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1901-08-02

Senate.

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

QUESTIONS

ORDER OF BUSINESS

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Senator PULSFORD

- I would ask the representative of the Government if he could inform the Senate of the intentions of the Government with regard to the order of business during the next week; more especially us to the Customs Duties Bill?

Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

- It is my intention next week to proceed with the Customs Duties Bill, and to push it on with all despatch. I would like it to be understood, however, that I hope the Vice-President of the Executive Council will be here then, as leader of the House, and that any arrangements I may make will be subject to his approval.

Senator Sir Josiah Symon

- In connexion with the Customs Bill, might I ask whether it will be possible for the measure, as read a first time yesterday, to be circulated among honorable senators today? If so, it will be a great convenience.

Senator DRAKE

- The printing of the Bill was ordered yesterday, and the Government Printer has been instructed to have it circulated at once.

DISTRIBUTION OF PAPERS

Senator Major GOULD

- With reference to the debate that took place in the other Chamber on the subject of allowances to public servants, a promise was made that a return giving all particulars with reference to these allowances should be laid upon the table of the Senate. I would like to ask the Postmaster-General whether he will cause a return to be laid upon the table of both Houses simultaneously.

Senator DRAKE

- The Prime Minister has stated that all returns will be laid upon the tables of the Senate and the House of Representatives simultaneously, or as nearly as possible simultaneously, so that honorable senators may depend on having the information laid before them as soon as possible.

The PRESIDENT

- The arrangement between the Speaker and myself is that all papers laid upon the table of one House shall be circulated among the members of the other Chamber.

Senator Major GOULD

- Will that apply in cases where papers are laid upon the table in compliance with an order of the House?

The PRESIDENT

- Yes.

REPORT ON OLD-AGE PENSIONS

Senator Lt Col NEILD

D- - Some few weeks ago the Vice-President of the Executive Council promised, in answer to a question by Senator Barrett, that copies of my report on Old-age Pensions and State Insurance would be provided for the use of honorable senators in the library. That promise has not yet been fulfilled, and as I am very frequently troubled with inquiries about the report, I would like to know whether it is likely to be fulfilled?

Senator DRAKE

- I accept the statement of the honorable member that a promise was made, and I have no doubt that instructions have been given accordingly. I do not know what is the cause of the delay, but I will cause inquiries to be made.

DISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL EXPENDITURE

Senator PULSFORD

asked the Postmaster-General, upon notice -

. Is he aware that the new federal expenditure is not being distributed amongst the various States

according to the existing proportions of population as shown by the census ?

Will the Government cause inquiry to be made on the subject, and re-distribute the expenditure if any errors be found to exist ?

Senator DRAKE

- The following answer has been supplied : -

The Treasurer has not used the census population, but has made his calculation upon the agreed population as on the 31st December, 1900. It is intended to use the census figures from 1st July, and when the Government statisticians have agreed as to the figures of the census the calculation will be made on that basis, and errors rectified. -

PENSION RIGHTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF PUBLIC SERVANTS

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Senator Lt Col NEILD

asked the Postmaster-General, upon notice -

. In what States are public officers transferred to the Commonwealth service "being required to make to a pension fund absolutely similar payments to those they made under the State Governments " ?

Is there any foundation for the statement made by the Minister for Home Affairs that the Victorian officers transferred to the Commonwealth service "will not receive any pensions " from its Treasury on completion of federal service ?

How many Victorian officials are there in the federal service whose appointments to the State service were made before the year 1880?

At time of their transfer were such officers contributing to a superannuation fund ?

Will such officers be required, under clause 58 of the Public Service Bill, to contribute to a superannuation fund, the same as similar officers transferred from New South Wales?

Are the Government still determined to apply differential treatment to transferred officers from New South Wales ?

Senator DRAKE

- The answer is as follows : -

All States.

I understand the Minister for Home Affairs referred to the fact that Victorian officers who joined the public service since 1881 were not entitled to pensions, but were dealt with under a system of compulsory insurance.

I will ascertain and acquaint the House.

No, and never did.

No, I think not. (i. There is no differential treatment, the State rights in every case being respected, but such rights vary considerably.

INTERCHANGEABLE POSTAGE STAMPS

Ordered (on motion by Senator Macfarlane) -

That a return be laid upon the table of the Senate containing copies of all telegrams between the Postal Conference that sat in February last and any officer of the Post and Telegraph department in Tasmania with regard to the estimated loss of postal revenue that would be sustained by Tasmania if the postage stamps of the various States were made interchangeable when the departments of the States were transferred to the Federal Government.

Return laid on the table by Senator Drake, and ordered to be printed.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Resolved (on motion by Senator Bar- rett) -

That leave of absence be given to Senator James Styles till 31st August, 1901., in consequence of ill-health.

SALARIES OF FEMALE PUBLIC SERVANTS

Ordered (on motion by Senator Dobson) -

That a return be laid upon the table of the Senate showing the number of, and the minimum and maximum salary paid to, females employed in the civil service of each State, and showing the average amount of salary paid to such female employees ; the salaries paid to females employed in the Education department of each State to be kept separate, and such return to be furnished, as far as practicable,

before the Public Service Bill is reported from the committee.

THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

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Senator PEARCE

- I move -

That, in the opinion of the Senate, any person appointed to the position of High Commissioner in London should be one who is intimately acquainted with the producing and commercial resources of the Commonwealth.

I think the time is opportune for raising this question, because honorable senators will have noticed that the press - possibly an inspired press - are beginning to feel the pulse of Parliament with regard to the nature of this appointment, and I think the Senate should place on record its opinion in the matter. The appointment of the High Commissioner in London will be an important one, and have far-reaching effects upon the development of our resources. We desire to be considered a practical people, and to have the development of this great country clearly kept in view, and I think we should look upon the appointment of the High Commissioner as a means to this end. "We should not regard the office as purely ornamental, or as one which is going to bring us into prominence in political or social circles in London, but as one that is going to benefit our trade and commerce, and bring us more in touch with the trade and commerce of the old world. I understand that it is the intention of the Government to introduce a Bill to provide for this appointment. I trust that when that Bill is before the Senate we shall endeavour to see that the duties of the person appointed shall be defined on the lines I have indicated, and that we shall, in making the appointment, do so with a view of getting increased benefit for the Commonwealth. Great care should be exercised in making this appointment. We know that Agents-General in many cases in the past have been able to assist the States they have represented. They have assisted the trade of the States and the relations of the States with the Government of the United Kingdom. This officer will represent, not merely a State, but the Commonwealth ; and greater care should be exercised in the selection of such an Officer, because of the more important duties which will be placed in his hands, and the greater interests which will be involved. The object of this appointment is to secure increased trade between the Commonwealth and European countries ; to have in London a financial adviser, who will be of great assistance to the Commonwealth Government in the flotation of loans, and in connexion with the various financial operations of the Government ; and to have some one who will assist in negotiations between the Federal Government and the Home Government upon all matters of policy regarding both internal and external affairs. We do not want this officer to be merely one who will occupy a prominent position at society functions, one who will be able to make nice and stirring after-dinner speeches, and shine generally in social circles. I believe the people of Australia will not care a fig if he never appears at social functions. I do not believe the trade of Australia will be injured to the extent of a halfpenny if he never makes his appearance at the dinners of the Imperial Institute. I do not believe the trade of Australia will suffer in the slightest degree if the gentleman appointed to this position does not happen to be the possessor of a title. We want a man in this position who will be a thorough business man from every point of view, and at the same time a man whose interests are in Australia. We do not want a man who will look upon Australia merely as a happy hunting ground for his political ambitions. We do not want a man who is going to make this position a stepping-stone to some Imperial appointment. We want a man who will be willing and able to assist in the future development of Australia, and we must therefore have some man intimately associated with Australia, one who knows her resources, and also is intimately associated with her commercial and political life. I have noticed in the press that there have been suggestions brought forward that some one of our ex-Governors should be appointed to the position. I, for one, decidedly set my face against any such appointment, and I trust this Senate will do the same. I cannot see, in the long list of ex-Governors, one man who will fill the position in such a way as will assist the development of our trade and commerce. Undoubtedly the future of Australia depends upon the development of our national resources, and that development can only be secured as we develop our trade with Europe and the United Kingdom. We must have an outlet for our natural productions, and we must have a man in London who will make it his duty to see that we have that outlet. We have had amongst our Agents General men who have devoted themselves to the one object of finding an outlet for the products of Australia. Wherever that has been the case the result has been an immense benefit to the State concerned.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- And very little benefit to themselves ; they generally got run out for doing it. .

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Senator PEARCE

- Possibly ; but I believe the people of Australia have noticed this, and are prepared to recognise these services in the future. There have been times in Australia when her products have been depreciated through outside markets having been closed to them, and the efforts of Agents-General who have endeavoured to open to them the markets of the old world have benefited every producer in the States they have represented. The men who can do such -a tiling as that must be men who thoroughly understand what they are dealing with. A man who has never been associated with the commercial life or producing interests of Australia, and does not understand her resources or requirements, but has merely been a public man in the political sense of the word, is not the man to open for us the markets of the old world. I contend that our ex-Governors are almost entirely limited to that class - men who have devoted themselves to political life, and who have not that intimate association with the requirements and resources of Australia that this office certainly demands. We have seen an immense development of our agricultural resources in Australia. Throughout the Commonwealth in 1881 we had 703,825 acres under wheat, and in 1899 we had no less than 5,614,367 acres under wheat. There has been all round a great increase in the amount of production and in the number of persons engaged in production in our three main industries, the agricultural, the pastoral, and the mineral industry. I contend that it is to the development of these three main resources that we have to look if Australia is ever to be the home of a great and thriving people. We have no market here to consume the products of these industries, and we must find an outside market for them. We find that we have such a market in the old country. The United Kingdom imports at the present time a large quantity of agricultural and pastoral products. It imports these chiefly from America, India, and some of the continental countries. Wherever proper care and precaution has been exercised, and wherever we have had proper facilities for placing our products on the markets of the United Kingdom, it has been proved that Australian products can compete successfully with the products of those other countries, and leave a profit to the producer. Whatever opinions we may hold as to the future of Australia as the home of manufactures, we are all of the opinion that the future of Australia as a producing nation in these three great industries is assured. All that is required is that the markets of the old 'world shall be assured to us, and that the officers of the Government shall take such steps as to assure that our products shall be placed upon the markets of the old world at the least possible cost, and sold at the best advantage. The person appointed to this office should, therefore, be one who knows the right steps to take to insure that end. He must be intimately associated with Australia, and it should be a matter of personal concern to him that this should be done. " We know also that there is in England amongst those prominent in social circles a prejudice against trade and commerce. There is a sort of stigma upon those who have made their competency by trade and commerce.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- No ; the leading peers in England are traders. They sell coals, and bonnets, and all sorts of things.

Senator PEARCE

- I speak of social circles, and I know that the prejudice has been broken down, as Senator Neild suggests, by the elevation of brewers and others to the peerage.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- No ; it is the other way about - some of the oldest peers in England are engaged in trade.

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Senator PEARCE

- Still that prejudice does exist, and I consider the appointment of a member of the nobility to such a position as this would act- detrimentally to the producing interests of Australia, because of that prejudice. That I consider an insuperable bar against the appointment of some of those who have been hinted at in this connexion. There is also the question to be considered of the attraction to these shores of some of that stream of emigration that has set in for many years towards America and Canada. We undoubtedly require in this great country a larger population, but we want a population of the right sort. We want men who will bring with them capabilities of furthering the producing resources of our country. We do not want men of the pauper class attracted here, who, coming here, lower the standard of living by entering into

competition with an already overstocked labour market. But there is a large number of men in the old country, with a small amount of capital, who are week by week attracted to the shores of Canada and the United States, to become permanent settlers on the soil, and valuable citizens of those communities. I believe that if we had a man who could place before the people of the United Kingdom the possibilities that lie in the future for Australia, we could attract a large share of those emigrants to our shores. It would be a distinct advantage to us if we could attract those who have some amount of capital, and who are familiar with agricultural and pastoral life, who would be prepared in this new world, under better circumstances, to become citizens of Australia. We know, from sad experience, that some of the speeches delivered at after dinner functions and at dinners of the Imperial Institute in England have sometimes not been judicious in the language used to induce immigrants to come to Australia. We know that sometimes Australia is pictured as the paradise of the working man. Sometimes extravagant statements are* made as to the possibility of a man coming here and knocking up a fortune in a few years. All that is in the direction of inducing those who have nothing, and who are sometimes in a pauperized condition, to turn their steps here. We need in England a man who is acquainted with the agricultural and pastoral resources of Australia, and who will direct to Australia the attention of those who would be of great assistance in the development of the resources I have indicated. I do trust that in this matter the Senate will put Australia first and the Empire very much second. We know there is a tendency at present - and I deplore that tendency - to put persons, because of their position in the Imperial Government and their connexion with it, before those of our own community, who would be of greater value to the Commonwealth in the directions I have indicated. I believe the Senate has a great appreciation of the seriousness of this appointment, and that honorable senators will not tolerate any appointment that is not in the best interests of Australia. I do not propose to speak further upon this question. I trust that members of the Senate will agree to the motion, and that the Government, acting upon the expression of opinion of this Chamber, will make such an appointment as will have the effect of bringing us into closer touch with the markets of the world, and of attracting to our shores that population which is desirable, and which will help to make the future of Australia better and more prosperous.

Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

. - I fully recognise the importance of this subject, and no one more than myself desires that the gentleman who may be appointed to the office of High Commissioner shall be in every way worthy of the eminent position which he will occupy. But in considering this matter we have to forecast the action which is likely to be taken by the various States of the Commonwealth. It is assumed - at all events in some quarters - that as soon as the High Commissioner is appointed the present Agents-General for the various States will be withdrawn. I am not at all sure that such will be the case. I think it is exceedingly probable that many of the States will retain their Agents-General in London, and in that case their positions will be of a somewhat different character to what they have been hitherto. In times past it was customary to appoint as Agent-General a gentleman who was perhaps more prominent in the political than in the commercial world.

Senator Pearce

- Not of late years.

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Senator DRAKE

- No; but it used to be so. It was customary to appoint a man who had attained a high position in politics, but who was not specially connected with the commercial and producing interests of the community. Of late years, however, the tendency has been in the direction of the Agent-General becoming, as has been said, a general agent, and of taking up the position of a man who has been sent to London for the purpose of advertising his particular State and its resources, and of doing his best to promote its commercial interests. I am inclined to think that with the change which is now taking place - and when the High Commissioner is appointed that tendency will be still further strengthened - the States, if they send persons to London to represent them, will probably send men who are commissioned more particularly to act in connexion with the producing and commercial interests. It is right that it should be so. If Senator Pearce will only look at the matter, he will see that questions connected with the commercial and producing interests of the States are more particularly within the purview and control of the States than of

the Federation. These are matters which practically pertain to the States. At present we have no Department of Agriculture. I know that there is a movement on foot to endeavour to establish such a department, and I have no doubt that it would be a very good thing indeed. But still we are dealing with matters as they are, and we must therefore recognise that the Commonwealth Government at present has no special control over agriculture, which constitutes one of the great producing interests of the Commonwealth. All the producing interests of the States are matters which come more particularly within the control of the State Governments than of the Federal Government. If the State Governments continue to send agents to represent them in the old country - as is extremely likely - the tendency will be stronger and stronger to send men who will be commissioned particularly to represent those interests. That being so, we have to consider the various qualifications which are required in the High Commissioner, and we are justified in view of the circumstances to which I have adverted in appraising the value, in a person of that character, of each particular qualification. I think that Senator Pearce will admit that, though it is desirable that the High Commissioner should have a knowledge of commercial affairs and be able to represent the producing interests of the States, it is also necessary that he should be somewhat of a diplomatist. Diplomacy must form some part of the qualifications of the man who will occupy that position. If the several States are going to be represented in London by practical commercial agents charged with the duty of looking after their commercial and producing interests, it becomes more necessary that the High Commissioner should be a man who should particularly shine in diplomacy. . At all events the duties which he will be called upon to discharge at the outset will be those of a diplomatist rather than of an agent representing the commercial and producing interests. Therefore, I think, it "is not desirable that this motion should be carried by the Senate. In selecting a gentleman to fill the office of High Commissioner in London, the .Executive should not be in any way trammelled by an expression of opinion which perhaps is intended to turn the scale in favour of a gentleman who may be connected with the commercial and producing interests against a man whose qualities as a diplomatist may be very much higher. In Canada, ever since the Federation was established, they have had a High Commissioner who represents the Dominion in the old country. In Munro's " Constitution of Canada," page 215, the duties of the High Commissioner are described as follows : -

To act as the resident agent of the Dominion in the United Kingdom, and in that capacity to execute such powers and perform such duties as may from time to time be conferred upon or assigned' to him by the Governor-General in Council.

To take charge of and supervise the emigration offices and agencies in the United Kingdom under the Minister of Agriculture.

To carry out such instructions as he may from time to time receive from the Governor-General respecting the commercial, financial, and general interests of the Dominion in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

Senator Pearce

- There is not much diplomacy about that.

Senator DRAKE

- Certainly there is. He has to act as the agent and representative of the Dominion of Canada in all matters. 1

Senator DOBSON

- I think that the general idea is to have the High Commissioner for finance and diplomacy, and a general agent for each State.

Senator DRAKE

- Exactly. Surely the words " to act as the resident agent of the Dominion in the United Kingdom, and in that capacity to execute such powers and perform such duties as may from time to time be conferred upon or assigned to him by the Governor-General in Council," are wide enough to cover everything. No doubt in selecting a gentleman to occupy this high position the Executive will be guided by considerations similar to those which have influenced the Government of Canada. In making such a selection they should not be hampered in any way in their choice. I do not deprecate this discussion. I can see no harm, and perhaps there is some good, in honorable senators expressing their opinions in regard to the qualifications which should "be possessed by the gentleman chosen, to occupy the position of High Commissioner But it is undesirable at this stage to emphasize in such a way the qualifications in connexion with the producing and commercial interests as to indicate that we consider that those

particular qualifications are of supreme importance. So long as the States continue to be represented by Agents General who are particularly charged with the duty of looking after those interests, the High Commissioner, above all things, should be possessed of qualities which will enable him to ably represent the great Commonwealth of Australia amongst the diplomatists from all parts of the world.

Senator STEWART

- I did not intend to take any part in this discussion, but after listening to the concluding remarks of the Postmaster-General, the position does not appear to me to be at all reassuring. The Postmaster-General seems to think that the High Commissioner in London should be a diplomatist and not a commercial agent. He founds his conclusion upon the presumption that the States themselves will look after their commercial interests, and that the region of high diplomacy will be reserved to the Commonwealth. I know that in the States the idea is very largely held that the offices of the Agents General should be abolished, and that one common agent should be appointed for all the States.

Senator Playford

- The honorable senator is mistaken.

Senator STEWART

- At any rate that is the idea which is held in Queensland. I believe that a similar impression prevails more or less in all the States.

Senator DRAKE

- It may come to that eventually, but I do not see any prospect of it at present.

Senator STEWART

- I am not going to offer an opinion now as to whether the States should abolish the offices of their Agents-General or not.

Senator Playford

- They never can, and never will. They must have somebody to represent them in London.

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Senator STEWART

- The more representatives the Commonwealth has in Europe the better, so long as their duties do not overlap each other. I fail to see the necessity for the High Commissioner to possess the diplomatic qualities of which the Postmaster-General has spoken. We are not a great power. We are only a small, a young, and a poor community. We have no foreign entanglements, and we do not desire any.

Senator Staniforth Smith

- We may have when we get a white Australia.

Senator STEWART

- I think that it is quite time enough to deal with those questions when they arise. My opinion is that we have a territory which is quite large enough for us to manage. Our principal duty is to devote all our attention to its development. Let other countries mind their own business, and let us mind ours. In all the States, I believe almost without exception, the appointments to the office of Agent-General have not been made because of any special qualification which a person might have; but for a political reason. It was desirable to get rid, perhaps, of a member of the Ministry who had outlived his usefulness, and was becoming unpopular. Younger men were desirous of pushing him out of the way so that they might fill his shoes, and accordingly he was appointed Agent-General and shunted off to London. His qualifications for the position were never, or very rarely, taken into consideration. I do not wish to say that on all occasions the persons who were appointed were not qualified. I do not think it is possible for any man to take an active part in politics for a number of years without becoming more or less well-qualified to fill a position such as that of Agent-General. At the same time I maintain that in our commercial circles, in our producing circles, men who never have taken any prominent part in politics might be found, and I believe would be found, whose capacity for filling efficiently a position of this character would be much greater than the capacity of any men who had given up a large portion of his time and attention to mere politics.

Senator Harney

- But though persons might be unconnected with politics they might not be connected with the producing or the commercial interest.

Senator STEWART

- One who is intimately acquainted with the producing or the commercial resources of the Commonwealth

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Senator Playford

- We very seldom find that commercial men have very much knowledge of the producing interests.

Senator STEWART

- It is desirable to try and find a man who is most suitable for the position.

Senator Harney

- I think it should be left open to the Government to pick generally.

Senator STEWART

- I do not see any objection to the Senate expressing its opinion. Surely it is much better that an appointment of this character should be made for reasons of ability, fitness, suitability, and knowledge, than for political reasons. As I did not hear the opening portion of Senator Pearce's speech, I do not know whether he referred to this ; but, as I have said, these appointments have almost invariably been made for political reasons. The Agent-General has stood very much in the same position as the Judges, and the appointment has been made for the same reason - for a political reason. We want to get away from that practice. An honorable senator asked how are we to know whether the person is qualified or not. It is for the Cabinet to solve that question. I should infinitely prefer the appointment of a man who knows our producing interest best, because I think he is most likely to best represent us in Europe. I do not see why we should not have a representative in the United States of America. In the near future we are likely to do far more business with that young and prosperous republic. They will want our products by-and-by. I believe their market will be thrown open to our wool within a very few years. In any case it is extremely desirable that we should have a representative there. We want to buy some of their products. From the United States we can get many things which are much better suited to our requirements - such, for instance, as agricultural machinery - than we can get from anywhere else. The presence of a representative of the Commonwealth in that country might easily lead up to a change in its policy, so far as the admission of our products is concerned. It would tend to produce a friendly feeling between two communities who have very much in common - whose institutions are almost similar, whose ideals, I believe, are the same, and who belong to the same race. So far as I can gather from Senator

Drake's reply, the idea appears to be to appoint an ambassador. We do not call him an ambassador, but that is really what is meant.

Senator HARNEY

- Hear, hear.

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Senator STEWART

- Apparently Senator Harney is of the same opinion as I am. I do not know whether he approves of the idea.

Senator Harney

- I approve of the use of the expression, because I think we should have an ambassador.

Senator STEWART

- We cannot have an ambassador. The honorable and learned gentleman does not appear* to realize the relation in which we stand to Great Britain.

Senator Harney

- I mean that the expression covers the idea.

Senator STEWART

- We are an integral portion of Great Britain, and we cannot send an ambassador to ourselves, so to speak. But it appears that the intention of the Government is that our representative in Great Britain should be more of an ambassador than anything else. That he should be a diplomatist, I do not see the slightest use or occasion for. What is he to do ? What high questions of policy is he to discuss ? If we appoint a gentleman of this stamp, we have to pay him a high salary. He will be expected to mix in the highest circles in Great Britain ; to attend banquets and give banquets in return. I disapprove of the idea that we should have a person who would act as an ambassador, because that involves paying a very high salary. I do not suppose that we should get a man to fill the position such as some honorable senators seem to desire, at under £5,000 a year. London is a most expensive place to live in, and if a man wishes

to take up a position in society, as an ambassador certainly would, either he must be well paid by the State he represents or he must have a private income which he is prepared to spend for the honour of occupying the position. I do not see any good that Australia would derive from having such a representative. If I thought it was necessary for the Commonwealth to be represented by a person holding the status, if not the office, of an ambassador in London, I certainly should support the idea, but I do not see what it can gain by appointing such an individual. It would simply be" a waste of money which might be much more profitably utilized in other directions. I trust that the Senate will pass this motion, if merely as an expression of its opinion as to what ought to be done.

Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- I agree to a very large extent with the contentions of Senator Pearce, but at the same time we must remember that the High Commissioner will have very important and onerous functions to perform.

Senator McGregor

- So has a hangman.

Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- But they are of rather a different nature, and it would be taking a wrong view of the functions of a High Commissioner to say that he was to act as an Agent-General, or, as Senator Stewart intimated, as a general agent. The High Commissioner will undoubtedly be the representative of the Australian nation. He will be the mouth-piece through which I presume the communications will go from the Prime Minister and the authorities here to the British Government. He will be the intermediary between the Australian nation and the Imperial Government, and it will be necessary for him to be a diplomatist of great political abilities. Not only must he represent the claims of Australia - and those claims will continually crop up - -but he must possess sufficient ability and political knowledge to logically present those claims if Australia should find it necessary to insist upon some particular legislation being allowed.

Senator Pearce

- There is nothing in this motion to say he is not to be. -

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Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- There is not, and that is exactly why I agree, to a very great extent, with my honorable friend's remarks. There is one thing we ought to strenuously insist upon, and that is that the High Commissioner should be an Australian. I do not say an Australian born, but an Australian. It would be a disgrace to our nationhood if we had to appoint some person to be our intermediary, to look after our interests, who had all his ideas as an Englishman and not as an Australian. I was astonished to read in the newspapers - and I was intending to bring it before the Senate - that it was suggested that the High Commissioner of Australia should be some gentleman picked in England. What can such a man know about the requirements of Australia? Supposing that any important topic arose; supposing that we passed a Bill for the exclusion of all alien races from Australia, and were anxious to insist upon its allowance by the Imperial authorities. The ideas of our representative would be those of an Englishman and not of an Australian, and his desire would probably be in favour of a refusal of such a request. We must insist at all hazards upon having an Australian to represent us in that high position. Canada has always done that. Lord Strathcona and all the other High Commissioners; appointed by the Dominion were Canadians. The idea of having so important an office as that filled by any one but an Australian is, I should think, abhorrent to the ideas of the Senate.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- How does the honorable senator distinguish an Australian?

Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- I mean an Australian by birth or adoption. It seems to me that some people think - if we can believe the newspapers - that we must have some person with a title, an Earl or a Lord of some kind, to represent the Commonwealth in London.

Senator Glassey

- That is so much flummery.

Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- I think it is.

Senator Glassey

- We want brains and ability, irrespective of position and title.

Senator STANFORTH SMITH

- We want a man who will consider the interests of Australians, and who will possess the highest diplomatic ability and at the same time great political experience. As our representative in London, he will have to play a very important part in the relations between Australia and the British Empire. I agree with Senator Pearce that the High Commissioner should be well acquainted with the producing and commercial resources of the Commonwealth.

Senator Harney

- It would be advantageous if he were, but it is not necessary.

Senator STANFORTH SMITH

- I hold that it is necessary that the High Commissioner should have an intimate knowledge of the resources of Australia, and that he should not be above using his position to forward the interests of the agriculture, mining, and commerce of Australia. He will be the intermediary between the Australian people and the British Empire, and should use his undoubted influence in the position he occupies to forward the best interests of Australia in every way. I have a very strong objection to the idea that such a High Commissioner should be an Englishman, although I have no prejudices against Englishmen. I consider that it would be derogatory to Australia to appoint some one who had not an affinity of feeling with the Australian people to represent them at the Court of St. James. Therefore, I agree to a large extent with the remarks of Senator Pearce in proposing this resolution.

Senator MACFARLANE (Tasmania). Although I feel that we are beating the air - because I am not sure that the adoption of this motion can be anything more than an expression of opinion - there can be no harm in the discussion. I agree very much with what the Postmaster-General said, because I do not think that the High Commissioner should be a commercial agent. The States will, for a considerable time, have their own representatives in London. The States Agents-General are gradually becoming to a large extent Commonwealth Agents or representatives of the commercial developments of the States. Our High Commissioner ought to have a knowledge of finance. That is one of the principal necessities for such an official. I think a man well acquainted with the producing and commercial resources of the Commonwealth would have a good financial knowledge, and that would enable him to be a strong factor in dealing with affairs in London. For these reasons I think that the adoption of the motion before the Chair can do no harm, as indicating an expression of opinion on the part of the Senate as to who ought to be appointed.

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Senator Lt Col NEILD

- As one who was born and lived for a very few years in a certain island at the western end of Europe, I beg to express my profound thanks to Senator Stanforth Smith, who was kind enough to inform the Senate that he has no strong prejudices against Englishmen. It is a positive relief to our minds that a gentleman occupying the position the honorable senator does is not burdened with any silly prejudices of that kind. The honorable senator rather reminds me of a phrase I read the other day in one of Mark Twain's books. Mark Twain observes somewhat to this effect - "I have no prejudices in regard to colour or creed or anything else. It is enough for me to know that a man is a human being. He can be nothing lower than that." That seems to me to be about the position that Senator Smith takes up in referring to people who have been unfortunate enough to be born in England - "they can be nothing lower than that." He commiserates with them upon the unhappy accident of their birth, and from his larger view generously wishes them no particular harm. Therefore, we are grateful. With reference to the appointment of a High Commissioner, I think we are all agreed - that it will be a desirable thing that a gentleman who fills the conditions laid down in Senator Pearce's motion should, if possible, be the man selected.

Senator Stanforth Smith

- Should he be an Australian ?

Senator Lt Col NEILD

- I do not say that the Government should be absolutely restricted to the appointment of a person who is born in Australia, because some time or another the people who are happy enough to have been born in Australia possibly had obligations to people who were born in England. There is generally supposed to be some connexion, at any rate. If Senator Stanforth Smith desires to confine the appointment to persons actually born in Australia, I should be rather disposed to differ from him. But if he uses the word Australian

in the broad sense, meaning that the person appointed has interests in Australia, and that his sympathies are Australian, I entirely assent to the proposition that a gentleman possessing that qualification should be appointed. I should be very glad to hear Senator Playford's views on this question, because we know that he was one of the most capable and successful Agents General who ever represented an Australian State in London. I am not going too far when I say that Senator Playford possessed a sufficient amount of individuality and carelessness for old grooves- to break away from what was looked upon as the orthodox condition of affairs, the having an office in Westminster. He went away into the city - a matter of three miles from where the rest of the Agents-General were - that he might have his office in the centre of where business was transacted. By that means he was able to do in the city a large amount of business of a commercial rather than official character. Still, I think I am right in saying that South Australia, nevertheless, has - as it deserved to have - a commercial agent in London. At any rate, many States have. There is a broad distinction to be drawn between a merely commercial agent and a High Commissioner, who has to discharge duties of a diplomatic and high financial character that would not come altogether within the scope of a mere general agent. We want a "High Commissioner or an Agent-General, not a general agent. As an old commercial man, I entirely appreciate the idea that commercial interests should have a proper share of consideration in the selection of a High Commissioner ; but I also think that the Commonwealth will require to consider other points as well. The High Commissioner will need to be trusted with the transaction of diplomatic business. A good commercial agent may be obtained through the good offices of the Chambers of Commerce or of Manufactures in Australia. Having regard to the condition of affairs in the capital of the Empire - which is the capital of the world - I do not think we can overlook the disadvantages under which the Commonwealth would suffer if it were represented by a man who was destitute or deficient in these qualities. Some regard must also be paid to the qualities which enable a man to hold his own in society. These qualities are not without their advantages, even in the transaction of the commonest matters of business in London.

Senator Pearce

- We occasionally get them combined with the other quality.

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Senator Lt Col NEILD

- If we can get them combined it will be a good thing ; and it is because I desire that such qualities may be combined as far as possible in the man selected that I am supporting Senator Pearce's motion. I do not want to have the Government tied down too closely, because though commercial qualities are of the greatest advantage, diplomatic qualities would be of equal advantage. We may have a commercial agent in every important centre, but we can have only one commissioner dealing with matters of diplomacy ; and a man who is capable of holding his own with the statesmen of the Empire at head-quarters is the -man who will possess qualities which are highly needful in the gentleman who may be selected to represent the Commonwealth of Australia in the old land. Indeed he will require to represent the Commonwealth probably in other positions. He may have to represent Australia in various conferences in the capitals on the Continent of Europe, when matters of international moment will be under consideration. We can understand that a gentleman fully versed in commerce might have very little ability for the discussion of such questions as must arise in connexion with the consideration of the occupation of the islands of the Pacific. Matters of international policy would not be as well handled by a gentleman well versed in _ butter, cheese, and tallow and other exports of this continent, as by a gentleman whose training had made him familiar with such questions, and who would by reason of his knowledge and experience play no second fiddle amongst the representatives of the Powers of Europe. Therefore I venture to say that whilst we may indorse the motion, so far as it involves the selection of a gentleman well versed in the natural products of Australia, we must also consider that .we require a man whose knowledge of diplomacy, whose knowledge of State affairs, and whose capacity for statesmanship will enable him, as I have said, to play no second fiddle in any company, official or unofficial, into which he may be thrown.' The idea that has been enunciated, that such a gentleman should be selected from the ranks of those who are Australian at heart and by circumstance and interest, is one that will have the universal approval of the Senate.

Senator O'KEEFE

- It seems to me that any honorable senators who object to this motion can only do so. on the supposition that it is impossible for any man to combine within himself the finer qualities necessary for a successful diplomatist and practical knowledge and experience such as are indicated in the motion. I think that every Australian, whether by birth or adoption, should agree to this motion, and I certainly cannot see that there would be any harm in our giving expression to our opinion. We all agree with the greater part of what the Postmaster-General has said as to its being necessary to have a gentleman who will make a successful diplomatist, but the Postmaster-General must also agree with us that it will be equally necessary to have a gentleman with experience of . Australian affairs, and who will be, like many of us here, an Australian first and an Imperialist afterwards.

Senator Walker

- Oh !

Senator O'KEEFE

- One honorable senator says " Oh," but I am not at all afraid to say that that is my feeling in the matter I would like to see a gentleman appointed whose aspirations would be Australian, and who would thus be an Australian first and an Imperialist afterwards. I hope the motion will be carried as an expression of opinion on the part of the Senate. As a native Australian I do not at all object to Senator Lt.-Col. Neild being an Englishman ; he could not help it. He took Senator Staniforth Smith to task for saying that the High Commissioner should be an

Australian. But Senator Staniforth Smith qualified his statement by saying that he need not be an Australian bom, so long as he was an Australian by adoption. There is nothing in the wording of the motion to tie the hands of the Government in that respect, but in order that a man may fulfil our requirements he must have had some experience of Australian affairs, and therefore be an Australian in the sense in which the term has been used.

Senator HARNEY

- I shall vote against this motion - if it comes to a vote If the motion required that due regard should be had to acquaintance with our producing and commercial interests, in connexion with the appointment of a High Commissioner, I would be entirely with Senator Pearce, but I certainly will not give my support to the proposal to narrow the choice down to those who are so qualified. In my humble judgment, the High Commissioner will have to discharge many duties of an entirely different character from those for which he would be qualified by an acquaintance with the producing and commercial interests. We have our domestic concerns .to look after, but we also have to consider the part we are playing in the affairs of the nation ; and although it is true, as Senator Stewart has said, that we cannot have an ambassador in London, we being a part of the same Empire, the fact that we are 13,000 miles away, and that we are now welded into the one union, requires that we should have at the hub of the universe some mouthpiece to express our views and to assert our rights in the international relations of the world.

Senator McGregor

- We must have a lawyer.

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Senator HARNEY

- I think that a lawyer would be in some senses fitted for the position, but in other senses eminently unfitted for it. Great regard should be paid to the necessity of having a High Commissioner possessing an intimate knowledge of Australian political interests, who should also be a person calculated to attract notice by his personality, accomplishments, and acquirements, in his communications with the statesmen of the. old world. If we can find a person possessing all these attributes, who is also connected with industrial and commercial interests, we shall be able to make a very good appointment.

Senator Pearce

- Does not the honorable member think that there are some such persons in Australia 1

Senator HARNEY

- Lots of them ; and I say that if we can find such a one we shall be very happy. Why, however, should, we pass over a man who may be eminently fitted in every other respect, merely because he cannot say that he is connected \with the producing and commercial interests of the Commonwealth. It is only right that we should leave the matter open, simply expressing the opinion that it is desirable that the High Commissioner should know something of, the commercial and producing interests, 'without making a

want of knowledge on these subjects an absolute bar to appointment.

Senator McGregor

- That is a most important thing.

Senator HARNEY

- I quite agree with the honorable senator. But, supposing that we find a man eminently fitted so far as his knowledge of commercial and producing interests is concerned, but who knows nothing about languages, and who has no knowledge of diplomacy, and is also quite destitute of statesmanlike qualities--

Senator STANFORTH Smith

- Will he require to know the dead languages 1

Senator HARNEY

- It might be desirable if he did. Still, I do not think we should appoint a person qualified commercially, and unqualified in other respects, in preference to one who is qualified in all other respects, but has only an imperfect knowledge of our commercial and producing interests. I quite agree with other honorable senators that the High Commissioner should answer to the general description of an Australian - not that he should be born here, but that he should be a person who has absorbed Australian concerns into his mind, who understands the state of feeling here, and who is an Australian in sentiment. But I would leave it open to the Government to select the person who possesses most of the attributes necessary to make his occupancy of the office successful and advantageous to the Commonwealth.

Senator PLAYFORD

- After listening to the discussion, I find that this High Commissioner that we have been talking about must be a kind of J Jack of all trades, and it appears that if we appoint a gentleman who is to have an intimate knowledge of such a variety of trades, the chances are that, like the usual Jack-of-all-trades, he will be master of none, but rather a worthless kind of character. According to what has been stated, the High Commissioner must have a thorough knowledge of the producing and manufacturing requirements of the country, he must be a thorough diplomatist, he must have a good knowledge of financial matters, and he must know something of modern languages.

Senator Harney

- I did not say he "must" have a knowledge of modern languages, but that it would be desirable.

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Senator PLAYFORD

- Then he must be an Australian. I think myself that he ought to be an Australian, and that it would be very undesirable to send to London any one who had no knowledge of the Commonwealth at all. I would, however; point out to Senator Pearce that, as a rule, it is not easy to find men who are intimately acquainted with both the producing and the commercial interests of the Commonwealth. The man who is intimately acquainted with our producing interests is not usually also equipped with an, equal knowledge of our commercial interests, and vice versa. I object to the motion on the ground that it will tie the hands of the Government, and I think that would be a great mistake. If the Government were to attempt honestly to comply with the terms of this motion they would fail, because they could not absolutely meet all requirements. Although I recognise that it is desirable that the High Commissioner should have some knowledge of our commercial and producing interests, I contend that he should have a more complete knowledge of finance than of any other matter. He could very easily throw hundreds of thousands of pounds away in London if he had not a knowledge of finance. According to my experience, the man who is representing the Commonwealth in London should be a financier above all things. In consequence of our representatives not having a good sound knowledge of finance, the States in the Commonwealth have lost practically millions of money. In one case a loss was incurred through the fear of undertaking the inscription of stocks, and our going to the banks instead, and paying fearfully high prices in connexion with the management of our loans. It would be the same thing in connexion with the inauguration of this office in London, and we must have a good sound financier. An honorable senator has interjected that we might float our loans locally, and I believe that where we can with advantage, we should do it, because it is a great deal better to raise our loans locally, even though we pay a little more interest to our own people, than that the State should stand the constant drain of remitting large interest payments to London. The man who goes to London ought to be a thorough financier. Of course it is well that he should also have a knowledge of commercial matters, but he cannot be a financier without having some

knowledge of commercial matters. It is well that he should have a knowledge of our producing interests, and that he should be a diplomatist. I believe that he might also have some knowledge of modern languages, but I put that qualification upon the lowest scale. Another point of great importance is that we cannot find a man who will be eminently suitable for the position unless he has had some political experience. I think we may safely say that. I do not mean to say that there are not men outside political circles who could fill the position; but, as a rule, I think it would be found not to be so, because the man who represents the Commonwealth in London will have to speak on behalf of the Commonwealth, and will need to have an intimate acquaintance with the wishes and aspirations of the people of the Commonwealth as a whole, and he will have to speak with some degree of authority upon those subjects. At conferences with Ministers at home, which he is bound to have, he will be asked innumerable questions, because he will be the only representative of the Commonwealth of Australia to whom the Secretary of State for the Colonies will look. The diplomatic business of the other Agents-General will be absolutely taken away from them. The High Commissioner will be the only one in London to speak authoritatively upon matters connected with the Commonwealth, and he must be a man having an intimate knowledge of the views, the feelings, the wishes, and the aspirations of the people. He cannot get that knowledge unless he has mixed to some extent in politics. The Secretary of State for the Colonies will be continually asking him questions relating to matters that crop up in connexion with the Commonwealth. I know that the present occupant of the office is always anxious to get the best information he can on the subject, and our commissioner must be able to speak to him with some degree of authority on those points. Another question which has been raised in connexion with the discussion is that the various States will not require Agents-General in the future. They will not require Agents-General possibly - they may not give them that title, but they may call them general agents - but each of the States will unmistakably require an agent in London to look after its interests. They each have loans, and must pay interest upon their loans, and they each have their commercial interests to be looked after, and the general agents of the States will especially have the duty of looking after their commercial interest. When it is suggested that the High Commissioner may look after the commercial interests of the Commonwealth as a whole, it will readily be seen that there may often be conflicting desires amongst the different States. The different States will not always be pulling upon exactly the same lines. We will want to get our frozen meat and butter and other produce established in the market, and other States will want their products looked after as well, and we know that the products of the different States will vary. The general agents for the different States will not only have to look after their smaller financial interests, but they will be specially charged with the commercial interests of the different States. In addition to the High Commissioner who represents Canada, and who, as is well known, has always been a leading politician, having an intimate acquaintance with the political views of his own country, each one of the provinces of the Dominion has a general agent in London to look after its particular interest. So it will be with us, and the States will not be able to do away with agents in London to look after their special interests. I do not think it will be the duty of the High Commissioner to do more than assist in every way he can the different States in the matter of their commercial interests. The more important work of that kind will be performed by the States' general agents. I know that South Australia will have one such general agent in London. We have made an appointment lately of an Agent-General, we call him an "Agent-General" for the time, but he takes a salary very much less than the previous Agent-General, and he will be more of a general agent, looking after the financial, commercial, and producing interests of South Australia. It will be the same, I believe, in all the other States. Therefore, it is not of so much importance that the High Commissioner should be intimately acquainted with the commercial and producing interests as that he should be a good financier, and should have a general knowledge of the views, wishes, and aspirations of the people. I think we must throw upon the Government the responsibility of appointing the best man they can get under the circumstances.

Senator HARNEY

- Untrammelled.

Senator PLAYFORD

- I do not think we should trammel them in the slightest degree in the matter, and I therefore ask Senator Pearce to withdraw his motion. He has initiated an interesting discussion, but I think we should not tie the hands of the Government. I have been in a Government myself, I have had the appointment of an

Agent-General, and I have been appointed an Agent-General myself. I have gone through the whole mill, and know the whole of the circumstances, and I know it is an unwise thing to tie the hands of the Government, because they may appoint a very bad man under this motion. They may appoint a man who has a knowledge of commercial matters and matters relating to production, but who may be an utterly unfit man from the financial stand-point or the stand-point of diplomacy. These are two very important qualifications, and to attempt to tie the hands of the Government under a motion of this kind would be a very great mistake. I ask the honorable senator to withdraw the motion.

Senator WALKER

- I am sure I voice the feelings of the Senate when I say that it is quite a pleasure to hear such a manly straightforward utterance as Senator Playford has favoured us with. There is no doubt that for this appointment we must have the very best man available, whether he be an ex-governor or not.

Senator Staniforth Smith

- There is the cloven hoof.

Senator Playford

- We would never go to ex-Governors.

Senator WALKER

- We may have amongst the ex-Governors some men of very high financial attainments, who would be very useful to us in dealing with the consolidation of the debts of the States. I think we should not tie the hands of the

Government, even to the extent of excluding ex-Governors.

Senator Glassey

- The people of Australia would not stand that. They want a man from among themselves.

Senator WALKER

- Senator Glassey knows that Queensland, for a short time, had an ex Governor as her representative in London, in the person of Sir Henry Norman, and I have yet to learn that he was not a successful Agent-General. In looking to the duties of the High Commissioner, we must remember that he is practically to be an ambassador, and he should have, I take it, with other advantages, a good social position. The Canadian High Commissioner has always held a high social position, and our representative at home should have an equally good position. If we are to say that the position should be confined to natives of Australia, our choice will not be so large as if we left the position open to natives of the whole Empire. Personally, I consider that as we are an integral portion of the Empire, our first duty in choosing is not to limit our choice to the natives of any particular part of the Empire.

Senator Staniforth Smith

- We might appoint a Hindoo at that rate.

Senator Playford

- Do not contemplate the awful fact that in Australia we have not a man fit for the position of High Commissioner.

Senator WALKER

- I am quite sure we have men in Australia fit for the position, and in the course of time we may have some ex-Agent-General made High Commissioner. I consider the position of Agent-General is a very good stepping-stone indeed for the position of High Commissioner. I had not the pleasure of listening to the opening remarks of Senator Pearce, but I understand he expressed himself rather unfavorably towards ex-Governors.

Senator Pearce

- Hear, hear ; very much so.

Senator WALKER

- In the course of 39 years' residence in Australia I have come across a great many Governors, good, bad, and indifferent, but amongst them one or two of very high financial skill. I trust Senator Pearce will withdraw his motion, so as not to limit our choice.

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Senator PULSFORD

- With Senator Walker, I think the Senate is indebted to Senator Playford for the very admirable and instructive remarks he has made. At the same time I feel that to negative this resolution would be almost

tantamount, or might possibly in some quarters be accepted as equal, to an intimation that the Senate did not put due weight on the qualification of knowledge of the resources and producing capabilities of Australia. Therefore I venture to propose an amendment which I think will meet the case. I move - That the words "Any person appointed to the position of High Commissioner in London should be one" after the word "Senate," line 1, be omitted, with the view to insert in lieu thereof the words " In appointing a High Commissioner in London, all other qualifications being equal, the Government should appoint a man."

The motion would then read -

That in the opinion of the Senate, in appointing a High Commissioner in London, all other qualifications being equal, the Government should appoint a man who is intimately acquainted with the producing and commercial resources of the Commonwealth.

I think the Senate might well agree to that amendment, and it would carry out all that Senator Pearce desires.

Senator Pearce

- With the consent of my seconder, I would accept that amendment. It has the same effect, I think, as my motion.

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Senator McGREGOR

- I would have preferred Senator Pearce to adhere to his original motion. I want to show that the difference between the amendment and the motion is of much more importance than Senator Pearce might imagine. The amendment says - " All other qualifications being equal." It may be impossible to find a man who is acquainted with the commercial and industrial features of Australia, and who at the same time has an equal knowledge of many of the other things required of him : yet his knowledge of those may be sufficient to qualify him very eminently to occupy the position of High Commissioner. It is only giving the Government a hint that if they can get some man of peculiar qualifications, it does not matter what part of the Empire he belongs to, they may accept him in preference to a man who may have an intimate knowledge of the producing and commercial resources of the Commonwealth. Of course, the word "intimate" is not really necessary. It makes the area of selection much narrower than it would be if a knowledge of the commercial and producing interests alone were required. I think that the most important qualification which any man occupying the position of High Commissioner can have is a knowledge of the affairs of Australia, both as regards its producing and commercial interests. He need not have an intimate knowledge of them, but he would certainly require to have some knowledge. Notwithstanding what Senator Playford has said, I know from experience that at one time there was an idea in the minds of a certain section of the people in Australia that no one could occupy the position of Agent-General unless he possessed certain social qualifications. Our connexion with the mother country, it was thought, should be particularly kept up by means of social relationships. In adhering to that idea I know a great deal of damage has been done to the different States in past years. They have lost a considerable amount in connexion with the management of their loans and of their affairs in other directions. I have a very vivid recollection of the time when Senator Playford, who was then - and still is - known as " Honest Tom," was appointed Agent General for South Australia. I have heard it asked upon the tram cars in that State - "What does he know about conducting himself in English society" 1 If that is to be a qualification for the office of High Commissioner it will be a sorry day for Australia. Of course, every man has a right to be a gentleman. When " Honest Tom. " went to England he did not court society, but I think he proved to the people of that country that there are gentlemen brought up in Australia. Possibly some might have been disposed to ask - " Although he was the Treasurer of a place like South Australia, where did he get his financial knowledge ? Was it in counting up a deficit or surplus of threepence halfpenny in a puny State like that " ? But certainly the honorable senator referred to proved not only to South Australia, but to the other States, that good practical Australians could be beneficial to the States which they represented. The same condition of things exists to-day, and will continue to exist. If we want men as Agents General and general agents - I cannot see any difference between the two - because they will always have the same functions to fulfil. Precisely the same thing applies to the office of High Commissioner. The highest qualification which he can have is a knowledge of Australia, of its production, of its commerce, of the aspirations of its people, and of its policy. I am sure that the resolution submitted by Senator Pearce does

not put out of court all the other qualifications of which the High Commissioner should be possessed. It merely states that it is essential he should have a knowledge of the commerce and production of the Commonwealth. I say that Senator Pearce should stick to his resolution. It refers to qualifications which undoubtedly the High Commissioner ought to possess. If he has a commercial knowledge he must of necessity be a good financier. I hope that the resolution will lie carried, because I believe it is submitted for the purpose of preventing the present Government or any future Government from appointing as High Commissioner men who, although they may belong to . social families, are only political adventurers so far as Australia is concerned. We want to be represented by men who know our aspirations, and have a living interest in us.

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- I think that the Senate should pause before it passes this resolution, or even accepts it in the amended form in which it is proposed. My idea is that the Government should have 'a free hand in the selection of the gentleman to fill the office of High Commissioner. That gentleman will require to possess other qualifications besides a knowledge of the commerce and production of this Commonwealth. Senator McGregor appeared to attach very great importance to the commercial and producing interests. There is no doubt that they are important, but there are other important qualifications which the High Commissioner should possess, in addition to having a "knowledge of those industries. I have yet to learn that the State Governments have up to the present time appointed any man as an Agent-General who has not had special qualifications for that office. In Victoria I am sure that we have every reason to be satisfied with the men who have been chosen. They may not have been admirable experts in regard to the commercial and producing interests, but still they have done tolerably well in London. I would point out to Senator McGregor that, however eminent the man may be who is sent to London, he will be a comparative cipher, especially if he has no social standing at all. The honorable senator cannot have lived in London if he imagines that a man sent home from here will produce such a very big impression as he supposes upon such a large body of people.

Senator McGregor

- Send Prince Ranjitsinhji.

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- I say send a man of common sense. Senator Playford is a living instance of the advantage of selecting as Agent-General an eminent politician. We have made a similar choice in Victoria. To carry this resolution will tie the hands of the Government in an objectionable way, and limit their choice between two particular men. A man might be a very excellent storekeeper, and know everything about the buying and selling of produce, but know nothing about anything else. I ask Senator McGregor whether he thinks there is any man in this State who has such an intimate knowledge of the commercial and producing interests of the different States that he could be selected for this position if the conditions imposed by this motion were applicable ?

Senator McGregor

- Yes, half-a-dozen.

Senator WILLIAM ZEAL

- I do not know of such a man.

Senator McGregor

- I do in the Commonwealth, but not in Victoria.

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- I do not know of such a man. I do not know of any man who has a commercial knowledge of New South Wales, and a similar knowledge of Tasmania. In these matters we must trust the Government. We must do as is done in other parts of the world. There are no such conditions attached to the appointment of High Commissioner for Canada as this resolution implies. To my mind Senator Pearce would be best serving the interests of the Commonwealth if he consented to its withdrawal. An Agent-General is a man who should have a knowledge of the interests of the particular State which he represents.

Senator McGregor

-What is an Agent-General?

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- He has to conduct generally the affairs of his own State in the mother country.

Senator McGregor

- Must he not also have a knowledge of other matters?

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Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- He must have a general knowledge, but not an intimate and particular knowledge. I am equal sure that Senator McGregor must see that a man could not undertake the duties of High Commissioner if such conditions as this resolution implies were imposed. We must give the Government some amount of latitude.

Senator McGregor

- Where is the honorable senator going to get the man that he wants ?

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- I know that it is a difficult matter, but if we have a man in these States who has won his spurs in the Parliament, he ought not to be tabooed because he does not possess an intimate- knowledge of the commercial and producing interests. What would many of the men coming from Western Australia know of the Victorian butter industry, for example? Whatever complexion this resolution takes, we shall have to fall back upon the fact, that while the High Commissioner will preside over the interests of the whole of the States, we shall require a general agent to look after their commercial interests.

Senator McGregor

- An Indian fakir would do, perhaps ?

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- We do not want an Indian fakir. The honorable senator is only trying to throw a little glamour over the matter to take me off the trail, but he will not accomplish his object. I know that Senator McGregor is a good square-headed man, who understands what he is talking about. He surely realizes that we must trust the Government in this matter. If the Government are not worthy of our confidence let us turn them out.

Senator Sir Josiah Symon

- We cannot turn them out.

Senator Sir WILLIAM ZEAL

- I do not desire to turn them out. While we have a Government who possess the support of the electors we ought not to tie their hands by passing abstract resolutions, which can have no effect whatever, and which will only tend to prevent the accomplishment of the very object which Senator Pearce desires.

Senator PEARCE(Western Australia). - I am rather surprised at the words which have been put into my mouth. I did not suggest that the High Commissioner should not be a financier, a diplomatist, and possessed of political experience. I merely asked the Senate to affirm that he should have a knowledge of the commercial and producing interests of the Commonwealth. I am surprised at the assertion of Senator Walker that we should throw the position open to the whole Empire. Perhaps the honorable senator would prefer a Hindoo to fill this office, on the same ground as lascars are preferred on our steam-ships - because they are cheaper. I trust that the Senates will express a decided opinion upon this amended motion. It will not tie the hands of the Government, but it will voice the opinion that we desire for the position of High Commissioner, a useful man who knows the aspirations of, and is associated with, the people of Australia. I ask honorable senators to vote for the motion.

Question- That the word's proposed to be omitted stand part of the motion - put. The Senate divided -

Ayes_____ 10

Noes..... 12

Majority ,..... 2

Question so resolved in the negative.

Amendment agreed to.

Question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

ACTING CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES

Resolved(on motion by Senator Drake) - That Senator Dobson be appointed Chairman of Committees for this sitting:

AUDIT BILL

Suspension of Standing Orders.

Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

. - I desire to have this Bill recommitted for the purpose of making a correction in one of the clauses. It was pointed out to me by Senator Lt.-Col. Neild, after the Bill had gone through committee, that in clause 53 there was an obvious error in leaving out the words "the commencement of." In order that the Bill may go through its remaining stages during the day, it is necessary -that the standing; orders should be suspended by a majority of the Senate ; and with concurrence I move -

That the standing orders be suspended to enable the Bill to be recommitted and to go through its remaining stages without delay.

Question resolved in the affirmative. "Bill recommitted and reported with a verbal amendment ; report adopted.

Bill read a third time.

STATE INSURANCE AGAINST INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS

Senator Pearce

- Shall I be in order, sir, in moving that the consideration of this order of the day be further adjourned.

The PRESIDENT

- It is very objectionable to keep on fixing the order and then altering it again. If the honorable senator likes to move that it be adjourned altogether he may. I understand that it was the wish of the honorable senator in charge of this matter that it should come on now. However, I. shall not stop Senator Pearce from moving for its postponement.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- I did not notice that there are two applications for leave of absence. If it is possible to take these two motions I shall be very willing to withdraw my motion.

Senator Harney

- One has been taken.

The PRESIDENT

- I call on Senator Pearce.

Motion (by Senator Pearce) agreed to -

That the consideration of the order of the day, Insurance Industrial Accidents, be further adjourned.

Senator Lt Col NEILD

- I move -

That the order of the day be further adjourned to admit of the consideration of notice of motion No. 5 being taken.

The PRESIDENT

- We have first to take the State Laws and Records Recognition Bill, and the order of the day in the name of Senator Keating. The question is that the order of the day, Insurance Industrial Accidents, be taken after the consideration of the other orders of the day and after notices.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- That is not my motion.

The PRESIDENT

- I shall put it in any way the honorable senator wishes, but we must call the orders of the day in their order.

Senator Lt Col Neild

.- It is evident that I have been placed in a false position, just through trying to meet the convenience of everybody. I object to the motion for postponement.

The PRESIDENT

- We have carried that motion, and it is now for the honorable senator to state when he wants the Senate to take the order of the day into consideration, and he can only do that subject to the standing orders.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- I may move that it be taken at a later hour of the day.

The PRESIDENT

- The question is that the further consideration of order of the day No. 2 be taken after the consideration

of the other orders of the day.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- That is not my motion.

The PRESIDENT

- If the honorable senator will tell me what he wants I will put it.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- I have moved that it be taken at a later hour of the day.

The PRESIDENT

- What hour? We must have either some hour or some day fixed.

Senator Glassey

- Say next Friday.

Motion (by Senator Lt.-Col. Neild) agreed to -

That the order of the day be read and discharged and stand an order of the day for Friday next. *

BASS STRAITS SUBMARINE TELEGRAPH CABLE

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Senator KEATING

-I move -

That, in the opinion of this Senate, the Government should forthwith acquire for the Commonwealth the ownership and control of the Bass Straits submarine telegraph cable.

I pointed out on a previous occasion the peculiar position in which the people on both sides of Bass Straits are placed with regard to telegraphic communication. I think I cannot better illustrate the point than by giving a practical instance. What I am saying with regard to messages despatched from Tasmania to the mainland would apply with equal force to messages despatched from the mainland to Tasmania. An ordinary message coming from the south of Tasmania to the north, and going no further, would cost for ten words 1s., the whole of which sum goes into the consolidated revenue of Tasmania.

But let a message be sent to Ballarat, and the same ten words would cost 2s., of which the Tasmanian Government would only get 6d., Victoria would get another 6d., and the private company would get 1s. In the interests of the Commonwealth, now that we have amalgamated the departments, an anomaly like that should not be allowed to continue for any long space of time. I may point out at once what is the position of this company with regard to telegraph rates. I have taken a great deal of pains to go into the agreements existing with the various States. In January, 1868, the Government of Tasmania contracted with the Telegraph Construction Company Limited, and it was agreed that the company was to lay this cable within fifteen months. The Government of Tasmania were to guarantee a return of 6 per cent, per annum on the cost of the construction, and it was agreed between the parties that the cost of construction should be put down at £70,000. If the net profits arising from the working of the line, plus the subsidy of 6 per cent., or £4,200, should exceed £7,000, that is, 10 per cent, on the cost of construction, the company were to refund to the Government the excess over the £7,000 up to at least the amount of the subsidy. In no case, however, were the company to refund more than the amount of the subsidy, £4,200. The company was to have the exclusive right of communication for twenty years from the opening of the line, and there were the usual provisions for auditing the accounts and -for the Government to have the right of inspecting the company's books. There was one particular provision to which I shall draw the attention of the Senate. It was one giving the Government priority with regard to messages. These are the words - And shall also be entitled to obtain and have the exclusive use of the said submarine telegraph upon giving reasonable notice to the company their successors or assigns and upon payment to them of an amount equivalent to the cost of the line and the value of the profits thereof, including the Government guarantee, the same to be determined in case of difference by the arbitration of disinterested persons. When the term under that agreement had nearly expired, the Tasmanian Government entered into another agreement, in 1889, with the Eastern Extension Company. That second agreement modified the previous one to this extent - that after the twenty years the right to exclusive communication was extended for a further twenty years to date from the 'expiring of the "current twenty years." The subsidy of £4,200 was specifically continued, but in this supplementary agreement all the net profits were to go to the company; so that even if the company earned more than 10 per cent, there was no refund to the Government. The Government, however, had power to reduce the rates, the company taking a portion of

the "message receipts," the Government guaranteeing the message receipts up to the amount of £5,600 per annum, in addition to the subsidy. Moreover, in addition to that the position of the company was that its instruments were to be free from duty and wharfage, and its ships from port duties whilst its property was to be free from taxation. So that in addition to their subsidy of £4,200 a year, in case the Government reduced the rates the company were to have another £5,600 a year absolutely guaranteed to them. That was, be it remembered, on a construction cost of £70,000 per annum. The company consequently had an assured income of £9,800 per annum, or 14 per cent. Altogether this company, so far as concerns the telegraphy of Australia, was in a very fair way to do a good thing for itself. Now the Commonwealth has power, as the representative of Tasmania, or Tasmania has power, as a part of the Commonwealth, to acquire possession of this cable, as laid down in the original agreement.

Senator Playford

- Can that be done now ?

Senator KEATING

- Yes ; the words are, at an "amount equivalent to the cost of the line and the value of the profits thereof." The second agreement modified the original agreement, but did not modify the provision with regard to the Government acquiring possession. That power of acquiring is vested in the Government of the Commonwealth directly, or indirectly in the Government of Tasmania.

Senator Playford

- Would it not have paid Tasmania to have exercised that right of acquisition?

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Senator KEATING

- Undoubtedly it would ; and if we had had in Tasmania a statesman like Senator Playford I have no doubt whatever that the cable would have been acquired by the Government many years ago. But the Tasmanian Government extended the term and gave the company an additional subsidy, so as to return 14 per cent. on the outlay, I must also mention that a further agreement was entered into in November, 1892, between New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and the Eastern Extension Company, whereby each of those States became co-contributors with Tasmania in respect of the annual subsidy of £4,200 per annum, payable out of their consolidated revenues. That agreement was entered into in consideration of Tasmania becoming a contributor with those other States in respect of a guarantee to South Australia in connexion with the overland telegraph line to Port Darwin.

Senator Playford

- How long was that to last?

Senator KEATING

- Indefinitely.

Senator Drake

- It was only to be terminated by mutual consent in writing.

Senator KEATING

- Yes ; so that the deficiency, upon the Northern Territory line of telegraph to Port Darwin is not necessarily borne by the South Australian Government, because the other States agreed to keep the revenue up to £37,552. We have heard a great deal about the generosity of this company to Australia in the past. Let me give another fact. An agreement was entered into on the 31st March, 1891, whereby, in consideration of the Eastern Extension Company reducing its rates, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania agreed that if in any year of reduced rates the company's total receipts and the Cis-Indian administrations in respect of Australian traffic, after deducting out-payments to other telegraph administrations, were less than £237,736, the States named should contribute half of such deficiency. This is the company of whose generosity we have heard so much. Whatever may be thought of the agreement which existed with this company with regard to international telegraphy, I think the circumstances I have put before honorable senators with regard to the Bass Strait line should stand on an entirely different footing from oversea affairs. This line is the connecting link between the telegraph systems of the mainland and the telegraph system of what Senator Dobson has called "The Ocean State"; and the conditions of the case render it imperatively necessary that as early as possible the Commonwealth Government shall exercise the powers vested in it, either directly or through the State of Tasmania, of acquiring all interests in this line for the Commonwealth. This should be done

not only in the interests of those, the success of whose commercial enterprises largely depend upon communication with the mainland, but also for the improvement and proper administration of our Telegraphic department throughout the Commonwealth.

Senator Dobson

- Can the honorable and learned senator give any indication of the profits of the company ?

Senator Fraser

- And of the expenditure?

Senator KEATING

- I cannot give those particulars just now.

Senator Playford

- Will it pay the Commonwealth to take over the line ?

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Senator KEATING

- I hardly think that is an argument that can fairly be adduced in respect of a motion of this character. I dare say if I went through the Commonwealth I could pick out section after section of the telegraph system of Australia, and taking any one section severally by itself, could prove that it was far from paying. The question is not; however, whether a particular section is paying, but whether it is for the interests of the Commonwealth, taking into consideration the interests of the telegraph system of the whole of Australia. We do not ascertain in regard to our telegraph system or in regard to our railway systems whether any particular section of the lines of communications pay per se, but we consider whether it is in the interests of the whole people and of the system as a whole. The difference in the two agreements may possibly suggest to honorable senators what is practically the cost of working the line. The question suggested by Senator Fraser is one worthy of every consideration, and one which naturally appeals to a shrewd business man. What is the actual outlay the company is put to in order to work the line ? I may say I am not in a position to say that, but the Government have power under the agreement to make quarterly inspections in the books, and may in that way ascertain what are the actual profits on the cost of working. The Government should therefore be in a position to understand what is the company's position in that respect. I wish to emphasize the contention that if we were not to consider this as one particular section of telegraph line, but as a part of the system of telegraphs throughout Australia, it would pay the Government to take it over.

Senator McGregor

- It would not cost the Government in any case over £9,800.

Senator KEATING

- It would not cost the Government any more than it is costing them now, and they would have the control, which would be an immense advantage. I think I may again refer briefly to a point I endeavoured to make in my opening remarks. If a telegram were sent from Melbourne, say, to Flinders, it would cost 9d. ; it would not go out of the State and the Treasury of Victoria would get the full benefit. But if a telegram were sent from Wodonga through Flinders to Tasmania it would be interrupted here and have to go upon different lines. It would go over a much longer distance and through the hands of a greater number of officers, and require the attention of a greater number of persons, and yet the State would actually get less, because this company has to take its toll of 1s. If I send a telegram in Tasmania from Launceston to Georgetown, for instance, where the company has its office, the Government gets the full benefit of the 1s. paid for the ten words, but if an individual went down to the other end of Tasmania, and sent a telegram from Southport to Melbourne, it would have to go from Southport to Hobart, then to Launceston to Georgetown and Melbourne, and for the same number of words 2s. would be paid ; and yet the Government of Tasmania and the Government of Victoria would only get 6d. each and the company would get 1s. That has been the practice in the past.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- It is rather against the honorable, and learned senator's argument as to the line paying. If they require a subsidy for a short line and charge twice the amount the State Government do, it shews that it cannot be a paying scheme.

Senator KEATING

- I do not say we require to subsidize it at all. I say that the system which prevails in regard to carrying on

this line actually takes out of the Treasuries of the several States money which should go into them.

Senator Glassey

- How long will that arrangement continue to run ?

Senator KEATING

- Until 1909. If this, line were part of the system of the Commonwealth, the ls. now paid to the company would not be diverted from the Treasury at all. The whole message costs 2s., of which each State gets 6d. and the private company gets ls. This is a matter which must be considered in any inquiry as to whether the taking over of the line by the Commonwealth would be a paying venture. I may point out also that by reason of the fact that the whole system on the mainland of the Commonwealth is now in the control of the Postmaster-General, the people in Queensland and the people in Western Australia and other distant States are now allowed to participate in an advantage which they could never have derived but for that amalgamation. The telegrams now sent to the press with regard to the proceedings of the Commonwealth Parliament are sent from here to Western Australia or from here to Queensland on the same terms as they are sent to the country press in Victoria.

Senator Drake

- Yes"; a uniform rate.

Senator KEATING

- In Western Australia, at Boulder, Kalgoorlie, or wherever else a newspaper may be desirous of getting information with regard to the proceedings of this Parliament, it is enabled to get it on precisely the same terms as a paper in Ballarat. AVe, in Tasmania, although we are not nearly so far away, cannot do that, because this company has to be considered. Questions have been asked of the representatives of the Government in this Chamber and in another place with regard to this very matter, and it has been pointed out -that, owing to the existence of this company, the uniform rates which have been fixed cannot apply to Tasmania.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- Could the honorable and learned senator say what is the reduction on press messages to Tasmania as compared with ordinary messages ?

Senator Drake

- The average is about ls. 3d. for every 100 words. The charge is 2s. 6d. for the first 200 words, and, of course, it varies according to the length of the message, and as the messages become longer, the charge becomes cheaper in proportion.

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Senator KEATING

- We are put into this isolated position to which I have referred. I move this motion to draw attention to what I consider is, and will remain, an anomaly with regard to our telegraphic system, unless some action is taken by the Government as early as possible. I do it, believing strongly in the principle affirmed by the Postmaster-General here,> and which I think has received the concurrence of all honorable senators of this Chamber, 'that the control of communication, both by post and telegraph, throughout the whole of the Commonwealth should be the absolute monopoly of the people of the Commonwealth. In order to give proper application to that principle, it is eminently necessary that this connecting link between the telegraphic system of one of the States and of the other States, should- be controlled and owned by the people of the Commonwealth. This, as I have pointed out before, is entirely dissimilar from an ocean cable going to the outside world. It is connecting the State with the Common wealth, and it cannot be pretended that the arguments I have used with regard to the necessity for this purchase might be applied with force to the purchase of a cable line from Australia to America or any outlying countries. This is within the Commonwealth itself and a part of our system, and until it is purchased we in Tasmania must necessarily labour under the disadvantages to which I have referred, and must put up -with the anomalies I have mentioned.

Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

. - The speech of Senator Keating is from first to last a condemnation of the intrusion into our State telegraphic system of a cable that is owned by a private company. Let us bear in mind, first of all, that previous to federation this could only be regarded as a cable occupying exactly the same position as

other submarine cables, and throughout the world all submarine cables are at the present time owned "by private companies. The accomplishment of federation has brought about a different state of things in this respect : That Tasmania, being a part of the Commonwealth, this privately-owned cable intervenes between that part of the Commonwealth and the rest of the Commonwealth. That is pointed out by Senator Keating as being objectionable, and he desires that steps should be taken as soon as possible to rectify it in some way or other. I was inclined to think, and I am not sure that I have entirely changed my opinion, that it was rather unfortunate that this motion should have been brought forward at the present time. . But if there is any compensation for the disadvantage we may be placed in in connexion with the moving of this motion, I think it will be found in the industry that has been _ displayed by Senator Keating in going carefully through these agreements, and laying their salient points before the Senate. In doing ' that I think he has performed a very useful work. I think he has shown that the Government of Tasmania has entered into a bargain with the Eastern Extension Company which is exceedingly for the benefit of that particular company. I think it can be easily seen in that agreement how the hands of the other contracting parties have been tied up. I do not think Senator Keating referred particularly to one condition of the contract which he brought under the notice of the Senate, and that is that during the currency of these agreements no other cable can be laid between Tasmania . and Victoria.

Senator Keating

- I said it has the exclusive right for twenty years - until 1909.

Senator DRAKE

- Not only has the right been given to this company to lay down their cable, but they have been allowed ' to safeguard themselves by providing that it is impossible for the State of Tasmania, or the State of Victoria, or the Commonwealth, or any other private company to lay down any other cable.

Senator Zeal

- Could not a cable be laid down from New South Wales to Tasmania 1

Senator Dobson

- The words of the agreement are - " Shall have the exclusive right of submarine telegraph communication between the colonies of Victoria and Tasmania for a period of twenty years."

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Senator DRAKE

- Under the terms of that agreement I have no doubt Tasmania would be precluded from granting even landing rights to any other company. So that this company has placed itself in the position, that it has got an absolute monopoly of the telegraphic communication between Tasmania and the mainland of Australia. That is one condition of the agreement, and there is another with regard to the terms upon which this cable may be acquired by the State of Tasmania, the terms being the payment of the cost of construction, £70,000, and interest upon the profits and upon the Government guarantee. . The term of the first agreement has expired, and a second agreement has taken its place for another twenty years, without making any alteration in that purchase clause. The consequence is that the company are in a position to say that the cable cannot be acquired unless we pay them the original cost of construction and interest upon the profits and the Government guarantee. Honorable senators will mark the fact that a submarine cable does not last for ever, like an Eastern Extension Company's agreement. It has a certain life. Very often the process of deterioration goes on without any defect becoming apparent, until some day or other the cable stops. That is provided for in the agreement. It is provided that the cable may cease working for a certain number of days.

Senator Dobson

- Thirty days.

Senator DRAKE

- But if it ceases working for a longer period, then the agreement terminates.

Senator Keating

- Unless the cessation is due to war or something of that kind.

Senator DRAKE

- Quite so. What is contemplated is this : The cable is getting older and older. Nobody knows when it is going to give out, and it may at any time break down and be found to be past repair. We are placed in this position under the agreements that exist, that the only way in which we can compulsorily acquire the

cable is by giving the company the full cost of the original construction and interest upon present profits and Government guarantees, the cable having been continually deteriorating, while the profits have been continually increasing. Under such circumstances, if it were considered desirable that the Commonwealth should acquire this cable, it should be a matter of fair negotiation. That is the reason why I deprecated the moving of this motion, because it seems to me to be in the direction of tying up the hands of one of the contracting parties. If we desire to acquire the cable, it is open now to the Government to enter into negotiations with the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company for its purchase.

Senator Fraser

- They will have a hard bargain. (

Senator DRAKE

- I have been leading up to that point. I have pointed out, first of all, that they have carefully arranged that they shall have no competition - they have a monopoly. They have arranged the terms on which a purchase may be made. They renewed an agreement after the first twenty years had nearly elapsed, providing that the original cost shall be paid for a cable which has lain under the sea for twenty years, and that interest shall be paid on profits which have been constantly increasing. And now we have a motion, which, if passed, would strengthen their hands, because it declares that we shall forthwith purchase the cable. If it were passed, and it had any effect, it would simply mean that, we should be bound - instead of negotiating with the company, and finding out what price they were willing to sell the cable and! allow it to come under State control - to pay them the price which is mentioned in the agreement. -

Senator Glassey

- What would the aggregate amount be 1

Senator DRAKE

- It is impossible to tell. It would be £70,000- the original cost - and interest on profits.

Senator Glassey

- Roughly, it would be £100,000.

Senator DRAKE

- I am not prepared to say what the amount would be, but it is a reasonably old cable which may at any time break down. If the motion is passed, and it has any effect, it will throw us bound hand and foot into the company's hands.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- Why not pay the difference in cost between the price of a message to the State of Tasmania, and the price of a message to a State on the mainland ?.

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Senator DRAKE

- The honorable senator has started another point, on which I should not like to give a positive opinion at the present time. We must remember that under section 99 of the Constitution we have to do equal justice to all States, and the question may at any moment arise whether we have a right to tax the people of the Commonwealth in order to cheapen messages to Tasmania. Senator Keating has very truly said that press messages containing Commonwealth news go all over the Commonwealth at the rate of 2s. 6d. for 200 words, except to Tasmania. It is very unfortunate that the same news cannot go to Tasmania at that rate, and the only reason is that there is this break in the State lines - that the State lines are connected there by a private cable which has the right within, certain limits to make its own charges. It is very desirable that the charges should be equalized throughout the Commonwealth, and I am sure no one desires that more earnestly than I do; but if we are to achieve that by purchasing the cable, surely the price we have to pay for it must be some factor, because if the amount we are going to receive for telegraphic messages sent over that cable is to be so small as to be an inappreciable factor, it will simply mean that the cable will be utterly unremunerative. If we are to pay to that company an extravagantly high price for the cable, and at the same time carry out what I think must be the rule - at all events after the first five years - that the charges for telegraphic communication throughout the Commonwealth shall be uniform, there is not the slightest chance of the cable being remunerative in any sense of the word. Surely, then, it is our duty to endeavour, if we possibly can, to acquire that cable at something like a reasonable price. Although I know that the intentions of Senator Keating in this matter are entirely right,

and though I agree with him, still I cannot help thinking that this discussion, and more especially the carrying of the motion, would be highly disadvantageous to us in any negotiations we might have to enter into with the company.

Debate (on motion by Senator. Lt.-Col. Neild) adjourned.

STATE LAWS AND RECORDS RECOGNITION BILL

Motion (by Senator Drake) proposed -

That the order of the day be postponed until after the consideration of the remainder of the private business.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- I understood from you, sir, this morning that an order of the day which had once been postponed had to be postponed to another day.

The PRESIDENT

- I did not say so.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- Well, I misunderstood you then.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Senator HARNEY

- I should like, if there is no objection, to move my motion in this form -

That leave of absence be granted to Senator Matheson for the remainder of this session on account of the pendency of the petition presented against his return by Mr. Saunders.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- Why not apply for leave of absence for him for two months, and then let him apply again ?

The PRESIDENT

- The question is that Senator Harney have leave to move his motion in the amended form which he has indicated.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- Mr President

The PRESIDENT

- Does any honorable senator object?

Senator Sir William Zeal

- I shall not object. I asked the honorable and learned senator to move for a specific term, and to allow Senator Matheson to apply again.

Senator Harney

- One thing at a time.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- Then I object to the alteration of the motion.

The PRESIDENT

- If any honorable senator objects it cannot be moved in the amended form.

Senator Playford

- I do not wish to object to the alteration of the motion, but I wish to point out to Senator Harney that it may be well to say " granted to Senator Matheson until this matter is disposed of," and mention no special time.

Senator Drake

- I think it will be better for the motion to be moved in its present form. There is some difference of opinion-

Senator Clemons

- Is it in order, sir, for the Postmaster-General to rise and debate the question ?

The PRESIDENT

- No.

Senator Drake

- Well, I object to it, and that will settle it.

Senator Harney

- The objection of the Postmaster-General--

The PRESIDENT

- Senator Sir William Zeal also objected.

Senator Harney

- He says he did not object.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- Yes, I object, unless the honorable and learned senator makes it a specified time.

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Senator HARNEY

- There is no connexion between the two things. The reason of the objection' to the alteration I am at a loss to discover, because whether it be for a specified time or for the whole term, there can be no harm in putting on the notice-paper what every one knows to be the fact. As the notice appears, in print, the ground of the application is the urgency of private business. That appears there because it is the stereotyped form. The reason of the application, is the pendency of this petition, and the fact that some honorable senators think that it should be for a specific period can in no reasonable way influence them in objecting to having it amended so as to make the words conformable with what they know to be the fact. That objection coming from the Postmaster-General is an unfortunate thing, because this petition has undoubtedly given rise to a good deal of ill-feeling already, and that ill-feeling is not lessened by a factious and unreasonable objection for which no ground can be shown.

Senator Drake

- We want to know first the honorable and learned senator's reason for asking for it.

Senator HARNEY

- That is not the point at all. The Postmaster-General has shown that he is the possessor of considerable intelligence, and he cannot be so mentally confused as to think that it makes the slightest difference to the issue, to put in the true ground on which the application is made, for whatever time. I have considered the question of how long this leave should be asked for. I thought six weeks would be sufficient, and, accordingly, a few days ago the motion appeared in that form ; but since, in consultation with Senator Matheson, I have come to the conclusion that it is only fair to him to make it for the whole session, because it is not only possible, but exceedingly probable, that this matter will not be determined for very many months to come. On looking at the minutes of the proceedings of the committee, I see that Mr. Pink, counsel for the petitioner, stated on the 9th July that he would not be able to obtain any of his witnesses until the 23rd August, that is nearly two months, and that the petitioner has left Melbourne and gone back to the West. Whether ill or well advised, he went back thinking there was an end of the matter.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- The Postmaster-General yesterday said that he had not gone. He said if he had had to answer my question he would have answered no.

Senator Drake

- That is a misstatement. The question was - Is the Vice-President of the Executive Council aware of it?

Senator Lt Col Neild

- I think the Minister is making a misstatement now.

The PRESIDENT

- Order ! I must ask honorable senators not to interject, and to allow the speaker to proceed.

Senator HARNEY

- There is no feeling on my part. I am attempting to show that this matter will very probably not be determined this session, unless it runs into March or April next year. The committee will not sit for a week or more. Then there are a number of preliminary objections to be got over. I do not know how long they will take. They will take several sittings, at all events ; it will take a fortnight or three weeks before they are in a position to set about business. The petitioner then will have to come over here. Arrangements will have to be made for getting the evidence, and we must allow some time for the inquiry, if evidence is to be gone into. A great number of witnesses will probably have to be examined, and if honorable senators tot all that up they will find that it will require four or five months. Having regard to the number of days available for conducting this inquiry before the final decision can be come to, is it fair to Senator Matheson to have him, through a spokesman here, coming forward every month or six weeks, cap in

hand, asking to have his leave extended? It is really putting him in the same position as a criminal, who comes up from time to time and asks to have his bail extended. I do not think that Senator Matheson ought to be unnecessarily forced to drag his name periodically before the public, and to revive in their minds the knowledge of the fact that the petition is hanging over him.

Senator Fraser. - That may be done for him.

Senator HARNEY

- It cannot be done without a feeling of annoyance.

Senator Fraser

- It is not a disgrace.

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Senator HARNEY

- It may be no disgrace, but it is an unpleasantness. I think none of us would like it ourselves. It must be a source of annoyance to Senator Matheson to have this matter mooted in the press at all. If we call on him to renew his application from time to time, we make public the fact that there is a petition against him, and therefore cause him very unnecessary annoyance. I respectfully submit that the proper course is to grant him leave of absence during the session. If the petition is determined within a shorter time than that, he can come here, and his leave of absence will at once "be annulled under the standing orders. "What I want to do is by one application to put an end to this matter, so that in future Senator Matheson can go about his business without feeling that he is beholden to the Senate to come here and ask for an extension of leave. This petition has been hanging over his head for three or four months. We are not going to renew the abominable discussion of the matter we have id ready had.

The PRESIDENT

- The honorable and learned senator ought not to say that the discussion was abominable.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- Is that senator's expression in order?

Senator HARNEY

- I at once withdraw the remark if it is taken in that way. What I meant to say was that it was an abominable thing that we had to go so much into personal matters in the discussion as we did ; I should be sorry to say that a thing was abominable in which I took a conspicuous" part myself. I ask honorable senators to grant this leave of absence by one act. No more will be heard of it then, and if the petition is decided in Senator Matheson's favour he can by coming here annul the leave granted.

Senator Sir William Zeal

- I will withdraw my objection if the Senate will permit me.

Senator HARNEY

- I move -

That leave of absence be granted to Senator Matheson for the remainder of this session on account of urgent private affairs.

Senator CLEMONS

- I am obliged to Senator Sir William Zeal ; but I am conscious that the objection of the Postmaster-General still remains. I wish to point out that what we are discussing at present is whether Senator Harney shall be permitted to amend his motion. For many reasons it is desirable that this matter shall be concluded by one motion ; but I am sure that the Postmaster-General will admit that if the motion were worded as such motions usually are, and the request were for leave of absence for six weeks or two months, it would be clear that the motion would have to be renewed at the end of that period. Senator Harney's argument is that it is undesirable to renew the notice, and that argument has appealed to Senator Sir William Zeal, who I am glad has recognised the fact that it is undesirable that the motion should be renewed time after time. The most optimistic of us will admit that six weeks or two months would not be sufficient to finally decide the petition. In other words, it is certain that in six weeks we are bound to have this matter raised again.

Senator Playford

- Why not put it that the leave is granted until the petition is disposed of.

Senator CLEMONS

- I will point put at once a good reason why we should not put it in that form. We should then be naming

an indefinite time. That might produce serious inconvenience to Senator Matheson, who might be out staying his leave of absence through no fault of his own, after the matter was disposed of. ' But if the Senate gives him a definite time, he can terminate his leave at any time, directly the petition is dismissed.

Senator Playford

- He could terminate his leave when the matter was decided.

Senator CLEMONS

- No doubt he would terminate his leave at the earliest possible moment. I cannot conceive that the Senate will object to the motion, except for some reasons that it will be undesirable to give expression to. I therefore urge upon Senator Playford, in all common fairness, to accede to the motion in its present form, and not be led away by any argument as to the undesirability of . giving leave of absence for what may seem a rather long time. The intention is that Senator Matheson may be able to absent himself from the Senate for the remainder of" the session, but that he shall return earlier if he is able to do so. It is certain that he is anxious to return.

Senator Playford

- This motion gives him a right to be absent all through the session.

Senator CLEMONS

- I admit that it gives him the right.

Senator Harney

- Why keep him on tenterhooks?

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Senator CLEMONS

- I am sure that Senator Playford admits that Senator Matheson will be here directly he can get back. The object of the motion is to enable him to stay after the petition is disposed of. I will take the responsibility of saying that Senator Matheson is most desirous of returning to his place in the Senate, and will take . the earliest opportunity of doing so. .

Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

. - Of course Senator Matheson, like any other senator, can ask for leave of absence, but it is usual in all cases to ask for leave for a limited time. The reasons usually given are either ill-health or urgent private affairs. As the motion stood originally on the notice paper it" asked for leave on the ground of "urgent private affairs." I think] had the right to ask Senator Harney before amending his motion to give some reason for its amendment. What he proposed to do without giving reasons was to amend his motion, giving Senator Matheson indefinite leave. I think it is not desirable in this case to grant leave for more than the usual period, foi" I cannot see that there is any difficulty about Senator Matheson getting extended leave if he desires to have it. Why I think it necessary that the senator should exercise some care in connexion with this matter is that there is a petition now under consideration by the Elections and Qualifications Committee against Senator Matheson's return. I do not want to refer to that more than is absolutely necessary ; but I will say this candidly : I do not know whether the motion in its original form or in its amended form will affect the petition in any way whatever, but what I desire is that the Senate shall do nothing whatever that could by any possibility delay the proceedings of the committee. I do not say positively that that would result, but I want an assurance from Senator Harney, and I should like that assurance to be backed by the wisdom of honorable senators, that if we grant this leave of absence, either for a limited period or for the whole of the session, it will not in any way interfere with the proceedings of the committee. I hope I shall not be drawn into saying one word more than is necessary, but I ask : is it possible that Senator Matheson may be required as a witness before the committee, and, if so, would his leave of absence have any effect ?

Senator Sir Josiah Symon

- How can it?

Senator HARNEY

- The other witnesses are not members of the Senate.

Senator DRAKE

- There could not be any difficulty whatever in their case. But the whole question is : Senator Matheson, being a member of the Senate and being absent on leave, would that make any) difference? That is the

point upon which I desired to be assured before consenting to the motion. We do not know how long the session may last. There is no reason why Senator Matheson should not be satisfied with getting leave of absence for a limited period, and when that period has nearly expired he can easily come down and ask for extended leave.

Senator Clemons

- Does the Minister suggest that Senator Matheson is keeping out of the way ?

Senator DRAKE

- No, I do not. I will leave suggestions of that kind to my honorable friend opposite. I move - That the words " the remainder of the session " be omitted with a view to inserting the words "six weeks."

Senator Lt Col Neild

- I am quite willing, as I am sure other honorable senators will be, to offer every convenience to Senator Matheson ; but at the same time there does arise a certain awkwardness under the standing orders. I direct attention to Standing Order 412 -

If a committee desire the attendance of a member as a witness,' the Chairman shall, in writing, request him to attend ; but should he refuse, the select committee shall take no further action, except to report the matter to the House.

The election petition is before a select committee. The Elections and Qualifications Committee cannot possibly be described as anything else. It has no power to do anything except to inquire and report. If the Senate gives Senator Matheson leave of absence, it seems to me that he will be absolutely beyond the control of the committee if they want him as a witness, as they probably will. It may be assumed that he will attend as a witness on his own motion ; but suppose that, for some purposes we need not attempt to describe or conceive, or on the grounds of personal convenience, he chooses to stay away, would he be guilty of _ any impropriety if he took no notice of the request of the committee for his attendance, seeing that the Senate had absolved him from attendance 1

Senator Dobson

- Standing Order 56 says that a member shall be excused from attendance on a committee so long as he has leave of absence.

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Senator Lt Col Neild

- That is a different matter. This is a case where Senator Matheson may be required as a witness.

Assuming that the committee goes into the facts of the case, his attendance may be imperative at some stage ; and I (Submit that if the Senate gives him- leave of absence he will be beyond the control of the committee as a possible witness. I therefore ask for the ruling of the President upon this point - whether, if the Senate gives the proposed leave of absence to Senator Matheson, it would be beyond the power of the Committee of Elections and Qualifications to summon him as a witness during the continuance of his leave? In view of the standing order mentioned by Senator Dobson, it would almost appear to be the intention of the standing orders to make it needless for a member having leave of absence to attend a committee; because if he is not required to attend as a member of a committee it almost follows by parity of reasoning that' he Would not be required to attend as a witness.

The PRESIDENT

- In answer to the point raised by Senator Neild, I reply that it is not exactly a point of order at all. It does not require any ruling from the Chair to prevent' this discussion from being continued, and a conclusion arrived at in reference to Senator Harney's motion. The two suggestions which have been made are - first, that there is some analogy between the attendance of a member who is a member of a select committee, and of a member who is required as a witness before a select committee. I do not think there is any analogy at all between those two cases. I do not think the one has anything to do with the other. But the main question which I understand to be raised is upon this standing order -

If a select committee desire the attendance, of a member as a witness, the Chairman shall in writing request him to attend ; but should he refuse, the select committee shall take no further action except to report the matter to the House.

Now, what has that standing order to do with the question as to whether a member has been given leave of absence or not ? I do not see that it has anything whatever to do with it, and therefore I do not think that there is really any point for me to decide.

Senator FRASER

- Personally, I am inclined to give every consideration to motions of this kind. I would like in such matters rather to err, if possible, on the side of leniency and liberality than that it should be said that we were unfair or illiberal in dealing with such a case. I would like the senator to have leave of absence until the matter which is now before the Ejections and Qualifications Committee is decided. More than that I do not think he should have, and more than that I do not think should be asked. It has been said that he may be wanted as a witness, but that has been pretty well disposed of. I would like to support the amendment, but I would like still better to increase the leave, so that no illiberality should appear in the motion as carried.

Senator Clemons

- Trust the senator, and give him the time.

Senator FRASER

- I would urge upon the Minister not to give the motion an appearance of-

Senator Sir Josiah Symon

- Pettiness.

Senator FRASER

- I would not have used that word.

Senator Drake

- Six weeks is what was asked for.

Senator FRASER

- I would ask the Minister to agree to an extension of the leave until the petition is dealt with. It may be dealt with very speedily, or it may not. The matter is in the hands of the Senate, and, so far as I am concerned, I am sorry I am on the committee, because I have plenty of other things to attend to;

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Senator GLASSEY

- I confess I am a little disappointed at this opposition to the proposal made by Senator Harney. The honorable senator, in whose name he speaks, is a gentleman whom we may reasonably trust, leaving it entirely to his honour to attend here when, in his judgment, it is desirable that he should do so after this matter in which he is involved is disposed of. I cannot understand this opposition. What is to be gained by it? My experience as a Member of Parliament is that, as a rule, members are liberal towards each other, irrespective of which side of the House they may sit on. I hope that rule will be carried out here. We may differ strongly and widely in political opinion, but when it comes to a personal matter of an honorable senator asking to be relieved of his duties for some reason - and I do not think it is our duty to pry into the reasons too minutely - it is a reasonable request, and members should be broad-minded enough to grant it. I hope my honorable and esteemed friend, Senator Drake, with whom I have been connected politically for many years, will not offer any opposition to the proposal, and that no other honorable senator will offer - any opposition. So far as I am concerned, sitting on this side of the House, and differing widely from the honorable senator concerned in many matters of State policy, I say this is not a question of State policy. It is a question of honorable senators treating each other with that liberality and the breadth of mind which we should always carry into a Chamber of this kind. I hope no further opposition will be offered on the present occasion, and that the motion will be passed as proposed, absolving Senator Matheson from attending to his duties in the House for the remainder of the session. When this unfortunate matter which has been referred to has been disposed of, we may leave it entirely to the honour, and integrity of the honorable senator himself to appear. I am perfectly sure he will appear, if he feels he can do so, after the petition is disposed of.

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- In common with my honorable friends who have last spoken, I am very unwilling as a member of the committee appointed to inquire into elections and qualifications, and having the matter out of which this motion arises before them, to interpose with one word in this discussion. I must say, however, that I regret that the representative of the Government in this Chamber should, upon grounds which, he will forgive me for saying, are paltry-

Senator Drake

- That is the honorable and learned senator's opinion. 1

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- That is the . opinion which I am endeavouring to express, and I hope it will have due weight with my honorable and learned friend. I say that the honorable and learned senator urged grounds which were paltry in opposing a motion of this kind. What is the motion? It is that an honorable senator shall have leave of absence for the remainder of the session. The suggestion that my honorable friend the Postmaster-General put forward in opposition to that is that it is imperative that he should be present to give evidence before the Elections and Qualifications committee.

Senator Drake

- No, I did not go so far as to say that.

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- That he might be required ?

Senator Drake

- I asked whether he would probably be required.

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON. Whether he would probably be required to give evidence before the Elections and

Qualifications Committee; and that difficulties or delays might be introduced. In the first place, my honorable and learned friend has no right - with great respect - to ask such a question. The committee have not been in a position to consider the question of what evidence will be required, or whether any evidence at all will be required, in relation to this petition, and, therefore, the honorable and learned senator is putting before* the "Senate an impossible proposition in asking us to say whether Senator Matheson's. attendance will be necessary at all. My experience of election committees is that the sitting member very rarely is a . witness in any such proceeding. I cannot recollect any instance in which a sitting member has. ever tendered himself or has ever been brought forward as a witness. There has. been a great misapprehension, not only on this motion, but also on previous motions, as to the course followed by a committee of inquiry of this kind, It is a suit between two parties. It is unheard of, and it has not been suggested now, that the plaintiff" so to speak - the petitioner in this matter - shall be entitled to call the respondent, the defendant, to give evidence, or that the counsel on the other side shall be entitled to call the petitioner.

Senator Dobson

- Would not the petitioner be entitled to call Senator Matheson if he wished to do so ?

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- I do not know whether he would or not.

Senator Dobson

- Surely he would.

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Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- I am not going to be drawn, and I do not think; my honorable and learned friend expects me to be drawn into pronouncing a decision upon an application which may come before us for consideration. It only shows the extreme inconvenience of debating a motion of this kind in this way, because the tendency of such a speech as that made by the Postmaster-General, and of his. amendment, is to introduce matters which may entirely prejudice one side or the other in the inquiry. I say we have had quite enough of that sort of thing, and the sooner it is put a. stop to the better. While we may all feel we have strength of mind enough to resist prejudice - as that word has teen used - it is making an assault upon our strength of mind which ought not to be permitted any more . than can be helped I do not know why my honorable and learned friend, Senator Dobson, should put forward a statement of the kind, but as you, sir, have pointed out, there is no relation between the standing orders which have been referred to and this matter. My honorable friend, Senator Neild, if he will permit me to say so, was entirely mistaken as to its being imperative that Senator Matheson should attend, but if his attendance is required he is under, as the President indicated in his reference to the other standing order, the same obligation to attend any order or warrant of the Senate as any other person would be.

Senator Lt Col Neild

- The honorable and learned .senator misinterprets what I said. I did not say that it was imperative, but that it might be imperative.

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- What is underlying the suggestion. If there is anything in what the honorable the Postmaster-General suggests, it is exactly what was put by interjection from this side of the House, that he suspects that Senator Matheson may keep out of the way. It is either that or nothing.

Senator Drake

- I want only an assurance that this will not cause delay.

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- What have the Government to do with the petition ?

Senator Drake

- As a member of the Senate I have.

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- No. Not as a member of the Senate. My honorable friend has no right to make the suggestion that it will cause delay in any shape or form. That is for the committee to deal with. It has been handed over to the committee, and they are to deal with it as they best can. My honorable friend is throwing a reflection by anticipation upon the committee of which I have the honour to be a member.

Senator Drake

- No. The Senate is being asked to adopt a certain motion, and we have a right to know whether it will cause delay.

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- My honorable and learned friend has no right to know it now. It is for the committee to determine whether it will cause delay or not.

Senator Drake

- The Senate has a right to know that.

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- Surely it is not in the hands of the Senate to-day?

It is out of the hands of the Senate, by virtue of the resolution carried the other day.

Senator Drake

- I am talking about this motion. That is not out of the hands of the Senate.

Senator Sir JOSIAH SYMON

- My honorable and learned friend is mixing up the two. By his suggestion he is endeavouring to take control, and that is in fact what the Government want to do, of the proceedings of the committee, and to make sure that this motion will not delay them. All I can say is that, as a member of the committee, I shall do my best, and I am sure others will do the same, to take care that no delay takes place in the determination of the matter somehow or other. How, it would be wrong of me to anticipate. We have to do our duty, and to do justice in dealing with the matter as it is before us. To say that a motion of this kind is to be resisted by the Government, and the time limited to six weeks, either because the senator will be kept out of the way, or because if the determination of the committee is arrived at sooner we cannot trust his honour, is to cast a slur by anticipation on him, and to prejudice his case. I say it is unworthy of the Government. I am sorry it was done, and I am sorry the necessity should have arisen for at least three members of the committee to protest against these inquiries, and these requests for assurances about delay which interfere with the administration of justice by a committee appointed by this House. The least we can do is to trust each other's honour and sense of duty. I do not know any more of Senator Matheson than that he has occupied a seat in this Chamber, that he has sat on the other side, and has spoken once or twice, but I have the same trust in him as I expect members of the Senate would have in myself, that he will be here to discharge his public duty at the very earliest opportunity.

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Senator DOBSON

- My honorable and learned friend who has just resumed his seat, will, I hope, forgive me for saying that I do not think that anything fell from the lips of Senator Drake to justify the very heated speech to which we have just listened. My honorable and learned friend is a perfect master in using choice language. I always admire his speeches, and take note of the choice sentences he uses ; but to-day, I think, he has rather fallen from his high estate. If he had said that the grounds urged by the Minister were insufficient, or wholly insufficient, those words would perhaps have been proper ; but when he says that the Minister's

reasons are paltry, I think the honorable and learned senator is dealing in language of very grave exaggeration, and language which had much better not have been used. Let me point out again that we have a leader of the Chamber, and I hope members will separate the functions of the head of the Government on a party question - fighting for victory or fighting for his life - from those numerous functions which in every Chamber the leader of the Senate as such, and as such only, has to carry out. The only thing the Minister asked was to be satisfied that in departing from the usual course - and my honorable friend, Senator Harney, admits that it is the usual practice to ask for a limited period of leave, and not for practically the whole of a session, that is going to last until Christmas time - motion should not in any way prejudice the proceedings, which unfortunately have arisen, and must be carried on until there is a determination in some way or another. What is the reason for all this heat ; and for my honorable and learned friend, Senator Sir Josiah Symon, being so anxious to make out that the Government, through Senator Drake, are acting unworthily or in a paltry manner or, worse than all, casting doubts and slurs upon the honour of an absent senator. I think all these words are most unreasonable, and almost unpardonable. If any of us desired to follow Senator Drake in looking at the motion to insure that it shall do no harm, and shall not prejudice either party to the action proceeding, are we to be accused of unworthy motives ? Are we to be told that we distrust the honour of either party ? I hurl back such language, and I do not think Senator Sir Josiah Symon should have used it. This matter is now before the Senate, and it is splitting straws and throwing dust in our eyes to talk about the petition being before the committee. We are not dealing with the petition. We are dealing with a motion which may, or may not, affect the hearing of the petition. I understand now from Senator Drake that he will be only too pleased to withdraw his amendment. All he desired was to be assured that the motion will not prejudice a matter which is now before the Senate as a court.

Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- I regret very much that this unnecessary discussion has arisen on the simple motion by Senator Harney that leave of absence should be granted to a senator. I cannot understand what object the Postmaster-General could have in objecting to it. He said he did not intend to allow this motion to go unamended. Is the honorable senator speaking as the leader of the Government? He gave no reasons why it should not go ' unamended. But there was a suggestion that it would give an unfair advantage to Senator Matheson.

Senator Drake

- The honorable senator entirely misinterprets what I said. I said I wished to be assured that it would cause no delay to the Elections and Qualifications Committee.

Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- I can see excellent reasons why this leave of absence should be granted, and I can see no reason why the Postmaster-General should raise any objection to it. The reason we ask for an indefinite time is that it is not desired that a motion should be brought on every month asking for leave of absence, when it would be brought up in the papers, and therefore the motion asks that the leave of absence shall be for the remainder of the session.

Senator Glassey

- That is disposed of; the Minister has withdrawn his objection.

Senator STANIFORTH SMITH

- It is not disposed of, because it will be reported in *Ilansard* and in the newspapers. I regret exceedingly that the Postmaster-General should have imputed motives, as I undoubtedly think he did.

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Senator WALKER

- As one of the members of the committee, I shall be very glad if the Senate can see its way to fall in with the proposition of Senator Harney.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment (by Senator Lt.-Col. Neild) agreed to -

That the question be amended by the omission of the words "urgent private affairs," with a view to insert in lieu thereof the words "the pendency of the petition presented against his return b3' Mr. Saunders."

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Resolved :That leave of absence be granted to Senator Matheson for the remainder of the session on

account of the pendency of the petition presented against his return by Mr. Saunders.

STATE LAWS AND RECORD RECOGNITION BILL

In Committee; consideration of amendments of House of Representatives:

General - Queensland

Senator DRAKE

. - The amendments which have been made in this Bill by the other House are all of a verbal character. They are merely amendments connected with the drafting, and therefore I have no hesitation, even though it is getting near the hour of 1 o'clock, in asking the committee to agree to them. If there is no objection, I shall move that they be accepted in globo.

Senator Playford

- There is a fearful lot of them.

Senator Major Gould

- They do not seem very important, though.

Senator Staniforth Smith

- It is a very extraordinary proposition.

Senator Sir Josiah Symon

- Perhaps if we had the Minister's assurance that the amendments are only formal, and do not alter the effect of the different clauses, we might accept them.

Senator DRAKE

- That is the idea I desired to convey. These are amendments to correct little slips in the draftsmanship, and not one of them affects the sense in any way.

Senator Sir Josiah Symon

- I am quite satisfied with that assurance.

Senator Staniforth Smith

- And so am I.

Senator DRAKE

- Then I move-

That the amendments made by the House of Representatives in the Bill be agreed to.

Resolution reported ; report adopted.

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15:34:00

Senate adjourned at 3.34 p.m.