

painful duty to submit the motion standing in my name.

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

Ayes	22
Noes	24

Majority against .. 2

AYES.

Mr. Boyle	Mr. Patrick
Mr. Brockman	Mr. Sampson
Mrs. Cardell-Oliver	Mr. Seward
Mr. Ferguson	Mr. Shearn
Mr. Hill	Mr. J. M. Smith
Mr. Hughes	Mr. Stubbs
Mr. Keenan	Mr. Thorn
Mr. Latham	Mr. Warner
Mr. Mann	Mr. Watts
Mr. McLarty	Mr. Welsh
Mr. North	Mr. Doney

(Teller.)

NOES.

Mr. Collier	Mr. Nulsen
Mr. Coverley	Mr. Raphael
Mr. Cross	Mr. Rodoreda
Mr. Fox	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. Hawke	Mr. F. C. L. Smith
Mr. Hegney	Mr. Styants
Miss Holman	Mr. Tonkin
Mr. Johnson	Mr. Troy
Mr. Lambert	Mr. Willcock
Mr. Marshall	Mr. Wise
Mr. Millington	Mr. Withers
Mr. Needham	Mr. Wilson

(Teller.)

PART.

AYE.	No.
Mr. McDonald	Mr. Munsie

Question thus negatived.

BILL—RECIPROCAL ENFORCEMENT OF MAINTENANCE ORDERS ACT AMENDMENT.

Returned from the Council without amendment.

House adjourned at 4.12 a.m. (Wednesday).

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 4th November, 1936.

	PAGE
Question: Butter dumping	1599
Leave of absence	1599
Bills: Mines Regulation Act Amendment, 1A.	1599
Financial Emergency Tax (No. 2), 1B.	1599
Financial Emergency Tax Assessment Act Amendment, 1B.	1599
State Transport Co-ordination Act Amendment (No. 2), 2A.	1600
Purchasers' Protection Act Amendment, 2A.	1613
Com. report	1613
Distress for Rent Abolition, 2A.	1613
Motion: Housing problem, to inquire by Royal Commission	1601
Returns: Steel and Iron Imports	1600
Agricultural Bank, abandoned farms	1609

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

QUESTION—BUTTER DUMPING.

Mr. McLARTY asked the Minister for Agriculture: 1, Has his attention been drawn to a paragraph in the "West Australian" of the 29th October stating that butter is to be exported to Western Australia from Victoria at a price of 133s. a cwt., which is 8s. per cwt. below the price operating at present in this State? 2, Can any steps be taken to protect the local market on behalf of our butter-fat producers against the dumping of cheap butter into this State?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE replied: 1 Yes. 2, The Dairy Products Marketing Board has the matter in hand, and is taking steps that will, it is believed, prevent the dumping of cheap butter in this State.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by Mr. North, leave of absence for two weeks granted to Mr. McDonald (West Perth) on the ground of ill-health.

BILLS (3)—FIRST READING.

1, Mines Regulation Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Minister for Lands, for the Minister for Mines.

2, Financial Emergency Tax (No. 2).

3, Financial Emergency Tax Assessment Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Premier.

BILL—STATE TRANSPORT CO-ORDINATION ACT AMENDMENT (No. 2).

Second Reading

MR. SAMPSON (Swan) [4.36] in moving the second reading said: The Bill of which I have the honour to move the second reading provides a highlight in point of brevity. Actually its aim is the inclusion of the word "honey" in the third paragraph of the First Schedule to the State Transport Co-ordination Act, 1933, after the word "vegetables" in the first line of the paragraph. That paragraph will then provide the essential exemption in respect of the transport of honey. As the paragraph stands, it relates solely to the carriage of livestock, poultry, fruit, vegetables—and at that point I desire the insertion of "honey"—dairy produce, and other perishable commodities. I can only believe that the non-inclusion of the word "honey" was an oversight. I know it is claimed that honey is not a perishable; but that is incorrect, as there is no food which cannot be termed a perishable. The State Transport Board have given consideration to this matter, which is, in fact, referred to in their third annual report, as follows:—

The beekeepers requested to use their motor vehicles to (i) convey crude honey from the apiary to the refinery; (ii) convey refined honey from the refinery to the marketing depot in Perth; and (iii) convey petrol from Perth to the place where their hives were situated.

The board agree that it is necessary to encourage apiarists to seek better grades of nectar, and that therefore the hives must be moved from place to place. Crude honey as extracted from the hives is not forwarded to the refinery in sealed containers, in order to avoid expense, and is liable to discolour and ferment unless speedily conveyed from the place of production to the nearest refinery. The board contend that honey, once clarified and refined and packed, is no longer a perishable. Under present conditions a special permit must be obtained, or else the product must be sent by rail. The board have agreed to give consideration to a request for the removal of the refined, blended and clarified honey from the clarifying depot to Perth or elsewhere by road, subject to a special permit being obtained. The beekeepers claim, and I think it will be agreed, that they should not be obliged to put forward special re-

quests; that, in fact, the refining, clarifying and packing of honey does not mean that the honey is no longer a perishable. It is unfair treatment of the beekeepers that a special permit should be required.

Mr. Thorn: The board might declare separated milk not a perishable.

Mr. SAMPSON: Yes. If this principle were adopted, then, once milk is separated, any further handling of it by road transport would be in conflict with the principle which is under discussion. Furthermore, there is the position regarding orchards. In many instances apples are not packed at the orchard but are taken to a packing shed, sometimes to a community shed situated some distance from the orchard. If the principle that applies to the transport of honey were to be applied also to orchards, the same difficulties would arise. Another argument that could be used is that relating to the gathering and packing of eggs. They are taken from the poultry run to the packing shed, where they are cleaned, graded and packed. The same applies to grapes that are gathered in the vineyard and taken to the packing shed where they are packed with the necessary cork or other filling. Then the fruit is carted away to city depot or wharf without any special permit being required. It is important that apiculture should be encouraged. The bee is a very important factor in pollination and it has often been said that thousands of tons of nectar are wasted each year. Despite the quantity available, the beekeepers find it exceedingly difficult to make a living. It is one of the poorest-paid industries in the agricultural field. As I said before, I believe the non-inclusion of the word "honey" in the First Schedule was an oversight, and I hope the House will agree to the single clause in the Bill. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by the Minister for Works, debate adjourned.

RETURN—STEEL AND IRON IMPORTS.

Debate resumed from the 23rd September on the following motion by Mr. Nulsen (Kanowna):—

That a return be laid on the Table of the House showing the value of the following imports into Western Australia for the year ended the 30th June, 1936:—1, Steel and iron for building, railway permanent way material, and general manufacturing purposes. 2, Fene-

ing wire, wire netting, nails, etc. 3, Steel wire ropes. 4, Steel or iron chain. 5, Black and galvanised iron, plain and corrugated. 6, Steel tubes and tubular products.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. H. Millington—Mt. Hawthorn) (4.45): I have no objection to the motion, and I have the return, which I will lay on the Table of the House.

Question put and passed.

MOTION—HOUSING PROBLEM.

To Inquire by Royal Commission.

Debate resumed from the 14th October on the following motion by Mr. Shearn (Maylands):—

That in the opinion of this House a Royal Commission should be appointed for the following purposes, that is to say:—Generally to inquire into and report upon—

- (a) The housing position in Western Australia with special reference to—
 - (i) the metropolitan-suburban area;
 - (ii) the goldfields;
 - (iii) the agricultural and other districts.
- (b) Residential financing; and the provision of facilities for home-ownership.
- (c) The special problem of citizens in the lower income groups and the necessity of there being available for their occupation, at a rental within their means, a sufficient number of houses which conform with reasonable standards of health, decency, and general amenity.
- (d) The adequacy and effectiveness of existing provisions for—
 - (i) the prevention and/or clearance and improvement of unhealthy areas
 - (ii) the repair or demolition of insanitary houses; and
 - (iii) overcrowding.
- (e) Co-operation between the State and Federal Governments, local governing bodies, social and welfare organisations, and all interested branches of private enterprise in the solution of housing problems and in the planning, finance, and development of housing projects,

and to make recommendations calculated to promote the welfare of the community and to effect any improvement or development which may be considered necessary or desirable in respect of the foregoing matters or any of them.

MR. NORTH (Claremont) [4.46]: I desire to make a few remarks regarding the motion, but not by way of stonewalling. Being a miserable mortal, with the advantage of not many capabilities, when matters are brought forward in connection with which I am interested, I rise with courage

to place before members such limited views as I hold.

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: We will be taking you at your own valuation!

Mr. NORTH: The subject covered by the motion is very wide and I commend the ingenuity of the member for Maylands (Mr. Shearn) upon the wording of it, for it really amounts to a speech on the subject. After we have heard the motion read, we have really listened to a disquisition covering the whole issue. It seems to me in the first place that the question is technical and the points arise as to how far we can go in achieving the objective of housing all the families, and as to whether there is any desire or wish on the part of the people for that to be done. On top of that, we have to ask ourselves whether the people would be prepared to follow that objective, from the standpoint of extending preference to the housing of families rather than a continuation of other building activities. If it were desired by a majority of people that we should properly house all the families residing in Western Australia, it would obviously mean that a great diversion would follow from the erection of buildings of other descriptions such as the enormous structures that are being erected in St. George's-terrace, the building of town halls, and so forth, in order to concentrate the whole of the building activities and those of architects and others upon the objective of house building. All such matters would have to be considered in dealing with a motion such as that before the House. The simplest way to analyse what might happen is to regard the matter from a military point of view. I sometimes ask myself what would happen in connection with an army corps. No doubt if the field marshal, or general in charge, decided to put up huts for the whole of the army, there would be no trouble whatever. He would call in the quarter-master and the different engineers, order stores without delay, and the job would be done without any difficulty at all. We know, for instance, from the technical standpoint, that the people could all be housed, if there were a desire on the part of the people for that to be done. I make the point, however, that there is no desire for it in the public mind. That is why I commend the member for Maylands. It may be urged from the standpoint of publicity. It is true that

that phase has been urged in the Press. On the other hand, there has been no real desire expressed by the people in favour of this objective. The longer I stay in this House the longer I realise that what people really want to have done can be done, but improvements are not made because there is no real expressed desire for them. The majority of people who have good homes are not interested in this matter. The many people who have not good homes have not the means of getting them. The question of financing is not of interest at this juncture. That will be dealt with later if the Commission is appointed. Another aspect of the matter concerns architecture itself. Too little stress has been laid on the need of good homes for the workers and people generally. I do not suggest that architects are not highly efficient, but there is no great demand by people so far as I can gather to obtain houses which would meet the actual if unexpressed requirements of the average housewife. My experience of housing has been that so far from the average home being, as it were, an Englishman's castle, a thing of stability and a joy forever, it is full of pitfalls and traps. In the first place, nearly every house I know seems to leak, and there is constant trouble with plumbing matters. There are few houses which attempt to keep out insects and vermin. There is still a large demand for mouse traps and rat traps and the quantity of sprays for mosquitoes and flies that is sold is tremendous. That suggests that we have not tackled in a general way the question of houses to meet the needs of the average housewife. I trust that if the motion is carried, that aspect will be taken into consideration, and that if it is decided to put into operation on a large scale a scheme for the housing of the families of this State, the houses put up will be entirely satisfactory.

Mr. Raphael: Build them with mosquito netting.

Mr. NORTH: I can understand the humorous side of this proposition. It would be easy to say that bough huts would do, but we live in times when the erection of good homes, insect-proof and rain-proof, is possible. What happens in practice, however, is far different. If after a few years' occupancy of a home, people attempt to put in wire gauze, the windows do not fit

and the wire doors rust, with the result that insects and vermin are not kept out. The matter needs to be properly tackled. I support the motion.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. H. Millington—Mt. Hawthorn) [4.55]: When any motion is moved in this House, an endeavour is usually made to discover the motive behind it. I am not concerned with the motive in this instance. Even if the hon. member had moved the motion with the idea of directing attention to himself, it is at least a decent method of doing so. There could be no objection on that score and the hon. member has brought before the House a matter which is of paramount importance, and which has been one of the great problems facing humanity through the ages. Even though I may not agree with the necessity for the appointment of a Royal Commission, I hope that will not be taken as an indication that the Government are not concerned with the housing problem, that it is not considered there is very much that needs to be inquired into, that there is not very much that can happen in respect of an improvement of housing conditions. The motion itself is a motion for the appointment of a Royal Commission. I agree with the last speaker that the motion contains whatever may be advanced in support of the idea in the mover's mind, but not many reasons have been given as to why a Commission should be appointed. We should remember that the question we are to decide is not the importance of an improvement in housing conditions, but the need or otherwise of an inquiry by a Royal Commission. The Premier's Department controls the Workers' Homes Board and at the Premier's request I have interviewed the members of the board with regard to this matter and have gone very carefully into the whole question. I have had the advantage of their experience over the last 24 years and discussed each phase of the question as it is known to them. Let us consider the motion *seriatim* to see whether a case has been made out for the appointment of a Commission, whether there is any need for a Commission and whether any advantage could be gained if one were appointed. That is the question before the House. The mover desires the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire, according to the first paragraph, into the housing position in Western Australia

with special references to (i) the metropolitan suburban area; (ii) the goldfields; and (iii) the agricultural and other districts. That embraces the whole State. Therefore he wants to know the position in respect of housing in all those districts. First of all, taking the metropolitan area, do we need a Royal Commission in order to discover the position of housing? Is it necessary to appoint a new and special board of inquiry to discover the position on the goldfields? I am reminded that the word "goldfields" includes all our goldfields. In consultation with the Workers' Homes Board, I found that they have a considerable fund of information and records in regard to the actual position of housing in the metropolitan area. What is the position in the metropolitan area? Can it be said that there is a dearth of houses? The building industry at present, so far as I can gather, is in a most buoyant condition, and during recent years has made enormous advances in the metropolitan area. The building industry is one that is most attractive to investors. It provides the best security in Western Australia. It is most attractive to those who have undertaken building as individual investors, it is most attractive to the building societies and to financial institutions and banks, and even to the Federal and State Governments. It is considered a most reliable form of investment, and on that account at set periods building booms occur. I am not sure whether we are not in the midst of a building boom in the metropolitan area at present. It may be that we are too near the picture to know what is taking place. It may be that we are making up leeway. The fact remains that there has been an enormous volume of building, not only in private houses but also in big commercial buildings. Just consider Nedlands. Nedlands has sprung up almost in a night, and there appears to be no end of money available for the purpose. As for the style of house being built down there, there is no need for a Royal Commission. Recently I was speaking to either the Master Builders' Association or the Architects' Association, and I think it can be borne out that even if the architect or the builder has not satisfied the man who is financing the building, they have at all events satisfied the housewife. In respect of design, I am informed by those capable of speaking as authorities that all the newest buildings, even of varying costs,

in the metropolitan area leave little to be desired. One cannot but admire the ornate design of the exterior, and as for the interior of the house, almost a revolution has taken place in recent years. At one time the housewife had to be satisfied with four bare walls, whereas the modern building is in itself almost half furnished, and every conceivable idea has been put into effect to beautify the inside of the home. In respect of health conditions, our own health laws provide that houses shall be built with due regard to sanitation and health. So, having regard to the design of the building and also to the aesthetic side, very little inquiry could be made which is not already in the hands of experts. The architect has to keep up to date. The newer suburbs of Perth are something to be proud of, something that does not warrant any special inquiry. So from that point of view we can see that the housing position is quite satisfactory. I would also draw the attention of the House to what has taken place recently. I am not for the time being dealing with the older portion of Perth, but with the newer suburbs. From every point of view they leave little to be desired. As to the question of valuation, the price paid for a building is the safest indication of what the owner gets. I have mentioned Nedlands, where a comparatively expensive type of house is being built. But let us take such a district as Wembley, in my own electorate, which is a working man's suburb. There the houses are not of so costly a type, yet they are nicely built, clean, sanitary, ornate, and well kept. From that point of view it could be termed a model suburb. This holds good in regard to all the building that is taking place out there. Even in regard to the older parts of Perth, where slum conditions obtain, there is no need for an inquiry into housing. I think we can say the modern house being built to-day in the metropolitan area is quite satisfactory. In regard to any need for speeding up the building of homes, as I said earlier I am not quite sure that we are not in the middle of a building boom now. Practically all the artisans in the building trade are fully employed. It would be very inadvisable for us to adopt the policy put into operation in Adelaide some years ago, when they set out on a thousand-homes scheme to provide a building boom. The result was that all

the available operatives in Australia were employed on full time until the scheme was completed. Then, of course, the inevitable reaction took place. All the artisans were out of work, and there was dislocation in the industry. That should have been avoided. I assume the mover of the motion does not desire at this stage that there should be a speeding up in the building of ordinary homes for people. Instead of co-operating for the speeding up of the building of homes in the metropolitan area, it might be that when we come to examine the position we shall find that we are overbuilt. I do not know whether the hon. member suggests that the Government should enter, to a greater extent, into the provision of homes, that the Workers' Homes Board should have additional money made available so that more homes might be built. I have indicated that, even if this were the desire of the hon. member, it would be ill-advised. I particularly asked the board about the position of those engaged in the building industry, and was informed that at present it would be impossible to get first-class men, even if we decided to speed up home building and additional funds were provided. For that reason there is no reason for speeding up. As to home building providing an avenue of employment, the policy of the Government has been to employ those men who were not provided for in private industry. When an industry was buoyant and the men usually employed were fully occupied, we preferred to get rid of men for whom we were providing work so that they could be absorbed in private industry, and the money thus saved would be available for use in other directions not catered for privately. As to the obligation of the Government, let me point out what has to be done by the Government, an inescapable obligation. I have had a return compiled covering the last six years showing the liability of the Government to provide money from general loan fund each year for building purposes. The figures are—

		£
1930-31	44,705
1931-32	25,449
1932-33	65,159
1933-34	130,679
1934-35	157,458
1935-36	140,566
Total		£564,016

During those six years the construction of more public buildings was necessary and would have been undertaken had funds been available. If it be suggested that the Government could find additional money to provide homes, I reply that nobody else would provide money for public buildings. To construct them is definitely a function of the Government. We are continually being bombarded with requests for additional funds for public buildings; in fact I do not know of a district that is satisfied. Requests are made every year for additional money to permit of the building of schools. Even if a Royal Commission recommended the Government to extend their activities to building private homes, since we cannot find sufficient money for public buildings, to provide which is undeniably a Government obligation, the provision of homes would have to rank second. Recently the Workers' Homes Board extended their activities to the goldfields. Evidently they were not anxious to do so, but I consider that the extension of the scheme to the goldfields was justified. I know of no other place at present more in need of additional homes than are the goldfields, and I refer not only to the eastern goldfields, but to other goldfields. Though our goldfields friends are satisfied that the asset would be sound, residents of the goldfields, who also have confidence in the future of the mines, invest a good deal of their money in other places. I know of goldfields residents well able to build homes who put their money into what they consider is more of a gilt-edged security, something which will not return an equivalent rate of interest, but something which they consider to be safe. They are investing their money, not on the goldfields, but in the metropolitan area. Those people who have confidence in the goldfields and have made money there are not anxious to invest it in homes on the goldfields. However, the Workers' Homes Board have initiated a scheme which might be extended. Having regard to the fact that the board have so many securities in the metropolitan and other areas that are considered to be gilt-edged, it is a safe investment to build a percentage of homes on the goldfields, even though they may not be considered to offer as satisfactory a security as workers' homes in the metropolitan area. I understand that as the demand for homes increases the board propose to devote additional attention to the goldfields. I have a lengthy report detailing the experience of the

board in country districts, giving the number of homes provided, and pointing out that some of the homes built in country towns have had to be removed. Full consideration is given to every request from the agricultural districts. The board have no prejudice against building homes in the agricultural districts. So long as they are satisfied that the demand is genuine and that there is a prospect of clients proving satisfactory, they are favourable to an extension of the scheme in country districts. I suggest that an inquiry into the housing position in the metropolitan area, the agricultural districts and the goldfields areas is one that could well be undertaken by the Workers' Homes Board, who are in the business and receive not only applications that can be satisfied, but many others besides. The board can, I assume, judge as to the building barometer better than a Royal Commission could do. It may be that the board, acting as a commission of inquiry, might co-opt those who consider they have information not available to it. I suggest that activities extending over 24 years have enabled the board to familiarise themselves with the needs not only of the metropolitan area but those of the Eastern Goldfields and agricultural districts. The members of the board have had actual experience in those parts of the State, and there can be no need for the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the matter and collect information that is already available. Whatever may be the importance of the building industry and the housing problem, I consider that a case has not been made out for the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into those questions. The next important point is that which deals with facilities for home-ownership and the question of financing home-ownership. Here we come to something that is associated with one of the greatest desires of man, namely, the ownership of a home. The financing of a home is often a very intricate problem. We did not wait until 1936 to deal with home-ownership. In 1912 the Labour Government of the day recognised the need for cheaper homes and for means of financing those who were unable to obtain homes for themselves. Accordingly, they inaugurated the workers' homes scheme. At that time the maximum advance for any home was fixed at £550, a sum that was made available to persons

whose incomes did not exceed £200 per annum. Those who wished to acquire homes could do so either under the freehold or the leasehold system. For people who have little or no capital, the leasehold system should commend itself ahead of the other system. I freely confess that for many years I was under the impression that the leasehold system provided only a second-rate tenure. My experience, not only on the goldfields but in the metropolitan area, has since shown me that the leasehold title is the safer one for a man with but little capital. I know that an area was set aside for leasehold homes on the goldfields, but after a number of years this was converted into freehold. Those who owned leasehold homes would not rest until the homes were converted into freehold.

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: That has happened in other places.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am told that within 12 months not one of those persons owned his own home. As soon as the freehold title was granted, the owners took advantage of it to mortgage their homes, and subsequently lost them. The man who is hard-pressed and in need of money will make available any security he has to raise funds, consequently the safest title for such a man is the leasehold. I have friends in Perth who 20 years ago, by putting up £5, were able to acquire a home which cost £500 to build. It is not possible to have a more simple form of home-ownership than that. The land is capitalised, and re-appraised I think, every 20 years, and only 3 per cent. is charged on the value of the land. The applicant does not have to put up a lot of money for the purchase of land, but any money he has he can put into the home. For that reason, too, the leasehold is the better. By experience of recent years has convinced me that the best title for those who have very little capital, but desire a home of their own, is the leasehold. I understand from the board that, whereas in past years there was a big demand for homes on freehold property, the applications that have come in since have comprised a big percentage of people who desired to build on the leasehold principle. I cannot take the view of those who suggest there is some easy way to obtain money or credit. There may be those who can manipulate the financial system, but the man without capital has to submit to the conditions as we find

them. The only way in which he can acquire a home is through the existing financial conditions, and he has to pay the interest charged and repay the capital outlay. The Workers' Homes Board started in 1912 with a capital of £525,500. In 1927 this was added to by £50,000, in 1929 by £25,000, in 1931 by £2,870, in 1932 by £41,295, in 1933 by £2,316, in 1934 by £35,000, and in 1935 by £35,000, or a total of £716,981. Of this total £672,817 was made available by Labour Governments. I mention this because Mr. Harold Boas, who wrote me a letter on the subject and who interviewed me, subsequently attended a meeting of a new organisation known as the Housing Association. Mr. Boas said that the Government appeared to be lukewarm on the housing problem.

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: That was the result of his interviews with you.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: If the Labour Government are lukewarm on this question. I remind the hon. member and also the member for Maylands that the Labour Government have made available nearly three-quarters of a million and the anti-Labour Government only about £40,000 in the period of 24 years. So I leave it to the House to say which was the lukewarm Government.

Mr. Thorn: Why not deal with Mr. Boas?

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: Is he not a supporter of your Government?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I should say not; I would not call any man a supporter of a Government that spent nearly three-quarters of a million pounds on workers' homes, if he described that Government as being lukewarm, and remembering that other Governments had only spent £40,000.

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: But there was very little available for the other Governments.

Mr. Thorn: Mr. Boas is a great friend of the ex-Minister for Employment.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I come now to that portion of the motion which is worthy of consideration. It reads—

The special problem of citizens in the lower income groups, and the necessity for there being available for their occupation at a rental within their means, a sufficient number of houses which conform with reasonable standards of health, decency and general amenity.

That part of the motion has my general approval and quite justifiably too.

That is a part of the problem with which we are interested. I discussed this aspect with the Workers' Homes Board, and in addition, I was interested in what was said on the subject by the Leader of the Opposition, who approved of this part of the motion. That hon. member said that a sum of money should be made available—I think he suggested that 50 houses of the cheaper variety should be constructed. The Workers' Homes Board have already paved the way, and as members are aware from the board's report, arrangements can now be made for the erection of homes at a cost of £350. The fact is recognised that in respect of the basic wage, there is not a surplus and that payments to meet the liability must be made each week. Therefore there is added to the rental the amount of the rates and taxes. Under this scheme, which meets with the approval of the Leader of the Opposition, the board will be able to provide a home at a weekly cost of 13s. 4d. and the payments will be spread over a period of 25 years. If the period be extended to 35 years, the rental can be reduced weekly by 1s. 2d. which would bring the weekly payment to 12s. 2d. I should like to refer to the hon. member's suggestion that block houses should be built. I discussed that with the Assistant Under Treasurer who I think is chairman of the board, the principal architect and the secretary of the board, and I was told the danger would be, if we built say 50 houses of the cheaper type, that they would deteriorate into slums. That is what the members of the board are afraid of. If however, it were decided to build under those conditions, then in the opinion of the board provision should be made for the upkeep of the homes and a further amount would have to be added for that purpose. Under such a system, of course, those who attended to the upkeep of the houses, would have to keep them shipshape and they should be given a rebate of the amount expended. Still, as I have said, in the opinion of the board there would be danger of deterioration.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Of course the occupiers would be the potential owners.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That is so, and they might form themselves into a kind of union.

Hon. C. G. Latham: If they were supporters of your side of the House they certainly would.

Mr. Thorn: And probably they would not get a house if they did not form a union.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: In any case, the objection of the Workers' Homes Board would to a certain extent be met if provision were made for the maintenance of the home.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Wooden cottages were built in England for soldiers, and they were still in good condition when I saw them last year.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: If homes of that description are to be built there must be cheap land. I made inquiries from the Workers' Homes Board and I found that they had acquired land within a reasonable distance and that the maximum price of the blocks was £25. There are also some blocks of land available at a cost of as low as £10. So it will be seen that attention has been given to the matter. Further, the board are hampered by the building regulations of the local authorities. It is incredible how far the declarations of brick areas extend. Even where the blocks of land are right out in the bush they come under the brick area regulations. That is one of the disabilities in endeavouring to provide the cheaper homes, but the fact remains the board have endeavoured to do their utmost to secure cheap land and to provide cheap homes. At the same time, the members of the board say that there are very few applications for that class of home, and their trouble is that the people who go to them want a better class of home, but are unable to finance it. They almost invariably refuse to accept the advice of the board that they should acquire the cheaper class of home, but mostly the people are ambitious and seem to be determined to carry the proverbial millstone around their necks so long as they are able to acquire a better class of home.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I hope it is not intended to build rows of cottages of a standard type.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That will not be done.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I admit it has not been done by the board.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I could show the hon. member that the types of houses built by the Workers' Homes Board are all different. My impression is that the

Workers' Homes Board have a tendency towards this, and that the very thing which we consider should be attended to has received attention. In plain words, the board are prepared to meet the demand. I agree with the hon. member that special attention should be given to the suggestion, and special funds made available for it, though not to the extent of building ahead of requirements or of attempting to build in places where suitable artisans are not available. That is the problem just at present. Undoubtedly in the building trade the best tradesmen are already engaged. So that even if the board were disposed to do as suggested, they would have to watch for their opportunity. I do not think it would be possible to launch out on a big building scheme even if the money were available. In fact, it would not be good business. I suggested to the board that they should give preference to applicants for cheaper types of homes, and see whether that demand could not be met. In any case, attention has been given to that aspect, and the suggestion made in the motion has great merit, undoubtedly. I hold that ways and means should be provided for supplying such homes on the leasehold principle. In accordance with the policy of the Workers' Homes Board, payment should be spread over each week, so that the whole liability would be weekly and that clients would not be faced with municipal and water rates at special periods of the year, which would make the position almost impossible for them. From that point of view, dealing now with the question of home finance, the policy of the Workers' Homes Board is first of all to apply the leasehold principle, which allows the purchaser the right to a home. I believe the purchaser has not even to provide the initial £5, so that he can start off with a reasonable prospect, and his weekly payment amounts to 12s. 2d. We could have a Royal Commission on that aspect; but unless someone can suggest a complete revolution in the monetary system so that cheaper money may be available, I do not think any more economical scheme for the building of homes by the Workers' Homes Board could be suggested. I say again that this part of the motion is worthy of consideration, and that I have already discussed with the board the question of putting it into operation as far as possible. Now comes an aspect which I consider not in any way a

responsibility of the Government. Paragraph (d) reads—

The adequacy and effectiveness of existing provisions for—(i) the prevention and/or clearance and improvement of unhealthy areas; (ii) the repair or demolition of insanitary houses; and (iii) overcrowding.

If the unsatisfactory phases mentioned in that paragraph represented present practice and policy, certainly the suggestion of their reference to a Royal Commission would be worthy of consideration. However, they are not the present policy and practice. Whereas local authorities may not be cleaning up old areas which could perhaps be termed slum areas, no exception can be taken to the manner in which they are attending to newer areas. Therefore, to suggest the appointment of a Royal Commission for the prevention and/or clearance and improvement of unhealthy areas is to suggest a Royal Commission in respect of something that is provided for already. The local authorities conform to all health laws and provisions, as also do builders in respect of any extensions made. Therefore paragraph (d) of the motion applies only to what has taken place in the past. As regards repair or demolition of insanitary houses, and also as regards overcrowding, the former is something within the realm of the local authority, and not something which particularly concerns the Government. I do not know that we are entitled to suggest that local authorities are not doing their duty in this respect. I hope they are. If not, I suggest that those who are dissatisfied should direct their attack, in plain language, on the Perth City Council and on the local authorities within the metropolitan area, where, I assume, the slums exist. The local authorities have wide delegated powers in this respect. They have to do with building and sanitation in the metropolitan area; and I fail to see that in this respect anything would warrant the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into conditions in the City of Perth, or in the Municipality of Subiaco, where the local bodies are doing their duty. Other means could be devised for straightening up local authorities if that were considered necessary. But certainly it is not the business of the Government. Our business is to see that local authorities have adequate powers. It is the business of the local authorities to give effect to those powers in this important matter. Next comes paragraph (e) of the

somewhat lengthy motion. The hon. member wants a Royal Commission to inquire into co-operation between the State and Federal Governments in the direction of housing. That proposal might merit the appointment of a Royal Commission on housing and on the relationship between State and Federal authorities. However, we have found it most difficult to devise means of co-operating with the Federal Government in regard to any financial proposal. I fail to see what a Royal Commission could suggest in respect of housing that would make it possible for the Federal and State Governments to co-operate in the matter. One would almost be inclined to agree to the appointment of a Royal Commission if it were feasible that suggestions for effective co-operation between the two Governments would result. Paragraph (e) also suggests co-operation of the State and Federal Governments with local governing bodies, social and welfare organisations, and all branches of private enterprise interested in the solution of housing problems and in the planning, finance, and development of housing projects. I do not know exactly where social and welfare organisations would come in. The final, and rather attractive, sentence of the hon. member's motion reads—

and to make recommendations calculated to promote the welfare of the community and to effect any improvement or development which may be considered necessary or desirable in respect of the foregoing matters or any of them.

I have not attempted in any way to question the hon. member's motive in bringing forward the motion. Neither have I attempted to underrate or belittle the importance of the housing problem. The only point is that we do not willingly appoint Royal Commissions to endeavour to extract information which is already available through official sources.

Hon. C. G. Latham: You do.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: No.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Oh yes, you do!

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The present Government are not addicted, as are Federal Governments, to the appointment of Royal Commissions of doubtful utility.

Hon. C. G. Latham: You had one on the Agricultural Bank.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I understand that Royal Commissions appointed by successive Federal Governments have already cost Australia over £100,000. That is a pretty fair amount to expend in the search

for knowledge and for the advice tendered by these various Royal Commissions to the Federal Government. In this instance I maintain we already have the organisation that can supply the information requested. If that information were supplied, it would then become a question whether the State Government could finance any project that might be agreed to by the Royal Commission. At the present time the Government have to focus their attention on devising schemes for the promotion of public purposes. It is true that the provision of housing may be regarded as a public purpose, but it is equally correct to say that an enormous amount of money is available for the building of houses. It is a popular form of investment. On the other hand there are inescapable duties that the Government must undertake in respect to public buildings. Each department is starved for money for the erection of better buildings, for schools and so forth. No member of this House is satisfied with the schools, the housing of teachers, police quarters, and the housing of officers generally in his particular electorate.

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: The member for East Perth should be satisfied with his school.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That of course, is not an East Perth School, but a metropolitan school. It is certainly a great credit to the Government and to the departmental architects. I wish we could erect more public buildings up to that standard. I would like better buildings throughout the agricultural districts as well as in the city. That should be the first duty of the Government rather than to enter into the sphere suggested in the motion. While I am in favour of a policy of providing better homes for the people, it is at present undeniable that homes are being constructed in the metropolitan area and in other districts, by means of privately subscribed money. So the problem nowadays is not so great as it has been at other times. The building trade is buoyant, and the whole of the artisans of the State are in employment. In those circumstances, I claim there is no necessity for the proposed Royal Commission. If an inquiry is needed in any particular direction, I give the House an assurance that the Workers' Homes Board will undertake that task. They have already gone into these matters, particularly in relation to the provision of cheaper homes. The board already realise the position, and have purchased ex-

tensive areas in the metropolitan districts at prices ranging from £25 per block downwards. The board are prepared to erect homes, and to make them available on the easiest terms that have been devised anywhere in the world. I hope the public will not be misled regarding some calculations in connection with the building of homes. The member for Subiaco (Mrs. Cardell-Oliver) spoke about homes in the Old Country that cost £550 to erect and were made available at a rental of 7s. per week, while housing bonds there returned 6 per cent., and later 4 per cent. Certainly no home costing £550 to erect can be provided in this State under any scheme of which I am aware, at a rental of 7s. a week, and at the same time permit rates and taxes to be paid, upkeep to be maintained, and then show a return of 4 per cent. I hope the people will not be misled into believing that under our present system it is possible to secure homes at 7s. a week for an expenditure of £550. If the Royal Commission could discover means by which that could be done, I might perhaps be prepared to support the motion. I give the member for Maylands full credit for moving his motion, and duly recognise its importance to the community generally, especially having regard to the necessity to provide cheaper homes, and for consideration of the easiest system to be adopted with regard to the financing of homes. At the same time, I claim that practically all the information sought is now available, and the system under which the Workers' Homes Board have operated has been well tried out, particularly under the leasehold system. The Government cannot agree to the appointment of a Royal Commission to discover either what is already known, or what is easily ascertainable through ordinary departmental channels. I oppose the motion.

On motion by Mr. Hughes, debate adjourned.

RETURN—AGRICULTURAL BANK, ABANDONED FARMS.

Debate resumed from the 21st October on the following motion by Mr. Doust (Nelson):—

That a return be laid upon the Table of the House showing—

- 1, The total expenditure since the inception of the scheme to the 30th June, 1936, of renovating abandoned farms in the Manjimup Agricultural district—(a) on

- abandoned soldier settler properties; and (b) on group settlers' blocks.
2. The total area so renovated—(a) on soldier settlers' locations; and (b) on group settlers' holdings.
 3. The total expenditure from inception of scheme to the 30th June, 1936, on the Walpole settlement.
 4. The area partially cleared and sown to pasture.
 5. The number of dairy cows supplied by the Department.
 6. The total cost of administration to the 30th June, 1936.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. M. F. Troy—Mt. Magnet) [5.57]: The member for Nelson (Mr. Doust) asks, in his motion, for certain information regarding the Walpole unemployment settlement and also desires to be informed regarding the expenditure incurred by the Government in maintaining improvements on Bank locations in the South-West. He is not in his seat, but I propose to supply him with the information, although it will take some time to collect. A survey of the whole of the improvements will have to be made, otherwise the information supplied would not be accurate. The hon. member's introductory remarks were rather contradictory. He asked for a return, and although he knew what he wanted, he did not seem to be quite sure why he wanted the information. In the course of his remarks he said that in the Walpole scheme we were starting a new group settlement area, and he was much afraid that we were not reducing the costs to anything like the proportion previously anticipated. He also said it was questionable whether other work would not be of greater advantage to the State than the clearing of the land, and he remarked that the same position might be created as that obtaining in connection with the major group settlement scheme. He also expressed concern at the conditions under which blocks had been taken over. There may have to be a writing-down. The Walpole settlement was initiated six years ago by the Leader of the Opposition. I am not going to comment on the purpose or object to it. The Leader of the Opposition was in office and thought it the best thing in the circumstances. What the Government had in mind was putting unemployed men on this land to enable them to make homes for themselves. The scheme has now been in operation for six years but we have not

got the results which were anticipated. That is not remarkable because this type of settlement, and every type of settlement where the Government provide all the money, creates a state of mind that is not conducive to the success of experiments of that kind. The expenditure to the 30th June last was £106,707. The highest expenditure in any one year was in 1932-33 when £26,068 was expended. As a result of change of methods and management, the cost for the last twelve months has been at the rate of £10,000 per annum. Advances will be reduced as more cows are supplied to the settler, the basis of advances being £8 per month, less a deduction for all cows over three of £1 and 15s. for heifers during the four months flush period. Most of the settlers at present have five cows or under, although a few have more, one having 15. A feature of the settlement which has been responsible more than anything else for the expense incurred is that few of the original settlers remain. Of the 64 original settlers there are now only ten. Having expended a considerable amount of money there, we are proceeding with the work in an endeavour to try to establish the settlement.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Are there any vacant blocks?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, there are 14.

Mr. Stubbs: The land is good there.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I think it is the best bit of country in one lot that I have seen.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I think it will be saleable later.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I was struck with the area. It is splendidly supplied with water and is nice fertile country. I was impressed by its amazing production.

Mr. Stubbs: Why have the men not made good?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I have mentioned that. Wherever the Government find the whole cost of such a scheme, it is unsatisfactory. Only ten of the original 64 settlers remain. It was merely a place of refuge for some people for the time being.

Mr. Stubbs: They were square pegs in round holes.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Some of them never intended to stay there. After I had talked to some of them, I felt sure that they would not remain; that when a better

job turned up, they would take it. Some are sticking it, and are very good settlers. Settlers have come and gone, improvements have not been maintained, and the work has had to be done over again. When a man does not maintain the improvements unless he is paid for doing the work, he is not a bona fide settler.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Some of the settlers would not even pick the karri bark off the ground.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The bona fide settler will maintain improvements all the while. I am of opinion that this scheme should never have been started, for such schemes have never succeeded in Australia.

Hon. C. G. Latham: That is a fact.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The only successful settlement is where a man goes in and puts his very best into it and, where necessary, will get help to carry on. Some will give only what they are paid for. The man who does only that will never make a success of it.

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: But a lot of the settlers in the wheat belt had no capital when they started.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I was not speaking of capital.

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: I thought you were.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No, I am referring principally to their labour. When a man puts some of his labour in conjunction with help from the Government into a proposition he is likely to make good. The administration is always quarrelling with these settlers. Why? Because the settlers always want more money.

Mr. Stubbs: That class of man ought to get out.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: In many of such schemes I find the administration at variance with the settler because he wants to pile up expenses. I do not want to find fault with these settlers, but although the settlement was not started until six years ago, only ten of the original 64 settlers remain. Those men gave their labour on advances of £2 per week and we supplied them with seed and super requirements. Some of them made magnificent gardens. I have never seen such fine vegetable gardens anywhere else. Their tomatoes were wonderful. A little while ago an official picked up receipts showing that one of the settlers had

taken off about £70 worth of produce in a few months.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I told you about one on another property.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, I have my eye on him. He has not been getting on too well with me lately, for he has not played the game. The department did not know about this one settler who was selling so much produce while drawing £8 per month all the time. I may say that eventually he left the holding. Recently I have placed both schemes under the Nannup manager, and I fancy the change is giving satisfactory results. This work has been economically done by some of the settlers, but wherever one settler follows another in occupation of a holding the result is unsatisfactory. The expenditure on Walpole from its inception has been £106,707 including £6,930, the cost of administration. The area wholly cleared is 153 acres and the partly cleared area 2,784 acres. The ring-barked area is 844 acres and the area sown for pasture 2,291 acres. There are 5,949 chains of wire netting fences and 5,913 chains of plain fences. There are 66 cottages, or shacks rather. We supply the floor boards and the iron, provided the settler requiring the cottage cuts the timber. The holdings occupied are 52, holdings vacant 14, holdings abandoned 7 and holdings linked up 4.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I am endeavouring to arrange for the Agricultural Bank to take over those settlements as soon as possible. One of the difficulties is that the Bank Commissioners are not prepared to take over the amounts that the Government have spent on the properties. That attitude can be readily understood. Those settlements, however, should be under the control of the Bank, and I shall endeavour to arrange for them to be taken over as soon as we reach a proper basis. The member for Nelson (Mr. Doust)—

Mr. Thorn: He is still in the hollow log, and will have to be smoked out.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member said—

Some of the settlers may undoubtedly not be suitable for the work they are expected to undertake, and if that be so, it is only right, proper and just that they should be dispossessed now, rather than be permitted to remain on their holdings for eight or ten years and then put off. Under those conditions, the settlers

would merely waste their lives by continuing at operations for which they were unsuitable. Why allow them to continue, only to create much dissatisfaction at a later date?

The hon. member suggests that if they are unsuitable they should be forced off their properties. I can understand his intention, but those settlers, if forced off their holdings would, after leaving Walpole, go on to sustenance work. We are not going to encourage that. I cannot agree that a man who has a home on one of the settlements and an opportunity to make a living is entitled to leave in order that he might receive payment from the State for other work.

Hon. C. G. Latham: And those settlers received a free block of land.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes. I shall not promise to meet the hon. member there. We cannot have people making a convenience of these properties. If settlers are unsuitable, it is not of much use their remaining, but if they were put off their holdings the Government would be under no obligation to provide work for them. The hon. member also stated that in his opinion a different method should be adopted with respect to the settlement schemes, and if that were done, it would be of advantage to the State and to the settlers concerned. I would have liked a suggestion from the hon. member as to the method to be adopted. I have already stated my own ideas. Experience shows that we should never again embark upon this sort of settlement. We have had experience of group settlement and other settlements, and all public men should now have their minds made up about undertakings of this kind. I believe that all public men are fully aware of what may be described as the qualifications of a sound settlement. I certainly am afraid that the types of settlement tried here are not likely to work out satisfactorily. Amongst the settlers are some who are very good and who, although isolated, have had fairly good opportunities. The time has arrived, however, when they must be placed under an institution. I am not able to force them under the Agricultural Bank, except by Act of Parliament, but I have been discussing with the Commissioners of the Bank the advisableness of taking over the properties. As I mentioned, the Commissioners will not take over the properties and accept responsibility for the expenditure incurred on them. Another settlement is that at South Busselton, which was started on locations

abandoned during the reconstruction period. When the group settlements were reconstructed, a number of locations were abandoned. During the time of the Mitchell-Latham Government, 36 settlers were again placed on those areas at South Busselton. The House will be interested to know that on those locations, where we had previously expended thousands of pounds to create farms and were unsuccessful, a sum of £14,355 has since been spent. Of the 36 settlers originally placed on the South Busselton areas, only seven now remain. I was Minister for Lands in the first Collier Administration, and decided to abandon those areas, notwithstanding the amount of money expended on them. The succeeding Government had the blocks re-occupied and spent an additional £14,355 on them, and now only seven settlers remain of the original 36. That is either proof that the new settlers did not possess the necessary qualifications, or, as I consider more likely, is a vindication of the policy of abandonment in the first instance. The hon. member may have the information he requires about the Walpole settlement, but some time will elapse before it can be prepared. Regarding the maintenance of group areas now vacant or those in the South-West lately held by clients of the Agricultural Bank, the member for Nelson admitted that the properties should be maintained. If those holdings are to be maintained, men must be employed upon them and it is not expected that the cost entailed will be recovered. Of course the State must maintain its securities as far as possible. Unemployed have been utilised to extend the existing improvements and also to maintain the improvements already made, thus creating provision for farming operations. That has cost a lot of money. The work has not been confined to the group settlement areas alone. The Agricultural Bank has utilised the men on areas which are occupied by their clients in other parts of the country. Some were utilised at Harvey on the settlers' locations there. I heard last night a discussion about utilising the unemployed on the Harvey commonage. That is not included in the work of reconditioning vacant holdings. As I have said, the cost has been very great. In June, 1933, the total number of men employed on land clearing and reconditioning in the South-West was 1,200, but at present the number is 617, of whom 585 are

employed on reconditioning Agricultural Bank holdings. These men have to be employed somewhere, and might well be employed on maintaining these assets. Even if the cost be greater than is desired, it is better that they should do this work than that the land should be allowed to revert to nature. It is difficult to find work for single men. These workers are maintaining the existing improvements and extending the opportunities for farmers by clearing more country. I am not entirely satisfied about the cost itself, but there it is. The men work several days a week. Members who know something about clearing operations, the necessity for maintaining fires and keeping the work well in hand, understand that such work should be continuous if we are to get anything like good results.

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: The trouble starts when you charge the cost against prospective settlers.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The incoming settlers will not bear any of that cost. In the last revaluation of group areas the whole of the cost of the work done by the unemployed was not accounted for. The valuations provided for a reduction in value of £1,777,000. That does not include the large amount of money expended in the utilisation of the unemployed in land improvements, and extension of farm areas. None of that will be passed on to the settlers. Without desiring unnecessarily to reflect upon settlers, one might expect that when the State is doing all this, creating further improvements and maintaining existing ones they would be grateful for what has been done. If the Government had sent these unemployed to any other part of the State to maintain improvements and extend the opportunities for farming, the settlers concerned would have shown great appreciation.

Hon. P. D. Ferguson: If they had been sent to your farm you would have said the cost was 100 per cent. too high.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That would not arise, because not one penny piece of the cost has been charged to the settler. All that work has been done for him for nothing.

Mr. Sleeman: A free gift.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I would have had no reason to object if a number of unemployed had been sent to my farm to extend the clearing and maintain the im-

provements. I should regard that as something to be grateful for. This is what we have done for the farmers in these areas. If members representing the South-West do not want this work done, then the men employed will proceed somewhere else. I do not say we are getting the very best results from these operations, for I am sure we do not. In the circumstances, however, probably we are getting better results than if these men had been sent somewhere else. I do not even say that the value for the expenditure is there, but we have something to show for it. These men will be further employed in the district in the maintenance and extension of improvements, in the hope that the time is coming when these properties will be appreciated and utilised. I have no objection to the motion.

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

Ayes	29
Noes	11
Majority for	18

AYES.

Mr. Brockman	Mr. Needham
Mrs. Cardell-Oliver	Mr. North
Mr. Collier	Mr. Nulsen
Mr. Coverley	Mr. Rapnael
Mr. Cross	Mr. Rodoreda
Mr. Fox	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. Hawke	Mr. F. C. L. Smith
Mr. Hegney	Mr. Styants
Miss Holman	Mr. Tonkin
Mr. Johnson	Mr. Troy
Mr. Keenan	Mr. Welsh
Mr. Lambert	Mr. Willcock
Mr. Marshall	Mr. Wise
Mr. McLarty	Mr. Wilson
Mr. Millington	

(Teller.)

NOES.

Mr. Boyle	Mr. Sampson
Mr. Ferguson	Mr. Thorn
Mr. Hill	Mr. Warner
Mr. Latham	Mr. Watts
Mr. Mann	Mr. Seward
Mr. Patrick	

(Teller.)

Question thus passed.

BILL—PURCHASERS' PROTECTION ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

MR. WILSON (Collie) [7.51] in moving the second reading said: I am introducing this small Bill to remedy a defect in the parent Act. The defect may appear small, but it is in fact of much consequence to the people the Act is intended to protect. The Act, passed in 1933, did not make it clear

how purchasers of land to whom magistrates had given a decision against were to proceed to secure some redress. Since the passing of the Act various cases of the kind have come into court, and of these I will give one illustration, showing how detrimentally the defect in the Act has operated to people who were foolish enough in days gone by to purchase land from some of the so-called financial land firms. The case is that of a man in Collie, and I may say at once that Collie is only one of many towns in which similar cases have occurred. In fact, I have letters from all over the State—from Albany, Perth, Nanup, Kalgoorlie—making complaints of the writers having been penalised in regard to blocks of land they were supposed to have bought in the good times gone by. The Collie case is that of a man named Bastow. He had bought three blocks of land from a firm: I will not name because if I did it might be thought I had a special set on that firm. I have no set on any such firm or land company, but I have a set on the conduct of certain firms and companies for the manner in which they sell land. The man Bastow bought three blocks of land at £80 per block, somewhere in the vicinity of Victoria Park, the total purchase price for the three blocks being £240. Presently the depression came along, and the man, although he had paid £100 off the price of the three blocks, asked to be relieved from going on further with the payments as he was out of work. He was, in fact, a sustenance worker for three years. His family are four in number, and he has had a good many other debts to pay. He wrote to the firm asking would they take over the three blocks together with the £100 he had paid and cry quits. I have a letter here from the firm which, in my opinion, it would be useless for me to read. So far as I am concerned, I need only say that the firm turned down the offer to take back the three blocks and keep the £100 that had been paid. Instead, they took the man into court. The magistrate, who showed himself very lenient towards the purchaser, said he was sorry but he would have to fine the purchaser or make an order against him for so much per week. The fault lies in this, that these land firms get various road boards to sue debtors for rates. The debtor has no claim or title to the property, but owing to some point of

law he is fined for non-paid rates in respect of property which he is merely trying to purchase. This man Bastow took no notice of the first summons. Then he was taken to court, and a fine was imposed, with imprisonment in default. The result is that these debtors refuse to pay the fine and thereupon are taken to gaol. During this year I have visited three men in the Bunbury gaol who had been sent there from Collie because they had refused to go on with payments for blocks of land they had purchased. One of these men has four children, all under 14 years of age. Bastow was for three years a sustenance worker. He had paid over £100 to this firm out of the total purchase price of £240. I contend that if a man pays £100 on three blocks priced at a total of £240, and the vendor firm will not take the £100 as a gift, the bargain is a very poor one indeed for the purchaser.

Mr. Patrick: The land cannot be worth much.

Mr. WILSON: True, it cannot be worth much and the transaction does not say much for the firm that put it over. These purchasers have little or nothing to live on. No redress is available to them as against the vendor firm except through the proposed alteration in the parent Act. The amendment gives the magistrate power to hear such a case and adjudicate on it, and give a decision whether payment shall be made in full or whether there shall be some alleviation. The last time I spoke on the subject I mentioned that a debtor with three or four children had been sent to Bunbury gaol and kept there for four weeks. The point is that if these land-selling firms and companies put a man in gaol, they should pay for his keep there. The country is being fleeced to obtain for these companies and firms undue payments in connection with land transactions. I hope the House will pass this small Bill, which will at least give relief to any man who has been summoned previously, by empowering the magistrate to review the case without any further adjustment. If the magistrate declares that the value of the land bought by the debtor is £250, then £250 has got to be paid; but if the magistrate declares the value to be only £50, something will come off. I remember years ago we had an investigation into land transactions in which soldiers were concerned. There were cases of land bought

for less than £5 per block being sold at prices ranging from £120 to £150 per block to soldiers. The soldiers were absolutely fleeced. This fleecing is still going on, especially in the case of women and men down on the bottom rung of the ladder as regards getting work. At the present time some of the purchasers of blocks of land are earning only about £2 to £2 5s. per week, the sustenance which they are receiving. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Mr. Hegney in the Chair; Mr. Wilson in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—Agreed to.

Clause 2—Amendment of Section 10 of principal Act:

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I did not quite gather from the hon. member's remarks when moving the second reading of the Bill exactly what the clause means and how it will operate.

Mr. WILSON: The clause will remedy the fault I referred to. The purchaser of a block may have been sued and judgment obtained against him. He may have taken no heed of the summons and judgment may have gone by default. Then further proceedings are taken against him, and he has either to pay up or go to gaol. The clause will give him the right to appear before a magistrate who will be able to take the circumstances into consideration and, if deemed necessary, grant the purchaser some relief.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I understand that the clause will give the right of appeal by an aggrieved person against whom judgment has been obtained, and I have no objection to raise if it has application only to such cases as the member for Collie referred to. I warn the Committee of the danger of passing such a clause if it is to have general application. I am aware that the section was passed to apply to "go-getters" and, although I will not oppose the clause, it seems to me unwise to pass it in a form that will enable the procedure outlined to become a matter of general practice.

Mr. WATTS: As I understand the Act and the proposed amendment embodied in the Bill, this will have general application to sales of subdivisinal land. Many such sales are entered into bona fide between the vendor and the purchaser, and such transactions would not come within the category mentioned by the member for Collie. While I agree that we should stretch a point and afford purchasers some relief when there are special reasons for doing so, I do not see why any vendor who has not done anything improper should be placed in the position of having to submit to additional proceedings after he has obtained his original judgment against the purchaser. Although the sale may have been perfectly bona fide in the first instance, the vendor might run the risk of having the whole transaction affected. I shall not oppose the clause, but I suggest that the member for Collie consider altering it in some way so as to provide for transactions that are perfectly bona fide.

Mr. THORN: I agree with the member for Collie that protection is required for some purposes, but I also recognise the fear that has been raised regarding the application generally of such a provision where bona fide transactions are concerned. I suggest to the member for Collie that he could get the Bill through this House and then give consideration to our representations and have it amended in another place in order to prevent the general application of the measure. I have discussed this matter with him several times, and dealt with many cases myself, and I know it is necessary to protect some people. Nevertheless we should consider the vendor who acts honourably.

Mr. WILSON: I am prepared to consider that. Scores of summonses have been issued over the past two or three years, and men and women have had very little time to get a solicitor, with the result that the verdict has gone against them. This clause is only intended to allow the magistrate to review the whole case and take all the circumstances into consideration. The honest vendor will not be penalised but will be given the same chance as the purchaser.

Clause put and passed.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment, and the report adopted.

BILL—DISTRESS FOR RENT ABOLITION.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 28th October.

MR. NORTH (Claremont) [8.14]: I desire to compliment the member for Canning (Mr. Cross) on his presentation of the Bill, and for his industry. We all listened with interest to his historical disquisition, and although it seemed almost entertaining at first it became later very compelling and interesting. The abolition of distress for rent is not now a matter of speculation, as some new proposal, because, as we were informed by the hon. member, in New South Wales such an Act is in force.

Mr. Cross: It has been in force for six years.

Mr. NORTH: It has survived two Governments of a different colour. The Lang Government introduced the measure and the present Stevens Government have left it on the statute-book. It therefore cannot be so terribly drastic and dangerous as those of a conservative mind might think. So many years have elapsed since the original legislation was introduced that the time has come when it should be reviewed. This legislation was conceived and has been carried on in what might be termed the ethics of the wolves' den—the law of the jungle—and surely we have come to an age when we can pass out of that sort of atmosphere! To continue this legislation for another ten years would be to make it become completely an anachronism. There is a new policy being followed by the Governments of the day. The nations to-day need strong, healthy men to bear arms and strong buxom lasses to become nurses in the potential wars of the future. The modern States which are so civilised that they are expecting this internecine warfare need more healthy babies; but we are getting fewer babies, and all are not too healthy. Over a period of ten years the birth rate has definitely fallen. Is this the time, when healthy citizens are needed, for greedy landlords—perhaps only one in a hundred—to throw people on the streets on the smallest provocation, take their furniture and sell it, and leave them to sleep in rights-of-way at night? That sort of thing has been happening in Australia during the last two or three years. If the modern State is going to take control of

its manhood and its womanhood and its children, and make them fit to go through the test of war—I am taking the lowest incentive—on that aspect alone the State should insist that housing is just as important as food or clothing. The remedy is there, for somebody who has bought food and cannot pay for it, or has bought clothes and cannot pay for them. The remedy is there through the courts and it is proposed that this remedy should apply to housing. We know that eventually the goods can be levied on through some judgment of the court. However, I do not want to start talking about law, for it is a long time since I practised it, and I may have forgotten some of it; but I know that much, and so it seems to me this is a good time to change the legislation. We have the example of New South Wales, and the incentive of all the States to preserve all their peoples and keep them in good condition, whether in peace or in war. In peace time, of course, we want to run the country as economically as possible, and keep the hospitals from being overcrowded. So I cannot see any argument in favour of the preservation of the existing law. In my view the House is under a debt of gratitude to the member for Canning (Mr. Cross) for the exhaustive presentation of his case when moving the second reading. I trust the Bill will be carried, and will receive ample support in another Chamber as well.

On motion by Mr. Marshall, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 8.23 p.m.