

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 26th August, 1954.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 2.15 p.m., and read prayers.

MOTION—URGENCY.

As to Gravity of Wheat Export Position.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have received the following letter from the member for Moore:—

The Speaker,
Legislative Assembly.

Dear Sir,

I desire your permission to move for the adjournment of the House to discuss the gravity of the wheat industry in W.A.

The movement of wheat overseas has been so slow that, unless more ships are made available to move

wheat from W.A., it is unlikely that farmers will be able to make delivery of their grain at harvest time.

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.) J. H. Ackland.

It will be necessary for seven members to rise in their places to support the proposal.

Seven members having risen in their places,

MR. ACKLAND (Moore) [2.20]: If it were not for the gravity of the position in which we find ourselves, I would not at this juncture have asked permission to move the adjournment of the House, but there has been knowledge amongst those most interested in the wheat industry of the likelihood that Western Australian farmers would not be able to deliver the whole of their crop this year. It is only during the last two or three days that the full significance of the gravity of the situation has been brought home.

Yesterday, I understand that the wheat section of the Farmers' Union called a meeting of the executive to discuss the matter, and late in the afternoon the executive discussed it with the management—the chairman and vice-chairman—of Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd. And so I want to make sure it is thoroughly understood, at the outset, that the views I am expressing are my own and that I am not here as spokesman for either of those two organisations. It is as well to remember that in Western Australia we expect to have a carry-over of 26,000,000 bushels of wheat when the new season's crop comes in.

From information which has been sent in from country districts it appears that the wheatgrowers of the State, although advised not to do so, have planted their normal wheat crop. From the information which they have forwarded to their handling organisation it is apparent that 8,200 of them—there are 11,000 altogether—expect to reap 2,750,000 acres of wheat.

Mr. May: Who gave you those figures?

Mr. ACKLAND: Those are the figures that have been sent in by the farmers themselves, as an indication of what they expect to deliver this year and so it seems that we are likely to have a normal wheat crop. I am willing to admit that there are some farmers who have not filled in their returns and it is quite likely that some of the returns are inflated but it has been the practice in past years for not more than 80 per cent. of the farmers to supply their figures and the figures supplied have usually been about the normal deliveries of the 100 per cent. who are growing wheat.

I feel, therefore, that we would be fully justified in anticipating that the wheatgrowers in Western Australia will this year deliver in the vicinity of 36,000,000 bushels

of wheat and that there will be a carry-over of 26,000,000 bushels when delivery is taken. Although it is quite likely that the handling organisation will find itself in a position to receive all the wheat that is offering in the Fremantle, Bunbury and Albany areas, that body is convinced that there will be more wheat grown in the Geraldton zone than the quantity for which storage will be available there. It would appear that the whole of the storage facilities at Geraldton will be full of last season's wheat when this season's crop is being delivered.

It seems that there are nearly 5,750,000 bushels of wheat already in the country areas, for which there is a storage capacity of in the vicinity of 8,000,000 bushels. From that we gather that a figure of between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000 bushels will have to remain on the farms and we must also take into consideration that there are 5,500,000 bushels of oats, 166,000 bushels of two-row barley and 2,125,000 bushels of six-row barley which will be coming forward. The position, as can be seen, is one of extreme urgency and I desired to bring this matter before the House so that it could receive some publicity and be brought before the people who are interested not only in the growing but also in the handling and processing of wheat, in order that they might realise the gravity of the situation.

There will be more than 100,000,000 bushels of wheat in Australia when the new season's crop comes in. It is anticipated with reasonable confidence that there will be a normal crop of 180,000,000 bushels making, in all, 280,000,000 bushels of wheat to be marketed this year. Owing to the intense nationalisation of the wheat industry in some countries and the fact that so much competition has been forthcoming for the Australian type of wheat, it is expected that there will be a market for about 60,000,000 bushels this year.

If we add to that the home consumption market of 60,000,000 bushels we find that at the end of next harvest it is possible that during the year, before the following crop is available, there will be 260,000,000 bushels of wheat unsold in Australia. That is enough to fulfil the anticipated market for two years, leaving 40,000,000 bushels available for home consumption at the end of that period. This means that Australia would need to grow only 20,000,000 bushels next year to meet all the requirements of this country, but the position is worse in Western Australia because, as I have already mentioned, we will have in this State a carry-over of 26,000,000 bushels.

We have a crop of 36,000,000 bushels, bringing the total to 66,000,000 bushels and if we get our full quota of the Australian export trade we are likely to have a maximum of 20,000,000 bushels sold overseas. I repeat that we can expect 20,000,000 bushels to be sold overseas and

then, with 4,000,000 bushels for home consumption, we will have more than sufficient in this State to meet our requirements and fulfil any markets which may be available to us, and enough wheat for two years to come. I trust that the Australian Wheat Board will, in its wisdom, decide to divert more ships to this State, particularly to Geraldton, so that at least this year the people in that area will be able to make their deliveries of wheat which they have a reasonable right to expect from this year's crop.

A moment ago an hon. member interjected with reference to the question of storage capacity. The following figures are approximately correct. Already at port terminals we have nearly 18,000,000 bushels storage capacity. In addition, further storage capacity is being built at Albany to hold 2,800,000 bushels and at Midland Junction additional storage capacity will be, when the season opens, ready for the delivery of 5,000,000 bushels of wheat, making a total storage capacity of approximately 26,000,000 bushels at and near ports of Western Australia.

Sufficient storage is also available in the country to hold 40,000,000 bushels, which means that if the wheat was grown in all areas where storage is available, there should be sufficient storage in the State. However as I have already pointed out, there will be storage for some 3,000,000 bushels short at Geraldton without any provision having been made for oats and barley. It is anticipated that the brewers themselves will be able to take 150,000 bushels of barley straight into their bulkhandling storage at their malting premises. But no provision has been made for oats and six-row barley when they are ready for delivery. It is quite possible that the growers could make their own arrangements for the storage of oats, but it is anticipated that if sales are not already made, arrangements will be made for the sale of six-row barley overseas.

Then again, members may ask why it is that Australia is not obtaining the overseas markets. It is a reasonable question. There are several reasons to give in reply. It so happens that some countries that have been our customers over the years have, by a subsidy, encouraged their growers to produce more wheat and so they have needed less from us. Australia was also a participant in the International Wheat Agreement and members should know that the people who were named as purchasers under that scheme have not, by any stretch of imagination, taken the wheat that they promised they would.

Mr. May: The reason for that is because of the price.

Mr. ACKLAND: I am glad the member for Collie mentioned that it is because of the price.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: How long have you known of this?

Mr. ACKLAND: I learned of the position this afternoon and that is why the matter was brought forward so promptly. I obtained the information at a meeting which I attended this morning. The gravity of the position seemed to warrant my speaking this afternoon. Reverting to the interjection by the member for Collie, he said that many countries have not taken our wheat because of the price. He is correct; it is a question of price and the ability to pay. The cost price of growing wheat last year in this country was 11s. 7d. per bushel. I believe that this year it will be in the vicinity of 13s. 6d. a bushel. That has been brought about partly—I do not want to criticise the Minister for Railways in this instance—because of increased freights which the farmer has had to pay on his super, wheat and other commodities, which will account for at least 7d. per bushel being added to that cost price, which will bring it up to from 13s. 4d. to 13s. 6d.

The growers of wheat in this country have done a great deal for the rest of the community. They have been the contributors to subsidies amounting to £200,000,000 over some years. We now know that they are going to have the opportunity of voting for a new stabilisation scheme, which will give them a reasonable return for their labour. There is no fear that the growers of Australia will not meet their obligations to the rest of the people, but they are not going to grow wheat to sell it at a loss in other countries of the world. That is something which they should not be expected to do and, in fact, they will not do it.

Today they find themselves in a more fortunate position than they did in 1930. In other words, they can change their activities to another more remunerative field of labour. There is a movement in Australia to get away from the f.a.g. standard of Australian wheat and to grow various grades as the growers in Canada and the United States of America do. I appeal to the Government and the Minister for Agriculture not to listen to that propaganda.

The SPEAKER: I think the hon. member is getting away from the question before the House.

Mr. ACKLAND: It is a matter of sales. I want to suggest to the Minister for Agriculture that he can do a great deal to boost the sales of Australian wheat by ensuring that his department does not make available to the farmers seed wheat of a low baking standard. There are several breeds of wheat today which return a reasonable bushelage per acre and which, if the farmers grew it, would increase the quality considerably. If the quality were

improved, we would be in a fortunate position with such countries as Argentina and Turkey, which are growing a similar type of wheat to ours, and who are under-selling us in the world market.

The Minister for Lands: There is a market at our back door for a type of wheat, if the growers would only grow it.

Mr. ACKLAND: Yes, there is a market if the growers would only grow it at a price. However, they are entitled to a reasonable return for their labour, the same as anyone else.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: What is a working man entitled to?

Mr. ACKLAND: If Western Australia wants to keep the wheat industry going, the responsibility does not rest entirely on the shoulders of the wheat-growers. I have no desire to repeat myself, but last time I spoke on this question I mentioned that the grower had contributed a great deal towards lowering the cost of production by following improved cultural methods. This matter is in the hands of the Government and in the hands of my friends who sit on my right in opposition and it is also in the hands of the trade union movement, to make it possible to reduce the cost of production. Instead of rising, as it will this year, from 12s. 7d. a bushel to 13s. 4d. or 13s. 6d., it is up to some other section of the community to try to make it possible for wheat to be produced at a lower figure.

The position in other parts of the world is more chaotic than it is in this State. Would members believe that in Canada, at present, they are storing wheat in dead-end streets, churches, halls, and on the bare ground? That is factual and not a flight of imagination. I admit that in countries where it is as cold as it is in that Dominion in the winter, they have not the fear of weevil. For us, in this State, to continue growing wheat next year as we have done in the past, would be suicidal. It is a commodity that does not keep indefinitely. It is a perishable commodity and next year, at this time, we will have not only the wheat that we should have sold between now and then, but also sufficient wheat to supply at least the needs of Australia and certainly more than the needs of this State for more than 12 months. It is a matter in which every one of us should be interested. I am not trying to make it a political propaganda stunt.

Mr. Lawrence: You would not do that.

Mr. ACKLAND: No, as the member for South Fremantle has said, I would not. It is far too serious a matter for that. This is going to affect the wheat-grower far less than any other section of the community.

The Premier: Can the hon. member tell us why shipping is not available?

Mr. ACKLAND: I was hoping that the Australian Wheat Board might be persuaded to divert shipping to Geraldton at least from other parts. But it must be remembered that Australia is not selling much wheat. It is not a question of finding more ships, but of finding people who will buy the wheat. That is the problem today. Whilst we have this surplus, buyers will be choosy and they are certainly not going to buy wheat which is one or two years old. They will want to buy new crops and leave the old stuff in the hands of the growers.

Mr. Lawrence: Why do not flour and bread come down in price?

Mr. ACKLAND: The hon. member had better ask the flourmillers and bakers that. The wheatgrower is paid for his wheat and the flourmiller and the baker are responsible for the price between the cost of production and the price the consumer pays.

The Premier: Does the hon. member know the opinion of the Australian Wheat Board on the question of sending ships to Western Australia?

Mr. ACKLAND: As a matter of fact, I had a copy of a letter, but most of the contents would not be for me to publish, but for the representative of the Australian Wheat Board in Western Australia. Everybody in this Chamber knows that Sir John Teasdale will do everything he can to assist this State. So we find ourselves in this position. I thought it was quite desirable that the question should be ventilated here. I have no doubt that there will be some publicity given to it in the farmers' own publication.

If the people of Western Australia could know what confronts them far more adversely than the wheatgrower himself, they would be greatly alarmed. The loss of employment, if all processing of wheat ceased, would be tremendous. Wheatgrowing in this State employs far more labour, directly and indirectly, than any other industry. I think that if the position, as it exists in this State today, does not improve, the farmers will have to take a holiday from wheatgrowing and divert their energies to some other form of production.

The Minister for Works: Would the position not be eased somewhat if the price of the wheat which has been in store for the longest period was substantially reduced?

Mr. ACKLAND: I think the position would possibly be eased, but I understand that Australia, Canada and the U.S.A. have entered into an agreement as to the selling price. If the price is reduced it will mean a call on the Federal Treasury, not on the wheatgrowers because they are already guaranteed their cost of production. That guarantee was given some years ago. If it is desired to encourage

a collapse of wheat prices, a reduction in selling price would be the very thing to bring it about.

The Minister for Works: Would it not have the effect of indicating to the consuming countries that the large stocks held were being substantially reduced, and therefore they could not rely on cheap wheat in the future.

Mr. ACKLAND: That may be so. The Deputy Premier might be a better judge of the position than I am, but I do believe that the Australian Wheat Board would not be the initiator in a move to substantially reduce the price of world wheat. I think that would be a very wrong move. As long as people in our country are not short of bread, it will be very much better if the farmers take a holiday. I have spoken to my electors on these matters on many occasions. Until today I have refused to recommend to any wheatgrower that he should not grow his normal crop. I have told farmers that the handling organisation would be able to take delivery of their normal crops if grown.

Mr. May: John Teasdale did not tell us that.

Mr. ACKLAND: I am aware of that. I did not join him when he made his statement. That was the first occasion on which I did not associate myself with his remarks. I did not advocate that farmers should grow no crops. I told them that if they grew their normal crops they would be able to deliver them. At that time there were sufficient ships in sight to load the wheat, leaving a surplus of 20,000,000 bushels instead of 26,000,000. Since then some of the ships have been cancelled. I trust that the Australian Wheat Board in its wisdom will decide to send sufficient ships to Geraldton to make it possible for growers there to deliver their wheat. This will mean the sending of many ships, because the normal cargo of a ship is between 330,000 and 350,000 bushels. It means that for every 1,000,000 bushels we send overseas, not one but three ships are required to move it.

Mr. Lawrence: Would there be a market for that wheat?

Mr. ACKLAND: There is no market for all the wheat which Australia wants to sell, but I am anxious that the Australian Wheat Board should divert some ships which may be intended for somewhere else to go to Geraldton and load the stored wheat. I expect that people in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia are urging similar steps to be taken.

Mr. Lawrence: Where will the ships take that wheat?

Mr. ACKLAND: They will not take it anywhere unless there was a market. There is a market for some wheat.

Mr. Lawrence: You have just said there was no market.

Mr. ACKLAND: There is a market for some wheat, but not for all the wheat which is delivered in the State. Of course, some ships are being loaded in Australia all the time. In the old days of private buyers for our wheat, they used to buy the wheat, load it on to ships, and when the ships had left they looked for markets with a result that the farmer got very little for his wheat. The buyers were not interested whether they found buyers for that wheat at 2s. or 10s. a bushel; all they were interested in was the amount of profit they would make by way of commission reckoned at a penny or a half-penny a bushel.

When the world buyers of wheat discovered there were 20 or 30 ships on the high seas loaded with wheat, and there was no market for it, being business men they offered a very low price which had to be accepted. Today we would not induce the Australian Wheat Board to load wheat on to ships for unknown destinations in the hope of finding a market. I do not think that we in this Chamber desire the Wheat Board to do that. It is far better to leave the wheat in store until someone is prepared to buy it. I am sorry that members opposite misunderstood me when I said there was no market. What I meant was there is an insufficient market for all the wheat.

Mr. Lawrence: What you said was that there was no market.

Mr. ACKLAND: Insufficient is the right word and that should have been used. I would like to see some ships diverted here.

The Minister for Agriculture: You do not want more ships to come to Western Australia to take delivery of wheat over and above the quota of the State? You are anxious to see more ships taking delivery of our wheat. Will that not mean exceeding our quota?

Mr. ACKLAND: The Minister knows the position better than I do.

The Minister for Agriculture: You had better tell us about that.

Mr. ACKLAND: If I am correct, Western Australia has not delivered all the wheat under its quota. I may be wrong. I do not wish to be dogmatic, but I believe that the amount shipped over the last 12 months was 17,000,000 bushels, whereas the quota should be 20,000,000 bushels. I am sure the Minister for Agriculture has more information about that matter than I have. I would like to see more ships coming here, particularly to receive the wheat at Geraldton. If the position does not improve by next April and May, I think farmers would be very well advised to accept the counsel of men like Sir John Teasdale and Mr. Don Massey and take a holiday. But this would be such a backward step. Only today when asked by farmer friends what I would advise, I told them it was for themselves to decide what to grow.

Mr. May: Do you not think that stockpiling has something to do with the present position?

Mr. ACKLAND: It did have something to do with it during the war years.

Mr. May: Since the war years, during the Korean campaign.

Mr. ACKLAND: The whole stockpile has gone. Great Britain, instead of taking 75 per cent. of her needs this year and last, took only 25 per cent. She had a crop of 25 per cent. of her requirements. Instead of buying the balance, she drew on her stockpile for 50 per cent. of her requirements. I understand that the stockpile has been liquidated.

Mr. May: In that case the position will be eased.

Mr. ACKLAND: Great Britain is in exactly the same position as other European countries. She is now encouraging farmers to grow wheat to a very much greater extent. Some countries are paying their growers anything from 21s. to 26s. a bushel to grow the wheat which can be supplied by the wheatgrowing exporting countries at 16s. or 17s. We can find more markets if we are prepared to accept goods in payment for wheat. We have a good market in Germany if we will take German products in exchange. We can find a good market in Japan, the same as America is finding, if we buy Japanese goods in return. Those countries have not the money to pay for the wheat; they can only pay for it in goods.

To a greater or lesser degree these are contributing factors to the state in which we find ourselves today. Unless something is done, as has already been done by the wheatgrowers, to reduce the cost of production, Australia will grow less and less wheat, but there will always be sufficient grown to feed the people of this country.

The Minister for Agriculture: Can you tell me what you expect this Government to do?

Mr. ACKLAND: I wanted to ventilate this matter in the House today as a basis for discussion. I am not criticising the Premier, the Minister for Agriculture or even the Minister for Railways, who always thinks I am on his back. I want only to state the facts as I see them. This problem is beyond the power of the Western Australian Government to overcome, but it can bring pressure to bear on the Australian Wheat Board to assist farmers in this State.

The Premier: The hon. member might have at least mentioned his intention with regard to this motion to the Minister for Agriculture before moving it.

Mr. ACKLAND: No discourtesy was intended. I arrived here at dinner time and I did discuss this matter with the Speaker and got his advice. I believe the Speaker discussed this matter with the Premier.

The Premier: That is right.

Mr. ACKLAND: I did not mean the slightest discourtesy to the Minister for Agriculture, as he knows full well.

Mr. Lawrence: Do you think the position will deteriorate before next Wednesday?

Mr. ACKLAND: I do not think it can be done quicker than today.

Mr. Lawrence: Do you think it will deteriorate before next Wednesday?

Mr. ACKLAND: I think the position may improve before next Wednesday as a result of bringing this motion forward.

Mr. Lawrence: You are a super optimist.

Mr. ACKLAND: I may be. One has to be guided by one's own feelings. I believe I possess a great deal more knowledge of this position than the member for South Fremantle. We do want ships to be diverted here.

The Minister for Agriculture: Where would they go to?

Mr. ACKLAND: To places where sales have already been made, but there are insufficient sales—

Mr. Lawrence: You have not answered the Minister's query as to whether or not Western Australia has exceeded its quota. You indicated that you did not know.

Mr. ACKLAND: I am sorry that the member for South Fremantle cannot be convinced. I thought our quota was 20,000,000 bushels.

Mr. Lawrence: You thought, but do you know?

Mr. ACKLAND: That is a very difficult matter. We have a total of 60,000,000 bushels. Taking into consideration the far higher home consumption in every State, particularly Victoria and South Australia, we expect to have 20,000,000 bushels as our quota for sale overseas. I said I thought that; I did not want to be dogmatic about the matter.

THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE
(Hon. E. K. Hoar—Warren) [2.53]: As far as I am concerned, the only value of the discussion this afternoon is to obtain publicity or to use it as propaganda.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: You have hit it right on the head.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: That can be useful also.

Mr. Ackland: That does not do you any credit.

THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: That is my opinion. If the hon. member had received some indication from the chairman of the Wheat Board a few days ago which led him to a frame of mind where he felt this matter had to be discussed in the House this afternoon, the very least he could have done was to inform me about the matter in order that,

if any possible steps can be taken by the Government to ease the position, they could have been taken before this afternoon. Bearing in mind that Western Australia, like all other States, has only a certain quota for shipments overseas under the International Wheat Agreement, and assuming, as I am doing without additional knowledge and without the opportunity of delving further into it, that the greatest proportion of the quota for Western Australia has already been despatched, there may be only 3,000,000 to 4,000,000 bushels of wheat yet to be sent.

I imagine that the matter from a shipping point of view can be adequately dealt with by the Australian Wheat Board, if the hon. member wants that board to divert ships here, either at this or any other stage, for the purpose of picking up wheat to take to some market which, however, the hon. member says does not exist! The overall picture appears somewhat grim, so far as the marketing of our wheat on an Australian basis is concerned. It would not be proper to suggest to the board that it should send ships here other than what we are normally entitled to receive. The hon. member can rest assured that the Wheat Board will undertake that in its own due time, and when it considers such action expedient and proper.

I am not defending the board in any way, because I do not know what the situation is so far as this development is concerned. I am in complete ignorance of it and am speaking only from the knowledge I have of its activities during my term of office. I think it has paid due regard to the claims of all wheat-growing States in the matter of export quotas. Without having any further knowledge, I imagine that on this occasion it is doing exactly the same as on other occasions, and that Western Australia will receive enough ships in due course to enable it to transfer its wheat to its logical markets. We cannot, however, expect to obtain any more shipping space than that.

In his speech, the hon. member introduced elements in connection with wheat marketing and storage which I feel could well have been dealt with in another debate in which full consideration could be given to the many important and valuable points he made. But to expect proper consideration of such an important matter in a debate of this description, without any prior warning having been given, is to expect the impossible.

For instance, reference was made to the f.a.q. standard. That is of distinct significance so far as the quality of Western Australian wheats and our prospects of sale are concerned. I know quite well that immediately north of us there is a country which is willing to take from 10,000,000 to 20,000,000 bushels of wheat of a certain quality. But we do not grow that wheat; and when the hon. member says that

there are all sorts of sections in the community, other than wheatgrowers, who should bear the responsibility of making this improvement in quality, I reply that out of all the primary industries I know—

Mr. Ackland: You want a hearing aid. I never said anything of the sort.

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: On what point?

Mr. Ackland: What you just said.

The Premier: What was it?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: What does the hon. member think I just said?

Mr. Ackland: You said I said something I did not say.

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: What I am saying is that there would be an opportunity for exploiting other markets than those we have today, if we could only give more attention to the quality of our wheat. When the hon. member was speaking on that point, he said that the workers could help to share the high costs of production of wheat. In reply, I want to tell the hon. member that of all the primary industries I know, the wheatgrowing industry is the only one that, up till recently, had made no contribution whatsoever on its own account towards research along the line of producing a better quality wheat. If there is to be any discussion as to who should bear some of the cost of extending markets on the basis of improved quality of wheat, the matter comes home very closely to the wheatgrowers, upon whom rests the necessity to do something about it.

I think that the situation with regard to overseas markets is not a very happy one. But we are not going to solve it by getting extra ships from the Wheat Board to run around in circles with a view to relieving the port of Geraldton, or any other port. Under the International Wheat Agreement we are obliged, if we are able, to send 48,000,000 bushels to other countries. The opportunity for selling our wheat overseas has been prejudiced to a very great extent by the fact that Great Britain, formerly one of our most important buyers, ceased to be a party to the International Wheat Agreement. Great Britain is a nation of hard-headed tradesmen; and what it set out to do, it has almost accomplished—that is, to have a cheap wheat placed on the markets of the world.

If we had to send our wheat to the markets in London on behalf of the British Isles, we would have to compete with other wheat, perhaps from North America; and unless we can land our product in London at the same price as that paid for wheat coming from some other nation, such as North America, or Canada, we are going to be at a disadvantage. One of the greatest difficulties of the Australian

Wheat Board today is to come to an agreement with all the other exporting nations so that we can all land our wheat on a given market at the same time and at almost exactly the same price. That is going to be a tremendous difficulty within the next few months.

It may be necessary, in view of the fact that other countries are half-inclined to follow Great Britain, to call on the signatories to the international agreement to take their fair share of the wheat offering. When that occurs—as it can easily do within two to three months from now—they will then have the legal right to demand that wheat at the minimum price, which is 13s. 10d., and not the world market price which could be a greater figure. If the hon. member sees any danger at all with regard to the marketing of wheat, I can see a lot more danger than he has mentioned. We are not far off the day when all importing nations will be receiving their wheat at the minimum rate allowable under the international agreement. So a situation more difficult than the one existing at the moment could easily occur in a very short time.

I say clearly and definitely that if the hon. member feels this Government can expedite the marketing of our wheat overseas by an approach to the Australian Wheat Board, or the Australian Government, as the case may be, we will be only too happy to do so. But I do not think the hon. member hit on the solution at all. It is not a question of finding ships at present, but of determining our future policy regarding acreage. Up till now, I have not approved any suggestion of Sir John Teasdale, or anybody else in that camp, who believes in a reduction of acreage; and I am not prepared to do so this afternoon, without giving a great deal more consideration to the matter.

Australia is facing a very grave time in the marketing of its wheat. We have for at least a couple of years, in my opinion, to make provision for large-scale storage. The Commonwealth Government, as has been indicated at the various meetings of the Agricultural Council, has been well aware of this fact; and, as the member for Moore knows, has made £3,500,000 available for storage purposes in the wheatgrowing States. Western Australia has £500,000 of that amount for its £5,000,000 storage at Midland Junction.

I fail to see how this discussion can do any good this afternoon. The Wheat Board has been fair-minded in the past in giving Western Australia and all other States a fair allocation of the freight, and I have no reason to think the situation will be any different on this occasion.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS
(Hon. H. H. Styants—Kalgoorlie) [3.10]: There is only one portion of the speech of the member for Moore to which I wish to

refer, and that is his mis-statement as to what would be the likely increase in the cost of wheatgrowing on account of increased railway freights. I hope the other data that he gave us was more factual than his statement concerning railway freights.

It was said by the hon. member that the cost of production per bushel of wheat last year was 11s. 7d.; and that, largely because of the increased railway freights, it would be 13s. per bushel this year. From last year's report of the Railway Department, I have taken figures showing that the average haul of wheat was 140 miles, which worked out at 40s. 10d. per ton. There are 37½ bushels to the ton, so that works out roughly at 1s. 1d. per bushel. Last year the average receipts of the Railway Department per ton-mile in respect of wheat hauled was 2.36d. whereas this year it is 3.46d. The difference between the figure last year and that of this year is approximately 1d. per ton-mile, or 12s. 6d. per ton for a haul of 150 miles.

Mr. Ackland: The haulage of oil and stores and machinery all comes into the cost.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The hon. member was talking about the freight on wheat.

Mr. Ackland: About the cost of wheatgrowing.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: When we consider that the difference between the freight on wheat last year and this year was 12s. 6d. per ton for a haul of 150 miles, and that there are 37½ bushels in a ton, we find that the increase in the rate was 4d. per bushel; whereas, according to the fallacious reasoning of the member for Moore, the increased freight was going to put up the cost of production from 11s. 7d. to 13s. He need not worry about the cost of transporting oil and fuel, because the farmer does not use the railways for the haulage of that kind of commodity any longer. He carts those things in his own vehicles. He leaves only super and wheat to the railways.

Mr. Ackland: You know that is not so.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: His estimate was 1s. 7d. per bushel. I could take the hon. member along the roads leading to his electorate, this afternoon or at any time, and show him vehicles owned by wheatgrowers and loaded with 18 to 20 barrels or 44 gallon drums of petrol, which the growers are carting for their own use. They are permitted to do that; and the hon. member knows it as well as I do. He knows that some of the oil companies have had to close down their bulk installations in country districts because farmers are carting oil and fuel supplies. I am not going to let him get away with the statement that railway freights will increase the cost of production from 11s. 7d. to 13s. per bushel.

I do not know much about wheatgrowing. But with regard to the hon. member's semi-threat that the farmers will not grow wheat, that seems to me to be the logical course to adopt. After all, what is the use of continuing to produce an article for which there is no market? If there were a decrease in the production of wheat, it would be unfortunate from the taxpayers' point of view; because, last year, wheat was hauled—for the first time, I think, in the history of the railways—at a profitable price to the department. Previously it has been hauled at less than cost. That has been the case over the last five to seven years, during which time the farmer has been receiving famine prices for his product.

HON. A. F. WATTS (Stirling) [3.15]: I listened to the member for Moore with great interest, and I am sure he has raised matters which ought to be given consideration. I can well understand the situation in which the Minister for Agriculture finds himself. He has not got at his fingertips, all the information he requires. This motion would not have been permitted had the problem involved not suddenly arisen. Therefore, it seems to me that the information that the House ought to be getting from the Government representatives just cannot be available.

It is all very well for the Minister to skim lightly over the position, but if the facts as stated by the member for Moore are correct, then there are going to be great and somewhat unexpected difficulties in regard to the storage of wheat in Western Australia; and those difficulties are going to arise particularly in the northern zone. The hon. member's information has been obtained, as far as I know, bona fide, and it may be perfectly correct, but there may be elsewhere an answer to the question. If, however, there is not a satisfactory answer to it, then is it not the duty of the Government to see whether there is some way by which the problem can be overcome?

I would not suggest that it should say "Yes" or "No" to that this afternoon. I do not believe it could, because no doubt some investigation would be necessary and much discussion, not only with departmental officers but possibly with people in other States. It might be practicable to find a way out of the difficulty to which the member for Moore referred. As far as members are concerned, at the present time they just do not know the facts. The Minister says, and I agree, that he has had no time to get all the information; and for that matter neither have I, and I do not like having to form a judgment, or this House forming a judgment, without having at least some semblance of knowledge of the details concerning the matter before us.

Mr. May: Do you not think it speaks for itself at the present time?

Hon. A. F. WATTS: It apparently does, but it is only apparently so at the moment. The Minister for Agriculture did not say, "Yes, I know from past experience, and knowledge that I had before the House met, that all we have been told is correct, or even worse." If he had told us that, we would have felt he had given the matter some consideration but, on the contrary, he told the member for Moore politely enough, that he had not had any time to consider the matter.

Mr. May: The Royal Commission reports indicated this.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: Yes, but they have not indicated the position in Western Australia. They have indicated the overall position, but until quite recently it appeared as though the position in Western Australia could be managed fairly effectively. After all, we are here to look after Western Australia first and foremost. If there is anything that can be done to make the position in this State better than it now appears likely to be, it is our duty to do it. I am not unreasonable enough to suggest that it could be done this afternoon; nor is it fair to ask the Minister, or any other reasonable person, to put forward a proposition which might bring it about, because, first of all, he has not the data, and, secondly, he has not had time to take advice, and, thirdly if he had all the data and advice, he could hardly be expected to come to a conclusion in the short time that has been available.

So I am of the opinion that this House is entitled to know the exact problem that faces Western Australia, and whether anything can be done to relieve it within the next three or four days in order to bring us back to the position we were in, so that we can reasonably handle the carry-over and the new season's crop. In order that this may be done, and so that we can find out just what the position is, it is my belief that this discussion should be adjourned until next week, if that is possible; and I think it is. I hope some hon. member will be prepared to take that course, and that the Government will not object to it.

Mr. MAY: I move—

That the debate be adjourned.

Mr. SPEAKER: I cannot accept that motion. The question before the House must either be withdrawn, or go to the vote.

MR. BRADY (Guildford-Midland) [3.21]: What peevs me is that this question has all of a sudden become an urgent matter, when, to the most uninformed, it has been quite obvious that the present wheat crisis has been developing for a number of years. If any hon. member looks back in "Hansard," he will see where I, a layman who knows comparatively nothing about wheat, forecast this position some four or five years ago. It is strange to have our friends of the Opposition raising

it as an urgent matter now. What did they do three or four years ago to advise their followers to prepare for this day? What applies to wheat will apply to a number of other primary products. Let us all put our thinking caps on and do something for the primary producers and for the State as a whole, and not try to make out that this Government should have been doing something for the last few months.

Mr. Ackland: Who suggested that.

Mr. BRADY: It is obvious that this position has been arising. We knew four or five years ago that other countries were getting over their war difficulties and were producing wheat, and that some which had not previously grown wheat were commencing to produce it. Yet we have members trying to imply that this crisis has arisen in the last month or two. Much can be done locally if all those concerned with the welfare of the State are prepared to play ball. I feel that people who could be using stock foods produced from wheat are priced out of buying them, because certain organisations are making profits as a consequence of the policy they are following. People who would like to use wheat products for poultry and stock in order to give us cheaper eggs and butter cannot afford to buy them.

I feel that quite a big volume of wheat could be used in this State and throughout Australia, if we adopted the right policy. We should all get together and find out why producers cannot buy wheat products for stock and poultry foods. When a State produces wheat it does so at a certain cost, and I am fearful that if there is only half the wheat production, the firms supplying oils and other requirements for putting in the crop will not be able to supply their goods at the present cost, because turnover makes it possible to have reduced costs, and if we have only a half or a quarter of our normal acreage, the turnover of these firms will fall and their costs will consequently rise, and we shall be no better off. This is another factor that should be considered.

Some four or five years ago I saw, at a farmers' conference, an authority on wheat produce two newspaper cuttings, one showing that the wheat sales were falling off because prices were too high, and the other saying that wheat sales were falling off because certain countries could not afford to buy wheat. Is not that true? Some countries want our wheat, but cannot afford to buy it. We are led to believe that the starving millions in Asia cannot afford to buy our wheat. What are our friends opposite doing to get together with these people to see if there can be some reciprocity in regard to trade? Much can be done by two parties if they get together in an endeavour to arrive at a common policy. As an ordinary citizen and a Labour man, I feel that to a large extent the wheat

farmer is the backbone of this country, and our party is anxious to help him, provided he is prepared to help himself. He must, however, realise that he cannot go on at the rate he has been spending—buying cars, machinery, etc.—if he wants the Government to help him.

To this extent, the farmer should examine his position to see whether he can cut down his costs in his own interests and those of the State. I had a few years in the wheat game, but I do not profess to be an authority on wheat. I understand that in my electorate about £500,000 is to be spent on the construction of a silo, or bulkhandling establishment, to carry about 4,000,000 or 5,000,000 bushels of wheat. What worries me is this: How long will the wheat remain in a saleable condition? I recall that some years ago thousands of bushels of wheat were stored, and when it came to be used it was found to be so riddled with weevils and other insects, and so damaged by rain and other elements, that only about one-half of it could be used.

I deplore the putting of millions of bushels of wheat into a storage bin if we are to retrieve only one-third or one-half of it in four or five years' time. I would much prefer that the Government should say to the starving masses in Asia and the near eastern islands, "We will let you have this wheat at a reduced price, and we will share part of the loss," than that the wheat should be put into storage bins and be destroyed by insects and rain.

I think that more wheat could be used in the ordinary households in our own country. The housewife would like to use more cereals, such as "Weetbix" and other wheat breakfast foods, but the price is too dear. The powers-that-be could get together to see why we should not have cheaper breakfast foods so that they could be available on the average worker's table each morning. Here again I feel that a bad policy is operating. I do not blame any particular person in this House for it, but I do think that members here could get together and find out why breakfast foods are so dear that the ordinary housewife is trying to avoid buying them.

There is another avenue in which some of our wheat products could be used. I am in sympathy with the farmer and I think we must do something for him, but I consider that he could do a great deal more for himself than he is doing at the moment. He could push the powers-that-be to discover why production costs are so high, particularly in manufacturing concerns which are turning out breakfast foods, stock foods, poultry foods, flour and other products. I repeat, I want to do everything possible to help the farmer, but he should help himself. One of the troubles has been that past Governments have not given sufficient attention to the problem.

MR. MAY (Collie) [3.31]: The member for Moore seemed to be half apologetic about moving this motion and wanted it to be made perfectly clear that nobody had asked him to move it. As a member who represents a wheatgrowing district, and as one who is personally interested in the wheatgrowing business, I think he was perfectly entitled to bring the subject forward off his own bat without having to be pushed by either the Farmers' Union, Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd. or anyone else. But I do not know why this stam-pede is taking place in regard to the wheat industry. Anybody who has been connected with the industry, over the past two or three years, should have realised that the time of adjustment had to come, and it has come.

Every farmer of standing in this State knew that the price of wheat could never be kept at such a high level—it was too silly for words—and the day of reckoning has come. As a result, the price of wheat must fall back to a normal level. I do not mean that that level should be the price paid for it in 1929 to 1933. I would never favour the price of wheat being reduced to that figure. But every farmer who has taken an intelligent interest in the world marketing of wheat must have known that the day of reckoning would come. In my opinion the same thing will happen to wool. Over the years that the farmers have received high prices for the commodities produced, they should have been preparing for the day that has now arrived.

Mr. Ackland: Do not you think they have?

Mr. MAY: I will tell the hon. member what some farmers have been doing—I do not say all of them. But I know dozens of farmers who, over the last few years, have taken their families for trips to the Old Country every year. I do not say that they are not entitled to do what they like with their money. After all, it is their money.

Hon. D. Brand: I'll say!

Mr. MAY: There were many other avenues through which farmers got rid of their money. Many of them could not get rid of it fast enough in order to dodge taxation. The hon. member knows as well as I do that that sort of thing has been taking place.

Hon. D. Brand: I should say that the same amount of taxation dodging applies to all other sections of the community.

Mr. MAY: I realise that, but it is nevertheless a fact; and I am in the happy position that I can speak without being biased. In the hon. member's case, he has to speak up for the farmers. The chairman of the Wheat Board suggested that the way out of the difficulty was to decrease the acreage sown. If that is the only thing he can think to do to adjust the world situation, he is not a very great statesman.

Hon. D. Brand: He was speaking only in reference to wheat storage.

Mr. MAY: He made that statement—

Hon. D. Brand: Of course he did!

Mr. MAY: —nearly 12 months ago. He said that the farmer had to wake up to himself and realise that there must be a reduction in the acreage of wheat. Will the member for Moore deny that?

Mr. Ackland: He said that last January.

Mr. MAY: Even Prime Minister Menzies did not agree with that statement and I do not agree with it, either. That is not the solution to the problem. Whether we like it or not, we must face up to facts.

Mr. Ackland: It was very wise advice.

Mr. MAY: The price of wheat must be adjusted to meet the world situation. This problem would have occurred some years ago had it not been for the Korean war and the possibility of that war spreading to other parts of the world. That caused America, England and other nations to stockpile wheat and, as a consequence, the price was maintained at its then artificial level. The time has arrived when the stockpiles are being placed on the market and, of course, that has interfered with the price of wheat. We have to face up to that fact whether we like it or not. The suggestions that have been made regarding the storage of wheat are not the solution to the problem. We can store this coming harvest and we can carry the surplus over from the last harvest. We can even store the harvest after next, but that will not be the solution to the problem.

Mr. Court: Altering the price will not necessarily get rid of it for us.

Mr. MAY: We are more likely to get rid of it if we alter the price than if we store it. I do not want the hon. member to tell me what should happen because I am a wheat farmer and the hon. member is concerned only with the profit end of it.

Mr. Court: Or the loss end.

Mr. MAY: There have not been any losses since 1939.

Mr. Ackland: At how low a price are you willing to sell your wheat?

Mr. MAY: It is sold on the world's markets. I know we are further away from the world's markets than are most countries. That is why an effort has been made to keep up the price of wheat so that we can compete with Canada, South America and other places. But we cannot hope to do so unless some other scheme is adopted for the growing of a different kind of wheat—a type that is more suitable for the world's markets. Unless we do that we cannot hope to keep up with countries that are much closer to the world's markets than we are.

Some mention was made of ships. The member for Moore said that he hoped more ships would be made available to

clear the wheat that is accumulating along the Midland line. Westralian Farmers Ltd. is the main dealer in wheat in this State and that company has a fleet of ships. Its fleet, at the present time, is not carting one grain of wheat; the fleet of ships, owned by Westralian Farmers Ltd. is carting iron ore. Does not the hon. member think that a company which is so interested in the wheat situation in this State should be paying some attention to the request of the member for Moore about shifting some of the wheat from along the Midland line?

Mr. Ackland: How do you know that they did not ask for a charter?

Mr. MAY: I do not know.

Mr. Ackland: Then why make a statement unless you know the facts?

Mr. MAY: Will the hon. member deny that the ships owned by Westralian Farmers Ltd. are carting iron ore?

Mr. Ackland: They cannot cart it unless someone gives them a charter for it.

Mr. MAY: Does not the hon. member think that their interests should lie more in the question of shifting the wheat from this State rather than in the carting of iron ore to Port Kembla?

Mr. Ackland: They must get a charter before they can cart it.

Mr. May: Of course they must, but have they made any effort?

Hon. A. F. Watts: You are implying that they have not asked for a wheat charter, but you do not know.

Mr. MAY: I am asking why they are not carting wheat when the member for Moore is asking that ships should be sent to this State to take away our wheat.

Mr. Cornell: You are having a stab in the dark.

Mr. MAY: I am not. What I am saying is a positive fact. That company has the biggest wheat business in this State but it is using its fleet of ships to cart iron ore. Yet the member for Moore, who represents a wheat-producing electorate, is asking for more ships to be sent to this State to cart away our wheat. The hon. member should answer that question, if he can.

Hon. A. F. Watts: The Australian Wheat Board does the chartering.

Mr. Ackland: The hon. member has answered the question to his own satisfaction, completely ignoring the facts.

Mr. MAY: The hon. member cannot answer the question. If the hon. member had tried to use some influence with Westralian Farmers Ltd. to send at least some of its ships to Geraldton to transport some of our wheat instead of using the ships to cart iron ore from Whyalla to Port Kembla he would have been doing a

better service for the farmers of this State. There is a solution and is there any earthly reason why those ships should not carry wheat instead of iron ore? Of course there is not!

Hon. D. Brand: To where will they carry it?

Mr. Ackland: You have left us speechless!

Mr. MAY: The hon. member may be left speechless, but he has not answered the question. I will be glad if he can produce an answer. He ought to approach Westralian Farmers Ltd. and ask the company why it is not able to lift our wheat. Then he should come back to this Chamber and tell us the answer. That should not leave the hon. member speechless.

Mr. Moir: It has.

Mr. MAY: Mention was made about the freights being charged by the railways; I am glad the Minister for Railways has had something to say in that connection. Before freights were increased, some 12 months ago, the wheat farmers had enjoyed an immense period of prosperity.

Mr. Ackland: A five-year period of prosperity.

Mr. MAY: It does not matter whether it was a five-year period or a three-year period. During that period the farmer enjoyed a period of prosperity and the cartage of his wheat was being subsidised by the Government through the State railways. Does not the hon. member think that in the interests of the State, with which he is now professing to be so concerned, the farmers' organisation should have said to the Railway Department, "You have a deficit of £3,500,000 this year. We are prepared to pay extra for the cartage of our wheat."

Mr. Ackland: The department put on 600 extra employees.

Mr. MAY: I am talking about freights. The farmer of today, who is enjoying such prosperity, is the same farmer who, a few years ago, received assistance from the Industries Assistance Board. On two occasions in this House I pointed out that with the exception of a few thousand pounds, that monetary assistance has never been repaid, despite the fact that every wheat farmer in this State at present is well on his feet. What happened when the Farmers' Union called for donations from the wheat farmers to purchase its building? Only one wheat farmer in this State responded with a donation of £20. That is how much the wheat farmer is prepared to help himself. I do not want to speak too long, Mr. Speaker, because it would only mean I would tell you a lot of things the wheat farmers should have done, which they have left undone.

Mr. Ackland: We will be very interested to hear what you have to say.

Mr. MAY: The hon. member's sarcasm does not mean a thing to me. We are perfectly used to it in this Chamber, and it runs off me like water off a duck's back.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I think the Speaker is trying to catch your eye.

Mr. MAY: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I think it is time for afternoon tea!

Sitting suspended from 3.46 to 4.8 p.m.

Mr. SPEAKER: This debate has got quite out of hand. I shall read again the letter of the member for Moore, as follows:—

I desire your permission to move for the adjournment of the House to discuss the gravity of the wheat industry in W.A.

The movement of wheat overseas has been so slow that, unless more ships are made available to move wheat from W.A., it is unlikely that farmers will be able to make delivery of their grain at harvest time.

Members, instead of adhering to the question, have engaged in a general discussion on the wheat position, with which the motion does not deal at all. I have allowed members a tremendous amount of latitude, and I ask them now to keep somewhere near the question.

Mr. MAY: In the motion, there is something about ships, and I certainly did deal with ships, though I noticed that you, Mr. Speaker, looked very closely at me. With regard to the situation mentioned this afternoon by the member for Moore, there is no one more anxious to help adjust that situation than the member for Collie. If the farmers are made to realise that the time of adjustment has arrived, then I believe the adjustment could be made evenly and with satisfaction to the wheat industry in this State. We must expect that everyone will be sympathetic towards the matters that have been raised by the member for Moore, but the farmers must realise that the enhanced price that has applied since the termination of the war will not continue so that the return for wheat will go back to somewhere near its proper level.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: What do you mean by "back to its proper level."

Mr. MAY: I mean that the wheat prices that have obtained in this State since the end of the war have been abnormal. This applies also to wool.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Does it not apply to the cost of production?

Mr. MAY: Yes, but I am still of the opinion that the cost of production is nowhere near the price that has been obtained for our wheat. I am not talking of last year or the present year, but of the years just subsequent to the war. In my opinion, backed up by practical experience, the price then was abnormal. I am not growling about the farmers getting that price provided they realise it was abnormal and that

sooner or later it would come down to what I call the normal level, which is the cost of production plus a workable margin for those engaged in the industry.

That is the basis on which we should all work. If this State Parliament, in association with the farmers' organisation and the Federal Government, could arrive at a solution of the problem, we would be doing more good than by attempting to store the wheat, because we have no guarantee that it will ever be sold. It probably will remain there from year to year, although I hope not. The sooner we all get together and find out what can be done in the way of supplying wheat to our near neighbours, the better it will be. Among our own people we have users of wheat. In my own area I know of three poultry farmers each of whom has 4,500 head of poultry. Those men are going out of the poultry-farming industry simply because they cannot afford to pay the present price for poultry food.

Mr. Ackland: And due to the reduction in the price of eggs.

Mr. MAY: Yes. The reduction of 10d. a dozen is the turning point which has decided them to close up. They could not even give the fowls away at the finish. The same thing applies to flour. If the powers-that-be and the farmers' organisation get together, some solution may be found by which the wheat industry of this State can be stabilised so that we can compete with other wheatgrowing nations.

THE PREMIER (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [4.15]: I want to underline the importance of the Australian Wheat Board in this situation. It was set up deliberately for the purpose of handling the very position with which the motion deals. I do not know all the members of the Wheat Board, but I would conclude that the board is expert in handling the duties with which it is entrusted. I know Sir John Teasdale, the chairman of the board, as I think we all do. I believe we would all acknowledge him as being an expert in regard to the production, marketing and transport of wheat.

For many years he was a practical farmer in this State and he would know, as well as any of us, and better than most, the wheat position in Western Australia. He would be aware of the difficulties facing the industry, no matter whether they were associated with production, storage, sale or shipment, and I am sure he would try to do everything he could to ensure that the problems in this State were overcome to the greatest possible extent and within the shortest possible time.

If the problems which exist at the moment, and those which are in prospect, are beyond the capacity of the Australian Wheat Board to handle, then the outlook for the wheat farmers in Western Australia is grim indeed. If that be the situation

there will be very soon, I should think, as was suggested by the member for Stirling and I think agreed to by the Minister for Agriculture, every justification for an all-out debate in this House upon the present and future problems of the industry. The Government would be willing and anxious to co-operate with members on the other side for the purpose of initiating and carrying through a debate of that nature.

Although the Australian Wheat Board is the expert organisation charged under the law to handle the situation, nevertheless the members of the Government and particularly the Minister for Agriculture, will continue to do everything within their power to have the problems overcome to whatever extent is practicable. The Minister for Agriculture certainly knows the situation in Western Australia, as do all of us to some lesser or greater extent. Nevertheless, he, and the members of the Government generally, depend largely on the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture for accurate and up-to-date information regarding the marketing situation, the availability of ships and the allocation of those ships to the various States.

I very much hope that the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, and also the chairman of the Australian Wheat Board, will keep the State Government, through its Minister for Agriculture, informed as well as, if not better than, they keep other people and organisations informed in this State. I have confidence in the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture and the chairman of the Australian Wheat Board, that both of them would do that.

Mr. ACKLAND: I ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

QUESTIONS.

EDUCATION.

(a) As to Kindergarten Attendances and Cost.

Hon. A. F. WATTS asked the Minister for Education:

(1) How many children of kindergarten age are estimated to be in Western Australia at the present time?

(2) How many of these are at present attending kindergartens?

(3) What would be the estimated cost of paying the salaries, and providing incidental equipment such as is provided at primary schools, necessary to enable all children of kindergarten school age to be provided for at the present time, allowing the maximum number of children to each teacher?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Approximately 30,000.

(2) Approximately 3,000.

(3) £1,560,000.

(b) *As to Restoration of Monitorial System.*

Mr. HUTCHINSON asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Is it intended to restore the monitorial system in the Education Department?

(2) Has consideration been given to re-establishing some modified form of the monitorial system?

(3) If so, what is the result of such consideration?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No.

(2) and (3) No. The department is strongly opposed to such a retrograde step.

(c) *As to Construction of School, Killarney.*

Mr. NIMMO asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Will he inform the House when the school in the Killarney district will be commenced?

(2) When will it be ready for occupation?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Plans and specifications for the North Scarborough school are now complete. It is not possible to give a commencing date until the contract has been let.

(2) It is anticipated that the school will be ready for occupation in February, 1955.

(d) *As to Construction, Armadale High School.*

Mr. WILD asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Will a start be made upon the Armadale High School before Christmas of this year?

(2) If not, why not?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) Answered by No. (1).

STATE SHIPPING SERVICE.

As to Deputation Regarding Crew of "Peter Reed."

Mr. COURT asked the Minister representing the Minister for the North-West:

(1) Did he receive a deputation regarding the crew of the State Shipping Service charter ship "Peter Reed?"

(2) If so, what was the outcome of the deputation?

(3) What is the decision on the crew for the period of the charter?

The MINISTER FOR MINES replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) The deputation was advised that the usual time charter had been entered into for a period of two years.

(3) The charter provides for a Norwegian crew. Provision has been made for Australian rates of pay to apply.

FARM MACHINERY.

(a) *As to Report on Fatality, Margaret River.*

Mr. JOHNSON asked the Minister for Labour:

(1) Has the Shops and Factories Inspection Branch received a report of the accident at Margaret River on the 30th July, in which a young girl was killed by dairy machinery.

(2) Has the inspector authority to inspect machines of this type?

(3) Under the Victorian Shops and Factories Act, could the inspector in that State take action under similar circumstances?

(4) If so, what action?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) and (2). No, as far as I am aware.

(3) and (4). The information might be obtained from the Act mentioned.

(b) *As to Accidents and Hospital Beds Required.*

Mr. JOHNSON asked the Minister for Health:

(1) Can he indicate how many hospital beds were occupied as the result of accidents from farm machinery on the 30th December, 1953, and the 30th June, 1954?

(2) What is the average number of bed days required by such cases?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) and (2). I regret it would not be possible to secure this information.

(c) *As to Fatality at Canna and Inspections.*

Mr. JOHNSON asked the Minister for Mines:

(1) Has he noticed the report in "The West Australian" of the 25th August of a fatal accident at Canna caused by farm machinery?

(2) Is such machinery liable to inspection by his or any other departmental officers?

(3) If the answer to No. (2) is in the negative, can such machines be classed as safe?

(4) Will he consider enlarging the scope of the Act to include all machines capable of causing death and/or injury?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) A report in "The West Australian" of the 25th instant has been noted.

(2) No.

(3) As far as I am aware harvesters properly handled are safe to operate.

(4) Almost any machine can be involved in an accident, and periodic inspection would not prevent this. To inspect all machines of this type would be almost impracticable, and would not eliminate accidents.

FIRE HAZARDS.*As to Determining Forecasts.*

Mr. HEARMAN asked the Minister for Lands:

Can he inform the House who is responsible for, and the methods used, to determine the fire hazard forecasts in—

- (a) jarrah forest area;
- (b) karri forest area;
- (c) agricultural area?

The MINISTER replied:

Fire weather forecasts are issued by the Divisional Meteorological Bureau, Perth, through the Australian Broadcasting Commission and local papers. For the forest regions, checks on the forecasts are made by the Forests Department's weather officer at Dwellingup prior to dissemination over that department's radio network to its various field offices.

Fire weather forecasts are based on a knowledge of the actual degree of fire danger at any time. The method in use which was developed in 1934 by Forests Department officers, is the fundamental change in inflammability as indicated by the change in moisture content of half-inch cylinders of *Pinus radiata* under varying weather conditions. This determination of current fire danger is made at Dwellingup in the jarrah forest and Pemberton in the karri forest, and transmitted with other standard weather information to the Weather Bureau, Perth, at 3 p.m. each afternoon from November to April each summer.

Forecasts for the agricultural region were commenced by the bureau two years ago at the request of the Commissioner for Railways. The Forests Department established a field weather station at its Dryandra mallet plantation (Narrogin district) in order to give the Weather Bureau a standard checking station in the drier areas. Dryandra forwards daily measurements of fire danger to the bureau at the same time as Dwellingup and Pemberton.

The Weather Bureau then uses this measured degree of fire danger as a basis, and has to decide how the expected weather conditions for the following 24 hours will effect the fire hazard—whether it will be higher or lower. When the forecast for the following day is completed, it is forwarded to Dwellingup by telephone at 4 p.m. and sent out over the departmental radio system. It is conveyed to the general public after the general weather forecasts, following the news sessions in the evening, and in the morning, and a special telephone message at 7 a.m. is sent to the Railway Department giving the fire hazard for all regions of the South-West.

Close liaison has been maintained between the Forest Meteorologist and the officers of the bureau during the past 20

years, and has led to a high degree of accuracy in forecasts for the forest regions.

POLICE FORCE.*As to Resignations and Reason for Increase.*

Mr. CORNELL asked the Minister for Police:

(1) What were the respective ranks of the 30 members of the Police Force who resigned during the period from the 1st January to the 30th June, 1954?

(2) What reason can be ascribed to the steep increase in the number of Police Force resignations during the six months ended the 30th June, 1954, compared with those of previous half-yearly periods?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The ranks comprised three sergeants, two women constables, one detective constable and 24 uniform constables.

(2) The only reason that can be given for an increase in the number of resignations is that apparently greater opportunities are now offering in business employment outside the service than formerly, and these opportunities appeal to men to get away from shift, week-end and public holiday work.

REGIONAL PLANNING.*As to Introduction of Legislation.*

Mr. COURT (without notice) asked the Minister representing the Minister for Town Planning:

(1) Is it the intention of the Government to introduce this session legislation to deal with the regional plan being submitted by Professor Stephenson?

(2) If so, at what approximate date is it proposed to introduce this legislation?

(3) In any case, is it proposed to introduce this session legislation dealing with town planning generally?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING replied:

(1), (2) and (3). The Chief Secretary at the present time is giving attention to the preparation of legislation embodying the two matters referred to. It is not possible to indicate at what stage of the session legislation will be ready for presentation to the House.

MILK.*As to System Regarding Prosecutions.*

Mr. YATES (without notice) asked the Minister for Agriculture:

As dairymen are becoming increasingly alarmed at the number of prosecutions for selling milk below the standards required by the Act, in most cases through no fault of their own, would he have the matter investigated with a view to altering the system now operating?

The MINISTER replied:

There have been a number of prosecutions and in a majority of instances they were due to such causes as the hon. member has in mind. But, so far as the quality of milk is affected by pasture development, the nutritional value of pastures and so on, that matter is being considered at present because the department is concerned at the existing situation and is doing everything possible to correct it.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL.

(a) *As to Date of Debate.*

Hon. D. BRAND (without notice) asked the Minister representing the Minister for Local Government:

Could he give any indication of the date when the debate on the new Local Government Bill will take place in this House?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied:

I could not give even an approximate date. I understand that the Bill as printed and circulated to members has to be altered in some way and reprinted. When I last spoke to the Minister for Local Government in connection with this matter he said he anticipated that it would be early September when the reprint would be available for issuing to members and the measure introduced into this House.

(b) *As to Reprinting.*

Hon. D. BRAND (without notice) asked the Minister representing the Minister for Local Government:

In view of the information already given in answer to a question without notice, could it be said that the general investigation on this Bill now being undertaken by local governing bodies should be held up until the Bill has been reprinted?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied:

I do not think that the amendments that have to be made would warrant such action. However, I will consult the Minister for Local Government and obtain the information for the hon. member. I do not think the Bill should be withdrawn, because the alterations to be made would not warrant it.

CIRCULAR TO MEMBERS.

As to Alleged Injustice to Individual.

Mr. NALDER (without notice) asked the Minister for Justice:

Has he taken, or does he intend to take, action in the case of an injustice done to a person in the metropolitan area, and which was the subject of a letter received by most members of Parliament, as well as the Minister?

The MINISTER replied:

We have not given any serious consideration to it but it will be considered on its merits.

PRIVATE MEMBERS.

As to Services of Parliamentary Draftsman.

Mr. HEARMAN (without notice) asked the Minister for Justice:

(1) Is he aware that the Parliamentary Draftsman available to private members, Mr. Turnbull, is on leave?

(2) Would he investigate the position and see if he considers that the facilities available to private members in this connection are satisfactory?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) and (2) I will certainly investigate the position. I thought satisfactory arrangements had been made on behalf of private members for the drafting of their Bills.

BILLS—THIRD READING.

1, Police Act Amendment (No. 2).

2, Land Act Amendment.

Transmitted to the Council.

3, Shipping and Pilotage Ordinance Amendment.

Passed.

BILL—CROWN SUITS ACT AMENDMENT.

Report of Committee adopted.

BILLS (2)—RETURNED.

1, State Housing Act Amendment.

2, Government Railways Act Amendment.

Without amendment.

RESOLUTION—NORTH-WEST.

Council's Message.

Message from the Council received and read notifying that it had concurred in the Assembly's resolution.

BILL—MINES REGULATION ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

MR. WILD (Dale) [4.35]: As the Minister indicated last evening, this Bill follows a review which took place recently, and takes place from time to time, by the Mines Department, the Chamber of Mines and the union, in order to keep up to date the safety precautions and regulations which are so necessary in the working of our mines. The four amendments that have been made on this occasion all prove, on investigation, to be ones that will no doubt receive the support of this Parliament and will be in the interests of those who work underground.

The first amendment in the Bill refers to the right of an inspector, of his own volition, to go to a mine and ascertain the cause of any accident. I note that

in the amendment the words "where practicable" are used to indicate that before an inspector goes to a mine to make an inspection, he shall, except in special circumstances, give notice of his intention either to the owner, the manager, assistant manager, underground manager, secretary, accountant or chief engineer. In most cases, one of those gentlemen would be somewhere around, and the inspector could advise him of his intention to inspect. But, on the other hand, as the amendment indicates, by the use of the words "where practicable," the inspector will, in an emergency, be able to inspect a mine without notifying any of those people. That is a most satisfactory amendment.

The next provision deals with a slight alteration to permit the information obtained by an inspector of mines to be passed on to some other person. Section 14 of the parent Act states that it is unlawful for him to convey any information he may acquire during the course of his inspection to anybody other than the mines officials or his union. The word "his" is used, but as the Minister pointed out yesterday, in most cases mines inspectors are members of the A.W.U. If we leave the Act as it stands and an accident occurs to a man working on the boilers, or to one of the engineers, the inspector would not be permitted to go to either of the unions concerned and give a report about the accident. It is intended that the word "his" should be altered to "a" and this will give the inspector the right to hand on information to any other union whose members may be the subject of a report.

The third amendment deals with the provision relating to the appointment of a temporary manager. The Minister said that the Act at the moment states that the period for such temporary appointment shall be for only a fortnight. The relevant section reads as follows:—

No temporary appointment under the provisions of Subsection (3) of this section shall be made for a longer period than two weeks except with the permission in writing of the inspector, nor for a longer period than one calendar month, except with the approval of the Minister.

In these days, when managers go away on holidays or on business, it is extremely unlikely that they could return within two weeks. Therefore, the amendment proposes to increase the period to four weeks, but if that period is to be exceeded, the approval of the Minister shall first be obtained. That provision is quite a sound one. I understand that the Chamber of Mines requested that the period should be for two months. However, I have since consulted that body and it is quite prepared to accept the period as set out in the amendment.

The final amendment concerns the right to clean spillage from the shaft on a Sunday. Section 44 of the Act grants the

authority to do certain work on a Sunday. There are many operations that can be undertaken on a mine on that day, but one thing which has been overlooked in the past is the right to clean spillage from a shaft. When the Minister replies to the debate I would like him to indicate whether this provision would include the right to clean spillage from a penthouse. I suppose it would. It is not an important point, but I would like to know definitely whether the cleaning of spillage from the penthouse would be permitted under this clause. The Bill has received the support of the Opposition. It is a step in the right direction to ensure the further safety of the men who work in the mines, and I support the second reading.

MR. MOIR (Boulder) [4.42]: I support the Bill which contains comparatively minor amendments. As mentioned by the Minister, a conference was held between representatives of the Mines Department, the Chamber of Mines and the mining division of the A.W.U. I was one who was representing the union at that conference and I took part in the discussion in my capacity as president of that organisation. The first clause deals with inspectors of mines. Whereas previously an inspector was not called upon to give any notice to a mine official before he entered a mine to conduct an inspection, it is now proposed that he shall give that notice to one of the various officials that are mentioned in the Bill.

Within my knowledge, it has always been the practice for any inspector, as a matter of courtesy, to give that notice to a mine official before he entered a mine and I do not know of any instance in the past where an inspector has not intimated, to at least some mine official, that he intended to conduct an inspection. Nevertheless, that provision in the Bill is quite in order. Of course, it does not preclude an inspector from entering a mine without notice being given in the event of any emergency, or if he encounters difficulty in contacting any of the officials referred to in the Bill.

As the member for Dale has just said, at present an inspector is unable to make a report to other than his own union. The next amendment in the Bill seeks to alter that procedure. It has been decided that this amendment is necessary because, although workmen's inspectors of mines have, in the main, always been selected from the ranks of the A.W.U., there might be some objection raised in the future as to their right to retain their membership in the union because in most unions it is mandatory that registration shall be conferred only on some official, life member or as a result of working under an award made by the Arbitration Court which has granted registration to the union concerned.

A workmen's inspector does not come within that category. At present there is some doubt as to whether the right of a workmen's inspector to be a member of the A.W.U. could be challenged. The other point mentioned by the member for Dale is that, in the course of his inspection of a mine, a workmen's inspector might be faced with some occurrence which not only involved a member of the A.W.U., but also a member of some other union. It might be an accident which involved solely the member of a union other than the A.W.U. Therefore, it is only fair that those other unions should be able to obtain a report from the workmen's inspector and that the inspector should have the right to send his report to another union, apart from the A.W.U., if it was in its interests or in the interests of its members.

Another amendment in the Bill deals with the appointment of a temporary manager, who may not have the requisite qualifications, to act in a managerial capacity whilst a certificated manager is absent from the mine. This amendment is extremely necessary. In my opinion the period of four weeks, as provided in the clause, is quite ample and, in most cases, will give a mine sufficient time to appoint another manager when a vacancy occurs.

There is a further provision included in that clause, of course, which states that if the period required is longer than four weeks, it shall be subject to the approval of the Minister. That latter part is also contained in the section of the Act that is to be amended and, while it could probably be interpreted to mean that an uncertificated manager could be in control of a mine for quite a lengthy period, that situation has never arisen. I am sure that the various occupants of the ministerial position would not sanction any period that was considered unreasonable. I feel sure they would not, because it is vitally important that a certificated man shall have control of the operations of a mine, as it means so much to the safety of the workmen.

The last amendment, which deals with the spillage in the shaft, is also necessary because, in the course of operations during the week on quite a number of mines, with the haulage of large tonnages of ore up the shaft, and with three shifts every day, there is a certain amount of spillage from the ore skips which, of course, goes down the shaft and lodges, in most cases, on the penthouse. That is why it is necessary to allow that work to be done on Sunday. It would mean that there would be no hold-up in the operation of the mine. The work could, of course, be carried out on Saturday, and in many cases this has been done with the exception, of course, where haulage may have taken place for quite some time without the spillage having been cleaned out; then it is left for a week-end operation which might extend from Saturday to Sunday before being cleaned up.

No legitimate objection can be taken to that, and it is necessary for the good working of a mine to allow that work to be done on Sunday.

As a rule, the union—in this case, the Australian Workers' Union—objects strenuously to Sunday work being done on mines when it is considered unnecessary. There are, of course, some operations which are necessary, and if they are considered to be so, the union does not raise any objection at all. But it does object from time to time to permission being granted for work to be done on a Sunday, particularly if it could be done just as well at some other time. The reason for objecting is that the organisation believes—and I do not think there is anyone who would deny the fact—that men should not be called upon to work seven days a week in a mine; it is purely from a health point of view that it is felt the men should have that break. As I pointed out, there are some operations that are inevitable, and in practice we find that most mining companies do try to avoid Sunday labour, if possible. I support the Bill, and hope the House will pass it.

MR. O'BRIEN (Murchison) [4.53]: I wish to support the Bill. I do so because I have carefully examined the four or five clauses contained in it, and I find that I agree with the amendments proposed to Sections 12, 14, 25 and 44. I congratulate the Minister for bringing this amending Bill before the House, especially the provision for cleaning spillage from a shaft. The union is always prepared to permit men to work on a Sunday when it is necessary for the safety of the mine. Spillage on a shift means that it could be spilt at various levels, and the fact of its being cleaned up and the mine ready for work on normal shifts, would indicate careful consideration by the management for the men who are working below any particular level. I am very pleased to see that amending clause included. After all, the membership of the Australian Workers' Union controls the majority of these mines. The motto of the union is, "Safety First." I support the Bill.

THE MINISTER FOR MINES (Hon. L. F. Kelly—Merredin-Yilgarn—in reply) [4.55]: I desire to thank members for their contributions and co-operation, and would like to assure the member for Dale that the cleaning of spillage would include that which was lodged in the penthouse, or any other part of the shaft.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment and the report adopted.

BILL—WAR SERVICE LAND SETTLEMENT SCHEME.*Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

MR. ACKLAND (Moore) [4.58]: I regret that it has been necessary to bring this Bill before the House today. I can realise the urgent desire of the Government to get it passed, but when the measure was introduced recently I sent copies of it to war service land settlers in my electorate who are very concerned about their position; so concerned that they have formed themselves into an association to defend their rights, as they see them. Up till now, I have not received from them the matters which they want discussed during the second reading of the Bill.

It is a pity that what was intended to be the most generous treatment of returned soldiers anywhere at any time, should be the subject of so much discontent and of a feeling of suspicion by some of those who are to benefit under it. It is possible that some of the soldier settlers may be misinformed; it is possible that the position may not be nearly as bad as they think, but it is necessary, or advisable, that they should feel a sense of security, such as apparently they do not enjoy today.

I want to make it clear at the outset that the position which has arisen did not have its genesis with the present Minister in charge of war service land settlement, because there was a good deal of dissatisfaction expressed in this House during the regime of the previous Government. But the present Minister must accept some of the responsibility for the feeling which exists today because he was chairman of a select committee of members of this Chamber, which inquired into the conditions of land settlement in this State. At that time I felt that the members of that select committee had not looked so much for those who were satisfied with the conditions under which they were working, but rather sought to get the dissatisfied soldier settler to magnify the troubles which he had.

In comparing the speech made by the Minister on this occasion with his previous ones, I find that he has not made the same approach, nor in all cases has he said the same things when introducing the measure. On one occasion at the end of his speech he made mention of the fact that the dairy farms would need to have a considerable writing down. I think he mentioned that instead of taking into account all the money which had been expended on a farm under the scheme, a flat rate had been established which valued the farms at £70 per cow.

He went on to say that the farms were arranged originally to provide pasture for 40 cows and on that basis it would be impossible to sell the holdings at the figure

set out in the Act, namely, £2,800. In answer to a question directed to the Minister in another place, he did state with reference to the two-fifths and three-fifths proportions of any loss which would be incurred, that there was no expenditure by, and no money had to be found by, the State Government.

The Minister for Lands: That is up to its final valuation stage. This is the answer to it.

Mr. ACKLAND: Unless the Federal Government is to find all the money, the loss must be met from somewhere. So many of my friends are afraid that under the averaging system other properties far more favourably situated are going to bear the brunt of these losses. I have three war service land settlement areas in my district, one at Tootra, one at Warrilda, and one at Bolgart. Of course, there are several other isolated farms as well. These people view with such suspicion the actions of the administration of the soldier land settlement scheme, that they formed themselves into a defence committee, and I believe have joined forces with two or three other defence committees in other parts of the State to watch their interests. Although the statement was made last night that the settlers at Tootra had received their leases, the latest information I had from these people was that the only documentary evidence they possess was what is referred to as a blue form, and not the lease itself.

When this matter was before the House previously, I think the Minister admitted there could be a claim of repudiation on the part of the Government. Whether it is the Federal or State Government is beside the point, but there can be a claim of repudiation. This Parliament makes laws to see that no private individual can repudiate anything, and I am of the opinion that we should not, by any subsequent Act of Parliament, repudiate something which previously had been done.

Although I was not in the House at the time, I understand that the first Act was No. 24 of 1945 and that a subsequent Act was introduced at a later date. I have here an extract of an opinion which I would like to read. Among other things it mentions that the second Act, No. 43 of 1945 was passed providing for the application and modification of the provisions of the Land Act for the implementation of the agreement. That Act, as amended by No. 61 of 1947, authorised the Government to grant leases of land in perpetuity upon such terms and conditions as the Government might approve in order to give effect to the scheme as contained in the agreement "provided that conditions imposed by the Government shall not in any way be inconsistent or repugnant to any of the provisions of the agreement."

The agreement was first executed after the assent to the first Bill and before the second Bill was introduced. If that is so, I believe these people have some just grounds for their claim that there has been and will be some repudiation. I, at any rate, am a great believer in a person owning the title deeds of his property, and this House passed an Act in 1947 which made it possible for the property to be converted into freehold. I am of the opinion that the instructions which were sent from Canberra may have had their origin in Western Australia. A suggestion might have been made from this State. In fact I believe it was. Long before the present Minister was in office this happened, and the instructions eventually came back from Canberra as emanating from the Federal Government. I believe there had been a move by the chairman of the Land Settlement Board to make it as difficult as possible for any man to own the title deeds of his farm under soldier settlement.

The Minister for Lands: That is not true.

Mr. ACKLAND: That is my opinion. I am entitled to my opinion just as the Minister is entitled to his. This happened sometime before the Minister took up his present office. He may have adopted the same attitude at the time he was chairman of the select committee.

The Minister for Lands: I have not held that against the chairman of the Land Settlement Board.

Mr. ACKLAND: I am of opinion that, Parliament having passed a measure giving the right to these people to secure their title deeds, they should be granted as much consideration as is extended to the man who wishes to hold his lease in perpetuity. I am not as well informed on the conditions of ex-servicemen's settlement as I should be. Until comparatively recently, the ex-servicemen settlers in my area were quite satisfied with the scheme under which they were working, and I believe that if there is a revaluation, they will still be on a very good wicket. They are wheat and sheep farmers and have done remarkably well, though I believe they are in for a period when they will have to reduce at least one of their activities. However, I still believe that they will be able to meet their commitments with wool growing, if that be necessary.

What I am concerned about is that these people who wish to obtain their title deeds should not be opposed. I do not wish to speak at length on the matter. I expect certain information to come to hand within the next day or two, and if the measure has then gone to another place, the information will be handed over to a member there so that consideration may be given to the case of those people who consider they are likely to be treated badly under this measure.

I do not approve of repudiation in any shape or form even though the parties concerned can afford to pay an extra price. I am not sufficiently well informed to speak on the provision affecting the Midland Railway Company. I hope that one of the legal members on this side of the House will have something to say on that aspect, but I feel fairly confident that when land was granted prior to a certain date, the grantees received the whole of the assets whether above or below the surface.

In Canada the same thing applies. Before the great oil strike in 1936, lots of grants had been made throughout Alberta to private individuals. The Alberta Government could not in any way interfere with those grants, and the people who owned that land have enjoyed the full value and use of any mineral or oil deposit below the surface. I do not know whether the position here is on all fours with that in Alberta, but I do know that the Midland Railway Company authorities believe that it is, and I would not be a party to legislation that repudiated an agreement with a company, even one as large as the Midland Railway Company, most of whose original shareholders are living in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lawrence: The Government repudiated the electric light agreement with the Fremantle council.

Mr. ACKLAND: If the Government acted wrongly in that instance, there is the more reason why it should not act wrongly here. I shall vote for the second reading because I know that some amendments will be moved in Committee. I have not seen those amendments, but I hope they will deal with some of the questions that are vexing settlers in my electorate who have taken up land under the scheme. If we are unable to do anything for those settlers here, members in another place, if they think the claims justified, may deal with the matter. With a good deal of reluctance, I support the second reading.

MR. COURT (Nedlands) [5.15]: I rise not in opposition to the measure but mainly to seek some information and clarification regarding various aspects. I purposely attended the land section conference of the R.S.L. congress hoping that I would obtain some clarification on the contentious issues that occupied the attention of this House last year.

The Minister for Lands: You should obtain it here, not at an R.S.L. congress.

Mr. COURT: Knowing that many members of the conference were vitally interested in the scheme and in view of the attendance of a senior officer from the Department of Agriculture who is mixed up with the scheme, I thought I would receive an elucidation of the problems of the ex-servicemen. I say without hesitation that I left the conference not much wiser than I was when I went there. However, I was not present at the time the

Minister spoke. Had I been present at that time, perhaps I would have received greater clarification.

The Minister for Lands: Not on those points, but that is not the place to seek clarification.

Mr. COURT: If members of such a body consider they have a grievance against the scheme, I think it is a proper place to voice their objections.

The Minister for Lands: They had an opportunity for 25 minutes at question time.

Mr. COURT: Had the Minister heard a pertinent question asked by one member, who was told that it was not a fair question to put to a representative of the department, he would appreciate the fact that others were reluctant to ask further questions. The Minister was not present at that time.

The Minister for Lands: They seemed well satisfied with the explanation.

Mr. COURT: The point that seemed to be worrying many of the settlers under the scheme is what they claim to be a degree of retrospectivity in the Bill. They consider that no attempt should be made to bring the people who were settled prior to the 1952 agreement with the Commonwealth under the agreement made in that year. When the Minister replies to the debate, he might be able to explain why there is no alternative to bringing them under the 1952 agreement.

The settlers feel that the methods of valuation that will be employed under that agreement are different from those that obtained when they entered the scheme. There was a 1945 scheme which contained different features as compared with the 1952 proposition, and if the change is to the detriment of those settlers, they have a good case for wishing to be treated in accordance with the conditions that existed when they went on to their properties. I trust that the Minister will give us some elucidation of that point.

Another matter that is worrying me as regards the measure before us is the method of valuation proposed. It appears that the valuation will be such purchase price for the fee simple as is fixed under the scheme by the Minister. The 1952 proposition is not very explicit as to how the valuation will be arrived at.

The Minister for Lands: Have you a copy of the conditions?

Mr. COURT: Yes. The chairman of the war service land settlement scheme, speaking at the R.S.L. land settlement conference, did explain that the aim in valuing these properties would be to fix a price that would be a sound economic proposition for the settlers and a price which, in his opinion, would be well below the market worth of the property at the time the settler was actually given his valuation. He went on to enumerate certain values

which might be adopted by his department in assessing the reasonable expectations of price for the commodities to be produced on these farms. He was trying to make the point that in fixing the economic values of these properties, they would be using prices for the products, such as wheat, wool and dairy products, which would be well below the average market price for the years under consideration.

One cannot seriously disagree with that proposition because if that formula were followed, the settler could well receive the property at a price much below its market worth on the day that he took over. But as I see the position, there is no assurance that at the time these people ask for their valuations they will be treated on that basis. No real formula is laid down. I think the Minister will agree that it is not specific as to details, and that quite a lot will be left to the feelings of the people making the determinations at the time when the price has to be fixed.

Under the legislation before us, no appeal board is provided in respect to valuations. The Minister might have some proposal for an appeal board to which the settler can go if he is dissatisfied with the value placed on the property in accordance with the Commonwealth scheme. The third point I wish to raise is that concerning the method of assessing the rental of the property during the period when the settler continues as a lessee and not as the freeholder. I have not been able to find out, beyond reasonable doubt, the method that is to be employed in arriving at this rental.

Here again the Minister may have the information at his finger-tips and so will be able to advise us of the formula that is used. The next point I wish to raise is the question of the 10 years' restriction before the settler can apply to be a freeholder. This provision is in the previous measure. The settler may accumulate nine-tenths of the purchase price, but I cannot see why the 10-year restriction is necessary. I trust the Minister can also give us some enlightenment on that point.

The Minister for Lands: It does not matter whether you consider it necessary or not. It is a Commonwealth determination, and if we want to continue with this scheme, we must comply with it.

Mr. COURT: There must be some reason for it. Surely we do not have to accept, willynilly, everything the Commonwealth Government suggests.

The Minister for Lands: You should have been here a couple of years ago.

Mr. COURT: What is the logic of the Commonwealth Government saying that a man cannot have a freehold title before the expiration of 10 years, if he is in a position to pay the money before that

time? Surely it suits the Government to receive the money. There must be some economic or other reason for the imposition of this restrictive period.

The Minister for Lands: There is, and I explained it yesterday.

Mr. COURT: I am afraid I did not understand it, although I listened closely to what the Minister said. The financial arrangements under this measure are rather unusual, as far as I can see. In the first place, the Minister is authorised to enter into an arrangement with the Commonwealth Government for financial assistance, and then, as I understand the Bill, it provides that without further appropriation he has sufficient authority not only to spend the Commonwealth share of the money, but also whatever proportion of the land settlement scheme money is necessary to comply with the State's obligations under the agreement that the Minister has entered into.

Apparently all the Minister has to do then is, within the six sitting days of the House next following his receipt of the conditions under which he receives this assistance from the Commonwealth Government, to lay upon the Table of each House those conditions. As I read the Bill, he will, on behalf of this State, already have accepted the proposition of the Commonwealth Government. It is important to bear in mind that the measure provides that he can enter into this proposition, subject to whatever conditions the then Commonwealth Minister, who is responsible for the Commonwealth Act, imposes.

Unless there is some legal machinery dealing with the operations of this House that I do not understand, when these papers are laid on the Table, it will be too late for members to take any action to disagree with the Commonwealth Government's proposition. We might dissent and say we do not like it, but nevertheless the arrangement will have been made, and so the laying of the proposition on the Table of the House will become a matter of information rather than a process of action.

The Minister for Lands: I suppose you know that the conditions you are talking about were accepted on behalf of the State by the previous Government.

Mr. COURT: I realise that only too well.

The Minister for Lands: What do you propose we should do about them now?

Mr. COURT: They need not be the conditions for all time.

The Minister for Lands: They are the only conditions under which the Commonwealth will make advances of money. That settles it.

Mr. COURT: I respectfully point out to the Minister that the measure is not restricting him to the 1952 conditions. It

gives him the right to negotiate a set of conditions with the Commonwealth Government at any time.

The Minister for Lands: No, it does not.

Mr. COURT: That is how I read it.

The Minister for Lands: There is no negotiation at all in respect to this. The point of disagreement that we had on averaging was taken up by me after the previous Government accepted these conditions on behalf of the State, and it was refused by the Commonwealth Government. The letter I read out the other day indicated quite clearly that those were the conditions under which we could expect to receive money.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! Is the Minister replying to the second reading debate?

The Minister for Lands: He is tempting me.

Mr. COURT: What the Minister has to say is very interesting and quite correct, but he still misses the point that I am trying to make, namely, that the Bill does not bind him to the 1952 proposition, only. He is now submitting by way of interjection his views with regard to the 1952 proposition of the Commonwealth Government. I consider that the Federal Government could revise this arrangement, and that when we pass the measure before us, the Minister will be authorised to enter into negotiations with the Commonwealth Government to amend the present proposition. I support the second reading of the Bill, but I would like the Minister, when replying to the debate, to clarify the several points I have raised.

MR. PERKINS (Roe) [5.30]: Unfortunately there are a considerable number of ex-servicemen, settled under the land settlement scheme, who have not as much confidence as they might have that they will be treated fairly by the board, particularly on the question of the final valuation of their properties. Previous speakers have indicated that some settlers have even gone to the length of forming defence bodies in order to protect their rights under the promises that were made to them earlier when they first went on the land.

The Minister has told us that we must either accept this Bill or else! I am not entirely convinced about the position. Obviously, there is some negotiation between the State and the Commonwealth but it so happens that everything put forward in this Bill fits in very nicely with the declared policy of the Land Settlement Board and I feel that if some other representations had been made to the Commonwealth, we might easily have heard a very different letter read out by the Minister for Lands, indicating what the final decision of the Commonwealth was to be.

[*Mr. Brady took the Chair.*]

The Minister for Lands: That was the basis of my criticism when I was on the other side of the House.

Mr. PERKINS: The Minister has not made it clear how the position has altered. He has not detailed the different representations which have been put up to the Commonwealth since then, involving some other approach, particularly towards this question of final valuations.

Mr. Nalder: The Minister has accepted the conditions—lock, stock and barrel!

The Minister for Lands: That is what you think and you are as far astray there as in other things.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is too much talk across the Chamber.

Mr. PERKINS: The real difficulty is that some of these men who were settled a number of years ago, but who have not yet received their final valuations, were placed on properties, some of which were fully developed, some partly developed and others developed only to a very small degree. They were bought at quite a reasonable market value at that time, and in view of the depreciation of the £ since then, those properties can now be considered to have been very cheap. As the position now appears, these settlers, when their final valuations are made, may find that they are much higher than they should be on the figure at which the properties were purchased.

On previous occasions, and particularly when the matter was debated last year, I pressed the Minister to make a categorical declaration that when the final valuations were arrived at, the settlers who went on to properties, which were purchased at an attractive price at an earlier stage, should not be loaded with costs from other properties or excessive costs of administration generally. It is a matter of opinion as to how excessive the costs of the Land Settlement Board may be, but during the debate in this House the other evening it was made clear to us just how excessive some of those costs have been in the development of properties.

Members have only to think back to the debate on the Bill to amend the Land Act, which was necessary in order that the Government might sell some of the land in that was to be the North Stirling project, in order to recover the cost of work done by the Land Settlement Board there. As the Minister had to admit to the House, the present-day value of the work done by the Land Settlement Board in that area is nothing like the board's actual cost in doing the work.

The Minister for Lands: I did not have to admit it. I told you frankly.

Mr. PERKINS: Very well, the Minister told us frankly, and that sounds even better from my standpoint. So, because of that position, is it not thought that

these settlers, who went on to some of the properties that were partly developed, have something to fear in that they may be loaded with some excessive costs of the Land Settlement Board, in view of the fact that it has been absolutely impossible to find out from the board what the actual costs have been on any particular property?

[*Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair.*]

The Minister for Lands: That is because the costs have been grouped.

Mr. PERKINS: That may be so. Does not the Minister agree, in those circumstances, that the settlers have something to fear when the question arises of what the final valuations of those properties are to be. I know that many of these settlers are anxious to receive their final valuations and do not desire to carry on indefinitely on a leasehold basis. It is obvious that members in this House are in a cleft stick, in having to agree to legislation of this nature before the final valuations can be made and the settlers allowed to free themselves of the Land Settlement Board.

I have heard it suggested on previous occasions, both here and outside the House, that these men ought to think themselves lucky in that they have got such good properties so cheaply and have made so much money out of them. I admit that some of them have done very well financially but I do not see anything wrong with that. Had they been settlers starting off privately at that time, they would have done equally well financially. There were many who started under the £1,000 rehabilitation loan arrangement and did very well. Still other men started factories or businesses or built homes, back in the period when the £ had not depreciated to the present extent. Naturally, the valuation of such a business or property is very much greater now than it was then, and I do not see why these returned men should be treated differently from anyone else.

A further point is that the returned men in this State had little choice. They had either to start with what help they could get from private sources—plus the £1,000 rehabilitation loan, which does not go very far in starting up a rural property—or else apply for a property under the land settlement scheme. That was not so in the other States of the Commonwealth. I have here the annual report of the Land Settlement Commission of Victoria for the year ended the 30th June, 1953. At page 7 of that report it is stated that since the inception of the single-unit farm scheme in Victoria, 2,512 settlers have been settled under that section of the scheme in that State and that they had money lent to them to the extent of £9,459,756.

Of course, any man who was able to start under that scheme in Victoria should now be in a very good financial position and,

what is more, some of them got their titles forthwith. I know of instances here in which, had finance been available, men who finally secured properties under the land settlement scheme could have obtained the same land independently, and, of course, could have had their final valuations and the whole business cleaned up long ago, as they would have been dealt with independently.

So the question of final valuations is an extremely important one to soldier settlers. I am anxious to see some finality reached in the matter and final valuations made of these properties, where possible, so that the men will know where they stand. I would like the Minister to make a categorical statement that these men will be treated fairly and, where the properties were purchased for a certain amount, that the promises will be lived up to, and that the settlers will be called upon to meet only those costs which are connected with the purchase and development of their particular properties.

The Minister for Lands: They will be treated fairly, according to the conditions laid down.

Hon. L. Thorn: There is a difference, of course. The Victorian Government has its own scheme—it is a parent State—whereas we are an agent State under the control of the Commonwealth.

The Minister for Lands: I know that.

Mr. PERKINS: That has no bearing on it.

Hon. L. Thorn: Yes, it has a lot to do with the conditions in Victoria and here.

Mr. PERKINS: All I did was to quote the scheme in Victoria so far as it relates to single-unit farms. The point I was making was that those particular settlers were able to get on to single-unit farms and they are reaping the advantage of an increased value on the properties since then.

Hon. L. Thorn: How many poultry farms were among the number?

Mr. PERKINS: I do not know, but the figures are fairly high; much greater than one would expect to apply to poultry farms.

Hon. L. Thorn: I raised that point because a lot of the Victorian allotments were for small holdings, such as poultry farms and so on.

Mr. PERKINS: The figures I quoted showed that 2,512 settlers had been placed on properties, and that over £9,000,000 had been advanced to them. That means that they have received, on an average, over £4,000 each, which seems to be much greater than one would expect to be advanced to small farmers such as those referred to by the member for Toodyay. The point I particularly wanted to stress—and this is the same as I stressed when we debated a similar measure last year—is that the Minister should give an assurance

that when computing the final valuation the settlers in each group will be called upon to meet only those costs relating to their particular group. There should not be any adding on of administrative costs, or excess costs of the Land Settlement Board. I ask the Minister to give us that assurance because I know it is a point which is seriously worrying many settlers.

MR. YATES (South Perth) [5.43]: Much has been said on this Bill, and during the past nine years a lot has been done, both by the Commonwealth and State Governments, in regard to war service land settlement in all parts of the Commonwealth. We in this House are interested mainly in the activities of the scheme as it affects the ex-servicemen concerned.

The Minister for the Interior, Hon. W. S. Kent Hughes, who is in charge of the war service land settlement scheme throughout the Commonwealth, recently attended the 38th annual congress of the R.S.L. in Victoria, and had quite a lot to say about the scheme generally. Unfortunately, his remarks were not published in the local Press; in fact, not a great amount of Press publicity was given to the comprehensive statement he made. I propose to refer to the portion of his speech which affects the war service land settlement scheme.

The Federal Minister commenced by discussing his visit to New Guinea where he hoped, in the future, to start a land settlement scheme for ex-servicemen of the mandated territories. He went on to say—

You are naturally more concerned with the question of settlement in the three principal States and the three agent States. There is really not much more I can add to what was said to you at your recent Land Settlement Conference at Canberra.

We are now reviewing the number of men who are still actively seeking settlement under the scheme, in relation to the number of blocks being developed. We want to know what finances will be involved in completing war service land settlement in five years, after this financial year. I know, and you know, that it is eight years since the war ended, and on a rough estimate I would say that we have been able to complete settlement of about half those genuinely seeking placement under the scheme. If you take the total number of applications originally received, we are not one-third of the way through, but a great number have gone into other jobs, and cannot now be regarded as genuine applicants. We are not forgetting the men who are still waiting and hoping for a block, and who have fitted themselves for soldier settlement and remain keen to find a place in the scheme. I think you will agree that we have made a fair effort when I tell

you that £90,000,000 has been spent on war service land settlement since its inception, or about the sum spent on war service homes in the past three years.

You all realise that there is constant pressure on Governments to provide many forms of rehabilitation and social service benefits. The demand for war service homes continues to be very great. It must be admitted that soldier settlers are individually receiving far greater financial assistance than any other class of ex-servicemen, but this is justified because of the importance of increasing primary production.

The question of the valuation of properties and writing down is not a simple one, owing to the variations which occur in the State controlling Acts. The conditions in each State must be considered on their merits. The Commonwealth is endeavouring to treat the ex-servicemen in each State as equitably as possible. One thing I can say is that the Commonwealth is not trying to make a profit on settlement. On the other hand, there is no need to incur unnecessary waste of public moneys in giving capital write-downs which cannot be justified under present economic conditions. We are writing off considerable sums of money, but in general we apply a test, and only agree to further write-down if it can be shown to be a necessity. The principles laid down in the original War Service Land Settlement Agreements Act are still operating to-day. One High Court decision upset the validity of the original agreements, although subsequent decisions have endorsed the right of the Commonwealth to rehabilitate ex-servicemen on the land. In general, all the States and the Commonwealth have continued to act in accordance with the principles set out in the original agreements.

During the last two years, or any-way up to 18 months ago, I, as the Minister responsible for war service land settlement, felt that things were not going satisfactorily in New South Wales and Queensland. The development schemes which had been undertaken by the States and the Federal Government were beginning to be a great financial drain on the loan moneys that were available and, irrespective of why these things happen, we found that those two States were granting less and less of loan moneys to war service land settlement. I am not going into the question of why the percentages dropped. In Victoria, war service land settlement has kept up around about £5-6 million per year during the last six years. Victoria has been able under various Governments,

Liberal, Liberal-Country Party and now the Labour Party—in fact, any of the parties in power in Victoria—to maintain an allocation of about £5 or £6 million or at least £4½ million for war service land settlement, and therefore Victoria is proceeding fairly satisfactorily.

In Queensland percentages were never very high, and are now somewhere about 2.6 per cent. of the State loan money available. Well, irrespective of the reasons for the drop in loan money, I felt that land settlement was slowing down or would come to a standstill in New South Wales and Queensland and at the Premier's Conference in 1952 I suggested that there would probably have to be some alteration and asked would those two States like to consider becoming Agent States. I very nearly caused a disturbance in the conference by suggesting it. But things were slowing down too much. Then, of course, later on at the end of 1952 after there had been a little cross fire politically, a further Premier's Conference was called. Unfortunately, I went off sick, and someone else took over from me. Eventually, at a conference held in March it was suggested that those two States not become Agent States, but remain Principal States and look after their own land settlement and, really, in fact, be subsidised Principal States.

The Federal Government cannot deal with any one Principal State on a different basis from the other two, nor can we say—it might be to Queensland or to Victoria—you can become an Agent State on a different basis from the other Agent States. We must deal with them all on the same basis on this question. Victoria and Tasmania each include things which were not in the original agreement, but the States thought they would like to give extra. The Federal Government, however, would not be responsible for anything that was not part of the original agreement. If States like to do that, they can go ahead, but the Federal Government will not be held responsible. We have to deal with all the States on an equal basis. From time to time it is said that the Commonwealth must bear the main financial responsibility for the war service land settlement scheme.

Once again we are up against differences in viewpoint between the Agent and Principal States. In the Agent States the Commonwealth finds all capital moneys and has policy control, although the State settlement authority has active control of details of administration. In the Principal States the capital moneys come from Loan Funds, allocated by the Loan

Council, with the Commonwealth assisting with certain charges. The Principal States insist on retaining a tight control over the scheme in their State. I know that you recognise that if more money is granted by the Loan Council for land settlement, this results in a corresponding reduction in expenditure for other items, shall we say for war service homes. Once the Loan Council has made its allocations, it is not possible to change anything during that financial year.

It is important to remember that no one can force a State to spend its loan allocation for specific purposes. There is, of course, a definite "Housing Agreement" and moneys received for home building are used for that purpose. But the Principal States have absolute discretion as to the sums they spend on war service land settlement. It is my hope and intention to call another conference with the three Principal States well before the next financial year, in an attempt to speed up settlement in the Eastern States.

That briefly sums up the position regarding the principal and the agent States. From that it can be seen that the principal States have a far greater measure of control over the conduct of war service land settlement than the agent States. They have the first and last say in the actual spending of money and the allocation of it to their various war service land settlement schemes, whereas Western Australia and other agent States come under a different type of control. Therefore, we cannot compare our scheme with those operating in the principal States. I would not say that our scheme is worse because it is operating under an agent State. I think that in Western Australia we have a very good type of scheme.

The Minister for Lands: I think it is; from the point of view of valuations. I have always said that.

Mr. YATES: Yes, the question of valuations enters into it. Whereas the principal States look after their own valuations, the valuations in our State come under the direction of the Commonwealth Government.

The Minister for Lands: It is not a question of what the difference is; it is a question of what we can do about it.

Mr. YATES: I trust that in the future the Minister will be able to plug away at the Commonwealth and eventually arrive at a satisfactory basis upon which these valuations can be made so that all the men concerned in this scheme will be acquainted with the basis established for the making of valuations.

Mr. Nalder: Do not you think that soldier settlers should know the basis under which the valuations are made?

Mr. YATES: We, in the R.S.L., have been battling for the last few years to get some satisfaction as to the basis arrived at for that system and also the actual amount for which these men are up. Under the present scheme we have never been able to find out what the costs are.

The Minister for Lands: The whole basis for the fixing of valuations is contained in these conditions.

Mr. YATES: The basis set out in the conditions is quite new, too. Prior to these conditions coming into force we were operating under the War Service Land Settlement Act of 1945.

The Minister for Lands: Those conditions were accepted in 1952.

Mr. YATES: Subclause (7) of Clause 6 of the war service land settlement agreement of 1945, reads as follows:—

(7) In making the valuations, the officers shall have regard to the need for the proceeds of the holding (based on conservative estimates over a long term period of prices and yields for products) being sufficient to provide a reasonable living for the settler after meeting such financial commitments as would be incurred by a settler possessing no capital.

That has been altered in this Bill. It is quite different altogether.

The Minister for Lands: You tell me what the alteration is.

Mr. YATES: I will tell the Minister what the difference is.

The Minister for Lands: No, the alteration in the conditions.

Mr. YATES: They are worded differently in this agreement.

The Minister for Lands: You should not get away from the question.

Mr. YATES: I am going to couple this up with the clause in the 1945 agreement on war service land settlement and the one in the Bill. This is the section that appears on page 187 of the 1951-52 Statutes—

A lessee shall—

subject to the approval of the Commonwealth—

be entitled, after the expiration of a period of ten years from the commencement of the term of the perpetual lease and on payment of such purchase price for the fee simple as is fixed by the Minister, in accordance with the provisions as set out in Clause 6, Subclause (7), of the War Service Land Settlement Agreement, 1945.

In the Bill it states—

after the expiration of a period of ten years from the commencement of the term of the perpetual lease and on

payment of such purchase price for the fee simple as is fixed under the scheme by the Minister,

That is entirely different. It is something about which the land committee of the R.S.L. is not keen. It much prefers the system that was in operation under the 1945 Act.

The Minister for Lands: Yes, but that did not make any provision for circumstances which the Commonwealth Government now say is necessary.

Mr. YATES: Is that through now?

The Minister for Lands: The Commonwealth says that it will only issue moneys under these conditions and no other.

Mr. YATES: What about the men who have been in the scheme since 1945?

The Minister for Lands: You can argue till you are black in the face, but those are the conditions. Since 1952, the only way for the State to obtain money is to accept the conditions that have been laid down by the Commonwealth.

Mr. YATES: We put up a submission to the Government for the establishment of an appeal board and I understand that the Government agreed to it. Has it been constituted yet?

The Minister for Lands: Yes. That section for which the State is responsible has been set up. That is, for allottee-designates, but the remainder cannot be set up until this Bill is passed.

Mr. YATES: The league is concerned about that because no allottee-designate has yet appeared before this appeal board.

The Minister for Lands: Allottee-designates have appeared before it.

Mr. YATES: Evidently I have not been fully informed, but the league was concerned about the matter and it has not been advised of the establishment of this appeal board and as to when a sitting would take place.

The Minister for Lands: It has been established and it is operating.

Mr. YATES: Another point regarding which the league is extremely concerned is the establishment of this board under these conditions. The relevant section of the conditions reads as follows:—

In the State there may be established an authority to investigate and determine such matters arising between a settler and a State as the Commonwealth and the State agree may be referred to it for determination. The form and the constitution of this authority shall be agreed upon by the Commonwealth and the State.

The league is not very happy with the word "may" appearing in that provision. By that interpretation it could so happen that the authority might never be constituted. They would very much like the word "may" struck out and the word "shall" inserted in lieu.

The Minister for Lands: I gave an assurance that it would be so constituted.

Mr. YATES: Does the Minister mean that the authority will be issued?

The Minister for Lands: It will be.

Mr. YATES: And that assurance was given?

The Minister for Lands: We have been getting that for the past 18 months.

Mr. YATES: Only today Mr. Eric Davies, who is chairman of the land committee of the R.S.L., brought this very point up.

The Minister for Lands: It was reported to the league by me personally.

Mr. YATES: I am only passing on the information given to me.

The Minister for Lands: You had better check it up.

Mr. YATES: I do not tell them they are liars; I take their word and bring the matter to the House for ventilation.

The Minister for Lands: Everything that could be done by the State has been done, and the only point at issue is the one in those conditions.

Mr. YATES: Last year the league had a number of its officers and members of the land committee visit several country areas to find out from the settlers themselves whether they were satisfied with conditions on their properties and with the treatment they were receiving from the Land Settlement Board. I would like to state that in the main the settlers were reasonably happy.

Several questions cropped up, however, and some of them are quite interesting. I would like to quote one or two to give the House an idea of the interest the league takes in the soldier settler. Officials of the league travel several hundred miles into the country in their own time to see conditions for themselves and that indicates a great interest in soldier settlers. The questions and answers I will quote are as follows:—

Q.—Do I have a choice of bank?

A.—Settlers can choose their own bank and they are not bound to be clients of the Rural and Industries Bank, although this in most instances would seem advisable.

The Minister for Lands: So it should.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Why?

Mr. YATES: The other questions are—

Q.—Final Valuations?

A.—It was made quite clear that all improvements performed by settlers on their own account were their own property, and all improvements made by their own efforts would not be taken into account in departmental valuation. In this connection it was pointed out that there were two valuations, one for taxing purposes, the

other for war service land settlement scheme and they were not necessarily related.

Q.—Uncertainty as to rental.

A.—Every settler in the Rocky Gully area will receive a write-off. The Commonwealth Government will give full credit for self-help.

Q.—What happens to the farm on the death of settler?

A.—The property must come back into the scheme; if the widow desired she could continue to carry on the farm herself, and if not she would be compensated to the extent of the work done by the deceased settler on his own plus any repayments.

I have quite a number of those questions and answers which the members of the league jotted down and brought back for future reference. It is only by visits that the league makes to these centres, and the communications it has with its various country sub-branches where war service land settlement is effective, that the league is able to find out what the settlers are up against.

The Minister for Lands: I think the land board of the R.S.L. has done a good job.

Mr. YATES: I am sure we will agree on that. It has worked in close co-operation with the Department of Agriculture, with the Land Settlement Board and with active members on both sides of the House. Its main object is to see that the man on the land is not there only for a short period, as was the case in World War I, but that he will be there to establish himself and remain on the land for the rest of his life in order that he may build up an asset for himself and make a contribution to the well-being of the community.

The R.S.L. does not want these men to meet with the tragedies that faced those men on the land in World War I. I am not critical of the Bill. I can see one or two faults which even the Minister can see and about which we can do nothing. I trust that the measure will not remain as it is for all time. We have reached the peak of war service land settlement, but there will be a decline in years to come unless we are faced with another war. If, however, we do not have another war there should be many applications for farms from men both in the State and in other parts of the Commonwealth. Even though we have reached the peak of land settlement and even though there may be a decline, the scheme will go on for 40 or 50 years and properties will continue to be allocated and the existing properties will continue to be maintained and cared for until they have been paid up. I would like the Minister in charge of the scheme in Western Australia to keep a close watch on legislation and, if necessary, bring

amending Bills before the House; to constantly confer with the Commonwealth and, if necessary, with the principal and agent States in other parts of the Commonwealth, to see that Western Australia is not forgotten in relation to this great scheme of settling soldiers on the land. The member for Roe during his speech made some very interesting comments on valuations. The member for Wagin not only on this but on previous occasions, has raised the important point respecting valuations proposed for individuals and not for groups of individuals.

There are two schools of thought in connection with individual and collective valuations, and I am not competent to say which is the better of the two. It is generally accepted that the overall grouping of the scheme and the giving out of a graduated system of valuations has proved successful recently. It might not have proved successful in some portions of the State, as the member for Wagin suggested. He brought forward instances of certain ex-servicemen in his electorate whom he thought had been rather harshly dealt with. But they are individual cases and do not affect the scheme to a great extent. Let us look at the other side of the picture. With these valuations being grouped, a far greater number would benefit rather than a very few who might possibly reap a bigger reward if not grouped. So the scheme of averaging the valuations of these properties is in the main very successful.

Mr. Nalder: Do you think the scheme should be extended to cover civilians?

Mr. YATES: I have not given it any thought. I am only interested in the ex-servicemen's point of view. This scheme should be divorced from any other scheme. It is the opinion of the league that this scheme should not develop into an ex-servicemen and civilian scheme. It is the intention of the Commonwealth Government, in collaboration with the States, to institute a civilian scheme, but it should be entirely divorced from this one.

The experience gained by the officers of the department under the war service land settlement scheme should be readily made available to the States so that the civilian scheme can be commenced on similar lines as the war service scheme. Towards the end of last year, certain comments were forwarded by the league to some members of this House, to two Ministers and members of the Council, relating to legislation that was then in process of going through this House. One of those comments is very interesting. It suggested—

A clause should be added to the Bill protecting the allottee-designate limiting the time he shall be required to be in this class. Possibly interim leases could be granted as in Victoria. Reference to present appeal board for

these men, in the event of collective dissatisfaction on any project they should have the right to appear before this board, or the board should visit the project and hear and see the complaints on the spot.

The Minister has explained that the appeal board has been set up and has interviewed some allottee-designates. I would like the Minister to make certain that the appeal board does visit the districts concerned and not merely hold appeals in the city. It is only through the board visiting not only the districts but the properties concerned that the men can get satisfaction. The members of the board also gain better knowledge of the difficulties of the allottee-designates in the tasks they are performing, prior to becoming owners. I would like the Minister to make certain that these visits take place.

The league feels that this board can only function successfully if it visits the centres in which the cases are located, and should go, for instance, to Wagin if a complaint should be received from that town. The board could visit not only Wagin but the property of the allottee-designate; it could hear his complaint and inspect the property. By this means it will have a clear idea of the difficulties of the allottee - designate himself.

I support the Bill with certain reservations. I know it is not possible for us to make many amendments to it, if any at all, because, as the Minister explained, the Commonwealth is most insistent that this legislation be passed in its present form. I would like the Minister to make certain that this measure is not placed on the statute book to remain there for all time, without the opportunity of amendment if found necessary at a later stage. I can see the danger of this Bill which proposes to obliterate completely the two previous Acts; it must be able to stand up to the test of time; if not, it should be brought back to this Chamber for review.

The only way to do that would be to get the consent of the Commonwealth authority to this State altering the legislation to suit the conditions applying in Western Australia, and not in the other parts of the Commonwealth. Before the Bill is finally accepted, I would like the Minister, if it is possible, to make sure that the Commonwealth will give full consideration to any request from him in the future, or from his successor, to have the Act altered in this House if the conditions in Western Australia warrant further amendment.

The Minister for Lands: I would not agree to any alteration unless Parliament approved.

Mr. YATES: I support the second reading.

On motion by the Minister for Mines, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 6.14 p.m.

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 31st August, 1954.

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

QUESTIONS.

RAILWAYS.

As to Use of Welded Rails.

Hon. C. F. J. NORTH asked the Minister for Railways:

(1) To what extent is welding of rails going to be adopted on the Western Australian Government railways?

(2) Is the programme imminent?

(3) Will a system of welded rails save money in the long run?

(4) What are the overall benefits?

(5) Is it a fact that in France welded rails have been effected of a length each of half a mile?

(6) What is the maximum length of welding per section to be adopted here?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) At present main lines laid with 80lb. rails are being relaid as welded track. It is as yet too early to say what the future policy will be.

(2) Last year 69½ miles of welded track were laid and it is hoped to lay a further 100 miles during the current financial year.

(3) Until operational data is obtained, it is too early to answer this point.

(4) Improved riding and increased life of rails with a decrease in maintenance and rail joints.

(5) Yes.

(6) The maximum length being laid at present is 270 ft.