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1901-07-05

House of Representatives

Mr. Speaker

took the chair at 2 p.m., and read prayers.

ELECTION PETITION

ADCOCK v. E. Solomon.

Mr. MAHON

(Coolgardie) presented a petition from William Eddrupp Adcock, of Derby and Fremantle, Western Australia, and of Drummond-street, Carlton, Melbourne, Victoria, in reference to the recent federal election at Fremantle.

Referred to the Elections and Qualifications Committee.

SHIPMENTS OF FRUIT BY MAIL STEAMERS

Sir JOHN QUICK

- I wish to ask the Prime Minister -

Whether he will, in the interest of external trade and commerce, draw the attention of the V. and O. and Orient Companies to the following extract, dated London, 24th May, 1901, written by the London correspondent of a leading Victorian newspaper, and published here on 1st July : -

Two shipments of apples have been sold during the week ex the Australia in London and the Runic in Liverpool. The condition of the apples in the former varied considerably, some being overripe, others spotted, and a portion heated. Cleopatras, Scarlet Pearmain, . and Sturmers appear to have carried best. Complaints are numerous concerning the carriage of the fruit by the mail steamers, and it certainly seems necessary for steps to be taken on your side to force the P. and O. and Orient Companies to guarantee a regular and proper temperature throughout the voyage. In one shipment lately arrived some apples were quite warm ; others placed near the cold-blast pipes frozen hard.

Whether he will invite the steam-ship companies mentioned to take steps to prevent the further loss of fruit in the manner described in the foregoing extract?

Since I tabled the notice of the question, I see from yesterday's issue of another leading Victorian paper that similar complaints have been made with reference to a large shipment of apples by the Omrah, which apples have been landed in a very unsatisfactory condition. The newspaper goes on to say : -

Consignees are loud in their complaints about the unsatisfactory way in which the mail companies' steamers have carried the fruit this year.

I would ask the Prime Minister whether he will draw the attention of the steam-ship companies to these complaints with a view to preventing the further and unnecessary loss of Australian fruit.

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Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

- So far as can be ascertained, it seems that the carriage of fruit is entirely a matter of arrangement between the shippers and the steam-ship owners. No contract is made with the Government. In Victoria, fruit intended for export, however, is all inspected by an officer of the Agricultural department before shipment, and a certificate given as to its condition before departure. The Commonwealth Government have not any control over such shipments or arrangements, however much they are in sympathy with the honorable member's object, but copies of the question and answer will be sent to the Premiers of the States, who will no doubt take such action as they may deem requisite.

KANAKA LABOUR

Sir WILLIAM MCMILLAN

asked the Prime Minister, upon notice -

Whether the Government are making an exhaustive and independent official inquiry regarding kanaka labour, preparatory to the discussion of the Pacific Islands Labourers Bill now on the business-paper ?

If not, whether the Prime Minister will at an early date lay before this House all documents, reports, &c, referring to this question?

Mr BARTON

- (1) The Government are making such inquiry as is deemed necessary in view of existing sources of

information, and will soon have a further report on certain special questions. (2) I have already intimated that I have received a supply of publications, all of which are available for perusal on application. The numbers are sufficient for this purpose, but not enough to allow of every member of each House having one copy of each publication. A number of copies of each were placed in the rooms occupied by the parties in each House, and more can be placed there on request.

BANKING LEGISLATION

Sir LANGDON BONYTHON

asked the Treasurer, upon notice -

What are the intentions of the Government in regard to banking legislation ?

Treasurer

Sir GEORGE TURNER

- The matter referred to by the honorable member for South Australia is a very important one. It will be necessary to have uniform banking laws throughout the Commonwealth, but honorable members will realize that it is a very intricate subject, and that there must be careful inquiry before we proceed to deal with it. I am obtaining information from bankers as to their views, and also information in regard to the banking laws in Canada and other countries. It will be impossible to deal with the subject this session, but I hope to have a comprehensive Bill to submit early next session.

NORTHERN TERRITORY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Mr V L SOLOMON

- I move -

That in the opinion of this House it is advisable that the complete control and jurisdiction over the Northern Territory of South Australia be acquired by the Commonwealth, and that the Federal Government should at once enter into negotiations for that purpose with the Government of the State of South Australia.

I bring this motion before the House with no object of hurrying the question, but more with the desire, at the earliest possible moment, to put a question of such importance - with which you, Mr. Speaker, know I have associated myself for many years - prominently before honorable members in order to give them all the possible information to enable them to consider the subject. The question is equal in importance to any with which this Parliament will have to consider during the present session. Of course, I am not aware whether the Commonwealth Government have entered into negotiations with the State of South Australia ; but so far, in answer to questions put by my honorable friend and colleague, Sir Langdon Bonython - whose action in regard to this matter is in sympathy with my own - we have had nothing but somewhat evasive replies. The reply on 'the last occasion was that, provided terms and conditions could be arranged satisfactorily - I am not quoting the exact words - the Government were favorable. What does that mean? Simply nothing. What I want to elicit from this Parliament - not to-day, perhaps, but during the course of the debate and at its conclusion - is an affirmation, which I trust will strengthen the hands of the Government in dealing with a question of paramount importance to the whole of Australia. In order to elicit that expression of opinion, I am sure the action I am now taking is the proper one. I do not intend to load this debate with too many details, but I may briefly allude to the position of South Australia and its Northern Territory, and the past management of the latter, and insist, from the stand-point of South Australia as a State, that something should be done either by the Federal Parliament, or by the British Parliament, to relieve the State of a liability, the importance of which it has certainly never appreciated. It will be within the recollection of most honorable members that in the year 1861 or thereabouts, the continent was first successfully traversed by John McDouall Stuart. Almost immediately following that date, an appeal was made by the then Government of South Australia to the Imperial Government to transfer to the South Australian Government control of the tract lying north of the 26th parallel of south latitude, with a view to its colonization and to its being opened up. At that time the South Australian Government represented to the Home authorities that it was the intention of the colony, if this extension of boundary about which there had been some communications before in the years 1859-60 - were granted - it being the natural extension of South Australia, which more properly might be termed Central Australia, the object of that State would be not only to colonize that tract of country, but also to extend telegraphic communication right across the continent to join with expected cable communication from the older

countries of the world. The British Government agreed in 1863 to this extension of boundaries, after some little preliminary trouble, and the passing of an Imperial Bill to alter the boundaries of the other colonies, Letters Patent in that year put the control of the whole of this tract of country under, or to use their own words, "annexed it" to South Australia. If honorable members will glance at the map I have taken the liberty of placing in their hands - not with any doubt of their geographical knowledge, but with the desire to place immediately under their eye, in considering such an important question, the whole position of the Australian continent, and of this particular tract of country - they will see that the territory in question comprises an immense area of something over 335,000,000 acres of land. Its value and productiveness I shall deal with later on. This great tract of country was handed over to South Australia, and very shortly afterwards the transcontinental telegraph line was constructed, being completed in the year 1873. That telegraph line was constructed to meet the cable from Banjoewangie, connecting us with Europe. The great work was undertaken, not as it should have been, at the cost of the whole of Australia, but by the courageous enterprise of that little State of South Australia, which then had a population of only a little more than 200,000, at its own expense, and at its own risk. I am sure it needs few words - of mine to tell honorable members the importance of that action on the part of South Australia. It needs little to recommend the proposition that I am going to put, namely, that South Australia's enterprise in constructing that line of telegraph is deserving of recognition, which it has not hitherto obtained, at the hands of the combined States of the continent.

Sir John Quick

- It has agreed to a rival cable to the Cape has it not?

Mr V L SOLOMON

- I trust that the honorable and learned member for Bendigo will not draw a line like that across my present argument, with which it has nothing to do.

Sir J John Quick

- It directly damaged its value.

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Mr V L SOLOMON

- It is not a question of the value of the telegraph line which has passed over with the rest of the Postal and Telegraph department to the control of the Commonwealth. That is not the point to which I am leading up. The point to which I am leading up is that South Australian enterprise in the construction of that line which connected all Australia with Europe, is deserving of consideration and recognition, irrespective of any other consideration at the hands of this Parliament. Of course at the time the line was constructed and the extension of the boundary was agreed to by the Imperial Parliament, the State of South Australia naturally enough expected to be able to settle and colonize that tract of country successfully. Unfortunately, owing to the various questions which have arisen since 1873 - questions of considerable importance to-day, such as black labour in Australia, - South Australia for many years past, in spite of having the country there - the climate and soil of which have been demonstrated to be capable of producing tropical and semi-tropical products of value - has, owing to the policy of which I am sure most of Australia will be proud - the policy of refusing to allow Asiatic labour to be employed in the northern portion of her possession - been the loser by many thousands of pounds each year. While on this particular point, perhaps, it would be as well for me to deal with the amount that South Australia has lost. Last year, I think I am nearly right in saying that the deficiency in the administration of the Northern Territory by South Australia was something like £90,000. In previous years it has aggregated from £50,000 to £60,000 and £70,000. And although I see some honorable members smile at the idea that one should desire to pass over an asset of such a questionable character, it is my desire to place before the House nothing but an absolutely candid and true position of the whole case. The difficulty that South Australia has had to contend with, owing to the adoption of the policy which I have mentioned, has been that, although she has admittedly a large tract of land in the northern portion of her territory, capable of growing sugar, rice, indigo, cotton, tobacco, and a host of other tropical products - which has been amply proven by the experiments at the Government Garden, and by other experiments by private individuals - the lack of suitable cheap labour, whether it be black or white - and I am certain honorable members will recognise that white labour in that degree of south latitude can hardly be successful - she has been unable to utilize that country. It is not necessary, in discussing a motion such as this, to touch upon the

suitability of the labour in other branches of industry. Although I am absolutely of the opinion, after a residence of more than fifteen years in that country - that without black labour, suitable to the climate, it is impossible to cultivate any form of tropical products, I still admit that in regard to mining and pastoral pursuits, there is no difficulty whatever.

Mr MAUGER

- Let us hope that there will be no cultivation.

Mr V L SOLOMON

-. That is a point which I am sure the honorable member will admit is now entirely beyond the control of South Australia. That is a question of policy for Federated Australia, and I think I am safe in saying that the settled policy of the United States of Australia is that the northern portion of the continent had better be left unutilized than that the future happiness and prosperity of our European races should be jeopardized. When I put my case in this way, it will be understood by honorable members that I do not desire in any way to cloud the issue or to influence their opinions by any threats as to what might be done if this portion of the continent were handed back to the Imperial Government. On that particular point, although the letters patent by which this territory was provisionally annexed to South Australia - I use the term " provisionally annexed " exactly as it stands - might raise some form of doubt, there can be little doubt in the minds of most of us that there would be no attempt on the part of the Imperial authorities to go back on the bargain which they made, or to belittle in any way the title of South Australia to this tract of country which they granted many years ago, and upon which that State has expended hundreds of thousands of pounds. Now, as to the financial position. In order not to delay honorable members too much upon private member's day, and to give as much information as I possibly can, I have had a small map prepared showing, not only the geographical position of this tract of country, but also some details of its exports and imports extending over a long period of years. Honorable members will notice, for instance, that the export of gold for 1881 to 1899, to which I have previously alluded, amounted to 458,475 ozs., of a value of a trifle over £1,572,214. The exports of cattle, wool, sheep, horses, tin, copper ore, trepang, and pearl-shell brought the total up to a value of £2,414,832.

Mr Barton

- Within what time?

Mr V L SOLOMON

- Between 1881 and 1899, a period of nineteen years. The population during most of the time - although it has varied, perhaps, by a thousand or two - has not been over 6,000 or 7,000. The population to-day, according to the Government Resident's report last year, is 1,620 Europeans, 2,180 Chinese, and 520 Malays, Japanese, and so forth.

Mr HiGGINS

- The Chinese are engaged in mining principally t

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Mr V L SOLOMON

- They are principally employed in mining. The Malays and Japanese are principally employed in pearl-shelling. There is thus a total of 4,320 souls in a tract of country comprising 335,000,000 acres, and extending for nearly 1,100 miles. Coming down to last year's record, which was certainly not as good as the previous year's in regard to mineral export and so forth, I find that the imports were valued at £129,488, or approximately £30 per head of the population, whilst the export of staple products was valued at £156,062, which is equivalent to 36 per head. For the whole population, including Chinese, Japanese, and Europeans - the Europeans being very much in a minority - the contribution to the Customs revenue is higher than any other portion of Australia, viz., £7 15s. per head.

Mr Mauger

- How is that accounted for?

Mr V L SOLOMON

- Largely in the same way as it is accounted for in Tasmania and Western Australia, by the great excess of male adults over the average of the populations in the other States.

Sir John Forrest

- Opium has something to do with it, too.

Mr V L SOLOMON

- Opium pays a fair amount of duty, but not I think anything like the amount that wines and spirits pay. In the same way as in Western Australia and Tasmania the large contribution to the customs is due to a great extent, to the fact that the population consists largely of statute male adults.

Mr Piesse

- 50s. a head is the average for Tasmania.

Mr V L SOLOMON

- The amount I have given is very much in excess of the average in South Australia and the other States. I think it was a little" while ago nearly ?6.

Mr. O'Maxiey

Tasmania is a richer State than South Australia.

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Mr V L SOLOMON

- I do not doubt that it is rich in mineral and other products. However I do not wish to extend my speech on this subject by dealing too largely with figures. I have for that reason placed the figures on the map I have handed to honorable members with a view to their thoroughly studying the whole position. I would like now to come to the question of the other possibilities in regard to this tract of country. It will be seen by the map that the line to be completed is some 1,063 miles in length, from Oodnadatta, at the south end, to Pine Creek, at the north. This railway will pass through the very heart of ' Australia, and will be found to be within fairly easy reach of the railways, stretching out from various important centres in Queensland, all of which should within a reasonable time be connected with this line. Irrespective of that question of the railway, which I do not desire to touch upon at any length at the present moment, I would like to point to the valuable pastoral country both on the eastern and western borders of this northern territory. On the eastern, the Queensland border, we have undoubtedly a very fine tract of pastoral country - what they call the Herbert River country. On the western, the Victoria River country, which I am sure is well known to the Minister for Defence, we have equally fine pastoral country j and this country absolutely cannot be opened up and developed without reasonable communication. The question will naturally be asked - why, with all the natural advantages of this portion of the State ; with the splendid rainfall, which in the northern portion, averages from 50 to 60 inches each year; with fine herbage, and with great mineral resources, South Australia has .not in the past been able to make a financial success of it ? Well, there are a good many reasons for the failure. First of all, without touching on State politics at all, I may point out that the very earliest attempt at colonization by the State of South Australia was a huge financial blunder. What did they do 1 Immediately after they obtained possession of this great tract of valuable country they offered, to the people of the colony and of the older country, land orders covering a. right to 160 acres each, at the rate of 7s. 6d. per acre. By this financial transaction they received altogether for 1,524 of these land orders, which entitled each purchaser to 1 60 acres of land, the sum of ?91,000. They received in interest upon the money while it was lying idle some ?5,000, and in customs duties a little over ?8,000. But between the years 1864 and 1873, after the issue of these land orders, the cost of maintenance and of the survey, which they had agreed with the land-order holders to make, and of various other things connected with the new settlement amounted to ?225,000. So that the results of the first ten years of experience of this costly, and one might almost say impudent, experiment on the part of a colony with, I think, only 200,000 people at the time - the absolute result from a financial stand-point of ten years' experience was a loss of ?1 20,000 in cash, and the alienation of 400,000 acres of land, including the whole of the town lands of the settlement. Can any honorable member imagine success from colonization commenced in that way, or that a burden like that put upon them so many years ago could possibly be fought with by a mere handful of people? That was the start. Difficulties afterwards arose from the very fact that this land had been alienated, as no man who landed at Port Darwin could find a block of land upon which he could settle, because the landlords or owners in England, Adelaide, Melbourne, and scattered in the various parts of the

Australian colonies, demanded for the half-acre blocks, for which they had paid 3s. rentals of from £70 to £100 a year on short leases with all improvements to be left. With such blundering as that at the start of colonization, it cannot be a matter of much surprise that the results have been a financial failure to the State. Following closely upon that, and within a few years, we had the introduction of Asiatic labour - the introduction of Chinese after the mines were discovered. They were not introduced by private individuals.

It is necessary to make a perfectly clean breast in dealing with a matter of this kind, and to explain that the first 200 Chinese were introduced by the South Australian Government for the purpose of assisting mining enterprise, the principle owners of the mining enterprises being people who were settled near the centres of population at Adelaide and elsewhere.

Sir John Forrest

- What Government did that?

Mr V L SOLOMON

- I do not know what Government did it. I do not wish to enter into State politics at all. But it is necessary, in putting the whole case before honorable members, to show how it is that with a country possessing such magnificent resources these failures have occurred.

Mr. Mauger. - How many years ago did that occur?

Mr V L SOLOMON

- In 1873 or 1874. But that is not the only thing. We had the construction of a line of railway authorized some years later, from Port Darwin to Pine Creek, traversing roughly about 150 miles, and supposed to serve the mining district. It was supposed also to be the northern section of a transcontinental line, and that it would eventually be connected with the line which honorable members will see stretches from the south to Oodnadatta. Unfortunately for the settlement of the northern end of the colony, the Government of the day consented to this line being constructed by what they termed " optional labour." I may say that by this regulation the South Australian Government saved some £80,000 in the contract price ; but the firm of C. and E. Miller, I think it was, who constructed the line, introduced thousands of Chinese to complete it, and when it was completed the Chinese left. Consequently the efforts at settlement in the country have been so far utter mistakes. And they should not be counted against the country in the consideration of the question I am now submitting to the House.

Sir John Quick. - Is there much good land left?

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Mr V L SOLOMON

- The area of land alienated is comparatively small, and very little of it has been alienated in fee simple. Only a small portion comparatively is even under pastoral lease except around the settled districts. There is no doubt about the quantity of good land for settlement, and there can be no doubt, from our experience of the McDonnell Ranges, and from the reports of skilled geologists like Mr. Brown, the Government Geologist, that there are large tracts of country that offer every inducement for farther prospecting. So that when it becomes a question whether the Commonwealth will be making a good or bad bargain in purchasing from South Australia this tract of country, embracing 335,000,000 acres of land, for what ? - probably in consideration of taking over the liability, amounting roughly to £3,000,000, or about 2d. per acre - when it becomes a question of the Commonwealth taking over this tract of country at such a price, I do not think it needs much consideration on the part of honorable members to enable them to decide that the bargain will be a good one. I say that, in spite of the futile efforts of this little State of South Australia, with its present population of only 350,000 people, to deal with a tract of country thousands of miles away from the centre of government, involving the question of the development of tropical country. Looking at the map one sees that the northern part of this country is within the eleventh parallel of south latitude, and is absolutely more tropical than some portions of India. To attempt to develop the agricultural resources of a country like that by European labour is a mistake, there is no chance of doing it successfully. Then again the question arose in the South Australian Parliament whether it was wise or fair to the other States of the group to allow this Port Darwin country - Port Darwin being the very back-door to the East - to be populated and developed by an inflow, which could easily have been obtained, of Asiatic aliens or even of Indians. Offers have been made to the Government of South Australia to take over this country, and to relieve South Australia of the debt over and over again, but have been refused, and I give the Government of that State full credit for it. The offer has included the construction of the whole line of railway, but has always had the condition attached that those who constructed the railway should be allowed to introduce into that northern end of the continent what labour they chose. At one time - in the year 1882 - the Government in power passed an Indian Immigration Bill to permit of the introduction of Indian immigrants for the development of the agricultural lands of the territory. Fortunately for the present position, this Immigration Bill was never availed of. There were difficulties

thrown in the way by the Indian Government, and I do not think there have been any labourers imported under it. Had the Government, however, chosen to throw open that part of the continent, to throw open their lands, to capitalists who were prepared to invest large sums of money there, especially when the agitation against kanaka labour in Queensland was rampant, the position of the Northern Territory from a financial standpoint would have been very different from what it is to-day. Now, passing from what may be described as a series of explanations of why the Northern Territory has not been a profitable asset to South Australia, I come to the broader position, and I think I may put it to honorable members that in dealing with this question they have to consider the geographical position of South Australia and of the Northern Territory. A glance at the map, which honorable members have in their hands, will show that within a very few days' sail or steam from Port Darwin - some 6 or 7 days by fast steamers - we have Singapore ; that within 5 days we have Hong Kong; and within 9 days .Japan. Then, going a little bit further north, we have Russia, or rather Russia's possession - Manchuria. Across the southern portion of Russia there has been constructed what the reporters of the leading papers published in England, describe as the future highway east and west of Europe - the Manchurian-Siberian railway - already constructed for a distance of some 3,300 odd miles. This railway is likely, to be completed within another two years at the very latest, and it will undoubtedly in the very near future form the highway for most of the passenger and mail communication from one end of the continent to the other. With that line completed, and with a swift steamer to connect with Port Darwin, it ' is quite possible, as is stated by the correspondents of some of the leading London dailies, that Australia may be brought at least 5 to 10 days nearer to London. The time at my disposal will hardly permit me to quote all the material with which I could supply honorable members; but I will satisfy myself by saying that the correspondent of the London DailyChronicle who, some 6 months ago journeyed across this 3,300 odd miles of railway to Irkutsko, the present terminus of the line, describes the travelling as being about the most comfortable of any to be found in the world, except in America. He says that not only is the travelling luxurious, but that the cost for that 3,370 miles for first-class passengers is a trifle over £16 ; for second-class passengers, £9 16s. ; and for third class passengers, £2 12s. 6d. Now, I think figures like these should show honorable members that in the very near future the existence of this line will be a very important point to bear in mind in considering the construction of our future transcontinental lines of railway. It certainly is a very important point to consider in connexion with the value of the Northern Territory to the Federal Government. It has been provided under our Commonwealth Act that the Federal Parliament may take Over a tract of country such as this, and may administer it either by giving representation, such as may be deemed fit - a certain amount of representation in the two Houses of the Federal Parliament - or by treating it as an appendage State for the time being, until a reasonable population becomes resident in the country. What I wish this House to decide is as to the desirability of taking over this tract of country. I do not wish the House to decide it to-day, or that there should be any haste in the matter ; but I do desire that, as far as the Government are concerned, we should have from them some distinct pledge as to their line of policy in reference to this question. Hitherto we have . had a few diplomatic replies to questions, all of which have meant nothing. From the very first announcement of the Prime Minister's policy I found fault with- the omission of a question of such great importance to Australia. Still, I am happy to believe, notwithstanding the guarded replies given by the members of the Ministry, that they are in sympathy with the proposal to take over this tract of country from South Australia.

It may be asked why the Northern. Territory ought to be taken over, and in reply I might ask why South Australia should continue to run this country, to keep that back door at Port Darwin closed against what the settled policy of the Commonwealth has declared to be undesirable immigration, at its own cost. It has been stated that unless the Federal Parliament agrees to take over this country, the natural result will be that South Australia, whether the Federal Parliament likes it or not, will be forced into the position of giving the country back to the Imperial Government. Now, is it desirable in the opinion of any honorable members of this House, that after having given local Government to every State throughout Australia, one large and important portion of our continent should be handed back to the Imperial Government to be dealt with as that Government may desire - perhaps in such a way as would not meet with the approval of a great many members of this Federation, and in such a way as certainly would not meet with the approval of a large proportion of our constituents. It would be quite within the power and quite within the right of the Imperial Parliament to settle this tract of country, if it were handed back to it, by permitting the

employment there of its own subjects from India; and, undoubtedly, if a scheme with that object were adopted, the possibilities of successful development in that north end of Australia can hardly be estimated by us. There can be no doubt that with the labour which could be introduced from the northern portion of India to develop the agricultural lands near Port Darwin, great success could be obtained. Still, I am just as anxious, as I think every other member of this House is, that such a scheme should not be adopted, and I am equally anxious that South Australia, having loyally defended the rest of the continent from an influx of undesirable labour, and having by her enterprise brought Australia into close communication with the older countries of the world by the construction of the transcontinental telegraph line, should be relieved as speedily as possible of the liability which she has every year to meet. It seems to me that there can be little doubt of the justice of a request on behalf of any representative of that State that this course should be adopted. If it is not adopted, the possibility is that the Northern Territory may fall back into the hands of the Imperial Government ; but I do trust that honorable members will see, first of all, that what has been offered by South Australia to the Federation is not a bad bargain, but that the tract of country to be handed over is valuable, and that with the powers and the immense purse of the Commonwealth its resources - mineral, pastoral, and agricultural - could be better developed than would be possible under the control of a small State like South Australia, with its population of only 350,000. I have no desire that this debate should be hurriedly concluded (House counted.) I have no desire to take the opinion of the House to-day, . or even next week, on this question. I am simply carrying out a pledge made to the electors of South Australia when I was the first, I think, in the whole of Australia to point out the omission of this important question from the Prime Minister's speech. That pledge was that, so far as I was concerned, this measure should be put before the Federal Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity, and that I would give it the fullest information in my power as to the advantage of taking over this tract of country. That pledge, I think, I have redeemed. I leave it to the good sense of the House to discuss this question - which is not a party question, but one of national policy - temperately and quietly and to look into it as closely and critically as possible ; and I am sure the result must be that honorable members of both Houses will agree that it would be a good thing for Australia if this tract of country were taken over by the Commonwealth.

Question proposed.

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Mr EWING

- I shall be very brief in my remarks. We ought to be to some extent grateful to the honorable member for South Australia, Mr. V. L. Solomon, for bringing so important a matter before us ; but I feel that, although we agree with him with respect to one or two facts,, most of his facts are singularly at variance with our views of what the Northern Territory is. Of course we know that the Northern Territory originally formed portion of New South Wales, and the honorable member is correct in saying that the Government of New South Wales in 1863 were very glad to get rid of a bad bargain by letters patent. The honorable member has placed before us a map, and I would ask any honorable member who knows Australia at all, to look at that map for a few moments and see what the Northern Territory really is. Very soon after we pass Goyder's line, and long before we get to Oodnadatta, we pass into the howling Australian desert. Although in the McDonnell Ranges there is .a considerable amount of mica and. a . considerable amount of gold, I think that if a camel were turned out there he would not get food between Oodnadatta and Pine Creek. There is simply nothing to keep body and soul together - no food for cattle or . sheep. The whole country today is a howling wilderness, and will remain so for all time.

Mr O'Malley

- There are jack-rabbits there.

Mr EWING

- I do not suppose .that even jack-rabbits are able to live there. Although the honorable member for South Australia, Mr. V. L. Solomon, is right on general principles in regard to the national aspect of the case, the whole of his local information appears to me to be incorrect - I do not desire to- say misleading. As we pass north along the railway to Pine Creek, and farther north to Palmerston, we get a 63-inch rainfall, but that, unfortunately, is accompanied by such a considerable amount of malaria that a white man finds it very hard to live there. Mr. V. L. Solomon.. - Do I look like it, after fifteen, years ?

Mr EWING

- I am very glad the climate did not affect the honorable member. The population consists of a few whites, a considerable number of Japanese, a good number of Chinese, a considerable number of aborigines, and a considerable number of criminals. When the Queensland Government want to get rid of any criminal who causes a great deal of trouble, they let him slip over to the Northern Territory, because he is there in company which just about suits him. Honorable members should understand that in places at the back of Pine Creek there is, perhaps, one of the most appalling populations in Australia. If any honorable member has an opportunity of going to Pine Creek and seeing the people there, he will almost wish he were back in Parliament. Port Darwin is the sort of place where the town is periodically blown into the sea, and left for the teredo to eat. There is a railway from Palmerston to Pine Creek, and, while the honorable member knows a little bit about the length of that line, he does not know anything about profits. The line was completed nine or ten years ago.

Mr V L SOLOMON

- Long before that. About 1886.

Mr. EWING____

I do not think the railway was in Pine Creek in that year, but I am speaking casually.

Sir John Forrest

- Say twelve years ago.

Mr EWING

- I think it was about 1888; but I speak subject to correction. However that may be, never at any time have the gross returns from that railway paid expenses.

Mr V L SOLOMON

-. - The returns have always paid working expenses, though not interest on the capital.

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Mr EWING

- In making a statement of the kind I am subject to correction, but at the same time I think I am perfect! y right in saying that the railway has never paid working expenses. Last year, or a year or two ago, when, singularly for Australia, a new jetty or something of the kind was built out of the railway earnings, the revenue from the railway was £10,000 behind. That I remember as a fact - I saw it stated at the time. That is about the position, so far as I can see, of the Northern Territory. Could any place be more useless to Australia from the local stand-point, with regard to which the honorable member had not a leg to stand on ? The more we inquire into- this matter from the stand-point of local value, the more sure we become that the Federal Parliament had better leave it alone. That will be the unanimous opinion of every man who looks into the question. But the main point, in regard to which the honorable member is light, is that the Northern Territory is close to Asia - is the back door to- Asia - and, therefore, whatever the cost may be, it must be taken over, preserved, and controlled by the Commonwealth Parliament. But in taking over a territory of this kind - and I would take it over for national reasons and not for local reasons- there must be an agreement reasonable to the Commonwealth made with the State Parliament of South Australia. It is not possible for any person to vote for such a proposal as the honorable member has made, and the honorable member must have known that when he tabled the motion. Although no local reasons may be advanced for taking over the Northern Territory, it being worth nothing, with millions of acres not worth a halfpenny per acre, still we have a national obligation which must be discharged.. I find in the Governor's speech a reference of this kind - .-.

No doubt the project of railway connexion between the Northern Territory and the Southern States will before long assume great public importance. A proposal made by the Government of South Australia for the surrender by that State and the acceptance by the Commonwealth of the Northern Territory is under careful consideration.

That is about as far as this Parliament can go in regard to the matter. It is under consideration, and there it must remain until we know more about it. I therefore move -

That all the words after " is," line 1, be omitted with a view to insert in lieu thereof the words desirable that the Government should as speedily as possible inquire into the advisability of taking over the Northern Territory of South Australia."

I am sure that the House will accept the amendment and nothing more. Although I have said a number of unpalatable things, the honorable member knows that they are absolutely true. He knows what the

Australian desert is, and what Port Darwin is. I presume that so long as he has the wish of his heart fulfilled, and the territory is taken over, he does not care whether it is taken over on local or on national grounds.

Motion (by Mr. Poynton) proposed -
That the debate be now adjourned.

Mr REID

- Before the motion is put, I think it would be convenient if the Prime Minister would, indicate to us what his view of the matter is, simply for the guidance of honorable members.

Mr SPEAKER

- I would point out that the honorable member for South Australia, Mr. Poynton, has moved the adjournment of the debate, and I cannot allow any debate on that motion.

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

. - I cannot say anything now, but I shall certainly take an early opportunity of speaking on the subject.

Motion agreed to; debate adjourned.

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15:13:00

House adjourned at 3. 13 p.m.