

Legislative Assembly,

Monday, 3rd February, 1902.

Question: Coolgardie Water Scheme, Pipe Caulking Contract—Question: Rabbit Fence, Subsidiary Line Eastward—Question: Condenser at Coolgardie—Question: Goomalling Railway, Particulars—Transfer of Land Amendment Bill, first reading—Brands Bill, Recommittal, reported—Annual Estimates: Resolutions reported, adopted; also Ways and Means—Motion: Coolgardie Water Pipes (Caulking and Laying), to accept Contract, debate resumed; Select Committee appointed—Motion: Land Grant to Trades and Labour Council, to disapprove (resumed), passed—Adjournment.

THE SPEAKER took the Chair at 4.30 o'clock, p.m.

PRAYERS.

QUESTION—COOLGARDIE WATER SCHEME, PIPE-CAULKING CONTRACT.

MR. J. L. NANSON, without notice, asked the Minister for Works: Whether he would cause to be laid upon the table of the House the existing contract between the Government and Messrs. Couston, Finlayson, and Porritt, with regard to the caulking and laying of pipes in connection with the Coolgardie Water Scheme.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. C. H. Rason) replied: Yes.

QUESTION—RABBIT FENCE, SUBSIDIARY LINE EASTWARD.

MR. A. E. THOMAS asked the Premier: Whether immediate steps would be taken to construct the subsidiary line of fence to protect Esperance, Salmon Gum, Grass Patch, and Ravensthorpe.

THE PREMIER (Hon. G. Leake) replied: The matter has been submitted to the Lands Department.

QUESTION—CONDENSER AT COOLGARDIE.

MR. A. E. THOMAS asked the Minister for Railways: 1, Whether tenders were called for the building of the new condenser at Coolgardie. 2, If not, why? 3, What is the capacity of the condenser? 4, What was the contract price?

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. W. Kingsmill) replied: 1, Tenders were not invited. 2, Because it was deemed that the urgency of the case rendered the loss of time involved in calling for tenders most inadvisable. In the

event of the continuation of the drought then existing, the delay of every day meant in a few weeks' time an expenditure of about £600 per day for haulage of water to supply the Southern Cross to Menzies section of the line. 3, 70,000 to 75,000 gallons per day. 4, £10,000, plus the cost of firebars, 25,000 gallon tank, and construction of a siding for loading bricks (£1,000), making a total amount of £11,000. Owing to the recent rains, arrangements have been made to complete only one-sixth of the whole work.

QUESTION—GOOMALLING RAILWAY, PARTICULARS.

HON. G. THROSSELL asked the Minister for Works: 1, On what date the construction of the Goomalling Railway was commenced. 2, What was the departmentally estimated time for completion of the line. 3, Upon how many occasions work has been stopped on the line, and for what reason. 4, Whether the delay in construction entailed extra cost to the department, and if so, to what amount. 5, What is the total amount expended to date. 6, Whether the Minister can now name a date for completion of the line. 7, Whether the Minister is aware that the great bulk of the produce traffic is being lost to the line, owing to the excessive charges for freight levied by the Construction Department. 8, Whether the Minister will consider the advisability of at once assimilating the charges for freight to those made upon open lines.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. C. H. Rason) replied: 1, March 19th, 1900. 2, 12 months for the 20 miles first authorised to be constructed. (An additional extension of 10 miles was authorised on 28th February, 1901.) 3, (a.) Four occasions, viz., from (1) November 7th to 15th, 1900; (2) November 28th to January 28th, 1901; (3) February 23rd to April 22nd, 1901; (4) May 31st to December 5th, 1901. (b) Intermittent and inadequate supply of permanent way materials and difficulty in obtaining suitable labour occasioned thereby. 4, (a.) Yes. (b) Extra cost difficult to estimate. 5, £39,870. 6, June next. 7 and 8, Instructions have been already issued to charge from 1st February, and until the line is handed over to the Working Railways Depart-

ment, such an all round rate per mile as will correspond with the average rate on opened lines for similar distances.

TRANSFER OF LAND AMENDMENT BILL.

Introduced by the PREMIER, and read a first time.

BRANDS BILL. RECOMMITTAL.

On motion by Mr. W. H. JAMES (in charge of the measure), Bill recommitted for amendment of certain clauses.

Clause 2—Short title and commencement:

MR. JAMES: As it appeared the Bill was not so widely known throughout the country as had been anticipated, it was desirable to postpone the date on which the Act should come into operation. He moved that the word "April," in line 3, be struck out, and "June" inserted in lieu.

Put and passed.

Clause 4—Definition of terms used in this Act:

MR. JAMES moved that after "sheep," in the last line, the words "or any ear-mark on cattle" be added. This would make the definition clearer.

Put and passed.

Clause 6—Description of brands to be registered under this Act:

MR. JAMES moved that the word "Minister," in line 4, be struck out, and "Registrar" inserted in lieu.

Put and passed.

Clause 8—Length of brand:

MR. JAMES moved that in Sub-clause 3 the words "three-quarters of an inch," in lines 1 and 2, be struck out, and "an inch and a quarter" inserted in lieu.

Put and passed.

Clause 10—No brand to be used unless registered:

MR. JAMES moved that after "nine," in line 1, the word "eleven" be inserted, also that in paragraph (b), after "mark," in line 5, the words "or age-mark" be inserted.

Put and passed.

Clause 21—Ear-mark to be made by punch or pliers only:

MR. JAMES moved that there be added to the clause the words "or an age-mark."

Put and passed.

Clause 27—Purchaser of impounded stock to brand:

MR. JAMES moved that in Sub-clause 4, line 1, the words "forthwith, and before removing the same," be struck out, and "within one month from such sale" inserted in lieu; also that in line 5 the words "before removal" be struck out, and "within the time aforesaid" inserted in lieu.

Put and passed.

Clause 32—Stock on which brand has been wilfully altered or blotched to be held to be unbranded:

MR. JAMES moved that the word "stock," in line 3, be struck out and "sheep" inserted in lieu.

Put and passed.

Clause 36—Stock branded under repealed Acts to be deemed branded:

MR. JAMES moved that in Sub-clause 2, line 1, the word "stock" be struck out and "sheep" inserted.

Put and passed.

Clause 39—Regulations:

MR. JAMES: A new provision was desirable, in case it should be found necessary to divide the State into districts. The existing Act allowed ear-marking on one ear; and as probably the number of ear-marks on one ear would be insufficient to meet the requirements of the whole State, the Minister might have to divide the State into districts; but it was not anticipated there would have to be so many under this Bill as there were under the existing Act. Probably two or three at the most, would suffice. If, however, the State were divided into districts, the certificate of registration of a brand or ear-mark should show the district in which such brand or ear-mark was entitled to be used. The new provision would farther enact that if an owner, being entitled to use a brand in one district, used it in another, that would be an offence against the Act. He moved that there be added to the clause a new paragraph, to read:—

Districts.—(2.) The Minister may, by proclamation in the *Gazette*, divide the State into two or more districts for the purposes of this Act, and may register any brands for use by the owner thereof exclusively in any such district. In any such case the following provisions shall apply:—(a.) The certificate of registra-

tion of any brand and the brands register and brands directory shall indicate the district in which a brand may be used by the owner thereof. (b.) Any owner using any brand upon any head of stock outside the district within which such brand may be used shall be guilty of an offence against this Act. (c.) The Registrar may refuse to register any brand for use in any district when, in his opinion, such brand is likely to cause confusion or mislead by reason of a similar brand being registered for use in an adjoining district.

This farther paragraph gave the registrar power to refuse to register a brand if he thought confusion likely to result. The State being for the purposes of this Bill divided into two districts, inside one of these districts it might, though he did not say it would, be necessary to use all the brands allowed: there might be so many different sheep-owners. Therefore it was considered advisable that discretion should vest in the registrar, so that he might allocate the brands in such a fashion that the ear-marks in use in those portions of the two districts bordering on the dividing line should be perfectly distinct. The registrar would take care that the brands in the district on each side of the dividing line were so allocated that there would be little or no risk of confusion. Under the Bill as it stood, the registrar had no power to use his discretion, but must register whatever brands were applied for. Hence this new paragraph.

MR. WALLACE: Did this refer to brands or to ear-marks?

MR. JAMES: To either.

MR. WALLACE: Did it apply to sheep only?

MR. JAMES: Yes.

Amendment put and passed.

New Clause:

MR. JAMES: The Committee should understand that the amendments now being moved were proposed at the suggestion of a number of gentlemen interested in sheep and cattle, who held a meeting in Perth on Saturday morning. Those gentlemen represented half-a-million sheep and 30,000 or 40,000 cattle. The meeting expressed itself strongly in favour of the introduction of a clause providing for age-marks. Those members of the select committee on the Bill whom he had been able to consult indorsed the recommendation. He moved that

the following be inserted to stand as Clause 11:—

Age-marks

(1.) The proprietor of any sheep who is the breeder thereof may ear-mark the same to denote the year of its birth. Such ear-mark (herein called an age mark) shall be made on the off ear for ewes, and on the near ear for rams or wethers, and shall be made during or within three months after the expiration of the year to which it relates and not otherwise.

In the year 1902, and in every seventh year thereafter, the off ear or the near ear, as the case may be, of all sheep lambled during the year shall be left clean and no mark whatever shall be made thereon.

For sheep lambled in the year 1903, and in every seventh year thereafter, the age mark shall consist of one notch on the front of the ear.

For sheep lambled in the year 1904, and in every seventh year thereafter, the age mark shall consist of two notches in the front of the ear.

For sheep lambled in the year 1905, and in every seventh year thereafter, the age mark shall consist of three notches in the front of the ear.

For sheep lambled in the year 1906, and in every seventh year thereafter, the age mark shall consist of one notch on the back of the ear.

For sheep lambled in 1907, and in every seventh year thereafter, the age mark shall consist of two notches on the back of the ear.

And for sheep lambled in 1908, and in every seventh year thereafter, the age mark shall consist of three notches on the back of the ear.

(2.) Any person who makes any ear-mark on the off ear of any ewe, or the near ear of any wether or ram, except as provided by this section, shall be guilty of an offence against this Act.

The age-marks would of course be placed on the clear ear, an earlier part of the Bill providing for the proprietorship brand being placed on only one ear. It was entirely optional with the breeder whether or not he would insert the age-marks; but under this clause age-marks would be the same throughout the whole State, and would thus be readily understood. At present, in order to recognise an age-mark, it was necessary to know the system of age-marks adopted by the breeder.

Put and passed, and the clause added to the Bill.

Sixth Schedule:

MR. JAMES moved that in the first part of the schedule the words "third ditto near quarter, fourth ditto off quarter," be struck out, and "third portion near ribs, fourth portion off ribs,

fifth portion near quarter, sixth portion off quarter" inserted in lieu.

Put and passed.

MR. JAMES moved, as a farther amendment, that in the second part of the schedule the words: "First portion, 'near cheek'; second portion, 'off cheek'; third portion, 'off cheek'; fourth portion, 'off cheek'; fifth portion, 'near shoulder'; sixth portion, 'off shoulder,'" be struck out, and "first portion, 'near rump'; second portion, 'off rump'; third portion, 'near shoulder'; fourth portion, 'off shoulder,'" inserted in lieu.

MR. WALLACE: The effect of the proposed amendments would be to deteriorate hides greatly. As a layman, he did not of course presume to dictate to a body of pastoralists; but the amendment seemed to him ill-judged. Cattle should be so branded that one might readily recognise the brands in riding through stock. It was pointed out to the select committee which inquired into the Bill that this desideratum was attained by the brand on the cheek, since cattle would naturally raise their heads when a man rode up to them. The English papers and magazines had published articles drawing attention to the loss caused to Australia through indiscriminate branding. His desire was that cattle should be branded on the neck; but in view of what had been stated in reference to branding on the cheek, he had given way. Branding on the rump would seriously affect the value of the hide. Still, if pastoralists placed no value on the hides of their cattle, he would not oppose the amendment, short-sighted though its policy appeared to him.

Amendment put and passed.

Bill reported with farther amendments.

ANNUAL ESTIMATES.

ON REPORT.

Resolutions passed in Committee of Supply reported.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY moved that the report from Committee be adopted.

MR. MONGER moved as an amendment that the Estimates be recommitted for reconsideration of item 2 in connection with the Mines Department.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: The hon. member wished to increase the amount.

THE SPEAKER: That could not be done.

MR. MONGER: It was intended to move a reduction in the item in order to express the opinions he held.

MR. WALLACE: Whether it was usual or not, he intended to protest against the recommitment of the Estimates. Members should spend their time in the Chamber when items were under consideration, and not be outside on the lawn smoking and talking.

Amendment put and negatived, and the report from Committee adopted.

IN COMMITTEE OF WAYS AND MEANS.

Resolution passed, giving effect to the votes of supply already agreed to, by granting the required amount out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund.

Resolution reported, and the report adopted.

MOTION—COOLGARDIE WATER PIPES (CAULKING AND LAYING), TO ACCEPT CONTRACT.

Debate resumed from 22nd January, on the motion by the Minister for Works, "That the proposals (as laid upon the table of the House) of Messrs. Couston, Finlayson, and Porritt, to complete, by contract, the caulking and laying of the pipes in connection with the Coolgardie Water Scheme, be taken into consideration, and that the Minister be authorised to accept the same, subject to the modifications suggested in the Engineer-in-Chief's report."

MR. J. L. NANSON (Murchison): Very few words will suffice for what I wish to say on this subject. I can fully understand that the Government, if they have no more information on the question of the laying of these pipes than is contained in the printed papers laid on the table of the House, wish to place on the House the responsibility of saying whether this offer should be accepted or rejected. It was noticeable in the speech of the Minister for Works, so far as it was possible for a member proposing a motion of that kind, he was studiously noncommittal in the tenor and tone of his remarks, which certainly did not suggest that he, personally, was strongly in favour of the proposal. Indeed, his speech bore the resemblance of one who had undertaken a disagreeable and somewhat distasteful task. I can sympathise

with the Minister in the position in which he found himself, because there can be no question that after its having gone forth that the contract for this work was proceeding satisfactorily, and that the previous occupant of the Works portfolio in this House, the member for Pilbarra (Mr. Kingsmill), having on more than one occasion given the House his assurance that everything was going on satisfactorily, it must have been somewhat of a humiliating task for the Minister to admit that matters were in no way satisfactory, that the work was proceeding very slowly, and costing much more than it should cost, and that officers at present in the employment of the Works Department could carry out the work much more cheaply if they were given a contract. What the Minister for Works did not explain, and that will perhaps be explained when his colleague, the Minister for Railways, speaks in the debate, which I suppose he will do, was why a proposal of this kind, so to speak, should have dropped like "a bolt from the blue," and that the Works Department should not have discovered earlier in the work the unsatisfactory condition of the Coolgardie Water Scheme. Earlier in to-day's sitting I asked the Minister for Works, without notice, to place on the table of the House the existing contract with Messrs. Couston and Finlayson, and my object in making that request was to ascertain exactly how the country stands in regard to these gentlemen. It has been stated that the contract which they possess with the Government is of such a nature that we really, in considering this proposal, have, so to speak, Hobson's choice. It has been stated in the public Press, I believe, that if we to-night accept this proposal the work must go on as it is going at present. We cannot send Messrs. Couston & Finlayson about their business, or terminate the contract with them; that we have two alternatives, either to continue the work by day labour with the risk, and a very serious risk, of its costing very much more than it should cost, and taking more time than it should take, or accept the new offer without any satisfactory assurance beyond that of the Engineer-in-Chief and the officer directly in charge of the works, Mr. Hodgson. There is no independent authority, and

the question is: which is the best to accept in the circumstances? It is desirable before the House divides on the motion that we should know definitely whether, in the event of the House deciding to reject this proposal of Messrs. Couston & Co., it will be possible to determine the existing agreement, also to ascertain what it is likely to cost to determine that agreement, so that if the House think it better to throw the contract open to public tender, we may know exactly the legal position of the Government or the Works Department in this matter. There can be no question, however we may differ on the merits or demerits of this present proposal, that the existing contract with Messrs. Couston & Finlayson is open to the gravest suspicion. No limit has been imposed as to the cost of the work under the agreement, or as to the time of its completion. There is therefore very strong sense in the proposal that either we should amend the contract, or failing to amend it, if we have power to do so, to enter into a new contract. Already something like 12 months have been occupied in laying 90 miles of pipes, and it is only a rule-of-three sum, of a very unpleasant character, to calculate how much longer the work will take if we are going on under present conditions. If we cannot get out of the existing contract, if we must abide by it and accept Messrs. Couston and Company's new proposals, I take it this House, whatever opinions members have as to the proposal, cannot but feel, although it be faulty in some respects, that the proposal is an improvement on the existing arrangement. The acceptance at any rate we know means a reduction of 30 per cent. in cost of the work now undertaken. It means that the work will be finished three months earlier than would be the case according to the departmental estimate, and we cannot be certain that the departmental estimate of the time will be borne out: they may be farther out in their reckoning. It means, what I believe is a very important thing, that the whole of the pipes will be tested and the contractors have to submit the pipes to a test of 25 per cent. above the normal pressure before they can get any money paid to them with respect to the jointing and the laying: it means that the pipes already laid will be subjected to a

test, and I am given to understand, and I should like to know in the debate which proceeds whether there is any authority for the assertion that the condition of the line, so far as it is already laid, is anything but satisfactory. There is no guarantee that the pipes will hold water—leakages have occurred in the joints owing to the joints not having been quickly covered, which has caused a contraction to take place. The condition of the pipe line, so far as it has been proceeded with, is not one that the House will view with any sort of satisfaction. I do not attach a great deal of importance to statements of this description, because anyone who has followed the contract in connection with the Coolgardie Water Scheme must know that in the Press, and in private conversation, statements of an extraordinary character are about as to what has already taken place in regard to that contract. But it is perhaps as well that statements of that extraordinary character should be mentioned in the House, if only to be contradicted. I have heard some statements myself that 12 miles of the line beyond Chidlow's Well have recently been subjected to a private test, and that the pipes have been found to leak in a manner which means that the whole of the caulking of the 12 miles of pipes will have to be done over again. I merely mention that statement so that it may receive contradiction.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is not true.

MR. NANSON: The Minister for Works says it is not true, and I am exceedingly glad to hear it is not true. As I have already said, many wild statements get about, and the sooner they come into the light of day and are contradicted, the better for the country and for this scheme. But on one point all sections of the House will be united, and that is on the extreme importance of completing this scheme at the earliest possible moment. Personally I should be sorry to have any responsibility on my shoulders of having it said later on that one had delayed the scheme by a single month; but when the Government ask us to sanction a proposal of this sort, when they place upon the shoulders of Parliament the responsibility of saying whether this is a good proposal from an engineering point of view and from a business

point of view, the House is justified in refusing to give its assent to that proposal until the case has been proved to the satisfaction of the House. The necessity for completing the work appeals not only to the goldfields but to the country as a whole, because if I remember aright early in the session the Treasurer told us this year something like £175,000 interest and sinking fund was required.

THE TREASURER: One hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds in all.

MR. NANSON: One hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds in all, and therefore with that heavy burden upon the finances of the country, it stands to reason that the sooner this work is bringing in revenue the better it will be for us. In the course of this debate a question will no doubt be brought up as to the merits of contract labour over day labour. I should like to say I am not one of those who condemn the system of the principle of day labour absolutely. Only the other day we had an instance of that system being adopted by a company in this country, who certainly would not dream of adopting it if they did not regard it as good under certain conditions. We know the Electric Tramway Company are laying down their tramway at Kulgoorlie by day labour, and therefore in one very notable instance we have proof that by business men it is considered not impossible to carry out work by day labour on a satisfactory and commercial basis. But if we go into the question of day labour carried out at present by the Public Works Department of Western Australia, then I think there can be only one conclusion, that being that it has been a failure, not only in regard to the Coolgardie Water Scheme so far, but in regard to other works; that it has cost this country perhaps hundreds of thousands of pounds which might have been saved, and that until the Public Works Department is so reformed that day labour can be carried out on an economical and business-like basis, this country cannot afford to have very much to do with it. The Engineer-in-Chief, with a considerable amount of courage, has gone back on his previous convictions, and so far as concerns the Coolgardie Water Scheme he has abandoned the cause of day labour. When we remember how strongly Mr. O'Connor has in the

past advocated that system, we may be sure he would not have undertaken what must have been to him the very distasteful duty of going back upon his previous convictions if he had not the strongest reasons for doing so. He must have been convinced by the unanswerable logic of facts that at any rate so far as this particular scheme is concerned it is not practicable in the interests of the country to carry it out by day labour. Of course, as to the general question of day labour and contract labour, it is unnecessary to obtrude it largely into this debate. After all, we are only dealing with one work, and with a work that has to be completed at the very earliest moment; therefore I urge on even those who think that as a general rule it may be advisable to carry out works by day labour, that in this instance it may be necessary to strain a point to get this work carried out by contract, either by accepting Messrs. Couston & Co.'s offer or by throwing the work open to public tender, if thereby we can get the work done quickly and in a way that will give satisfaction to the country. There is only one more point to which I wish to allude, and that is as to the question whether this work should be given immediately to Messrs. Couston & Co. or whether it is not advisable to throw it open to public tender. The point seems to be whether caulking by a machine or caulking by hand is the more efficient system, and those of us who are not engineers but who have taken an interest in the question cannot but be struck by the immense divergence of opinion that exists on this point. It is true that if we do not go beyond these papers issued by the Government we can only come to the one conclusion and at once accept Messrs. Couston & Co.'s offer; but if we take into consideration the opinion of men who should be authorities on these two rival methods, if we take into consideration that pipes of this nature have been caulked by hand labour in South Australia and Victoria, then we cannot have a large amount of doubt as to whether the proposals of Messrs. Couston & Co. are not putting the country to an unnecessarily large expense. I simply mention the point so that when the members of the Government come to deal with this proposal in the course of the debate they may be able to throw some light on that aspect of it.

It is no doubt in the knowledge of the Minister for Works as it is in the knowledge of many members of the House that there is that strong difference of opinion, and very many people, very many contractors, very many engineers believe that it will be to the advantage of the country to have the caulking done by hand labour. The most astonishing statements are made as to the failure resulting from the use of the caulking machine; and unless we can get stronger evidence than is contained in these papers, I cannot think the House would be altogether justified in taking upon itself the responsibility of immediately sanctioning this proposal. The Government will perhaps be able to suggest now how it will be possible to give this additional evidence. Some information may be got by appointing a select committee, and another proposal may be to bring two expert engineers from the Eastern States to examine the two methods, and let the Government be guided by their advice. I merely throw these suggestions out. I am not at the present time prepared to bring forward any amendment to this proposition, because in a matter of this kind I think it is the duty of this (Opposition) side of the House to give the Government all the reasonable assistance in our power. It is possible that as the debate proceeds it may be advisable to move some amendment which may be welcomed by the Government, but at the present stage I myself do not feel inclined to move an amendment. The difficulties I have slightly indicated may be removed in the course of the debate, and more light may be thrown upon this subject by other members who have knowledge of these works and of engineering, to which of course I myself in no sort of way lay claim.

Mr. G. TAYLOR (Mt. Margaret): I move the adjournment of the debate. My reason for doing so is that I moved a motion calling for papers to be laid on the table setting forth the amount of remuneration Mr. Couston is receiving, and those have not yet been produced. I think those papers would materially affect the position, and this is a very important question. Taking that view of the case, I think I am justified in moving that the debate be adjourned for a week.

Motion (adjournment) put and negatived.

MR. R. HASTIE (Kanowna): There seems very considerable hesitancy among members to speak on this question, and I am not surprised, because everyone thinks with the member for Mt. Margaret (Mr. Taylor) that we are not possessed of sufficient information on the subject. It has been said here to-night that the Minister for Public Works in moving this motion was in a very doubtful condition, and was doubtful where his own sympathies were. Exactly the same thing can be said of the leader of the Opposition, who, in speaking, mentioned that this was not a question of departmental or day labour, but said almost in so many words it was rather a question between one system of contract and another system of contract. If I understand the case, Couston has already entered into an arrangement, practically a contract, with the Department by which the Public Works Department give him a certain sum of money running into many thousands of pounds and also £10 a week. Besides that, the department allow him to employ his two partners in positions with reference to this scheme. Farther it gives him full control of all the men employed. So far as I can understand the position Couston receives £10 a week, his partner (Porritt) receives £8 a week, and Finlayson, the other partner, although not receiving any salary, superintends the alterations and improvements to the caulking machine at a workshop at Midland Junction. The workshop and all its fittings are owned by the Government and all wages are paid by the Government, and the improvements which have been made to the machine since it was purchased by the Government are made by Government labour and at Government expense. That means that the machine is the property of the Public Works Department, and practically the Public Works property is the property of Couston. If we refuse to enter into this scheme, where are we? Must we continue to go on in the present position? There are no clauses in the present contract directing that the work shall be finished within a certain time, nor is a certain price specified; and if, as I have no doubt is the case, that firm gets at least over £20 or £25 a week from the

Government, it is obvious that it is in the interests of that firm to continue the job for the next five or ten years—is it not? No arrangement whatever is made as to time, nor has there been any arrangement to assure the efficiency of the scheme when it is put through. The member for the Murchison suggested that we should have a copy of the agreement already made with Couston. I wonder why papers to that effect had not been placed on the table; because I believe every one of us is curious to know the terms of that arrangement, and when and why it was made: why it was that the control of this scheme has been taken out of the hands of the department and given to men who are, as far as we know, irresponsible. Surely we are entitled to have that information; and I fully believe the Government will place it on the table before they allow this question to be decided; that farther on, an amendment will be proposed or an adjournment moved before we are asked to dispose of the motion. This proposal regarding Messrs. Couston and Co. is made on the recommendation of the Engineer-in-Chief. I understand the Coolgardie Water Scheme itself was first instituted on the recommendation of this Engineer-in-Chief; and he has told us all along that it would be finished very early. He gave many of us to understand it would be finished last Christmas, and now we are promised that it will be finished next Christmas. Again, the engineer comes forward and practically tells us that it cannot be finished next September, or even next Christmas, unless we allow this new contract; and he adds that the part of the scheme which is already completed is inefficient, and tells us that the principal part of this new contract is that the would-be contractors guarantee to remove or to improve the pipes already caulked. Now why is it that at this time the Engineer-in-Chief is not present? [MR. JACOBY: Hear, hear.] Why does it happen that he has arranged that this question shall be before us at a time when he is outside the State? That to me is very strange. I do not believe he is a reliable authority on this matter. As far as the Coolgardie Water Scheme goes, I believe the man who thinks the least of it, who has the smallest opinion of the matter, and who is probably the

least reliable authority on it, is Mr. C. Y. O'Connor himself, who, over and over again, has assured the people of this country that the scheme would be finished at dates on which there was no prospect whatever of its being finished. And we should not wonder at that, because it is perfectly true, as the member for the Murchison (Mr. Nanson) mentioned, that it is not peculiar in not being expeditiously carried out. Various other public works have been under the control of the Engineer-in-Chief, and as far as I know not one of them has been finished, and it is very doubtful whether any of them will be finished. Take, for example, the Fremantle Harbour Works, the Bunbury Harbour Works, the Coolgardie-Kalgoorlie duplication, the Boulder duplication, the Menzies-Leonora line—there is not one of these works which has not taken two or three times longer than we were induced to believe would be required when the work was first put in hand. Yet so far as we have gone, the only real authority quoted in favour of giving this new contract is the Engineer-in-Chief. I take it, the meaning of this is that Mr. O'Connor has quite given up hope of the pipe-line under his superintendence being a success, and in farther proof of the idea that he did not think for a moment that it would be carried out at the end of the year, or even in August, as this contractor assumes, I would mention that the Engineer-in-Chief has not provided for the reticulation, though he knows as well as every member of this House that it will take at the very least nine or ten months to get ready the pipes, engines, and other appliances required for that purpose. I am not one of those who, like the member for the Murchison, fancy that if we accepted this contract, or did something similar, we could get the water on the goldfields at a comparatively early time—say in August or September next; and I shall not be surprised if the water does not become available for the next two or three years. Because I believe this will happen that even though the scheme be put through, there will appear some unexpected difficulties. There will be in the best of circumstances unanticipated breakdowns; and a lot of things will require to be changed. All that will mean delay, so that a considerable time must elapse before the

scheme becomes anything like a permanent success. On the point I mentioned before as to the pipes for reticulation not being ordered, I should like to say, if in any circumstances the scheme reaches completion in August, September, or October of this year, then we shall require to send the water to the mines. There is no arrangement for that being done; and if the water reach Coolgardie or Kalgoorlie by the end of this year, a considerable delay must then take place before we get pipes for reticulation, and another summer will pass before the water is in any way available for mining.

MR. HIGHAM: That is your concern.

MR. HASTIE: What is our concern?

MR. HIGHAM: The reticulation.

MR. HASTIE: The people on the goldfields have never shown that they were not prepared to consider that question. I assure the hon. member that they will consider it at the very earliest opportunity. But I do not believe there are 50 people on the goldfields who have any idea that the water will be available before the end of the year; and therefore they do not hurry themselves very much. But the question presents itself thus: Is this scheme as it is being carried out anything like a good scheme? Is it a good scheme that we should see carried out farther before we really and thoroughly consider the question whether there is any chance of its being efficient? Remember this, that the belief in the efficiency of the scheme rests on the authority of the Engineer-in-Chief, and on his authority only. If I am told in reply that it rests on the authority of other people connected with his department, and that they agree with him, then I say that is to be expected. There is a freemasonry between the officers of every department which prevents any one of them from expressing an opinion different from that of other officers in the department. (A laugh.) Hon. members laugh; but that is my experience, and I believe the invariable experience of every member of this House.

MR. TAYLOR: Silence is golden.

MR. HASTIE: Four or five months ago the member for Boulder (Mr. J. M. Hopkins) moved a motion asking that a test be made; and in reply, the then Minister for Works, apparently with

the sanction of the Engineer-in-Chief, promised that a test should be made, at the latest within four months. That time has been exceeded and that test has not been made. It then seemed to most of us, and it still seems to me, and I believe to others, that we ought to have that test made before we consider this question any farther. I hope no fresh arrangement whatever will be made till we can make sure that the pipes as they are will be reliable conductors of water. I have not at the moment any motion to move; but I wish to say that I will oppose this proposed contract by every means in my power; and I hope the Government will not do anything farther in the matter to-night in the direction of finishing this debate, until some of the information we require is available.

THE PREMIER (Hon. G. Leake) : It certainly is not the desire of the Government to press this matter to a division without giving hon. members full opportunities for discussion, and also furnishing them with all the information the Government possess. I think everybody will admit that the Government find themselves in a very difficult position. Here is a scheme we have to force to completion, which we are pledged indeed to force to completion, but which for many years past the majority of members on the Ministerial side of the House have opposed tooth and nail in Parliament.

MR. JACOBY : Not the majority of the present Ministerial supporters.

THE PREMIER : I do not say all; I shall restrict the remark to myself. From its very inception I was opposed to this scheme; and now I find that the exigencies of politics have placed me in a position in which I must try to bring this matter to a satisfactory conclusion; and I assure the House that I will use my best endeavours—though I was opposed to the scheme—to make it a success, both from an engineering and a commercial point of view. [**MEMBERS:** Hear, hear.] I have never questioned the scheme from an engineering point of view; but what has always been a trouble to me is, how this scheme could become a commercial success. We are now, I will not exactly say accused, but it is suggested that we attempt to create delays in the completion of the work. Perhaps hon. members have read the letters on

this subject which passed between me and Sir John Forrest a short time ago, from which it will be seen that the right hon. gentleman, who was responsible for this scheme, implied that the present Government had probably done, or would probably do, something which would militate against the speedy completion and success of the work. Now this is a great public work which has been adopted by Parliament and by the country, and I acknowledge it to be my bounden duty and the duty of my colleagues to make the scheme a success if that be possible; but we do not wish to have the mistakes of other people thrown on our shoulders. We do not want to be saddled with other people's blunders. And it must also be understood that the present Government did not make the agreement with Messrs. Couston and Company.

MR. HASTIE : Who did?

THE PREMIER : The Minister for Public Works at the time was the Hon. F. H. Piesse, member for the Williams.

MR. JACOBY : No, no!

THE PREMIER : Yes, yes!

MR. JACOBY : Was it so long ago as that?

THE PREMIER : It was. The gist of that contract will be found on page 10 of the printed "Papers in connection with the Coolgardie Goldfields Water Supply," which have been laid on the table; Appendix A, second paragraph of letter from Messrs. Couston and Company to the Minister for Works, dated 20th January, 1902. There is a contract, as I say, and a copy of it will be laid on the table by the Minister for Works; but I am told by the Minister that the gist of it is really contained in the second paragraph of this letter, reading as follows:—

Our present contract for the supply of machinery and maintenance of same contains (specification page 7, paragraph 2) the following conditions:—

The contractor at all times during the maintenance period shall provide and maintain, at each of the six installations, an experienced and suitable mechanic (who shall have the principal charge of the machinery thereat respectively during the same period), and also a suitable staff of employees for working each such installation; and the Minister (subject to the provisions of this contract) will pay to the contractor, once every month, such a sum as shall be certified by the Engineer-in-Chief to be equal to all the wages

and cost of fuel and other stores paid by the contractor for or in respect of stoking, working, or cleaning the machinery of such installation.

Now, that is practically a contract for the caulking of those pipes; and, as hon. members are aware, the work is done by machinery.

MR. NANSON: If you decide to discontinue the use of machinery, will the contract terminate? If you decide in favour of hand-caulking, I mean, will that bring the contract to an end?

THE PREMIER: I am not prepared to say off-hand. There is a contract, however; and what is now proposed to be done is to vary that contract in the terms to be gathered from the correspondence. The position of the Government is this. Up to the present moment the work has been carried out by contract under the sole control and supervision of the Engineer-in-Chief, a gentleman who has up to the present moment enjoyed the confidence of the Government, and whose recommendations have, I believe, in every case been acted on. That gentleman now makes a recommendation to the present Government, who consequently hesitate before disregarding the advice given. We do not take shelter behind anybody else; for by this motion we ask that the Minister be authorised to accept the contract, subject to the modifications suggested in the report of the Engineer-in-Chief. From this it will be gathered that it is the present intention of the Ministry, still acting on the advice of the Engineer-in-Chief, to enter into the contract recommended by that gentleman. The House being in session, however, and the acceptance of the contract involving a departure from the system which has hitherto obtained, we as a Ministry thought it right to report the whole of the circumstances to the House. [MR. TAYLOR: Most decidedly.] If the House declare that we should be wrong in accepting the advice given, very well: the House will have to consider what is the next best step to take. I ask hon. members, however, to understand that what is now proposed is practically only a variation of an existing contract, which contract was recommended by the Engineer-in-Chief and approved by a former Director of Public Works, Hon. F. H. Piessé, who was at the time a member of Sir John Forrest's

Government. It is our duty as Ministers, I take it, to see not only that the scheme be properly completed, but that it be completed at the least expense to the State; and the argument in favour of these recommendations, so far as we know, is that a very large sum of money—something like £30,000—will be saved to the State if the proposed extension of the existing contract be made. A farther strong argument for the acceptance of the proposal is that under it we shall have a proper guarantee as to not only the work to be done in the future by the present contractors, but also as to the work done in the past. [Several interjections.] Moreover, we shall save three months in time.

MR. A. E. THOMAS: What sort of guarantee can Couston & Co. offer now, if they cannot guarantee the work which they have been already paid by the State to carry out?

THE PREMIER: We have no guarantee at present; but under the proposed extension of the contract we shall have one. Messrs. Couston and Co. undertake to enter into a sufficient guarantee—I presume by bond—and, at any rate, the Government will have the retention money to come-and-go on. The retention money is 30 per cent. on the amount of the whole contract. The House will see that, *primâ facie* at any rate, the recommendations which are made to us, and which we are prepared to accept, are all in favour of the State. It is of importance for us to save time, and it is of importance for us to save money. The proposal now under consideration is recommended, according to the correspondence I have referred to, by the father of the whole scheme, Sir John Forrest; and he is backed up by the Engineer-in-Chief. Whether the adoption of the suggestion will result in a departure from the principles hitherto laid down and hitherto acted on is, I think, beside the question; because we, as Ministers, have to consider the best interests of the State at large. I declare again, this contract appears to be one which, if adopted, will save the State both time and money. We felt it incumbent on us, however, to report to Parliament what we proposed to do; and this without endeavouring to shield ourselves behind Parliament. It is right for us, I consider, to take the step which

we have taken. If we had not brought the matter before Parliament, or say if we had waited until Parliament had risen and then accepted the contract during recess, we should have been open to criticism. Again, if we had rejected the proposal and the scheme had, in consequence, been delayed for a time, we should have been asked, "Why did you not accept Couston and Co's. contract?" We should stand, therefore, to be shot at either way, unless we had, I will say, "nous" enough to tell Parliament all about the proposal when made. It cannot be contended that the Ministry shirk responsibility, because we say by this motion that we recommend the acceptance of the contract, or rather, I must say again, an extension of the existing contract. That there have been mistakes in the past I will not deny, though I do not propose in this connection to particularise. Indeed, I do not think I am in a position to do so. I am under the impression, however, that this is a big pumping scheme to enable water to be forced from the Darling Range to the eastern goldfields. Everybody will admit that water cannot be pumped without pumps. [MR. RESIDE: Oh, go on!] Hon. members do not doubt that? Very well. That being so, one would suppose that the first thing to receive attention was the erection of these pumps in order that, as each small section was constructed, these pumps might be called on to do their duty and test the line of pipes in its various sections. Those who had control of the scheme, however, thought fit to leave the contract for the pumps to be completed at a future date.

MR. TAYLOR: So that the pipes could not be tried in the meantime.

THE PREMIER: I do not say that. I am accusing nobody. I want the House to understand that I am accusing nobody.

MR. TAYLOR: I am, though.

THE PREMIER: I think the contract time for the pumps is up in June next.

MR. TAYLOR: And you cannot try the pipes in the meantime?

THE PREMIER: No. It stands to reason that a pumping scheme cannot be tried without pumps.

MR. JACOBY: Yes; it can be tried by hydraulic pumps.

THE PREMIER: Of course, when I say the contract time for the pumps is up in June next, I refer to the pumps for the whole line. As a matter of fact, however, the pumps for the first and second sections will be completed in March, when the Minister for Works will be in a position to try these sections. Then, if the pumps do their duty, and if the works so far constructed are sound and good, water will be taken up as far Cunderdin. That will be about the middle of March; but no matter how well the pipes may be laid and no matter how well they may have been caulked, it is of course impossible to take the water from the Mundaring Dam to any point towards the eastern goldfields, unless the pumps are established and in working order. The present Government, at any rate, cannot be blamed for any delay up to June next. But I have it on the authority of my colleague that probably the whole of the pumps will not be ready by June next, because an extension of time, which has been asked for by the manufacturers, will probably have to be granted.

MR. HOPKINS: When you say June, do you mean June of this year?

THE PREMIER: This year, so far. Of course, every day's delay, I am prepared to admit, means additional loss to the country. The pipes have been laid down and the trenches have been dug for nearly the whole of the way to Coolgardie. That work, of course, has taken some considerable time, and has—

MR. HASTIE: Why not lay the pipes?

THE PREMIER: They are being laid.

MR. HASTIE: Only very slowly.

THE PREMIER: That is not the fault of the present Government. The pipes have been laid, and the trenches have been dug, and of course we are standing out of the interest on the money expended in that work, whatever the amount may be. It must be some hundreds of thousands of pounds. We cannot hope to receive any return for that outlay, or to check the charge for interest, until the pumps are in working order. The State, however, is not only paying interest on the loan, but has also to meet the cost of the sinking fund which, as the Treasurer has told the House, amounts to

something like £175,000 per annum. If the motion now before the House be not negatived, Ministers will of course use their best endeavours to make the best possible contract with Messrs. Couston and Co. Whilst we have said that it is our intention to accept this contract, that statement is, of course, subject to any possible alteration which may be for the benefit of the State. It may be in the power of the Government to reduce the contract price, and thus save a farther sum of money. The member for the Murchison (Mr. Nanson) spoke of determining the agreement, requiring to know what it would cost to do that, and as to amending the contract, and so forth. We do not desire to commit any breach of any contract, and we do not wish to terminate the work if it will bring on us any liability. As to amending the contract concerned, the proposals made really amount to amending the contract, but an amendment which is *primâ facie* for the benefit of the State, because it will save both time and money.

MR. NANSON: It has been said that there would be a saving of expenditure and time if the caulking were done by hand instead of by machine.

THE PREMIER: I believe it is said, whether by persons of responsibility or not, that caulking can be done by hand as economically as it can be done by machine.

MR. TAYLOR: Twenty-two times cheaper.

THE PREMIER: I can hardly think that. The people on the goldfields, and everybody else, declare that there should be no delay in the completion of the contract. If we do not enter into this contract, if we call for tenders on fresh specifications, and so forth, there necessarily must be delay; and we do not know if anybody else is in a position, until tenders are called, to offer to do this work at a less figure and in shorter time than Messrs. Couston, Finlayson, and Porritt are prepared to do it in. I am reminded, supposing the caulking machine is a more expeditious method, we should have to arrange with Messrs. Couston & Co. to use their patent machine.

MR. HOPKINS: You have done that already.

MR. JACOBY: Yes.

THE PREMIER: If we have then I will withdraw that point. By reason of

their patent rights Messrs. Couston and Co. have secured the contract for the caulking, and the Government are paying them a fixed salary, finding the wages and all other necessary accessories. They however declare, for reasons I cannot explain, that as contractors they can make a better job of it, and yet save time and money to the State. That, I admit, is a blot in this proposed contract.

MR. TAYLOR: They ought to be ashamed to say so.

THE PREMIER: Yes; I cannot understand that. I think in the correspondence they have been asked to explain it, and I think the reason given is that red-tape is the trouble: they cannot get the supplies. The Works Department possibly are able to make a calculation as to what the work will cost, and in what time it will be done on the basis of past experience; yet these people say—whether they have gained benefit from that past experience, I cannot say—at any rate they say, “If we are working for the department, we cannot do such good work, or do it so economically, but give us the contract and we can make money, and you can save money.”

MR. TAYLOR: Scandalous!

THE PREMIER: I do not wish to use harsh terms: I want to be dispassionate in this matter. There are many things I cannot understand, and many things that are extraordinary; and this seems to be one of them.

MR. TAYLOR: They should be made to explain.

THE PREMIER: Suppose they do explain, and it turns out afterwards that the proposed scheme for the completion of the contract is most economical: what reason can any member give that the Government should not enter into a binding contract to bring about a very proper end?

MR. TAYLOR: What would a private company think of similar proposals?

THE PREMIER: If the hon. member thinks I can answer his questions, well then I cannot. They are every one of them posers, consequently that is the difficulty of my position. I cannot dodge the hon. member's questions. Acting on the advice given to us by our professional experts, it is our duty to save the State both time and money. That is the position. We do not want to shelter ourselves

behind a Parliamentary debate or resolution. We have declared our intention to give effect to this recommendation; we honestly come forward and tell Parliament that is so, and we give our reasons, based principally on the professional advice which has been given. And when we realise that time and money can be saved if we carry out this recommendation, I do not think either Parliament or the State can blame us for the recommendation we have made.

MR. A. E. THOMAS (Dundas): A clause which occurs in the report over the name of Mr. Rason, Minister for Works, sums up the position pretty clearly; and that is what the Premier has just been speaking about. The position appears to be practically that Messrs. Couston and Co., as salaried officers of the State, can spend over £30,000 more and take some months longer to do work which Messrs. Couston, Finlayson, and Porritt can actually do as contractors. As contractors, they can do what should be their duty to do as servants of the State. If not, what prevents them? What I object to in this position is that these people have been paid by the State, as the member for Kanowna has said recently, about £25 per week to perfect a machine for caulking which they in the first place, together with the tools, sold to the Government for a big figure. They have been using their position as servants of the State to perfect their machine and tools, and then they come along after they have perfected them at the expense of the State, and ask us to make them a present of a tremendous sum of money. If a contract is to be made for the work, I object to its being given to this firm without proper public tenders being called, and I feel satisfied that if public tenders are called for this work, if it is found possible to do it in the interests of that scheme, we will find that tenders will be put in at a very much lower price than the price submitted by Messrs. Couston and Co.

MR. DIAMOND: That is only surmise.

MR. THOMAS: I have gone into this matter with some engineers. I do not pose as an authority myself; not being a mechanical engineer I would not dare to give an opinion; but I have taken the trouble to inquire from men who are not only mechanical engineers, but have had

experience of similar work; and I have taken the trouble to inquire as to the cost of similar works which have been carried out in other States of Australia, and the figures I have seen in connection with these works are very different from the figures submitted by Messrs. Couston and Co. The figures given to me would work out something like this. Fixing the pipes in trenches, 1s. 6d.; fixing the joint rings, 6d.; ramming and expanding, 8d.; caulking in pipes, 4s.; trying joints and examining pipes, 1s. 2d.; hire of tools, 1s. 3d.; making a total of 9s. 1d., as against 15s. 6d.

MR. DIAMOND: Is that the Beetooloo scheme in South Australia?

MR. THOMAS: These figures are considerably in advance of the price to be charged here. There are the Bandoleer, Barossa, and other schemes.

MR. DIAMOND: The Barossa scheme was not carried out, but the Beetooloo scheme was.

MR. THOMAS: There are one or two other schemes. These are figures which have been given to me, and they can be checked by hon. members, if desired. The Engineer-in-Chief advocated in the first instance that this work should be done by day labour under departmental supervision and control. There was no difficulty in letting a contract to these people without calling for tenders. As I have said before, these individuals to whom the Engineer-in-Chief proposes to let the contract have gained their experience here, and the previous cost of the work has shown that they had very little experience and knowledge when they came into the service; but now, having gained their knowledge and perfected their machine at our expense, they are prepared to do this work. They have been in charge all this time, and have succeeded in doing marvellously little work in a long time. They have said themselves that a tremendous amount of money has been wasted over the work, but they will save £30,000, therefore the Engineer-in-Chief recommends the proposal. I hold that the proposals which the Engineer-in-Chief has made in the letters which we have from him are tantamount to a vote of censure on the chief engineer, passed by himself. A contract has been entered into by a high official in the State—the highest official

whom we can look to in the State—and a contract out of which we cannot get without compensation being paid, a contract without limitation of time and price, without limitation as to whether the work shall be efficient or not when completed. Now this officer is desirous of shifting the responsibility from his shoulders in regard to the 20,000 joints which have already been completed. What have we paid these people over £25 per week for, besides finding all their supplies, all the wages and the machines to do the work? A statement was made in another House by a member the other night, that a test had been made of the pipes, and that they had been found to be in a leaky condition. I do not know if that statement is correct or not, but there should be some ground before a member would stand up in the Legislative Council of this country and make use of the statement, which he did last week. If contracts like this have been entered into, I would like to know if any other contracts have been entered into of a similar nature by the Engineer-in-Chief; if so, I would like to see the particulars of them laid on the table of the House for the information of members. I think the sooner we have a Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the matter of the Coolgardie Water Scheme, the better for the sake of the taxpayers of the country. I intend to oppose this motion, and I do so because I do not consider we have information before us to warrant us in giving a report, and in arriving at a decision in regard to the matter. If I am asked to report on a mine, I am going to have some details, I am going to have some particulars and some information on which I can base my report before I will put my name to it. I intend to oppose the contract being let, and I would like to see more definite proposals given to members of this House.

At 6:30 the SPEAKER left the Chair.

At 7:30, Chair resumed.

MR. M. H. JACOBY (Swan): It is a difficult matter for members, with the information before the House, to decide whether they are justified upon the merits of this case in acceding to the proposal of

the Minister for Works. The Minister has all the available information at his disposal; he has all the expert advice at his disposal, and if that advice were at the disposal of the members of this House—

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is.

MR. JACOBY: No; if that advice were at the disposal of the House in the same way as it is at the disposal of the Minister, then, perhaps, we might be justly asked to express an opinion upon the merits of the case; but it appears to me to be a matter which the Minister himself can only properly advise upon. There are thousands of avenues of information which are only open to himself, and in addition to that we have the peculiar position of the Engineer-in-Chief being away during, perhaps, the most critical time in connection with this water scheme. I think that, as the Government must have anticipated this question would arise just now, it is to be regretted the Engineer-in-Chief was allowed to leave this State during the time. I hardly think that if I were acting for myself, as I am acting as a representative in this House, I would be justified in saying "yes" or "no" to the proposal put forward. During his speech the leader of the Opposition made reference to statements that were current regarding re-caulking, which was supposed to be going on in a section of the scheme near Chidlow's Well. I am exceedingly surprised at the Minister disclaiming any knowledge.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Twelve miles has been caulked.

MR. JACOBY: If the caulking has been completed, and not tested, I should like to know why it has been found necessary to re-caulk it. This particular portion of the line is one of the portions where the heaviest strain will take place, and special precaution was taken in the original caulking of this section. The machine was given 5 in. returns round the joint in order to secure extra tight caulking. The pipes were then covered in the usual way, and by some means or other it was discovered that they were not efficient. Now the whole of this work has to be done, and is being done, again. If this is an evidence of the manner in which Messrs. Couston and Finlayson carried out the work, I can hardly think

they are going to do it better in the future. We find the pipes have to be uncovered at the joints, that larger man-holes have to be excavated, and that the machine is being worked without the aid of power, hand power being used, and this work is being done by four men on the machine. Until this time we have been using a dynamo of considerable power to do the work which four men can now efficiently do; and I have it on most excellent authority, from two different sources, that when these pipes were uncovered at the joints, on trying with a hand chisel it was not difficult to tighten the leads to the extent of making them half-an-inch tighter than they were made by the machine. This is, perhaps, one of the most expensive pieces of work in connection with this caulking. The pipes were covered, but they had to be uncovered and extra large man-holes had to be made to accommodate men working the machine. In some cases these holes had to be excavated in the solid rock, as it cannot be blasted, and the whole of it had to be done by hand. In addition to that, the machine has to be carried from joint to joint, as the intervening portion of lead over the pipes will not allow it to be rolled along. Altogether this piece of caulking is an exceedingly bad piece of work, and if it be an indication of the whole work that has been done, then I can say I have very little confidence in the work that has been carried out.

MR. DIAMOND: I understand they guaranteed the work they have already done.

MR. JACOBY: Then I do not think anything of the guarantee. In this case one of the most important sections on the line has to be done again. I trust that the information we shall get from the Minister will be a little more comprehensive than what we have at present. If what I have stated—and it has been given to me upon the best of authority—be true, then I consider the Minister should have had these details. The Minister comes down and asks us to consent to an alteration of the contract, which practically means the alteration of an important portion of the policy of the Government.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Will you say what details you want?

MR. JACOBY: I think in this I alone have given sufficient indication. It is quite impossible for members of the House, in a matter of this high importance involving enormous expenditure, to express an opinion whether this contract should be accepted or not, unless we have absolutely the fullest information. If it be true that a portion of the work that has been carried out previously by these people, in the employ of the Government, is of such a nature as to require the whole of it to be done again, I ask the House whether these people can be safely trusted upon the meagre information given this House with a continuance of carrying out this scheme.

MR. C. HARPER (Beverly): It seems to me the House is in a rather difficult position. We are asked to give an opinion on a question without sufficient evidence. The Engineer-in-Chief says, at the end of his report:—

While thus recommending that the contract should be let, I do not, however, recommend that it should be entered into hurriedly, and would suggest that the subject be ventilated either in Parliament or in the public Press, or amongst the principal members of Parliament, before final action is taken.

It would appear from this that the Engineer-in-Chief is somewhat doubtful about his own recommendation—[MEMBERS: Hear, hear]—and it appears to me that there are only two courses which we can follow. One is to inquire farther; or, secondly, to say, "The Government or their advisers must take the whole responsibility." Surely the House is not in possession of sufficient detail as to the reason why this proposed saving can be made, to say that the proposal should be adopted. Undoubtedly the saving should be made; but we want to know why it cannot be made otherwise; and it is impossible to ascertain why, with the information before us. If we take the responsibility of saying "The Government must decide, and their decision rests on the advice of their Engineer-in-Chief, who himself appears to be doubtful," the question arises whether we are doing our duty to the country. Because this is a most serious thing, and more far-reaching than perhaps appears on the surface. These contractors say they can save the country something approaching £70,000 or £80,000. If the House

follow the advice of the member for Kanowna (Mr. Hastie) and say "We will not do it," the people who lend money to this country will say, "Why is this?—here is an offer to save £70,000 or £80,000 rejected!" We can easily understand that the buyers of our scrip will hesitate to lend money when they see such an opportunity of saving capital passed by. In that respect the position is most serious, and should, I think, be carefully inquired into before we decide what to do. There is involved in the problem not only this saving, but the question of departmental *versus* contract work. There is no good blinking the fact which underlies the hostility shown to any alteration; and from the district which I represent, and throughout the agricultural districts, there has been a long complaint against the Government for absorbing all, or nearly all, the available labour, and paying absurd prices for inferior labour. For the last year or so, that has been a common complaint.

MR. RESINE: Do you want more of the inferior labour?

MR. HARPER: I hear whispers on the Labour bench. I have no doubt the hon. member interjecting will be only too glad to have an opportunity of proving that mine is an incorrect view of the position; but I know from instances which have come before me that labour, not of the highest class, has by the Government been paid at the highest rate on Government works. The men prefer such work to any other they can get. Therefore the question to my mind is: are we to seek to gain more information, or to take, as it were, a leap in the dark, and leave the Government with the responsibility of saying "yea" or "nay" to this, perhaps to find out afterwards that they might have obtained more information? As far as I recollect from a conversation I had with the Engineer-in-Chief regarding these caulking machines, these contractors undertook in their contract—or I shall not say it was in their contract, but the understanding was—that these machines were to caulk, I think, 36 joints a day. [MEMBER: Thirty-two.] It is obvious, if they are not doing that number, there is something wrong; and we should know the reason why. If they are not coming up to the standard, that shows there is something wrong, and that we should

know what is the reason; because surely, whatever the terms of contract are, there must be some means of rejecting it. The Government ought to be in a position to cancel the contract if the machines are not doing what it was asserted they would do. [MR. JACOBY: Hear, hear.] There being a general consensus of opinion that this caulking is not efficient, and that it is not being done cheaper than it can be done by hand labour, we ought to know more about it; and for these reasons, although I strongly hesitate on the subject, I think the question lies between taking a leap in the dark and having a select committee of inquiry. And I think an inquiry is so important, not only for the success of this scheme and the saving of money, but also in regard to the effect the result may have upon our latitude in borrowing, that we should thoroughly thresh out this matter, and know where the weak spot is; because everyone seems confident that there is something behind which we do not know. Therefore I move as an amendment:—

That this matter be referred to a select committee, with a view of getting as quickly as possible at the root of the difficulty.

MR. W. J. GEORGE (Murray): I second the amendment.

MR. J. GARDINER (Albany): It seems to me, after a perusal of this report, that if we took the general opinion of the House, it would be that those responsible officers who recommend the acceptance of this contract ought at the same time to have tendered their resignations. [MEMBERS: Hear, hear.] I never in my life read anything that more fully condemned the officers of this department than their own words; and I am sure those of us who in the past have had any responsibility in this matter, or who now feel the full responsibility of seeing this great work carried to a successful issue, are in dread that this is only the beginning of many other huge mistakes. [MR. GEORGE: Discoveries.] Well, I will say discoveries. It seems to me that this colony embarked on a great scheme on the recommendation, and pledged itself by the reputation, of one man. It was a scheme worthy in the first instance of having the best expert advice obtainable in the world, by which we might benefit. Now we are faced by a position clearly showing that the re-

sponsible men have not been fully seized of their responsibility, but have allowed minor details very materially to interfere with the carrying out of this great work. Can anything be more condemnatory than some passages of Mr. C. Y. O'Connor's remarks in these papers which have been laid on the table? He replied verbally to the questions of the Minister for Works, and subsequently he put in writing as a reason for the acceptance of Messrs. Couston and Co.'s contract, that—

They can have a freer hand than they could have by doing it departmentally, as they could employ whom they liked and discharge whom they liked.

What does that mean? Does it mean that in this work, carried out under departmental management, the responsible officers were not allowed to have the best workmen, and to see that those workmen carried out their duties faithfully and well? Then we go farther down:—

And their system of dealing with men and paying them, keeping their time, etc., would probably be simpler than is required in the Government service.

Can any greater sarcasm than that be put into print regarding the administration of a department? We go still farther down:—

Taking into consideration that they have offered to be responsible for the efficiency of the 20,000 joints which have been completed.

Surely to goodness, if we are to have responsible men who have practically pledged the credit of this country to a great scheme, surely if we are to pay those men to occupy positions, they ought to see that whatever work is done is done efficiently. [MEMBERS: Hear, hear.] That is what we are paying them for. And to bring into our minds doubts as to the efficiency of the 20,000 joints which have already been completed is simply to undermine our faith in the success of the scheme as a whole. I say that is the feeling in my mind; and I venture to say it is the feeling in the mind of every member of this House who is impressed with his responsibilities. We are told that by employing the same men under the same supervision, and by paying those men the same rate of wages and working them the same number of hours a day, if we let these would-be contractors do it by the proposed contract, then it can be

done at a saving of something like £80,000 to the State. There is mention in these papers of the old contract apparently entered into, showing an absolute lack of business capacity in the then Minister and his responsible officers. For surely, if there was any responsibility felt, there ought to have been in that contract a provision that the contractors should not be paid unless their work were efficient; and there should have been a time limit, and a proviso that we should not go on paying these men practically for all time, or for as long as they liked to take to complete this work. The one necessity of this scheme is to get it completed as quickly as possible; otherwise, I venture to say the House will have to take means for conserving water on those fields, leaving the Coolgardie Water Scheme to be constructed at some future date; for every summer we are faced with the difficulty that owing to the tardiness in the completion of this work, we have to pay an enormous sum for water; and every year we trust to the statement that the Coolgardie Water Scheme will be complete when the next summer comes. Consequently, every year we are faced with a huge loss; because time after time we have relied on the word and the advice of this responsible engineer that the scheme would be almost immediately completed. Now, as the leader of the Opposition (Mr. Nanson) said, if we are to go on at this rate, goodness knows when we shall have it completed. I am sure we all recognise the position. There is no desire to be "little" in any way. We are ready to accept what responsibility belongs to us; and the responsibility thrust upon the House is to have that work completed as quickly and economically as possible. Why, from the beginning of this work up till now, there is a rottenness apparent. We have those pipes sent out, and we find that any amateur can discover in them defects of various kinds. Surely in a work of such a magnitude the Government should have seen what their responsible officers—I am not blaming this or any other Government—but I say it was the duty of whoever occupied the ministerial bench to see that we were getting our money's worth, and that our money's worth was such that we could rely upon it from beginning to end. That is the position.

MR. GEORGE: They must rely on their officers.

MR. GARDINER: I quite understand that; but I think if we were to say now what is deep down in our hearts, we would say that those officers, on that report, should be suspended or should be asked to tender their resignations.

SEVERAL MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

MR. GARDINER: It is a scandal that public officers should send in such a report as this.

MEMBER: It cannot be done.

MR. GARDINER: Yes; it can be done. The report states that this firm employing the same men under the same conditions can do the work 30 per cent. more cheaply than it is now being done.

MR. GEORGE: I am glad the Engineer-in-Chief admits it.

MR. GARDINER: I hold that he does admit it.

MR. GEORGE: Yes; and I say I am glad he admits it.

MR. GARDINER: Hon. members must bear in mind that this may be only the first of a series of big mistakes which Mr. O'Connor will have to admit. That is the position we are faced with. We have to ask ourselves whether, presuming the Government say, "No; we will not let this firm have the contract," the firm will continue to carry on the work departmentally in the present unsatisfactory manner.

MR. GEORGE: Let us hope not.

MR. GARDINER: We may well look aghast at the prospect of a continuance of the work under the supervision of such responsible officers as this report brings to our knowledge. The amendment of the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper) has no other purpose than to serve the best interests of the country: I am quite certain of that. Before we proceed it would be wise to be fully informed whether the present contract is or is not terminable. Undoubtedly the calling of fresh tenders will mean great delay; and, therefore, the question arises how the work is to be carried on in the interim. Should it be carried on in the wasteful fashion now obtaining? Shall it go on in the haphazard fashion described by the Engineer-in-Chief, who states that a private firm will be able to do the work more cheaply and quickly because they will not be hampered with red-tape dealings with the

Government Storekeeper, but will be able to get their requirements filled promptly by private merchants? Surely it is outrageous that a gigantic public work should be carried out in the slipshod manner described by the Engineer-in-Chief himself! I am firmly convinced that the instance now brought to our notice is not the only one, but that right from the beginning to now there have been delay and delay, and waste and waste. This country is not in a position to bear a waste of hundreds of thousands of pounds in this prodigal fashion. The country is too large, and there are too many demands on the public purse with the object of allowing the masses of the people to earn their daily bread better and more easily, than that we should allow thousands to be frittered away by the incompetency of highly-paid officials. And that is the state of affairs which I think this report clearly proves to exist. It would be a wise thing if the Minister for Works asked Mr. C. Y. O'Connor to return to this country immediately—[SEVERAL MEMBERS: Hear, hear]—so that we may obtain the benefit of whatever explanation he has to offer before we finally decide the question. I consider the position which the Government have taken up, fully justified. If the work can be done more cheaply and effectively by amending the contract as suggested, then let the contract be amended; if the Government can effect a saving of £30,000, it is their bounden duty to do so. But before they accept the contract, the Government should have the matter probed to the bottom, so that the responsible officers, whoever they may be, can be called to account.

THE PREMIER (Hon. G. Leake): One word on the amendment of the member for Beverley. On behalf of the Government, I am prepared to accept the amendment. In saying so I have, however, to express the desire of the Government that the proposed select committee, having once embarked on this inquiry, should finish it and make a report. The session, as we know, is nearly at an end, and it is extremely probable that the committee may not be able to complete their investigations before the prorogation. In that event I think it will be advisable to convert the select committee into a Royal Commission—[SEVERAL MEMBERS:

Hear, hear]—and thus make sure that some competent body will deal with the whole subject. I have not one word to say in objection to the criticisms which have been levelled at the motion. Ministers are as desirous as other members to have the matter sifted to the very bottom; and so far as the Government are concerned, no obstacle of any description will be thrown in the way of either a select committee or a Royal Commission. It is the desire of the Government that any such body should have the benefit of the fullest possible information. The only appeal I make to the House is that the Minister for Works may be appointed to the committee, in order that he may assist other members with every information at his command, and also that he may have the benefit of conferring with those other members. Under such conditions the inquiry should be completed promptly.

MR. W. J. GEORGE (Murray): I have but little to say on this matter. The member for Albany (Mr. Gardiner) referred to the eminent engineer who is responsible for the Coolgardie Water Scheme. I wish to call the attention of the hon. member to a report by Mr. C. Y. O'Connor, dated 17th July, 1896. A passage in that report reads:—

I need scarcely say, therefore, that I never urged, nor do I now propose to urge, upon the Government or the country the undertaking of this work.

Mr. O'Connor states in an earlier portion of the report that it appears as though he had been urging the scheme on the Government. In the paragraph I have quoted, he makes it clear that he did not do so. His opinion on the scheme was asked, and he gave his opinion. I mention these facts because I feel sure the member for Albany, on learning them, will no longer be desirous of attacking Mr. O'Connor in this connection. But the hon. member has practically attacked the whole administration, with which Mr. O'Connor has certainly had something to do.

MR. JACOB: Many people had something to do with the administration.

MR. GEORGE: The matter is a most serious one—almost too serious for discussion; for unless this question be satisfactorily determined, not merely to the minds of hon. members but to the

minds of men who understand works of this nature, all the motions we can propose and all the regulations we can adopt will not do anything towards saving the country from a terrible loss. I therefore consider that the select committee proposed by the amendment, or better still the Royal Commission suggested by the Premier, should be appointed. I wish to remind hon. members, however, that the members of such a committee or commission ought to be chosen not necessarily from this House, but from the best men available. Where an expenditure of millions is involved, the State would do wrong to be parsimonious in obtaining the best possible advice: we should have the benefit of the best experience available. If I were making an attack on the administration in connection with the Coolgardie Water Scheme, I should want to know—and that very clearly—how it comes about that the recommendations of the committee of eminent experts which inquired into the scheme in London have been practically ignored. To my mind, there is no doubt those recommendations have been practically disregarded; and it is on that score responsibility is involved. Whoever is responsible for the casting aside of those recommendations has practically taken it on himself to accept for certain what a committee of experts considered doubtful. On the person responsible in that respect the blame must rest. With the member for Albany (Mr. Gardiner) I feel that this disclosure with regard to the caulking is only the first of many disclosures we may look forward to. I greatly fear it is but the precursor of a whole series of admissions. This is not an occasion on which to discuss the question of departmental work *versus* contract work. The suggestion of the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper), which has been accepted by the Premier, affords the readiest and best means of settling the matter. It is undoubtedly desirable that the whole subject should be fully inquired into before we make any farther arrangement with Messrs. Couston and Co. or with anyone else. For my part I feel convinced that if it were decided to call tenders for the work of caulking and laying the pipes, the figures submitted by Messrs. Couston and Co. would be bettered in the interests

of the country. The report placed before us shows, as has been truly said, a number of points against the administration of the Public Works Department. I do not think, however, that the present is the proper time to make an attack on that administration. The labours of the select committee or Royal Commission will, no doubt, embrace a thorough inquiry into the methods of the department. We must remember, farther, that the men to be judged are not here, nor represented here, and are thus without opportunity of reply to the criticisms which all of us, myself included, are perhaps too ready to pass.

MR. GARDINER: I criticised them on their own admissions.

MR. GEORGE: I could pass a good many criticisms which would, perhaps, be interesting; but I do not think it is advisable to do so now. I agree with the Premier that the committee or commission to be appointed should finish its labours and make its report. The present is an occasion on which all hon. members may well assist the Government, even though they hate them. I have no particular love for them, but I will help them on this occasion, and indeed help them farther in the matter.

MR. THOMAS: Who is trying to block inquiry?

MR. GEORGE: I do not think anyone is trying to block inquiry. I simply express the opinion that this is a time when all of us should assist the Government, in the interests of the country's welfare.

MR. J. M. HOPKINS (Boulder): I am of opinion that the present system of caulking should be continued for the time being. The appointment of a select committee will not, I think, meet the case. It is necessary that a Royal Commission be appointed straight away, consisting of the Minister for Works, as chairman, and —

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: Not as chairman.

MR. HOPKINS: Very well, then; a Royal Commission consisting of three members of this House and two of the most eminent engineering experts we can obtain.

MR. GARDINER: Inside or outside the State?

MR. HOPKINS: If we cannot obtain the engineers we want in Western Australia, let us bring them from the Eastern States. The matter is one of serious importance. From one end of the State to the other there is a feeling of anxiety lest the large amount of money already expended on the scheme should prove to be so much money wasted. I understand there is in existence some kind of contract by which Couston and Company have a sort of mortgage over the entire scheme until completed. Briefly, it is a matter of astonishment and disgust to me to find such a situation created at so a critical a period. Certainly it is a reflection on the engineering branch of the Public Works Department, that with the concurrence of the engineering officers, works should be carried out under such conditions of extravagance and delay that a private contractor can do them in a much shorter time and at 30 per cent. less cost. It leads one to believe that the engineering capacity to be found within the public service is very much lower than that to be found outside. Certainly, some of the Government engineers receive high salaries; but the state of things disclosed by the papers laid before us to-night lends point to a criticism I passed in connection with the Estimates, that the lowness of the salaries, generally speaking, paid to departmental engineers has a tendency to drive good men out of the service and to leave the Government only those whom it is not very desirable to employ. No member of this House is more anxious than myself to see the scheme completed; but still I think a board of inquiry, and preferably in the shape of a Royal Commission, is absolutely necessary. If members of the House are to be appointed to the inquiring body, they should be absolved from legislative duties for the remainder of the session, in order that they may devote the whole of their time to the inquiry and furnish a report to the Government with the greatest possible expedition.

MR. F. WALLACE (Mt. Magnet): It appears to me that the one prominent phase of the question which concerns members to-night—and I may say the whole people of the eastern goldfields—is, how can we get the water to the eastern goldfields in the quickest possible time? While having that desire

myself, I, at the same time, want to safeguard the State interests in this way. It will be no use rushing this scheme, as we are doing now, unless we are satisfied the work is being done in a proper manner. We have heard for months past questions raised as to the inefficiency of the work ; to-night we have had evidence given us by members who have obtained it from reliable authorities, that the joints already fixed are not efficient. I have been told by one man engaged at the caulking machine that he could see daylight through all the joints which he had assisted in caulking. Be that correct or otherwise, it prompts members to be careful in coming to a decision. This question has been referred to by every member of this House, and we are asked to take upon ourselves a responsibility that should be placed on the shoulders of the Engineer-in-Chief, who, in the past, has been looked upon as an officer of high qualifications. But this officer now asks the House, composed of laymen, without qualifications as engineers, to take upon ourselves the task of completing the Coolgardie Water Scheme. The information given to hon. members, in many instances from reliable sources, can scarcely be questioned when considering the qualifications of the persons giving the information. It has been told me, with reference to the pipes and the pipe-rings, that in many instances the pipes are not entrenched ; that they are merely laid on the surface of the earth and covered with ballast.

MR. MONGER: Do you take all you hear as correct ?

MR. HOPKINS: It is quite correct.

MR. WALLACE: I need only ask the member for York (Mr. Monger) to take a trip as far as Chidlow's Well, and he will see what I say is correct.

MR. JACOBY: They are all trenched as far as that.

MR. WALLACE: If we take it that the majority of pipes are trenched, then they are not laid in the trenches sufficiently deep, I am told, to resist the pulsation which will be brought about by the force of water which will be sent through the pipes from pumping station to pumping station. Members without practical experience can form some idea of the pulsation which will be caused to those pipes if they simply look at a small

pump around their home: that will give them an idea of the pressure in a large pipe such as that used in the Coolgardie Water Scheme. I believe the joint-rings are not sufficiently wide to permit of the pulsation. That has been told to me by a practical man, and when it comes from a man of some engineering knowledge, it must certainly create an impression in one's mind. I cannot help thinking that there is some cause for the rumours. And in giving my decision to-night, I must be influenced by the information which has been given to me. I am pleased to say that members are not going to take upon themselves, as a Parliament, to decide this question. It has been proposed by the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper) that a select committee be appointed to inquire into this matter; but in accordance with a remark made by the Premier, I am going to move an amendment that a Royal Commission be appointed in preference to a select committee. It is all very well to have a Royal Commission or select committee, but how many of the 50 members know sufficient to pit their contention against the contention of Mr. C. Y. O'Connor ?

MR. HOPKINS: They would sit in a judicial capacity.

MR. WALLACE: Then it is not going to be the opinions or knowledge of the committee, but the report is to be based on the evidence. I question if expert evidence can be obtained in the State.

MR. JACOBY: Oh, yes; it can.

MR. WALLACE: The Minister for Railways reminds me of an eminent engineer, Mr. Christie: probably after that, I shall be able to class myself as an eminent engineer. If expert engineers can be obtained in Australia, we should have gone to those experts instead of sending our Engineer-in-Chief home to the old country to confer with the engineers there.

MR. HOPKINS: Not necessarily: they did strange things here a while ago.

MR. WALLACE: I am of opinion that expert evidence cannot be obtained from the Eastern States.

MR. DIAMOND: What about Mais, of Adelaide ?

MR. WALLACE: If I am wrong, I shall be pleased to know that it is so, but this idea is not purely one of my own. It has been formed from information given to

me, and based on discussions which I have had with many prominent men whom we meet in this city, and who are looked upon as expert engineers. There has been a large expenditure to date, and we have to consider the question of a still larger expenditure before the completion of the work. Notwithstanding the desire to get the water to Coolgardie as quickly as possible, it is our duty to see that we have good workmanship put into this scheme, even if we have to defer the delivery of the water at Coolgardie for another year or two. Are we going to have this work constructed, and the pipe-track completed straight away, and as soon as we get the water into the pipes to find that we ought to have done so and so. It is better to go slowly and surely than to rush the scheme through in order to get the water to the other end. The Minister for Works just now replied to an interjection by the member for Albany (Mr. Gardiner) that it would have been better if the Government had made preparations for conserving water on the fields in the past, and to have allowed the scheme to go along leisurely and surely. I was going to suggest, in obtaining evidence for the Royal Commission, that instead of appealing to our local engineers, we get the evidence and knowledge of some of the highest engineering authorities in London.

MR. GEORGE: They cannot be here.

MR. WALLACE: It runs in my mind that one eminent engineer consulted at home in the early stages of the scheme was one Mr. Carruthers, and I have heard that our Mr. C. Y. O'Connor served under Mr. Carruthers, and to a certain extent Mr. Carruthers was responsible for the Engineer-in-Chief's position in this State. Are we going to appeal to Mr. Carruthers to pass an opinion on a work which has been commenced, and which has been a successful failure up to the present time—are we going to ask that gentleman, who gave us his advice five years ago, to give us his advice now?

MR. GEORGE: Are you sure he gave advice on the scheme?

MR. WALLACE: From what I recollect, the opinion given by the engineers at home was not on the success of the scheme as a financial concern, but they did say that it was possible to pump water

from here to there, and farther on. I believe there was some such statement as that, but I, as an ordinary engineer, could give the House that information.

MR. GEORGE: Don't forget that these gentlemen recommended tests.

MR. WALLACE: What the member for the Murray (Mr. George) suggests has been recommended by the member for Boulder (Mr. Hopkins) for some time past. That hon. member has suggested testing small portions of the work.

MR. GEORGE: The engineers recommended it, not the member for the Murray.

MR. WALLACE: And the member for Boulder has advocated it for some time in this House; that is, a trial of the first section of the pipe-line.

MR. GEORGE: Those gentlemen recommended it in 1896.

MR. WALLACE: I started several times to tell the House from what source evidence should be obtained, but I have been interrupted so often that I have not succeeded in my efforts. Evidence might be obtained from a society which is called the Institute of Civil Engineers of London, and from that body we could get engineers of reputation so valuable that they would not give a report on a question of this sort unless they were prepared to demonstrate to this Government that their advice could be carried out to success. The member for Albany also touched on the key-note of this question. He suggested that we should get rid of all the officers associated with this report, and that would do one really good thing for the State. I wish to move an amendment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member had better wait until the amendment which is now before the House has been dealt with.

MR. S. C. PIGOTT (West Kimberley): I do not quite fall in with the idea of a Royal Commission, because the amount of money at stake is too vast. Looking through the report from a purely business point of view, I notice first of all that for the sum of £68,264 an offer is made to practically complete the work. That offer is to be backed up by satisfactory bonds, and guarantees that the work will be carried out properly and finished to the satisfaction of the Government within a certain time. On

the other hand I see that the estimated cost of finishing the scheme, as it is being carried out now by departmental labour, is, according to the Engineer-in-Chief, £97,520. That is by an officer whom we all respect. But I do not think it can be looked upon as a firm offer, because if we consider the figures which have been given hitherto by this gentleman, and his estimate of the works to be carried out under his control, he has always been far under the amount which it has taken to complete the work.

MR. DOHERTY: That is wrong. What about the Fremantle Harbour Works?

MR. PIGOTT: For argument's sake we will take these figures as correct. What do we find? We find we are going to have this work done, if we accept the offer made to us, for £29,256 less and in three months less than we propose to do it ourselves in. The sinking fund and interest that we have to pay on this scheme amount, as the Treasurer told us, to £175,000 a year. The Engineer-in-Chief says he cannot complete this scheme under his own direction unless we give him three months longer than the contractors offer to finish it in. At that rate, provided we assume that when this work is completed it will bring in sufficient to cover cost of interest and sinking fund, that three months means another saving of £43,750. Altogether these two sums amount to £73,000. Then we go farther than that. These contractors say, "If you will give us 10 per cent. more on the amount we have asked for, we will cut the time down by another two months." So if we add another £6,826, that will make a farther saving of £23,240. Thus if we accept the offer that has been given to us, the work will be completed on 31st August, and the Government will save £95,242. We are asked, "How do we know that?" We know nothing except what has been worked out, but we cannot do better than take these figures which are before us. The offer of Couston & Co. is genuine, for it must be impossible for them to make offers of this sort unless they are prepared to carry the contract through.

MR. DOHERTY: Then why did they not carry it through when they started?

MR. PIGOTT: That has nothing to do with the question. It would be very wrong for this House to refuse an offer

for saving an amount of money so enormous as that for the sake of finding out where the fault was. The only surprise I have had in this matter was after going through the papers, to find out that the matter had been brought before the House at all. I feel certain that if the Government had accepted this offer straight away and published it in the House and adhered to it, they would have gained the approval of all sections of the community, bar one.

MR. RESIDE: Which one?

MR. PIGOTT: I cannot see why the Government delayed at all. The Premier says he has not brought the matter before the House in order to shelter himself or the Government. Why has he brought it down? There is only one reason that I can see, that is that he does not wish to alienate from himself and confers the support of the Labour party. When the Premier was speaking, I asked when it was likely that the pumps would be ready. He said the time for the completion of the pumps was the end of June. The Minister for Railways said the contractors had asked for an extension of time. That being the case, there is no reason why the pumps should not be up by the 31st August, if we allow an extension of two months; and I assert that if this contract offer be accepted, there is no reason why the water should not be flowing through the pipes by the 1st September. A good deal has been said as to what has been going on hitherto. From what I can make out I think our Engineer-in-Chief has made a very large mistake; but, in my opinion, he has condoned his error to a great extent. There is not the slightest doubt that when this work was started, Mr. O'Connor thought that by carrying it out departmentally by day labour he could do it cheaper, or as cheaply, as if it were done by contract. Now, the reports that are before us prove to us that Mr. O'Connor has changed his mind. I admire him for stating plainly that he has changed his mind. If Mr. O'Connor has been in error, and has neglected his work, there must be something wrong. Either he has been wrong in his own opinion, or the work has been neglected shamefully, seeing there has been a leakage to the extent of £30,000 on an amount of £100,000. I cannot understand where

that money goes to. It must either go to labourers who do no work, or else it goes into the pockets of people who are outside. This is a shocking state of affairs, and the more one looks into it, the more he feels that the whole thing really stinks. I do not know that if this offer be accepted we shall get the work done at the cheapest possible rate; but I do know that if the offer be accepted a sum of nearly £90,000 will be saved. I assert that the Cabinet ought to have accepted that offer and have said, "We will take this £90,000, as it is offered, and we will let the small fry go." In conclusion, I have only one thing to say. Mr. O'Connor is either right or wrong. If right, this will be the last of day labour in Government works in Western Australia.

MEMBER : No fear !

MR. PIGOTT : If Mr. O'Connor is wrong, I hope this will be the last of Mr. O'Connor.

MR. H. DAGLISH (Subiaco) : I cannot agree with the member for West Kimberley (Mr. Pigott) in his opinion that the Government should not have referred the matter to the House, because it seems to me a matter in which the Government deserve credit for consulting members before taking an important new departure. It is far better that the Government should consult members frankly beforehand than wait to be criticised afterwards. We might have found certain members sitting in Opposition criticising the Government, whatever they did, whether they adopted day work or let the work by contract, and telling them they should have done the opposite thing. I am satisfied that the last member who sat down, and who, I regret to say, fired a shot and ran away, would have been one of the first to attack the Government, no matter what course they adopted. I am prepared to commend the Government for bringing the matter before the House, but cannot agree with the motion as they have introduced it, because I do not think there has been any justification shown, up to the present, for making the important departure proposed by the Minister for Works. It is not, as the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper) would have us believe, a question of day labour *versus* contract labour. There is nothing of that sort about it, because the main element

in the contract system is that all contracts shall be the result of public tender, and this important, this essential element of fairness in any contract system is absolutely lacking in the present instance. Furthermore, there is the important point introduced of Government servants being allowed to tender for Government work. This is, indeed, a very new departure; and then again we have it proposed by these servants of the State that they shall have the use of machines which have been bought by the State; have the use of Government property for the purpose of carrying out their private contract. That again is a feature which is not common in any public contracts of any description whatever. It seems to me there has been a big and unnecessary waste of public money in this Coolgardie Water Scheme. And one important element of waste has been the purchase of a machine that was really only in an experimental stage.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS : They are prepared to take the machines back.

MR. DAGLISH : I quite understand that, but I should like to know if at full rates.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS : The letter says, "We are also prepared to take over the plant already purchased by Government, and agree to the same being deducted from the contract price."

MR. DAGLISH : Then the position is altered to this extent, that whereas an imperfect machine was sold to the Government and the Government have perfected it, the contractors are willing to take over the perfected machine at the price the Government paid for the imperfect one. In other words, the contractors are to have the benefit of all the experiments which have been made at the Government cost, and the Government have to bear the expense of all the failures incurred after the landing of this machine.

MR. GEORGE : Don't forget there is a royalty to be paid.

MR. DAGLISH : Quite so; but the royalty would not be refunded—I understand that. My particular point is that this particular machine should never have been bought by the Government until it had been rendered fit to be put on the market for ordinary commercial purposes. I should like to refer to a point alluded

to by the member for Beverley, who feels very strongly with regard to the labour question, and that was that the Government had sought nearly all the labour at this work at absurdly high rates. I do not like to hear that sort of statement made unless there be some justification for it. If there were justification, I would make use of it myself. The member for Beverley seemed to imply that if the contract system were adopted, labour would be obtained at a cheaper rate. I find the contractors say, "We are prepared to undertake the work at a lower price than it can be done at by hand caulking, and also to give a much more perfect job. We are also prepared to recognise the eight hours a day for the men, and pay at least the same rates of wages as are being paid by the Government." That really implies that a somewhat higher rate if anything might be paid, but at all events no lower rate would be paid than the Government are giving. That at once removes the contention of the member for Beverley that the Government are paying something more than a reasonable rate of wages. That is in the first letter on the question; and in a second letter, dated the 6th January, they say:—

The prices we here quote are about 30 per cent. below what the work has cost up to the present, and considering that the men's wages shall probably have to be increased as the work approaches the fields, it will readily be seen that we are offering to complete the work, not only in much shorter time, but at a considerably lower price than is possible under the present day system.

While they recognise that instead of reducing wages, it will probably be necessary to increase wages, they at the same time show that there is no justification for the implication that there has been any over-payment by the Government in regard to the daily wages of the men employed on this work. The members for Kanowna (Mr. Hastie) and Albany (Mr. Gardiner) spoke with great force regarding the management of the Public Works Department, or at all events of the Coolgardie Water Scheme; and this seems to be the crux of the whole question. Undoubtedly there is strong justification for inquiry, and I am prepared to support the amendment of the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper) to have a select committee. I should like a select com-

mittee rather than a Royal Commission, because I do not believe in members of Parliament being elected to take certain responsibilities, and then palming off their responsibilities on persons outside Parliament. I think we ought not only to recognise that we have these responsibilities on our shoulders, but that before we enter this Chamber we should feel satisfied that we are competent to fulfil our duties. What we want is not a committee of experts, but of independent men who will hear evidence and give an unbiassed finding on that evidence. However, experts should be brought in, not as judges but as witnesses; and I am quite satisfied that we can get from this House a committee competent to hear the evidence and afterwards to give an impartial finding. The member for Mount Magnet (Mr. Wallace) is like a lot of people in this State who prove the truth of the scriptural statement that "a prophet hath no honour in his own country." The hon. member does not believe that our Australian experts are worth anything; but I would point out to him that we have some very able engineers, especially in connection with our Australian Universities; we have some very capable engineers in each of the States and in New Zealand, and I think this State will find quite a number of competent men in the other States who will be fit to give reliable evidence before a select committee. I should not like to see an unnecessary slight cast on our Australian engineers. The fact that these gentlemen have come from England to make their living in our midst does not indicate that they are in any way inferior to those who have stayed at home. I know of my own knowledge that our Universities are very careful, when importing gentlemen to fill engineering or other chairs, to select absolutely the best men available, and to pay them salaries which will make it worth their while to come out. I should like to repeat what has already been said, that this report before us is practically an expression of censure on the capacity of the engineering division of the Public Works Department. I do not think it is in any sense a reflection on the ordinary men engaged on the work; but it is a reflection on the engineers, and on the supervision they

have exercised over the workmen. The same workmen would doubtless to a great extent be employed if a contractor were to take over the work; but Messrs. Couston & Co. say the supervision would be better. Now I contend there is no reason why the supervision on a Government work of this sort should not be just as good as the supervision of a private contractor.

MR. GEORGE: Except that it never is.

MR. DAGLISH: I am satisfied that it could be, if the Government engineers were imbued with a desire to do their duty, to do their best for the State just as private engineers do their best for the private contractor. I am quite satisfied the Government can get just as good men to supervise this work as can the contractor.

MR. GEORGE: But such men are cramped in their operations: that is the trouble.

MR. DAGLISH: But in this case it is proposed that the men actually in the employ of the Government shall do the work; and therefore it cannot be alleged that Messrs. Couston and Co. as private contractors would be any better than Messrs. Couston and Co. as State employees.

MR. GEORGE: They give their reasons why they should be better.

MR. DAGLISH: I find the reasons in the statement of Messrs. Couston and Finlayson on page 11 of the printed report:—

Our own personal motives in seeking to secure the work on the conditions stated in our offer are with a view to establishing the reputation of our patent caulking machines. Our patent machine is the only invention for jointing pipes known, and we feel that, with the business directly in our own hands, we could make such a reputation for the machine as would bring it into general use throughout the world.

It shall doubtless be asked why this great saving cannot be attained under the present arrangement, to which we have to reply:—First, the conditions attending contract work are such as to enable the contractor to obtain at the same rates of wages a far greater amount of work from the men employed. Second, the difficulty in obtaining stores under the present arrangements has been such as to seriously impede the progress of the work. Third, the addition and improvements we contemplate making to the machinery would enable us to carry on the work at a considerably reduced price.

MR. GEORGE: They could make those amply under Government.

MR. DAGLISH: Quite so; and they could give the better supervision under Government too, if they chose. There is no reason why the supervision in the Government service should not be equally as good as in private contracts. It is simply neglect on the top rung of the ladder; and I feel quite satisfied that if on Mr. O'Connor were placed the responsibility of carrying out this work at the price he recommends in his report, it could be carried out as efficiently as it could be done privately. I want to impress on the House a fact mentioned before, namely that Mr. O'Connor is not satisfied with doing his own work, but that he will insist on taking on work altogether outside his own particular province. For instance, the report which he makes on the 16th January concludes with this paragraph:—

While thus recommending that a contract should be let, I do not, however, recommend that it should be entered into hurriedly, and would suggest that the subject be ventilated either in Parliament and in the public Press, or amongst the principal members of Parliament, before final action is taken.

Now I think the shoemaker should stick to his last; and it should not be for any individual member of the State service to give Ministers advice on questions of policy. I do not think any public servant should say for a moment that a matter had better be ventilated in Parliament or in the Press, or that the principal members of Parliament should be consulted. I think we should require our Engineer-in-Chief to adhere to the work of his own department; and if that were done, I have no doubt that work would be better attended to than at present. We have had him previously as a financial expert, and now we have him as the guide, philosopher, and friend of the Minister for Works in regard to the course the Minister should pursue in Parliament. I cordially support the amendment of the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper), and I believe the result of a committee of inquiry will be at all events to satisfy the public mind, which is at present in a state of unrest regarding this matter. I would point out in conclusion that in respect of the 20,000 pipes already laid, of which Messrs. Couston

and Co. have offered to guarantee the efficiency if they get this contract, this State is entitled to look to Mr. C. Y. O'Connor to guarantee the efficiency of those pipes, as they have been laid directly under his control; and if any farther expenditure on them is necessary, then the State is entitled to know why it is necessary, and where the fault lies, in order that it may deal suitably with those who are responsible for that fault.

MR. D. J. DOHERTY (North Fremantle): I have little to say on this subject, and what I have to say will be definite. I think, of all the proposals which have ever been put before either the people or the Parliament of Western Australia, this proposal "takes the cake" for a colossal piece of impertinence. The question is that these engineers say they will take the anxiety from the Government; whereas they should have been doing their duty to the Government for the liberal wages paid them. Having for from nine to twelve months been receiving pay from this country for directing certain work, they wish to maintain that it is impossible under their own direction to carry out the work at a cheap rate. "But," they say, "give us a contract." What does that mean? That these men have been robbing this country; and if I were to-morrow a member of the Government, I should put the case into the hands of the Criminal Investigation Department, as a huge piece of absolute robbery, seeing that this country has suffered from the determination of these men simply to farther their own ends; and I should be very careful of these gentlemen for the future, and should go farther than this State to find out their antecedents so that I might understand their characters. It is with no uncertain voice that we should speak on this subject; because never in the history of the States of Australia has such a proposal been made by men who admit that they have been practically robbing this Government. In what other way can we take it? They say "Now that we have robbed you and got the money out of your pockets, and perfected our machines, we know exactly what to do, and under better facilities we can cheapen the work." After taking the money from the Government for perfecting their machines they are prepared to carry out

the work 30 per cent. cheaper under contract.

MR. GEORGE: What will it cost if they finish it under the present arrangement?

MR. DOHERTY: I do not mind what it would cost. If that proposition were put in my hands, and I were the Minister for Works, I should dismiss these men from the work in ten minutes.

MR. GEORGE: You could not: they have a contract.

MR. DOHERTY: I should break the contract.

MR. PIOTT: You could not do that.

MR. DOHERTY: What? There is evidence that they have been robbing this country. Surely there is equity and justice to be obtained in our courts. The country cannot be imposed on by men of this sort. If we cannot carry out the work by the people at present guiding it, it is our duty to get proper men. There seems to be an opinion that the Engineer-in-Chief is responsible for all these things. But we must know that in a great work he cannot be at every pipe joint, or at both ends of the pipe-line at once: he has a huge department to control. I say the men who are immediately and directly controlling the work are the men responsible to this House.

MR. THOMAS: Still, the Engineer-in-Chief recommends the acceptance of the contract.

MR. DOHERTY: Evidently to relieve him of certain anxiety. But we say we pay these men, and they should bear the burden of the anxiety. I do not believe much in Royal Commissions, because I think a Royal Commission would probably stop the work, and be a very heavy cost to the country; but I think a select committee might grapple with this question in the first instance.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: A committee would not have time to report to the House before prorogation.

MR. DOHERTY: The House seems to be of one opinion—that these engineers should promptly be removed from this pipe-line—I mean these men, Conston, Finlayson, and Porritt, whose names appear at the head of this report. If they cannot be removed, I say, "Put the police on to them, and remove them forcibly."

MR. GEORGE: What about compensation?

MR. DOHERTY : If a man goes into your employment, and you find out that he, by means of various little tricks of the trade, is robbing you, you bring him before a court.

MR. PIGOTT : There is nothing of that sort in this case.

MR. DOHERTY : They say that under their control, Government workmen cannot carry out this work as cheaply as under contract. Has he not the same headpiece, the same men, the same machines, and has he not the Government behind him to pay wages?

MR. GEORGE : But what about compensation? Is there no distinction between wasting and robbing?

MR. DOHERTY : There is no distinction so far as public money is concerned. These people have been wasting the public money, therefore they have been robbing the country; and if the House allows such men to continue in the State employ any longer, a grave injustice will be done to the country.

MR. GEORGE : Suspend them and hold an inquiry.

MR. DOHERTY : Suspend them! I would not have them on the works another ten minutes. These people write:—

Considerable anxiety exists both in the minds of the Government and many of the thinking public—

I agree with that statement. The anxiety at present, however, is to have these men removed from the work as quickly as possible. They also say:—

And we feel certain that, should you favourably consider our proposal, a speedy and satisfactory solution of the pipe-laying difficulty would result.

Of course! These men have been experimenting at our expense, and now the solution is to let them have a contract and make a huge profit at the country's cost. I maintain that Messrs. Couston and Co.'s offer constitutes absolutely as huge a swindle as has ever been submitted to any Parliament in Australia. It is bare-faced impudence. These men come forward and say openly, "This is our mode of swindling: please accept this contract."

MR. GEORGE : There will be a leading article about you in to-morrow's paper.

MR. DOHERTY : I do not care what the leading articles may say. My opinion

is that the country should not be shamelessly robbed, either by this firm or by any other body of men. I hope the Minister for Works will give us his views on the question whether these men shall continue in Government employ. As regards the method of inquiry, I prefer a select committee to a Royal Commission. I wish to point out again as regards Mr. C. Y. O'Connor, that although he said the work could be done, he never was very much in favour of it. When originally asked as to the practicability of the scheme he said, "Yes; I can pump water to the fields or to the sky, if you give me money enough." The scheme was foisted on Mr. O'Connor.

THE PREMIER : By whom?

MR. DOHERTY : Now, on the question of contract *versus* day labour, I know that certain people favour everything being done by contract. The effect of the contract system is to permit the contractor to sweat a certain amount of money out of, say, 600 men instead of that money going into the pockets of those 600 men. Which is better for the country? I say it is better for the community that the 600 men should have the money than that the contractor should have it. On the question generally, I fear my remarks have not been strong enough.

MR. GEORGE : They were weak, very weak.

MR. DOHERTY : True; and I hope members will bear in mind that I meant them to be strong.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS : Your arguments are weak.

MR. DOHERTY : The Minister for Works says my arguments are weak. The hon. gentleman's reasoning is that men who want to rob the country of £30,000 should be allowed to do so. Is that good reasoning? That is the position the Minister takes up.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS : Not at all.

MR. GARDINER : Do not set up a man of straw just to knock him down again.

MR. DOHERTY : I have pleasure in supporting the amendment proposing the appointment of a select committee.

MR. W. D. J. HNSON (Kalgoorlie) : I desire to support the amendment in a few words. With the member for North Fremantle (Mr. Doherty), I think this

one of the most glaring and impudent proposals that has ever come before an Australian Parliament. Mr. C. Y. O'Connor by his report practically says, "Under my management Messrs. Couston and Co. cannot carry out the work satisfactorily; but remove them from my control and they can do it very satisfactorily." Mr. O'Connor thus practically admits his incompetency to manage this great work. Couston and Company in effect say to the Government, "We have so far made this work as costly as possible; we have been experimenting at the public expense; we have been perfecting our machine and we have ascertained the cheapest method of doing the work. Now that we have satisfied our minds as to the most economical methods of laying and caulking the pipes, we want a contract, under which we will do the work at a lower cost and pocket the difference." I quite agree with the member for North Fremantle that Messrs. Couston and Co. should not be allowed to remain in Government employ for one minute longer. The Minister for Works ought to have dismissed them as soon as he received this report, which makes it plain that Couston and Co. have been robbing the country for some considerable time.

MR. GARDINER: Don't be too rough!

MR. JOHNSON: I am not too rough. When the Minister for Works saw that these men were robbing the country, it was his duty to discharge them from the public service. I agree with the opinion expressed that a select committee can make the necessary inquiry. Very little evidence, I think, will be wanted to prove that the work has been and is being badly managed. Farther, a select committee can easily get proper advice as to the means of carrying out the work with greater economy, and with greater expedition as well. This important question is occupying the minds of the people of Western Australia. Public opinion, I think, is generally in favour of having done with Messrs. Couston & Co. and their machines and allowing the work to be done by hand-caulking. I am prepared to maintain that if this State had never seen Messrs. Couston & Co. or their machines, the Coolgardie Water Scheme would have been farther advanced and the workmanship put into it would

have been better. [MR. GEORGE: Hear, hear.] If the butt-gang system, which is employed in similar cases in New Zealand, had been introduced into this pipe caulking, the pipe line would have been a good deal nearer Coolgardie than it is to-day.

MR. A. E. THOMAS (Dundas): I oppose the amendment because, as I said in speaking before the adjournment, it is high time a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the whole administration of the Works Department. I do not know that in this House we shall find men competent to decide the question. Only one of our members is a mechanical engineer; and yet it is proposed to appoint from amongst ourselves a select committee to try this important issue. Necessarily, four out of five of its members would not be competent to pass judgment in the matter at all.

MR. DOHERTY: There is Mt. Magnet (Mr. Wallace), too, you know.

MR. THOMAS: I favour the appointment of a Royal Commission on which the only member of Parliament would be the Minister for Works.

MR. R. HASTIE (Kanowna): I desire to say a few words on the amendment. Since I spoke to-night a great deal has been uttered concerning the Engineer-in-Chief. One or two members have pointed out that Mr. O'Connor did not, at the initiation of the scheme, declare his belief in it. That may be; but over and over again since the work was started he has been publicly and semi-publicly complimented on the scheme. It has been said in his presence that he believed in the scheme from the beginning; and, so far as I know, there has not been heard one syllable of contradiction from him. He has not denied his belief in the scheme; and he has, at any rate, acted in such a way as to create an impression in the minds of the people that he was favourable to the scheme. But the Engineer-in-Chief alone cannot be held responsible for the work. There is another highly-paid officer, Mr. Hodgson, who is the engineer in charge of the work; and I wonder why that gentleman has not received more attention from members of the House. Mr. Hodgson is, I believe, generally responsible for the carrying out of the

scheme. Any remarks passed concerning the Engineer-in-Chief in this connection should, therefore, be shared by Mr. Hodgson. The member for West Kimberley (Mr. Pigott) has said that the first necessity we should look to is the adoption of a plan which will enable the scheme to be completed at the earliest possible moment. The hon. member pointed out that Messrs. Couston and Co. offered to complete the work for £30,000 less than it would cost on the present basis, and, moreover, to complete it much earlier than is possible under departmental administration. I wish to remind the hon. member, however, that there are others prepared to do the work by hand-caulking more cheaply and more quickly even than Messrs. Couston and Co. offer to do it. Various members of the House can support me in that statement. If final offers to the effect stated have not been made, then I can assure the Minister for Works that those offers will be made at an early date.

MR. THOMAS: The Government are tied up, and cannot accept any offer but Messrs. Couston's.

MR. HASTIE: I refer to the remark made by the member for West Kimberley. However, even if we do not adopt the system of hand-caulking, but retain the system of machine caulking, we have still another way out of the difficulty. The Government have bought the machine: the patent is the property of the Government, and so also are the improvements which have been made in the machine not solely by members of the firm of Couston and Co., but also by various employees of the Public Works Department.

MR. DOHERTY: At the Government expense: that is the point.

MR. HASTIE: And at the Government expense. If the Government, therefore, take over the machine, they will find plenty of officials ready to keep it going. These officials, with the gangs of men now employed on the line, are capable of carrying out the work more cheaply and quickly than Messrs. Couston and Co. themselves. Unfortunately, however, there is a bugbear in the way, as we are reminded by the member for Dundas (Mr. Thomas), that apparently the Government have entered into a contract with Mr. Couston by which they guarantee him employment in supervising the work

until it is finished. I do not know what the terms of the contract are; but I suppose the Government have not been so foolish as to sign a contract without some saving clause. Perhaps there is a clause, such as is usual in these contracts, that the work is to be carried out satisfactorily. If the contract contains such a clause, surely to goodness that clause can be applied now; and in that case the Government can adopt other measures to carry out the work of laying and caulking. The speeches I have heard in this House to-night convince me that it would be an act of folly on the part of the Government to accept Messrs. Couston and Co.'s contract on anything like the terms offered. In speaking on the substantive motion before dinner, I omitted one point. It has been understood on all hands that the responsible authorities are not sure that the 20,000 pipes already laid are in good condition. It is within my knowledge that within the last fortnight one or two gangs of men well up the line have received instructions to hold themselves in readiness to return farther down the line, in order that they may overlook and perfect certain parts already laid. This fact goes to show that the Government engineers in charge of the line are by no means satisfied with the pipes that have been laid. Whether a Royal Commission or a select committee take hold of this question, I hope the body to be appointed will take the fullest evidence and bring up a report at the earliest possible moment.

MR. J. RESIDE (Hannans): I share the opinion expressed by the members for North Fremantle and Kalgoorlie, on the report laid on the table to-night. I consider that report amounts to an absolute confession of incompetency on the part of the departmental officers. I am ready to pledge myself to it that if such a report had been received by the head of a private firm, the gentleman making it would be immediately sacked and the proprietor would take the earliest and best means of finding out a thing or two. The time has come when the Government should take steps to secure the effective supervision of public works. Messrs. Couston and Co. practically admit that they are not dealing fairly and honestly by the Government. They are not giving the country a fair

deal. In fact they are making money out of the Government which they are not entitled to. They say that if they are relieved of red-tapeism they can do the work much cheaper. How they are going to do the work much cheaper, I do not know. The member for Kalgoorlie and myself have had some experience of Messrs. Couston and Finlayson and the way in which they have endeavoured to carry out work cheaper, was by reducing the wages of the working men by 10s. a week.

MR. TAYLOR: They did it too, did they not?

MR. RESIDE: They did so. As far as the Government are concerned, in submitting this matter to the House they have done the right thing. It is only right that an important question such as this should receive the approval or otherwise of this House. As to the question of day labour *versus* contract labour, I believe the principle of day labour is a good one, but unless you have good supervision it is a bad principle. So far as the day labour system has been carried out in Western Australia lately, it is doing all it can to damn the system and there are a number of people who believe in the contract system who would like to see it damned. The only day labour system which can be a success is to have the work carried out similarly to a private contract and I do not see why it should not be done. I believe a select committee will be eligible and competent to come to a decision. The member for Mt. Margaret (Mr. Taylor) has referred to the question of obtaining expert evidence. The chief duty of a select committee will be to endeavour to find out the best means of completing with despatch the first section of the pipe line from Mundaring Dam to Cunderdin and having a practical test made. A practical test of that section would be more valuable than all the expert evidence which we could get throughout Australia. In reference to the remark that there is not sufficient talent in the House to form a select committee, I differ from the member for Dundas (Mr. Thomas), because I consider there are members in the House competent to form this committee. Only the other day I heard the member for Dundas say he was an engineer.

MR. THOMAS: Oh, no!

MR. RESIDE: It is not altogether a question of mechanical engineering.

MR. DOHERTY: He is an underground engineer.

MR. RESIDE: Well, the hon. member called himself a mining engineer, and that is next door to it. It is not altogether a question of mechanical engineering, but a question of men of common sense who have had some experience in carrying out public works contracts, and I think there is sufficient talent in this House to deal with this question, and to lay the result before Parliament in a report. In reference to the question of hand or machine caulking, the member for Kanowna (Mr. Hastie) said that offers no doubt will be made to do the work cheaper by hand labour than by machine. That says very little for the machine. That is all I can say on that matter. I do not wish to say much more on this question, but I favour the appointment of a select committee because I do not believe the House has sufficient evidence before it to-night to decide this question. I favour a select committee being appointed to obtain farther evidence before Parliament should come to any definite decision as to an alteration being made in the carrying out of this work. I think the committee should go to work and complete the job as soon as possible.

MR. S. C. PIGOTT (West Kimberley): I wish to make an explanation. When the member for Kanowna (Mr. Hastie) was speaking, he charged me with giving no reasons why I thought the Government should accept the offer without first calling for tenders for the work. I gave the hon. member sufficient credit for having read the papers before the House, and I also gave him credit for really understanding the question. I am very sorry I have wronged the hon. member.

MR. HASTIE: What is the hon. member talking about?

MR. J. EWING (South-West Mining): It is quite unnecessary for me to go over the ground which hon. members have traversed, but I feel it incumbent upon me to support the remarks which have fallen from the member for North Fremantle (Mr. Doherty) and others. I feel that we are called on to decide a very important question, and the expressions which have fallen from many members I indorse. I feel it is the first duty of the

Government, whether there is a contract or not, to take seriously into consideration the advisability of breaking the contract at once, if there is one. It seems to me this firm of Couston, Finlayson, and Company have practically "got at" the Government, and are making money at the Government expense. We know that the Government have shown a great deal of pluck in the past—they know the facts of the case and we do not, and there may be some difficulty in the way of breaking that contract now—I feel sure the Government will take the necessary steps if they think these people are robbing the country, and take the contract out of the hands of Messrs. Couston and Company. So far as day labour is concerned, if these gentlemen were removed from the service of the country, I am sure there are competent men in the service who could conduct the supervision of the work by day labour and carry it out successfully. I am not saying that I am particularly in favour of day labour as against the contract system, but in this matter the Engineer-in-Chief in his earlier reports was in favour of day labour, but practically to-night he tells us that we should not have this work carried out by day labour. Possibly that is on account of these particular men taking charge of this work and playing the game of perhaps getting at the Government, as I believe they are. I rise to support the appointment of a select committee in preference to a Royal Commission, but I think the scope of the committee might be widened and the reticulation schemes come under their observation. I join issue with the member for Dundas (Mr. Thomas) when he says there are not five members in the House who can take evidence and arrive at an intelligent decision on this matter. I feel it is a question of evidence, and certainly there are five members who can go clearly into this matter and submit a report for hon. members. The Premier pointed out that one great reason why a select committee should be appointed was that the House would prorogue at an early date.

MR. DOWERTY: It could be turned into a Royal Commission then.

MR. EWING: In that case I would not oppose a Royal Commission, but I wish to save expense and prevent exorbitant salaries being paid to men who sit on Royal Commissions, and I think the

members of the House should take the responsibility of the whole thing. I would also like to suggest that when this report is ready, that the Government should call the House together, if only for a week, and allow members to take the full responsibility, so that it should not be placed on the shoulders of the Government. The members of the Government, or rather the Premier, has told the House that he has been opposed to the scheme all along, but I accept his assurance that he is going to bring it to a successful issue at an early date. I think the Ministers should have a short session in six weeks or two months' time, so that members could once and for all settle this question of the Coolgardie Water Scheme. In connection with the contractors, it seems to me a terrible thing that they should be drawing £25 a week and at the same time placing before members of the House a proposition which seems absolutely ridiculous and should not be tolerated for one moment. I trust the select committee will be appointed and that we shall have their report at an early date; also that Parliament will be called together so as to decide what shall be done.

MR. G. TAYLOR (Mt. Margaret): I rise to oppose the motion of the Minister for Works, to hand over this contract for the completion of the Coolgardie Water Scheme to the firm of Couston and Company; for I think this is the greatest fraud that any salaried servants of any English-speaking country ever asked their masters to carry out. In the first instance I am led to believe the Government advanced Messrs. Couston and Co. a sum of money to do all the preliminary work in connection with the construction of their machine. The Government then bought the patent, and I may say the country does not know what the perfection of that patent has cost the country. I have been told, I do not know how truthfully, that repeatedly this machine has been in the Government workshops, and that the charge for the work done has been made to other departments, but not to the perfection of the machine. For that reason there is no possible way of finding out what this patent has cost this country.

MR. DOWERTY: It must have been the Forrest Government who did that.

MR. TAYLOR: No; it has been going on for a long time, and right up to the present; it has been going on ever since I have been in Parliament, for I have been told repeatedly about it. The Premier said we were not actually called on to give a contract to Messrs. Couston, Finlayson, and Porritt: it was only a variation of a contract, recommended by Mr. C. Y. O'Connor, the Engineer-in-Chief.

THE PREMIER: Already in existence.

MR. TAYLOR: Already in existence. If there are any covenants between these people, then the work is not being carried out by departmental labour. I think the public have been under the impression that Messrs. Couston, Finlayson, and Company were the servants of the State supervising this work, but now we are told by the Premier that these people have a contract. They seem to have something behind them, which we do not know exactly. They have a hold on the Government by an agreement in existence: they have been very guarded right through in carrying out this work. The Premier to-night said no pumps were erected to date, or that only two had been erected at the pumping stations. It has been generally understood that no pumps at all were erected.

THE PREMIER: The pumps are not erected yet.

MR. TAYLOR: The object of Messrs. Couston, Finlayson, and Co. was to see that the pumps were not erected as long as possible, because they were deeply sensible that their work would not stand, and that immediately the water was pumped into the pipes and a test was made leakages would appear. I said in this Chamber three or four months ago—

THE PREMIER: I did not say that.

MR. TAYLOR: No; nobody expected you to say that—no fear! I said in this Chamber I had been told on good authority that one could poke a stick through holes in the pipes. The member for Mt. Magnet (Mr. Wallace) has also told the House that he had heard one could see daylight through the pipes. If one can see daylight through the pipes, sticks can be pushed into the holes. The member for Dundas (Mr. Thomas), who has some mechanical knowledge, has also told the House that sticks

have been pushed into holes in the pipes. You can imagine that, if you poke sticks through, water may follow. There is no doubt the idea has been not to have these pumping stations. The present Minister for Railways promised in this House, in reply to a question I asked, that there would be a test made in three weeks from that day, and I think I am perfectly within the limits when I say that was four months ago, and I have never heard of that test. Hon. gentlemen occupying the Ministerial benches are responsible to this country for the expenditure of money. We are the guardians of the public purse, and whatever gentlemen are on the Treasury benches, they are responsible. I do not deprecate the idea of the Premier in regard to the statement he made that he was taking Parliament practically into his confidence, or that he wanted an expression from Parliament as to whether this contract should be accepted or whether they should continue to ask for this inquiry and probe the thing to the bottom, to allow Parliament to see all that was possible in connection with this scheme. The Minister for Works, who is now Minister for Railways, did not carry out his promise. He remained longer than three weeks as Minister for Works and that test was not made. Why are hon. gentlemen not straightforward in this matter? Why could they not say, "We cannot make the tests; we have no pumps to pump water into the pipes"? Then we would have known where we were standing, but hon. gentlemen allowed the House and the country to believe that the only reason the test was not made was that the pipe-caulking was not completed, and that as soon as a section was completed it would be tested. There was no idea that the Public Works Department or the Engineer-in-Chief were afraid to put the water into these pipes. The Minister gave us no idea that sort of thing existed in their minds. But the Premier made it perfectly clear to-night, when he said "You have no pumps, and without pumps you cannot pump water." The Premier was perfectly correct when he said that if you were going to pump water the first thing you should have looked to was to get the power to pump. He said, "It is not being done now, and it will not be

done till June." So that this country is not to know until June whether this pipe-caulking is a success.

MR. DOHERTY: And these men are allowed to go on their way.

MR. TAYLOR: And these men are allowed to go on their way, as the member for North Fremantle has put it, still plundering the country; and I say they should at once be dismissed. I have to work for my living, and if I fail to give satisfaction I expect to be dismissed, or, as it is commonly expressed in my circle, "get the sack." If the case is as clear as this report says in relation to Couston and Co.—and their own letters say it, and also the Engineer-in-Chief—I assert the whole lot deserve dismissal.

MEMBER: The men?

MR. TAYLOR: I do not know about the men. The men were under the most exacting employer in Western Australia. Couston and Finlayson, when private contractors, were supposed by the workmen of this country to be the most exacting employers in this State. As contractors on the goldfields they were the first to reduce wages five or six years ago, as the member for Hanuans (Mr. Reside) put it, during the erection of the post-office at Kalgoorlie. Whatever portion they have controlled it has been to the loss of the State. It is a good thing for this House to know to-night that there are some men in charge of some departments of that pipe-track who are doing justice to the State. We know that Finlayson and Couston have not done so: we are deeply sensible of the fact. As the member for East Fremantle (Hon. J. J. Holmes) put it, they have been lying low. They have been practically robbing this country while they were perfecting their own machine, and now they have got it they want to get a contract off the Government. They tell the Government they can save them 30 per cent., and if they complete this job three months sooner by contract than by day labour they will save the country £60,000. That means a great saving to the State. If these men, with the power they had to do this pipe-caulking, have failed to do it, they no longer enjoy the confidence of the Government of the day and the Works Department, and when they have lost that confidence they should be dismissed. That is the position I take up. The

caulking is only a very insignificant piece. I will read a few lines—it will not take long—that appeared in the *Morning Herald* last week, and members can take them for what they are worth. They are supposed to be from a practical engineer. The writer says:—

In a letter from Messrs. Couston and Co., to your contemporary on Monday, they allege that they have had 450 men employed on the jointing works, and that by hand-caulking two men can do four joints per day.

That is the part I want you to take notice of—

That is at the rate of 900 joints for 450 hand-caulkers per day, or five miles of pipes. It, however, has taken their machines, with 450 men, eleven months to do 70 miles of jointing; but if these men had been hand-caulking without these machines they would have done that 70 miles in 14 days; consequently, according to the statement of Couston and Co., the use of these machines (which have cost us £19,000), with 450 men, takes 22 times as long to do 70 miles as these 450 men would have done it in without them.

That is all about it, as far as any importance is concerned. I do not know whether there is any truth in this statement or not. I am not going to vouch for the accuracy of it.

THE PREMIER: Is that a "leader"?

MR. TAYLOR: It is a portion of a letter signed by a well-known gentleman, W. B. Christie, a man with wonderful mechanical knowledge, I believe, but I do not know. I have read controversies in the papers this last twelve months from the pen of the same man. There is no doubt he has shown the weaknesses of the whole of this system: he has shown from the very inception that it was a fraud. Ministers of the Crown would not take any notice of this man.

MR. DOHERTY: Which Government?

MR. TAYLOR: The present Government. They would not take any notice of a letter signed by this man because he was not a reliable authority; but I say that this man has, for the last seven months to my own knowledge, shown the position we are in to-day: he has not been one iota wrong throughout. He said these men would never complete the scheme under the present system, and it has been shown to-night on their own word, and on the word of the Engineer-in-Chief, that they cannot do it. Whatever the faults of this man Christie may

be, the position he has taken up in reference to this water scheme has, up to date, apparently been solid. He has never altered one iota, but has written column after column pointing out that the water scheme was going to be a failure under this caulking system. I am sure there is no member of the House who has not practically acknowledged—if he has not done it in so many words—that it has been a complete failure. If it has not been so, I wonder why we have been called upon to discuss the advisability of handing over the matter as a contract, or to have a select committee or royal commission to inquire into it. When I have spoken to members of this House with reference to these statements of Mr. Christie in the *Morning Herald*, extending over a period of four or five months, I have been met with the reply, "Oh! take no notice of Christie: he knows nothing about it." But it is a most remarkable fact that we are landed in the position to-night that he told us five or six months ago we should be landed in. Therefore, I think it is necessary to at least take some notice of what he says. He speaks of a letter written by Couston and Co., and he points out in his argument that two men can do four joints a day by hand-caulking, and if they had 450 men 70 miles would be completed in 14 days. I do not think there is any necessity for this House to go into hysterics as to whether the whole success of this scheme depends on the caulking machine or not. I am credibly informed that the patent of this machine cost the State £13,000. Is that right?

MEMBER: Nineteen thousand.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Five thousand pounds for the patent rights, and the rest for the machine.

MR. TAYLOR: Nineteen thousand in all, I suppose? Nineteen thousand pounds have been spent of the people's money for a machine which is practically no good, according to the reasoning here, that is, whereas two men can hand-caulk four joints a day, with the machine it took 450 men 11 months to do 70 miles. So I know there is a great desire on the part of the Government to keep on with this machine.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Are you certain that is all that is done?

MR. TAYLOR: It is a comparison. It is in a letter written in answer to one of Couston's, when it dawned on his imagination that they would have front enough to write a letter to the public, asking the Government to let them have a contract.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: On whose authority do you make the statement?

MR. TAYLOR: On Christie's, according to this letter. Couston says in a letter that they have done 70 miles. He says that, in a controversy between Couston and Christie; and I am quoting Christie, and making a comparative statement. Couston says that two men can do four joints a day; so how many joints can 450 men do? Christie says they can do 900, or five miles; and if they do five miles a day, how long will it take to do 70 miles? It will take 14 days. It has taken 11 months practically to do that amount of work, according to Christie. If more than 70 miles has been done, of course the difference is not so great. This is what I should like to draw the attention of the House to, that in regard to what is done we have no assurance that it is a success. Couston and Company themselves say, "We will undertake to put that in order." The State has spent this money, and what have we got for it? Everything we read in connection with this—these papers laid on the table containing letters and suggestions from Couston and Co., and also the advice of our Engineer-in-Chief to the Government of the day to give over this contract—goes to show, in regard to the caulking that is supposed to be complete, that there is no certainty about its success, and that he will undertake to see it put in order. Considering the good salaries these people have been receiving, and the fashion in which they admit they have been doing the work, if the facts do not warrant their dismissal, I do not know what will. I hope the Minister for Works will not shelter himself behind the Public Service Act in respect of this question. I am commencing to get tired of people sheltering themselves behind this and that; and I think it is time that gentlemen who grace the Treasury bench should tell the House straightforwardly what is their position. If it is within their power to dismiss these men, Couston

and Co., I say the Government should dismiss them. There is no doubt in my mind that they have merited dismissal. Moreover, I believe if this were a discussion in a private firm, if we were the partners in the firm, we should not be considering their dismissal; we should probably be considering a case in the Supreme Court, as the result of which they would be sent down to Fremantle for three or five years. But no. We sit here and smile because we are wasting the public money. [MR. DOHERTY: Hear, hear.] Thousands of people in this State are ill able to lose money spent like this; and farther, this system is a blow at an old-established practice in this State, namely, departmental work, a system which I do not thank the democratic element in this House for introducing, because it was introduced in the days of the old conservative Government. Yet now, when democracy is supposed to be at its zenith, we are called on to go back to the old days of contract work, to sweat people by means of contractors, while yet we are riding on the waves of democracy! That is what I object to. I have no faith in a select committee; I can easily see at one glance that if a select committee be appointed the House will prorogue, and the committee's work will cease. The Premier says we can make the committee into a Royal commission; and if there be a Royal commission, I hope it will probe this question to the bottom. I am perfectly satisfied that there are certain things in connection with this water scheme that have been in existence for a long time, and that will not bear the light of day; I hope whatever committee or commission be appointed will have the straightforward honesty of purpose to make the whole thing clear and to let the light of day shine upon it; and I am satisfied the principle of departmental work will not suffer. In connection with these caulking machines there has been a huge swindle from start to finish. Now the inventors wish to say that they cannot do the work because they have not got it under contract; and according to the Premier's own statement to-night it is partially under contract. I hope whatever form of inquiry be adopted, the fullest investigation will be made, and finished once and for all.

MR. W. M. PURKISS (Perth): I must admit that I view this question to a large extent as "through a glass, darkly." I am also prepared to admit that in the papers before the House there is a great deal of what is humiliating; that the attitude taken by Messrs. Couston and Co., so far as is revealed by the papers, is open to grave criticism. Beyond that I do not go. But from a perusal of the whole of the papers, and from what has been in many respects a very able debate on both sides of the House to-night, I may say that at the present moment the question presents itself to my mind as revealing something like a bottomless bog. However, I think we can bottom that bog; and I throw out a suggestion which I think ought to form a true solution of the present difficulty. We all know that an ounce of practice is worth a pound of theory. I am informed the pipes are laid and jointed between the dam at Mundaring and Cunderdin, a distance of 85 miles; and I am also credibly informed by those who know that the pumping-plant which is in course of erection at Cunderdin will be ready to perform its proper function during the first week in March.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: No; April.

MR. PURKISS: In April we shall have the pumping-plant at Cunderdin. Very well: in April we shall have the pipe-line to Cunderdin laid and jointed. Why not therefore pause? When I say "pause," I also say, "In the meantime, let all those who have control of this work under the existing régime be enjoined to go on with due diligence, and let us wait for this object-lesson which we shall have in the first week in April.

MR. DOHERTY: And what will you do with Couston and Co. in the meantime?

MR. PURKISS: Go on.

MR. DOHERTY: Let them go on?

MR. PURKISS: Yes. Let the work proceed.

MR. DOHERTY: Then this House will not be doing its duty.

MR. PURKISS: Yes; because, as far as they are concerned, they cannot do any more mischief. They cannot lead the country into any more expense in the section between the dam and Cunderdin than has already been incurred, because

the pipes there are already laid and jointed. To test them, we need only await the start of the pumping-gear at Cunderdin. As soon as that plant is ready to perform its operations, you will have an object lesson worth all your select committees and Royal Commissions.

MR. DOHERTY: Then you practically stop the work?

MR. PURKISS: Not at all.

MR. DOHERTY: You must.

MR. PURKISS: Then, even if we stop the work, would it not be better? Will you not stop the work if a Royal Commission be appointed?

MR. FICOTT: No.

MR. JACOBY: Let it go on.

MR. HOPKINS: Certainly; keep it going.

MR. DOHERTY: Shift those engineers now in charge: that is all that is necessary.

MR. PURKISS: The Royal Commission will not shift them.

MR. DOHERTY: This House can pass a resolution to shift them.

MR. PURKISS: The question of their conduct and the conduct of all responsible officers above them can remain in abeyance until the report of the Royal Commission comes in. I say, wait. We shall have an object lesson in the 85 miles of pipes tested. We shall see whether this caulking-machine has done its work thoroughly. We shall see whether the pump at Cunderdin is able to do its work; and then you can go out with experts, and call in additional experts, if necessary, and if it turns out everything is satisfactory as far as that 85 miles is concerned, then we shall have a lesson more valuable than could be given us by any select committee or Royal Commission.

MR. HOPKINS: There is much to inquire into besides the caulking.

MR. DOHERTY: The proposal would delay the water scheme by three months.

MR. PURKISS: I do not say delay the work.

MR. DOHERTY: You must, if you stop the work. We should get rid of the engineers.

MR. PURKISS: The Royal Commission would delay the work.

MR. DOHERTY: No; it would suspend those engineers.

MR. PURKISS: My proposal would enable us to get to the bottom of this bog.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. W. Kingsmill): In my opinion, the paramount object which at present should occupy the attention of the House and the Government—and I think I can answer for the Government—is the best way to get the water scheme finished in the quickest possible time. [MEMBER: Dismiss Couston.] Of course that is one suggestion, and I have no doubt in the opinion of the member for Mt. Margaret (Mr. Taylor) a very valuable suggestion; but I should like to point out that such action in itself would have no great effect on the progress of the scheme.

MR. DOHERTY: Could you not put an honest man in charge to do the work, after you dismiss the dishonest servant?

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I think the hon. member interjecting is rather excited with regard to this question. The dismissal of any officer without the adoption of other means does not mean the completion of the water scheme.

MR. DOHERTY: It does, if you have honest men to do the work.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: That is another thesis. The hon. member is now proposing to employ other means. I presume it is just with the idea of finding out the best possible method of completing the work that the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper) has moved, as an amendment to this motion by the Minister for Works, that a select committee be appointed; and I think that from the members of this House surely five men could be chosen who could be trusted to approach the subject fairly and with ability, and to advise the Government as to the best way to carry out the work. Perhaps I am taking a somewhat anxious view of this in my present capacity; because I should like to inform members that it is a matter of very vital importance to the department over which I now preside. I hope, whatever steps be taken, no steps will be taken which may in any way delay the progress of the work. Every month during which that work remains unfinished means a cost in interest and sinking fund of something like £14,500. Then, again, if this fine weather continue and we get no more rain on the fields, the Railway Depart-

ment will be put to enormous expense. That is another question. Much has been said about having a public test; and the member for Mt. Margaret (Mr. Taylor), who wade an able, eloquent, and most impassioned speech on this subject, evidently thought the reason why this test—which I undoubtedly admit was promised by me shortly before I had the misfortune to be forced from the honourable position I then occupied—was not made, was that the pumps were not in position. Now I should like to disabuse his mind of that idea. What was proposed to be done was to gravitate water from the dam at Cunderdin into the length of pipe which was finished on this side of Cunderdin, and then to conduct a test exactly similar to the ordinary hydraulic test of a boiler. Unfortunately, it was found we could not spare the water from the Cunderdin dam. Steps were then taken to caulk the line of pipes at Chidlow's Well; and shortly after that began, which was some three or four weeks after the promise had been made by me in the House, the abandoning of which was due to the fact that we had not sufficient water—I ceased to take official interest in the proceedings. But if the hon. member had been so anxious, I have no doubt he might have used that abundant energy of which he has given such evidence this evening in placing the subject as boldly and as forcibly as only he could place it, before my successor.

MR. TAYLOR: I had no time to see him.

MR. DOHERTY: Who was your successor? I forget now.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The member for Mt. Margaret had time to do that.

MR. TAYLOR: To do what?

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: To place this matter before my successor.

MR. TAYLOR: He was not five minutes in office.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I should like to point out that a good deal of work done by the hon. member is done outside this Chamber.

MR. TAYLOR: If your successor had remained in office long enough, I should have tested the question whether your successor was as big a dodger as other Ministers.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Another point concerning which I should

like to disabuse the hon. member's mind is as to the responsibility for the scheme. A great many members have said the Engineer-in-Chief is responsible for it. I wish to give that a most emphatic denial. The only part of the scheme for which the Engineer-in-Chief is responsible is the technical part. With regard to the policy of adopting the scheme at all—and that is a feature of the case I had very much pleasure in assisting several other members now on this side of the House to a right view of—the policy originated, I believe, with the late Premier, the Right Hon. Sir John Forrest.

MR. JACOBY: We are talking about the administration, and not about the scheme itself.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I am simply endeavouring to combat an assertion, made several times in this House, that the Engineer-in-Chief is responsible for the scheme.

SEVERAL MEMBERS: Oh, no!

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I certainly gathered that from what hon. members said, and I have listened to the debate with a good deal of interest.

MR. HASTIE: It would never have been initiated without the concurrence of the Engineer-in-Chief.

MR. JACOBY: Is he responsible for the administration?

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: If it comes to that, what about the administration?

MR. JACOBY: That is what we are discussing.

MR. DOHERTY: Who is Minister for Works now?

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The Minister for Works is now prepared to assent to the proposition made by the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper) that, the state of things being more or less unsatisfactory, inquiries should at once be made with a view to putting matters on a proper basis; and that is the object which this House has in view, I think, in practically accepting the amendment. Another aspect of the case was placed before us by the member for Perth (Mr. Purkiss); but I am sorry to say that while his arguments were admirable, his premises were not altogether sound. Unfortunately the pipe track is not complete between Mundaring and Cunderdin. It is a great pity it is not; although,

even if it were complete, it would depend on the erection of the pumps before pumping could be carried on. Of necessity, however, this part of the scheme is, I will not say the last to be completed, but one with regard to which there are difficulties in the way of completion. It so happens that close to Northam, from approximately Clackline to Northam, it is necessary, on account of the greater pressure to be combated there, to use pipes of thicker plate and stronger make, and also correspondingly stronger joints, than in other portions of the scheme. These pipes being fewer in number than those of the weaker class, and the difference in the plate necessitating some alteration in the manufacture, the stronger and thicker pipes were manufactured last. It is also a fact that from Clackline to Northam there is a deviation from the railway line, so that these pipes were not only manufactured last but had to be carted a certain distance to their destination. Consequently the gap between Cunderdin and Merredin is now one of the greatest on the whole pipe line. I give in my strongest adherence to any proposition which would be likely to effect the speedy completion of the scheme. So far as the Railway Department are concerned, it is a matter of paramount importance to them to have water along the railway line as quickly as ever it can be obtained. I think it is quite possible—indeed, I hope—that with the portions of the scheme already laid and jointed the water will be at Cunderdin about the end of March, and at Merredin by the end of April.

MR. GARDINER: What would that save the Railway Department?

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It is very hard to say.

MR. DOHERTY: Seventy thousand pounds a year.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I feel inclined to have the question more fully inquired into. I do not think investigation will cause delay, and I hope, therefore, that the amendment will be carried.

MR. DOHERTY: Can I now move a farther amendment, sir, to the effect that the House is of opinion that Messrs. Finlayson, Couston, and Porritt should be immediately dismissed from the public service?

THE SPEAKER: That would not be an amendment to the present proposal.

Question (that the words proposed to be struck be struck out) put, and passed.

Question (that the words proposed to be inserted be inserted) put:

THE PREMIER: I thought hon. members wanted a Royal Commission.

MR. HOPKINS: I propose to move an amendment to that effect now.

THE SPEAKER: This is the time to move such amendment.

MR. DOHERTY: What about the amendment I wanted to move?

MR. GARDINER: What is the use of condemning these men first and then having a trial afterwards?

MR. HOPKINS: I wish to move as a farther amendment that a Royal Commission be appointed.

MR. HASTIE: Supposing a select committee be appointed, can the select committee be turned into a Royal Commission at the end of the session?

THE SPEAKER: Yes. A select committee cannot sit after the end of the session.

MR. HASTIE: Will that select committee have power to call expert witnesses?

THE SPEAKER: Certainly.

MR. HOPKINS: I am convinced that the best course would be to appoint a Royal Commission straight away. Three members of this House, with the assistance of two expert engineers obtained either in Western Australia or from the adjoining States, could deal with the whole question. I should like to test the feeling of the House on that point.

THE PREMIER: I have to point out to the hon. member that the House does not appoint a Royal Commission; the Government appoint Royal Commissions. If the House decides to appoint a select committee, that select committee will be able to start work immediately. It can go a certain distance and get through formal work; and when the House rises—and it must rise before the select committee completes its work—the Government will include the members of the select committee in a Royal Commission, to which, if necessary, other persons will be added.

MR. HOPKINS: Should not those other persons be added before the inquiry is entered on?

SEVERAL MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

THE PREMIER: The Government might arrange to appoint a select-committee and a Royal Commission simultaneously. There is no trouble about that. I will promise the House—

MR. HOPKINS: Will you appoint an engineer to assist?

THE PREMIER: Oh, don't ask me whom I will appoint.

MR. HOPKINS: I did not intend to ask that.

THE PREMIER: I promise the House that there shall be full inquiry into the matter, and that I will confer with the members of the select-committee to ascertain who should be appointed to assist them.

MR. DOHERTY: In the meantime, what do you intend to do with the contractors? That is what many members want to know.

THE PREMIER: We have to find out, first of all, whether the contractors have broken their contract.

MR. HOPKINS: Since the proposal of the Premier meets with the approval of members, I shall not move my amendment.

Question passed.

Motion as amended thus agreed to.

Ballot taken and committee appointed, consisting of Mr. Daglish, Mr. George, Mr. Rason, Mr. Nanson, also Mr. Harper as mover; with power to call for persons and papers and to sit during any adjournment of the House; to report this day fortnight.

MOTION—LAND GRANT TO TRADES AND LABOUR COUNCIL, TO DISAPPROVE.

Debate resumed from the 16th October, on the motion by Mr. C. Harper, relating to land granted to the Trades and Labour Council, and affirming "That this House refuses to sanction the proposed transfer, and condemns the principle of land grants for purposes of this nature without the consent of Parliament."

MR. R. HASTIE (Kanowna): The meaning of this motion practically is that the House should disagree with the granting of a piece of land for a trades hall at Fremantle. This grant consists of three-quarters of an acre of ground, situated in Fremantle, and I understand that the bodies concerned, about 12

months ago, tried to get a piece of ground, and after all the vacant blocks had been looked up, this was found to be the only available piece of land, and the then Forrest Government offered to the trades hall people this block, which was accepted. After that, the foundation-stone was laid by Sir John Forrest. It has been pointed out by the mover (Mr. Harper) that this is too valuable a block to give away; but I understand there was practically no choice in the matter, because no other block was available. The member for Beverley has also raised the objection that in giving such a valuable block to one body, it was a certainty that other trades associations would put in a claim for blocks of land, and it was very fairly pointed out by that hon. member that it would be absolutely impossible for the Government to agree to that, because there is not sufficient public land to go round. But the member for Beverley seems to misunderstand the intention and the position of this matter. This land is intended, not for one body, but for all the trades in Fremantle, and it is a rule in almost every part of this country to give one block, and that block is called the trades hall site, or, if not a trades hall site, it is understood to be for the use of all the trades people within the district. So far as this block is concerned, I have not yet heard that the purpose for which the land was granted would not be carried out, until the opposite idea was suggested by the member for Beverley. This block of land is intended for all trades associations within the Fremantle district. The member for Beverley did not like this idea, because it was practically giving a grant of the public estate to one class. I recollect there was an objection interjected that blocks of land are given to agricultural societies, but the hon. member for Beverley answered that objection by saying that agricultural societies are not a class, inasmuch as all people in the neighbourhood are eligible to become members. Exactly the same thing obtains with reference to the trades hall in Fremantle. There are some exclusive trades who allow only those people working at particular industries to join, but there are others such as the Australian Workers' Association which are open to all. In any case it can hardly be said to

be a class grant, because the trades hall would be available to at least 80 to 85 per cent. of the people in Fremantle. Besides, the question appears to me to be simply this. The ground was granted for that purpose by the then Government of the day; and while I do not say the Government of the day were justified in doing this any more than doing any other thing they did, yet they did seriously enter into this affair. They gave over this ground for the particular purpose; and as it has been the object of every member of the present Government and everyone in this House to carry out the arrangements made by previous Governments, therefore I submit that this also should be carried out. I believe it is the intention of the mover and of some others to suggest that this ground could easily be cut into two. It is not in the power of the Government to hand over at any moment another portion. It is said sufficient ground could be given for a trades hall out of the original portion that was given; but I have made inquiries on that subject, and I find that supposing a portion of the ground were handed over, it would give them a frontage of only a little more than 20 feet for the erection of a building. Members will see that this is impracticable. Besides, the piece is a very small one; it is wedge-shaped, and will be of comparatively little commercial value. To give only part of the block would tend to spoil the block for a trades hall, and the portion left would not be of much use. I shall not say anything farther on the matter, because there are various members from Fremantle in the House at the present time who are conversant with the whole case. They also know that this land was given openly by the last Government, and I believe they are all prepared to advise us to carry out this engagement that has previously been entered into. I shall only say this in conclusion: I have been assured by those who will get the land that it is not a grant to any exclusive body whatever, but it will be for the use of all trades and all unions and associations in Fremantle, and it will be in the power of the Government in drawing up this lease to make sure that this object is carried out.

MR. J. J. HIGHAM (Fremantle): This is a matter in which I have taken

considerable interest, and I have been to some extent instrumental in inducing the Government to concede this gift to the trades and labour people and the different friendly societies of Fremantle. The gift may appear to some members a somewhat extravagant one, but after considerable attention had been devoted to the matter, and after the Surveyor General had visited Fremantle and gone over the various sites that might be made available, this has been found to be the only site that might be given for the purpose. To cut up the site, as now proposed, would be absurd. It would nullify the object of the original gift. The intention is to build a trades and friendly societies hall, to erect several offices connected with some 16 or 17 associations, and to build some shops on the basement that will recoup these associations for the very heavy expenditure they will be compelled to incur. A question has been raised as to the Government title to this land, and it is said there is some little difficulty because the Government in the early days of the colony did not properly carry out the transfer of this bit of land. As far as that point is concerned, I do not think there need be any difficulty whatever. My own recollection goes back nearly 40 years, and I know the Government have been in undisputed possession of the land for that period. I hold a letter here which I have shown to several members, in which it is stated that in the opinion of a very old Customs House officer the Government have been in possession of that land for 65 years; and notwithstanding the fact that they may not have proper transfers or proper conveyances, as they would have been in those days, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the Government are in undisputed possession of all that land.

MEMBER: What is the value?

MR. HIGHAM: £6,000, I should say.

THE PREMIER: £7,000.

MR. HIGHAM: Apart from the question of value, if you come down to the main fact, it is this. These several blocks of land were given to these trade and labour and friendly societies. The Premier of the colony came down and laid the foundation-stones for a series of buildings they proposed to erect. Subsequently he attended a banquet where the gift of this land was confirmed,

and there cannot be the slightest doubt as to the promise of the Ministry in power that this land was about to be given for this purpose. I cannot see that any subsequent Cabinet can withdraw from the obligations laid upon them by a previous Ministry. There can be no question that, extravagant as the gift may seem to some members, it is going to be a very valuable one to the various municipalities connected with Fremantle. I am satisfied that the present Administration cannot withdraw from the obligations laid upon them by a previous Government.

MR. A. J. DIAMOND (South Fremantle): I cannot conceive that the Legislative Assembly of Western Australia should pass a motion which would virtually be dishonouring the bills of the Forrest Government.

MR. HOPKINS: The foundation-stone.

MR. DIAMOND: This land was promised in good faith. A member of the Government who promised it laid the foundation-stone. Plans are prepared, the societies are ready to start building at any time, and I think it would be a shame if the House were to pass this motion. In fact, I would ask the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper) to think better of it and withdraw it. With reference to the value of this land, I believe in some official documents the value has been put at £7,500, but I say that is simply ludicrous. The position is a bad one for business purposes.

MEMBERS: Oh, no!

MR. DIAMOND: Business is removing to the northern side of the town, in a different direction—the member for North Fremantle (Mr. Doherty) will bear me out in saying the business part of the town is moving towards the river. At the time when the sea jetty was the important part of the town, the particular portion of land may have been of great value, but I think, and not only think, but know, that the values of land in that particular portion of the town are decreasing. This particular portion of land is irregularly shaped, and if you attempt to cut it up and give a portion to the trades hall people and reserve another portion, neither portion will be of any value to anybody. But the main point is this—and I do not think any member of the House will gainsay it—that a pledge has been made by a former

Ministry, that pledge has been confirmed by the then Premier laying the foundation stone of the proposed building, it was again confirmed at a banquet given in Fremantle, and in my hearing it was confirmed by Sir John Forrest on his late visit to this State. I think a solemn pledge and promise has been entered into, and I certainly hope the House will not vote for this motion.

MR. D. J. DOHERTY (North Fremantle): Being somewhat connected with Fremantle, I should like to enter my protest against the motion. The mover can scarcely understand the importance to a body like the Trades and Labour Council of a site of this sort, because if the land is to be of advantage to them, it will in the future, from an educational standpoint, be of benefit to the rising artisans of Fremantle. You must remember that within the boundaries of this building they will give a certain class of technical education. We shall have libraries and reading rooms, and there will be facilities for intercourse between members of different trades, which will naturally improve things. It is all the better for us to consider it in this light, that so long as we have a number of men meeting as tradesmen in a particular hall for their mutual improvement, we remove them in a certain way from obstacles which may interfere with their welfare in future, their manhood and usefulness. So we have to consider it not only from the point of there being a trades hall, but from the fact of there being a hall at which education will be given to the rising artisans of Fremantle and the surrounding districts. As to the value of the site, I do not question it at all. I say it is a very desirable site, but the case deserves a valuable site. The position is a very good one for the hall. Surely this great democratic Government, which swept over the country with a flood of democracy, the Leake Government, cannot repudiate the democratic idea of assisting the working men of this State. They have got into power by the vote of the working men, and surely they will not now refuse to come to the assistance of these very working men. Now we want to hear what they say on this subject. Though the working people, or the great majority of them, supported the Government, yet Ministers seek to repudiate this promise!

MR. JOHNSON : The motion comes from your (Opposition) side.

MR. DOHERTY : When you have been here long enough, you will know—

THE SPEAKER : The hon. member must address the Chair.

MR. DOHERTY : When those (Labour) members have been here long enough, they will understand that the bombshells thrown into this House at the instance of the Government are frequently thrown, in the first place, from the Opposition side.

MR. JOHNSON : Do the Government make the bombs ?

MR. DOHERTY : They generally do. But on this question, the Government will be obliged to state definitely to-night what are their intentions. I shall have pleasure in voting against the motion.

MR. F. McDONALD (Cockburn Sound) : As one of the Fremantle members, I should like to say a few words. I was present when the foundation-stone of this hall was laid with great ceremony by a former Premier, Sir John Forrest. I know this block of land; and I am afraid I shall some day come to the Government with a request for a block of land for some other society in Fremantle. I can quite understand why this block should have been offered to the trades and friendly societies of the Port; but I can hardly agree with the last speaker when he says that the commercial value of this block is decreasing, or that property in that neighbourhood is decreasing in value; because I think the hon. member, during business hours, would hardly bear that out.

MR. DOHERTY : He merely stated that trade was going to the other end of the town.

MR. DIAMOND : So it is.

MR. McDONALD : I understand there is about three-quarters of an acre in that block. I know for a fact that the present Government have not enough land at Fremantle for the erection of an office for their shipping-master. I shall vote against the motion, but I would go thus far. I think a strip of that valuable land at the corner of the Esplanade and Collie street, Fremantle, of say 40 to 50 feet, should be quite sufficient for a magnificent trades hall. The block abuts on three streets. We heard a lot of a transaction in which Messrs. Dalgety and Co.

got a block of land. I am quite agreeable that the trade unions should get a block of land for a trades hall. But at the present moment the Government have practically not a foot of land whereon to erect a building in Fremantle; and I think the trade societies would be satisfied if the Government were prepared at once to hand them over, say, that strip of land bounded on three sides by the Esplanade, Collie street, and Packerham street respectively.

HON. G. THROSELLE (Northam) : This was a most generous and a most important gift to what I believe to be a most important society or association. I have no doubt that Sir John Forrest, who presented the land to this association, had the very best motive in so doing. Whatever opinion we may have regarding such a gift of land, still out of respect for one who has done so much for this State, we surely cannot withhold our consent to the transfer. The fact that Sir John Forrest was invited to lay the foundation stone of that hall shows that the trade societies acted wisely, and in their own interests. If the society be mad, there is certainly a method in their madness. However, I would invite members, in all kindness, to shut down the debate on the matter, and to recognise that this was a generous gift from a generous man to an important society on the eve of his departure from the State. I confess that it put this association in a most unique position. I believe the value of the land at the least is £5,000 to-day; and the gift placed the society in the position of being able to erect its hall and to obtain an advance to the best advantage. Possibly Fremantle representatives have already told the House that the association numbers something like 2,000 members; and if I am rightly informed, the hall or halls to be erected are for the use of all classes of labour associations. The importance of Fremantle cannot be gainsaid, and I venture to say the hall itself will be worthy of the port and worthy of the man who presented the site. If my private judgment were now to be appealed to, I should be bound to say that the gift appears to me unnecessarily large. On the other hand, I do not wish to shirk responsibility. Loyalty to my old chief prevents any farther expression of my opinion on

the matter. I say again, with all respect for the present Government, that they will do a graceful act to a man who is absent, and a graceful and generous act, too, to this important association, by allowing the matter to pass, clinching the bargain, and making a legal gift of the land to the association. I would urge it upon the Premier not to let the report go forth that the late Premier, Sir John Forrest, who has done so much for this State, and publicly laid the foundation stone of this hall, has since been stultified by having his gift withdrawn. If an error of judgment has been committed, let us remember it is an error of judgment on the part of one who has a very large heart and very great claims on our consideration and forbearance, if consideration and forbearance be necessary. Hon. members can recognise my position. If the motion go to a division, I shall support the action of Sir John Forrest in bestowing this land upon the association.

THE PREMIER (Hon. G. Leake): The member for North Fremantle (Mr. Doherty) says that in the interests of democracy this land should be given, and because the Government pose as a democratic Government.

MR. DOHERTY: I said "pose."

THE PREMIER: Of course the hon. member does not know the first principles of democracy, or he would know perfectly well that giving away the lands of the State is not one of its principles. [Mr. HARPER: Hear, hear.] When we give away the lands of the State, not for public purposes but for quasi-private purposes, there is still less democracy about that. But the hon. member, I know, lives in Fremantle. I wish the House to remember that the grant was promised about December, 1900; that a general election was then pending, and took place in April. I shall say no more on that point. On the 3rd October, 1900, the following letter was written by the Under Secretary of the Premier's Department—of course by direction of Sir John Forrest, as Premier—the member for Northam being then Commissioner of Crown Lands:—

I have the honour, by direction, to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th ultimo, requesting Government aid towards the erection of a trades hall at Fremantle, and in reply to state that the Right Hon. the

Premier is informed that there is no block of Crown land available which would suit your committee. I am directed to add that the Premier regrets that he could not recommend the alienation of the old court-house as desired, and that the question of granting money for trades halls is an important one, which will have to receive consideration from Parliament. So far, only one small grant has been promised, and before any further promises are made, the whole question will require careful attention. I suppose careful attention was given to it; because I find that on the 19th December, 1900, there is a minute in Sir John Forrest's handwriting, signed by him—apparently a Cabinet minute:—

Ministers advise that the whole of this land be granted to the Trades and Labour Council; the term to be 999 years; the material to be the property of the Crown, and to be removed as required. The quarters of officers now on the land not to be disturbed for one year. Subject to this, the other portions of land to be given immediately. Under Secretary Premier's Department ask Lands Department to reply accordingly, and wire to Mr. Higham. On the 24th September, 1901, some farther question seems to have arisen—I suppose as to the delay in issuing the grant; and the lands purchase officer, who was asked for a valuation, writes as follows:—

Herewith please find my valuation of Fremantle Town Lots 94, 118, 119, and the adjoining reserve, facing Marine terrace, Collie street, and Pakenham street. The land has a frontage of 145ft. 6in. to Pakenham street, 102ft. to Collie street, 199ft. to Marine terrace, and 38ft. 6in. to Henry street, by a through depth on the north side from Henry street to Pakenham street of 241ft. Bearing in mind that land in Henry street is worth £50 a foot, and in Pakenham street £30 a foot, and that this land is surrounded on three sides by streets, I value the whole block at £6,500, at which price there would be little trouble at present in obtaining a purchaser. The buildings as they stand are worth £1,000, making a total of £7,500 for land and improvements. The land is enclosed by a stone wall, which, from its appearance, has been erected many years.

MR. DOHERTY: He does not value the stone wall, I notice.

MR. HIGHAM: What about the depth?

THE PREMIER: Oh, there is any amount of depth.

MR. DOHERTY: Who is the valuator?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Stronach, the Government land valuator. If this land were being resumed by the Government for any purpose, I venture to say the price would be doubled. There is no getting away from the fact that the land is of

great value. I am prepared to admit there has been a promise by the late Government to make a grant of this land to the societies.

MR. HIGHAM: Of the whole block?

THE PREMIER: Yes; of the whole block. The matter was brought under my attention soon after I came into office. I was informed that the promise had been made, and that there was a difficulty about the title. It was farther shown to me in the correspondence that the Government of the day had promised to bring in a Bill to cure the defects in title. At the moment I did not realise what the land was; but being satisfied the promise had been given, I told the gentlemen who waited on me that if a Bill to cure the defects in the title was all they wanted, they should have it. I knew that the title must be in the Crown, and that there could be no difficulty, therefore, in passing a Bill to confirm the title. Later on, however, fuller particulars of this grant were brought to my knowledge. Farther, the Government were, as hon. members know, on the track, so to speak, of these irregular grants; and it turned out ultimately that this would be an irregular grant. The promise was one which the Premier and the then Commissioner of Crown Lands had no legal right to make. It was made, however. I feel it my duty to place these facts before the House. Having avowed my opinion—in which opinion I believe my colleagues agree with me—that these grants of land, if illegal, should not be given effect to, I consider it only right that we as a Government should express an opinion on the proposal. Only a few weeks ago the Government actually took steps in the Supreme Court to revoke a grant of land which, in some respects, is analogous to this one. It was a case of a free grant of land by way of compensation. The Supreme Court held that such grants are not within the power of Parliament.

MR. HOPKINS: Not within the power of Parliament?

THE PREMIER: Not within the power of the Minister, I should say. Of course, Parliament can do it by statute. Parliament can do anything.

MR. DOHERTY: You refuse to carry out the promise of the previous Ministry?

THE PREMIER: If some hon. members want to make a fuss about this, I am ready for them.

MR. DOHERTY: We want to show you up in your proper light.

THE PREMIER: If the hon. member wants to make an electioneering speech, this is an admirable opportunity. Some hon. members need these opportunities, and make a practice of taking advantage of them directly they arise. If we find, then, that we have sought the aid of the Supreme Court in avoiding a promise of a similar nature, how can we consistently grant this land to the Fremantle societies without introducing a Bill into Parliament for the purpose? I declare that this is one of the most valuable pieces of land left to the Government in Fremantle. I do not care what any hon. member says to the contrary. I know the locality, I know the property, and I know the nature of the buildings put up during the past few years in the locality.

MR. HIGHAM: Nothing has been built there for 30 years.

THE PREMIER: What about the warehouses close by?

MR. HIGHAM: There are none close by.

THE PREMIER: There are some not far off.

MR. DOHERTY: The land is valuable enough.

THE PREMIER: It is no use arguing that the site is not valuable; because, if it were not, these people would not want it so badly.

MR. HIGHAM: But you were talking about the buildings, and I say nothing has been built there for 30 years.

THE PREMIER: This promise was made in good faith; and the people to whom it was made have acted on it to a certain extent. They have incurred some expense, and have gone so far, I believe, as to lay the foundation stone of the building which they propose to erect. They went a step farther than that, and asked Sir John Forrest to lay the stone and thus confirm the promise. In the circumstances, I am prepared to recommend Parliament to make a grant of land to these societies in the locality in question; but I am not prepared to recommend that the societies should have more land than is sufficient for the purpose of erecting their hall. A grant of the block promised will be in the

nature of an endowment, which is foreign, I say positively, to the principles of the Land Act and the general land policy of the country. I would much prefer to see another course taken; namely, that a site sufficient for the purposes of their building be granted to these people, and that the House vote a sum of money by way of compensation for the value of the land not granted. That would be fair; and I venture to say that if we go before arbitrators and value the land under the circumstances, we shall find that £7,500 is not the figure at which we shall get out of this bargain of the old Government. I do not want to deprive the societies of the privilege which has been promised to them; but, at the same time, I am anxious that the Crown should not part with its land in any coastal towns, and particularly in the port of Fremantle. I do not want to steal a march on the societies; and I repeat that I am prepared to recommend Parliament to make a grant of sufficient land to construct the hall on. The title to that land will be made absolutely clear, if necessary by statute. I am prepared, farther, to recommend a money grant in lieu of the land not transferred.

MR. HIGHAM: In lieu of the difference?

THE PREMIER: Yes. I would go to that extent, because I would rather part with the value of the land in money than part with the land itself. I say nothing can be fairer than my proposal.

MR. NANSON: Do I understand that the Government propose to grant a new site?

THE PREMIER: No; a portion of the present site. If, however, the Government have another piece of land which the societies prefer, I am prepared to consider the advisability of granting a new site. If the societies desire particularly to erect their buildings on the site where the foundation-stone is laid, the Government will make an exception in this case and bring in a Bill to justify the grant and confirm the title; and, in addition, I am prepared to recommend this House to vote a sum of money as stated. But I want to affirm the principle that farther land grants are illegal. Having once affirmed that free land

grants are illegal, I cannot consistently recommend this House to make such a grant as is proposed. That is the position I find matters in. The papers are before hon. members. Of course, I have quoted only two short memoranda; but these have a very important bearing on the question at issue. I do not think we should violate a principle we have affirmed. We should not be doing our duty if we made free grants of land of such value as this and in such an important situation.

MR. J. M. HOPKINS (Boulder): I would like to congratulate the Trades and Labour Council of Fremantle on their remarkable business aptitude. When the title was not forthcoming they at once induced the Premier to lay the foundation-stone of their building on this land; which was the best way to secure the property. I think the O'Leary case mentioned by the Premier was hardly a fair comparison with this case. The land was given to Mr. O'Leary in conjunction with two or three other land-grabbers on the eastern goldfields, while in the Fremantle case it was an endowment to an association. I agree with the Premier it is time that this trafficking in land should be put a stop to, because it is manifestly absurd to say the Premier would have placed the value of the land on the Estimates as a grant to the association. If an association is to be permitted to go to the Ministry of the day and ask for £20,000, and to be told "I cannot give you £20,000, but if you like to pick a block of land in Hay street of the same value you may do so," it shows the necessity of amending the Land Act. This matter has gone so far that I feel it is almost advisable to complete the transaction and let the Trades and Labour Council have a portion of the land. The proposition made by the Premier is fair and reasonable in view of the stand the Government have taken in the matter of surrenders, and very likely the members of the Trades and Labour Council when they have that proposition before them will consider the proposal eminently satisfactory.

MR. T. F. QUINLAN (Toodyay): I am inclined to fall in with the view expressed by the Premier, and in doing so I feel we are under a moral obligation to these people to grant them a piece of

land sufficient for their purpose; also I think the Premier's suggestion is a very admirable one. I think three-quarters of an acre of land in the central part of Fremantle, which is so valuable, is too much to give away, but in the circumstances I feel I am justified in supporting the proposal of the Premier in making some provision as well as giving a sufficient quantity of land for the purpose of building a hall. To give away three-quarters of an acre of such valuable land is certainly going beyond what I think is the duty of any Government, no matter who or what they are. When the debate on the Perth commonage question came up some time ago the member for Subiaco (Mr. Daglish) was especially strong in his remarks in regard to the granting of the land, and he opposed the grant most strenuously, whereas the country are pledged to give this endowment, and it has been in the possession of the Perth Council for 20 years. I mention this by the way to show how some members change their opinions frequently in this House, and, although the member I have referred to has not spoken, I take it for granted that he is of the same mind as those who are concerned in relation to this hall. The member for Kanowna (Mr. Hastie) referred to there being only 20 feet frontage, but he admitted there were three-quarters of an acre. Therefore I can hardly understand how the three frontages would be of that length. I trust the expression of opinion by the Premier will meet with the satisfaction of the House, that he will give sufficient land for the building of a hall and monetary assistance, but not to the amount of £6,000.

MR. A. E. THOMAS (Dundas): I cannot help saying since this motion has been spoken to from the Labour benches, and since we have heard remarks from one member of that bench as to a rotten and corrupt Ministry, that if the same grant of land had been for the purpose of erecting a hall for an employers' association or a chamber of mines we should have had the whole of the members on the Labour bench rising to condemn such rotten and corrupt practices on the part of the Government.

MR. C. HARPER (in reply as mover); I think the Premier has arrived at a just conclusion. After the promise made,

these people are entitled to something; but I really cannot understand the position taken up by some members who are supporting this proposal that it requires three-quarters of an acre to erect a trades hall on. I think the Labour members are damaging their case by making such a claim. I was going to make some remarks similar to those which were made by the member for Dundas (Mr. Thomas). If this had been a grant to an industrial firm even on good terms to the country, that might have been styled a most corrupt proceeding; but as it happens to be for an industrial purpose, for a class—because there is no getting away from it they wish to make money out of it—

MR. DIAMOND: They do not.

MR. HARPER: They propose to erect a lot of shops, and I do not suppose they are going to allow the occupants to rent them for nothing.

MR. DIAMOND: Not for the benefit of private members of the association.

MR. HARPER: I do not say that.

MR. HIGHAM: They have to find the money to build the shops.

MR. HARPER: That is not the purpose for which the Government should grant land. For members to come here and favour this proposal, and then condemn similar proposals, puts them in an unhappy position. The position is this. An association may go behind the scenes and get a promise of a piece of land which they know they would not get if it were brought up in the House. I say it is a most destructive position for the Legislature of a country to establish. It is not pure administration. There are many men in the House who were sent here to see what they could do to evolve pure administration; but if that kind of proceeding be carried out, there will be no purity of administration; therefore it is quite right and proper that this matter should be brought up in the House and condemned for all future time. I hope every member will realise that this is a proceeding which should never have been committed; in fact, Sir John Forrest condemned it himself, because he said no money should be granted without a vote of the House, and then he gave away land of the value of £6,000. I cannot see the difference. Those members who support this matter do not conduce to the

high honour which they ought to maintain in the House.

MR. HIGHAM: May I rise to a point of order. If this debate is continued, the Fremantle members will not be able to catch their train.

THE SPEAKER: I do not see what that has to do with it.

MR. HARPER: It will do the Fremantle members good to be kept here. Sometimes we have had to sit here till midnight, and this matter has been postponed on three separate occasions out of consideration to the Fremantle members. If they do not wish to wait they can go, and the House can finish the business in their absence, as we have done in relation to many other matters. I cannot quite support what I understood to be a promise given by the Premier, that he was prepared to give a portion of this land and the value of the balance. I do not think it would be right at all.

THE PREMIER: I said a money grant. I do not think I spoke about the land.

MR. HARPER: I am pleased to hear the hon. gentleman say so. I cannot see what is required more than ample space for the building of this hall and for any necessary little offices.

THE PREMIER: I certainly would give them a substantial grant.

MR. HARPER: I have no objection to that, but I do not think it would be right to give them a grant of land worth £1,000, and £5,000 in money. If I understand the hon. gentleman not to mean that, I am certainly quite agreeable that a sufficient portion of land should be given for this building, and I have no objection to a grant of money also being given, but I protest against this system of giving the country's land behind Parliament. If grants are to be made, they should be made by Parliament.

THE PREMIER: Would the hon. member withdraw his motion, and then we can perhaps fix it up and bring the matter down again to-morrow in another form, on the Supplementary Estimates?

MR. HARPER: If I withdrew this, I should be withdrawing the condemnation of a principle. That is what I object to. It might be said then that the House did not agree to the condemnation of the principle. I say I want to condemn the principle.

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

Ayes ...	13
Noes ...	11

Majority for ... 2

Ayes.	Noes.
Mr. Ewing	Mr. Daglish
Mr. Gregory	Mr. Diamond
Mr. Harper	Mr. Hastie
Mr. Illingworth	Mr. Higham
Mr. Jacoby	Mr. Holman
Mr. Leake	Mr. Hopkins
Mr. Monger	Mr. Johnson
Mr. Nanson	Mr. Reid
Mr. Phillips	Mr. Reside
Mr. Quinlan	Mr. Taylor
Mr. Rason	Mr. Doherty (Teller).
Mr. Thomas	
Mr. Wallace (Teller).	

Question thus passed.

ADJOURNMENT.

The House adjourned at 11-28 o'clock, until the next day.

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 4th February, 1902.

Papers Presented—Motion: Midland Railway Inquiry, Conditions before Purchase (negatived)—Motion: Public Works, to Inquire as to System—Leave of Absence—Judge's Pension Act Amendment Bill, first reading—Motion: Coolgardie Water Scheme, to Expedite and Test (resumed)—Fourth Judge Bill, Recommittal, reported—Gaols Act Amendment Bill, in Committee, reported—Kalgoorlie Tramways Act Amendment Bill, first reading—Criminal Code Bill, in Committee, Schedule 4 to end—Early Closing Bill, in Committee, Clauses 9 to 13, progress—Adjournment.

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

PRAYERS.

PAPERS PRESENTED.

By HON. A. JAMESON: 1, Conservation of jarrah forests in Western Australia by use of sawn telegraph poles—Copy of Correspondence between the Western Australian and the Commonwealth