

render amalgamation expedient, I propose to outline briefly the circumstances which led to the appointment of the Commission, the work it has done, and the changed conditions of the present day. Prior to the appointment of the Irrigation Commission in 1923 the administration and development of the irrigation areas was vested in the Minister of Irrigation, with the Director of Irrigation as the responsible head of the department. The functions of the department were limited to the work of preparing land for settlement, supplying water, and dealing with other matters of local administration. All matters affecting the fixing of rents, &c., were dealt with by the Lands Department under the Crown Lands Acts, while the administration in regard to questions affecting advances to soldier settlers in the irrigation areas was controlled by the Superintendent of Soldier Settlements. Numerous complaints by soldier and other settlers were made to the Government in regard to the administration under a system which divided the control between three separate authorities, and the Government of the day decided to appoint the Irrigation Commission, and for that purpose Parliament passed the Irrigation Act, 1922. This Act placed on the Commission the responsibility of the administration in all matters affecting settlers in the irrigation areas. At the time of the appointment of the Commission it was anticipated that a large area of additional land in the irrigation areas, estimated at from 40,000 to 100,000 acres, could be developed and settled. Owing, however, to the difficulties that arose in the marketing of dried fruits and the fall in prices, it was decided, soon after the Commission was appointed, not to proceed further with the development of these lands. The Commission has since its appointment made considerable reductions in the cost of administration (in salaries alone a reduction of £48,616 has been made since the Commission was appointed). I should like members to give due consideration to that fact, and if they can to justify the criticism which has been levelled at the Commission in certain centres, by showing where economies have not been effected by the Commission itself.

The Hon. M. McIntosh—That is only half the story.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—The point I want to stress is that this Bill has been introduced for the purpose of amalgamating two departments rather than to pro-

IRRIGATION BILL.

Introduced by the Commissioner of Crown Lands (Hon. R. S. Richards) and read a first time.

Second reading.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS

—As a print of this Bill is not yet on the files it is not my intention to proceed beyond moving the second reading to-day in order that members will have an opportunity to consider its provisions. The Bill has been brought down by the Government as a further effort to secure economy in Government administration. Early this year Cabinet instructed the Public Service Commissioner to investigate and report upon the expediency of amalgamating the Irrigation and Drainage Commission and the Lands and Survey Department, and the ways and means by which the amalgamation could best be accomplished. The Commissioner, after an inquiry in conjunction with the Investigating Officer, Mr. Wainwright, recommended the amalgamation. In order that members may fully appreciate the present circumstances which

vide an opportunity for general discussion of the activities of the Commission itself.

Mr. Reidy—They have not been very active since we gave them the control of South-Eastern drainage.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS

—The installation of more modern pumping plants and rehabilitation of others has been

carried out by the Commission with a view to reducing the pumping costs. This work is now reaching finality, and the results are reflected in the following statement which shows the revenue and expenditure of the working account (exclusive of charges for interest and other overhead expenses) since the inception of the Commission:—

Period.	Revenue Receivable.	Cost of Supplying Water.	Surplus.	Deficiency.
1923-4 . . .	59,922 7 9	88,254 2 5	—	28,331 14 8
1924-5 . . .	72,973 12 0	80,713 8 1	—	7,739 16 1
1925-6 . . .	74,285 5 11	84,786 3 8	—	10,500 17 9
1926-7 . . .	76,537 3 1	82,902 6 8	—	6,365 3 7
1927-8 . . .	79,152 8 9	84,801 10 1	—	5,649 1 4
1928-9 . . .	83,473 12 1	75,483 11 3	7,990 0 10	—
1929-30 . . .	87,701 2 3	64,833 0 2	22,868 2 1	—

The figures are illuminating in view of the criticism levelled against the department from time to time.

Mr. McHugh—Was that revenue actually collected?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS

—It was receivable. It represents what the Government would have received if the whole amount had been collected. The surpluses are due to the installation of more up-to-date pumping plants, stricter supervision, and the rehabilitation. This statement shows that the working account has improved in the seven years from a deficiency of £28,331 to a surplus of £22,868. Prior to the appointment of the Commission large expenditure had been incurred in the preparation of lands in the Loveday and McIntosh divisions of the Cobdogla irrigation area and in other places, and as these lands have not been settled the areas accounts have to carry a dead load of interest, which largely contributes to the annual net loss on the irrigation areas. During the term of its office the Commission has been largely engaged upon the settlement of the question of the liabilities of soldier settlers in the irrigation areas, and as the result of its reports very large reductions in the liabilities have been made. This work is now approaching completion, and although the administration of the areas will continue and will entail very considerable work, the Government have decided that, owing to the fact that there is no present prospect of further development, and the work in the future will be largely administrative, there is no justification to continue the control of the areas by the Commission.

Therefore, it is proposed to abolish the Commission and to amalgamate the work with the Lands and Survey Department. The position of Secretary for Lands will also be abolished by an amendment of the Crown Lands Act, and the amalgamated department will be placed under the control of an officer called the Director of Lands. It is proposed to appoint the present Chairman of the Irrigation and Drainage Commission, Mr. E. J. Field, to this position, and he will be assisted by one of his co-Commissioners, Mr. W. J. Colebatch, as Assistant Director, and the latter will also be appointed to the position of Chairman of the Land Board.

Mr. Reidy—That is not fair to the Assistant Secretary for Lands, who is a very capable officer.

The Hon. M. McIntosh—What will happen to Major Tolley?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS
—All things will come to those that wait. Owing to the large amount of money invested and the necessity for close supervision of lands settled in small blocks for intensive culture, as in the irrigated areas, the administrative work will continue to be heavy, but by reorganising the departments it is anticipated that it can be efficiently carried out at less cost than at present. In reporting upon the amalgamation scheme the Public Service Commissioner estimates that the saving will be about £20,000 per annum. Even if the Government save only 50 per cent. of the estimate it will be a worth while economy.

Mr. Reidy—Evidently no consideration has been given to the question of taking new men into a department and pushing other officers back.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—The honorable member always sees something sinister in the moves of the Government. This is an amalgamation to effect economy, and when two departments are amalgamated it is only natural that the staffs of both cannot be absorbed.

Mr. Reidy—There is too much Hunkin in this.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—Although it is unlikely that the irrigation areas will be extended, there will be a considerable amount of engineering work to be attended to in the supervision of the pumping plants, construction of irrigating and drainage channels, upkeep of embankments, and seepage problems. It is not, however, proposed to attach an engineering staff to the new department, but to arrange for the Engineer-in-Chief to supervise any engineering work that may be required. Another Bill will be introduced to amend the South-Eastern Drainage Act, under which the control of the work in the South-East was placed under the Commission. It is proposed in that Bill to transfer the work to a new body to be appointed under the Bill, and to be termed the South-Eastern Drainage Board. It is proposed that Mr. Colebatch will also be chairman of that board.

The Hon. M. McIntosh—Where does Major Tolley come in?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—He may be considered in connection with the engineering problems. I remind members that this is a Bill to effect economy and not one to provide jobs for privileged persons. With regard to the details of the Bill, there is very little to say. The Bill re-enacts the existing law concerning irrigation, with such amendments as are necessary to give effect to the altered system of control. By clause 7 the Irrigation and Drainage Commission is abolished so far as its functions on the river are concerned. It will, however, be deemed to remain in existence for the purpose of exercising control over the drainage system in the South-East until other provision is made by Parliament. The other provision referred to, of course, is the South-Eastern Drainage Bill, which it is hoped to introduce shortly. By clause 8 it is declared that the Act is to

be administered by the Minister of Irrigation, and by subsequent clauses all the rights, liabilities, and property of the Commission are transferred to the Minister. The advisory functions which the Commission exercises in determining the size of blocks and the rent payable for leases thereof are transferred to the Land Board. The general provisions of the Irrigation Act, 1922, as to the acquisition, tenure, and transfer of lands within the irrigation areas, the management of irrigation areas, and advances to settlers on irrigation areas are re-enacted in the Bill with only such amendments as are necessary to substitute "the Minister" for "the Commission." There is only one additional amendment to which I need draw special attention. That is contained in sub-clause (3) of clause 104. This clause provides that the advances made to a settler under separate mortgages or other securities may be consolidated into one advance and a mortgage taken therefor containing such conditions as the Minister approves. This will enable the Minister, if he thinks fit, to extend the time for payment of the advances and to alter the rate of interest. That provision has been incorporated in the Bill in order to give effect to the request of the deputation which waited on the Minister during his recent trip to the areas, and concerns chiefly civilian settlers. Apart from these changes of the law which I have mentioned the Bill raises no contentious matters whatever, and the House can rest assured that the other clauses are really only consolidating provisions and introduce no new principles whatever. This matter was seriously considered by the present Government and the previous one. It was under consideration before we assumed office, and in view of the advantages which we were advised would accrue we pressed on with the scheme.

The Hon. M. McINTOSH secured the adjournment of the debate until November 4.

INDUSTRIAL CODE AMENDMENT BILL.

Second reading.

The MINISTER of INDUSTRY (Hon. J. McInnes)—This Bill is for the purpose of fixing the salaries of the President and Deputy President of the Industrial Court at lower rates than those fixed under the present Industrial Code. This is merely following the policy of economy found necessary by the Government. Shortly after I assumed office as

Minister of Industry I ascertained that the then occupant of the position, Dr. Hewitson, was on leave. I was informed by the officers of the department that there had been an understanding that Dr. Hewitson was to retire on the termination of his long service leave. Acting on that assumption, the present occupant was appointed Acting President during Dr. Hewitson's absence. Shortly after I assumed office Dr. Hewitson reported back to duty, and it appears that he was distinctly of the opinion that there was no arrangement made by which he was to retire. Cabinet decided to take the matter up, realising even at that period that it was absolutely necessary that economies should be made, and by mutual arrangement Dr. Hewitson resigned, and it became mandatory in accordance with the code to appoint another officer to the position. Cabinet decided to appoint Mr. Kelly, and, acting on Cabinet's instructions, I interviewed Mr. Kelly and informed him that in the event of his accepting the position the Government intended to reduce the salary paid to the amount stipulated in this Bill. When Mr. Kelly accepted the position, therefore, he was aware that the salary would be reduced. In this case at any rate no suggestion of repudiation can be directed against the Government. That does not apply to the position of Deputy President, because there is no Deputy President at present. It is mandatory on the Government to appoint a President, but it is not mandatory that there shall be a Deputy President. The Government do not intend at present to appoint a Deputy President, but if it is found necessary later to make such an appointment the salary for that position will be fixed in accordance with this measure. I move the second reading.

The Hon. R. L. BUTLER secured the adjournment of the debate until November 4.