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1901-12-13

Senate

The President took the chair at 10.30 a.m., and read prayers.

QUESTIONS

MORTALITY OF KANAKAS

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Senator DAWSON

- Can the Postmaster-General intimate when I am likely to get the return concerning the mortality of the kanaka and white population in Queensland?

Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

- I shall furnish the return as soon as I can get the information.

FEDERAL CAPITAL SITE

Senator WALKER

- Can the Postmaster-General say when we may expect to get a precis of the correspondence about a site for the federal capital? Honorable senators will be going away shortly for some weeks, and this paper is looked forward to with great interest in New South Wales.

Senator DRAKE

- I believe the return is being prepared, but I am not able to lay it on the table to-day.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Senator CLEMONS

- With concurrence, I move -

That leave of absence for six weeks be granted to Senators Cameron, Harney, and Millen, on account of urgent private business.

While I do not feel sure that the motion is necessary, still there are some doubts whether a difficulty may not arise under section 20 of the Constitution Act. These honorable senators have been absent for a fortnight, and if we should adjourn for six weeks, it may bring them within the operation of that section, which says -

The place of a senator shall become vacant if for two consecutive months of any session of the Parliament he, without the permission of the Senate, fails to attend the Senate.

To prevent the possibility of such an unfortunate occurrence, I think it desirable that leave of absence should be granted.

The PRESIDENT

- It is rather objectionable if it is to be drawn into a precedent to put three names in one motion, but the circumstances of this case are peculiar, and it may be allowed.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

QUESTIONS

LARCENY OF LETTERS

Senator HIGGS

- I desire to ask the Postmaster-General if it is true, as stated in the Brisbane Observer, of the 7th inst., that about 100 letters, said to contain money, addressed to Brisbane firms, have gone astray in the Postal department, and will he cause a thorough inquiry to be made into the complaints made by Brisbane firms as to the failure of the Postal department to trace the missing letters?

Senator DRAKE

- I have no official information on the subject. I shall make inquiries in regard to any complaint which comes before me.

POSTAL DEPARTMENT : INCREMENTS

Senator KEATING

asked the Postmaster-General, upon notice -

Will he, before the distribution of the amounts to be provided for increases to salaries of certain deserving officers in his department, inform the Senate as to the names, positions, and present salaries of the officers to whom it is proposed to grant such increases, and the amount of such contemplated increase in

each case ? .

Senator DRAKE

- - All the information available will be given to the members of the Senate who may desire it, but I cannot place such information before the Senate, because after the money has been voted it will be necessary to obtain reports from the chief officers in each State, and probably the approval of the commissioner under the Public Service Act before a final determination as to increases is arrived at.

DISTRIBUTION OF PAPERS

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- According to the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives, on the 11th of December, the Minister for Home Affairs laid on the table, by command of the Governor-General, a paper in reference to the Hare system of voting in Tasmania. A similar report has not been laid on the table of the Senate, and I would suggest that if possible it should be circulated during the recess, in view of the notice of motion given by Senator McGregor on that question.

The PRESIDENT

- The arrangement is that all papers laid on the table of either House shall be sent to every member of the Federal Parliament.

Senator DRAKE

- I thank the honorable senator for calling my attention to the matter. I shall endeavour to obtain a copy of the paper and lay it on the table during the present sitting.

SUPPLY BILL (No. 5)

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Resolved(on motion by Senator Drake) -

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as will permit of the Supply Bill (No. 5), when received from the House of Representatives, passing through all its stages without delay.

POST AND TELEGRAPH RATES BILL

Motion (by Senator Drake) proposed -

That the Bill be now read a third time -

Senator PULSFORD

- I desire to put on record my protest, not only against the general character of this Bill, but also, and more particularly, against the way in which it was introduced here and carried through its various stages. In effect it is a postal tariff, and it ought to have been accompanied with all the information that is necessary for its due consideration. That information ought to have been in the hands of honorable senators sufficiently long to enable them to grasp all its details. The Bill should not have been proceeded with until the public of Australia had had a reasonable opportunity offered them of understanding how its details would affect not only the finances of the States, but the various and complicated business interests. I hope, however, that the other House will be afforded fuller details before the Bill is debated, as it is one of great financial importance. It ought to be an understood thing that an important measure affecting the finances of the States generally, and even affecting important business interests, should not be rushed on either House, and should not be passed until the whole of Australia has had an opportunity of carefully considering all the details and of expressing public opinion thereon.

Senator DAWSON

- I have noticed a very bad practice growing up in the Senate. A persistent effort is being made by honorable senators to debate all Bills on the third reading which ought to be a formal stage. I record my protest against the practice, which, I think, is a pernicious one.

The PRESIDENT

- It is quite in accord with the standing orders.

Senator DAWSON

- I know it is ; but it is a very bad practice, which is not followed in other Parliaments.

Senator CLEMONS

- Before the Bill is read a third time I should like Senator Drake to explain to me the effect of the first schedule. In Tasmania many newspapers are sent separately by the proprietors to private individuals. If these newspapers come under the second section of the first schedule, which provides that there shall be 1/2d. postage paid on newspapers posted within the Commonwealth for transmission therein, for each

newspaper the subscriber will have to pay 1l/2d. Will it be possible under the first portion of the first schedule to post in one parcel all the newspapers which are going to a district? Supposing, for instance, that a dozen subscribers to a newspaper live in a small country town, will the Postmaster-General allow the proprietor to bundle together those newspapers, although they are separately addressed, and allow the postmaster at the country town to distribute them to each subscriber?

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Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

- It is through a misapprehension of the wording of the schedule that a good deal of the opposition which was manifested in the first place against the provision arose. We take newspapers in bulk, and weigh them and carry them at the rate of 1d. per lb., no matter how many or how few may be in one wrapper, but all separately addressed. We go further than Senator Clemons desires. We not only accept them and weigh them by bulk when they are to be sent to one separate district, but we do exactly the same if they are to be sent all over the Commonwealth. Newspapers separately addressed all over the Commonwealth can be brought by a proprietor or newsvendor to the post-office, and there weighed in bulk and charged at the rate of 1d. per lb. The rate, therefore, for a newspaper weighing 4 ozs. or less - and that is a heavy weight for a daily - would be 1/4d. If the newspaper weighs 2 ozs. - and a number of them weigh less than that - the rate will be one-half of a 1/4d. each. That is a very slight burden indeed, and it is a great concession, because, in five States, newspapers are taken in parcels to be delivered to one person at 1d. per lb. The concession we have made in the schedule is that we accept them at the same rate and deliver them separately to the addressees. I hope that Senator Pulsford on consideration will see that the Bill has not been rushed through in any way. It is a measure for amending the rates with regard to the transmission of certain newspapers and telegrams. When the second reading of the Post and Telegraph Bill was moved in June, I was asked to state the intentions of the Government with regard to the rates. I was afterwards asked the same question several times, and the answer always was that as soon as that Bill became law I should introduce an amending Bill. I feel sure that honorable senators generally were expecting that I should fulfil my promise. The newspaper rates are those which were recommended by the conference of permanent heads of Postal departments that sat more than a year ago, and brought up by their report. So that I cannot see how the Senate has been in the slightest degree taken by surprise. I told honorable senators that I proposed to introduce a schedule amending the existing rates in such a way as to attain uniformity among the States. That has been done in this Bill; and I do not think any scale of rates would have answered the end in view better than the scale proposed. When the measure was introduced there certainly was no protest against going on with it in committee. If there had been a strong feeling expressed against proceeding, I certainly should have yielded at once.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill read a third time and passed.

PUBLIC SERVICE BILL

In Committee (consideration resumed from December 12, vide page 8632): .

Clause 27 (regulations for entrance examinations).

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- This clause provides for regulations for certain purposes. Honorable senators will be of one mind as to the desirability of insuring that the service shall not contain undesirable characters. Hence it is necessary that the ordinary precautions that are taken by the States with regard to the character of applicants for the civil service should be taken here. I beg to move -

That the following new paragraph be inserted: - "(a) A preliminary examination as to the character of candidates."

In Victoria for many years past the applicant has been required to supply a certificate as to good moral character and industrious habits.

Senator Pearce

- Who gives the certificate?

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- I should imagine that in some cases it is given by a clergyman, or by a bank manager or schoolmaster.

Senator CHARLESTON

- In South Australia, most lads leaving school obtain a certificate of character from the school teacher. That could be done in such a case as this. I think Senator Sargood's suggestion is a good one.

Senator PLAYFORD

- I should be more inclined to find out the character of the parents of the applicant for admission, because often, if the parents are vicious, although a young man's conduct may be all right at first, he will develop undesirable qualities later on. If I were proposing to take a young man into constant employment I should prefer to find out whether his parents were of excellent character.

Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

. - This clause refers to the conduct of examinations. I agree with what Senator Sargood has said, and think that there must be some provision in the Bill to that effect. But the object can be attained by regulation. Surely when a lad is a candidate for admission into the service the commissioner may make inquiries into his moral character. It would be better to put such a power in the clause dealing with regulations.

Senator STANTFORTH SMITH

- The clause refers to the qualifications of candidates for employment, and one qualification is that the applicant shall be a person of good moral character. I think Senator Sargood's amendment is one that the committee should accept, but we should confine ourselves to the character of the applicant, and not as Senator Playford suggests, visit the sins of the parents upon the children. If a youth is of good character the greater credit redounds to him, if his parents are of bad character.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Senator STANTFORTH SMITH (Western Australia). - With regard to the medical examination I should like to obtain an expression of opinion from the Postmaster-General as to its nature. If we are to have a system of life assurance for our public service we must have it on those of good health, and must have a different arrangement as to persons who are not physically strong. But it would be a very cruel thing to deny the right of any person to enter the service because he was not physically strong. Such persons are unable to find employment where physical exertion is required, but may be quite capable of mental labour.

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Senator Playford

- Yet the honorable senator would give them the minimum wage.

Senator STANTFORTH SMITH

- Exactly, they are to get a minimum wage on account of mental ability. If we refuse admission to the clerical division to people who are not physically strong, it will mean that no such person will be able to earn his living. If the banks and other large institutions followed the example of the Government, they also would prescribe that unless a person was physically strong they would not employ him. If the avenues of mental employment are closed to such persons, they will have to starve. I do not mean that persons suffering from consumption, and diseases of that description which would be injurious to their fellow workers, should be allowed to enter the service, but there are physical ailments which would by no means incapacitate a man from doing clerical work. We employ 8,000 civil servants, and if the Commonwealth takes over other services, we may employ double that number. It would be very cruel if people on account of physical infirmities were not allowed to enter the service. It would be carrying out the Darwinian theory of the "survival of the fittest," and those who were not physically strong would be left to starve.

Senator PLAYFORD (South Australia). - If we are to adopt the principle of the minimum wage as laid down last night so energetically by the labour representatives, it will be perfectly proper to say that only strong men shall be allowed to enter the service. That is the logical conclusion of the arguments used yesterday. I hold, on the contrary, that there are many men who are not physically capable of doing a certain amount of work, and who are not worth a certain wage, but whom it would be a cruelty to keep out of the service altogether. Now those honorable senators who voted for the minimum wage see the effect that is going to be produced. Senator Smith voted with the labour party last night, but now, in the kindness of his heart, he recognises the mischief that would be done by carrying out the principles then advanced.

Senator MCGREGOR

- No honorable senator who voted for the minimum wage intended that any applicant for a position

should be employed if he was incapable of doing the work. What Senator Smith means is that a man may be a very good clerk, though he may have a wooden leg, or only one eye.

Senator PLAYFORD(South Australia). - The analogy of the wooden-legged and the one-eyed . man fails, because no insurance company would trouble about such defects if the man's health was good. He might live as long as a man with two legs or two eyes. The fact is that we have made a. great mistake in inserting the minimum wage provision as it will prevent a number of men from earning wages of £80, £90, or £100 a year, and it will prevent many from getting into the service, simply because they cannot come up to the standard of work which will be fixed.

Senator DRAKE

- We are touching, in. this clause, on one of the most painful problems that have to be considered, and that is, what is to be done with persons who are afflicted with such bad health as to be disqualified for ordinary occupations. In the interests of the public service, I think that they ought to be debarred from entrance to it. Very painful cases have sometimes come under my notice in administering a department. What, for instance, is to be done with an officer of a department who develops consumption? He cannot be turned out upon the streets. He may be entitled to no pension or gratuity, and he refuses to resign. He cannot be permitted to continue to work in a room crowded with other persons, and in one or two such instances what I have had to do has been to give such men practically permanent sick leave. The service must be protected against cases like that.

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Senator DOBSON

- Senator Smith has raised a question of some importance, but I see no way of remedying the difficulty he has suggested in the Bill, because, under clause 52, it is required that every officer before the confirmation of his appointment shall effect an insurance on his life. It must be understood that every life insurance office will require every officer to pass a very strict medical examination. It appears to me that it is better to leave the clause as it stands.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 30 -

Except as hereinafter provided every person admitted to the public service shall in the first instance be appointed by the commissioner on probation only, and may be continued in such probationary position for a period of six months, but may be dispensed with by the commissioner at any time during such period. After the period of six months on probation has expired, the Governor-General may, on the recommendation of the commissioner, upon a report from the permanent head, confirm or annul such appointment.

Senator CLEMONS

- It appears to me that sub-clause (2), of clause 30, leaves the door open for the continuance of a practice which has existed in most of the States of keeping on probationers in the public service ad infinitum. There is nothing in the clause to make it compulsory upon the commissioner to take a man off the probation list and put him upon the permanent staff, and under this subclause (2) he may remain on the probation list for ever. If no one suggests a better amendment I am prepared to move the omission of the word "may," with a view of inserting the word " shall." It does seem to me that it should be compulsory upon the commissioner to take some step to remove probationers to the permanent staff after six months' probation.

Senator DRAKE

- This appears to me to be a merciful provision. If we strike out "may " and put in " shall," it will mean that the officer to whom the commissioner will not give another six months' probation must be dismissed. Under the clause as it stands, if, after a probation of six months, the commissioner comes to the conclusion that an officer is not giving satisfaction he has the option of giving him a further six months' probation, but if the alteration proposed is agreed to, and he must either annul or confirm the appointment at the end of six months, he will annul it.

Senator FRASER (Victoria).- The apprehension I have is that any number of temporary hands may be kept on under this clause for a life-time. It would be better to provide that after a probation of twelve months an appointment must be confirmed or annulled.

Senator CLEMONS(Tasmania). - I agree with what Senator Fraser has said, and I agree also that there is

force in what has been said by the Postmaster-General. I do not wish to do anything harsh, and perhaps we should not be in too much of a hurry to dismiss a probationer after six months. I still think, however, that my original contention holds good, and that it is not desirable that in the public service we should have a number of temporary hands employed for an indefinite time. I move -

That the words "for one further term of six months," be inserted after the word "may" (line 9).

That would limit the term of probation to twelve months, and would give the commissioner a further period of six months in which to ascertain whether a probationer should be continued in the service. Twelve months is an ample probationary term, and the amendment I propose will meet the objection raised by the Postmaster-General.

Senator DRAKE

- If there is a feeling in the committee in favour of limiting the probation to twelve months, what is desired can, I think, best be secured by inserting another subclause to this effect -

The period of probation shall not in any case extend beyond twelve months.

Senator Clemons

- If the honorable and learned senator cares to submit an amendment in that form I am perfectly willing to withdraw the amendment I have moved.

Senator DOBSON

- We have to thank Senator Clemons for pointing out a serious blot upon the clause, because the number of temporary officers continued in the service of the States has been so large as to be a scandal. We must do something to put an end to that system, but, at the same time, we should be merciful to any man for whom a probationary term of six months is not sufficient. I think the best way to deal with the matter would be to add the following words to the clause -

Or retain any person whose appointment is not confirmed for a further period of six months, at the end of which latter period such appointment shall either be confirmed or annulled.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment (by Senator Drake) proposed -

That sub-clause (2) be amended by the addition of the following words : - " or extend the period of probation for a further period of six months, provided that the whole term of probation shall not in any case extend beyond twelve months."

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Senator Clemons

- That will do.

Senator FRASER (Victoria). - I grant that the words proposed to be inserted by Senator Drake may be sufficient, but in some departments of the public service in Victoria a great number of probationers have been employed for years and years. They go in for six months, are put off for a week, and then go in for another six months, and that practice is carried on regularly. Under this sub-clause there is a danger of a probationer going in for a year, coming out for a week, and then going on for another year. Unless the clause is well drawn that practice may be introduced into the Federal service.

Amendment agreed to.

Senator CLEMONS (Tasmania). - What Senator Fraser has just said is well worthy of the attention of the Postmaster-General. It is very desirable that he should draft a short provision, which would render it impossible for a probationer to re-enter the service, except after an interval of twelve months ; otherwise we may have a continuous series of temporary officers with breaks of a week, possibly of a day.

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- There is evidently a real danger to be apprehended. Even under the Victorian Act these evasions have taken place. This sub-clause is certainly more elastic than the section in that Act, which provides that the appointment shall be for a period of six months absolute, and goes on to say that at the end of that period the Governor in Council may not extend it, but confirm it, and if it is not confirmed he ceases to be in the service. That section has been evaded to a considerable extent in this State.

Senator DRAKE

- I would suggest the insertion of another sub-clause, in these words -

No person who has occupied the position of a probationer for twelve months, and whose appointment has not been confirmed, shall be eligible for re-admission to the service.

Senator PEARCE

- The committee should pause before it accepts the suggestion of the Postmaster-General. The effect of such an amendment would be to disqualify a man not for a short time, but for ever. Supposing that owing to the exigencies of the finances the commissioner had to retrench, and that he discharged any probationers. They would be disqualified to re-enter the public service at anytime, not because they were incapable, but simply because, owing to the exigencies of the Treasury at a certain time, they were not appointed.

Amendment (by Senator Clemons) proposed -

That the following be inserted as a new subclause : -

No such probationer whose appointment shall be so annulled as aforesaid shall be eligible as a probationer at any time within twelve months from the date of the annulling of such appointment.

Senator DRAKE

- The object of the probationary period is to find out whether the probationer is a man who should be admitted. As the clause reads now, if at the end of six months the commissioner is not satisfied with the officer, he may allow another six months to see how he shapes, and at the end of that time he has to decide whether the officer has shown himself fit to be admitted. The committee is now asked to provide that if the commissioner then annuls the appointment, the man is not to be eligible for re-admission at once, but may be eligible for re-admission at the end of twelve months. Only two reasons, it seems to me, can be advanced for making that distinction. One is that during the period of twelve months he may so improve that he may become fit for another trial, but I think that is entirely unlikely.

Senator Clemons

- Give him a chance.

Senator DRAKE

- I would sooner give him a chance by letting him go on in the service for another term of six months than let him make a second start after an interval of twelve months spent out of the service. I do not see why the man should be debarred for a period of twelve months. The same objection applies to the argument of Senator Pearce, that through the exigencies of the service a man may not be required at a certain time, but that he may be required afterwards. The man may be required within a week or a fortnight, but why should he be debarred from re-entering the service for twelve months?

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Senator PULSFORD

- The Postmaster-General does not quite grasp the case. In the public service we have an ebb and flow of work. There are times when there may be a sudden increase of work, and then it may be very desirable to take on for a limited period men who have been out of the service for a year. If the commissioner has not power to re-engage those men for a limited time, he may have to take for a limited period men who have had far less experience. The amendment gives a little elasticity which the service requires, and at the same time is just and fair, not only to the service, but to the probationers.

Senator Sir FREDERICKSARGOOD (Victoria). - At first sight there would appear to be considerable force in the argument of Senator Pearce, but I think he will see, on reflection, that if financial stress arose, there would be every inducement to keep on the probationers at £40 or £50 a year, and to dispense with those who were drawing high salaries. First of all, we wish to get into the service capable men. They are to be taken in as lads, and allowed six months in which to show their adaptability to the position. If they display their suitability the appointment is confirmed. If, on the other hand, they are not quite up to the mark, but the commissioner thinks that a little more time may qualify them, there is power taken in the clause to give them another six months' trial. Then if he still fails, his appointment is absolutely annulled. That, I think, is quite right, and we ought not to go beyond that. Neither should the young man be taken back as a probationer. He has had two chances, and that should be enough. But it does not necessarily follow that the young fellow shall not be employed in the public service at all. He could be employed under clause 40 in temporary employment. That, it appears to me, is the way in which the equities of the case could be met.

Senator CLEMONS(Tasmania).- The reason for my amendment is that it is notorious in the public service that there have been temporary officers whose services have been dispensed with, but who at the end of a week or a fortnight have been taken on again. I have put the amendment in a modified form, because I

recognise what some honorable senators state, that we should not be too harsh with these men, and should not say absolutely once and for all - "You shall never become a probationer, and never have any chance of entering the service."

Senator STYLES

- If a youth fails to pass his examination at the end of twelve months, he should not in justice to other applicants be allowed to enter the service at all. By that time he will have had two chances - one at the end of six months and one at the end of twelve months.

Senator Pearce

- Suppose he is not appointed because the service is overmanned.

Senator STYLES

- We are not dealing with that. What I say is, that at the end of twelve months the probationer will have had two chances to pass the examination, whilst other candidates will have had no chance at all. If this amendment is agreed to it will mean that many a young fellow will say - " Oh, I don't care about the examination, because if I can't pass it now, I shall have another chance in twelve months." Hence he will waste his time. He will be like Mahomet's coffin, hanging between Heaven and earth. If he fails to pass in twelve months he should lose his chance.

Senator Clemons

- For ever?

Senator STYLES

- Yes, for ever. I would not debar him from obtaining temporary work, but he should lose his chance of entering the service permanently.

Senator WALKER

- I intend to support Senator Clemons in this matter. As to what Senator Styles has said, the probationer may be performing temporary duties for a time, during which he may qualify himself. He should be allowed within that time to endeavour to pass the examination.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 32 (Age of new appointees to clerical division).

Senator PEARCE(Western Australia). - This clause practically lays down the law that we shall not allow any person to enter the clerical division who is over the age of 21 years. I think that is too drastic altogether. After all, if a man is 22 or 23 years of age and can pass an examination, why should he be debarred? One hardly knows how a man is going to turn out until he is over 21.

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Senator DRAKE

- I regard this as a very wise provision. We want to fill up the ranks of the service in the clerical division with young fellows. It is preferable if they are destined to enter the service that they should take up the profession soon after they leave school. As a rule a young man does not stay at school until he is 21 years of age, and we do not want to leave the door open for the service to be entered by those who have tried some other walk in life and failed. Moreover, the salary for a man who enters the service in the clerical division is at the beginning only £40 a year. How is a man with a wife and eight children to keep himself and his family on £40 per annum ? He has to be three years in the service before getting the minimum wage of £110. The object of inserting this clause is to secure for the service useful young men who have only recently left school and are just starting life.

Senator CLEMONS(Tasmania). - I am inclined to agree with Senator Pearce. I should like the Postmaster-General to tell us whether it is possible, for a person to enter the higher grades of the service, even though he has not started in the clerical division? If not, we should be likely to shut out many desirable persons. If there is an avenue by which men of ability can enter the higher grades over the age of 21, I am not much concerned, but it appears to me that this clause practically shuts out every man from the higher grades unless he is over 21. That is rather drastic. We should hesitate before saying that no man shall enter the 'Service - which we want to see equipped with the best men in the Commonwealth - unless he starts before he reaches the age of 21.

Senator WALKER(New South Wales). - We must remember that in other clauses we have provided for officers being transferred to the clerical division. Therefore, to be consistent, we ought to make this clause read -

No person shall be appointed to the clerical division unless he has been transferred from another division, ' and so on. We do not wish to limit the right of men to be transferred to the clerical division at any age.

Senator Fraser

- Transferences are not affected by this clause.

Senator WALKER

- If we transfer a man from one division to another, it appears to me that we appoint him to the division to which he is transferred.

Senator FRASER

- I think the age of 21 is too low, because many at that age are mere lads. It would be an advantage to the Bill to extend the age for two or three years. But I quite agree that the age must be fixed. It would be a great mistake to appoint men of 28 or 29, because at that age they have responsibilities which would not enable them to live on the small salary we propose to pay.

Senator STEWART

- I think the age might very well be extended. Our object is to get as good men as we possibly can into the civil service ; though I am not one of those who believe that we require specially good men. So far as my acquaintance with the civil service goes, the work is very largely a matter of routine. The impression that has been strongly borne in upon my mind is that this age limit prevents us from getting the best men in the Commonwealth. Private firms leave themselves open at all times to avail themselves of the best talent they can get ; but our Government deliberately shut the door against all who do not enter the service between sixteen and 21 years of age. It is desirable that we should have men in the service who have had a varied experience of life. If we put a lad of sixteen into the Post-office he knows nothing but Post-office business, and often not much of that. His mind runs in a particular groove, and he can see nothing outside of it. He has no experience of the general business of life, and his lack of experience makes him more or less incompetent for the very work he is paid to do. According to this provision, if a man were wanted in the Customs department the public service commissioner might take a man out of the Post-office and set him to do Customs work ; but it would not be possible to take a man who had been Customs clerk for a large firm, and who intimately knew all the minutiae of Customs business, and put him in the department. Yet, it must be evident that such a man would be a valuable acquisition to the staff. We ought not to be so hide-bound in our management of the service, which should be open to any man capable of passing the examination and showing capacity for the work required of him.

Senator O'Keefe

- W - Would the honorable senator prevent officers from working their way up in the department ?

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Senator STEWART

- I am not a slave to the idea of working up. We should leave the door open to the appointment of men of the best capacity we can find at all times. I have seen extraordinary anomalies in connexion with the public service. I remember a case in Queensland where a man who had been a draftsman in the Lands office, but who was retrenched, was appointed within a few months to be chief clerk in the Police department. What on earth could that man know about police work ? That is an instance of the stupidity of this iron-bound rule. Would it not have been much better to appoint some solicitor's managing clerk who was well acquainted with police business and criminal procedure? I remember another case where a school teacher in Queensland was appointed clerk of patents. He knew nothing whatever about patents. He was afterwards appointed Under-Secretary for Agriculture. I am certain that a young man could have been obtained in Queensland much more fitted for that position -than this ex-school teacher could possibly be. He was a scholarly man, and no doubt a good teacher, but could not have had sufficient knowledge of the kind that would qualify him for the position of Under-Secretary for Agriculture. We ought to extend the age limit. I think 35 would be a fair limit. We should, to use a phrase of the Right Honorable George Reid's, "let air into the public service," and not make a close preserve of it. as seems to be the idea of some honorable senators. Let the friction of competition work within the departments, and I believe that we shall have an improved Commonwealth service instead of one of the pattern so often complained of at present.

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Senator O'KEEFE

- I am afraid that the honorable senator's recommendation, if adopted, would not only let in the air, but would also let in some abuses. Honorable senators must know that there are often complaints that outsiders, through a little political or social influence, are introduced over the heads of worthy men in the service. Senator Stewart's proposal, if adopted, would permit that kind of abuse to continue, because the honorable senator would extend the age to 30 years. The honorable senator also would allow any position in the public service to go to a stranger who had not been previously in the service, and as to such, a person having special knowledge, the special knowledge sometimes is really only in the matter of exercising influence. We should adopt the clause as it stands if we wish to secure a useful and efficient public service.

Senator PEARCE(Western Australia). - When I raised this point I had not previously considered the full effect of clause 31. On further consideration I think it is better to leave clause 32 as it stands in order to meet the objection stated by Senator O'Keefe. But if that is done, we should recommit clause 31, in order to place the clerical division in the same position -as the administrative and professional divisions, in the matter of the admission of persons who are over 21 years of age, with the condition that such appointments are laid before Parliament. There is much force in the objection raised by Senator O'Keefe, that by extending the age in this case, we might inflict injustice upon those who have gone through the probationary period between the ages of sixteen years and 21 years.

Senator DOBSON(Tasmania). - I hope the clause will be retained as it is. I object to the proposal to extend the age, because if we wish to train persons to become efficient officers and clerks, the heads of the different departments must get them when they are young. That is the experience of men of business, and it is the practice also in the army and in the navy. Unless a man is a bank manager or a good customer, he cannot get a young man into a bank at the age of 24 or 25, because the banks want youths who can be trained. I have been much astonished to hear the arguments used by my honorable friends who have declaimed against political influence. By this amendment they are proposing to open the door to the very thing which they profess a desire to shut out. The Bill -provides that persons may enter the service at sixteen years of age, and not over 21 years, and it is now proposed to increase the age to 23 or 25 years. If we allow grown-up men to come in and compete with lads who have entered the service at sixteen years of age, we shall have this result - that in two or three years' time the man who entered at 23 or 24 years of age will be an efficient clerk, and the boy who has entered at sixteen will also be an efficient clerk ; but when the chief accountant or chief correspondence clerk wants a good man, although these officers will both be in the same grade, other things being equal, he will naturally select the man who has eight or ten years more experience of life. The unfortunate boy who made up his mind from the start to enter the service will be handicapped by being placed alongside, perhaps, half-a-dozen men who have been allowed to enter the service eight or ten years later.

Senator FRASER(Victoria). - I think we might extend the time for two or three years for the simple reason that many boys do not leave school until they are over 21 years of age. Parents who are anxious that their boys shall get a university education, keep them at school until they are over that age. Some persons are very precocious at seventeen or eighteen years of age, and others are the reverse at 21 years. I think it would be better to extend the age to 23 years.

Senator Sir FREDERICKSARGOOD (Victoria). - My feeling is that if we wish to thoroughly demoralize the service from top to bottom we shall adopt the amendment suggested by Senator Stewart. As has been pointed out, a number of lads enter the service, after passing an examination, with a view to devoting the whole of their lives to the service. It is in the interests of the Commonwealth that we should have in the public service capable men gradually trained, and who know all the ropes. But if this extension of age is agreed to, political influence will be brought to bear upon Ministers to appoint some hanger-on of Members of Parliament, who may be 23 or 25 years of age. The Minister will make the appointment at £40 a year, because the law provides that that shall be the salary to begin with. There is an additional objection in the fact that that will lead to the appointment of seniors to do junior's work, and as a large employer of this class of labour, I unhesitatingly say that there is nothing more demoralizing in a large office than to put a senior alongside a junior to do similar work. The trouble will not stop there, because shortly after the man is appointed, some kind friend will ask a question in Parliament as to whether it is a fact that Mr. Soandso, a married man with a couple of children, and 25 years of age, is only receiving £40 a year. Parliament will sympathize with such a case, and a special vote will be passed to increase that

man's salary, and that will place the whole of the lads who are honestly working their way in the service in an unfair and unjust position. Senator Stewart has stated that these changes from one department to another result in putting a square peg into a round hole. That may very occasionally happen, but not to anything like the extent generally supposed, because clerical work throughout the departments is practically the same. I strongly advise the committee to pass the clause as it stands, if they wish to keep alive a healthy spirit of emulation, and a feeling amongst public servants that they will be fairly treated. Senator CLEMONS(Tasmania). - I am inclined to think that the age should not be greatly extended, if extended at all, because looking at the clause more carefully I find that the limit is 21 years on the last birthday, and that really opens the door to persons who are practically 22 years of age. Senator Eraser used an argument which I think has some weight. I do not agree that there are many boys at school at 21 years of age, and I am afraid that those who are would never be fit for the public service of the Commonwealth. I agree, however, that there are a good many boys of 21 attending the universities, and we should remember, that under clause 43 provision is made for allowing any public servant who has passed an examination, conducted by a university in any of the States, to obtain certain exemptions in the matter of examinations in the service. It may be a very desirable thing to encourage youths who have attended the State universities to enter the public service.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- Their efforts would be directed to getting into the professional branch.

Senator CLEMONS

- I recognise what Senator Zeal says, but there is a provision permitting a university man in the clerical division to escape certain examinations. As the limit under the Bill may extend to 21 years and 11 months, I think it will give ample opportunity for youths who have passed through a university course to get into the clerical division.

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Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- I ask honorable senators to pause before they alter this clause. This provision is the result of years of experience, and it is found that boys entering the service require a probationary period before they obtain a permanent status in the service. A similar practice is adopted in commercial, banking, and insurance houses, and is found to work well. There are many objections to allowing persons to enter the service after a certain age. One strong objection is that to do so will be to cause dissatisfaction amongst the employees. The question raised by Senator Clemons with reference to lads who have had a university education is met in the Victorian Public Service Act, because a boy who has passed in an honorable way through a university is under that Act as a matter of right eligible for a position in the professional division of the Railway department. It is with a view to encouraging efficiency in the service that this provision has been adopted, and I hope the committee will agree to the clause.

Senator PULSFORD(New South Wales). - I think the clause should remain substantially unaltered, but there is one little flaw in it which requires to be remedied. I think the word " appointment " should be " application," because as the clause stands at present, it may happen that a person putting in an application for employment may not be 21 years of age at the date of his application, but by the time the commissioner is ready to appoint him he may be over that age. I move -

That the word " appointment," be omitted, with ii view to insert in lieu thereof, the word " application."
That will give a little more margin, and will meet, I think, all that is desired.

Senator DRAKE

- This amendment, I take it, means that if the application is put in just before the applicant becomes 21 years of age, he shall be eligible for appointment even when he is 25, 26, or 27 years of age. The evils of admitting men of mature age would be as bad under this amendment as under any of the other amendments proposed. I think 21 years is a fair limit, and it would do no harm even if the minimum limit of age were lowered. I think that the junior ranks of the civil service should be filled by youths, and not by men.

Amendment negatived.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 33 -

Any person not more than 60 years of age who at the establishment of the Commonwealth was engaged

in any office or employment not being of a temporary or casual character in the public railway or other service of any State shall be eligible for appointment to a position in the corresponding division in the public service of the Commonwealth. *

Senator CLEMONS

- I believe that the intention of the clause is that no person who was 60 years of age at the establishment of the Commonwealth, and was then employed in the public service of a State shall be debarred from being transferred to the Commonwealth service. If so, it is not worded happily, and it ought to be amended so as to read -

Any person not more than 60 years of age at the establishment of the Commonwealth, who, at such time, was engaged in any office or employment, &c

As it reads, it does not define the position of a man who was engaged by a State at the time when the Commonwealth was established, and was then not more than 60 years of age. I propose to move an amendment so as to make it clear that if any person was not more than 60 at the establishment of the Commonwealth, he shall be eligible for transfer.

Senator Pearce

- This clause applies to railway servants as well as to civil servants.

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Senator DRAKE

- Supposing that the clause was amended as Senator Clemons has suggested, and that ten years hence a man was 70, who at the commencement of the Commonwealth was less than 60, and was in the employment of the railway or other service of a State. Does he desire that that man should be eligible for entrance to the Commonwealth service, although he might be 70 years of age? I think not. We say- that a man who is 60½ is not to be debarred from obtaining employment under the Commonwealth. The clause provides that if he is not more than 60 at the time when he wishes to enter the service, and if at the time of commencement of the Commonwealth he was in the service of a State, he shall be eligible for entrance into our service, but it is not considered desirable to recruit it with men who at the time of entry are more than 60 years.

Senator CLEMONS (Tasmania). - I admit that there is something in what Senator Drake has said, but I would ask him seriously to consider the condition of men who at this moment may be 59 years and 10 months. If this Bill is not passed within two months, they will be debarred from entering the federal service. It is a hard-and-fast rule, dating, in my opinion, from the wrong time, because it depends on the provision we make in this Bill whether many an old officer shall be transferred, or be dismissed on account of his age. I can quite understand that in the Commonwealth there may be at least 50 old men who are hoping that this Bill may become law within the next two months.

Senator PEARCE (Western Australia). It is provided in the Constitution Act that all servants taken over with departments, from the States are taken over with all existing and accruing rights preserved. This clause only provides for the appointment of men from public departments of a State not transferred to the Commonwealth. No injustice is inflicted on the persons who have been mentioned by Senator Clemons. It only gives them a privilege. I move -

That the words "not being of a temporary or casual character," lines 3 and 4, be omitted.

The clause provides that persons in the railway or other service of a State shall be eligible to be transferred to a position in a corresponding division in the Commonwealth service, but it bars the transfer of all those whose employment is of a temporary or casual character. It has been frequently stated in the chamber by Senators Sargood, Dobson, and Playford that in some States there are a number of officers whose employment, in the language of their State Acts, has been of a temporary character. Although some of these men have been employed for ten or twenty years. For instance, the employment of the "pro and tem" men in South Australia would certainly be held to be of a temporary or casual character. If this privilege is to be allowed to those who have the distinction of being permanent officers, it should also be extended to those who are under the disability of being known as "pro and tem" officers. After all, it does not bind the Commonwealth to take over any men. It is left with the commissioner to decide whether the services of any men shall be Accepted. It gives the men the right to apply for an appointment, and if their application be approved they can be appointed to a position in the corresponding division in the Commonwealth service. I think that the Government might very well accept my amendment.

Senator DRAKE

- The officers who have been employed temporarily by the States for a long time can I presume continue to be employed. If there had been any great desire on the part of the Railways Commissioners or Public Service Board of a State to retain their service the men could have been put on permanently. In South Australia practically the men referred to have been in permanent employment.

Senator Playford

- But they are called provisional and temporary.

Senator DRAKE

- They have been in permanent employment. But why should we desire to throw open the Federal service to persons who are in that way permanently employed in the States? Why make officers in the railway or public service of a State eligible for appointment? I take it that we do not wish to throw the service open to men whose services have not been particularly valued by a State. It can still go on employing them. It may be that men who have been temporarily employed for a long time are valuable public servants, but is it not a fact that in a great many cases a man is retained from time to time, because it was felt to be rather a hardship to dispense with his services when he was getting old?

Senator Pearce

- This amendment would not compel the commissioner to accept him.

Senator DRAKE. - To make them eligible is practically to hold out hope to such men that they can get into the Federal service. If the State has been employing these men for five, ten, or fifteen years, and they are to be continued in employment, out of charity, surely it is the State which should find them work? What the clause contemplates is that there might be in the Railway department of a State an officer occupying a high position whose services might be very much desired by the Federal Government, and it is considered that he should not be debarred from entering our service. But its object is not to throw the service of the Commonwealth open to a number of men who are getting near 60 years of age, who are not permanently employed and whose services perhaps are not particularly required by the States. I think that there should be some limitation of this kind made.

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Senator GLASSEY

- I cannot follow the line of reasoning which Senator Drake has adopted. To me it is absolutely illogical. In this Bill the right is reserved to the commissioner to go into any State and engage any man whose services, in his opinion, would be of value to the Commonwealth. That is right so far as it goes. But there is another section of civil servants to be considered, and that is "provisional and temporary" hands who have been employed for years. However desirable it might be to employ any provisional and temporary hands, whose services would be valuable to the Commonwealth, it is proposed in this clause to cut off the supply from the service. If the services of a man would be valuable to the Commonwealth by all means take him, but do not limit your choice. Unless this amendment is made, possibly the very man who would be most valuable to the Commonwealth might not be eligible simply because he was called a provisional servant. I do not think that the opposition to the amendment is worthy of a Minister of the Crown.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause as amended agreed to.

Clause 40 -

Whenever in the opinion of the Minister of a department the prompt despatch of the business of a department renders temporary assistance necessary, and the commissioner is unable to provide such assistance from other departments in the State in which such assistance is required, the permanent head or the chief officer shall select in such manner as may be prescribed from the persons whose names are upon the prescribed register in the State in which such assistance is required, such person or persons who are available as appear to be best qualified for such work, and they shall be paid at the same rate as is paid to the permanent employees for similar work, and shall be entitled to the same holidays.

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- We have now reached a very important clause, dealing with a subject which has not been touched upon in the discussions upon preceding clauses. It gives to the Minister the power to put on temporary assistance in his department whenever he thinks it is necessary. The clause brings up the whole question of temporary appointments. Temporary assistance is necessary sometimes in order to carry on the

business of the departments, but the appointment of temporary officers should be surrounded by safeguards, and it should not be within the power of the Minister to make them even for a nominally short time. The amendments which I have circulated require that temporary appointments shall be made on the recommendation of a responsible officer, and not at the mere dictum of the Minister. I intend to move, first of all, that the words - "in the opinion of" be omitted. Then I propose to insert after the word "department," the words - "upon the report of the permanent head or the chief officer of such department, is of opinion that." The clause will then read -

Whenever the Minister of a department, upon the report of the permanent head or the chief officer of such department, is of opinion that - and so. on. The amendment introduces the safeguard of a recommendation being required from an officer capable of giving an opinion on the subject.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- The Minister will never act unless he gets a report from the head of the department.

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- The honorable senator surely forgets what transpired in Victoria before the Public Service Act was passed. I have known cases in which appointments have been made in the teeth of the permanent officer. I am providing that the Minister shall not act without having the advice of his responsible officer. I mention the permanent head, because we are in a position different from that of the States. There is now a permanent officer over the whole department, and what was formerly called the "permanent head" in the States, becomes the chief officer. The chief officer of a department cannot communicate with the Minister except through the permanent head. My object is that the Minister shall not, on his own motion, be allowed to make temporary appointments. 'Take, for instance, the Victorian railways. A recent report has shown that, within the last five years, the temporary officers have increased from 712 to 2,630.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- The Minister had nothing to do with that.

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- We also find the Public Service Board of Victoria, in their report, calling special attention to this system of making temporary appointments.

Senator Playford

- They are not made by the Minister.

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- They cannot be made except with the consent of the Minister, and the Act is evaded by the Minister consenting to the temporary officers remaining beyond a merely temporary term.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- The heads of departments are responsible, not the Minister. It is all nonsense.

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Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- I am speaking of what I know, and I think I know a great deal more of the departments than the honorable senator. I am anxious to prevent this abuse of temporary appointments, which is not fair to those permanently employed. I know of one department in which there are eight officers who have been temporarily employed for an average of over four years, and one of them has been on the temporary staff for seven years. If we wish to have a healthy system we must take some steps to place the employment of temporary officers on a proper footing. If my amendment does not carry out that object, I shall be glad to accept one that will. In my opinion, the clause as it stands at present is very dangerous, and leaves too much power in the hands of the Minister. I therefore move -

That the words "in the opinion of," line 1, be omitted.

Senator DRAKE

- This provision for calling in temporary assistance in certain cases is very much safeguarded, because it cannot be exercised unless the commissioner is unable to provide the assistance from some other department. The objection is that the Minister may capriciously, and against the advice of the permanent head, call in temporary assistance. I think that the Minister does not act except on the recommendations of the permanent officers of his department. This amendment is only one of a series to be proposed by Senator Sargood. In one of his amendments he introduces the words "whenever the Minister of a department, upon the report of the permanent head or the chief officer of such department, is of opinion,"

and that would provide for the continuance of the very evil the honorable senator has pointed out. because under such an amendment the Minister could, upon the report of a chief officer, override the views of the permanent head.

Senator Sir Frederick Sargood

- The word "or" there should be " and."

Senator DRAKE

- In that case the Minister could not accept the advice of the permanent head unless it was backed up by that of the chief officer, who is a subordinate. It must be clear that that amendment could not be accepted, and it must be altered so as to provide that it shall be upon the report of the permanent head only.

Senator Sir Frederick Sargood

- I have no objection to that.

Senator DRAKE

- I do not think there is any necessity for amendments of this character. The Minister must be guided in these matters by the permanent head, and even if he should act in opposition to the advice of the head of his department, what injury can result when it is provided that this temporary assistance can only be called in if the commissioner is unable to provide it from other branches of the service? I do not go as far as many honorable senators in thinking it advisable to place all power in the hands of the Minister, but in this matter of temporary employment I think Ministers may be trusted.

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- I should like to ask Senator Sargood how a Minister is to know of any dearth of employment in any department unless some one reports it to him. Is he to go round from room to room to inquire if a man is wanted here or a boy there ? That would be a practical proposal, but, under the amendment the honorable senator proposes the Minister would have no knowledge except upon the report of his permanent officers and he is not likely, against their advice, to incur the odium and risk of proposing employment that is not required. I have never heard of such cases as the honorable senator has referred to.

Senator Sir FREDERICKS ARGOOD. I can tell Senator Zeal that I know of one case where a Minister sent a letter to the head of his department telling him to find a position for the bearer. The head of the department sent the letter back with an indorsement that he had no vacancy, and could not find one. The letter was then returned to the head of the department with an indorsement that he had been told to find a vacancy for the man, and he did so.

Question - That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the clause - put. The committee divided -

Ayes 14

Noes 7

Majority 7

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

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Senator DOBSON

- I agree that this is a very important clause. It is in respect of the temporary officers that most of the State Public Service Acts have broken down, and have not resulted in the good we had a right to expect from them. Parliament requires to keep a specially watchful eye on the appointment of temporary officers, and I therefore move -

That the following new sub-clause be added: - "(7) The commissioner shall in the month of July in each year make a return showing the names of all persons temporarily employed in the public service during the previous financial year, the period for which such persons have been respectively employed, and the remuneration paid to them, and such return shall be laid before both Houses of Parliament.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause, as amended, agreed to.

Progress reported.

SUPPLY BILL (No. 5.)

Bill received from the House of Representatives, and (on motion by Senator Drake) read a first time.

Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

. - I move -

That the Bill be now read a second time.

This is a Bill for the ordinary supply required for the services of Government. The amount asked for is £410,761, and that will be one month's supply on the basis of the Estimates. Honorable senators are aware that supply has been granted up to 31st December, but the probability is that this Chamber will not meet until the end of the third week in January, and it is therefore necessary to ask for Supply for the month of January.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill read a second time.

In committee :

Schedule.

Senator PULSFORD

- I presume that there is nothing new in the way of policy in these Estimates, and that we shall have an opportunity of discussing them in detail in due time. There is one very large item relating to the Australian Auxiliary Squadron which requires some explanation.

Senator CLEMONS

- I agree with Senator Pulsford that the item of "Auxiliary Squadron, £105,900," is one in regard to which some information is required. I should like to have some details as to the way in which this amount is made up. We were discussing this matter the other day in connexion with the resolution for the taking over of British New Guinea, and, no doubt, it will be a most important question. Any information relating to it, which the Postmaster-General can give us, will be of interest.

Senator DRAKE

- This amount represents the annual contribution under the agreement which was made in regard to the auxiliary squadron, and it is distributed on a population basis.

Senator PULSFORD(New South Wales).- I presume that the £105,900 represents the payment to be made in January to the Imperial authorities for the year, and that is not to be taken as representing the cost for one month, although we were told that Supply was required to cover the expenses of the department for only one month.

Senator DRAKE

- Of course not. It represents the payments to be made next month for the whole year. The agreement was made for ten years.

Senator Clemons

- What is the date of the agreement ?

Senator DRAKE

- The date of the Victorian Defences and Discipline Act, in the 6th schedule of which the agreement is given, is 10th July, 1890, and the ninth article of the schedule contains this statement -

The agreement shall be for a period of ten years, and only terminate if and provided notice has been given two years previously, viz., at the end of the eighth year, or at the end of any subsequent year, and then two years after such date.

Therefore, the agreement is still current.

Senator DOBSON

- Does the agreement show how it is that this year the payment asked for is £105,900, whereas last year it was something like £90,000. Is the increase due to the increase of population ?

Senator DRAKE

- I think the amount is adjusted from time to time according to the actual expenditure. It is provided in the 10th article that -

The accounts of these vessels shall be closed each year on the 31st March, and the difference between expenditure and £91,000 per annum for maintenance, adjusted in subsequent annual payments, should the actual expenditure prove less than that sum.

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Senator PEARCE

- It is to be regretted that this item should have been brought forward in a Supply Bill of this character,

although, I presume, it could not be avoided. The item is certainly worthy of serious consideration. This is the first occasion upon which it has come before the Commonwealth Parliament. It is an expenditure to which the States' have been committed by State legislation, and the Federal Parliament is to be committed to it, to some extent, without any consideration as to whether we are doing justice to the Empire, or justice to Australia. The hurried manner in which this Bill must be dealt with this afternoon precludes any general discussion. It would be better if some temporary arrangement could be made so that we might deal with the item on the Estimates. We should then have time to thoroughly discuss it, and to obtain full information upon the subject.

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- I think it is well that this question has been raised. I would ask honorable senators to consider whether it is not desirable that the squadron, instead of remaining in Sydney Harbor from years' end to years' end, should sail round the coast of Australia and make calls at different ports. For instance, Victoria contributes something like £29,000 or £30,000 per annum towards the cost of the squadron, and it is only once a year - during the Cup festivities - that the exigencies of the State are considered to require its presence in the Bay. No doubt the colonies made a splendid bargain when they agreed to contribute to the maintenance of the auxiliary squadron.

Senator Glassey

- A most outrageous bargain.

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- I do not think so. The Imperial Government contributes more than we do to the cost of the squadron.

Senator Glassey

- We want to lay the foundation of a navy of our own.

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- We cannot have a navy of our own. We are better as we are under the protection of the old flag. Having entered into this bargain, we should derive as much benefit from it as possible. I am sure that if some of the vessels of the squadron called at the principal ports of the Commonwealth two or three times a year, instead of remaining in Sydney Harbor all the year round, it would be a good thing. It would be far better for us to pay the cost of the coal required to enable these vessels to go from port to port, and to exercise their men in rough seas, than to allow them to lie idle in Port Jackson.

Senator DAWSON

- Does the honorable senator wish to see Tasmania ruined ?

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- Tasmania's contribution on a population basis is a very small one, and the wages which the men of the squadron would spend while in port at Hobart would amount to more than her contribution. When the proper time arrives I shall be prepared to make some effort to give effect to my suggestion.

Senator CLEMONS(Tasmania). - I think that Senator Zeal has raised an important point. We know that we must vote this item this afternoon, and vote it quickly,, but I am sorry that the Postmaster- General is unable to give us the information we desire. The only explanation we have been given in regard to this item is that it is distributed On a per capita basis. We did not need to be told that. When the Postmaster-General was requested to state how this sum was made up, and why it should be £105,900 this year, as compared with something like £90,000 last year, he was unable to give us a satisfactory answer.

Senator Drake

- I shall give some more information.

Senator CLEMONS

- I shall be glad if the Postmaster-General will do so. I was afraid the source of information had been dammed up. What Senator Zeal has said seems to me to be worthy of consideration. To the support of this squadron, all the States contribute per capita. The question of whether the subsidy is enough is beside the point that the squadron should visit each State at different times. Senator Zeal has pointed out that for most of its time the squadron remains in Sydney. I wish to ask the Minister if this Parliament has any control over the destination or the movements of the squadron. If it has, I think the time is not long distant when it will be desired to act in some direction, otherwise it will be of no use to complain that the squadron spends all its time in Sydney or Melbourne.

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Senator DRAKE

- With regard to the amount of the contribution, the seventh article of the agreement provides -
The colonies shall pay the Imperial Government interest at 5 per cent. on the first and prime cost of these vessels, such payment not to exceed the annual sum of £35,000.

The next paragraph provides that we have to pay the actual charges for maintaining the ships from year to year, and so on -

Provided always that the claim made by the Imperial Government, under this head, does not exceed the annual payment of £91,000. £126,000 is the annual cost of the squadron subject to modification from time to time. The accounts show that for this year the amount is £106,000, but it is necessary, I am told, to ask for less than the actual amount in order to leave full opportunity for discussion on another occasion. The amount of £126,000 may be subject to some adjustment, but it is estimated that that 'will be the contribution of the Commonwealth under that article of the agreement. As with regard to the warships being moved about from place to place, when the agreement was entered into, New Zealand and one other State made the stipulation that one vessel should periodically visit its waters. With that exception the movements of the squadron have been left, and wisely left, to the control of the Admiral. We must all recognise that we do not pay this sum in order to have the opportunity of seeing the ships occasionally, and perhaps deriving some advantage from their calling in at different ports. We pay the money as a protection to Australia, and for that reason it is recognised that the movements of the fleet shall be under the control of the Admiral,

Senator PULSFORD (New South Wales). - I think Senator Drake has dealt very fairly with the whereabouts of the squadron. I do not think we should expect that it should be turned into a perambulating show. If it be necessary that it should be taken everywhere, it might ultimately be found necessary to take Port Jackson with it. We do not feel that we could spare our beautiful harbor. It offers facilities for the squadron which have been recognised by the Imperial Government. I should not be willing to consent to anything arranged on a Commonwealth basis being turned into any undue advantage to the State I have the honour to represent. If it could be shown in any way that the other States are unfairly dealt with, I should be anxious to put that right, but we should not forget that these matters are in the hands of the Admiral representing the Imperial authorities, and if we trust him to do the best for the service I think we shall generally be satisfied with the result.

Senator DOBSON (Tasmania). - If, as I believe, it is a fact that the ships of the squadron stay longer in Sydney than in other ports the right reason has not yet been stated correctly. It is not done on account of the excellence of the harbor of Sydney, because I venture to think that the harbor of Hobart is quite as good as, if not better, than the other, but the head quarters of the navy are at Sydney, with all the Imperial stores and the Imperial officers to superintend all repairs. We have such magnificent waters, not only in our harbor at Hobart, but at Norfolk Bay, that the Admiral comes down almost, annually to carry out certain manoeuvres and gun practice there, and he is going to do the same in January. We have frequently had a man-o'-war which has needed repairs. In many instances we have not had the material or the machinery requisite to repair her. In other instances the repairs have been tolerably large, and we have not been able to do them as cheaply as they could be done in Sydney. In another case, the officers at head-quarters would have had to come down to Hobart and do the repairs. Honorable senators will see at once that whatever State contains the head-quarters of the navy, is far more likely to see man-o'-war more often than other States. We cannot have material and repairing officers and engineers sent to each State. I should not like it to be thought that because I asked Senator Drake whether the amount was increased by about £10,000, I have any objection to that increase. I have always thought, and said, that the contribution we pay for the protection of Australia to the navy is a very beggarly one. I make this remark because I have read in the newspapers that all the State Premiers when they met here recently were impressing on the Federal Ministers that there must be retrenchment, especially in defence. It appears to me to be the one department in which we can have no retrenchment.

Senator Pearce

- Yes we can.

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Senator DOBSON

- I shall join with the members of the labour party in not appointing highly paid officers, and in not having too much gold lace, or too many clerks. But if we wish to do justice to the Empire, and to take up the position in the world which other nations think we are going to take, from our action in reference to the war in South Africa ; we shall have to see, no matter what it may cost, that every boy and youth in the Commonwealth is possessed of a rifle, and the necessary ammunition to enable him to join a rifle-club and learn how to shoot. My idea of retrenchment is to give every boy and man a rifle and ammunition. I desire no floating batteries, no land batteries, and no gunships. I wish to see that the very element of the great colonial defence is formed, and, hot dashed to, the ground by silly notions of retrenchment. Senator CLEMONS(Tasmania). - I wish to draw attention to a small item which affects Tasmania. Hundreds of thousands of pounds are to be voted, and the only item I can find affecting Tasmania is - " Tasmanian Military Forces, Head-quarters Staff, salaries, £150." I wish to ask the Postmaster-General if there is any other item in the Estimates.

Senator Drake

- Yes, on page 16 an item of £175, and an item of £40. Tasmania is defended by the squadron.

Senator CLEMONS

- I find that there is also an item of £175 for salaries of permanent forces, and an item of £40 for salaries in the ordnance stores branch. When we were passing a previous Supply Bill, I drew the attention of Senator O'Connor to the fact that proper provision was not being made for Tasmania. I mentioned that certain forces had been distinguished as volunteers which ought and must necessarily be classed as militia, and that the vote would have to be altered sooner or later, and he promised to give the matter consideration. But in this Bill there is no recognition of the fact that a large part of the so-called volunteer forces of Tasmania is really a militia force. I find votes for militia in other States, but none for the militia in Tasmania.

Senator PULSFORD(New South Wales). - The Post and Telegraph department is the only one that is directly represented in the Senate. I should be very glad if the Postmaster-General would give us a little information on a matter of public policy. In New South Wales there has been a considerable expression of opinion and a good deal of annoyance at the proposed closing of the post-office in the suburbs of Erskineville and Darlington. I shall welcome any steps taken by the Postmaster-General in the direction of economy. I shall be glad, therefore, if the Postmaster-General will take advantage of this opportunity to explain with what fulness he thinks desirable the policy on which he is acting, whether he has proposed to close any post-office in any other State, upon what information he took the steps he did, and, generally, what results he expects from his action, and whether the interests of the public are being conserved. The interests of the public should, of course, first be considered.

Senator DRAKE

- I wish, first, to say a word in reply to Senator Clemons, with regard to the military forces in Tasmania. He has overlooked the fact that provision was made by previous Supply Bills with regard to the defence force of that State. Therefore it is not necessary this month to ask for a larger amount than is set down in the schedule. The total- amount voted in the three Supply Bills on account of Tasmania was, for the headquarters staff, £1,540, permanent forces, £1,885 ; mounted infantry, £400 ; artillery, Launceston, £200 ; Southern Tasmania, £200 ; and engineer corps, £200. So that the defence force of Tasmania has not been in any way overlooked, and it is in consequence of the amounts voted on previous Supply Bills that it is not necessary to ask for a larger amount this month.

Senator Clemons

- There is a singular absence of contingencies as compared with the votes of the other States.

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Senator DRAKE

- Contingencies amount, so far as concerns the head-quarters staff, to £460, and so far as concerns the permanent forces to £600. These amounts compare favorably with the votes for other States. In regard to the Post and Telegraph department, I can assure Senator Pulsford that it is no gratification to me to be away from the other House when references are being made to the department of which I am the head. The honorable senator wants to know the reason why it has been proposed to close certain post - offices. That has been done in accordance with a policy of reasonable economy, of which Senator Pulsford appears to approve. In pursuance of that policy, which I have endeavoured to carry out equally in all the

States of the Commonwealth, I issued instructions to the officers that they should use reasonable economy, and inform me of any expenditure being incurred which might be saved. In regard to the two particular offices mentioned by Senator Pulsford - Erskine-ville and Darlington - it was reported to me in the case of Erskine-ville that there was a post-office 35 chains -away in one direction, "and another office 44 chains away in the other direction. Surely there is no necessity for a post-office between these two other offices. The officers recommended that the official post-office should be discontinued, that a letter-box should be placed in its stead, and that some provision should be made for -the sale of stamps. In the same way in regard to Darlington, that was an office which was only about 40 chains away from the post-office in George-street west, and not very far from Redfern Post-office in the other direction, and from another office the name of which is not in my memory at the present moment, but which was not far away. I have looked carefully into the reports from the officers ; they are to the effect that this accommodation is not really required, that economy can be effected, and that the offices in question are really superfluous. I want the committee to understand that each case is dealt with on its merits in any particular State. Of course, some people who are living in the district are not satisfied with the decision, and think that these post-offices ought to be continued. The permanent head of the department, Mr. Scott, is leaving Melbourne in the course of a few days, find I have instructed him to confer with Mr. Dalgarno, to make all the necessary inquiries, and probably visit the places himself, so that he may report to me as to the necessity or otherwise of continuing these offices. I should like Senator Pulsford distinctly to understand that the policy adopted with regard to New South Wales is exactly the same as the policy adopted with regard to other States. We have also taken steps to close offices in other States which are considered to be superfluous, and where that can be done without restricting postal facilities. But each case will stand upon its own merits, and if I find on inquiry that a good case is made out for the continuance of the offices in question, nothing will give me greater pleasure than to continue them. Senator PULSFORD(New South Wales) - The distance between post-offices is only a matter of detail. If the population in a district was very dense there might be a sufficient reason for the continuance therein of an additional post-office. I presume that the Postmaster-General in having the matter fully considered will bear in mind, not merely the distance between other post-offices, but also the use that is being made of the offices, and the amount of business transacted. It would have been more to the point if the Postmaster-General had dealt with the population surrounding the post-offices rather than the distance between them, but I am glad to hear that arrangements are being made for the case to be carefully considered on its merits. 25 d

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Senator HIGGS

- The matter which I am going to mention ;'is one that I should not have brought up except for the fact that we shall be shortly adjourning for a few weeks, and there will be no opportunity of referring to it during that time. I asked the Postmaster-General a question regarding it earlier 'in the day. From what has been published in the Brisbane Observer, a perfectly reliable journal, published from the Courier office, which deals with the subject in three columns of matter, there appears to be serious neglect on the part of some postal officials. As far back as October, 1900, a certain firm made complaints in regard to missing letters. Investigations were initiated which led to the conviction of a boy employed in the post-office at Goondiwindi. The firm in question found it necessary to make continued complaints. These complaints were made occasionally in connexion with the western mail, and - though it will hardly be believed - it was some seven months after this first conviction that the firm was able to get the department actively to move in the matter. The head of the firm, Mr. Beirne, is one of the most straightforward, and one of the cleverest business men in Queensland. He made constant complaints about these missing letters, but could get no satisfaction from the department, which, indeed, chided him for not opening his letters himself, and told him that the fault must be in his own firm and amongst his own employes. They forced him to employ detectives, who were at the business establishment for some time trying to find out a reason for the letters being missing. The employes of the firm, numbering about a couple of hundred, were placed under a very unjust suspicion. The detectives could find nothing wrong in the firm, and, as I have said, some seven months appear to have expired before the Brisbane postal authorities took active steps to endeavour to trace the missing letters. Even then there appears to have been some bungling, because when it was discovered that one of the " trap " letters which had been posted in Brisbane went

astray, they did not discover who had the letter, nor do they appear to have discovered it to this day. It is very unjust that some one in the department in Brisbane should have placed the whole of the employees of the firm I have mentioned under a suspicion that should not have attached to them. Of course we all admit that very few instances of anything going wrong in connexion with the Post-office occur. It is a great tribute to the honesty of our Post-office employees, and a sign of our advancement in civilization, that we should be able to conduct our postal business so well. But in Queensland there is evidently something wrong on the face of matters. I would urge the Postmaster-General to cause full inquiries to be made into the whole question. Nothing short of that will satisfy those who have read anything in connexion with the case. It was very strange that the Postmaster-General had not received official intimation about the matter, as he stated this morning. I believe that he has some information in connexion with it now. But for some months past this unsatisfactory state of affairs has been going on, and I think the Postmaster-General ought to have been acquainted with the failure of his department to discover who was responsible for the loss of these letters. Some 60 or 100 letters have been missing. It is stated that the complaints have only been made in connexion with this one firm. If that be so, it is rather in favour of the department if they can claim that they did not take steps because of the fact that only one firm made the complaints. But when a conviction was secured some twelve months before, and the firm in question continued to make complaints, and when the detectives could discover nothing wrong in the firm's establishment, the department should have taken proper steps earlier than it did to inquire into the matter. I do not wish to blame the Postmaster-General, but I am sure he will recognise, when he reads the newspaper articles in question, that the firm has great cause for complaint. That firm is receiving an undue advertisement from the exposure which has taken place in Brisbane. During some months it has had to suffer from the reports which were being circulated to the effect that it was not safe to send money orders to this firm because they would not carry out their promise to send parcels in response thereto. I do not think it can be claimed that any endeavour is being made to simply advertise this firm.

Senator DRAKE

- This is one of the unfortunate cases which must necessarily happen occasionally in connexion with the Post-office - the case of dishonest persons interfering with letters. I can hardly express any opinion upon it now, because it has only just come under my notice. I have no doubt it was some time ago that these dishonest practices were first discovered, and an inquiry was made. Since then, as I understand from a brief glance at the papers, the Postal department and the police have been engaged in endeavouring to discover the offenders, but nothing was made public until the 7th December. It must be understood that in these cases where an endeavour is made to track down offenders and punish crime, it is not desirable that the whole matter should at once be made public. On the 7th December, this matter appears to have been made public in a paper issued in Brisbane, and on the same date the Deputy Postmaster-General sent his report to Melbourne, covering a long report from Mr. Crosby, the Superintendent of Mails, which I have not had time to read. The papers only came under my notice today, while the Senate has been sitting, and it must be understood that as the letter was posted in Brisbane on the 7th December, and this is the 13th, only six days later, there has been no delay. I have not yet had time or opportunity to go into the matter, but I will see that a full inquiry is made upon the spot by the Secretary of the Postal department. When we meet again I have no doubt I shall be able to give Senator Higgs any information he asks for on the subject.

Senator HIGGS(Queensland).- The attempt was made by the department to discover the offender in July last.

Senator Drake

- That was probably not made public, and the honorable senator must see that he is quoting an ex parte statement.

Senator HIGGS

- I admit that I am giving only one side, but I mention this as a reason why the Postmaster-General should cause a thorough inquiry to be made. The first attempt made by the department in Brisbane to deal with the matter took place in July last, and several months are allowed to elapse before it is brought under the notice of the Postmaster-General, and then only after the whole affair has been published in the Brisbane Observer.

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Senator Drake

- Why should they bring a matter of this kind to me when they were doing the necessary work in connexion with it themselves 1

Senator HIGGS

- It may not be absolutely necessary that the matter should be brought under the notice of the Postmaster-General, but I understood the honorable and learned senator to complain of its publication in the Brisbane Observer.

Senator Drake

- No. I say it was published for the first time on the 7th December, and it came before me with a recommendation on the 13th, so that there has been no delay.

Senator HIGGS

- I understood the honorable and learned senator to say that when it is necessary to track down an offender, it is a great mistake to publish an article of this kind, and I wish to point out that the article was published several months after the department appears to have failed to do anything. I know the gentleman who conducts the Brisbane Observer, and I have a very great regard for him. I believe him to be thoroughly straightforward, and I know he would not publish such an article unless he was sure there was good foundation for it.

Senator PULSFORD(New South Wales). - I should like to ask the Postmaster-General if he will endeavour to have the accounts of the various States presented to us, arranged in future on some uniform system. In some of the States they are arranged under three or four headings, in the case of New South Wales under five headings, and in the case of South Australia under two headings. In the case of the South Australian accounts, there is £19,000 out of a total of 31,000 under the heading of "contingencies," while "contingencies" for New South Wales are given at £7,000. It will be seen that it is quite impossible for honorable senators to have the least idea of what is meant by headings varying in that way. I suggest that it would be a great advantage to Parliament if the accounts of the various States were in future presented under uniform headings.

Senator Drake

- I shall endeavour to have that done.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment.

Report adopted.

Bill read a third time and passed.

PROPERTY FOR. PUBLIC PURPOSES ACQUISITION BILL

Royal assent reported.

PAPER

Senator Drake laid on the table the following paper : -

Hare-Clark system of voting in Tasmania - Report upon the operation of the.

Ordered to be printed.

FEDERAL CAPITAL SITES

Senator DRAKE

- I beg to lay on the table - "Pricis of correspondence in reference to the federal capital sites," and I move -

That the paper be printed.

Senator HIGGS

- I think this may be a fitting opportunity to refer to the question of the federal capital, and the proposed visit of senators and members of the House of Representatives to certain suggested sites. I happened to be in the other chamber when the Supply Bill was being discussed, and this question of the visit was referred to. It was said that members of the House of Representatives would be given an opportunity of visiting certain places in New South Wales.

The PRESIDENT

- I do not think the honorable senator should refer to the debates in another branch of the Legislature.

Senator Barrett

- The honorable senator should say he has heard it on good authority.

Senator HIGGS

- I have heard it, on very good authority, as an honorable senator ingeniously suggests, though I do not know that that will get me out of the difficulty.

The PRESIDENT

-If the standing order is wrong it ought to be altered, but honorable members should not encourage each other to evade the standing order.

Senator HIGGS

- I assume that members of another Chamber will be visiting these federal capital sites at some time during the next month or two. They may decide to visit them while members of the Senate are engaged in discussing the Tariff. If it is necessary that members should visit these sites before coming to a decision as to where the federal capital should be, I should like to know when it is proposed that members of the Senate shall visit them. I think that a good time would be during the interval between now and our next meeting.

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Senator Playford

- In the blazing hot weather?

Senator HIGGS

- If it is too hot we wish to find out the disabilities of the proposed sites as well as their advantages. If we postpone the proposed visit indefinitely we may land ourselves in such a position that our work here will prevent our making the visit at all, and we shall not be able to come to a proper conclusion. I think a week during our recess might be spent in this way, and that would be preferable to postponing the visit indefinitely. Some honorable senators seem to think that the time is coming when the Senate will have very little to do. When we first came here I was inclined to think that our Chairman of Committees would not have much to do, but I see very little prospect of that time arriving for some years. We have legislation in front of us that will keep us going for months. I should like to know if the Postmaster-General is in a position to say when he thinks the proposed visit might be made.

Senator STEWART

- I was not in the chamber when the discussion on this question began, but I gather from the remarks of Senator Higgs that he advocates a visit to the suggested sites during the Christmas recess. I hope that course will not be followed. I hope we shall not spoil our Christmas holidays by sandwiching into them a week spent in a hunt after the federal capital. I do not see that there is any special hurry in this matter. The federal capital will keep. Are we not quite comfortable where we are? I do not see that we shall improve our position by removing to New South Wales and getting on to the top of a mountain where we shall be away from everybody. Here we have all the comforts of civilization.

Senator Higgs

- I understand that the honorable senator has never been warm since he left Queensland.

Senator STEWART

- I am getting accustomed to the climate. I can assure the honorable senator that I am quite comfortable, and in no special hurry to go over to New South Wales.

The PRESIDENT

- I do not wish to restrict debate too much, but the motion is " that the paper be printed." I think it is quite relevant to that to discuss whether we should during the recess visit these sites, but it is hardly relevant to discuss whether we shall remain in Melbourne for the next twenty years, or have a new capital of our own. That is hardly within the scope of a motion that the paper be printed.

Senator STEWART

- I think we should not distract our minds during the Christmas holidays with the serious question of choosing a site for the federal capital. We may very well postpone that matter until the Tariff and a number of other contentious measures have been dealt with, and we are in a sufficiently calm and judicial frame of mind to enable us to make a good selection.

Senator WALKER

- I am glad to hear that we are to have this paper printed. Might I suggest that it' should be forwarded to honorable senators during the recess?

The PRESIDENT

- All papers that are printed are sent to honorable senators.

Senator WALKER

- Honorable senators from New South Wales would like to see the question of the site of the federal capital settled as soon as possible. It is all very well for some honorable senators who, like Senator Stewart, are far away from home to say that they are very comfortable here.

The PRESIDENT

- I will ask the honorable senator not to discuss that question.

Senator WALKER

- I trust that the Christmas adjournment will not exceed three weeks.

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Senator DRAKE

- I agree with Senator Stewart that it is not desirable that we should undertake a trip to the sites suggested for the federal capital during the Christmas recess. We want a holiday on this occasion, and those who can get away are anxious to return to their homes, and spend Christmas in the usual style. Honorable senators would hardly like to put in their holidays in travelling from site to site.. If a time should come, as has been prophesied, when the Senate will not have any work to do, it will afford us an admirable opportunity to pay these visits of inspection. I may mention as a matter connected with the subject of this motion, that one other paper has been laid upon the table of the House of Representatives - a communication from the Premier of Queensland. There is no copy available to lay on the table of the Senate, but the paper will be printed and copies will be distributed in the usual way.

The PRESIDENT

- As the matter has been referred to on several occasions, I should like to mention that instructions have been given to the Government Printer by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and myself that copies of all papers laid on the table of either House shall be sent to every member of the Federal Parliament.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ADJOURNMENT

The Christmas Holidays

Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

. - In rising to move the adjournment of the Senate for a longer period than usual, I wish to mention that, having in view the desirability of obtaining as long a holiday as possible without any detriment to the public business, it is considered advisable for the Senate to adjourn at its rising until the 22nd January next. I understand that another place will adjourn for a much shorter period, but there is a considerable amount of business to be dealt with by that Chamber, which will not be ready to come before us until perhaps a fortnight after it re-assembles. There is one unfinished Bill before the Senate, but having consulted a number of honorable senators, I have come to the conclusion that we should adjourn until the date that I have named. As this will be the first time that we have adjourned for a similar purpose, I trust that I may be permitted, on behalf of the Government, to wish you, sir, and honorable members of the Senate, a very happy Christmas. I Hope we shall meet again in January in good health and spirits ready to proceed with the work of the session. I move -

That the Senate, at its rising, adjourn until Wednesday, 22nd January, 1902.

Senator MCGREGOR

- In seconding the motion, I am pleased to say that most honorable senators with whom I have conversed, are satisfied that the holiday proposed is a fairly liberal one considering the work that remains to be done. I have also been requested by several members of the party to which I belong - and I am sure I join with them in their desire - to express the wish that you, sir, may enjoy a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I hope that honorable senators will meet again on the 22nd of next month in good health and good temper, prepared to proceed with the business of the country.

Senator DOBSON

- Might I ask the Postmaster-General whether, in his opinion, we shall have any work to occupy our attention for three or four days in the week between the 22nd of January next and the date on which the Tariff will be brought before us? It appears to me that we shall not. We have dealt with the greater part of

the Public Service Bill, but it is true that we shall have the standing orders, and perhaps an Electoral Bill to deal with.

Senator Drake

- That Bill will be ready.

Senator DOBSON

- I have been informed that another place proposes to adjourn until the 14th of next month. Unless it meets at least a month before we do I feel certain that we shall have nothing to do. I ask the Postmaster-General not to bring us back on 22nd January, after a sitting extending over seven months, unless he is satisfied that there will be work for us to do when we reassemble.

Senator CLEMONS

- I agree with the Postmaster-General that the 22nd January next will be a very convenient day for us to re-assemble. No one will gainsay that we have thoroughly earned a holiday. On the other hand, in spite of what Senator Dobson has said, I believe that there will be plenty of work for us to do when we meet on the 22nd of January, although the Tariff may not be ready. While I should like a longer holiday I do not think we would be justified in making a demand for an extension. Senator Dobson has indicated work that we ought to take in hand without delay, because it is very desirable that we should have our standing orders settled before we discuss the Tariff.

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Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- I certainly object very strongly to Senator Dobson's suggestion. I object also to the lengthy holiday proposed by the Postmaster-General. While there are important matters urgently requiring legislation, we ought to take a holiday in these exceptional circumstances similar to that enjoyed by business people, who suspend their labours only for a fortnight or ten days. To a certain extent we have, at the present time, a disorganized civil service. I have no fault to find with the management, but we have a civil service being administered under six different Acts, and great injustice is being done in many cases. While we have an Electoral Bill - to the urgent need of which I have frequently called attention - and standing orders to be dealt with, I think we ought not to adjourn for so long a period. If we were to adopt Senator Dobson's suggestion we should wake the Senate subsidiary to the House of Representatives. The Electoral and Franchise Bills are very important measures. If an honorable member for South Australia in the House of Representatives were to die, that State would have to be polled as one electorate, in order that his successor might be returned, and a great deal of expense would thus be involved. I have objected on several occasions to the policy of sitting only three days a week.

The CHAIRMAN

- We are dealing only with the question of the period for which we shall adjourn.

Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- As the result of sitting only three days a week we are behindhand in our work.

Honorable Senators. - No

Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- It is true that there is only one Bill on the notice-paper, but there are a number of other measures which ought to have been dealt with, and should be law by this time. It is only because certain honorable senators have desired to go away from Friday until Wednesday every week that we have not been able to deal with them.

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD

- It is really quite refreshing to witness the energy with which our youthful and honorable friend, Senator Smith, applies himself to his work. Many of us have gone through the same period of infantile energy, but we have learned to take matters more calmly, and to believe that after six or seven months work we are entitled to a holiday. We ought to do all we can to carry out the wishes of those who have been separated from their homes for so many months. Senator Smith has no responsibilities, and, therefore, is not anxious to go away: I can understand that other honorable senators of more mature age and with increased responsibilities must be anxious to return to their homes. I think we have done very well. I rose at the request of several honorable senators sitting beside me to express their concurrence, as well as my own, in the hearty good wishes tendered to you, Mr. President, by the Postmaster-General. I am sure that if he had thought of it the Minister would have included the Chairman of Committees and the

officers of the House, to whom we are so largely indebted, for a great deal of courtesy and valuable assistance, and, lost if not least, I wish to tender our thanks to our worthy Ministers. On all occasions they, have fought their Bills with the view of getting them through, but they have always fought them as became courteous gentlemen, and I think we are also indebted to them.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ELECTORAL BILL

Senator DOBSON

- May I ask the Postmaster-General whether before the 22nd January he can send us each a copy of the Electoral Bill ?

Senator DRAKE

- I cannot undertake to do that.

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15:41:00

Senate adjourned at 3.41 p.m.