared to believe that the Government who made the arrangement which has resulted in this debit were actuated by the highest ideals, I consider the present Government should see that the amount advanced is repaid with interest. The interest outstanding at the end of 1916 amounted to no less than £18,763 3s. 1d.

Hon. P. Collier: You have no hope of squeezing that out of those squatters.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: When the Government are imposing on other localities the necessity for rating themselves in connection with vermin destruction, they should at least see that the Gascoyne people pay up their back dues. A cheque for £13,000 or £19,000 would be very acceptable to the Government just now.

Mr. Munsie: We are right with you there.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: As for the Industries Assistance Board, from my own knowledge I can state that chaos reigns in the affairs of the board. I could give dozens of instances where it has been found impossible to obtain the exact position of a farmer under the board; and it is for the benefit of farmers that the board exists. At present the board are a political body. The affairs of the board should be conducted through what we regard as the standard of administration in Western Australia—the Agricultural Bank. The board are really a new institution.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: It was supposed to be merely a temporary affair.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: The board being a new institution, it was only natural that the officers could not possibly know the full ins and outs of the position of all the farmers, could not possibly know who was worthy of assistance, and who was not. And yet, next door to the board's offices, there is a permanent staff thoroughly conversant with the position of individual farmers. I refer, of course, to the Agricultural Bank. The bank have their inspectors out constantly, and know the position of every farmer in Western Australia. Instead of making use of the reliable information of that institution, the Government start a new board. I say unhesitatingly that complete chaos reigns in the affairs of the board. I hope the Government, who in many instances are trying to effect economies, will amalgamate, if I may use the word, the Industries Assistance Board with the Agricultural Bank, when, I am sure, favourable results will accrue not only to our farmers but to the State. I do not wish to go into the question of the wheat marketing scheme, but I must refer to one phase of it. We have been given to understand that one of the objects the Government had in view this season was to save expense to the farmer. For that reason they did not want undue competition at the various centres. At each centre there was to be only one agent to receive wheat on behalf of the Western Farmers, Ltd. But what is happening? I say at once that what is occurring is the fault of the House. That is the peculiar aspect of the matter. In Tambellup, for example, there is a representative of the Western Farmers, Ltd., and one man whom I may call a tally clerk. They have been at Tambellup for a fortnight, and during that time only one load of wheat has come in. A further surprising feature is that there are also stationed at Tambellup two Government men connected with the wheat scheme—whom I may call bosses, and one whom I may call the tally clerk. I would like to learn from the Government what these three men are doing at Tambellup, and who is paying them? One can only

surmise that the Government do not trust the Westralian Farmers Ltd.

Member: In that they may be showing good judgment.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: If the farmer is to be saddled with the expense of these three extra men, the result will be that the taxpayer will be called upon to pay the difference between the sale price of the wheat and the unnecessary expenses which the Government are incurring. Turning now to the subject of Royal Commissions, I am uncompromisingly opposed to them, and I hope the Government will take the very firmest stand in putting a stop to their unnecessary operations, and to the piling up of uncalled-for expenditure on the over-burdened taxpayer. We have gleaned from the Press that the Royal Commission on Agriculture have offered some good suggestions; but there are ways and means of obtaining those suggestions more simply and more cheaply. I have yet to learn of any benefit which has accrued to the State of Western Australia directly from a Royal Commission. The only result up to date has been that the taxpayer has had to pay enormous sums for the cost of these Royal Commissions. I understand that the cost to date of the Royal Commission on Agriculture amounts to something over £4,000. The Royal Commission on the Cost of Living are absolutely making themselves the laughing stock of people who know anything of the subject. For some time past lengthy reports of that body's proceedings have been published in the Press, and the Premier has informed the House that the cost of the Commission to date was £182. It means that for the purpose of advertising the boot trade of Western Australia the Government have saddled the taxpayer with the expense of £182. What other result has accrued? Are we getting our boots any cheaper to-day?

Mr. Lutey: How does the cost of the Royal Commission on the Cost of Living compare with the cost of some other Royal Commissions?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: The question naturally arises, if it costs £182 to find out nothing about boots in this State, what is it going to cost to find out nothing in a similar way about all the other commodities? Recently the Royal Commission have been simply wasting their time. I am surprised that the members of the Commission did not know before they started their investigations that the Federal Government are operating the produce of Australia, and more particularly butter, and that the prices for both buying and selling are assessed by the Federal Government.

Mr. Lutey: The merchants ignore those prices.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: No matter what the findings of the State Royal Commission may be, they can have no effect.

Hon. P. Collier: They have had the effect of proving to the people of Western Australia that the profiteer is abroad amongst them.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: I sincerely hope the Government will have those Commissions

stopped forthwith. I make the suggestion that if inquiries of this nature are necessary—and probably it may be necessary from time to time to undertake these investigations—why should not the Government secure the services of members of Parliament for the purpose?

Mr. Jones: And pay them. Good!

Mr. H. ROBINSON: We are paid to do our duty, and why should not the Government call on us to do this work?

Hon. P. Collier: We have made such a mess of our duties in the past, that our activities ought to be restricted.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: In reply to that interjection, I take it that the members of Royal Commissions would not necessarily be chosen from the side on which the hon. member interjecting sits, but that the personnel of Royal Commissions would be judiciously selected from both sides of the House. Further, the personnel need not necessarily be restricted to members of Parliament, for I feel sure that there are in Western Australia commercial men who would offer their services for such a purpose gratuitously.

Mr. Munsie: Of course they would, in order to protect their own interests.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: These commercial men would know something of the subjects which the Royal Commissions are supposed to investigate.

Mr. Lutey: They would frame nice reports.

Mr. O'Loughlen: Do you question the ability of the members of the Royal Commission on the Cost of Living?

Mr. H. ROBINSON: Yes, undoubtedly.

Hon. P. Collier: In what way?

Mr. O'Loughlen: No matter what the report of the Commission may be, I say you will not find three better men in the country.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: As regards local borrowing for local production, I hope the Government will be able to carry out their scheme, which I feel sure will prove of great benefit to the State. If confidence is to be quickly restored in Western Australia, it will be only through determined action by the Government in advancing money to assist production. Let the Government not merely talk about this, but let them put their principles into practice. The sooner the Government put their plan into operation, the better it will be for Western Australia. I am convinced that the proposal to start butter and bacon factories will receive support from both sides of the House: but I trust the Government will judiciously go into the details of the various schemes before placing at the disposal of every town in the State a butter and bacon factory. Provided these conditions are observed by the Government, it will not be long before Western Australia will be producing more than her requirements in both butter and bacon. Here let me mention the Denmark butter and bacon factory. I do not wish to comment on what has been stated in the Press by the Honorary Minister (Mr. Baxter); but I consider that credit is due to the late Commissioner for the South-West, Mr. Connor, for arranging the alteration of the original scheme and converting the farm into a butter and bacon factory. That factory has been the means of en-

abling a number of Denmark settlers to turn the corner. As we know, the Denmark settlers have had a most trying time from the inception of the settlement. They were wrongly placed on the land, and the land was wrongly priced. Not until Mr. Connor initiated the butter and bacon factory at Denmark was there a reasonable ray of hope for those settlers. Although the facilities at the factory are somewhat behind the times, yet its operations for the last 12 months, including working expenses for a full year but sales for only eight months, showed a profit. The profit was for only eight months because during the summer months they are unable to do anything. The proposition before the Government at the present time is that they should increase the works to enable the settlers there to continue to make a living for the full twelve months. I have had the honour of placing before the Ministry particulars in this respect, and I sincerely hope the Government will give the matter full consideration and that it will not be long before they decide on the extension of a very important asset. This will help the farmers in the vicinity of Denmark, and if it is not done, there will be no living for the 300 families in the vicinity of that place. If the Government will increase the facilities in the direction I have suggested we shall have a flourishing example in that part of the State of what is badly wanted in Western Australia.

Mr. O'Loughlen: It would be a trading concern then.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: If the Government will establish an up-to-date factory there, within two or three years the settlers of Denmark will be able to take it over as a co-operative concern. I know nothing better than that at the present time, and if the Government are sincere, they can do in this part of the State what they are always declaring it is their intention to do. With reference to the Albany wool stores, much has been said about them, and while I do not desire to go into the pros and cons of this question, I would like to point out that the greater part of the newspaper controversy which has taken place on the matter has not been altogether true. If the Government will provide in these stores for the freezing of fat lambs and pigs, with established abattoirs in close proximity, the works will be conducted with success. So far as the returned soldiers are concerned, there are already in this State about 2,000, and I think it is the duty of the Minister in charge of repatriation to close himself up in his office and seek the assistance of the most practical men. There is another matter that I would like to bring under the notice of the House and it is that of the Torbay drainage scheme. As hon. members know, the Government have spent over £12,000 on this scheme of drainage which was supposed to take the water off the settlers' properties and enable them to farm their various holdings. Before the scheme was started it used to cost £20 or £30 a year to clear the bar. Since the Government have spent £12,000 there, and have ruined nearly every settler in the district, it costs £150 a year to clear the bar, and yet we have it from the Government that the scheme has proved a success. When

I tell hon. members that when the scheme was first started there were 70 settlers in the vicinity of it working 430 acres, and that to-day there are only 19 settlers working 60 acres, it will be admitted that the figures speak for themselves. I hope that Government, at no matter what cost, will get expert advice in the direction of rectifying what at the present time is a most unsatisfactory drain. I understand that in the early stages this scheme was passed by the Engineer-in-Chief, and that being so, that officer could only state that the scheme at the present time was a success, but the Government last week sent another engineer down there to try to get the settlers to take it over. At the same time the Engineer-in-Chief was looking over the scheme to see whether alterations could be made. Is it fair to the settlers of any district that the Government should try and make them accept something which they declared was good, and at the same time make inquiries in the direction of effecting alterations. Two years ago the estimated losses to the settlers in the district totalled over £70,000, and if we add to that railway freight, we can form an idea of what the State has also lost. I hope the Government will do something to rectify what is an unsatisfactory scheme from beginning to end. Undoubtedly the people there are worse off to-day than they were before the Government even thought of a drainage scheme. With regard to the railways of the State, I hope the Government will appoint a Commission to go into the question of administration generally. It appears evident that the concern is too big for one man to control, no matter how capable that man may be. The Commission I would suggest should be a Commission of members of Parliament. The present Commissioner of Railways, who has not been in good health for some time to come, has too much to shoulder with the management of the railways and the tramways. There should be sectioning of the departments in the future so that statements of revenue and expenditure for the various sections might be shown.

Mr. O'Loughlen: We have asked for them for 10 years past.

Mr. H. ROBINSON: Whenever we ask for a return dealing with a certain section with the object of getting improvements effected along that section, we receive a reply that the railways generally are not paying and that consequently the request cannot be agreed to. I will give an instance which will prove that something should be done. Recently the scheduled time of the Denmark express has been altered by the addition to it of 20 minutes, so that the produce picked up might catch the train at Kalgoorlie. I had the honour of travelling on the first train under the altered arrangements. We left Torbay Junction at 10 minutes to one and arrived at Albany, a distance of 9 miles, at 2 o'clock. It took an hour and 10 minutes to do that journey. Surely that is not a record that anyone should be proud of. With reference to decentralisation, this has been the declared policy of Government after Government, and one is glad to know that some attempt has been made to carry out the principle in one or two instances. I am convinced that as the Greater

Perth scheme is almost completed, it would be in the best interests of the State to municipalise the tramways, the ferries, and sewerage. By bringing these concerns under local government control, the taxpayer would benefit considerably and it would be possible to locate the losses. The municipality would be able to borrow more money on the tramways than the Government can do at the present time, and the result would be more extensions and generally a better service. The same applies to the ferries and the sewerage system. With reference to Parliamentary hours, I hope that the Government will consider the advisableness of beginning the afternoon sitting at 3 o'clock and on one day a week, preferably Thursday, starting the sitting at 10 o'clock in the morning. The constituents of the State have sent hon. members to represent them here at the present time more seriously than has ever been done in connection with any other Parliament. We have been sent here to endeavour to straighten out the finances, and if we are to attempt to do that, we must come here willing to work and to do our duty in longer periods than the Government have arranged for us. Moreover, it is unfair to ask country members to come up as has been done this week, to attend to the work of Parliament for only two afternoons and two evenings. It would be decidedly preferable in the interests of better debating if we were to sit in the afternoons and early in the evening rather than into the late hours of the night and the early hours of the morning. I sincerely trust that the Government will pay some attention to the suggestions I have made with regard to returned soldiers and that the measures which will be submitted will be in the direction of giving to these men that help to which they are entitled and also in the direction of altering the chaotic state of the finances.

Mr. PILKINGTON (Perth) [6.10]: As the last speaker has observed, this Parliament has been sent back in the hope that it will be able to do something towards straightening out the finances of the State. It appears to me that in the present condition of affairs, there is one matter paramount above all others which it is the duty of the Government and this Parliament to deal with; I mean that of the State's finances. A very few figures with which perhaps hon. members are familiar, are sufficient to show both the condition of the finances and the proposals which, up to date, the Government have made for the purpose of meeting the present difficulties. Stating those figures very shortly, they are as follows:—The deficit for the last financial year was £700,000. The deficit for the current financial year in the absence of any remedial measures, is estimated by the Treasurer at £1,057,000. If one wishes to test the value of that estimate by the events of the last six months, one can easily do so. The Treasurer estimated the deficit for the first five months of the current financial year at the sum of £400,000. In fact the deficit for that period was £494,000, exceeding the estimate by nearly £100,000. On the other

afternoon, there was a surplus in December of £36,000, leaving a deficit for the whole of the half year just ended of £457,000, indicating, I think, that the Treasurer's estimate was fairly accurate and that in the absence of remedial measures, the deficit for the present financial year may be expected to be £1,057,000 as estimated. The importance of these figures is this—it is an increase in the annual deficit of 50 per cent. in the absence of remedial measures. It means that in the absence of remedial measures the annual deficit jumps from £2 to £3: that is for every £2 of the deficit last year, there is £3 this year. I have not the faintest notion of what the increase may be next year, but that we may expect an increase, and a large increase, is beyond doubt.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. PILKINGTON: Before tea I was pointing out the enormous increase in the annual deficit between last year and the present financial year, an increase amounting to 50 per cent. I would ask the attention of hon. members to another view of the finances. The total deficit on the 31st December, 1917, amounted to the sum of £2,518,000. If hon. members will refer to the last issue of the Loan Account, the last issue which I have seen, it will be noticed that the total amount which is shown as due from the Treasurer is the sum of £1,822,000. That has, I take it, been all spent and is part of the deficit with which we are now faced. The whole of the loan money was spent and it became necessary to draw upon another account, and the expenditure of trust moneys then began. The trust moneys spent amounted to £695,000, making the total of £2,518,000. These figures are significant and cause us to look with some anxiety to the remedies which the Government have up to date proposed. It may be the Government have remedies which it is proposed to put forward and of which we know nothing, but I am speaking of the remedies which the Government have up to date made public. Those remedies were stated in the policy speech of the Premier and were as follows:—In the first place the Government propose the suspension of the sinking fund, which will give them a sum of £300,000 per annum. Next they propose that there shall be certain economies effected which they estimate at a sum of £100,000 per annum. Next, certain taxation was suggested, an increased annual income tax which would give another £160,000. Then there was to be an increased dividend duty tax which would give £27,000, and an increase in the stamp duties and shipping, and insurance company taxation, which was to give £25,000 per annum, and a tax on what was called the sporting community, which was estimated to return £28,000; making a total of £640,000 by these remedial measures. But we were told at the same time that these remedial measures would only be applicable to half the year. Therefore, they would only get one-half that sum to set against the deficit of this year, namely, £320,000, of which £150,000 is represented by

suspension of the sinking fund. The total remedies which the Government propose to introduce by taxation and economies give a total of £170,000 per annum to set against, as stated in the policy speech, the deficit of the current financial year. But hon. members will observe that of that £170,000 a sum of £80,000 was to be obtained by an increase in the income tax, and I confess I have long wished to understand how an increase in the income tax, which would fall on the incomes earned in the current financial year, is to be set against the deficit of the same year. That income tax will not be collected until the next financial year and will, therefore, not be available to set against the deficit of the present financial year. The same remark applies to the increase in the dividend duty tax. That increase in the dividend duty tax is the sum of £13,500, making a total of £93,500, which will not be available, and I think the same remark may apply to the £25,000 in so far as it is to be raised by shipping and insurance taxation charges. Roughly, say, £100,000 out of the £170,000 will not be available for the present financial year, which leaves us in the position that the Government's remedial proposals, putting aside the suspension of the sinking fund, will give us a sum of £70,000 to set against an expected deficit of £1,057,000, and I venture to say those figures show that the Government's proposals are utterly and hopelessly inadequate to deal with the position. Let me just point out what that means. In the figures which I have given we are going back, according to the estimate of the Colonial Treasurer, and I have no doubt he is right, at the rate of £3,000 a day, while with the remedial measures suggested by the Government, putting aside the suspension of the sinking fund for the moment, we are going to set against the £3,000 a day roughly £200 a day. Throw in the whole of the sinking fund and you get £600 a day. Those figures will be, of course, increased next year because there will be the full figures available, but at the same time it is to be expected there will be an increase in the annual deficit. There is one observation I should like to make in regard to the figures I have referred to and it is this: it is a remarkable fact that all the proposed remedies appear to emanate from the Colonial Treasurer. There does not appear to be any suggestion from any other source. Someone just now interjected what was I going to do about it. But it is the duty of the Government to find out what has to be done, and if they find out that they are absolutely incapable of dealing with the matter it is for them to say so.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): It is the duty of the Government critics too.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The position, as I understand it of a Government critic, is that he is entitled to criticise fairly and sincerely and honestly, and that is what I am endeavouring to do, but I say this, the Government should remember that those who stand outside the Government have not the same opportunity of knowing the facts which the Government know. The Government know the facts and the figures, which we do not. It is impossible

for me, if I was the best skilled business man in railway matters, to say what should be done in regard to the railways, but the Government have the opportunity of ascertaining the whole of the facts, and it is impossible for anyone outside the Government to point out as a certainty what the figures and facts are. Anyone outside can only suggest general principles, and as I criticise honestly, fairly and sincerely, I expect the Government to listen and answer me in the same honest and sincere spirit. I mentioned just now that one of the Government remedies was the suspension of the sinking fund. I am not prepared to say the time may not arrive in a State such as this when the suspension of the sinking fund is justifiable, but I say this, the suspension of the sinking fund is pro tanto a repudiation of our obligations and no suspension of the sinking fund can be justified unless accompanied by economies and good administration, showing that the Government has a reasonable chance and expectation of meeting the serious difficulties that we are in to tide over them. During the last general election I referred to the education vote and I refer to it again. The estimate of the education vote for the present year is, I understand—I take the figures from the policy speech of the Premier—a sum of £375,000, including the University vote. It is the largest sum that has ever been voted for education in any one year in Western Australia. I spoke of that matter during the general election campaign, and I wish to make clear the position I took up then, and which I take up now. I am not concerned with any question as to the efficiency of the Education Department. I am not concerned at the moment with any question as to whether there is waste or extravagance. What I am concerned with is this: we have an enormous deficit, increasing by leaps and bounds, and this education vote is bigger than ever before. It is a vote which any outsider knows can be cut down, and if the Government and Parliament say it shall be cut down, it can be cut down.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): In what particular instance?

Mr. PILKINGTON: The hon. member asks me to make suggestions. They can only be made by any person in the position of the Government. If the Government wish to cut down, their first duty would be to get together the heads of the departments and find out how it is best to cut down. It is not for me to do that. I cannot do it. What I do say is that that vote can be cut down, and the State will continue doing its business. If the affairs of the State cannot be put in order without cutting down that vote, it should be cut down as a mere matter of good business and honesty.

Mr. Thomson: In what way?

Mr. Griffiths: The way you suggested was to starve the minds of the children.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I never advocated anything of the sort in my life. I do not pretend to know enough about the Education Department to say what should be cut out and what should not. I have not the

necessary knowledge, and I think no hon. member has it. Any member who set out to cut down that vote would first have to get the necessary information from the permanent officials in charge of the department.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): Start on the University.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I am indifferent as to where you start, but I say we are spending on education a sum which we are not justified in spending. Every penny saved from the education vote would go to reduce the amount of trust funds which we are spending at present. Those who say I am desirous of starving the brains of the children will perhaps tell me themselves if I am right in my contention that it is necessary to cut down expenses. If we do not cut down somewhere we shall be in serious trouble at an early date. I will ask those who say the vote cannot be cut down because the children would starve, what they propose to do when the State is not in a position to pay its interest bill?

Mr. Jones: Why not resort to taxation?

Mr. PILKINGTON: If the hon. member will suggest any reasonable form of taxation which can be imposed at the present juncture I feel certain the Government will be prepared to accept it. According to the Constitution under which we live I find it exceedingly difficult to discover any fresh available avenue of taxation.

Mr. Jones: Unimproved land values.

Mr. PILKINGTON: When the hon. member shows to what extent an unimproved land values tax will meet the present position I shall be glad to hear him.

Hon. P. Collier: The "West Australian" explained it the other day.

Mr. PILKINGTON: Not how by such a tax we are to meet the present difficulties.

Mr. Holman: It would all help.

Mr. PILKINGTON: That is precisely the point of view I should like hon. members to note. When we shall have worked out the amount of taxation we can expect to get, we shall see what sort of deficit is to be expected next year, and see whether the taxation is sufficient. Unless every possible source of saving is made use of, this deficit will not be stopped. I am not attacking the Education Department. Let us assume that it is the finest in the world, and I still say we have not the money to spend on it. If we do not cut it down I fail to see how it is possible for the deficit to be met.

Mr. Thomson: By how much do you suggest it should be cut down?

Mr. PILKINGTON: Again I say it is impossible for an outsider to determine that without the assistance of the heads of departments. I only say, "Here is a vote which we know can be cut down." It may be that it should be cut down to the basis of reducing it to cover only primary schools. In order to find a satisfactory scheme of reduction a great many matters will have to be gone into which I do not know anything about.

Mr. Lambert: You would propose making education a close preserve.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I have no intention of doing so. My whole desire is this: if the education vote can be maintained and if we can at the same time meet the deficit, I do not ask that a penny of the education vote be taken. I only say that if we cannot meet the deficit without taking a part of this vote, we shall have to do it to carry through. If my contention is correct it will follow that some day we shall not have money for education or anything else. I would preserve some portion of the education vote to go on continuously, whereas I fancy some hon. members would say, "Keep it at the full strength at present," and when they found themselves, a few years hence, without funds they would then let it all go.

Mr. O'Loughlen: There are other departments.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I do not think there are any departments at all which ought not to occupy our attention. For instance, let us turn to the Railway Department. I am not able to say that in the Railway Department it is possible to make large economies or retrenchments. I suspect it is, but I am not able to say that it can be done, as I can say in the case of the Education Department. But the position of the Railways to-day is this: there is a loss expected during the present financial year of a sum approaching £400,000. The Railways are the largest receiving and spending department which the Government have to deal with. The problem which is presented by the Railways to-day is the most serious problem that any individual Minister has to deal with, and the sincerity of a Government can be judged to some extent by the manner in which they deal with that department. I ask the House does it indicate that the Government are seized of the importance of that problem and its difficulties, are seized of the importance of the question to the country, when they select to be Minister for Railways the hon. member for Yilgarn (Hon. C. A. Hudson). Against the member for Yilgarn I have not one word to say. He is a reputable member of an honourable profession to which I myself belong, but I do say that it is ridiculous to suggest that the member for Yilgarn was the best person that the Government could find to undertake the problem which faces the Minister for Railways. It is no reflection on the member for Yilgarn to say so. The same might be said of myself if I held the same position. But I do say that the sincerity of the Government can be judged by that appointment of Minister for Railways to face this problem. I ask hon. members can it be said that in the appointment of the member for Yilgarn the Government were actuated solely by the motive of finding a person who was most capable of dealing with this, the greatest problem which has to be dealt with by any individual Minister? I think, to that question there is but one answer. Indeed, if the Ministry were seriously dealing with this question, one would expect that the Minister for Railways, whoever he might be, would be recognised to have in that position sufficient to occupy the attention of one man. If the member for Yilgarn were the most capable man in Australia for the

position of Minister of Railways, then I venture to say it would be absurd to burden him with the further duties of Minister for Mines.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: You must remember that the Railways are under a special Act.

Mr. PILKINGTON: That is perfectly true, but what I am putting forward is that the problem which has to be dealt with by the Minister for Railways is the biggest problem that any individual Minister in the present Government is faced with, and I submit to the House that the manner in which that matter has been dealt with is not in accordance with the best interests of the State, and does not show a desire to deal with the matter in the best interests of the State. I say, in fact, the appointment was actuated by party considerations. When I say party considerations, I should like to let members understand that I do not speak of party as a thing which is in itself evil; for when party means that there is an association together of men for political purposes, men who are bound together by an honest and sincere political faith, then party is a good thing. However, the appointment of the member for Yilgarn was not based upon any consideration of any political faith.

Mr. Green: Are there not other Ministers who might be open to criticism as well?

Mr. PILKINGTON: There is no question about that. I have not selected the member for Yilgarn for criticism for any personal reason. I happen to have criticised him because he is put in charge of this, the greatest receiving and spending department of the Government, and because it appears to me that proper care in the making of such appointment was not exercised. That is the only reason why I have selected that Minister.

Hon. P. Collier: It was as bad, if not worse, to put the important Department of Agriculture under an Honorary Minister.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I must be allowed to point out that if I were to criticise the Government in detail I might detain hon. members a great deal longer than hon. members would like to be detained. I may say I am attempting to confine myself to those matters which concern the finances of the State, or are closely connected therewith; many matters to which I should otherwise refer I propose to pass over in silence. The next point I would consider has been already referred to this evening, namely, that of State enterprises. I refer to it in this connection: I am desirous of knowing what is the policy of the Government in connection with State enterprises. The matter is one which in my view at any rate is of very great importance. I am not attacking State enterprises, and never have done so, on the ground that they do not pay—the majority of them I believe do not pay—that is not the importance of the matter. The reason, I believe, why the majority of persons, who have a strong opinion on the matter, disapprove of State enterprises is this: we believe that the prosperity of a country necessarily depends upon the success of private individuals in business, and we also believe that when a State engages in business in competition with private individuals private enterprise is then choked. In other words, State enter-

prise when in competition with private enterprise tends to choke the prosperity of a country. That, put very shortly, is the political belief which I hold, and which I think most hon. members believe is sincere and which they see the reason of. No doubt I shall be told that I am raising here a controversial question. The answer is that a controversial question is not being raised by me; it is here. It is raised by the facts themselves. Here are State trading concerns in being, and the public and this House are entitled, I think, to know from the Government what their policy is with regard to them, one way or the other. Is it their policy to maintain these enterprises, or to get rid of them?

Mr. O'Loughlin: To maintain them.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I do not know whether the hon. member is right or wrong. Not long ago I introduced a deputation to the Premier, and the members of that deputation were desirous of knowing what the policy of the Government was. The Premier gave us a very long answer, and was followed by the Minister for Works, and we went away without knowing what the policy was. I am not criticising the Premier for his answer on that occasion, because I do not know whether the Attorney General had told him what the policy of the Government was. If he had not done so, the Premier, of course, would not know. Under these circumstances, the difficulty in which the Premier was placed is obvious.

The Minister for Works: You are entirely wrong there.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The Minister for Works told us that he was very strongly against State enterprises, but that he was going to carry them on. The Premier told us that he was always against State enterprises, and that he always would be against them, that we all knew what his views were, but still "at the same time," he said, in effect, "State enterprises are going to be carried on." We were told that whatever the policy of the Government was and whatever the Government thought—but what they thought they would not tell us—they were going to carry on these State enterprises exactly in the same way as if hon. members opposite were in charge of them.

Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): Quite right.

Mr. PILKINGTON: What we are entitled to know is, what is the policy of the Government? Are the Government in favour of the State enterprises or not? I can quite understand the Government saying, "We cannot put an end to them at the moment," but is it their policy to get rid of them or is it not?

The Premier: Now we are coming to it.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The Premier may like to say to one section of his supporters that it is the policy of the Government to carry on, and to another section that it is not their policy to do so, but the Government should have some definite policy upon a matter which is here in our midst. Let them say either that they are in favour of State enterprises or against them. This House and the public are entitled to have an answer to that question.

Hon. P. Collier: Is it their policy to sit upon the fence?

Mr. PILKINGTON: That is apparently what they are trying to do in this matter, and I am afraid it is extremely uncomfortable for them.

Mr. Lambert: And you are not likely to make it any more comfortable for them.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I was merely endeavouring to afford them a little assistance in the matter. There are many questions upon which I should like to have touched, but do not propose to speak upon them at this juncture because they do not immediately concern the State's finances. I have in mind, however, such a matter as the curious development of an elective Ministry.

Mr. Mullany: If you were in power, would you get rid of State enterprises at once?

Mr. PILKINGTON: If I had my way, I would tell the public that my policy was to get rid of them at the earliest possible opportunity. Of course, I would not throw them away.

The Minister for Works: That is what you were told by myself.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I am very glad that the Minister for Works has now explained what he had intended to say, but did not say. If he will look at the account of the interview, he will find that he did not say this at all. If it is the policy of the Government, as a Government, to get rid of the State enterprises at the earliest possible date, I am glad to hear it, and trust that they will show that they mean to do this by bringing in a Bill, which I think will be necessary, to enable them to dispose of them.

Member: Would you dispose of the Government railways?

Mr. PILKINGTON: It is true that the railways form a part of the State enterprises, but when I speak of State trading concerns or State enterprises I refer to those concerns which are in competition with private enterprises.

Mr. Munsie: The Midland Railway is a private enterprise.

Mr. PILKINGTON: There is one other matter to which I wish to refer, but which is connected comparatively remotely with the finances of this State, and that is a matter which was debated in the House when the Wheat Marketing Bill was before us some few weeks ago. This is a matter upon which I appeal to the Government to speak with a little more candour. I may have misapprehended what took place, and what I read in "Hansard." The Minister for Works tells me that I entirely misapprehended what he said the other day. At all events, the same misapprehension under which I have suffered was in the minds of others who were present, with the exception of the Premier who has not yet told me what he thought of it. The question to which I wish to refer is that of the Westralian Farmers, Ltd. There was a proposition put forward by hon. members opposite which appeared to me to be a very reasonable one. They said, "We want to know how it was that the zone system, which the Government had intended to recognise or to adopt, or had contemplated adopting, was abandoned." It was, in fact,

abandoned and the result was that the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., got the whole job.

Hon. P. Collier: We have had no explanation as to that yet.

Mr. PILKINGTON: My impression is that this House has had no explanation yet, but I am perfectly satisfied that there is a sound, simple, and good explanation available.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The members of the Country party know.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The explanation which was given by the Premier, who got up to explain, was that he had never given any undertaking that there should be a zone system. No one ever said he had done so; that was not the point. The point was, why was the zone system given up? It had never been entirely adopted, but clearly had been contemplated. It was, however, given up, and one company got the lot. I confess after all that has been said in the House, that if the man in the street goes away thinking that there is something odd about it, he is justified in the attitude he adopts. When I speak of the man in the street, I mean the general public, who have not had the advantage of hearing a private explanation between closed doors. The general public must be wondering what the explanation is. I believe the explanation to be an extremely simple one, and I trust I am right. I repeat, the zone system was contemplated. The Government considered, whether on representation or not I do not know, that as the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., was a farmers co-operative company, it was a fair thing that the farmers should have an opportunity of dealing with their own company, and consequently the Government said, "All right, we will not have the zone system. You can have the whole country, and the farmers can deal with the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., or the other firms." The other firms then said, "We will not come in." If that is the explanation, which I have gathered from various sources, then there is nothing wrong in what has been done except that the Government have surrounded the matter with a veil of mystery, for what reason I do not know.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: They could not go to another agent. They were compelled under the Act to go to the agent who was appointed.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The difference was this, that if the zone system was done away with and the whole of the country thrown open to the agents, then the farmers would be able to deal with their own company, the co-operative company.

Mr. Maley: Who suggested the zone system?

Mr. PILKINGTON: I do not know, and that point does not matter. The point that requires explanation, and upon which members opposite were asking for an explanation, was that the zone system had been contemplated and was then thrown up. What was the reason? That question was not answered.

Mr. Lambert: Do you attach any political significance to the matter?

Mr. PILKINGTON: No. I believe the thing to have been honest, straight-forward

and right, but I do complain that the Government threw a veil of mystery over it. I feel keenly about the matter, although I am not a Country party man or a Farmers and Settlers' Association man. I do, however, firmly believe that this co-operative movement in Western Australia amongst the farmers is a sound one. It is in fact a sound form of private enterprise, and if the Government would only keep their noses out of it the thing will be a success, as it has been a success elsewhere. If the Government put their noses into it, it will not be a success. If the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., have been or are at any time unfairly favoured by the Government, that will be the end of the co-operative movement. That movement will be damned for ever, and rightly so. What I have said about the Westralian Farmers, Ltd., is this, that I believe that the transaction between them and the Government was a perfectly straightforward, proper and right one. I cannot put the position plainer than that. I believe that the only thing that was wrong was that the Government allowed the transaction to be surrounded by mystery, and they have not given a clear explanation of the surrounding facts. I am not suggesting that there was anything wrong. On the contrary, I have suggested that everything was right. What I say is that if any Government try unfairly to assist any of these co-operative concerns, the concern must prove a failure; that if this co-operative movement relies upon the Government, seeks to be bolstered up with Government funds, it will fail. I believe in the co-operative movement so long, and so long only, as it remains a private enterprise, working out its own salvation. I have been endeavouring to explain why it is most important that the Government should not present proper actions in such a mysterious manner as to make those actions look wrong. The co-operative movement will depend for its success entirely on working out its own salvation.

The Minister for Works: I say the action of the Government has been straightforward and above board.

Mr. PILKINGTON: I am afraid that the Minister for Works, having been misunderstood by me, now seeks to get level by misunderstanding me. There are certain matters upon which I should like to understand the position of the Government. I have touched upon those matters, and they amount shortly to these: Do the Government recognise that the present rate of increase of the annual deficit, if not checked, must land the State in financial disaster? Do the Government recognise that the proposals so far made by them to check such increase, are inadequate? If the Government do not recognise that their proposals are inadequate, will the Government give the figures and estimates showing how such proposals are adequate? Do the Government believe they can put the finances of the State on a sound basis? If so, will the Government state how they propose to do so, giving figures and estimates showing the expected results? Have the Government formulated

any scheme for dealing with the present financial condition of the Railway Department? If so, what is it? Are the Government in favour of maintaining the State trading concerns or not? If the Government do not know the answer to this last question, will the Government say so?

Mr. Munsie: The Premier ought to ask you to give notice of those questions.

Hon. P. Collier: They are very pertinent, anyhow.

Mr. PILKINGTON: The Government have plenty of time in which to find the answers; and, if they give satisfactory answers to these questions, I shall be the most pleased man in this House. I should like to conclude by saying that if the Government will tackle the question of the finances vigorously, they will find no firmer or more loyal supporter in this House than myself, but that if they refuse to do so—and I confess that up to the present, with the exception, perhaps, of the Colonial Treasurer, they do not appear to me to have done so—I am bound to be their opponent in this House. For to me it is plain that any Government who, in the present crisis, sit in office and do not resolutely and purposefully deal with the financial question, are in office for the benefit of themselves and not in the interests of the State.

Mr. HARRISON (Avon) [S.20]: I am very pleased that members of this House have made an attempt to carry on the business of the State by means of a National Government. It is not the followers of the National Government who are at fault—if anyone is at fault—that the best men in this House are not on the Treasury bench or in the Cabinet. By the expedient of an elective Ministry, members on the Opposition side as well as members on this side had the opportunity of entrusting Ministerial portfolios to the men best qualified to promote the interests of the whole of the people of this State. It is a great pity, therefore, as regards not only Western Australia but also the Commonwealth, that the Opposition have seen fit to stand aside. If ever there was a time in the history of this State and of the Commonwealth when all parties should have joined hands for the uplifting of administration, this is the time, during the war. For three years past many members of this House have had that as an objective, and it ought to have been carried into effect. Let me point out that no section of the community can reap advantage at the expense of other sections without the whole community suffering. It is not for me to-day to plead for any particular section of our community. I merely point out that if one of the three great sections of Western Australia suffers, the other two are bound to suffer also. We cannot injure the industrial portion of our community—say, by placing upon them burdens greater than they can bear—without necessarily affecting primary energy and industrial energy and commercial energy. Three separate strands cannot possibly bear as heavy a weight as can the same three strands if solidly combined in a rope. And never has this State had to carry such a weight as it has to carry to-day. We speak of reducing

the deficit and of the Treasurer's duty in that connection. But is it possible for this State to meet its current obligations while from 30,000 to 40,000 of its best and most energetic citizens, men from 18 to 45 years of age, are away at the Front?

Hon. P. Collier: But an attempt can be made to prevent the State from drifting.

Mr. HARRISON: To that end we want the aid of gentlemen of the ability of the hon. member who has just interjected. The hon. member had the opportunity, but refused to avail himself of it; and it is not the fault of this side of the House if he is not on the Treasury bench administering. If Western Australia is to have the best that this tenth Parliament can give the people, we must be united in our efforts. Even if the best of our manhood were not away at the Front, there would still be the difficulty of meeting our current indebtedness, because we have not the outlet for our national energy—we have not the ships needed to carry the product of our energy to the markets of the world. It was not my intention to make a speech to-night. The leader of the Opposition declined to make a speech. There is, however, one specially important matter, one vitally important matter, which I desire to bring before hon. members. I could not move the adjournment of the House, though I believe the matter to be of such national weight as to warrant a motion for the adjournment in order to permit of its discussion. I refer to the position of the primary industries, and especially of agriculture, relatively to the rabbit danger. I am not going from the sublime to the ridiculous. Before I sit down I shall endeavour to make hon. members realise what the rabbit question really means. During the last 12 months the pest has developed to an extent not realised even by the farmers themselves. I want the Government to make every farmer with even one rabbit on his property realise what the danger is, not only to himself, but to the entire industry and to the State. The Country party want the Government to set to work immediately distributing poison all over Western Australia to the vermin boards and roads boards. Every farmer should be made to realise how much depends on his efforts in the first 14 days of February. During that fortnight every farmer with a rabbit on his property should be engaged on the destruction of that rabbit. We must have concerted action, right throughout every farm and every holding that carries a single rabbit. To-day on my property there are 20 rabbits where there was only one last year. Many farmers, in many districts, have lost hundreds of acres of crop. We have it that numbers of these farmers will not be able to continue, and this applies even to farmers whom the Industries Assistance Board are paying 9s. per day in order to keep them on their holdings. Even such men have been compelled to leave their properties on account of the rabbits. Between the two fences the pest is now so serious that unless we all go to work simultaneously it cannot be checked. Some farmers who to-day have a few rabbits on their properties think it is a good thing, and that

they will be able to get a few dinners off the rabbits, and that it will not matter. To-day they feel secure. But in the course of a few weeks they will lose their next season's crop by reason of the rabbits. The period suitable for successful poisoning is only short. Every day lost between now and the middle of February may mean the loss of many acres of crop next year. That is where the seriousness and extreme urgency of the matter lie. I suggest that the Government should within 24 hours get into communication with the various farming districts and centres, and send out poison all over the State. I suggest, further, that the farmers be advised through the "Government Gazette" that they must during, say, the first 14 days of February comply with the conditions of an Order-in-Council to be issued in this connection by the Minister for Lands. Unless these steps are taken, we shall not get the farmers to realise the seriousness of the position.

Mr. Maley: What about the rabbits on Crown lands?

Mr. HARRISON: There is no question that the Crown lands are the breeding grounds of the rabbits. But the rabbits congregate most where the most succulent feed is obtainable, and the most succulent feed is obtainable where the farmer cultivates the land and conserves the moisture. Throughout the salt lake districts, around the edges of the lakes, there is succulent feed to-day. The attention of the Government should in the first instance be directed to destroying the rabbits where the succulent feed exists. Attention should then be directed to the Government's own lands right throughout the State as far as it can possibly be done. There are not only the assets of the farmers to be considered, but the assets of the Industries Assistance Board, and the assets of the Agricultural Bank; and, further, the interests of our railway system are also menaced by the rabbit pest. If hon. members will go into the matter closely, and view it as it should be viewed, they will realise the immediate seriousness of the position. I have risen in order to bring the rabbit question before the House. I want the Government to take the matter in hand seriously without waiting even 24 hours. What are we to do? It is up to every one of us, no matter where he sits in this House, to do his level best for the State in this danger. I do not agree with the views expressed by the member for Perth (Mr. Pilkington) in regard to reducing the Education Vote. The one word for Western Australia to-day is efficiency, in whatever direction we can attain it. The present expenditure of the Education Vote may or may not be the best expenditure in the interests of Western Australia, but it is the very last vote we should reduce if that reduction is going to affect efficiency. The losses which have resulted from those who have gone to the front and not returned will have to be made up by our boys and girls; they will have to carry the weight of what is ahead of us. They will have to repay the whole of the military expenditure which we have incurred, and they will have to do not only that but they will have to keep the wheels of industry

moving, and they will have to bring up the succeeding generation, and if we are to keep our place in the world's markets, if we are to remain efficient, we cannot repudiate our obligations; we shall have to provide for our children the best means whereby they will be able to maintain a state of efficiency. We must, therefore, not neglect our primary, secondary and technical schools. We must do for the children of Western Australia the very utmost that is within our power, and not only in connection with education but in all other matters as well. As I pointed out three years ago, we want to modernise our departments, but, as the member for Perth declared, I am not here to show how the departments are to be modernised. We have brains in Western Australia capable of bringing about that improvement. An attempt has been made to do that in connection with some of our trading concerns. These have been brought into line with the trading concerns outside, and the nearer we get to the successful methods adopted elsewhere, the more efficient will those concerns become. It has been stated that there is only one method by which that can be done, and it is by the appointment of a board. We should get away from jealousies which exist.

Hon. T. Walker: Do you mean a board over the whole public service?

Mr. HARRISON: I dare say that would be a very good idea. If I remember correctly, I made a suggestion some years ago that a gentleman from one of the banking institutions should be appointed to conduct such an investigation into the service, and I pointed out that his salary would be saved in no time. The question of that expense would be nothing at all in comparison to the ultimate saving which would be effected. I am told that certain departments impose charges against other departments, whilst some departments do not make a charge at all for services rendered. Yet they receive money from the Treasury. How can we define the cost of government if one department makes a charge and another does not? I throw out the suggestion which I have just made as a means of overcoming the difficulty. We can also, by amalgamating departments, get more effective work done without duplicating that work and bringing about complications as well. In that way also we could save money and achieve better results. I would be very glad if that question, too, were tackled. We should do more than to preach economy; we should practise it. In this very Chamber we ask far too many questions across the floor of the House. If every question costs, in the aggregate, £10, members should see the wisdom of economising in that direction. Unless there is some matter which is really important to the State as a whole, and the answer to which is going to be of benefit, a question should not be asked with reference to it across the floor of this Chamber. I trust that this tenth Parliament of Western Australia will leave its mark and that we will get above trying to make political capital out of the other side. The people are sick and tired of this changing of policy after policy. Let us rise above the practices of the

past and do our best for the State and Empire.

Mr. GRIFFITHS (York) [8.36]: It was not my intention to speak on the Address-in-reply; I was going to follow the good example set by the leader of the Opposition because I felt, as he did, that it would be saving so much of the country's time and money. There are, however, one or two things which I desire to bring under notice, but which should not take more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. We have had laid before us in the past the policy of the Government I have the honour to support.

Hon. T. Walker: Honour?

Mr. GRIFFITHS: Honour. The fourth paragraph in the Speech refers to the question of repatriation. We have been away for two months engaged on the Referendum campaign, and whilst I say that we as a State can congratulate ourselves upon the result of our efforts, so far as the vote was concerned, there has been a grievous disappointment to many of us that the call to supply reinforcements for our men at the front has been turned down by the Eastern States.

Hon. T. Walker: That is not correct. Reinforcements and conscription are two different things.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: I do not desire to introduce anything of a controversial nature but I would like to mention that I have letters in my possession from my mother who describes to me the horrors of a Zeppelin raid over London when she, with many others, was forced to go into an underground tube and remain there from 8.30 in the evening until 2.30 next morning. In graphically describing what took place, she mentioned that in going out of the tube were to be seen mothers with babies in arms and two or three children dragging behind, and it was common to hear remarks such as this. "I hope to goodness they have not been in our street." Great hardships were inflicted upon women and children there. I have my son here now who, after nearly three years of service in the trenches, was attacked with trench fever and only had 10 days' leave when he was ordered back to the trench, only to be re-ordered back to the hospital. Is it small wonder that many of us feel strongly the neglect of Australia to supply reinforcements, so as to enable those brave men who have been fighting so long to get that rest which they need so badly. Had the hon. member who interjected the experience of going home and finding it in ruins, and perhaps his wife and children amongst the ruins, he would feel on this subject as strongly as I do.

Hon. T. Walker: How do you know I have not had it.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: I am judging by the interjection.

Hon. T. Walker: My interjection was that you were confusing the two things.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: I am not going to be taken off the track. If we do not send men to assist those at the front, it is certainly up to us to do the best we can for them when they return here. I am not going to deal with the Nornalup Inlet scheme, and in regard to the

Riverton Estate, I understand that has been turned down. The Subiaco poultry farm has been dealt with at length by the member for Albany but in that connection I would point out that if we are going to have poultry farmers it should be remembered that, in this town to-day, eggs are being sold at 7½d. a dozen, in contrast with 1s. 9d. and 1s. 10d. at other times. We are suffering under disabilities which other countries have experienced when establishing industries of this sort, and we should provide cool storage. I have asked a question with regard to cool storage, and it is not only eggs that we have to think about but the increase of stock in the near future. The Government will shortly be approached in regard to a certain proposition which is going to be put forward on the subject of cool storage and the method of handling. With regard to the Butcher estate at Beverley, one has not heard anything about it so far, but I believe the member for Beverley will have something to say in regard to it. We have a fine area of land there which was purchased by the Government some time back. It is within reasonable distance of the railway line and is on the banks of the Avon, and also no great distance from the metropolis. In July, 1916, we were told by the then Minister for Works that it was the policy of the Government to cut up the Yandanooka estate, that it was intended to extend settlement blocks at Harvey, Bridgetown, Mount Barker and the fertile gullies of the Darling Ranges, and that it was also proposed to train returned soldiers as poultry farmers, vignerons, and orchardists, while for those who knew nothing at all about such things, arrangements would be made whereby they would be trained at technical and other schools. What I want to know is whether that policy has been carried out and, if so, to what extent. I understand that the matter has already been placed before the Minister for Education and the Attorney General. I would like to read a paragraph to show what is being done in connection with repatriation in Canada.

Mr. Green: I notice you have been getting a lot of correspondence from there lately.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: That correspondence points to the direction in which we should devote our energies. A select committee was appointed in Canada to inquire into the condition of the returned soldiers and it was felt that they were not being attended to in the manner that was expected. The result of the inquiry was laid before the House of Commons in Ottawa, and it was shown that it came out in evidence that there had been appointed a Dominions military hospital commission, which, acting in conjunction with the Soldiers' Aid commission, and the Education Department, had brought about what I am going to read. I have already laid this before the Minister for Education and the Attorney General, and it is as well for the House to hear it. Whether there is anything in it or not is for members to say.

The Attorney General: It is very valuable information; you read it to the House.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: The member for Albany (Mr. H. Robinson) has said that he is quite willing to offer his services to the Government

in whatever capacity he can be of use, and I am not only willing to offer any small ability that I have to the Government, but I am willing to give them all the work which I have done and the information which I have gathered, and which I am told by the Attorney General is valuable. The extract which I wish to read is as follows:—

By an Act of the Legislature, the Soldiers' Aid Commission of Ontario was empowered to provide specially for the vocational education of returned soldiers. The Commission has appointed Mr. W. W. Nichol as vocational officer to take charge of this department of vocational education. He is working in harmony with the Dominions Military Hospitals Commission, and the Ontario Department of Education. He is studying the needs of the men in the military convalescent hospitals and is making provision to meet those needs either through individual or class instruction in the hospitals themselves or through attendance at classes in commercial, technical, or other schools already established. Roughly, the work undertaken may be classified under the following heads:—(1) Education in elementary and commercial subjects and light shop work in wood and metal undertaken by convalescent patients for therapeutic reasons. (2) Education for convalescent patients for improvement in academic, commercial, and industrial branches. (3) Re-education for soldiers so disabled by their military service that they cannot return to their former vocations. Such men are given training for new occupations suited to their condition and capacity.

There are four centres in which hospital schools have been started. In Toronto schools have been started in connection with hospitals, and in addition to the hospital classes the technical schools are made free for the use of the soldiers. In Hamilton elementary and commercial instruction is given in a classroom in the convalescent hospital, and soldiers attend the Hamilton technical school for instruction in mechanical drawing, machine shop practice, workshop mathematics, and electricity. In Ottawa all instruction is given in the hospital classes, and in London classes are formed in the convalescent hospitals for instruction in elementary and commercial subjects and soldiers attend the London industrial school for instruction in many subjects. At the end of January, 1917, 454 returned soldiers enrolled in the various vocational classes in military convalescent hospitals throughout the province. This particular phase of the question I emphasise, and whilst I admit a great deal is being done, I believe the gentlemen controlling the department here are making special efforts to deal with the question. Even from a health point of view it is a matter of importance. It assists these men to recover. The health authorities and the doctors have reported that the reading of these subjects has been of assistance to these soldiers in recovering. Instead of the men reading light literature, they have something to occupy their attention and it helps them along. I have ventilated what I intended in connection with this question. Before I sit down I should like

to mention a matter on which the Attorney General has been very active. I refer to our natural resources. The platform of the National party includes developmental research. I do not wish to dwell at length on that particular phase of the matter, but apart from our exports of what we produce there are many things which, as the Attorney General has recently very pointedly advocated, the utilisation of many things which might be taken in hand. Although we have a committee with whom we have shelved the responsibility for the time being, as it were, still if we take an interest in research and the utilisation of our natural resources we shall be doing something. The Agricultural Commission recently reported that in this State up to the end of June last year £1,202,390 worth of products were imported, which we could have produced in our agricultural areas. It is time we woke up and did something. I wish to say a word or two in regard to dispensing with the services of experts in this State. In regard to the abolition of the office of Dr. Stoward, a mistake has been made. As has been pointed out, Dr. Stoward knew a great deal in regard to poison plants. He knew more than anyone in the Commonwealth, and I think a mistake was made in dispensing with a man of his ability. As far as Dr. Stoward is concerned, it has been a good move, because he is likely to get a much higher appointment with the Commonwealth Government, who know a good man when they see him. In the matter of dispensing with Mr. Connor, I should like to say that I think an error has been made. Last year we imported in jams, jellies, currants and raisins, and in bran, lard, eggs, butter, cheese, and milk £882,170 worth, and I think Mr. Connor was doing good work and assisting in the production of these goods in this State. I have heard conflicting reports about his ability, but the little experience I have had in taking him around the country and from what I have heard from people who knew him in Victoria, he is a man of practical experience. People have said that he is not a practical man, but from listening to his lectures he appeared to be very practical. The only fault I had to find was that he was a little long-winded in his lectures, but I put that down to his enthusiasm. A final word in regard to the reorganisation of the service, and the matter of economy. When the Government bring forward their proposals no doubt something will be said in regard to the housing of the public service. It is extraordinary the manner in which the public offices are dotted over the city. We have the Public Works Department just below this building. Then there is the vacated Education Department building, and a house has been taken at a rental of £550 a year to accommodate the officers of the Education Department. Coming to the A.M.P. Society building, the Government pay a rental of £1,020 for offices there. The previous Government threw up a nine-months' lease of offices in Emanuel's Buildings to take the offices in the A.M.P. Buildings. Then there is the Public Service Commissioner's office, for which £300 per

annum is paid. Then we come to what I call a rabbit warren at the G.P.O. We have there a place eminently adapted for loafing. It is filled with narrow passages and tortuous ways. Then there is the Agricultural Department across the road in St. George's-terrace, and there are buildings in Irwin-street, but I think they have now been curtailed. It used to be the Labour Bureau. Then in Hay-street there is the Mines Department. The Charities Department is housed in a building in Murray-street, where is also situated the Colonial Secretary's Office. If a person wishes to pay his water rate he can go to the end of James-street, and then along Wellington-street to the Taxation Department. The Forestry Department is in Cathedral-avenue. As a man pointed out to me the other day, one requires a black tracker and a map to find some of the departments in this city. No doubt members will ask what I propose should be done. I say that the service should be housed in modern buildings built on modern lines, with all the departments open for public inspection. Someone interjected that I would spend over £200,000 or £300,000 on public offices, but we have the Federal Department vacating the Post Office building in a very short time because the new post office is nearing completion, and then we shall have to take over the old post office. I am sure the Treasurer would be able to finance offices with a very little expenditure. I shall not detain the House longer. It is up to us to do what we can to develop our resources. The advice of the Science Advisory Committee should be followed, and we should assist the Government by all the means in our power. The member for Albany has offered to give what assistance he can to the Government. Every member of the House can make himself a sort of vigilance committee by giving the Advisory Committee any information that he has in his possession. I have been able to lay before the Colonial Treasurer certain facts which I hope will be of assistance to him. There is a road 30 miles long which has been duplicated at Baandee. Enough money has been spent over that road in duplicating it so that one can go up the eastern side to Baandee and then go to Kununoppin if one wants to change by going down on the western track.

Mr. PICKERING (Sussex) [9.0]: Probably there are very few members who, when on the hustings, did not give some indication of what actuated them in seeking the suffrages of the electors. Two of the reasons to which I attribute my appearance in the House are, firstly, the desire to win the war, and, secondly, a proper scheme of repatriation. Repatriation is a subject we have to consider very seriously, because it represents promises we gave to those men who have gone to take the responsibility of fighting our battles. I regret that I should have to speak to-night, because there are several questions to Ministers, notice of which I gave to-day, and to which I would have liked answers before addressing myself to the House. In respect of repatriation I have previously asked several questions of Ministers, the

replies to which, I regret to say, were not at all satisfactory to me; and if not satisfactory to me, not vitally interested in those questions, how can they be satisfactory to those men to whom we held out repatriation as an inducement to go and fight our battles? In one question I asked the Minister in charge what provision had been made in respect of the industrial phase of repatriation; and the reply was to the effect that nothing had been done in regard to the industrial and general aspect of that important question. We are now in the fourth year of the war, and at the date when the first soldiers left our shores it became incumbent on the Minister in charge to deal with the question of ways and means of providing for returned soldiers; yet to-day the Minister tells us that nothing has been done.

The Attorney General: Who was the Minister?

Mr. PICKERING: The hon. member replied to the question; he had control of it at that time. Then, when we come to the land aspect of repatriation, I would ask anyone who has seen the scheme formulated by the Minister to say if he thinks there is in that scheme any advantage over the inducements for land settlement held out to ordinary immigrants. I have looked very carefully through the Minister's scheme, and found only one advantage to the returned soldier, namely, that he is to get his money at a lower rate of interest when he first goes on the land. The rate he will be asked to pay is $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., which will be increased by one half per cent. per annum until it attains the normal rate of interest. Is that the proper way in which to deal with the question? I have asked for a return showing the land being made available for these soldier settlers, but that return has not yet been laid on the Table. If the idea of the Government is to use the returned soldiers as a means of developing unimproved country, it is an iniquitous proposition; because anyone who has taken up virgin country in the remoter areas knows the heart-breaking task awaiting such settlers. The House should be ashamed of such a proposition. At a previous sitting I asked would the Minister in charge be prepared to consider the advisability of making a 50 per cent. free grant of the loan of £500 suggested as a basis of the scheme. The answer was that the money was financed by the Commonwealth, that the State was not able to finance it. I think a fitting reward for the returned men would be to give them that special concession under the conditions I laid down in the question I submitted to the Minister. If the Commonwealth Government cannot find it in their hearts to treat these men generously, it is up to the State Government to try to evolve some means of coming to their assistance. At least it should be possible for the State to give to the returned soldiers the land at the expiration of a period of occupancy, and on the completion of certain specified improvements. If the Minister in charge is not broad-minded enough to grasp that view, he falls very much short of the estimate in which I have held him. There have been

several suggestions as to the class or description of land to be made available to returned soldiers and sailors. One is that agricultural properties which have been abandoned should be included. But there must be some reason why those properties were abandoned, and I contend that in the majority of instances they were abandoned because the men who held them found it impossible to make a living on them.

The Attorney General: Returned soldiers are not being placed on such properties.

[Mr. Stubbs took the Chair.]

Mr. PICKERING: Again, there are certain regulations under which the operations of the Agricultural Bank are conducted. I believe it will be necessary to amend the Act governing the bank in order to make the more desirable of these abandoned properties attractive to returned soldiers and sailors. For instance, I believe the Agricultural Bank cannot wipe out any accumulation of interest or any loans on a property. It would be absurd to ask soldiers to take up properties heavily burdened by debt, or properties the improvements on which had lapsed.

The Attorney General: We are not asking them to do so.

Mr. PICKERING: There is nothing in the scheme to suggest anything to the contrary. When reading this proposed scheme it seemed to me that the interests of the returned soldiers and sailors had not been conserved at all; the idea seemed rather to conserve the interests of the State Government and of the property offered to the returned soldiers. There are in the scheme numerous safeguards protecting the Government, while one can search in vain for provisions devised in the interests of the men. One of the main things that should actuate the Government in the drafting of such a scheme is the interests of the men themselves. I am strongly opposed to the sending of any of these returned men to remote districts. Personally, I think the only land that should be made available for returned soldiers and sailors is the best land the State has at its disposal in juxtaposition to existing railway lines. There should be no element of doubt as to the possibility of any of these settlers making good on the land, provided he is a bona fide earnest worker. We have had before us a Utopian suggestion known as the Riverton scheme. With the member for Wagin (Mr. Stubbs) I was shown over a portion of the Riverton estate, and together we arrived at the conclusion that so much of it as we saw was not fit to be recommended for settlement by returned soldiers. I refer exclusively to the portion of the estate which I saw. It seems to me that the scheme enunciated by Lieutenant Williams had its origin in unjustifiable optimism. Every lot occupied by a returned soldier or sailor should have within itself the possibilities of his making good, whereas a block of the Riverton estate would be far too heavily loaded.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Why is the land unfit for the purpose?

Mr. PICKERING: Because it is not good enough.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: The stuff grown out there is pretty good.

Mr. PICKERING: I have had considerable experience of land of that nature, and I say that what I saw of the estate is worthless. There may be good land there, but I did not see it.

Hon. P. Collier: Did the hon. member view the land from a launch on the river?

Mr. PICKERING: No, I landed and went over a portion of the estate.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Some of the settlers there are making £600 a year.

Mr. PICKERING: I am speaking from my own personal knowledge of such land. I landed at Point Henry and crossed over the sand hills on to some plains behind it. I went some three-quarters of a mile through that estate, and what I saw was quite enough. I must say that I was told it was the worst part of the estate. Recently at Harvey I saw an area being cleared for the settlement of soldiers. The district is a first class one, and I am told that a portion of it held by the Government constitutes the best in the district. But that particular land has not been thrown open for the soldiers.

The Attorney General: All the land there is available for soldiers.

Mr. PICKERING: The area already cut up is, I can say from my own knowledge, some of the worst in the district. If that is the spirit actuating those in charge of this scheme, it is altogether a wrong one and inimical to the best interests of the soldiers. Still on the subject of repatriation, we come to the question of boards. In the scheme we find the names of certain gentlemen appointed to the boards dealing with the returned soldiers. One of the questions I asked the Minister was, would he favourably consider the placing on the board of a nominee of the Farmers and Settlers' Association. The answer the Minister gave was entirely unsatisfactory, and even evasive. We find that the board consisted of Mr. F. S. Brockman, the Surveyor General, now deceased, Mr. C. E. Lane Poole, Mr. C. G. Morris, Mr. A. G. Hewby, Mr. G. L. Sutton, and Mr. J. F. Moody, and Mr. J. M. B. Connor, both of whom have now been retrenched.

The Attorney General: You ought to read your paper. That board went out of existence a month ago.

Mr. PICKERING: Then the Minister should have considered the question I placed before him of putting a practical man upon the board from the Farmers and Settlers' Association.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: All the practical men are not in that association.

Mr. PICKERING: At all events we are certain of finding a man in that association who is fully competent to deal with the soldiers and sailors settlement scheme. On another board we have Mr. John Robinson, Mr. A. McLarty, and Major J. T. Milner. Major Milner is a member of the Returned Soldiers' Association, Mr. McLarty is assistant general manager of the Agricultural Bank and a member of the Industries Assistance Board, and

Mr. Robinson is put down as a practical farmer.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: And a good man, too.

Mr. PICKERING: I do not know anything about the other two men from a farming point of view, but first and foremost they are Government officials. On a board of this nature there is at least room for a representative of a reputable body such as the Farmers and Settlers' Association. I am at a loss to understand why the Minister should decline such a reasonable request. Whilst I am a member of this Chamber I am going to watch very closely the repatriation scheme. It is the duty of the Minister to see that every endeavour is used to have investigations made as to the best places available for the settlement of our returned soldiers and sailors. Every district should have an opportunity of offering of its best for this purpose and every district should be served fairly. With regard to the south-west portion of the State, I should like to draw attention to part of the Premier's policy speech which reads—

While in past years the energies of all Governments have been devoted to encouraging settlement and fostering production in the wheat-growing areas last year's crop of over 18,000,000 bushels of wheat has amply justified the energy and capital expended. We now feel that the time has arrived when our attention should be more closely directed to and centered upon the development of the South-West, that fair province in which we have, with an assured rainfall, an area larger than the whole of Victoria, a soil rich and productive, and a climate second to none in Australia. While the appearance of past neglect may be a matter for some regret, it is the intention of my Government to devote its energies in the direction of bringing about closer settlement and intense culture.

What has been the subsequent action of the Government with regard to the South-West?

The Premier: The people are not here yet.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: And are not likely to be for a while.

Mr. PICKERING: The policy of the Government has been that of retrenching the men who were appointed in order to develop the South-West and to fill their positions with a wheat expert.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That is right to the point.

Mr. PICKERING: Mr. Sutton, the wheat expert, may be an excellent man in connection with wheat, but I defy any one man to be everything, though he may think that of himself. As the Government have dispensed with the services of Mr. Connor and Mr. Moody their positions should be filled by men whom the Government may deem to be better fitted for them than those whose services they have just dispensed with. I asked a question this afternoon with regard to the Busselton butter factory, which is one of the oldest established butter factories in Western Australia.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: They used to have a lot of Victorian butter boxes down there.

Mr. PICKERING: That may have been so in the past but it is not the case to-day. This

factory has been struggling along for many years, and until the Labour Government took the question in hand the factory was languishing. When, however, Mr. W. D. Johnson took control of the department connected with the butter-making industry, the tide changed and prosperity came in, and the factory began to go ahead by leaps and bounds. What do we find is the attitude of the Honorary Minister (Hon. C. F. Baxter)? If the statement which I placed before the House to-day in the form of a question is true, the Honorary Minister contemplates shutting down this factory. Mr. Baxter may be an excellent man in connection with wheat, a matter which I do not pretend to understand myself.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: He appears to have a very poor judgment on that matter judging from what he said the other day.

Mr. PICKERING: He has shown that he knows nothing whatever about butter or bacon factories, and if it is his intention to close down these factories I am very much against him.

Hon. P. Collier: They pulled his leg in Bunbury.

Mr. PICKERING: I should like to know who did the leg pulling. From the figures I gave to the House, there appears to be every indication that the butter industry is improving in the South-West. Seeing that the Premier prefaced his policy speech by the words "produce, produce, produce" we surely expect the Government, of which he is the head, to help us in our endeavour to produce, and not to check us with the threat of shutting down such works as the Busselton butter factory. With regard to the Brunswick State farm and the grubbing of the orchard, the Honorary Minister (Mr. Willmott) claims to be a practical orchardist, and to know something about the growing of fruit for profit. I do not know anything about his knowledge as an orchardist, and do not claim to be an expert myself. There is no doubt, however, that before such a step as grubbing this orchard was taken the Honorary Minister should have given the members representing that part of the State an opportunity of expressing their views upon such an important question.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Mr. Grasby settled that all right.

Mr. PICKERING: Mr. Grasby is not infallible. We have seen a great deal of correspondence in the Press with regard to the Brunswick orchard, and the remarks which have appeared in the newspapers condemning the hasty and ill-considered action of the Honorary Minister were well merited. I do not know what the orchard has cost, and put the question I did to-day in the hope of getting this information. It is evident, however, that the orchard was laid down at considerable cost. I have the views of expert fruit men who told me that they saw the orchard a few months ago, and that it was showing great prospects of ultimate profitable development. I asked whether the disease "die-back" affecting the trees in the orchard was peculiar to the Brunswick area. I know, however, that it is not peculiar to that area, and that the presence of such a disease gives no justification

for the grubbing of an orchard. If the State is to be depleted of an asset of such a valuable nature as this orchard without the approval of the members of the districts concerned, or the knowledge of the House, then it is a matter for grave condemnation. I believe that the orchard was planted $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $5\frac{1}{2}$ years ago, and that there was every indication of its coming into early profitable bearing. I asked the question whether the Honorary Minister had considered any alternative for grubbing the orchard, but I am still awaiting an answer. I also asked whether he had considered if the orchard could be leased at a profit. We have had the statement in the paper that it could have been leased for £300 a year. If it had been leased for nothing it would have been a good thing for the State, because such conditions could have been attached to the lease as would have meant the proper control and maintenance of the orchard. The Government have spent a great deal of money in obtaining every kind of fruit tree imaginable with which to furnish the orchard, even going to the length of bringing trees from France in order to establish there different varieties to serve as a demonstration as to what trees were most profitable. The Honorary Minister condemned Mr. Moody because he treated the whole of the orchard in the same manner. In my opinion that is the more to Mr. Moody's credit, because if he had treated different parts of the orchard in a different manner from other parts, we should not have had established a knowledge as to what were the best trees for the district.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Do you not think there is something political in this?

Mr. PICKERING: I should not like to say what my real thoughts are in this matter. One thing I believe is certain, and that is that when a man gets a portfolio he also gets a swelled head.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: In some instances.

Mr. PICKERING: Yes. No Honorary Minister should have it in his power to destroy an orchard of 40 acres without first consulting his Government. We are led to believe that he went down there, and before leaving set men on to grub the orchard. That is a disgrace to the State. Here is a valuable experiment destroyed at one fell swoop by an Honorary Minister, and that is certainly not as it should be. I now come to the question of the railways as affecting the South-West. I have introduced deputations to the Honorary Minister in that connection. We have suffered from a depleted railway service and are now threatened with increased railway freights. How are we to develop this country if the railway service is to be decreased, and freights are demanded which those engaged in industries along the railways cannot afford to pay? The Honorary Minister said he would be glad of advice. He has had the advice of the "West Australian," and advice from the Farmers and Settlers' Association and many other sources, and that advice is to effect the transference of the sinking fund and interest of the railways to Consolidated Revenue. Consolidated

revenue is practically non-existent, but there are means of raising money by an unimproved land tax or by increasing the income tax, or both, for the purpose of finding money for consolidated revenue. If the railways are to be treated as they should be in a broad-minded manner the Commissioner must be given an opportunity of running them on a broad basis. He must, of course, make them pay, and if he is not able to transfer the incidence of sinking fund and interest the only thing left for him to do is to cut down the service and put up the freights.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: During the holidays matters were in a disgraceful condition on the Busselton line.

Mr. PICKERING: That is so. Women and children were crammed into the carriages in a disgraceful manner, and there was no proper lavatory accommodation for them. This state of things was commented upon by Mr. Justice Northmore and the Police Magistrate of Perth. The service on the Boyanup-Busselton line has certainly justified an increase in the number of trains, but in spite of my continually bringing this question before the Minister for Railways on every conceivable occasion I can get no satisfaction. I want the trains to be shown on the time tables, and not to be run without anyone having the opportunity of knowing that they are running. Reasonable facilities should be afforded to the farmers to profit by the summer trade, and to get their products to market at the lowest possible freights. I hope that when the question comes up on the Estimates hon. members will see that no iniquitous proposition is authorised. Touching briefly on the finances, I agree with other members who have spoken to-night that this House is faced with the biggest responsibility that has ever fallen on any Parliament of this State. I am confident that every member has at heart the interests of the State from a financial point of view. Various hon. members have spoken on the financial question, but none has thrown out any valuable suggestion for the use of Ministers. I, as a new member, and as a member representing a country district, am, perhaps, not in a position to offer many, if any, suggestions. But I feel sure that the combined wisdom of the House will, in the course of time, evolve some means by which we shall remedy the finances and bring down the deficit. It is our bounden duty to do so. We must recognise that we are living in abnormal times, and that we must cut our coats according to our measure. It is no use thinking that we can to-day live as extravagantly as we did in the day of plenty. We must reduce our expenses and simplify our modes of living. I feel certain the Government will have the cordial support of every member when the question of finance comes before the House. If only the Government are reasonable in dealing with the various questions, the support they will get will be such as to assist them to remedy the position. I am not going, like the member for Gascoyne (Mr. Angelo), to offer my services to the Treasurer.

Hon. P. Collier: You might offer your services to the Honorary Minister controlling the Agricultural Department.

Mr. PICKERING: Perhaps I could do so with advantage to that department.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. R. T. Robinson—Canning) [9.33]: I think the member for Sussex (Mr. Pickering) is not quite aware of the exact position which this State finds itself in with regard to the repatriation question. We as a State are not charged with the whole of the industrial and social side of the repatriation work. I often think I wish we were; but the point I wish to make clear to the hon. member is that the Commonwealth Government themselves have undertaken to look after the repatriation of our soldiers and sailors, leaving to the various States only the settlement on the land of returned soldiers and sailors. So that what one might call the industrial side—which, by the way, we might well undertake in this State—is at present a function carried out by the War Council, pending the appointment under the Commonwealth Repatriation Act of a committee referred to in that measure.

Mr. Pickering: What is being done in the meantime?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Repeated statements have been made on that point by the War Council. These statements have appeared so frequently in the public Press, that I am surprised the hon. member is not aware of the position. About a fortnight ago the War Council published a statement showing the number of men they had settled in industrial pursuits. Speaking from memory, out of 1,432 applicants they had settled 1,380, leaving only about 40 or 50 remaining to be provided with positions.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: But a lot of those men have been out of employment again.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I am personally aware of a case where the War Council have found a particular man—I could give the name and the address—four different billets; and the last billet he was in I know he might have had for months, or even to the present day, had he chosen. I agree with the member for Sussex that the provision which this State is able to make for the returned soldier to go on the land is inadequate to fulfil what I consider, and what the hon. member considers, to be due to men who have made so great sacrifices for us. But the question is one of ways and means. I myself would love to deal with every returned soldier wanting to go back on the farm, so freely that it would be his for ever. I would love to give him a competency. Let hon. members only furnish the Government with the necessary funds. Perhaps some of the learned gentlemen who have spoken to-night will find the funds. Then the Government will do the rest.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: It is for the Government to bring down a proposition.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: How can the Government find four millions? It is ridiculous. I do not see how the funds can be obtained. There is no Government in Australia could finance such a scheme. No

Australian State is providing a more liberal scheme for its soldiers than that of Western Australia. I am familiar with Eastern States, New Zealand, and Canadian schemes, and not one of them does more than we are doing.

Hon. P. Collier: The Queensland Government are doing more for the returned soldier than any other Government.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: It is a matter of opportunity. But, as a matter of fact, when we come to analyse what has been done in Western Australia for returned men, it must be owned that we have done well.

Hon. P. Collier: But we have done nothing of a permanent nature. I do not blame the Government. It is the fault of the Commonwealth for not finding the money.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I wish to illustrate the settlement side as distinct from the industrial side. I am Minister for Industries, and I do not wish to be blamed for not having settled these men in industrial pursuits. I have no more to do with that than has the member for Sussex. Again, the member for Sussex mentioned abandoned properties. Properties are classed as abandoned for many reasons. If they are abandoned for the reason of worthlessness, they are worthless, and the department would not give them to anybody. But there is many and many a property to-day in the hands of the Agricultural Bank solely because the man owning it went straight into the firing line and handed the property over to the bank.

Mr. H. Robinson: You ought to keep it for him. It is your duty to do so.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: It is all very well to say that. I can give the names and positions of numbers of farms which have been thrown on the hands of the Industries Assistance Board and the Agricultural Bank, where it is impossible to get anybody to look after them. Such an instance as I am now about to give is quite a common one—I could furnish the name and address. A particular farmer was indebted to the Industries Assistance Board but was in quite a good position. He decided to go to the war, and went into camp. He did not tell the board anything about this, but made arrangements with a neighbour to look after his farm in his absence on particular terms. He reported to the board accordingly. After he had gone an inspector went in the ordinary way to see what was being done on the farm. The neighbour told the inspector, "I undertook to keep an eye on the farm, but I cannot find the time to do it, and I am not going to do it." And he did not do it. Now, that farm is quite a good one, and there are many such.

Mr. Pickering: Are you going to forfeit that farm?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: No such farms have been forfeited. They are what is called abandoned. They are what the member for Sussex calls abandoned. In many cases, where a farm which has only been taken up for a short time is let go, or abandoned, or the owner leaves it for, say, a couple of years, the suckers and scrub will

grow up to such an extent that the land will cost almost as much to clear as in the first instance. In such cases—and there are many such cases—it is surely better to give the returned soldier who had the farm originally, his choice of going on to another property. And that is being done. Properties which I prefer to call Agricultural Bank properties, and which are good, and there are many of them, are being taken up again by other settlers, or by returned soldiers. I published the figures last week, and I think I am right in saying that eleven have been taken up by soldiers after inspection, and that negotiations are proceeding in respect of eleven similar properties which are now being inspected. Additional negotiations are pending for 30 or 40 other properties. So that consideration has been given to returned soldiers as regards farms. One other thing I wish to say in connection with repatriation. Two or three hon. members seem to have got it into their minds that returned soldiers have to run the gauntlet of several boards.

Mr. H. Robinson: So they have; two boards.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: If ordinary members know more about the subject than I as Minister do, I had better sit down. There are not two boards. Hon members might as well say that Queen Anne is not dead. Two months ago there were two boards. The reason there were two boards was this: We wanted one board to deal with the qualification pure and simple of the soldier. That should be a small board, containing a practical farmer, such as John Robinson, a returned soldier, such as Major Milner, and a member of the Industries Assistance Board, who would, of course, be a farming man, too, Mr. McLarty. That was a very good board, and a better one could not be found in the country. The function of this qualification board, as it was called, was to see that the men to whom advances were to be made, who were to be placed on the farms, understood the business of farming. For it would be the most foolish thing ever done to place a soldier on a farm away in the country if he did not know anything about farming. That would be the most expensive way in the world to teach him. Therefore, only such men were placed on farms as passed that board. Then we had another board called the land board. The object of that board—they were only in existence for about six or seven weeks—was indeed a good one. It was impossible for Ministers new to office to ascertain within a few minutes in the vast ramifications of the Government departments, all the lands that were available and suitable for soldier settlement. So as to avoid the passing of applications from one department to another, say, from the Lands Department to the Forestry Department for the purpose of ascertaining if the latter had any objection, or to the Works Department in order to ascertain whether there was any objection from a water supply point of view, and so on—I conceived the idea, which was approved by Cabinet, of having an expert officer from each one of these departments, half a dozen in all, and letting them, in conjunction with

the Surveyor General and the officers of the Lands Department, go through all the Government lands available for settlement, classify them, and decide on those which were suitable for soldier settlement. The soldier never had to go before that board at all. It was a board to collect information and to determine what lands were suitable and what were not. That board fulfilled its functions when it was decided to appoint a special repatriation officer in the person of Mr. Surveyor Camm. The board then automatically ceased; its work had finished. The information was all collected, it is in the Lands Department, and Mr. Camm is in charge of the repatriation office, and any soldier who goes to him is shown what farms are available, and full explanations are given. The soldier, therefore, has not to run the gauntlet of any boards. This statement which I have just made has also appeared in the Press. I want to clear up another thing, and it is to express to members the differences in the activities, or rather the duties of the Lands Department and the Industries Assistance Department. The Industries Assistance Department has within its borders the Agricultural Bank and the Industries Assistance Board. The Agricultural Bank is the Government banking institution, with many trained men on its staff. These men are accustomed to dealings in connection with land, and there are also a number of inspectors who are capable of helping those soldiers likely to settle on the land. It was therefore decided that the financial operations of the repatriation scheme should be conducted by the Government bank with the aid of its own machinery and its trained staff.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Where does the money come from?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: That is another question; it is to be provided by the Commonwealth Government, but we have not stopped repatriation because the Commonwealth Government have failed in their duty to find the money.

Mr. Pickering: Sir John Forrest says it is available.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: We shall know all about it when the Treasurer returns from Melbourne. The financial question is not one that we need bother about now, because the Treasurer will tell us all about it in the course of a few days. But we are continuing to finance soldiers, and we are finding the money, although we have not received a copper from the Commonwealth Government.

Mr. Pickering: The conditions under which you are advancing the money are identical with the conditions in connection with ordinary settlement.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: No settler in the country is getting the amount which is being advanced to returned soldiers. The ordinary settlers' advances are limited. I would like to be able to make a free gift of the £500 to the soldiers, but that cannot be done. As I have stated, there is a fine set of trained men in the Agricultural Bank, and those men are principally in the wheat areas. We in the Industries Department, not having trained officers, say for irrigation at Harvey

nor for market gardening and the like in the metropolitan area, nor for the various schemes that might be put forward in the south-west, it was decided to divide the scheme of responsibility in two ways. The Lands Department it was decided should take the sole responsibility for administering the scheme in the south-west and the metropolitan area, and to attend to what I call the fathering of the men, showing them what to do, to be continually at their sides and instructing them in the development of their places on right lines. For instance, if a man takes up an irrigation farm he wants to set about his work with a fixed plan. Now take the other side. He makes use of the Agricultural Bank and its officers. The control and responsibility, however, will rest with the Lands Department, so that we know that one Minister will be responsible to the soldiers and to this House. They, however, have not the machinery of banking and finance in the Lands Department, and it was considered unwise to create such a department there. It was therefore determined that the Agricultural Bank should do the financing for the Lands Department on a purely book-keeping principle, and the bank will pay on the certificates which will be issued.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: That is outside the powers of the bank.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: We will have to bring in a Bill to provide for that. The responsibility for the settlement will rest with the Minister for Lands, and the banking will be done with the Agricultural Bank just as if it were one of the private banks, and payments will be made on the certificates. The Agricultural Bank will make advances and will assist and help to protect the soldiers to the best of its ability. The statement that the Industries Board to-day is in a state of chaos is a flight of the imagination.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: When are you going to close down that board?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The functions of the board were given to it by Parliament some years ago owing to the failure of the crops and the destitute state the farmers were then thrown into. It is my object as soon as ever it is possible to do so, to restore those men who are connected with it to their original state as free farmers. The sooner this is done the better, and I hope I may be permitted to shortly make this announcement to the House.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: I do not think you will.

Hon. P. Collier: I think you will be too old.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: When the hon. member sees the figures he will think differently. I hope to be able to announce to the House that the farmers we have undertaken to shelter and protect have been made free men again, but of course not those who are impossible, or who have gone over the edge. The position will be placed before the House by a properly constructed system of figures, and this will be done either to-morrow or on Tuesday.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: I hope the Federal wheat pool figures will be given.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I know what I want, and I have been after it ever since

I have been in the Industries office, and I have just succeeded in getting the figures.

Hon. P. Collier: If you are not overburdened with work, for heaven's sake take over the control of the wheat pool.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: From the first week that I went into the Industries office it was my desire to get a statement of the whole of the debts of the farmers. I wanted them sorted up into districts and classified into, good, fair, doubtful, and bad. I have those figures complete now. They are on my table to-day. I also have a statement showing the indebtedness of each person in March, 1917. The figures are given showing the number of bags that each person has delivered to the board, and from the board to the scheme to date. I have the number of bags and the value of the bags, and I have had that turned into pounds. Hon. members will see when they get the papers that those who are in the good class have returned to the board two bags for every pound they owe. Those in the fair class have returned a bag and a half, those in the doubtful class under a bag, and those in the bad class about a quarter of a bag.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Have you entered into an arrangement to compromise with any of the business firms?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: That is a matter that I can tell the hon. member everything about. There is nothing in the Industries Department that cannot see the light of day. There is a board established in the Industries Department, and it has power to manage its own affairs, and any Minister who understands his business will interfere very little with that board. There are not seven as has been stated in this House, but three of the most experienced men we have in this State, namely, Mr. Richardson, a fine type and a solid farmer, Mr. Cook, one of the most painstaking and careful men, and Mr. Maitland Leake, a similar type of gentleman. I have the highest opinion of them all, and they can hold their own with any farmer in Western Australia. To call such a board as that political is a misuse of a term. I found the board there, and I have not interfered with it. I have watched them carefully, and after six months I have come to the conclusion that they are honourable and painstaking men who would be hard to replace. Take the manager of the Agricultural Bank, Mr. Paterson, one of the best men who could have been chosen, selected by a Government far away back, retained by every Government in succession, and he has the goodwill of everyone. To call these men political is monstrous. When I lay, as I shall either to-morrow or on Tuesday, those figures before members, they will be able to know just as well as I know about the affairs of the Industries Board financially and of any question as to what is being done in regard to the contract or any individual. If members ask for the information it shall be given to them. There is only one thing I want to say with reference to the Westralian Farmers and the zone system and I only say it because I was administering the affairs of the wheat board for six weeks when Mr. Baxter was in Melbourne and the matter came prominently

under my notice then and was well drilled into me and was repeatedly drilled into me until I could not forget it. Under open competition the Westralian Farmers as against Bell & Co., Dalgety & Co., Dreyfus & Co., and Darling, secured four-ninths of the business, that was in open competition; and as time went on they would have secured more than four-ninths this season because they were doing their business well; they were the farmers themselves. In order to defeat that the agents suggested the zone system because then each would have had one-fifth. What they could not reduce the Westralian Farmers to by open competition they wanted to do by arrangement.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Was it the merchants, or who suggested the zone system?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I give the facts and I know they want a lot of answering.

Hon. P. Collier: The Minister is not fair. The file shows clearly that the suggestion of the invitation came from the Honorary Minister (Mr. Baxter).

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I do not care who it came from; I am rather defending the Westralian Farmers' side of it. I did not know the Minister was attacked; but the Westralian Farmers got four-ninths of the business in open competition and the suggestion of the zone system would have reduced their business to one-fifth.

Hon. P. Collier: But it came from the Minister.

Mr. Maley: It came from the Advisory Board of the special wheat board.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: In giving this information it is in relation solely to the Westralian Farmers and not in relation to anyone else. Who started it or who benefited by it is another matter. I mention it all the more now because in the debate in this House some two months ago I do not think it was as carefully explained as it might have been. At any rate, it was not put in as plain language as I am putting it in to-night.

On motion by Mr. Hickmott debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 10.6 p.m.