

Legislative Council,

Wednesday, 7th. October, 1903.

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THE PRESIDENT took the Chair at 4:30 o'clock, p.m.

PRAYERS.

PAPER PRESENTED.

By the COLONIAL SECRETARY: Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure on account of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the year ending 30th June, 1904.

Ordered, to lie on the table.

MOTION—LAND SELECTION, TO FIX PRICES.

HON. C. A. PIESSE (South-East) moved:—

1, That, in the opinion of this House, the system at present adopted by the Lands Department of increasing at will the prices to be paid for 2nd and 3rd class land is distinctly in opposition to the intention of the Land Act of 1898, and prejudicial to the successful settlement of the land. 2, That the prices at which all lands dealt with under the provisions of Parts 5 and 6 of "The Land Act, 1898," should be definitely fixed by Parliament.

He said: The motion is divided into two parts, and in speaking with reference to both parts at one time, I trust members will give me encouragement in this matter. My one desire is to see the successful settlement of the land, or (in other words) provisions which will lead to the settlement of a large and contented agricultural community. For some considerable time past selectors, numbers of whom I have the honour to represent, have complained that they have been charged prices over and above what they were led to believe they would have to pay for second-class and third-class land. To explain the position to members I may mention that they desire that I shall introduce the matter with a view of some redress being given them, or at any rate to prevent attempts of this kind in the future. It is necessary for me to refer to the Lands

Act of 1898 to explain the position. Most members will remember that the price of first-class land is 10s., that of second-class 6s. 3d., and that of third-class 3s. 9d. It is stated in the Act, so far as grazing leases are concerned, that the price of such land shall be fixed by the Governor—I lay stress on those words, for we all know that the Governor means Governor-in-Council, and in fact the interpretation clause explains that I believe—but shall not be less than 6s. 3d. per acre for second-class land, and 3s. 9d. for third-class land. This Act was assented to on the 28th October, 1898, and on the 27th January, 1899, three months later, the Governor-in-Council fixed the prices, and notice appeared in the *Government Gazette* to that effect. The price for first-class land under Sections 55 and 57 is 10s. per acre—no "more or less" about it—and under Section 68, and it is in relation to this that the principal cause of complaint comes in, the price for second-class land is 6s. 3d., and that of third-class land 3s. 9d., and in these cases there is no "more or less" about it. The position is that only last week one of these selectors was charged 10s. an acre, and allowed 30 years to pay it in. That is for what is absolutely third-class land, but for the sake of argument we will admit that it was second-class land. No doubt there is a desire to make as much profit for the State as possible; but, admitting it is second-class land, the Agricultural Department is not justified in charging that man 10s. an acre. Special conditions are provided for, and no doubt the Governor-in-Council can take advantage of those special conditions. If there are special conditions warranting raising the price, it can be done; but this is not a special provision, for it has become a general one without exception. Those settlers are now charged over and above what Parliament intended they should be charged for this second-class and third-class land. I think members will agree with me that this is not a state of affairs which should exist; and I may tell members that already these men are warning people in the other States to be careful. In fact, only last week an instance came under my notice where a man wrote to his friend and said, "Do

not come just yet." He did that because of the difficulty arising as to the price for second-class and third-class land. I maintain that it is the duty of Parliament to see that this is remedied, and it is with that object I have brought my motion forward. I want to show what is being done. I desire to state that there is no wish in any way to unduly worry or annoy the Lands Office, but I am doing this now for those people because I desire to see a contented agricultural community settled on the land. This matter concerns, I am safe in saying, millions and millions of acres. It is a big thing to speak of millions, but it does concern millions and millions, and should there be any check in the settlement of this land it will cause serious loss to Western Australia. I have no hesitation in saying, even if I am taking up this matter at undue length, it is one of the most important subjects that can be dealt with. I desire that these prices shall be fixed by Parliament, except in special cases, and in regard to those cases we can still leave the power to the Governor-in-Council. There are special cases which will crop up, I suppose in any country, and I do not wish to take the privilege from the Governor-in-Council or the Executive Council; but so far as this matter is concerned generally, so far as the settlement of the land is concerned, I want the prices to be fixed so that any person will know that so long as the land applied for is in a true class, he is not going to be asked to pay any more for it than the price fixed by the Governor and gazetted as I have shown. It is a matter in which I desire to work hand-in-hand with the Minister for Lands (Hon. J. M. Hopkins), who is full of energy, and we should work together in every way we can to make the land settlement more successful than it is now. Settlers complain, "If we grumble we are marked men." I want to take advantage of my public position to say they need have no fear of that sort of thing. Whatever the shortcomings of the Lands Department may have been, there has been no reason why the settlers should have this fear. Members can quite understand the position. They will understand it if they consider the position of landlord and tenant and apply it to the land. These men are new to the country, and, as I say, they fear they

will be marked men. There are certain conditions affixed to the land, and they fear that if they make themselves conspicuous in fighting for their rights they will become marked men to their landlord. But I repeat that such will not be, and I publicly say from my position in this House, they need not fear that; but on the other hand those men are equally entitled to justice at our hands. They need someone to look after their rights, and I am endeavouring to do the very best I can for them. In this question of land settlement I think Parliament was influenced in the first place by the actual values of land for productive purposes, taking into due consideration the capital employed in its development. In fixing the price at 10s. Parliament stipulated that something else should be done in the way of improvements to make the land worth holding, which brings to my mind a fact that must not be lost sight of, that this 10s. to be charged for second-class land carries with it the responsibility of 10s. worth of improvements on these lands. To those who know the country it is simply impossible for third-class or even second-class lands to carry that large amount of money in improvements. If such lands could carry 10s. they would then be first-class lands to all intents and purposes, and the people who hold them would know that they could carry not only 10s. but three times ten in the shape of improvements. Some of the settlers are now submitting quietly, because they have to submit of necessity. They have selected first-class land, and have made application for second-class lands adjoining, which they must have, and there is no getting away from that. They have no choice but to submit now of necessity, with the object of appealing to the Government later on for a reclassification of these lands and a consequent reduction in price. This should not be the case; there should be nothing of this kind to complain of. Now I think I have said sufficient with regard to this matter to show the very unsatisfactory state of affairs that exists; but I do not wish to lay blame at the door of the present Government. What I complain of has been carried on in a small way for some considerable time, gradually assuming greater proportions. A responsibility is cast upon the officers of the Lands De-

partment which they should never be asked to carry. The Under Secretary for Lands, for instance, is an estimable gentleman, desirous of doing his best for the country, that being my experience of him, at any rate. He is always desirous of assisting development in every way; but he should not be placed, as he now stands in this matter, as judge of the price of lands he never actually sees. I am informed, and I think there is a lot of truth in it, that even the reports of the classification officers have been over-ridden, and that prices have been put up over and above what they have recommended. I do not say there is any truth in the report, but it appears that there is something in the matter. If prices are to be fixed over and above what are recommended by the classification officers, there must be some loss somewhere and great discontent. The responsibility should not be laid on the department of fixing the price of lands. Parliament did not intend that it should be upon the department. If Parliament has fixed the price of land, and if three months later the Governor by *Gazette* notice has fixed prices, those are the prices that should be charged until Parliament thinks fit to increase them. The people in the agricultural districts do not want from Parliament any special concession. They only want fair play, and I think Parliament is desirous of giving it to them. They do not want to appear as if any action taken would be an action of benevolence. They simply want justice, and are quite prepared to do their level best to make their lands pay. The high prices which have been ruling lately come back on the farmers themselves, by making land appear more valuable than it really is. I would be the last to run down our lands, but I have common-sense enough to know that these lands are only of certain value, and that people are called upon to pay more for them than they are worth. There must be a loss somewhere, and the man who has to pay the price is the loser. I can only say that the present interpretation of the Lands Act was never intended by Parliament, and that the position is unfair to the farmer, unsatisfactory to the country, and an injustice to the settler. There are four cardinal points in connection with land settlement. The first is correct classi-

fication. I think hon. members will agree with me that this is absolutely necessary. The success or failure of a settler depends upon classification. I spoke to the late Minister for Lands (Dr. Jameson) on the subject, and he promised me that, so long as he remained in office, he would take every means of obtaining fair classification, and that a new-comer's ignorance of his surroundings would not be taken advantage of; that if a person made application for a wrong class the Minister would see that it was the duty of the officers to put it right, with a consequent reduction of price on a new classification. We should do the same with these new settlers. If, in their ignorance, they pay too much, it is the duty of the responsible officers of the Lands Department to put them right. The next cardinal point is the fixing of values according to the price of classification values. The third is the limitation of areas. I should be very sorry to see this country reach the state that New Zealand has reached. There they are cutting up estates into such small areas that they have thus taken away all the energies of the people. If we keep our liberal land laws we shall have the flower of New Zealand coming here yet. I know what I am talking about, because I have taken the trouble to visit those small settlers I talk of. They all complain of limited area and limited room. This is the third cardinal point to which I wish to draw attention—limitation. I do not want to see one man hold too much land. The fourth point is "performance of improvements." If we get these improvements done in connection with land settlement, the mere payment of instalments is only a cypher. The improvements which are necessary to make land payable are as ten to one in comparison with the payment of instalments. I need not labour this any more. I am afraid I have not done the justice to it I could have done if I had not been suffering from a severe cold; but I hope that the Minister will give my remarks the attention which the settlers are desirous of seeing them receive, and that the House will approve of the motion standing in my name.

On motion by Hon. J. M. DREW, debate adjourned.

INSPECTION OF MACHINERY BILL.

Received from the Legislative Assembly, and read a first time.

UNIVERSITY ENDOWMENT BILL.

Read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Assembly.

ELECTORAL BILL.

SECOND READING.

Resumed from 22nd September.

HON. J. W. HACKETT: This order of the day waits upon the Minister. There was an understanding that we were to take the three measures together before dealing with them separately.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: I have been somewhat disappointed this afternoon in not receiving from another place the Redistribution of Seats Bill. In these circumstances, and by reason of the promise I have made to hon. members that I would not ask them to consider these Bills until the "set," if I may use the term, was complete, I have nothing left for me to do but to move that the House do now adjourn. While I should like to adjourn over to-morrow it would be scarcely feasible, because we must be here to-morrow to receive the Redistribution of Seats Bill, so as to continue the debate on Tuesday next.

HON. J. W. HACKETT: We can receive it on Tuesday and have the debate on Wednesday.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: I hope hon. members will realise that the last thing in the world I would ask them to do is to hurry; but naturally I would ask them to lose no time. However, if hon. members desire that we should adjourn over to-morrow, I have no objection to offer.

HON. J. W. HACKETT: Is there not likely to be a lull in business from the other place, owing to the number of measures going there from this House?

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: When we get through these Bills we shall have rather a lengthy adjournment. I do not see there is any help for it. I do not think there would be any harm in adjourning over to-morrow, and I therefore move that the debate be adjourned until Tuesday next.

Motion passed, and the debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT.

The House adjourned at 5 o'clock, until the next Tuesday.

Legislative Assembly,

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THE SPEAKER took the Chair at 4:30 o'clock, p.m.

PRAYERS.

PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the MINISTER FOR LANDS: Lands Granted to and Transferred by the Midland Railway Company: Return moved for by Mr. Harper.

Ordered, to lie on the table.

INSPECTION OF MACHINERY BILL.

Read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

MINING BILL.

SECOND READING.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

MR. F. REID (Mt. Burges): This Bill is, in my opinion, one of the most important which can be dealt with by this Parliament. Last evening the Treasurer enumerated the various minerals which we have in abundance in this country; and if we ever succeed in becoming a great nation, our success will be due to our minerals. I have no desire to speak at great length, as most of the objections which the Labour party have to the Bill will, I trust, be remedied in Committee. I shall mention one or two of the provisions to which we do object, and which if passed will press harshly on