

with the building regulations of the local governing body. I cannot understand why the Minister has introduced the Bill at all. There is no necessity for it from the standpoint of the country districts.

Mr. LATHAM: A sufficiently strong case has been made out in support of the contentions of the member for Swan. I can understand a charge being levied for the inspection of plans and specifications, but I cannot understand why a renewal fee should be imposed. I think the Minister should give some consideration to this point and meet the wishes of the country members.

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 8.5 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 27th August, 1929.

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

QUESTION—LAND ACT, RESIDENTIAL CONDITIONS.

Mr. LATHAM asked the Minister for Lands: 1, Have the residential conditions under Section 68 of the Land Act been altered? 2, If so, under what authority? 3, If by regulations, when will they be tabled?

The **MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS** (for the Minister for Lands) replied: 1, Yes. 2, Section 25 of the Land Act, 1898. 3, Answered by No. 2.

QUESTION—LICENSING BENCH.

Mr. MANN asked the Premier: The term of appointment of the Licensing Bench having expired on 13th inst., what is the intention of the Government with regard to the position?

The **PREMIER** replied: The term of appointment of the Licensing Bench has been extended until the 31st day of December, 1929.

QUESTION—STATE SAWMILLS, FIREWOOD.

Mr. CORBOY asked the Minister for Trading Concerns: 1, Has any arrangement or agreement been entered into whereby the whole or the major part of the production of firewood from State Sawmills will be sold to one firm? 2, Is any such arrangement or agreement under consideration?

The **MINISTER FOR TRADING CONCERNS** replied: 1, No. 2, No.

BILLS (4)—FIRST READING.

- 1, Electoral Provinces.
- 2, State Savings Bank Act Amendment.
- 3, Fair Rents.
- 4, Agricultural Products.

BILL—LAND AGENTS.

Read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

BILL—ROAD DISTRICTS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR GOLDFIELDS AND AGRICULTURAL WATER SUPPLIES (Hon. J. Cunningham—Kalgoorlie) [4.43] in moving the second reading said: This or a similar Bill has been before the House on at least two occasions during the

last three or four years. In accordance with promises made to the Road Districts Conference, a Bill was introduced in 1926 for the purpose of providing comprehensive amendments to the Road Districts Act of 1919. In that Bill provision was made for the principle of one ratepayer one vote. The Bill passed this House, but another place refused to endorse that principle of one ratepayer one vote. It is with reluctance that on this occasion I have excluded the principle of one ratepayer one vote.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: What! Desert your principles like that?

THE MINISTER FOR WATER SUPPLIES: Since the Bill was last before Parliament, when it was dropped in consequence of the attitude of another place, the Road Boards Conference and also several road district boards have pressed for urgent amendments to the Act. Therefore the Government have deemed it advisable to introduce the Bill again this session. Nearly the whole of the amendments contained in the Bill were passed by this House on a previous occasion. Still, there are a few alterations. One of the most important of the amendments in the Bill provides for altering the title "Road Boards" to "District Councils." In Victoria and New South Wales the term "shire council" is used, and in South Australia the term "district council" is used. The latter title finds favour with the road boards conferences held here from time to time, and I also favour an alteration from road board to district council. In years gone by the functions of a road board were altogether different from what they are at present. In the early stages of development and during the early history of road boards, the activities and functions were confined mainly to the construction of roads and bridges, but to-day those bodies are called upon to render service in many other directions. For instance, some of the road boards are to-day controlling electric light stations, and they also carry out many other activities in the interests of the ratepayers that were not in existence years ago.

Mr. Corboy: Some of them have controlled light stations for 20 years.

THE MINISTER FOR WATER SUPPLIES: That is so, but as time goes on the activities of the boards are becoming enlarged. Hence it was contended that by retaining the

title of road boards we were not accurately conveying to the community what was meant by local governing bodies of this kind. With that amendment is an accompanying alteration in the term "chairman" which we propose to make "president," and provision is also made for a vice-president. Under the existing Act there is no provision for a vice chairman, and considerable confusion has arisen through the absence of a chairman when it has been necessary for a road board to meet and elect a temporary chairman. The duties of the vice-president are also set out. A matter that has agitated the minds of road board members for some time is that of election day falling on a Saturday that happens to be a public holiday. The Act provides that in the event of an election day falling on a Saturday which is a holiday, the election shall be held on the next succeeding week-day. Saturday is the most suitable day for road board elections, and the Bill provides that all elections shall be held on a Saturday. When an election falls on a Saturday which is a public holiday, it will be held on the first Saturday following the public holiday. That proposal meets with the approval of individual road boards and also of the road board conferences. Provision is made in the Act for the abolition of a road board when the general rates do not exceed £300. We propose that the Government shall have power to abolish a road board when the rates do not average £600. Several boards have gone out of existence as a result of depression in certain parts of the State, particularly on the gold-fields, and it has been found advisable in the interests of the ratepayers to merge one or more boards into a single board. When the matter was being discussed it was realised that the sum of £300 had been fixed in pre-war days when work was less costly and administration expenses were much lower than they are at present. An alteration is proposed in the portion of the Act dealing with the duration of councils. The Bill provides that the period of election shall be three years. It may be argued that it would be much better to adhere to the present practice, but I think experience teaches that, in view of the important works undertaken by these local authorities, the period is too short. A board should be given sufficient time to carry out important works and members should be assured of some continuity of control.

Mr. Latham: Every member has three years under the present Act.

The MINISTER FOR WATER SUPPLIES: I realise that. Perhaps the rate-payers may be taking a rather keen interest in the administration of a board, and the alteration of the period will give them ample opportunity to voice their objection to any acts of administration or work of which they disapprove, and also to deal with any matter which they consider to be of sufficient importance to be decided by way of a general election of the whole of the members on the one day.

Mr. Latham: Under that proposal there could be no continuity of policy.

The MINISTER FOR WATER SUPPLIES: There are many other provisions in the Bill. The Act provides that committees to control halls and recreation reserves may be composed of members of the board only. It is proposed to empower the board to appoint committees of persons other than members of the board. This will be advantageous to groups of people who are living in parts removed from the town in which a road board office is situated. The area of some of our road districts is very extensive and it is almost impossible for a road board, as such, to carry out the functions and render useful service in each and every portion of the district under its control. Hence the desirability and urgent necessity to enable the board to appoint committees to control halls, libraries, and reserves vested in the board.

Mr. Sampson: I hope the Minister will not give them power to pay any license fees.

The MINISTER FOR WATER SUPPLIES: I do not fully understand the hon. member. The license fees chargeable are laid down and such committees will be under the control of the board. Any license fees that may be collected can be collected only with the authority of the board. The hon. member need have no fear on that score. The Bill also provides that where an amalgamation of districts takes place or where a municipality takes over a district controlled by a road board, the enlarged district or municipality shall also assume the liability incurred by the board. In the past some difficulty has arisen in this connection and therefore it is proposed to remedy the defect. Road boards are empowered, whenever circumstances warrant, to pay a gratuity to an officer, and it is proposed to extend the

privilege to employees as well as to officers, but to limit the concession to employees to those who have been in the service of the board for a period of not less than ten years. That provision will bring the law into line with the public service regulations. Some of the road boards will not be altogether satisfied with the proposal, but when introducing a measure of this kind it is necessary to look ahead. As we have a precedent under the public service regulations, in connection with which the question was well considered, it has been deemed desirable to make similar provision under the Road Districts Act. It should not be necessary to enlarge further on the provisions of the Bill. On two occasions within the last four years members have had an opportunity to discuss similar proposals. Many small amendments are included that can be more conveniently dealt with in Committee. They will have to be dealt with when the clauses are considered in Committee, and to discuss them now would be only a waste of time.

I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Sampson, debate adjourned.

BILL—PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

In Committee.

Resumed from the 22nd August; Mr. Panton in the Chair, the Minister for Works in charge of the Bill.

Clause 14—Fees for licenses:

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Swan, at the previous sitting of the Committee, had moved an amendment to strike out the words "or renewal" in Subclause 1.

Mr. SAMPSON: At the previous sitting I read to members some scathing comments by Mr. W. C. Angwin indicating his opinion that it was unreasonable to make it essential that public buildings should be licensed. He made those remarks when dealing with another Bill referring to health matters and the inspection of buildings. I hope members have taken his utterance to heart. If the license fees stand, every little hall in the State will have to pay at least £1 a year, and those that are equipped for the showing of pictures will be charged from £5 to £20 a year. Such halls as those at Queen's Park, Cannington, Gosnells, Kelm-

scott, Armadale, Kalamunda, and Mt. Helena, in close proximity to Perth, will pay either £5 or £10 a year.

The Minister for Works: What a wonderful imagination you have! I do not suppose one of the places you have mentioned will seat 300 people.

Mr. SAMPSON: It is provided that if a hall will seat up to 300 people, the fee must be £5, and if it accommodates from 300 to 500 people the fee must be £10 a year. The Minister says the Bill will not be put into force immediately, but it would be dangerous to leave such a tempting measure on the statute-book.

Mr. CHESSON: This clause may seriously affect the hall at Cue which has seating accommodation for 600 people. It is managed by the citizens and is seldom used except as a means of raising revenue for charities. If the controllers of the hall are to be charged at the rate of £15 a year, I shall have to vote against the clause, because it will mean that the citizens will have to give up that control.

Mr. LATHAM: Members had an opportunity last week to restrict the operations of the Bill to the metropolitan area.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member is out of order in discussing that question.

Mr. LATHAM: We can at least, by passing the amendment, prevent the Minister from charging any fee for renewals. Too often the Government charge for services that are not rendered. That is a highly immoral proceeding. The Bill will probably lead to the creation of an army of inspectors, which the State cannot afford to maintain. It is almost inevitable that a big department will grow out of this measure.

Mr. THOMSON: I do not understand why the Minister has inserted the words "or renewal." There is no comparison in point of service between the original grant of a license and its renewal, which entails very much less work. The powers placed in the hands of the Chief Architect are grossly unfair powers to confer on one man. Before the original grant of the license the plans and specifications must be submitted to that officer for his close scrutiny, and with that I agree. For such scrutiny the charge is to be 3s. per 100 square feet. The renewal fee means an annual tax. Inspection after the original erection can only amount to ascertaining that the building is in good order and re-

pair. The Minister cannot have originally intended the Bill as a taxing measure. If the clause passes as printed, the charges on the principal halls in my electorate will be—Kojonup, £15, Katanning £20, Broome Hill £15, Tambellup £10, and Gnowangerup £10. The smaller halls built by struggling settlers carry overdrafts, and they are to be charged from £1 to £5 for annual inspection. Where entertainments are held nightly, greater vigilance is needed; but in the smaller halls not more than four or five entertainments might be held in a year.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The renewal of a license will entail work, as the building will have to be inspected. The large buildings in the city, it is estimated, will have to be inspected at least once a month, the larger halls in the country three or four times a year, and the smaller halls once annually. The very large buildings are mostly owned by foreign companies, who should not have this service rendered to them at the expense of the taxpayers of Western Australia. Why should the taxpayers carry such an obligation?

Mr. Latham: Will there be more inspections in the future than there have been in the past?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am prepared to listen to reason and argument as to revising the schedule of fees, but I wish to be assured that sufficient revenue will come in to cover the cost of administering the measure.

Mr. Latham: The owners will pass on the fees.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: No; the fees are too small to be passed on. I propose to make more grades—the present grades being too wide—and to reduce the fees for the smaller halls. I do not believe for a moment that the owners of halls will object, because the inspection will really represent an insurance to audiences against dangers such as panic, fire, or riot. Loss of life resulting from such occurrences might otherwise mulct the owners in heavy damages. The Government have no desire whatever to make money out of the measure. Annual license renewal is essential to its success. On the schedule of fees I shall be prepared to consider hon. members' suggestions. The case submitted by the member for Cue is probably unique, but I will look into it.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: The Minister does not know even now what fees he wants to charge. The work has been done successfully by the Health Department for years.

The Minister for Works: You are quite wrong.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: Nothing has happened so far, without all this business of inspecting and charging. Every building or place used for the comfort of people, for picture shows or amusements, for race meetings or football matches, will be taxed. I do not know why Parliament should be asked to make it possible to create an additional staff of officials to undertake the work suggested. If every hall throughout the State is to be inspected annually, it will mean tremendous work. I do not see that there is any need at all for annual licenses. It is right that structures should be approved at the outset, and the public are entitled to know that buildings in which they congregate are quite safe. It is right that control shall be exercised over such buildings so that people may know that, should a panic occur, there are proper means of exit provided. After the original inspection and approval of buildings, surely the State can do something without the necessity for the imposition of an additional tax. Under existing conditions revenue is derived from places of amusement. The Minister says that an impost of £10 will be nothing to some of the buildings he has referred to, but I do not know that the people of Spearwood, for instance, will say that any such amount will be nothing to them for the renewal of the license in connection with their stone hall that has stood the test of time for years and will be there for many years to come.

The Minister for Works: We do not get a shilling now; there is no license!

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: I said that the State received revenue from these buildings.

The Minister for Works: You have made the statement two or three times that we get license fees. I have corrected you; there are no license fees.

Hon. Sir JAMES MITCHELL: But the State receives revenue. First the Federal Government receive their revenue, and then the State authorities collect theirs. If a staff of inspectors is to be appointed, the officers will require to be highly qualified; otherwise the inspections will be useless.

Why is it that on every possible occasion the Government seek to impose additional fees? Very few halls are privately owned, and I trust the Committee will decide that no additional fees shall be imposed upon halls owned by the people in the country districts. I hope the amendment will be agreed to.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: The Bill under consideration serves to demonstrate how careful we should be in dealing with legislation. I confess I had not read the Bill thoroughly, but I was startled to hear that every country hall or other place for the accommodation of people will be taxed if we agree to the Bill in its present form. There are about 30 halls in the Avon electorate. Some have been built by returned soldiers as memorials, and at Kellerberrin the Boy Scouts have erected a hall.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not think that has anything to do with the amendment.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: But if we agree to the Bill, it will mean that fees will be charged annually in respect of those halls.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: If a stall is opened to sell a particular individual's pastry, it will have to be licensed.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: The imposition of the renewal fees and so on will mean a tax on charity efforts.

The Minister for Mines: There are hundreds of concerts held for charitable purposes in respect of which not a shilling is charged, yet the hon. member says that this will mean a tax on charities!

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The Minister is out of order.

Mr. GRIFFITHS: It is not fair to levy on the country halls. If even £1 only is collected from each hall, the fees in the aggregate would represent a considerable source of revenue for the State.

Mr. SLEEMAN: If the Minister could achieve what he imagines, I would be with him. Apparently he considers that he will be able to collect the tax from the foreign companies that have been referred to, but I am afraid he has no chance of doing that. I can visualise the impost being passed on to the public. We know there are foreign companies that introduce films to be shown at various picture halls.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! We are discussing the renewal of the licenses of halls and that has nothing to do with films coming into the country.

Mr. SLEEMAN: If I am not to be allowed the latitude that was accorded the Minister—

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member must not reflect upon the Chair.

Mr. SLEEMAN: I know that the tax will be passed on to the people. Every year the inspectors will go round and collect their £10 or £15 in connection with various halls inspected, and that will mean an extra charge upon those who attend the picture shows. I remember that when the men working in the baking industry received an increase of 5s. a week, a halfpenny or so went on to the price of every loaf of bread. If a fee of £10 is collected on account of a hall, I am afraid we will find 6d. or 9d. going on to the price of admission to that hall. At the present time officers of the Health Department inspect halls, and we have fire brigade officials carrying out similar duties. I believe there is one fire brigade officer in Perth who devotes the whole of his time to that work.

Mr. Latham: We are becoming an inspector-ridden State.

Mr. SLEEMAN: I cannot discern any reason why there should be inspections additional to those at present being made, and I see no reason for approving of the measure.

Mr. LINDSAY: I intend to support the amendment; in fact I should like to see the whole clause out. Although the Minister for Works said that the case mentioned by the member for Cue was unique, I think the instance quoted can also be made to apply to my electorate. There are no foreign-owned halls there, and I know that several have not paid their way. People in the country erect halls to enable the community to meet together, and entertainments are held, perhaps once or twice a month. It is in such circumstances that difficulty is experienced in paying interest and sinking fund on the cost of construction. Many individuals are forced to put their hands in their pockets to meet deficiencies. The clause will add to the trouble. I cannot understand why the Bill was introduced. The position is covered by Section 138 to 145 of the Health Act which deals with public buildings and also the granting of licenses. The local bodies inspect public halls; they are given that power.

The CHAIRMAN: We are not discussing the question of inspection of halls.

Mr. LINDSAY: The amendment deals with renewals of licenses, and before a re-

newal can be granted a hall must be inspected. Consequently I consider I am speaking to the amendment. We have an Act that is a dead letter. Is the Minister for Health prepared to say that his department are not doing their job? I consider they are, and that they are doing it well. Under the existing law an owner cannot make any alteration without first getting the approval of the local health authority. Why does the Minister want a Bill now to authorise him to do something that is already being carried out satisfactorily? It has not been shown that the local authorities are not doing their job. I hope the amendment will be carried.

Mr. THOMSON: The Minister has told us that in respect of renewals it was necessary that in the city, buildings should be inspected once a month, and elsewhere three or four times a year, whilst the smaller halls should be inspected once a year. I have calculated roughly what the inspections will mean to my district. It will mean approximately a tax of £100 a year if the schedule is passed as it appears in the Bill. The Minister is prepared to give that matter further consideration, but I cannot see that there will be any additional cost to the Government. In the country we find that the Works Department supervisor or inspector who is in the district attending to his other duties, has to inspect the halls and see that the work has been carried out in accordance with the specifications submitted. That is provided for in the granting of licenses. When it comes to renewals being granted the officer would have to go through the district and that is what is being done to-day in respect of workers' homes and public works. In all country districts the supervisors are doing the work, and in some instances are also inspectors of scaffolding. The officers do not receive one penny more for carrying out those duties. The Minister's case is weak and it savours very much of the building up of another department, which is not wanted. I hope the Committee will support the amendment.

Mr. WITHERS: I intend to oppose the amendment, principally because the Minister has given the Committee an undertaking that the schedule will receive further consideration. It should be time enough to debate this matter when the schedule is under discussion.

Mr. Sampson: There is no need to license country halls each year.

Mr. WITHERS: The Minister might consider the position of country halls that are controlled by committees, and from which no one is deriving a profit.

Mr. LATHAM: The Minister told us that the intention was to protect the public, but the public are already protected by local inspectors. Surely these officials can do the job. The Minister apparently does not realise that his proposal means a duplication of control in regard to halls. The Minister also said that if there was a fire or a riot the owner would become responsible. Even with the clause the owner would still be liable. The clause will impose a tax on the very people whom we have no desire to tax. The clause sets out that fees shall be payable on the renewal of the license. The Chairman told us that the schedule had nothing to do with the clause.

The CHAIRMAN: What I said was that the schedule could not be discussed at this stage.

Mr. LATHAM: The schedule must guide us in this legislation and if it were reasonable in respect of fees the probability is we would not raise any objection.

The CHAIRMAN: The schedule will govern this clause.

Mr. LATHAM: The clause says, "The fees payable on the granting or renewal of licenses of public buildings shall be at the annual rates set out in the Second Schedule." Thus the Second Schedule is linked up with the clause. The fees in the schedule have caused us to object to the word "renewal." I suggest that the Minister should report progress, and amend the schedule. He might then persuade us that he is reasonable in his demands. What I object to is the duplication of control, the appointment of additional inspectors, the additional charges to be made and the absolutely rotten system of collecting revenue, because we are getting down to the widow's mite stage.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is quite obvious that hon. members either did not listen to what I said at an earlier stage or were not in the House when I spoke. I have already stated that the Bill will take the place of the Health Act.

The Minister for Health: Which is not a satisfactory Act now.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The Bill has been submitted at the request of

contractors and builders who are interested. They have repeatedly asked for the introduction of this legislation.

Mr. Lindsay: The contractors have nothing to do with the renewal of licenses.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Country people have a habit of making alterations without consulting anyone. The Bill will deal with the structure in regard to which the Health Act does not set out anything definite. When an architect proceeds to design a building he does not know just what his obligations are. All are at the whim of one individual. The Chief Architect says he feels that responsibility, and that it should be the responsibility of Parliament to set the limit to which one man should go. The same case is now being put up about the tax and the army of officers, and the wanting of revenue. Is not this repeating almost verbatim what was said when we introduced the Scaffolding Bill? The same arguments with the same motives were put forward then, and all my assurances that there would be no additional expense, and that we did not want to make revenue out of it, fell on deaf ears. But to prove that what I said was right, we have now before Parliament a Bill to reduce the fees under the Scaffolding Act, so economically have we been able to administer that Act.

Mr. Latham: You have never rendered the service.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It appears to me the whole of the arguments hang on the schedule. I am prepared to adopt the suggestion of the member for York and have the schedule redrafted, in the meantime agreeing to report progress until I put the amendment on the Agenda Paper so that we can all see where we are. The main consideration of the Government is that the lives of those who enter these buildings shall be safeguarded. In Perth I attended a function where I met men whose business it is to erect these structures. There I listened to speech after speech deprecating the nature of buildings recently erected, and declaring that the lives of the people would be endangered in some of those buildings. Those men urged me to have something done in Parliament so as to give protection to people using public buildings, and provide for a fee as low as possible.

Mr. Latham: What about the passing on of the fee?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is nonsense to talk of passing on so small an amount. But it is obvious that there can be an improvement in the grading and arrangement of the schedule, and so with a view to shortening the debate I will have an amendment drafted and put on the Agenda Paper. As I said on the second reading of the Scaffolding Bill, we have no idea of getting revenue. We do not want revenue from this activity. But it should be made to pay the cost of its own supervision. If the fees fixed prove to be too great, we will do the same here as we have done with the Scaffolding Act, namely, come down and ask for their reduction. If we wanted to make revenue out of activities such as this, why should we be bringing down an amendment of the Scaffolding Act with the object of reducing the fees under that Act? It is the duty of Parliament to see that the lives of those using public buildings are safeguarded. But we do not want to make money out of it. If it should be seen that the revenue derived is more than sufficient to meet the cost of supervision, the Government will not hesitate to ask Parliament to revise the scale of fees.

Progress reported.

BILL—MAIN ROADS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 20th August.

MR. LINDSAY (Toodyay) [6.6]: I agree that this is a most important measure. The Minister, when moving the second reading, informed us that the executive of the Road Boards' Association had agreed to his suggestion. I understand that the Minister suggested first of all 33 per cent., and that the Road Boards' Association agreed to pay 25 per cent.

The Minister for Works: They made a promise of 25 per cent., but I suggested 33 per cent.

Mr. LINDSAY: Very well. At the same time I do not agree with the attitude of the road boards' executive. The matter was well discussed at the last August conference, and there was carried a resolution to the effect that the traffic fees should be

an inalienable source of road board revenue. There has been a great deal of difficulty and a great deal of dissatisfaction over the allocations. Various boards consider they have not had value for the money they are asked to pay. I think the objection has been rather to the value, or lack of value, received than to the actual amount they have been asked to pay. It is doubtful whether the Minister is justified in asking for this amount. Legislation should be passed in the interests of the whole of the people, if possible. It is not possible to pass legislation under which some section will not be dissatisfied, but at least it is the duty of Parliament to see that a large section of the community is not treated unjustly. In my opinion that is what the Bill means in taking 25 per cent. of the traffic fees from the whole of the local authorities. Many road boards will agree with the proposal because their traffic fees are heavy and their expenditure light. But on the wheat belt, and particularly in my own electorate, we are going to have to pay out a great deal more money than we should be asked to pay. I have received from various road boards in my electorate letters asking me to oppose the measure. I have written back to them for information as to how the Act will affect them. Recently the Minister told the House that he had in the Federal Aid Roads grant £550,000 not yet used. That is to say, that money is still available from the Federal Government. And if my memory serves me, the Minister also said that all the money had been allocated except £3,400. I and other members have been asking ourselves why that money has not been expended. The only reason I can give for it is that the Government have not had sufficient loan funds to meet the money offered by the Commonwealth Government. Since the roads are required, and since we have large numbers of men looking for work, I can only ask why that money has not been expended. The Federal Aid Roads Act, which was passed in 1926, prescribed that the Federal Government should pay Western Australia £384,000 per annum, and that the State should pay £288,000 towards the fund. Had that been carried out in its entirety, we should have spent on roads since 1926 no less a sum than £2,086,000. But according to the Minister we have not done so. The Minister

has told us there is £550,000 of the Federal money not yet spent. That means that on the balance of £602,000 actually spent, the State has spent £451,000 on roads during the last three years. I have not the exact figures; I have had to work them out from the Minister's own statement. However, it seems that during the last three years we have spent from loan money £451,000 for the maintenance and development of main roads in Western Australia, or an average of £150,000 per annum. Notwithstanding the fact that we have spent only £451,000 in three years—my figures are approximate—the Minister says he is going to spend $1\frac{1}{4}$ millions on roads during the current financial year.

Mr. Griffiths: Where is he to get the money?

The Minister for Mines: He would not get much from you.

Mr. LINDSAY: Of course not all the £451,000 has been spent on main roads. The Minister, in reply to a question by the member for Avon the other night, told the House we had spent £209,000 on main roads. According to the Main Roads Act, the local authorities have to pay half the amount expended by the Government, that is to say, one-half the £209,000. The Minister, also replying to a question by the member for Avon, told the House that in the first year the charge to the local authorities was £4,702, that in the second year the charge was £7,449, and that last year's charge had not yet been allocated. But assuming that it works out on a similar basis, we can say the charge this year should be £12,000 or £15,000. In other words, the total charge to the local authorities for the three years will be approximately £25,000.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. LINDSAY: I was dealing with the reply of the Minister to the member for Avon as regards the amounts charged by the Main Roads Board to the local governing bodies under the Main Roads Act. For 1926-27 the amount was £4,702 and for 1927-28 £7,449. For 1928-29 no assessment has yet been made. The Minister also told the member for Avon that the amount contributed by the State on the basis of 15s. in the pound towards the making of main roads for the three years had totalled £209,158.

Under the Main Roads Act passed in 1925 certain principles were laid down which in my opinion were quite fair and just. The local governing bodies were to be charged "the proportion of the amount as aforesaid to be apportioned which is allocated to each such district having regard to the benefits it has obtained from the expenditure." When one receives a benefit, one should be prepared to pay for it, and that was the principle laid down in the original Act. The Minister is now departing from that principle in that he is going to impose a charge upon the whole of the traffic fees collected, irrespective of whether the district collecting the fees derives any benefit from the expenditure on main roads. Although there has been some trouble over the proposed allocations, I do not agree with the principle that the Minister is now attempting to introduce. So far as I have been able to ascertain, the total amount spent during the three years was £451,000. The Act lays down that the amount spent on developmental roads shall not be charged to local governing bodies, but that they shall be charged only half the amount spent by the State on main roads. Therefore, if the expenditure on main roads in three years has been £209,000, one-half of that amount, or £104,500, is a charge against the local governing bodies. I want the House to understand that that amount was expended not in one year, but in three years. The Act also provides that the local governing bodies shall pay $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the amount charged to them. On £104,500, $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. amounts approximately to £6,800 per annum. If we take those figures and compute the probable assessment for this year—I have not the figures for this year—and add maintenance also, we might estimate the amount to be charged to the local governing bodies this year as £12,000 or £13,000, or a total for the three years of £25,000 or £26,000. The Minister, in the course of his speech, stated—

We have endeavoured to allocate to our local authorities £2,000 a year for this class of work. They are asked to contribute nothing towards the work done on the road, but after it is done the road boards are asked to maintain it. The local authorities are charged nothing for the work.

Thus it is clear that the money spent on developmental roads is not a charge against the local governing bodies. The only charge against them is half the amount spent by the State on main roads. What concerns

me more than anything else is the effect that the Bill will have on my electorate. I think I am safe in saying, too, that the effect in the wheat areas, particularly those in the eastern districts, will be similar. The Minister told us that by taking 25 per cent. of the traffic fees—not merely the motor fees, but the whole of the traffic fees—he will collect this year a sum of £55,000. I have already shown that in three years the charge against local governing bodies has amounted to £25,000 or £26,000. Consequently, the Minister will have a surplus over the three years of something like £30,000. Members must appreciate that as the years go on, so will the cost of maintenance, interest and sinking fund charged to the local governing bodies increase. It naturally follows that with each succeeding year the amount will be greater. Yet it appears that the Minister is going to make a profit this year. The Minister told the House that he intends to spend £1,250,000 this year. We have been told that the full amount allowed to Western Australia by the Federal Government, £550,000, had been allocated with the exception of a sum of £3,400. In my district certain money was allocated for roads in the vicinity of the Bjandjng-Northwards railway, but the whole of that money has not been spent, and the people are very anxious that it should be spent. The plans and specifications and everything else necessary for proceeding with the work were ready, and the only reason I can assign for the work not being proceeded with is that the loan money is not available. The Minister, however, has said that this year £1,250,000 is to be spent. That will mean the State will have to borrow £550,000 for road work alone, and to me it appears that that will be impossible. When we realise that the money market is not favourable for borrowing, that last May the Federal Loan Council met and cut down the loan allocations of the various States almost to the bone, and two months later met again and cut them a further 20 per cent., that, according to the Premier, we shall get £800,000 or £900,000 less loan money this year than we had last year, and that during the last three years the average amount of loan money made available for road construction was only £150,000, how will it be possible, I ask, to spend an extra £400,000 of loan money on main roads this year? Yet the Minister has based his figures on those estimates. The

proposal in the Bill will affect my electorate seriously. There are seven road districts in my electorate, and after the Minister had moved the second reading of the Bill, I wrote to each board asking for information. Members may recollect that when the Traffic Bill was introduced originally, I did the same thing and was able to give the House some useful figures as to the effect that measure would have on my electorate. Those seven road boards will pay by way of 25 per cent. of the traffic fees no less than £3,500 per annum into this fund. So far they have been charged a sum of £82 15s. towards main roads and that is not for one year, but for two years. Yet for one year's charge they are now to be asked to contribute £3,500. In my electorate we do not worry about main roads. Developmental roads are what we require to open up the country. Settlers require developmental roads in order to get their produce to the sidings, not main roads in order to travel to Perth. If the Government take an average of £500 per annum from each of the seven local governing authorities, what will the effect be? That money in the past has been expended on developmental roads, and it will mean those road boards will have to make up the deficiency by imposing an increase of at least a halfpenny in the pound on the rates. Until the measure before the House is passed, it will be impossible to impose that additional rate in some instances. One at least of the boards is taxing up to the full limit of 3d. in the pound. To give some idea of the position, let me quote the figures for various road boards. The Nungarin Road Board has been charged £11 8s. 11d.; the traffic fees total £1,596 a year, 25 per cent. of which would be £400. Thus, where Nungarin has paid £11 8s. 11d. for two years' work, it will be charged £400 for one year. The Dowerin Road Board has been charged £22 5s. 7d.; the traffic fees total £1,863, 25 per cent. of which would be £466. Thus, where Dowerin has paid £22 5s. 7d. for two years' work, it will be charged £466 for one year. Bencubbin has been charged £14; the traffic fees total £2,120, 25 per cent. of which would be £530. Thus, Bencubbin has paid £14 for two years and will be charged £530 for one year. The Wyalkatchem Road Board has been charged £35; the traffic fees total £2,362, 25 per cent. of which would be £590. Thus, Wyalkat-

them has paid £35 for two years and will be charged £590 for one year. The total charges for those four boards has been £82 15s. for the two years, but on the basis of 25 per cent. of the total traffic fees, they will be called upon to pay £1,986 per annum. I have another illustration from the Avon electorate that is worth quoting. In that district there are three road boards—Meckering, Kellerberrin and Merredin. The total charge against them is £187 19s. 10d., while the amount to be taken under this measure will be £1,976. Consequently, not only my electorate, but the electorate of Avon will have to pay a great deal more for any benefits received than under the original Act. I have not received information from all the boards concerned, but I have received details from several. The secretary of the Nungarin Board shows that half the amount spent by the Main Roads Board on the Midland Junction-Merredin road to be paid by local boards is £2,490 11s. 5d. The Nungarin board's share is 2.73 per cent. or £67 19s. 8d. That is not the annual charge; it is the capital cost of the work debited to the board. The amount falling due on the 1st July, 1930, is £4 8s. 5d. On the Northam-Goomalling-Mullewa road half the amount spent by the Main Roads Board to be paid by local boards is £1,830 14s. 6d. The Nungarin board's share is 1.63 per cent., totalling £29 16s. 10d., and the amount falling due on the 1st July, 1930, is £1 18s. 10d. To this maintenance is added. In the case of the Midland Junction-Merredin road, half the amount is spent by the Main Roads Board, and half by the local board, a total of £222 16s. 6d. This board's share is 2.73 per cent., or £6 1s. 8d. The board will pay a quarter of £1,596 9s. 6d. in order to meet the small amount I have mentioned. The traffic fees, from the point of view of the amounts collected, are not the fixture they are said to be. They have been increasing every year, and are likely to increase in the future. In 1925 the Dowerin Road Board collected in traffic fees £522, and in 1929, they collected £1,863, an increase of nearly 400 per cent. in five years. Maintenance and permanent works charged for by the Main Roads Board over two years amounted to £22 5s. 7d. This road board will pay a quarter of £1,863, in order to meet that £22 5s. 7d. I have a letter from the Wyalkatchem Road Board, as well as

a copy of a letter they have sent to the executive of the Road Boards Association. I was a member of that association for many years. Last Thursday the secretary of the association interviewed me and discussed the matter with me. Yesterday the chairman of the association, who is also chairman of the Goomalling Road Board, rang me up. I told him I did not agree with the payment of 5 per cent., and asked if he knew the facts. The chairman seemed to think that this applied only to motor vehicles. I told him that the Bill applied to all licenses, even to sulkies and spring carts used in the bush, and that in all cases vehicles had to pay a quarter of the revenue to make up the fees. The Wyalkatchem Road Board sent me this telegram:

Total traffic fees collected by the board last year equals £2,362. Board emphatically protest against any contributions towards maintenance and construction main roads. There are no main roads gazetted in our district. Oppose measure in Parliament. Letter following.

The road board also sent me a copy of the letter to the Road Boards Association protesting against the Bill and giving me these figures. I have travelled over the Northam-Goomalling-Mullewa road on many occasions. It was gazetted as a main road between Northam and Mullewa. I travelled over the Northam-Goomalling section, and have not seen it in so bad a condition for the last 24 years. I presume its condition is due to the fact that it has been taken over as a main road, and that neither the Goomalling nor the Northam Road Board has spent any money upon it. Certainly some money may have been spent upon it further north than Goomalling. If so, none of my road boards has derived any benefit from it. Notwithstanding this, the Wyalkatchem Road Board was charged up in 1927 with capital cost to the amount of £173 15s. 2d., and in 1928 with capital cost of £43 15s. The annual payments in 1927 were £11 5s. 11d., and in 1928 they were £2 16s. 10d. I now come to the Midland Junction-Merredin road from which they get some advantage. In 1927 the capital cost amounted to £271 10s. 4d., and the annual payments to £19 13s. In 1928 the capital cost amounted to £99 12s. 5d. and the annual payments to £6 9s. 6d., while the maintenance in 1928 amounted to £8 18s. 3d. I find, taking the board as a whole, that

the seven local authorities in my electorate will pay £3,500. I have not all the figures, but I can say that the total charges for the two years would not amount to £150. I now come to the question of where the traffic fees come from. What is likely to be the increase in future traffic fees collected by the Minister? I have taken some figures from the Western Australian Pocket Year Book, and will quote those for 1927 and 1928, for the metropolitan and country areas. In 1927 the number of motor cars licensed in the metropolitan area was 8,223. In 1928 the number of motor cars licensed in the metropolitan area was 10,723, an increase in the one year of 30.4 per cent. Motor trucks licensed in the metropolitan area in 1927 numbered 1,927, and in 1928 they numbered 2,464, or an increase of 28 per cent. The increase in omnibuses in the metropolitan area over 1927 was 51 per cent. The country figures show a remarkable increase as compared with the metropolitan area. I have been told that the metropolitan area will pay 45 per cent. under the Bill. In 1928 the number of motor cars licensed in the metropolitan area was 10,723, whereas those licensed in the country numbered 13,482, an increase over the previous year of 20 per cent. The most important phase of the Bill relates to motor trucks. That is where the country shows the greatest advance. In 1928 the number of motor trucks in the metropolitan area was 2,464, whereas the number licensed in the country was 5,506, or an increase over 1927 of 44.3 per cent. I find from an analysis of the figures that at the end of 1928 country motor cars were 25.6 per cent. in number in excess of the city cars, and that motor trucks in the country were 123 per cent. in excess of city trucks. These figures show that the country will pay considerably more than the 55 per cent. mentioned.

The Minister for Works: Give me the exact figures.

Mr. LINDSAY: I have taken these figures from the Year Book. I telegraphed to one road board asking them to let me know the actual amount collected in motor car fees, and in fees for ordinary vehicles. The reply is as follows:—"Following licenses collected: cars £1,112, motor trucks £994, carts and carriages £204." In actual fact motor trucks and ordinary vehicles in the country pay more than the motor cars. I

am in accord with the principle that those who use the roads should pay for them. I also agree that the Minister must get money somewhere, as the road boards have turned down the method now adopted. I do, however, object to trucks and vehicles, used only for running about on the farms or to and from the sidings, and which do not use the main roads, being called upon to contribute towards the cost of the main roads. These vehicles may use the developmental roads at times, but they never use the main roads. In the case of the Wyalkatchem Road Board, not within 70 miles of the town of Wyalkatchem can it be said that any money has been spent on main roads. Last year the amount received by way of licenses for motor trucks in the Wyalkatchem Road Board area was £900. Not one out of a hundred of these vehicles ever goes upon a main road. Most of them are used to run about on the farms. Nowadays we find it is much quicker and more economical to use a motor truck for the carting of wood or goods to the siding than it is to harness the horses into a wagon. We use motor trucks to cart our super, and seed wheat. Generally speaking, half the work on a farm consists of carting wheat and super. to and from the siding, and the other half of work on the farm itself. I object to that principle in the Bill which taxes vehicles that do not use the main roads. I have a circular letter from the Kununoppin-Trayning Road Board. They considered the matter so serious that they sent this letter to all boards asking for a conference. I believe on the figures I have obtained that the Minister will get considerably more money, at all events for the next two years, than he is entitled to, although he said he would get only £55,000 for this year. I believe he will get considerably more than the allocations charged to the board over the last three years. In my opinion the figure will be not £55,000, but on the figures I have given showing the increase in motor licenses the increase will be something like 30 per cent. each year. The £55,000 will, therefore, be increased by 30 odd per cent. in the first year, and will go on increasing correspondingly with each year.

The Minister for Works: I doubt that.

Mr. LINDSAY: It will certainly amount to £70,000, and will go on increasing. The other States do collect money out of the traffic fees. We have a much more important

problem than that of making main roads. The problem is to construct developmental roads for those who produce the wealth of the State. This year £3,500 will be collected from my electorate in traffic fees, and the people, in order to keep their roads in repair, will have to strike another rate and tax themselves to make up the deficiency. The Main Roads Board have improved considerably of late, but I still believe that the road boards in the wheat belt can get more out of £1 than the Main Roads Board can get out of £2, even in the case of the developmental roads. For that reason I say that the money to be taken from my local governing bodies could be better spent by them than by the central authority. I would almost say to the Government that we would rather they allowed us to keep our traffic fees and refrained from giving us £2,000 a year. So long as we have the spending of the £1,000 we feel we should get £2,000 value out of it instead of the value the Main Roads Board would get out of it. The principle of my speech has been that motor cars and even country motor cars do use main roads, but not to the same extent that metropolitan cars use them, and that the users of the roads should pay for them. I am prepared to agree that the Government should take 25 per cent. of the motor car fees, and that every truck or 'bus which carries passengers or plies for hire over the main roads should pay its proportion to the fund. What I object to is the old sulky or spring cart, the wagon, and the farm truck, which never go near a main road, having to pay traffic fees. The local authorities are to be deprived of fees that are charged to non-users of main roads, and the money is not to be spent on those roads which the vehicles that pay the fees actually use. In Committee I intend to move the following amendment to Clause 10:—

That in line 27, after the figures "1926," there be inserted the following:—"but excluding from such one-fourth the fees received for licenses for motor trucks and horse-drawn vehicles not used for hire."

The executive of the Country Road Boards Association yesterday informed me that the chairman was not aware that fees for horse-drawn vehicles were to go into the fund, but thought it was only fees for motor vehicles. I hope my amendment will receive the Minister's consideration. If he accepts it, I believe the measure will prove more work-

able, and will give a greater degree of justice to the man outback than he has hitherto received.

MR. RICHARDSON (Subiaco) [8.1]: Probably most members, like myself, realise the great difficulties confronting any Minister administering the Main Roads Act. First and foremost, the local governing bodies work in a purely voluntary sense, and consequently it is our duty to do as much as possible for them. Next, most Governments are hard up against it in the matter of finance. A good deal has been heard from country members opposed to the Bill, and therefore it may be as well for me to say a few words on the metropolitan aspect of the subject. The Minister for Works has probably regarded the administration of the Act somewhat as a nightmare, since it is not possible to please everybody.

The Minister for Works: It has put a hundred years on to my age.

MR. RICHARDSON: I can believe it, although the Minister looks young. Unquestionably our local governing bodies do not like paying for what they cannot use, something that is not a matter of local concern at all. Thus the Minister finds himself in hot water. Apparently it is impossible to arrange a quota likely to be regarded by all parties as fair, and so the Minister has reached the conclusion that by giving a flat rate he will stir the local governing bodies into activity which will result in their working out a quota for themselves. Personally I do not regard a flat rate as worthy of consideration, more particularly from the metropolitan aspect as contrasted with the country point of view. I have obtained certain figures which I believe to be correct. They are the latest I was able to secure, and refer to the year 1927-28. For that financial year the traffic fees collected throughout the State totalled, I believe, £247,934; the Minister may correct me if he has the figures. Of that total of £247,934 the metropolitan area contributed £116,424 and the country districts £131,510. Any hon. member who cares to work out the details will find that the contribution of the metropolitan area for that year represented 46 per cent. of the total traffic fees, leaving a contribution of 54 per cent. by the country districts. I take it that the Minister anticipates receiving £220,000 during the current financial year, because he has said that if the Bill

passes he expects to have £55,000 for the Main Roads Board. It is only a simple sum in proportion to deduce that he anticipates traffic fees will reach £220,000. This estimate of the Minister I regard as conservative. As the member for Toodyay (Mr. Lindsay) pointed out, motor cars are increasing in Western Australia, and also motor trucks. If a revenue of £247,934 was received in 1927-28, it stands to reason that we should receive considerably more than that amount during the current financial year, and indeed must have received more during the financial year just expired. Now I wish to point out the unfairness of the Bill to the metropolitan area. The Minister said there had been numerous complaints regarding the quotas paid by the various local bodies, but I cannot recall any serious complaints from the metropolitan area. Probably the Minister is more in the way of hearing such complaints than I am. The complaints made related not so much to the percentage, but to the fact that one local authority in the metropolitan area was paying a slightly higher percentage than some other local authority, and the former came to the conclusion that it was just as much entitled as the latter to pay the lower rate. Under the old system country road boards were grouped in some degree where main roads were constructed, and those groups paid 80 per cent. of the cost of construction to the Main Roads Board, while the metropolitan area paid the remaining 20 per cent., divided in varying ratios among metropolitan local bodies. Calculating on the £220,000 which the Minister anticipates receiving we find that 46 per cent. of that amount, the contribution from the metropolitan area, represents £101,200. On the basis of 20 per cent. on the total collections in the metropolitan area, the metropolitan contribution would be £25,300. On the old system of 25 per cent. paid by the metropolitan local authorities, the amount would be only £11,000, or £14,300 less. In reality under the Bill the metropolitan area's payment would be increased by 125 per cent.

Mr. Thomson: You do not suggest that the old system was fair, do you?

Mr. RICHARDSON: It is impossible to say definitely what would be fair; but in my opinion, if the old system was unfair, the present proposal is doubly unfair. The metropolitan area has no cause to complain about paying something towards the coun-

try districts. No such complaint has, in fact, been made by any metropolitan local governing body. Many of our motor cars go into the country; but many cars come in from the country districts, and use the metropolitan roads as well. If we make main roads in country districts and give those districts the local benefit of those roads, whereas we get no local benefit at all in the metropolitan area, it is unfair that we should contribute 46 per cent. as against 54 per cent. contributed by the country districts. Under the Bill we shall not pay 20 per cent., as we did before, nor will the country districts continue to pay 80 per cent., but we shall pay 46 per cent. and the country districts only 54 per cent.

The Minister for Works: And yet the country districts growl.

Mr. RICHARDSON: I have sat here wondering what country members find to complain about in the Bill.

The Minister for Works: It is the best Bill they ever had.

Mr. J. H. Smith: You do not know country conditions.

Mr. RICHARDSON: I do, and I realise that something is due to the country people for main and developmental roads. The difference I have referred to is, however, altogether too great.

Mr. Thomson: The country districts carry the metropolitan area.

Mr. Lindsay: Who uses the roads?

Mr. RICHARDSON: The country people mostly.

Mr. J. H. Smith: The country people do not want main roads.

Mr. RICHARDSON: I hope the Minister will note that interjection. If country members do not want main roads, they can be assured that the metropolitan area does not want to spend money on main roads that are not required.

Mr. Latham: Thank Goodness. In that case we would not have had the Canning Road.

Mr. RICHARDSON: We are quite prepared to pay our fair quota, but for the life of me I cannot see why the metropolitan area's portion should be advanced from 20 per cent. to 46 per cent. I hope the Minister will agree to the appointment of a select committee to inquire into the Bill. By that means, I believe, a fairer and surer basis could be arrived at, one that would inspire confidence in country local bodies

and in metropolitan local bodies as well. It has been said that the Local Governing Association of the metropolitan area has consented to the Bill. Still, it is highly remarkable that whenever the question has been discussed by the local bodies, each and every one of them has turned it down. They certainly do not agree with it. If they go into the figures, naturally they cannot do so, since the payments are too high. The metropolitan local governing bodies agree that something is due from the metropolitan area to country districts in the matter of roads; but I do not believe that any metropolitan local authority, having worked out the figures, would be prepared to pay 46 per cent. of the total expenditure on country main roads. The metropolitan area derives no benefit from the construction of new country roads.

Mr. J. H. Smith: Who uses the roads?

Mr. RICHARDSON: In point of fact, what advantage does the metropolitan area gain from the construction of a main road from Norcman to Esperance?

Mr. Sampson: And what advantage do we get?

Mr. RICHARDSON: What possible advantage can the metropolitan area reap from a road main road between Albany and Denmark? Yet we are being asked to pay 46 per cent. of the cost of such main roads. I am a metropolitan member, and the country members can fight their own battles; but I fully acknowledge that the metropolitan area owes something to the country, being dependent upon the country. Still, country members must realise that their districts are dependent upon the metropolitan area to keep its roads good, so that rural residents can transact their business when they come in from the country. If we are now to pay through the nose for all the country main roads that are constructed, how are we in the metropolitan area to maintain our own roads? It will be a matter of impossibility. The drain on our funds will be too great. Let me tell the country members that there is not one municipal council, or local authority in the metropolitan area that is not facing the task of financing operations for the year without a deficit. That is a fact. In many instances our roads are not up to date and we cannot rectify that position. Yet the country members claim that we in the metropolitan area should pay 46 per cent. of the cost! I object to it and I hope

the Minister for Works will accept the suggestion that the Bill be referred to a select committee.

MR. THOMSON (Katanning) [8.16]: I am gratified that the member for Subiaco (Mr. Richardson) has expressed his belief that the metropolitan area should pay a considerable proportion of the cost of the construction of main roads. During his remarks he said that he wondered what advantage it was to the metropolitan area that the main roads had been constructed. In my electorate there is the Kojonup Road Board. In that particular district there are 80 miles of main roads constructed to the north, south, east and west. I can assure the member for Subiaco that if he were to maintain a check on the cars using those roads, particularly during the festive season, he would find that at least 75 per cent. were from districts outside the Kojonup area.

Mr. Richardson: All would not be metropolitan cars.

Mr. THOMSON: The hon. member would find that they were mostly from the metropolitan area. We welcome the people from the city to our country districts because the visits enable them to see the enormous extent of country that has to be developed and to realise the difficulties that residents of the country districts have to contend with.

Mr. Richardson: If you go down to the Royal Show you will see more cars from the country districts than from the metropolitan area.

Mr. THOMSON: That refers to a show that is held once a year.

Mr. Richardson: But you spoke about a check on cars that passed through the Kojonup district during the festive season! That is once a year, too.

Mr. THOMSON: The member for Subiaco said that he did not know what benefit it was to the metropolitan area to pay for the construction of main roads.

The Minister for Railways: You can see country cars at the races every Saturday.

Mr. THOMSON: The presence of the country cars in the metropolis means financial gain to the whole of the metropolitan area.

Mr. Richardson: And when the city cars go to your country districts the same thing applies.

Mr. THOMSON: But not to the same extent. It is to the distinct advantage of the metropolitan area that country visitors come down to town.

Mr. Richardson: And vice versa.

Mr. THOMSON: There is no comparison between the two positions. Perhaps a percentage of the city cars that go through the Kojonup district may pull up for benzine or petrol, but the majority pass merrily through. For many years prior to my entry into Parliament, and since I have been here, annual conferences of road boards have devoted time to discussions regarding the construction and maintenance of main roads. The consensus of opinion at those conferences was that the construction and maintenance of main roads should be a charge against the Government and not against the local authorities. I believe that was the intention of the Main Roads Board as well. When the Federal Government introduced the legislation that gave to Western Australia £384,000 a year, a sum much in excess of our per capita payments, they took into consideration the task ahead of this State in connection with developmental problems. That action certainly expedited the construction of our roads and led to the passing of the Main Roads Act. There is much dissatisfaction to-day regarding the allocation of the cost of the main roads. While many local authorities are prepared to accept the Bill under discussion whereby 25 per cent. of their traffic fees will be taken, a large number of the smaller boards claim that they derive no actual direct benefit from the construction of main roads. They know that hundreds of cars seldom go outside the districts in which they are licensed. I hope the Minister will agree to the appointment of a select committee to inquire into these matters and to obtain information from a majority of the road boards as to whether they approve of the Bill. The proposition to take 25 per cent. of the traffic fees from the local authorities is a serious matter for them. I had hoped that the Minister would have included some provision that would enable the Government to impose a tax on petrol. We passed a Bill along those lines and certain revenue was collected. I consider that the imposition of a tax of 1d. per gallon on petrol or benzine imported into the State will give the Government considerably more revenue than the Min-

ister will derive under the provisions of the Bill.

The Minister for Works: No.

Mr. THOMSON: I received information to-day indicating that during the year 1928-29 we imported into Western Australia 16,359,566 gallons of benzine and petrol, on which duty, handling charges and wharfage fees amounting to £585,995 was paid. If a tax of 1d. per gallon were imposed, that would give the Government £68,164.

The Minister for Works: There are exemptions.

Mr. THOMSON: I will allow the Minister exemptions amounting to £13,000; that would still give him £55,164.

The Minister for Works: When we imposed a tax of 3d per gallon, it brought us in £90,000 a year.

Mr. THOMSON: Yes, but the years have passed since then.

The Minister for Works: It was two years ago only.

Mr. THOMSON: But, as the member for Toodyay (Mr. Lindsay) pointed out, there has been an increase of 30 per cent. in motor vehicles that have been imported into the State and have been licensed. However, on the figures available to-day we could derive a revenue of £68,164 by the imposition of a tax of 1d. per gallon on petrol and benzine. I had hoped that the Government would have introduced a measure that would enable the local authorities to reduce the wheel tax to an extent that would correspond with the amount the Minister proposes to take from them under the provisions of the Bill. Then, again, the Government could certainly have exempted trucks and other vehicles that are used wholly for business purposes. It is grossly unfair to continue the present methods of taxation by which the man who is a common carrier and uses his truck all the year round pays, in respect of traffic fees, exactly the same as the man who uses his truck for a portion of the year only. It would be fair and equitable to either exempt or reduce the fees payable in respect of motor trucks that are used by individuals to convey produce grown by themselves, either to market or to the railway station for transport to markets within the State or overseas. The suggestions I put forward present an easy solution of the problems facing us. The

difficulties that arise in connection with the cost of construction and maintenance of our main roads have occasioned grave anxiety. I have already indicated that the consensus of opinion in road board circles is that the cost of that work should be charged against the Government and not against the local authorities. There are other proposals embodied in the Bill. For instance, one clause provides that no contract involving expenditure of over £1,000 shall be entered into without the consent of the Minister. I do not know why the Minister seeks to have that authority unless it is that he desires to prevent a recurrence of anything like the Canning-road episode. In the interim report that was submitted by the select committee of the Legislative Council, we find the following statement:—

Files disclose the fact that the preliminary rough estimate was £70,000, or £8,750 per mile for eight miles of road 18 feet wide. Subsequently, alterations were made, which increased the estimate to £91,600, and the approval of the Minister for Works (Mr. McCallum) was given for construction at that figure.

Then again, it was stated in the report—

Evidence from a number of sources further inclined the committee to believe that strong representations should be made to the Federal authorities with a view to enabling the Main Roads Board to enter into direct negotiations with local authorities for the economical and prompt construction of developmental roads.

I have no doubt that the Minister will be able to give us the reasons, when we deal with the Bill in Committee, for asking for that particular power.

The Minister for Works: I gave you the reasons. That provision is in the Act now.

Mr. THOMSON: I think it is misplaced in the Act.

The Minister for Works: I explained all that.

Mr. THOMSON: I understand the Main Roads Board were brought into being with the idea that they should be outside political control.

The Minister for Works: And where do they get their money from?

Mr. THOMSON: The Government provide the money. All the roads have to be approved by the Government or by the Main Roads Board. One condition that is

approved by everybody is that the local authorities and the Main Roads Board have what is called a five year programme ahead. That is very wise. It seems to me that once those roads have been approved and the Main Roads Board have the power and authority to construct them, it is unnecessary there should be any further authority.

The Minister for Works: That would be all right if the board could find the money, but where are they to get the money? It is all very well to give them power and authority, but where is the money to come from?

Mr. THOMSON: I presume you allocate and allow the Main Roads Board so much.

The Minister for Works: What if you have not got it?

Mr. Latham: The Government find the money.

The Minister for Works: But what if the Government have not got it? The Minister must have authority, or there is no money forthcoming.

Mr. THOMSON: But that is not likely to happen.

The Minister for Works: It has happened.

Mr. THOMSON: As I interpret the intention of the Act—

The Minister for Works: I assure you it has been carried out.

Mr. THOMSON: I have no desire to take away from the Minister or the Government the control of the funds. But in any ordinary business it would not be necessary to have this dual control. We have brought into being the Main Roads Board and given them statutory authority to construct roads, and it seems to me that if the Main Roads Board are told that this year there is so much money available, that would be sufficient.

The Minister for Works interjected.

Mr. THOMSON: The Federal Government supply £348,000 per annum for the purpose.

The Minister for Works: But already this year the Loan Council have modified our programme. Perhaps you would like us to find half of the amount from revenue.

Mr. THOMSON: The money has to be found, whether out of loan or out of revenue. I am not going to quote, as I could do, the amount of money the Bill will take

from local authorities in my electorate, but I offer for the consideration of the Minister and the Government the suggestion that there be imposed a penny tax upon petrol. Quite a number of people will say that is going to be a very hard impost on those using petrol.

The Minister for Works: We have already passed a petrol tax.

Mr. THOMSON: I know.

The Minister for Works: Then why suggest another?

Mr. THOMSON: Because you have not put into operation the one you have.

The Minister for Works: Do you not know what happened? Somebody else took it out of our hands.

Mr. THOMSON: There was a test case, and the High Court said the tax was ultra vires. But South Australia is now testing the question. At the inter-district conference held at Wagin last year the Minister put it forward that we should consider the imposition of a tax of 4d. per gallon. He said that would serve to abolish the whole of the traffic fees. We were opposed to that suggestion because we considered it was not fair. Naturally, the local authorities did not view with any great favour the imposition of a tax of 4d. a gallon, the Government to collect it and hand over the quotas to the local authorities. In my opinion this suggestion I am putting forward for the imposition of a tax of a penny per gallon will cost the Government only the minimum to collect. And certainly it will be very much cheaper for the local authorities, especially when we remember the number of those local authorities and that a strict account will have to be kept for each, and that consequently the bookkeeping will not only be cumbersome, but expensive to local bodies in country districts. I comment to the Minister consideration of my figures, which I am sure are correct, since I got them only to-day from the department. My suggestion seems to me to offer an easy solution of a very difficult problem. Under it the man who uses the roads most will pay the greatest tax. I hope the Minister will agree to send the Bill to a select committee so that all its phases may be fully considered. Let us hope that then we shall be able to get a satisfactory solution of what for many years has been a very difficult problem.

MR. LATHAM (York) [8.40]: I am disappointed in that the Minister did not properly constitute his board before coming along with a request for amending legislation. There has been a vacancy in the board for close on 12 months, and it still exists. If it is possible to carry on the activities of the Main Roads Board by two members of that board, I suggest it is also possible to carry on by one member. I should like the Minister to ask for an amending Bill to provide for a commissioner, as in our railways. Certainly the expenditure of the Main Roads Board is not nearly so great as that in the Railway Department, but I believe that under a commissioner we should have equally good service and greatly reduced overhead costs. And as I say, if it is possible to carry on the work of the board by two men, it is equally possible to carry it on by one man. I was hopeful that the Minister would at least have properly constituted his board, or else would have come along and asked for the appointment of a commissioner. It has been suggested in the Press and elsewhere that this would be a wise policy, and I agree with that. The one contentious clause in the Bill is that dealing with the payment by the local authorities of their quotas to the Main Roads Board's trust account, and also for maintenance work. I do not know how the Minister is going to tackle the local authorities, but we can understand their feelings towards the Bill when we realise the position of some districts, such as Narembeen, whose liability for the last two years has been only £54 18s. 2d., but who are now to be called upon under this amending legislation to pay £420 per annum. Then there is Bruce Rock, with a revenue of £2,800 per annum. The payment is out of all proportion to the services rendered, and it is not a fair distribution of liability. I do not know how the Minister proposes to get over this difficulty, for I notice in the report of the Main Roads Board for the year ended 30th June, 1928, according to their declaration of main roads, from Coolgardie to Esperance there is a length of 231 miles, and from Perth to Albany 245 miles, while from Albany to Denmark is 32 miles and from Chidlow's Well to York 32 miles. If we are to be asked to contribute our share to the Coolgardie-Esperance road of 231 miles, we shall be paying something for which we are never likely to get any ser-

vice. For there will be practically no traffic from agricultural areas over that road. It is purely a local road and will not be used by the general public outside its immediate area, and so it will be very difficult to allocate the fees. The Leader of the Country Party has made out a very reasonable case for the imposition of a petrol tax. There is no doubt the High Court of Australia decided that such a tax imposed by a State was ultra vires to the Federal Constitution. But there are in existence other State Acts of Parliament which, if their legality were questioned by the Federal High Court, would probably be ruled out with consequent loss of revenue to the State. I believe it is possible to approach the Federal Government in a manner calculated to arrive at an understanding under which there could be framed a State Act that would not be ultra vires to the Federal Constitution. If that were done, and if we could produce this revenue of £68,164 as proposed by the Leader of the Country Party, by a petrol tax of one penny per gallon, we would then be able to reduce our motor license fees considerably. If the local authorities are able to pay over £400 or £500 per annum from their traffic fees to the Main Roads Board's trust account, then they have been collecting £400 or £500 per annum more than they required for local use. If they have not been taxing the people heavier than was necessary, then additional taxation will have to be imposed to make good the payments to the Main Roads Board. This measure is not likely to meet the wishes of the people, and it certainly will be difficult to enforce. The probability is that if a select committee were appointed to deal with the financial clauses, we would be able to effect an understanding between the local authorities and the Government and settle the question once for all. The question of how the local governing bodies could secure the revenue to provide half the cost of maintenance and half the interest and sinking fund has been a very debatable one. The figures supplied by the Main Roads Board recently are very illuminating. They show that the interest and sinking fund charges against the local governing bodies for ten years amount to £257,400. From then on there is an amount of £46,800 to be found annually. I do not know whether the local governing bodies are aware that they are to be called upon to meet this tremendous an-

nual cost, but it will probably be information to them if a select committee is appointed. It must be admitted that a great deal of local benefit is being obtained from this expenditure, because but for it developmental roads would not have been in the state in which we find them to-day, but the increased expenditure has meant an additional drag on the resources of local authorities in order to provide for maintenance work. The charge proposed to be made under this measure will be very heavy, particularly in the newer districts. The additional work required and the work done by the Government to open up new roads such as clearing roads will become a heavy drain on the resources of the road boards. The traffic fees play such an important part in the finances of road boards that there is very good reason for opposing any encroachment on this source of revenue. I hope the Minister will agree to the Bill being referred to a select committee in order that an effort might be made to find a solution of the difficulty. It is useless to put legislation on the statute-book if the people who have to find the money are opposed to it, because it merely causes friction between them and the Government department administering the law. The easiest way out is to provide means whereby an understanding can be arrived at between the Government and the local authorities. I shall support the second reading of the Bill in the hope that it will be referred to a select committee. Of course, the most important clause of the Bill is that dealing with finance.

MR. STUBBS (Wagin) [8.49]: I intend to support the second reading of the Bill. Judging from the criticisms levelled against the measure I feel sure the Minister will be induced to agree to the appointment of a select committee. I do not think the Government desire for a moment to impose on the road boards of the State burdens they cannot possibly carry. My district under the re-arrangement of boundaries will include nine road boards. I have communicated with them, but have not had time to receive replies from all of them. I am satisfied that some of them will not be able to bear the financial load that will be imposed upon them if the Bill becomes law. Some of those boards have a revenue of not much more than £1,500 a year, and yet, from my reading of the measure, such boards would

have to pay about £400 a year towards main road costs. I think the Minister realises that that would be a very heavy tax on the people. I know that his sympathies are with the people in the back blocks, and I feel convinced that a satisfactory arrangement could be evolved if the Bill were referred to a select committee. Such a committee could frame the measure in a manner that would be acceptable not only to Parliament, but to the country.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. A. McCallum—South Fremantle—in reply) [8.52]: There are one or two aspects of the debate with which I wish to deal, and I shall endeavour to reply to the points raised by the various speakers in the order in which they mentioned them. The member for Swan (Mr. Sampson) dealt particularly with the Welshpool-road. I am indeed surprised that he even mentioned the Welshpool-road, much less adopted the attitude he has done as regards the financing of the work on that thoroughfare. It cost me a great deal of time and trouble to get that road on the programme. First of all it was struck off the programme by the Commonwealth authorities. When I went to Melbourne I had an argument with the engineer and the Minister, and after a strenuous fight I succeeded in getting the Welshpool-road together with the Wanneroo-road included in the programme. When the Commonwealth engineer came to Perth, he asked to see those roads, and Mr. Tindale took him over them. When he returned, he said to me, "If I had understood the proximity of the Welshpool-road to the metropolis, I would never have consented to its being included in the programme."

Mr. Sampson: It extends a distance of nearly 30 miles.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am aware of that. In the other States the agreement is that none of this money may be spent on roads within a hundred miles of the city. I got that provision broken down as regards this State. But after having fought to get the Welshpool-road on the programme, I am repaid for my efforts by the criticism of the member for the district.

Mr. Sampson: I pointed it out as an example.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is an example of generosity on my part to the district the hon. member represents. If I had accepted the original decision of the Commonwealth that the road could not be included in the programme, the work would have been left to the local authorities entirely. They would have had to spend their own money on the road, but because I fought to get it included in the programme, I am now told that the money should not have been spent on the road. If I had been left alone, I would have given more assistance to that district. The hon. member went so far as to criticise the metropolitan traffic pool. I should like to explain the relation of the traffic pool to his district. When we were fixing the boundaries of the traffic pool the papers were made out for Executive Council approval to include a great proportion of the Darling Range Road Board area. We left out just a little bit of the bush, but we included all those through roads. Then the hon. member came to the department and objected. He said, "You have to take in the whole of the district or none at all." We told him we were not anxious to take in any, but we thought those roads should be included. He said, "I shall oppose any section of that district being included unless the whole is taken in."

Mr. Sampson: When did that happen?

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: We told the hon. member we could not agree to the whole of it being included and he said, "Then I shall have none of it included."

Mr. Sampson: When did that happen?

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Two or three years ago.

Mr. Sampson: Perhaps five years ago.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Not more than if as much as three years. The hon. member remembers it well enough. In consequence of his attitude we said we would have none of it and we altered the papers and struck out the Darling Range Road District. I am advised that the traffic fees collected by that board last year totalled approximately £500.

Mr. Sampson: The Minister has a wonderful memory for little details, and yet the traffic fees are mounting up towards £3,000.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: I am advised by the department that the fees collected for the district we proposed to

include in the pool amounted to £500 whereas, if the district had been included in the pool, it would have received £3,000. The hon. member however, objected, and it was struck out, and so instead of his district getting £3,000 it gets £500.

Mr. Sampson: I think you are wrong.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Now the hon. member adopts a critical attitude regarding the Welshpool-road. If there is one road about which he should remain dumb for ever, it is the Welshpool-road. For what has been done he should be grateful to the Government and the Main Roads Board for all time. That district is the luckiest district I know because, in spite of all efforts to the contrary, that road has been constructed.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell interjected.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It was not done at the instigation of the member for the district; I did it from a sense of duty. The hon. member may rest assured that that will always be the principle upon which I shall base my decisions. A point has been raised regarding the clause of the Bill stipulating that all contracts for £1,000 or over must receive the approval of the Minister. That provision is in the Act and I do not think there is any doubt that Parliament intended it to apply all round. The Crown Law Department say there is a doubt, that the stipulation was not inserted in the right place and that consequently it might be argued that it applied to only one section. However, since the Act was passed, it has operated and every contract for £1,000 or over has been submitted for my approval. I have insisted upon that because I cannot see how any other arrangement could be tolerated. The Main Roads Board have no source of income and the Treasurer has to find all the money required for their expenditure. The Loan Council have cut down the programme for each State by 20 per cent., and there is a likelihood of a further cut being made later on. If there was cut after cut by the Loan Council and the Main Roads Board proceeded with the signing of contracts for 1¼ millions' worth of work without reference to the Treasurer as to where the money was to be obtained, members can imagine for themselves the impossible position that would be created. It cannot be conceived that anyone outside the Government should have control over the expenditure of State funds. Control must lie

with the Government, and no Parliament could think that anyone outside them should have the right to sign blank cheques and commit them to the expenditure of State money.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: They cannot let an unlimited number of £900 contracts.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: We keep an eye upon that. Every contract for £1,000 and over must come before the Minister. Members will agree that such a principle must operate in all expenditure of this kind. This is the only State in Australia where the traffic fees go to the local authorities. In every other part of the continent the fees go to the central control.

Mr. Thomson: That was the intention when the Act was first introduced.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It was the original idea of the Government that all traffic fees should be at the disposal of the Main Roads Board. This is the only State in Australia where that principle does not operate. Every time I go to the Eastern States for a conference, and the question of the financial relationship between State and Commonwealth Ministers crops up, I am out of step with the rest of the Commonwealth, in that while the others are talking of the thousands or millions they get from traffic fees, which the Main Roads Board in their States have to expend, we cannot talk of the receipt of a penny-piece from that source.

Mr. Thomson: I hope you will continue to be out of step.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I hope not. It is illogical to continue the present position. The member for Toodyay (Mr. Lindsay) asked again to-night, as he has repeatedly done, why the money allocated each year has not been spent? He said he could only think that it was because the State Government had not the money in hand. Time and again he has been told that is not the case. When he made the statement in the House before that no developmental roads had been constructed in his district for 12 months and that the money was not there, I told him the money was there, that all the money was there that the Main Roads Board could spend, but that they could not spend it. The instructions from the Commonwealth Government were that tenders had to be called for every job. The Main Roads Board had not the staff with which to prepare the plans and speci-

fications, and to effect the change-over from day labour to contract. I explained that this was what had hung up the developmental roads for the whole year. I told the House, at the end of June last, when the Estimates were before us, that by the end of June we anticipated we would have approximately half a million pounds left unexpected. That was how things resulted. It was owing to the fact that the Main Roads Board could not spend the money that it was not spent. We were urging them to go on as fast as they could, but they could not equip themselves with the professional staff to cope with the work. The drafting room was working overtime every night. We had to send to New Zealand and South Africa and all over Australia, to get draftsmen to cope with the work offered. The hon. member takes the last two years of expenditure and the allocations made to the local authorities, and cites them in comparison with the money that will be obtained under the proposal in the Bill with regard to 25 per cent. of the traffic fees. We have not been able to live up to our programme in any year, he says, and we have half a million pounds unexpended. This year we propose to pick up all arrears and to expend one and a quarter million pounds. By the end of the year we shall have levelled up our programme. It is no argument to quote the past. If the allocations are made at the end of this year under the present Act, it will be on the basis of the expenditure this year of a million and a quarter pounds. That cannot be compared with the £200,000 or £400,000 expended in the years gone by.

Mr. Lindsay: You said that the amount had already been reduced, and that we might have to reduce it by another 20 per cent.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I have no doubt the Government will find all the money the Main Roads Board wants. We have said that the first claim on loan money available for expenditure will be upon that which is to be spent wholly in Western Australia, and will involve the largest proportion of expenditure on labour and the smaller proportion on material which has to be ordered outside the State.

Mr. Thomson: That is very sound.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Expenditure on roads will have the biggest claim upon the money at the command of the

Main Roads Board. There is not much doubt that we shall be able to live up to all the requirements of the Main Roads Board. The million and a quarter to be spent this year will be really greater than the amounts spent in the last two years put together.

Mr. Lindsay: A lot more.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Of what use is it to compare what has been done in the past with what is to be done this year?

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Are they going to get the money?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: They must get it if the Bill goes through. The Act says they must get it.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: You have not the money and are not likely to have it.

Mr. Lindsay: The Act does not say you are going to spend a million and a quarter.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The Act says we are permitted to spend approximately £900,000 a year.

Mr. Lindsay: This Bill does not say anything about a million and a quarter.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: We are picking up the arrears. This million and a quarter will enable us to level off our programme. Long before this Bill came up for discussion, and before the proposal had reached any concrete form, this was publicly stated, and it was mentioned in the Governor's Speech at the opening of Parliament. The Main Roads Board have told me right through they expect to be level with their programme at the end of the year. It is no use putting up allocations made to the local authorities in the past two years and making comparisons with what the position will be at the end of the year.

Mr. Thomson: You say you have all the surveys and plans up to date, and are now able to carry on?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: We shall be level with the programme at the end of June next. It has been suggested that all expenditure on main roads should be a national or State-wide charge, and it is also contended that the users of the roads should pay for them. Both are sound contentions. Has there been any suggestion within the authority of Parliament that is any nearer that view than the one contained in this Bill?

Mr. Lindsay: Yes, my suggestion.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is to be a national charge, a charge that will be contributed largely but not mainly by those

people who go on the roads. The traffic fee system is the nearest possible to that principle.

Mr. Latham: Apart from the petrol tax.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That is not within our constitutional rights. The charge is spread throughout the local authorities, who collect the money from the road users. I cannot see that there can be anything more equitable than the present scheme so far as our authority goes. The task set to the Main Roads Board under the Act is an impossible one. They have to allocate to the local authorities the benefits they are getting from each job that is done. No one can do that satisfactorily.

Mr. Lindsay: It would be a just way if it could be done.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It has not been found possible to do it. It was laid down in the Victorian Act, and the Victorian board decided to charge each local authority for the work done in their area. They cannot get on to a basis of carrying out the spirit of the Act. I have attempted to give the matter a thorough sifting. It has been one of grave concern to those in charge of the administration. I have appointed two or three committees to investigate it. I had one committee consisting of the Under Secretary, the accountant, and the chairman of the Main Roads Board, who gave the matter a thorough investigation. The chairman of the Main Roads Board and the Under Secretary had another inquiry, consulted with the local authorities, and put up a comprehensive report. While I was away last year, Mr. Tindale submitted to the Premier, who was administering the Act, an exhaustive report dealing with the position as he found it overseas. We have had repeated conferences with local authorities, and discussed the matter with their executives. For over a year we have been in constant touch with the executive, and have then given careful and earnest consideration to all phases of the question. As the outcome of all this, the executive have made an offer to me. They have said the best suggestion they can make to get us out of the difficulty in which we find ourselves is that they should pay 25 per cent. of the traffic fees into the Main Roads Board's account.

Mr. Ferguson: Does the letter say all traffic fees?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The letter distinctly says "all traffic fees." I

am prepared to produce that letter. I am so clear about it because we remarked upon it when the letter came back. There can be no doubt about it. The Under Secretary and I noticed that it said "all traffic."

Mr. Ferguson: In our discussions motor license fees were repeatedly mentioned.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: No discrimination was made in my presence and none is made in the correspondence. The letter refers to all traffic fees, and that is the proposition that was made to me. The chairman of the Main Roads Board and the Under Secretary, at my instance, went into the figures to find out what would be necessary. They estimated that next year we would require £54,720 by way of contributions from the local authorities under the Main Roads Act.

Hon. Sir James Mitchell: Is that for interest on the 7s. 6d.?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That is for the charges of half the interest on main roads and half the deposit on the maintenance. It is estimated that this will bring in £55,000. There is a difference, therefore, of only £300. As the years go by the contributions from the local authorities must grow. The bill each year will increase. The traffic fees will also increase, but not in the same ratio as the bills to the local authorities will increase under the existing law. I asked for a percentage of 33-1/3 because we estimated that that percentage would be needed to meet the obligations of the local authorities to the Main Roads Board. The reply was that 25 per cent. was all the local authorities could stand for. The Government accepted that percentage, and said the Bill on the 25 per cent. basis would be proceeded with. The problem has been thoroughly sifted and thoroughly examined, both sides being anxious to discover a satisfactory solution, so that the work might go on. The result is the proposition in the Bill, which proposition has been agreed to by the executive of the Country Road Boards Association and by the representatives of the metropolitan local governing authorities, from both of whom I hold letters agreeing conditionally on the wiping-out of the first year's obligations. The member for Toodyay (Mr. Lindsay) suggests that the local authorities should not be called upon to contribute unless they have main roads in their districts.

Mr. Lindsay: I did not say that.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes, the hon. member did.

Mr. Lindsay: I never mentioned that.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member stated it more than once, and mentioned more than one road board, saying, "There is no main road in that district, no main road expenditure."

Mr. Lindsay: But I did not say those boards ought not to contribute something. I said that under the Bill they would be contributing too much, but that they were quite prepared to pay what they had paid in the past.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I would like to make this comparison. If it is to be argued that the amount to be contributed by a local authority should be in proportion to the work done in its district, what is going to be the position in the metropolitan area?

Mr. Lindsay: I agree with you.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: While not one penny piece would be spent in the Metropolitan Province, yet that province would be called upon to contribute 46 per cent. of the total expenditure. If that attitude were to be taken by country authorities, one can readily see what the attitude of the metropolitan area would be.

Mr. Lindsay: I agree we should pay.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The figures for the metropolitan area are £98,247, as against £131,057 for the country districts.

Mr. Lindsay: On those figures, how can the metropolitan area contribute 46 per cent.?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That would have been the metropolitan area's contribution last year, according to the money available to be distributed after deduction of charges for collecting. I wish also to remind country members that prior to the present scheme of road construction being agreed to between the Commonwealth and the State Governments, country road boards, and in fact all local authorities, had to attend to all their own roads—had to make all developmental roads and had to maintain them, had to look after all main roads, and had to do everything themselves.

Mr. Lindsay: Not always.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes. Nobody else did anything.

Mr. Lindsay: The State Government used to give a 10s. subsidy.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That was a long time ago.

Mr. Lindsay: Even during the war there was a 5s. subsidy.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The local authorities got a little, and they still get something. The Government still distribute about £30,000 in subsidies. But formerly the local authorities had to make their own developmental roads, look after all their own traffic, and attend to all their main roads. Now each of them gets a minimum of £2,000 a year to be spent on new developmental roads, and this is quite apart from the huge expenditure on main roads throughout the State. If the old system had been retained, this country's development work could not have proceeded as it has done. The aid given has been material. The local authorities should realise that they are getting enormous help, and they should show some sense of obligation [I am surprised that after the long, careful examination of the matter by their executive bodies in conjunction with the departmental officers week after week and month after month, and after the eventual making of this agreement, they have not stood up to it. I am also surprised at the attitude of the member for Katanning (Mr. Thomson) towards a petrol tax, when he knows very well what has happened. The present Government carried a petrol tax through both Houses, and it operated for 12 months. The South Australian Government imposed similar taxation. The Commonwealth challenged that South Australian legislation, took it to the High Court, and had it declared ultra vires. Our Act was not challenged before the High Court; but it was a similar Act, and it was administered by the Deputy Federal Commissioner of Taxation. Under instructions, he ceased collecting the tax. If we had thereupon appointed one of our officers to collect the tax, our Act would have been declared illegal too.

Mr. Thomson: I think that decision would be upset on appeal.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: There could only be an appeal to the Privy Council, and with the consent of the High Court. We cannot run counter to the law. I have explained to the House, and also to the local governing authorities, that this Government asked the Commonwealth Gov-

ernment to impose a petrol tax and return the amount to us. The Commonwealth Government declined to do so.

Mr. Thomson: But you asked for 4d. per gallon.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: No.

Mr. Thomson: That was stated in the Press.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: No. We said that if the tax were wiped out altogether, it would require 4d. per gallon. The Prime Minister published his statement to the effect that the Commonwealth could not possibly entertain the idea of collecting a tax and remitting the proceeds to the State. South Australia thinks it has found a way round the constitutional difficulty, and has drafted a Bill, of which I have a copy, and it will be introduced in the South Australian Parliament this session. When moving the second reading I told this House that the Government would watch the result of the South Australian experiment with much interest. Our own view is that the petrol tax is the most equitable method of taxation yet devised. It is not altogether perfect; it can be faulted, and a case put up against it; but every point against the petrol tax can be duplicated or multiplied in the present system. It is no use arguing in favour of a petrol tax, having regard to the decision of the highest tribunal in the Commonwealth. Therefore we have decided to await the result in South Australia before we make another excursion into that field of taxation.

Mr. Thomson: In the event of the South Australian Act proving successful, will you agree to abolish this scheme of taxation?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes; I have agreed to that. If we can constitutionally impose a petrol tax, this measure will go and the local authorities will be relieved of their contributions. In comparison with the existing system, that which the Bill proposes is simpler and more effective; in fact, it is the simplest and most effective yet devised. Under the existing law local authorities do not know, cannot know, until the end of the year what their obligations are. Until they get the bill from the Main Roads Board, they do not know what they have to pay, and accordingly cannot budget for it. Thus they are hampered and harassed all the year round in regard to their finances. Under the pro-

posal contained in the Bill they will know from day to day just how they stand and what finance they have to contribute. It was that aspect, making the position so simple and effective, that carried the local authorities, in my opinion, a good way towards the point of agreeing. The Government have given the matter careful thought. For over a year we have been trying to find a way through. The executives of the local authorities and the departmental officers have met me frequently to discuss the matter. I doubt very much whether further investigation will unearth further particulars, or provide avenues of investigation that have not yet been explored. I am not opposed to an inquiry if it can be made without delay. While this question remains undecided, metropolitan local authorities do not know where they are, and neither do the country road boards. The local authorities will not know how much of the traffic fees now being collected is to be their own, or whether they have to pay 25 per cent., or meet the obligation under the existing Main Roads Act. An early decision is desirable in the interests of all concerned; otherwise the local authorities will not know what to do regarding their obligation. When the second reading has been passed I shall move that the Bill go to a select committee, on the understanding that the report is furnished quickly. I want to get a decision with the least possible delay. If the select committee can devote their time to the question straight away, they will be able to furnish a report within a week. Numerous documents have already been prepared by the department, and the local authorities have their information ready. The material will be available if the committee will apply themselves to the question immediately.

Mr. Richardson: It could not be done in a week.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: By applying themselves to the matter, the select committee could, I think, get all necessary evidence within a week. If that is found to be impossible, an application for extension of time can be made to the House. The great bulk of the traffic fees are in, and the local authorities want to get on with the job, and so does everyone. Now is the time for trying to do that work. Soon it will be too late. To hang it up would be a serious business all round.

After the second reading has been agreed to, I shall move that the Bill be referred to a select committee.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

Referred to a Select Committee.

On motion by the Minister for Works (Hon. A. McCallum—South Fremantle) resolved:—

That the Bill be referred to a select committee.

Ballot taken and a select committee appointed consisting of Messrs. Clydesdale, Kenneally, Richardson, Lindsay and the mover, with power to call for persons and papers, to sit on days over which the House stands adjourned, and to report on the 3rd September.

BILL—INSPECTION OF SCAFFOLDING ACT AMENDMENT.

In Committee.

Mr. Panton in the Chair; the Minister for Works in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Amendment of Section 2:

Mr. THOMSON: The third amendment provided for seeks to delete the words "exceeding eight feet from the horizontal base." in the definition of the term "scaffolding." I hope the Minister will not insist upon that amendment. It would make the Act apply to ordinary cottages and would impose an additional cost of construction that would be unnecessary. I hope the Minister will give us the reasons for such a drastic proposal. When this legislation was before us originally, this question was considered at great length and finally the Minister agreed to the retention of the 8ft. provision that he now seeks to delete.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: It will be remembered that when I introduced the Bill that is now the Act, I explained that it was a copy of the South Australian legislation. That legislation originally contained the limitation, but it was found that it presented serious obstacles in the way of effective administration, and did not afford the protection that was necessary. The South Australian Parliament ultimately

wiped out the limitation upon the height of scaffolding altogether. In the original Bill I proposed that we should benefit by the experience of South Australia and not include any limitation upon the height of scaffolding. I could not get that provision through.

Mr. Thomson: I hope you will not do so now.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member expresses that opinion before hearing the reasons for the amendment! I have here a number of reports that have been made from time to time by inspectors in which they refer to what has happened because of the limitation. The inspectors in these reports submit some of the difficulties that from time to time they encounter in trying to administer the Act in its present form with a limitation of the height of scaffolding. It means that if a scaffold is within the prescribed height, although it be obviously defective, the inspectors have no power to prosecute on that score. Under the existing Act inspectors have no authority to interfere if the scaffolding be less than eight feet high, and so some contractors seem to think that if the scaffolding be below that height they can put up anything they like. I could go on reading page after page of these reports from various inspectors showing that scaffolding under eight feet in height is frequently not up to the standard the inspector would insist upon if it came within the purview of the Act. Under existing conditions the men are asked to work on scaffolding from which they would get a severe fall if the structure were to collapse.

Mr. Mann: Have there been any accidents on scaffolding less than eight feet in height?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Quite a number. Frequently the inspector has asked the contractor to put the scaffolding in order, and in many cases that has been done although the inspector had no power to insist upon it. The clause is merely asking that all scaffolding shall be erected with a view to the safety of workmen. Even a fall of eight feet may be a pretty severe fall when there are bricks and stone and timber lying underneath.

Mr. Latham: You have no record of an accident on any scaffolding of less than eight feet in height.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes, we have any number of them. I am asking for power for the inspector to step in whenever he finds defective scaffolding, even if it be less than 8 feet in height. In the other States the Scaffolding Acts have been amended to abolish the limitation of height, and we are asking that the same thing be done here.

Mr. THOMSON: The Minister has not had very much practical experience of building operations, or he would not have quoted such absurd reports as he has read out to-night.

The Minister for Works: The men who wrote those reports have had far more practical experience and have better practical knowledge than has the hon. member.

Mr. THOMSON: I will not admit that. I have had a life-long experience of the building trade, yet I have never heard more absurd statements submitted to any Minister than those reports the Minister has read out. Men who submitted such reports could only have done so with the object of making their job a little bigger so as to introduce more men into it. If we are to bring every cottage under the provisions of the Scaffolding Act, we shall be imposing an additional expense which is not warranted. One of the reports quoted by the Minister spoke of a scaffolding 8 feet 10 inches in height and which varied from 7 feet 8 inches to 8 feet 3 inches. When a departmental officer reporting to his Minister has to split straws to that extent it is clear that he finds it difficult to make out a case. He or another inspector also reported that, contrary to regulations, square ledgers were tied to round poles. I have built hundreds of scaffolds and I can assure the Committee that any man who knows his job, building an 8 feet scaffold with square scantling tied to round poles, can place it in such a position that there will be absolutely no danger of its slipping. Why do we want all these regulations and inspection that mean increased cost to the community? I hope the Committee will not agree to bring ordinary cottages under scaffolding inspection. The money collected by the department under the existing Act must have been more than the Minister expected when he originally introduced the measure, seeing that he is now suggesting a reduction

of fees. The official report for 1927-28 states—

The number of notices of intention to erect scaffolding received during the year was 1,923, an increase of exactly 900 over the number received during the previous year. Inspectors made 3,433 inspections of scaffolding on 910 structures to which the provisions of the Act and regulations applied, the cost of these structures, as indicated by the notices, being £1,100,968.

The CHAIRMAN: The clause deals with the definition of scaffolding and has nothing to do with what the hon. member is reading.

Mr. THOMSON: Yes it has. The Minister has given reasons for deleting the 8ft. limit, and has quoted reports to show that workers were endangered through having to use scaffolding which, if it had exceeded 8ft., would not have complied with the regulations. I am endeavouring to show that there is no necessity to excise the 8ft. limit. The report continues—

Eight accidents, one of which was fatal, were notified and investigated during the year. Only one of these accidents (unfortunately the fatal one) was caused through defective scaffolding. In that instance, a scaffold, which was of a type not provided for by regulation, had been erected to a height of 26 feet for the use of workmen engaged in affixing plaster sheets to the ceiling of a public building. . . . The department was not notified of the intention to erect this scaffold, and the owner was subsequently prosecuted and fined £5 and costs.

I am not arguing against the Act. In the erection of large buildings where big gear is used, inspection is necessary, but to apply similar conditions to small cottages merely means increasing the cost unnecessarily. The report continues—

The longest period of incapacity suffered by any workmen as a result of accidents other than those referred to above was two weeks.

With all the safeguards, regulations, and inspections, there were only eight accidents. I do not think the Act has had the effect of reducing accidents on buildings, and it would be unwise to insist upon the deletion of the 8ft. limit.

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 10.7 p.m.