

my opinion about the action of the Legislative Council in the past, because that is the main reason why I occupy a seat in this Chamber at the present time.

HON. J. M. DREW (Central Province): As this is the first occasion I have had the honour of addressing the House, I hope both the President and the members will show me every indulgence. It appears to me, the question we are called on to consider is not whether it is advisable for this colony to enter federation or whether it would be injudicious to do so. If that were the subject of debate I should certainly proclaim myself as opposed to federation under the Commonwealth Bill, because I consider the measure bristles with dangers to the progress and prosperity of the colony. We are, however, called on to debate no such question. What we have to discuss is whether we shall allow the people of this colony to exercise the franchise on this question, or whether we shall attempt to rob them of their undoubted birthright. The electors on the roll, I may say, are only a portion of the people of the colony.

HON. C. SOMMERS: A small portion.

HON. J. M. DREW: A very small portion. There are about 30,000 names on the roll, a great many of which appear on the rolls for the different districts, and it is my firm conviction that, in consequence of plural voting, not more than 25,000 people are really represented on the roll. The adult male and female population of the country is about 90,000, and I fail to see how we can justify any attempt to deprive 65,000 adult persons of the right of expressing their opinion on the question of federation. There are special reasons why we should not adopt the course which has been adopted in the other colonies. In this colony we have an Electoral Act which would seem to have been devised specially to prevent people from getting on the roll, and to remove the names of persons already on the roll.

HON. C. SOMMERS: You are not far wrong.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Which Electoral Act?

HON. J. M. DREW: The old Electoral Act. There are thousands of people, not only in the mining districts, but in the agricultural districts, who are not on the roll, and there are hundreds in the Geraldton district who have never been

on the roll, and never will be, because it takes an expert lawyer to fill in the form of application in accordance with the Act or, at any rate, it takes a person with special knowledge to perform that duty. Any little informality causes a claim to be rejected, and the result is that a great number of people are disfranchised, and if the Commonwealth Bill goes to the people, will not have an opportunity of recording a vote. It is my conviction that federation under this measure would be a serious disadvantage to Western Australia; but I may be wrong, and anyhow I am not going to pit my opinion against the opinions of others who claim to represent some 90,000 persons in the colony, and who may be able to form a better judgment on the question than I individually. Some people say we should refuse to consult the people in the matter; but to say that is to argue either that the people are deficient in intelligence, or that they are dishonest—that they are political conspirators bent on ruining the colony, and while entitled to the franchise are not to exercise it. I cannot conceive any reason or pretext to justify such an unwarrantable calumny on the people of this colony. The people may approve of the Bill if it be remitted to them, and the result, as I said before, may be disastrous but far better our material interest should suffer than we should deal a blow at political freedom. We can only strive to deprive these people of their rights we could not succeed for any length of time. This House, if it attempted to restrict the liberties of the people in dealing with this question, would soon pave the way to its own inglorious extinction. I very much regret that the Government have not made provision to have the Bill remitted, not to the electors alone, but to every man and woman who is 21 years of age, is a British subject and has resided in the colony for six months.

HON. W. MALEY (South-East): I am in favour of federation and of the Commonwealth Bill being remitted to the people, because I look on the latter as peculiarly a people's measure. I remember some 10 years ago I attended a conference on federation in the Town Hall, Melbourne, as a representative of the Australian Natives' Association in the

colony. On that occasion we, the Young Australian Party, drafted a Bill, and that Bill has practically been adopted as the Commonwealth Constitution of Australia. That was the first popular convention on federation, and it has been my duty and my pleasure to watch the progress of the measure, though it has not been my privilege until now to take any further part in its discussion. I may say I am returned here by the property-owners of the district I represent. I was supported in a peculiarly strong and forcible manner by the largest property-owners in the district, gentlemen who possess, perhaps, the largest area of freehold land in the colony; and these gentlemen are not at all afraid of taxation, or that their property will be dissipated or lost, nor are they afraid of any of the contingencies such as have been pointed out as bogies by those who opposed the principle of federation. I do not consider this the proper stage to discuss the question of federation fully. I should like, of course, to see the Bill go to the people, and when I say to the people I mean to the adult population of the colony. At the present time, under the new Act, there is no one practically on the roll. The new Act is in force, and yet it is not in force, and if there were an election to-morrow the old roll would be the one practically in use. Some method will have to be adopted, as already suggested by Mr. Haynes, to overcome this difficulty, and I am positive that when the Bill does go to the people it will be accepted as the salvation of this colony. Some gentlemen, with perhaps some show of reason, if not with sound reason, hold that agriculture and all industries appertaining to the cultivation of the soil will be killed outright by federation. I have been engaged in agriculture off and on for something like 25 years, and I can say that so far as those industries are concerned, the farmer will be in no worse position under federation than he is to-day, because the duty he is supposed to receive now does not go into his pocket. That, unfortunately, is the truth of the whole matter. If a duty could be put on to encourage agriculture without encouraging something else to counterbalance the benefit I would myself probably say it was reasonable to oppose federation; but I have examined the question from the standpoint of one

concerned in the growing of wheat and the cultivation of the soil, and I can say the farmers in the district I represent received my expressions of opinion everywhere enthusiastically, and they have returned me here as a proof that they are prepared to accept federation at the present time. In the Kataning district there has been more progress than in any other district. There is all the work of clearing to be undertaken, and men are facing difficulties which they know, because they are experiencing them to a greater extent than those, say, in the York district; and they have sent me to this House, I take it, as an act of protest against what has been said in support of the food duties.

HON. A. P. MATHESON (North-East): If one dealt with the Administrator's Address simply as it stands in print, there would be very little to say. I am cordially in agreement with Mr. Moss—on whose speech I desire to congratulate him—when he differs from those hon. members who, like Mr. Kidson, are inclined to condemn the Government for their attitude at the present time in having called us together.

HON. A. B. KIDSON: I did not condemn the Government for that.

HON. A. P. MATHESON: I understood Mr. Kidson to say he was unable to compliment the Government on their change.

HON. A. B. KIDSON: I referred to the attitude of the Government all through.

HON. A. P. MATHESON: Their change of attitude.

HON. A. B. KIDSON: What I said was that I was unable to compliment the Government on their attitude all through the question.

HON. R. S. HAYNES: Their "Jim Crow" attitude.

HON. A. P. MATHESON: I quite understood that Mr. Kidson's remarks included the change of attitude by the Government at the present moment.

HON. A. B. KIDSON: I did not mean that; you misunderstood me.

HON. A. P. MATHESON: I am sorry if I have misinterpreted the hon. member.

HON. A. B. KIDSON: Perhaps you will apologise?

HON. A. P. MATHESON: I do; I say I am sorry if I have placed an inter-