

give proper consideration to the Bill. I think the Government should postpone the pastoral clauses until next session. I feel sure then that members will give far better consideration to them than now. Sir Edward Wittenoom has said that the provisions of the Bill have been known to members for a long time. May I point out that the pastoral provisions of the Bill, in which the hon. member is interested, were not known to the Government last night. They were unthought of.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: It is the conditional purchase clauses I want.

Hon. W. KINGSMILL: Then if that is true, language was truly given to us to conceal our thoughts. I share my friend's wish to get through the conditional purchase parts of the Bill, and perhaps he wishes that the important portion of the Bill dealing with pastoral leases should receive that consideration which can only be given to it by an adjournment for a few weeks. With these reservations, I support the second reading of the Bill.

On motion by Hon. J. E. Dodd debate adjourned.

#### BILL—LAND AND INCOME TAX ASSESSMENT.

Message received from the Assembly notifying that the Council's amendment had been made as requested.

#### BILL—TREASURY BONDS DEFICIENCY.

Message received from the Assembly notifying that the Council's amendment had been made.

#### BILL—RUNBURY TOWN LOT 318.

Received from the Assembly, and on motion by Hon. J. Ewing, read a first time.

#### ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. H. P. Colebatch—East) [5.59]: I have used my best endeavours to ascertain the wish of the House as to the length of the

adjournment, and unless I am grievously wrong I interpret the wish of members is not to proceed with the Land Bill until next Tuesday. That, I take it, is the opinion of the House, and if I am right in that no special motion is necessary.

*House adjourned at 6 p.m.*

### Legislative Assembly,

*Friday, 16th March, 1917.*

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 3 p.m., and read prayers.

#### BILL—TREASURY BONDS DE- FICIENCY.

##### *Council's Amendments.*

Schedule of six amendments requested by the Council now considered.

##### *In Committee.*

Mr. Carpenter in the Chair; The Premier in charge of the Bill.

No. 1. Clause 4.—Strike out the clause and insert the following:—“(1) It shall be lawful for the Colonial Treasurer, during the financial year ending the 30th day of June, 1917, and any subsequent financial year, to apply any moneys standing to the credit of the Public Account to meet expenditure authorised by the Supply Acts and the Appropriation Act in force for the time being. (2.) If at the expiration of any financial year it shall appear that the expenditure as authorised to be made from the consolidated revenue fund has exceeded

the revenue for the year, the matter shall be forthwith reported to Parliament, if then in session, or, if not, as soon as practicable after the next meeting of Parliament”.

The PREMIER: The Council has suggested four amendments in the clauses relating to the funding of future deficits. The fifth has to do with the allocation of surplus revenue and the sixth is consequential, striking out certain words from the Title. It will be remembered that Part II. of the Bill dealt with the authority of the Colonial Treasurer to apply any moneys standing to the credit of public account for the purpose of supplying funds to meet a deficit: that is to say, to legalise the Treasurer in his attitude in utilising moneys in his keeping for the purpose of supplying funds to meet a deficit in Consolidated Revenue. All this it is proposed to strike out. The Bill and the Schedule gave the amount which may be funded as ascertained at the 30th June, 1916. That has been agreed to. Then the Bill went on to provide that future deficits might be transferred to the deficiency account if they exceeded £100,000 in any one year, and that the Treasurer must then come to the House for authority to issue debentures or bonds to replace that shortage debited to deficiency account. The Council thinks it is unwise to have that provision in the Bill. I think one or two members voiced that opinion when we were passing the Bill. The only difference made by the striking out of the provisions is that the year's deficit will remain as a deficit until the Treasurer comes to Parliament to get authority to transfer it to the deficiency account, and also to issue debentures or bonds to recoup the shortage. In the other case the Treasurer would have had the power to debit the deficiency account and practically wipe it out from the records of Consolidated Revenue, transfer it to deficiency account and then come to the House to get his authority to raise debentures or bonds. There does not seem to be very much objection to the Treasurer each year announcing to the House that the deficit is so much, and asking for authority to transfer that deficiency and issue bonds or debentures, to make it good. Therefore I propose that we agree to the Council's amendments and in respect of No. 1, I move—

*That the amendment be made.*

Hon. J. SCADDAN: After all that has been said about the illegality of the late Treasurer's action in having a deficit, the Council's amendment appears as a joke. The amendment makes the clause positively facrificial, because the Constitution Act already provides that the Treasurer may, under any appropriation by Parliament, or under warrant from the Governor, draw on public account. I know that the Premier, although he accepts the Council's amendment, would not accept it had he time to point out to another place why it should not be agreed to; and I would be with him in adopting that course. What we provided should be done with future deficits is exactly what the Bill provides shall be done with this deficit. The items on the Estimates are, as their name implies, merely the amounts which the Government expect will be spent on the various items. In fact, the Treasurer may transfer from one item in a division for the purpose of meeting another item in the same division. Moreover, the Estimates are of no value until an Appropriation Bill has been passed. It is the Appropriation Act that gives power to expend money. In no year has the Treasurer drawn from the public account in excess of the Appropriation Act. While some items were overdrawn, others were underdrawn. What the Premier had in mind when drafting this clause—and I agree with him—was to set forth in an Act of Parliament how future deficits should be dealt with. The object is that if the Treasurer goes on the money market and borrows money for a specific purpose he shall not expend that money for any other purpose. The effect of the Council's amendment will be to compel the Treasurer to come down next session with a somewhat similar Bill to this for a similar purpose.

Question put and passed; the Council's amendment agreed to.

On motions by the PREMIER, Council's amendments Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 made.

*[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]*

Resolutions reported, the report adopted, and a Message accordingly returned to the Council.

# MOTION—BREAD, RETAIL PRICE.

Notice of motion had been given by Hon. P. Collier, "That in view of the generous action of the Commonwealth and State Governments in guaranteeing to farmers a minimum of 3s. per bushel for wheat at railway sidings, this House is of opinion that the price charged by the pool to local millers should be such as will enable the retail cost of bread as at Perth not to exceed 3½d. per 2lb. loaf."

Hon. J. SCADDAN (Brownhill-Ivanhoe) [3-28]: I ask the permission of the House to move the motion standing in Mr. Collier's name. That hon. member has requested me to move the motion, in his unavoidable absence.

Leave given.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I move—

*That in view of the generous action of the Commonwealth and State Governments in guaranteeing to farmers a minimum of 3s. per bushel for wheat at railway sidings, this House is of opinion that the price charged by the Wheat Pool to local millers should be such as will enable the retail cost of bread as at Perth not to exceed 3½d. per 2lb. loaf.*

I must apologise for lack of preparation on my part for moving the motion. I shall, however, be brief. In any case, the principle of the motion is all that I am really concerned with. A resolution passed by both Houses of Parliament has already approved a State guarantee to the farmers of 3s. per bushel at sidings for all wheat they may produce next harvest. I do not think one can complain of that action. Indeed I believe all parties in both Houses agreed that such guarantee was desirable in the present unsettled state of the wheat market—unsettled in this respect, that we still have on hand a balance of the 1915-16 harvest, and have about 18 million bushels coming in for the 1916-17 harvest. Unless something was done by the community acting through the Federal and State Governments, the farmer would be left with any amount of wheat on his hands, but with no money to enable him to carry on his calling of producing that which is essential to life. We all recognise that one of the most difficult positions is obtaining the freight to put it on the world's markets. There is a keen demand for wheat in the old world, while we have a huge surplus,

and the farmer is not responsible for that state of affairs. He is willing to supply it if those responsible for supplying freight can make it available. We have given a guarantee. If we base it on what we have a right to do we are entitled, from the point of view of the guarantee given by the State, to assume that we shall have a large harvest. That being the case we may expect to pay 3s. a bushel against 20 million bushels produced, that is at the siding. We are unable to say what will happen between now and the date of the guarantee being kept faith with. We hope the war will be over, and if the cessation of hostilities in Europe will bring a rapid fall in the wheat market, I for one shall not complain if the State has to find the difference between the 3s. and the price then obtainable. The point of the motion is that while we are prepared to undertake the responsibility, having entered into a guarantee on behalf of the whole of the people—something like three million pounds will be necessary—I feel, and I think a number of members feel, in turn, that we should receive some guarantee from those who are getting the benefit that the community who are giving the guarantee shall not suffer. I recognise that it may be said that, after all, we are not taking any great risk and in any case the people of the State who are giving the guarantee are thinking that they should not suffer because of such guarantee. I have previously said that the price the farmer receives for his wheat has been a fictitious value because of the action of the community in helping him to get his wheat on to the market. But if we remove that we have to decide that in consequence of the action of the Commonwealth and State Governments we have been able to get a price for wheat in Australia that would not otherwise be obtainable. Authorities who have given a study to the question have after carefully considering the matter, asserted that had it not been for some such arrangement as the wheat pool the farmer would probably be able to obtain for his 1915-16 harvest something like 2s., or at most, 2s. 6d. a bushel. It is not for the farmer alone, but for the State as a whole. The farmer is getting the benefit of the high prices but the individual consumer has had to suffer something because he has had to pay more for his bread than he

otherwise would. Let me say that I believe we are such an enlightened community throughout Australia that we recognise that injury will be done to the primary industry if injury is done to every individual in the State. Therefore we are always willing to help. I have never heard one person complain of my action in advocating that this should be done to protect the producer on the land. But what we might fairly ask is that having gone so far and shown our bona-fides, and having been prepared to pay a higher price for our loaf to assist the farmers, having given a further guarantee which may involve three million pounds, if that is going to happen the persons who obtain the benefit might at least say, owing to the action of the general community in giving a guarantee and assisting us, we are not asking too much. We are not going to allow that action of yours to increase the price as against ourselves. Many read into our action the fact that we are trying to reduce the prices of wheat to the farmer, but that is not so, except that which is required for local gristing for the purpose of consumption in the State, that it shall be sold at a price to allow bread to be sold at 3½d. per loaf. I do not think that is a harsh proposal. I suppose the local consumption will not amount to more than two million bushels. They may grist more than that; let us hope they will, so as to get the essential by-products, but for gristing into flour I doubt if we shall require two million bushels. If the total output is going to be 20 million bushels it will mean two million bushels sold to the millers to allow the loaf to be sold at 3½d.

Mr. Willmott: Do you know what that means?

Mr. Hicknott: It is about 3s. 6d.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Take the member for Pingelly's statement that it is about 3s. 6d. a bushel. We are giving a guarantee of 3s., and we are only asking that in the event of anything happening, the bottom falling out of the market, or the price rising in the market, that so far as the local consumer is concerned he shall pay 3s. 6d. a bushel and no more. That is on two million bushels against a gross output of 20 million bushels.

Mr. Willmott: Possibly; I hope it is so.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We are entitled in giving a guarantee of that nature to try and estimate what will be paid. Assuming the harvest is up to the standard, and giving such a guarantee that it will permit the farmer to do his utmost to produce all he possibly can, and taking into account that the farmers produced 18 million bushels without any guarantee last year, I think we can count upon a 20 million bushel harvest this year. We must base our estimate of the future on normal conditions.

Mr. Harrison: We are getting abnormal costs of production.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: And you are getting abnormal prices for your wheat. Will not the member for Avon admit that the surplus of last year's harvest in bringing 4s. 9d. f.o.b. is higher than any farmer in the State anticipated? Did the hon. member anticipate that the balance brought forward from the 1915-16 harvest would have returned 4s. 9d. f.o.b.?

Mr. Harrison: My anticipations would not alter it.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member said that the cost of production was abnormal, and I said the price that wheat was bringing is abnormal. Did the Minister himself anticipate such a price?

The Minister for Railways: No, I did not.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not arguing whether the price is getting too high or too low; I am arguing, as a matter of fact, that the farmer is getting for his carry-over last year more than he ever anticipated. All I am suggesting is that in view of the fact that last year a certain quantity of wheat was produced without a guarantee as to whether the farmer would get a market at all, and without any definite price being guaranteed, and that this year we in Parliament have decided that for every bushel the farmer produces next year he shall not receive a single half penny less than 3s. a bushel at the siding, the farmer should consent to allow the consumer, who has guaranteed the price, to get some benefit. Members on the cross benches appreciate that we have done something of value, not an ordinary promise but one that will be kept. It is not the ordinary promise that we hear given sometimes by Ministers which they seize upon an opportunity to get out of.

The Minister for Works: Such promises that we have heard in times gone by.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Those which we have heard during the last seven or eight months. This is a pledge given.

Mr. Harrison: Not by one State but the whole.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I am not worrying about one State. I do not care what the other States have done or what they have not done. I may tell the hon. member for Avon that I do not come into the House to represent my constituents to follow what has been done somewhere else, but to do the best notwithstanding what has been done anywhere else in the world. We have given that pledge and it will be kept. The farmers therefore can proceed to produce wheat for next year, knowing well they will receive not less than 3s. a bushel at the siding for it. That is a pretty substantial guarantee to receive especially when it is received in the name of the State through Parliament itself. Is it asking too much to say, "Very well, as an appreciation of your action, we will give the guarantee and we will not permit that action to unduly burden the person giving it." The consumer is giving it equally with the producer. Is it unreasonable to suggest that for the quantity of wheat required to grist into flour for local consumption, the producer shall receive a price which will enable bread to be produced and sold at not exceeding 3½d. per 2lb. loaf?

The Premier: Three shillings and sixpence per bushel at the mill.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Ten per cent. of the total crop.

Mr. Willmott: Ten per cent. of the estimated crop.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: If we have the ordinary average of about 11 bushels—

Mr. Harrison: Do not forget that they have not yet recovered from the drought.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The farmer can take 10 bushels from each acre and give to the local mill just over one bushel at a price which will permit of bread to be sold at 3½d. The market price next year f.o.b. will be 4s. 9d. which is equal to 4s. at sidings. Our proposal is that the farmer shall get 4s. for every bushel he produces from his holding which is required to grist for flour for export, or which will be exported from any of our ports and that one

bushel shall be sold to grist for local consumption at 3s. 6d. It can easily be worked out just what he is sacrificing. Take an ordinary farmer with 250 acres who has an average of 10 bushels and taking 10 per cent. from it to sell at 3s. and the balance at 4s., we can see the sacrifice he is making. In view of the guarantee we are giving, the farmer will not be putting in his 250 acres at a loss. He should be able to say, "I am prepared to sell one-tenth of my wheat at 3s. 6d." and thus show some appreciation of the treatment he has received.

Mr. Harrison: Suppose that guarantee is not fulfilled?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member must understand that there can be no backing and filling in a matter of this kind. We have given a guarantee that, good season or bad season, high price or low price, the guarantee will be honoured. I take it that Parliament, having given a guarantee is entitled to express an opinion in the direction desired by the motion.

The PREMIER (Hon. Frank Wilson—Sussex) [3.56]: It will be remembered that when this matter was before the House on a previous occasion when we were moving the original motion to give the guarantee which was suggested at the Premiers' Conference, I mentioned that this should take the form of a separate motion so that the House might discuss the matter apart from the guarantee. I want hon. members to understand that the action taken by the Premiers' Conference and subsequently by the Government when introducing the motion to the Chamber had a twofold purpose. First I think I made it pretty clear that the one idea was that we should encourage our farmers to produce all the wheat possible. Then we also wanted to give the farmers a fair return for their labour, in other words, to see that they got a price which, at any rate, covered them from actual loss in carrying out that request. Therefore we introduced a motion and I am happy to think that the House, notwithstanding that it was pointed out that there might possibly be some risk in carrying that motion, endorsed that view as well as Parliament as a whole. Hence our settlers are now in the position that they can, in all confidence, go straight ahead and increase their operations, if possible, in order that we may have a record harvest

next season. I have never yet disguised from myself, my colleagues, the members of this House, or the public, the fact that it is just possible we might be taking a risk which would come back upon the taxpayers of this country, or in other words, that the State is taking a chance, should peace be declared very quickly—of which I do not think there is the slightest prospect at the present stage—with a big harvest, as a result of the operations of America, Canada, and other wheat producing countries, and the Russian wheat being released altogether, and with perhaps a considerable fall in freights, in that we might possibly have to face a very considerable liability under the guarantee that we have given.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Then the price of bread will be bound to come down.

The PREMIER: It was worth the risk. It is surely a time in the history of our country and our Empire when we must of necessity depart from all rules of procedure in connection with commercial undertakings, and must of necessity take enormous risks in order to do what we consider is best in the interests of a large section of our own people and to assist in the finding of what is so necessary for the successful prosecution of the war, namely, foodstuffs for our people in the Old Country and their Allies. That being so, I do not think anyone will regret the fact that, as announced yesterday, the Government have gone one step further, and that now not only have they guaranteed a minimum cash advance of 3s. per bushel at sidings, but they have guaranteed that the farmer will have a minimum return for his wheat of 4s. per bushel f.o.b. It may not be a very large increase but would represent 4d. or 5d. per bushel over and above 3s. at the siding. I hope the result will be as we have predicted, and which was the reason for the introduction of the guarantee, namely, that we will put such heart into our farmers that they will put forth their very best endeavours to increase the production of their farms in every possible way for the next harvest. Whilst we do that it is of course recognised that we ought not, if we can possibly avoid it, allow any unscrupulous set of men to penalise the consumers, and I believe honestly that the motion has been placed on the Notice Paper and moved in order that we may in advance bring pressure to bear upon those

who control these matters, by resolution of the House, to the end that the consumers will not suffer by reason of the guarantee that we have thought fit to extend to our producers. At the same time, I recognise that it is possible, and with all the hardships that our producers have suffered and all the trouble they have in connection with getting the necessary labour with which to work their farms and take off their crops, and with the increased cost of everything in connection with this great industry in our State, which of course is only in common with all other industries, that we must see, in fairness to the producers, that they get the full value for their produce, even from the consumers. I do not want to unduly delay the House in dilating at any great length upon the motion. I think we are all in accord with the principle underlying it and the motive which actuated the mover. I do not think that anyone, whether he be a producer or a farmer's representative, or not, will for a moment object to the consumers of this country getting a fair deal. I do not, however, quite like the wording of the motion. I am happy, indeed, that the leader of the Opposition is not wedded to its exact wording and intimidated as much. Therefore, I am going to ask him to consider whether we should not make it more general whilst conveying what we wish to those who are responsible, in the first place the wheat board which controls the actions of the pool in Western Australia, which of course rules the wheat and will have to fix the price of wheat for local consumption; secondly the Federal authorities which at the present time are the only Government with power, and that only under the War Precautions Act, to fix the price of commodities such as flour and bread, and whether we might not by the general wording of our resolution bring that pressure to bear upon them that will draw their attention to the possible danger to the consumer having to suffer from what we have done, and enable them to see that in our opinion at any rate they ought to take every precaution so that the consumer is not penalised on account of the producer being guaranteed the price which is embodied in the resolution which we have already carried. I think, if the leader of the Opposition agrees with me, we might amend the motion and get exactly

what we want without dealing with the specific price of bread. For instance, if we carry this motion that the retail cost of bread at Perth should not exceed 3½d. per 2lb. loaf I do not think I should be justified in accepting those figures. First of all, what strikes me is, what does 3½d. per 2lb. loaf as at Perth mean in the value of wheat?

Hon. W. D. Johnson: You could work it out to a farthing.

The PREMIER: You cannot.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It has been worked out over and over again.

The PREMIER: Wheat varies so much in weight and quality that it is impossible to do so. I have been milling myself, and I know that one farmer's wheat will give very much more flour and of a much better grade and much better bread than another farmer's wheat will. I would be very much afraid to fix a hard and fast price, because I do not know that anyone could accurately say what it would mean in the price of wheat. At all events I cannot do so. Even if we passed the resolution, the point with me is, what does 3½d. per 2lb. loaf at Perth mean in the way of a retail price? Does it mean at the door, purchased at the bakery, or purchased at some baker's shop in Hay-street?

Mr. Willmott: At the baker's shop in Perth with the cash in your hand.

The PREMIER: What is the man who brings the bread to charge? I want my bread delivered at the door and most other consumers would want it too.

Mr. Munsie: Four pence per loaf, if you pay in advance at the door on the ticket system.

The PREMIER: I cannot get tickets where I live at the present time. I suppose I am being mulcted at the rate of ½d. per loaf.

Mr. Munsie: You pay 4½d. if you do not buy tickets.

The PREMIER: One sees at once that it is futile to put a price in which may mean a lot or only a little. If we can agree to a resolution something after the following, which would guarantee all we wish and will get what I am trying to aim at, whilst giving the producer full market value for his commodity, we will by the pressure which the resolution will bring to bear upon the authorities in the Eastern States probably be able to safeguard the

interests of the consumer also. I suggest that the wording of the motion be as follows:—

"That in view of the generous action of the Commonwealth and State Governments in guaranteeing to farmers a minimum price, in fixing the price of wheat for local consumption, care should be taken to protect the consumer against any inflation in the retail price of bread owing to the guarantee of 4s. per bushel f.o.b., and that the prices of flour and bread should if necessary be controlled for this purpose."

I think a resolution of that sort would convey to the wheat board, in the first instance, that in the opinion of this House the price of wheat sold locally must be regulated so that the consumer would not be penalised, and in the second place, convey to the Federal Government that in our opinion they should step in and fix the price of flour if necessary. No matter what the price of wheat is the miller charges what he likes to the baker. This should be controlled. If necessary the authorities should also fix the price of bread from the baker to the consumer under certain conditions.

Mr. Munsie: Has not that been done by the Federal Prices Adjustment Board? They fixed the price to be charged to the baker for flour on the price paid by the miller for his wheat, and they have also fixed the price of bread on the price paid by the baker for his flour. Suppose peace is declared, six months after the War Precautions Act becomes inoperative, and then who is going to fix the price?

The PREMIER: If we pass a resolution of that sort and the Commonwealth cannot exercise any power which they can now exercise, if necessary we will have to take steps to get these powers for ourselves.

Mr. Munsie: If you add that to the bottom of your resolution I will give it my support.

The PREMIER: I do not think there is any necessity to do this; it is just as binding on the Commonwealth as it is upon the wheat board or ourselves. In fixing the price of wheat for local consumption care should be taken to protect the consumer against inflation owing to the guarantee of 4s. per bushel, and the price of flour and

bread should if necessary be controlled for that purpose.

Mr. Munsie: Why not add it to the resolution?

The PREMIER: There is no need to do that. If the House agrees to the amendment it will be endorsing the principle, and will have done all that is necessary to bring the opinion of the House to the notice of the Federal Government. I therefore move an amendment—

*That all words after "minimum" in line 3 of the motion be struck out and the following inserted in lieu:—"price, in fixing the price of wheat for local consumption care should be taken to protect the consumer against any inflation in the retail price of bread owing to the guarantee of 4s. per bushel f.o.b., and that the prices of flour and bread should, if necessary, be controlled for this purpose."*

Mr. WILLMOTT (Nelson) [4-18]: In rising to support the amendment, I would like first to point out that there seems to be a rather hazy idea as to the effect of the price per bushel of wheat on the price of the loaf. I will deal with that matter a little later. The Leader of the Opposition has no doubt sound arguments on his side from his own point of view, but I would ask hon. members the question what will happen should we have an abnormal wheat season and the motion as it is printed on the Notice Paper is carried by this House? Supposing that this State produces only five million bushels of wheat. The member for Guildford will bear me out that as a wheat grower he would not care to bind himself that in the case of drought he will be allowed to take only three shillings per bushel for his wheat. Two million bushels are required to meet home requirements. If we produce only five million bushels in all, what will happen? We do not want to be unfair, and personally, I am satisfied that members opposite have no desire to be unfair to those on this side of the Chamber; but it would be unfair if an attempt is made to bind the wheat pool to a minimum price. I venture the opinion that the price of wheat will not drop as people seem to think. If one studies the wheat market it will be found there is an abnormal shortage. The fact that the British farmers have been guaranteed sixty shillings per quarter over a term

of years on a sliding scale must demonstrate to members that the British Government knows there is a world shortage and that the finish of this war will not have the effect some hon. members seem to think. I understand the shortage to be something like three hundred and thirty million bushels. I have no desire to dwell on this point and wish only to draw members' attention to it. It is no doubt of advantage to the farmer that he shall have a minimum guarantee. I wish that the fruit grower might also have a minimum price guaranteed to him, but unfortunately he produces a perishable article. But the question I wish hon. members to consider is whether three shillings per bushel is sufficient to make it payable to grow wheat twelve miles from a railway.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: As a matter of fact the guarantee of three shillings is of no value at all, and the resolution is not worth twopence. If we did not think we were likely to obtain more than three shillings a bushel, it would not pay to put a crop in.

Mr. WILLMOTT: That is the admission I have been waiting for, that the guarantee of three shillings amounted to nothing, because it will not pay to produce wheat under present conditions at that price. Wheat at three shillings per bushel as I work it out, gives two thousand 2lb. loaves at twopence halfpenny. Every increase of a penny in the price of the 2lb. loaf means a difference of £2 10s. per ton in the price of flour; and the miller and the baker have to make a living. Let me give hon. members these figures: The present price of flour to the bakers is £11 5s. per ton of two thousand pounds. The present charges for bread are per 2lb. loaf threepence halfpenny cash at the bakehouse—

Mr. Munsie: Where you cannot get it.

Mr. WILLMOTT: Fourpence cash, delivered, and fourpence halfpenny booked, delivered. Allowing 1,400 2lb. loaves can be produced from one ton of flour, calculated on the prices I have quoted this represents £20 8s. 4d. The cost of flour is £11 5s. and the difference between the cost of flour and the value of the product is £9 3s. 4d. which is swallowed up between the miller and the consumer. The farmer does not get it as some hon. members seem to think.

Mr. Munsie: No one thinks he does.



Mr. WILLMOTT: Nine pounds three shillings and fourpence is the difference. Every shilling per bushel increase in the cost of wheat to the miller means £2 8s. per ton added cost of flour produced, which is equal to a half-penny per loaf. From that members may work out for themselves what will be the cost respectively at 3s., 3s. 6d. and 4s. per bushel. I have worked it out at 4s. 9d. because I think if I were a wheat farmer I should live in hopes of getting 4s. 9d.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Flour at £11 5s. per ton is the equivalent of wheat at 4s. 6d.

Mr. WILLMOTT: With wheat at 4s. 9d. it takes 48·42 bushels, that is £11 8s. 10d. Forty five bushels of offal at present price represents £2 8s. 9d., which must be deducted from the £11 8s. 10d. leaving a difference of £9 0s. 1d. The present price of flour per ton is £11 5s. and the cost of milling £6 4s. 11d.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: That is absolute robbery. The bakers themselves before the Royal Commission said that 40s. milling profit is reasonable; personally, I think it is too high.

Mr. WILLMOTT: I think too, that it is too high, but I contend my figures are right. The baker is in the position that if the price of flour rises he has someone else to pass it on to. With flour at say £7 10s. a ton, that would be say twopence halfpenny per loaf; and if you put £2 10s. on top of that there is the difference. When it gets over the halfpenny, then the baker has the benefit of the extra halfpenny he is allowed to charge, but even when it is slightly under the halfpenny the baker is doing fairly well. There is a great art in buying for baking. The man with cash can buy up to a certain figure and if flour rises one shilling he gets the benefit because he may sell his product at an extra halfpenny per loaf. It is a far more intricate business than members probably think. In my opinion we would do well if instead of adhering to the motion as it appears on the notice paper we passed the amendment. That would meet all that we need ask and would ensure that the consumer will not be unduly penalised. I support the amendment.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON (Guildford) [4·28]: The amendment is purely a pious

hope that something may be done by somebody else than this Chamber. When the resolution was before this House guaranteeing to the farmer it was done definitely and distinctly by this Chamber and the farmers knew exactly what was coming. But the amendment suggested by the Premier means nothing at all, because it leaves the whole question to somebody else. The leader of the Opposition has pointed out that the resolution carried by this House, so far as the farmers were concerned, was a guarantee by a definite resolution of Parliament, and irrespective of party or Government it must be put into operation. But this proposed amendment would have no effect at all. It is, as I said, a pious hope that may eventuate or may not. But the motion was just as definite a guarantee to the consumer as the guarantee this House gave to the farmers of the State. The guarantee to the farmer is not worth anything at all, and the farmers' representatives were absolutely lunatics to have anything to do with the resolution.

Mr. Piesse: They did not request it.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: They should have turned it down. While the guarantee by Parliament to the farmer is of no value, this guarantee to the consumer is of some value. When the other guarantee was before the Chamber, it was supported by the Country party and the Government, and was carried on the distinct understanding that this motion also would be carried.

The Minister for Railways: Why is the guarantee no good?

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: Because none of us would grow wheat if we were not sure that we would get more than 3s. for it. The Minister will say that the object of the resolution was to encourage the farmer to increase the area under crop. It came too late for that purpose, and so was of no value in that regard. Again, suppose it had been brought in three months earlier, it would have been of no use as an encouragement to good farming, because in this country it is idle to attempt to successfully grow wheat except on the fallow basis.

Mr. Piesse: Not absolutely.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: To my mind it is. The Industries Assistance Board should lay it down distinctly that they will not advance except on fallowed country. I am prepared to admit that on newly cleared land fallow may not be necessary during the first year, but after that to get wheat on a paying basis it must be planted on fallow. When the resolution came before the Chamber guaranteeing 3s., most of the farmers' representatives took it with both hands, and when the amendment was moved by the member for Boulder (Hon. P. Collier) the Premier said that if the motion was not pressed, it could be brought up afterwards. And while he may not have said it in so many words, he conveyed to me the impression that he was going to support the 3½d. loaf. It has been laid down exactly what is a reasonable profit to give the miller and, with flour at a given price, what the baker can do. The bakers admit that they can make bread and retail it at 3½d. if they get flour at £11. We are giving them flour at £11 5s. Taking 50 bushels as the average for a ton of flour, and allowing £4 10s. for the offal, we arrive at exactly the figure the hon. member has given. Flour at £11 5s. is equal to wheat at 4s. 6d. If we allow 40s. for milling and profit, which is admitted to be reasonable, we arrive at the figure of £31 5s. Then, fixing the offal at £4 10s., we get half a ton of flour.

Mr. Harrison: You cannot get offal at £4 10s. to-day.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: No, but that is the basis for a normal price. We then get £2 5s. for the offal, bringing the figure back to £11 for flour. The present figure of £11 5s. is practically the same. It shows that it is a practical proposition to say that when bread is at 3½d., the farmer will get 4s. 6d. in Perth, which is a reasonable price. It practically means that we will get on our farms an average of 3s. 11d. for wheat, which is just about what we will get out of the pool.

Mr. Willmott: You are not allowing for anything abnormal.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: I appreciate the point. There is just a danger that there may be drought or disease or some other trouble, and that we might not get the production. If we did not get that, it would be very severe on the farmer to make him

sell his wheat at a price to enable bread to be retailed at 3½d. On the other hand, we have to recognise that that was not emphasised when the resolution was before the Chamber and, regardless of the danger, was carried. I was not enthusiastic over the motion; I would rather it had not been introduced. I am beginning to realise that people are getting tired of giving the farmers this, that and the other. A lot of what the farmers get is not worth anything to them. Take this 3s. advance: it is no use to the farmers, yet the man in the street says, "There you are, giving the farmer everything he asks for." I would rather have seen the resolution negatived, for it was carried on the understanding that this would follow. The amendment the Premier has moved is not worth anything, for it is merely a pious expression of opinion. If we carry the motion, the Government of the day will have to overcome any difficulties that might arise.

Mr. VERYARD (Leederville) [4-49]: I am of opinion that to ask that wheat shall be sold on a basis of 3½d. per loaf of bread is asking too much sacrifice of the farmer. The mover of the motion has been somewhat inconsistent. He based his argument on a guarantee which he admits is not likely to cost Australia anything. Consequently the only effect it will have will be the encouragement to the farmer of knowing that he has a minimum price awaiting his wheat. A large proportion of the bread baked is sold at 3½d. This of course is sold mostly to stores and to refreshment rooms and hotels. The greater proportion of the bread is sold at 4d. and some little may be sold at 4½d. However, the latter is not the real value to the baker, 4d. being the cash price. Apart from that, it costs from one-half penny to three farthings to deliver. I suppose 90 per cent. of the bread consumed in this community is delivered by the baker to the consumer and so the bakers' profits are considerably reduced. The price is based on £11 5s. for flour. To profitably sell bread at 3½d. the flour would have to be at £8 15s. and the farmer would have to lose, on the present basis of wheat, at least 1s. a bushel. That would be altogether unfair, for we must remember the bad seasons the farmers have had. From my experience I can say that the master bakers would pre-

fer to sell bread at 3½d. than at the higher price. A low price means considerably less capital employed in the business. I would support any motion having for its object the reduction of the price of bread, but when it has to be done at the sacrifice of the farmer, I am not prepared to go that far. I support the amendment moved by the Premier.

Mr. HARRISON (Avon) [4.46]: To my mind, the amendment is preferable to the motion. If the State is guaranteeing the farmers as mentioned, it is also guaranteeing every other occupation and calling in the State. The member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) has said that the farmer is receiving 3s. 11d. per bushel. The truth is that the farmer is receiving nothing like that amount, which is subject to heavy reduction by charges. The motion itself is unnecessary, because the whole matter is provided for already. Apparently, the poor farmer is to be further burdened in order that certain hon. members may gain kudos with a view to the next general election.

Mr. GRIFFITHS (York) [4.48]: The hon. member who drew this motion must have had his tongue in his cheek when expressing admiration for the generous treatment accorded to the farmer. The guarantee is merely a paper guarantee. Recently I gave a possibly trite, but certainly quite truthful, exposition of the commercial development of the great countries. I pointed out that it is the duty of the Government to pay particular attention to the conditions surrounding export industries. I cited instances of other nations to prove that agriculture is the basis of prosperity. To encourage the basic industry of agriculture is looked upon as statesmanlike. Mr. Hughes does not call this guarantee to the farmer an act of generosity, but says it was an absolute necessity for the Commonwealth and the Empire and a statesmanlike action. I object to the fixing of the price of wheat for local consumption. One can imagine the indignation of the member for Boulder (Hon. P. Collier) if it were proposed to limit the price of labour in the same way. The guarantee represents merely the cost of production. As the Federal Government have power to fix the price of bread, I think we can leave the matter at that. To show the

unfairness of the proposal to fix a maximum price for wheat for local consumption, let me point out that in the year of the drought the cost of every bushel of wheat produced ran into something like 15s. or 16s. Now with the possibility of a drought, the farmers are to be asked to guarantee to sell wheat at a price which will permit of bread being sold at 3½d. per 2lb. loaf. But for the wheat guarantee, more than half the farmers of Australia would have been unable to finance their operations, and the lessened production would have reacted on the whole community. I oppose the motion, though I certainly admit that the consumer should be protected. I do not contend for one moment that the member for Boulder was playing to the gallery. I think the hon. member was sincere in expressing a desire to protect the consumer. I support the amendment because I agree that the consumer ought to be protected, but without the producers being penalised.

Mr. MUNSIE (Hannans) [4.54]: I agree with the member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) that the amendment amounts to nothing but a pious wish. It is all very well to say that by carrying the motion we shall be accepting responsibility. The motion, however, puts the responsibility on somebody else. That somebody else—if the war lasts much longer—will be the Federal Government, or the Federal Government's Price Fixing Board. If the War Precautions Act goes out of operation, however, the motion will mean nothing at all. I asked the Premier whether in that eventuality he would undertake that this Parliament should do something towards price fixing. The hon. gentleman would not assent to that at all. When the leader of the Opposition was giving figures in support of the motion, the Minister for Railways stated that the carrying of it would mean a loss of £7 10s. to a settler with 200 acres carrying an average of 11 bushels. I have made the calculation, and find that the amount is only £5 10s. Seeing that the community have guaranteed the farmer 4s. according to the Premier, or 3s. according to this House, it is not asking too much that the consumer should get 10 per cent. of the estimated yield at a price which will allow of bread being sold at 3½d. per loaf. I had a talk with the

members of the Commonwealth Price Fixing Board when they were in this State, on the price of bread. In my opinion, the board did not remain in Western Australia long enough to realise local conditions. The statement of the member for Leederville (Mr. Veryard) that 90 per cent. of the bread consumed is bread delivered at the people's door, in my opinion, underestimates the position. It is useless for hon. members opposite to quote the price of  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. cash per 2lb. loaf at the bake-house door, fixed by the Commonwealth board, because one cannot go to the bake-house door and get a loaf.

Mr. Green: No; the bakers have always run out.

Mr. MUNSIE: The cheapest price of bread is 4d. per loaf paid in advance. The terms represent more than actual cash on delivery. One has to buy a dozen tickets for 4s., and the baker supplies a dozen loaves of bread later on. I acknowledge that the whole of the industries of Western Australia are so interwoven that it is to the benefit of every person, irrespective of his calling, to ensure that the farming industry prospers; but I ask the farmers' representatives to admit that the Government have done something for the farmer. Had not the Government stepped in and had not the pool come into existence, I question very much whether the farmer would get 2s. per bushel for his wheat. We are told, again, that the guarantee means nothing because it does not pay the farmer to grow wheat at 3s. What the guarantee does mean is that the farmer, irrespective of whether he can sell his wheat at all, was guaranteed a certain price. In the face of that guarantee, the least we can expect is that those responsible for the guarantee, which is to say the general community, should receive the small measure of consideration which the motion asks for. I trust the amendment will be defeated, because it is meaningless; and I hope the motion will be carried.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. J. Mitchell—Northam) [4.59]: I wish to offer a word or two in reply to the statement of the member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) that the guarantee of 3s. per bushel which led up to this motion

represents no advantage to the farmer. I do not think that statement ought to go forth to the country unchallenged. The guarantee represents a great advantage to the farmer. Hon. members will recollect that when I went to Melbourne for the purpose of attending to this business for the State, first of all an advance of 1s. 6d. per bushel was mentioned, with a further payment of 1s. to follow. The result was consternation throughout Australia, because everyone knew the farmers could not carry on with an advance of that sort. There is no anxiety on that score now, because the farmer knows he is getting more than he received last year. The farmers of the country must realise that this guarantee of 3s. is of the utmost value. The guarantee of 4s. is of course f.o.b. I do not wish to discuss the motion at any length, but I want to point out that the Federal Government fix the price, and it is  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. at the shop.

Mr. Munsie: Not at the shop, but at the bakehouse.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: In country places it may be at the bakehouse. I would like hon. members to remember the many people that the farmers support throughout the community. The member for Fremantle could tell the House what it means to the millers at Fremantle, and the railways would be practically doing nothing to-day but for the farmers' wheat. There has always been a system of bonuses on production. It has been the custom of Australia for years, and is a sound policy. There are a great many members who would vote a considerable bonus to a man who could double the output of gold. There have been bonuses given for every great industry. The butter bonus of Victoria costs a great deal of money. We are not paying a bonus to the farmer, but we are giving him a guarantee that he shall get the cash. Therefore I think the House would do well to accept the amendment moved by the Premier. It commits every member of the House to give this question consideration if the Federal Government fail to see that the prices are not fairly regulated. Just now this is a Federal responsibility and duty—to fix the price,—and if it ceases the motion says the House must take the matter into considera-

tion. We should have time to take the matter into consideration after the war ends and before the control of the Federal authorities ceases. I think members will accept the amendment. I am sure members will agree that it would be much wiser to carry the amendment moved by the Premier than to pass the motion.

Mr. Munsie: It is an easy way out of the difficulty.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It may be, but I think it would be a more effective way. This motion would mean nothing. You are not directing anybody to see that the loaf of bread should be 3½d. I think the amendment is stronger than the motion.

Amendment (to strike out all the words after "minimum") put and a division taken with the following result—

Ayes	..	..	..	..	17
Noes	..	..	..	..	14

Majority for	..	..	3
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AYES.

Mr. Allen	Mr. Mitchell
Mr. Connolly	Mr. Piessé
Mr. Cunningham	Mr. Robinson
Mr. George	Mr. S. Stubbs
Mr. Griffiths	Mr. Thomson
Mr. Harrison	Mr. Veryard
Mr. Hickmott	Mr. F. Wilson
Mr. E. B. Johnston	Mr. Willmott
Mr. Lefroy	(Teller.)

NOES.

Mr. Angwin	Mr. Scaddan
Mr. Carpenter	Mr. Taylor
Mr. Chesson	Mr. Thomas
Mr. Green	Mr. Underwood
Mr. Holman	Mr. Walker
Mr. W. D. Johnson	Mr. O'Loughlin
Mr. Mullaney	(Teller.)
Mr. Munsie	

Amendment thus passed.

Mr. SPEAKER: The question now is: that the words proposed to be inserted, be inserted.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN (North-East Fremantle) [5.11]: As the motion stands it might have some effect on the Federal authorities. It has been pointed out that while the price of wheat at the mill is fixed—if I mistake not, there has been something like £75,000 gained. The purchasers of bread already have received £20,000 of that amount, and there is £50,000 additional pro-

fit which has gone into the pockets of someone between the miller and the consumer of the bread. That only relates to Western Australia, and that being so there is a possibility of the Government taking no notice of the motion as moved by the Premier. The Federal Government might take some steps to try and find out who is reaping the benefit of the £50,000. It is not the farmer. It is either the miller or the baker. It is only just to the consumer that if wheat is reduced the consumer should have some benefit of the reduction. The reduction is not made for the express purpose of benefiting the miller or the baker. I trust if the motion is carried as amended the Government will take action in that direction, and try to ascertain where the loss is.

Hon. J. SCADDAN (Brownhill-Ivanhoe—in reply) [5.14]: I do not propose to traverse the arguments of members who opposed the motion and supported the amendment, or at this stage to delay the House in arriving at a decision. Personally I resent the statement made by the member for Avon (Mr. Harrison) that the motion was prompted for electioneering purposes. I think it comes with ill grace from that hon. member representing as he does, the section of the community concerned.

Mr. Harrison: I mentioned that the member for Pilbara said it.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The motion which was submitted arose out of the action previously taken. I want hon. members to bear in mind that this cannot possibly be other than a desire to obtain from the representatives of the people in Parliament an expression of opinion as to whether it is desirable to undertake as a community something in the nature of a guarantee which, if evaded, might land the State in a heavy loss. Therefore is it not better to have an expression of opinion on the question as to whether there should not be a return for the action taken in the interests of one section only.

Mr. Harrison: I disagree with you there.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I knew the hon. member had in his mind the welfare of the farmer.

Mr. Harrison: I said the whole thing was complicated.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: We recognise it is complicated, but; is that the reason why the

motion has now been put in the nature of a pious expression of opinion. It is not the same as the motion which was originally moved. I know that the hon. member's statement to a certain extent is correct, because indirectly the whole of the community benefits by the success of the farmer.

Mr. Harrison: Directly too; look at the railways.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: I recognise what the hon. member says is correct, but does not the same thing apply in regard to mining? I want to come now to the point that this action has been taken for a definite purpose, and that definite purpose is to help the man who is producing wheat. Let me ask the Premier whether the Government were prompted to take this action in the first instance from the point of view of helping the consumer or the general community or whether it was to help the primary producer?

Mr. Harrison: To help the Empire.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Let us take that as the line of argument. Does not the hon. member know that at the present time we have wheat stacked here that is being eaten by mice and wheat that is rotting and that we cannot get away, and that it is passing through our wharves into the deep sea?

Mr. Piessé: A small percentage.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: But we cannot get that wheat away. Then what is the use of giving a guarantee for wheat to help the Empire.

Mr. Piessé: Are they not getting it away?

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Of course they are. But how is it helping the Empire when we have huge quantities of it still stacked, and which we cannot get away?

Mr. Harrison: If the shipping were available it would not be there.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The hon. member does not know what underlies a statement of that nature.

Mr. Harrison: If there were no produce there would be nothing for the ships to take.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: Unless the general community gives a guarantee that the farmer will get 3s. he will not produce wheat for the Empire. But it required a 3s. guarantee to cause the farmer to recognise the fact that it was essential at the present juncture that he should do his part as everyone else is doing. I would not support

the proposal on that basis. I deny that the farmer requires anything in the nature of a guarantee in order to do his part. I will not believe it. It was done for the definite purpose of giving the farmer an opportunity of carrying on an industry which is essential to our being.

Mr. Harrison: I agree with that.

Hon. J. SCADDAN: The guarantee was submitted for a specific purpose, and that was to enable the farmer to produce wheat, notwithstanding the possible disasters that might follow in the event of certain things happening if he were left to himself. We recognise indirectly that the State benefits by the action, but the direct benefit is obtained by the farmer. The 3s. guarantee does not make the slightest difference from the point of view of the man who is farming, and who is doing his best. We now have an amended motion, and as it reads it is something that I cannot quite understand. It says what should be done in the event of other things happening. The motion as it has been amended is worth nothing at all.

Mr. PIÉSSE (Toodyay) [5.25]: Hon. members on the other side of the House have been at some pains to place a wrong construction on the action of the Federal Government in regard to the guarantee which has been given to farmers. One would think from their remarks there had been an agitation on the part of the farmers to secure this guarantee. When the Minister for Industries was in the Eastern States the question no doubt received the fullest consideration, not so much from the point of view of the farmers, but from the point of view of the Empire. It is stated daily that there is a serious prospect of a big shortage of wheat, not only in the coming year, but afterwards, because of the immense call on the European supplies. There was no agitation on the part of the farmers for this guarantee.

Hon. J. Scaddan: Yes, there was.

Mr. PIÉSSE: But when the guarantee was announced the farmers asked of what use would 3s. be. They wanted 4s. The leader of the Opposition is quite welcome to his opinion, so far as the farmer is concerned, that he is the one who is deriving the sole benefit.

Hon. J. Scaddan: I never said that.

Mr. PIESSE: The hon. member led the House to believe it.

Hon. J. Scaddan: I did not.

Mr. PIESSE: It is only a little while ago since the hon. member as Premier, in one of his policy speeches, said that in anticipation of a booming harvest we expected the affairs of this State to quickly adjust themselves. That is the feeling no doubt which actuated Ministers who dealt with this question in the East. They said, "We will do everything possible to encourage production" and there were men on the land who were anxious about next year's prices, particularly in view of the fact that there was a scarcity of shipping. The action was fully justified, not so much in the interests of the man on the land as in the interests of the community as a whole. Had we been active in our agitation for the guarantee of 4s. f.o.b., there would have been some justification for the motion.

Hon. J. Scaddan: You are getting practically that.

Mr. PIESSE: There is no justification for the motion.

Mr. CARPENTER: (Fremantle) [5.30]: It becomes the fashion nowadays in almost everything mentioned in public to bring in the glorious Empire. The man who gets drunk to-day declares he is doing it to increase the revenue and help the Empire. I am surprised that our friends on the cross-benches are waving the flag over this question and declaring that their desire is to help the Empire.

Mr. Piesse: I did not say anything of the kind.

Mr. CARPENTER: Any question of moment which is settled in the right way is apparently helping the Empire. Everything that tends to help and bring prosperity in the affairs of the various sections of the community is apparently being done in the interests of the Empire. It is a little nauseating to hear hon. members on the cross-benches, when they are asked a definite and simple question from this side of the House, dodging the answer by waving the flag and saying "We are doing this for the sake of the grand old Empire." Usually I regard the member for Toodyay (Mr. Piesse) as a

level-headed legislator. On this question, however, he seems to regard himself as being on very thin ice, and when he is pressed for a straightforward reply hides behind the flag. In listening to the debate on the motion and the amendment, I have come to the conclusion that we are simply heating the air in regard to both of them. I do not quite agree with the member for Guildford (Hon. W. D. Johnson) when he states that the guarantee which this House gave some weeks ago was of no value to the farmer. I can conceive that under certain conditions this might not be, but when we passed that legislation I think everybody but that hon. member did agree that it was doing something which it was right to do and which had great value behind it. As every month goes by, and as the conviction seems to grow upon us that there is not so much hope of the war being finalised in the spring, and as we hear reports from those who control the wheat market that there is going to be a general shortage, we cannot but realise that there is not so much prospect of the price of wheat falling much below its present price as there would be in other circumstances. When we passed that resolution and gave that guarantee, we have the farmers what might have been, and might yet be, a very valuable concession, and we gave it at the possible expense of the taxpayers. I do not suppose one member of the cross-benches will deny that. It means that we pledged ourselves in the face of certain contingencies to put our hands into the pockets of the general community and hand a portion of their income to the farmer. It might have been a very considerable contribution. I am not one of those who cry out about the farmer getting too much. I know that with the legislation we have had here during the past few months there has grown up a very considerable conviction that the farmers' friends to-day are throwing their political power to one side in a sort of see-saw fashion, and, whilst they may consider they are justified in doing this, and showing their power in that way, a strong suspicion is growing up in the minds of the public that they are extorting from the Government, who are helpless in the matter, and have to give them what they demand or else vacate the Treasury benches. They are put-

ting the screw on a little too tightly, and the general public are going to suffer by the exercise of that power. It is up to the farmers' representatives, to, if possible, prevent that suspicion from growing. I am sure that, if once the general community get hold of that idea, and that conviction, namely, that the farmer is here for the purpose of manipulating the political machine and get more than he has a right to get, he is going to suffer the next time we go to the country. As one who wants to be the friend of the farmer, I say I know that the disaffection is general, and we hear it everywhere that the country members are getting more than their fair share of the milk from the State cow.

Mr. Piesse: You are not sincere.

Mr. CARPENTER: Yes, I am. The Premier sometime ago expressed himself in this House as being quite in accord with the object which the member for Boulder had when he first suggested this motion. The object of the Premier, as outlined by him, was that the retail price of flour and bread should be fixed at such rates as would return not more than 4s. per bushel to the farmer. This was the Premier's definite statement in the House.

The Premier: I do not think I mentioned 4s. a bushel. Is it in *Hansard*?

Mr. CARPENTER: In No. 13, at the end of the discussion on the motion as to whether we should give this concession to the farmer, the Premier will find his remarks. In spite of this, the Premier is not keeping his word in the amendment which he has submitted.

The Premier: Hold on a minute.

Mr. CARPENTER: The Premier will find the words there. We passed that resolution unanimously, with the guarantee from the Treasury bench that when this motion came on as a substantive motion, that would be the attitude of the Premier. Now we have had a motion submitted in the form we have, an evasive motion, which shelves the matter, and makes a declaration which means nothing at all, and the only impression it will convey, and is intended to convey, is that the Government are more anxious to protect the interests of the consumer than the hon. member who introduced this motion. I repeat that the very essence of the motion has been destroyed by

the amendment, and the words proposed to be added by the Premier mean nothing at all. I am sorry for the sake of the Government and the farmer that they could not have agreed to a reasonable proposition such as that submitted by the member for Boulder, and so have given the public some assurance that all that is being done, and all the money that is being pledged in guaranteeing hundreds and thousands of pounds to encourage the farmer to go ahead with something like assurance, and the fact that the Commonwealth Government have bought a fleet of steamers in order to carry the wheat to the markets of the world, would result in their saying, "We do not want to take advantage of these things against the local consumer. We will see that so much of our wheat is sold at a reasonable price and that the man who is working at a small wage can get his loaf at a cheap price." If that were the case it would make a very much better impression. I hope that the amendment will not be carried as against the original motion.

Amendment put and passed; the question as amended agreed to.

#### MOTION—ESPERANCE-NORTHWARD RAILWAY, CONSTRUCTION.

Hon. T. WALKER (Kanowna) [5.40]: I move—

*That, in the opinion of this House, the abandoned work of railway construction on the Esperance-Northward railway should be resumed without delay.*

It is not my intention to labour this most important matter. It would appear to me that it is self-evident that what is expressed in the motion should be carried out by the Government without either argument or spur, or stimulus, of any kind. The Esperance-Northward railway line was stopped without due inquiry, without adequate reason, with nothing, it appears to me and the people in the Esperance district, but political spite to warrant it. There has been the excuse made that the railway was stopped, forsooth, because of the alleged presence of salt in the soil. It was mentioned in the Premier's policy speech, and in other speeches which he delivered at the elections, when they went up for Ministerial return,



that we had suppressed a certain portion of the evidence relating to salt on which we had encouraged settlement in the Esperance district. It was said that we knew and concealed the knowledge—that was the effect of it—that the Esperance soil was of such a salty character that it would not grow wheat, and that it would be a most injurious and cruel policy to invite people to settle upon those lands. That, in spite of the fact that Esperance has grown wheat for years past, and under the same conditions as would prevail elsewhere with equal success, and in spite of the fact that all the settlers of Esperance have pledged their faith to the character of the soil, and they surely are the people best able to judge! I am submitting that the stoppage of the Esperance railway was a mere subterfuge on the explanation given, that there was no necessity to stop it and that by stopping it a great and lasting injury has been done to a most important part of the State. And the evil continues and grows at the present stage. If ever there is a question brought up affecting the settlers in that district, the invariable answer from every department of the Government is "We will withhold our judgment or hold our decision in suspense pending the report of the Esperance Land Royal Commission." Even a matter of repairing a road, injured by the inflood of the sea water at Esperance, is deferred, notwithstanding that it is an acknowledged necessity, in the Works Department, by the excuse that "We are waiting for the report of the Royal Commission." I had a request from the Esperance roads board for some needed repairs in order to repair roads which had been injured by flood waters from the bay. That work is out of the province of the roads board and is one which, if attended to promptly, will save money in the future. The work is a necessity, as to which the Public Works Department is agreed. That department admits that the work is needed and that they have given consideration to it in the past; but it has to be deferred pending receipt of the report of the royal commission on Esperance lands.

Hon. J. Seaddan: Paltry political pique.

Hon. T. WALKER: Paltry to a degree. Can you imagine a population which has endured hardships and privations year in and year out for many years sitting quietly by and tolerating a slap in the face such as that? I had imagined we had a higher standard of political life, and that justice would be done to all parts of the State even though justice could not be done to individual politicians. But no! I have requested that matters be attended to at Seaddan, Grass Patch and elsewhere; and the cry is that no action will be taken until the report of the Royal Commission on the lands at Esperance is received. The result is that the people are becoming in a sense, and would probably be justified if they were actively, rebellious. And why have we not the report of the commission now? Late in the last year I asked when that report would be made available, and we were told it would be given to the public early in January.

Mr. Underwood: Do you not realise that political friends wanted a trip East. What would you do in like circumstances?

Hon. T. WALKER: I would not violate a whole district, injure and ruin a community in the State and defame the good name of the State to give anybody a trip to the East.

Mr. Underwood: Political friends must get a trip East sometimes, you know.

Hon. T. WALKER: I admire the satire of the hon. member, but it does not help me at this juncture of my speech. I submit that the whole of the delay in presenting that report is a subterfuge, that there was no necessity for the trip East and that the Government has broken faith with this Chamber and with the country in not delivering that report, which should have been made in January last. I do not think any breach of secrecy will be blamed on the Royal Commission if the report were made public to-day upon the events already to hand it would justify the continuance of that railway and it would show the absolute necessity for the railway in order to make farming in that district a profitable proposition. It would show, too, that with the railway the district would go ahead, but

without the railway the district is penalised and prevented from getting its fair chance. Why then has there been delay? I asked the other night why the evidence already taken could not be made available. If we may not have the report, if we have to wait three or four months whilst certain people take what the member for Pilbara (Mr. Underwood) describes as a pleasure trip to the Eastern States, if we may not have the report until that pleasure trip is ended, why may we not have the evidence? Why not permit the country to know what evidence there is either for or against the Esperance lands? But the people are kept in the dark on the subject; they are not to have the evidence. Why? Because if the evidence were published it would clearly demonstrate that the Government are not justified in one hour's longer delay in the construction of the Esperance line. There is no justification for it whatever. There need be no delay so far as Parliament is concerned. Parliament has given the authority and has voted the money for the construction; the construction had already commenced and was in progress when, for political motives apparently, the construction of the line was stopped. And now when there is not one scintilla of fact to justify the action then taken by the Government, they are making use of a pleasure trip by the Commissioners to keep that community still in uncertainty and to prevent justice being done to that portion of the State. The money which has been wasted on the commission would have been of considerable help to the country at the present juncture. Let me take another aspect. Every other portion of the State has been assisted by the Industries Assistance Board, but this portion of the State has not been shown the same consideration. And why has that consideration not been shown? The answer always is, "We are awaiting the report of the Esperance Royal Commission. We want to know what they think; we believe your land is salty."

The Minister for Railways: We are assisting the settlers.

Hon. T. WALKER: But not in the same way as in other parts of the State. I know the help to which the Minister refers. It was not until recently by my intercession, that

the Industries Assistance Board would do anything towards acquiring the wheat of the Esperance settlers. They were practically given to understand that their wheat might rot upon their farms.

The Minister for Railways: Nothing of the sort.

Hon. T. WALKER: They were. I am speaking now in regard to what happened in connection with last year's crop. I contend that it was not until then that the question arose as to the alleged saltness of the soil. I asked a question in this House of the Minister for Industries as to what was proposed to be done with the Esperance wheat, and he replied that the question was receiving consideration. I had to renew my question, and the Minister had then to admit that some steps were being taken for the acquirement of the wheat from those settlers. This was done at my suggestion through a settler from Grass Patch. These things have transpired only recently in this Chamber, therefore what I say cannot be disputed. It was not arranged until a very late hour that the settlers at Scaddan and elsewhere in the Esperance district should be assisted. They were then told that if they carted their wheat to Norseman or to Esperance they would get 5s. a bushel for it. So far so good; that was reasonable. But the moment they took it there and the merchants paid for it, then, and then only, they were told that the Industries Assistance Board wanted every penny of that 5s. a bushel. They showed not the slightest consideration for the farmers who had carted the wheat all that distance and who had to contemplate the future before the next harvest.

Hon. W. G. Angwin: That was a bit of sharp practice.

Hon. T. WALKER: Undoubtedly sharp methods. The farmer in other portions of the State in like situations have been not only carried by the Industries Assistance Board so far as the purchase of wheat is concerned, but he has been granted assistance in actual cash to meet his grocer's bill or his storekeeper's account. Nothing of the kind has been done in respect of the Esperance settlers. After all their fighting against the stern opposition of the Government and

after having carted their wheat all that distance, they found it collared by the merchants on behalf of the Industries Assistance Board. This is a time when people should know what the Government propose to do. It is the sowing time for next harvest. The wheat of Esperance is just as valuable as the wheat of the Eastern districts, it is just as serviceable for the Empire. And those people want to know whether it is safe to go on cultivating their land and putting in crop. But the Government is not ready with the answer, they will give them no encouragement. The fact that those settlers have wheat to sell at all is an answer to the assertion that the land will not grow wheat and that the soil is too salty. One could understand a group of school boys playing marbles making such silly excuses as that, but one cannot understand a Government whose avowed intention it is to raise every shilling for the State, and is desirous of assisting settlement, men of supposed business acumen, making excuses of this kind to hang up an enormous area like this. It has been the avowed intention of some members of the Government to drive these people off the soil and, if they could not do it by intimidation, to buy them away, by offering them greater facilities nearer the markets if they would leave Esperance and go into the eastern belt, where they were to have land for land. Yet such is the faith of the old settlers in that district that they prefer to risk the insidious and perfidious attempts of the Government to destroy them rather than that they shall give up the land in which they have placed their faith and have still an abiding trust. Under such circumstances, the Government deserve to be censured, and I want to know what the Government propose to do. Are the Government prepared to go on with this work, or are they still going to keep these people in this inglorious state of uncertainty? Are they still going to persecute those who dare to settle a constituency which has elected a Labour man to represent them in this House? Are they going to penalise them and forever break the hearts of those who have gone into the wilderness to make this land more fertile, simply because they have another political colour distinct from that

which marks the Government? Is that the purpose of the Government? I could understand the Government saying that they could not do the work, because the facilities for railway construction are not now what they were. In that there would be comparative honesty. But to still be libelling that portion of the State by saying that they are waiting to know if there is any salt in the ground, is not only unbecoming but hypocritical and false. Are the Government determined forever to injure this part of the State, or are they willing to carry out the authority given to them by Parliament and to really help to develop a very much neglected part of the State from this time onwards? If they are not willing to do this, then what can we think of them; what can even those settled in the metropolis or those in other agricultural districts think of a Government that for some political purpose refuse to do justice authorised and in fact commanded by the people of the State? There is no other instance known to me so humiliating, so wrongful and so baneful in its effect as the conduct of the Minister for Works in stopping the construction of that line. Those settlers need that line for the next harvest if they are to have any benefit from it, and it requires to be started at once if it is to be of use to them next year. Already the Royal Commission have secured evidence showing that with the aid of this line the district can profitably produce wheat, and have determined that Mr. Mann's calculations are not worth anything in view of the actual practical results and the demonstration of the district's capabilities in the field together with the testimony of the settlers. The knowledge obtained by the Commission proves that the country, under like conditions, is the equal of the eastern belt. Are the Government going to continue in this disastrous, this wicked policy? Are they still going to be stubborn in a matter affecting so much the lives and destiny of a body of settlers and the future of the State? Are they going to show that political spite which would injure the whole district in order to be avenged on their political opponents? I trust, Sir, that all this will be altered and that in the resumption of work on this line

the settlers will have occasion to see the dawning of a new era.

On motion by the Premier debate adjourned.

#### ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

The PREMIER (Hon. Frank Wilson—Sussex) [6.6]: I move—

*That the House at its rising adjourn to 4.30 p.m. on Wednesday, the 21st March.*

Question put and passed.

*House adjourned at 6.7 p.m.*

### Legislative Council,

*Tuesday, 20th March, 1917.*

Bill: Land Act Amendment, 2a. . . . . PAOS 2535

The PRESIDENT took the Chair at 3 p.m., and read prayers.

#### BILL—LAND ACT AMENDMENT.

##### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 16th March.

Hon. J. M. DREW (Central) [3.5]: I am glad the Colonial Secretary abandoned his intention to rush the Bill through in one sitting. It would have been a public scandal if the measure had been forced through in the course of a few hours, it would have been to the everlasting discredit of the House if discussion had been stifled on a question of such momentous importance. Certain clauses of the Bill must have far-reaching effects. Indeed this is probably

the most important Bill we have had submitted to us in 18 years. If, in ordinary circumstances, we make a mistake in passing a Bill, we have an opportunity in the following session of rectifying the mistake, but if in respect of the Bill before us we make a blunder, that blunder must stand for the next 32 years. The Bill contains provision for the conversion of leasehold into freehold. The Labour party is strongly antagonistic to that. If that particular clause is passed, those who regard it as a mistake will have an opportunity of remedying it in due course but, as I have said, if the pastoral provisions be passed there will be no opportunity of reviewing the position, and the blunder will have to remain for close on half a century. Sir Edward Wittenoom said that some members are always opposed to those engaged in developing the primary industries. That can be classed as a thoughtless observation, and if in the making of it the hon. member was referring to the Labour party I think the remark was unjustified. The Labour party has never attempted to harass the pastoral industry. We established the State steamers with the twofold object of providing meat for the consumers and of assisting the producers in the North-West. To that end we reduced freights on the coast; the present Government have increased them again. While we were in office no complaint was made of the treatment of the pastoralists by the Labour Government. The pastoralists objected to our general policy, but no accusation of unfairness in administration was alleged against the Scaddan Ministry. Personally I have a keen appreciation of what the pioneers of the pastoral industry have done for Western Australia. Nobody realises better than I the privations they endured, the dangers they braved and the wealth they produced. In the early days the colonisation of Western Australia would have been abandoned had it not been for the work of the pastoralist. The export of wool kept this State afloat for nearly half a century, and that fact should be borne in mind in the consideration of the Bill. I hope it will not be thought that I am opposed to the renewal of the pastoral leases. The attitude I take is that sufficient time