

The Chairman -

At the invitation of the Ballarat and Sebastopol Councils, representatives of the State Electricity Commission attended at the Ballarat Town Hall on Friday, the 25th October, 1929, for the purpose of explaining the terms of the agreement entered into by the Commission with the respective groups of municipal councils in the Geelong and Bendigo districts, respecting the administration of the tramways in those districts, in the event of the Commission being authorised by Parliament to operate such tramways as part of the electrical undertakings. There were present:-

Sir John Monash (Chairman), Mr. Commissioner Clements, Mr. W.J. Price (Secretary), Mr. H.H. Dooley (Legal Officer), and Mr. W.R. Armstrong (Chief Clerk & Publicity Officer), representing the Commission, with Mr. G.G. Jobbins (Engineer & Manager of the Melbourne Electric Supply Co.Ltd.), as adviser on tramways.

The Mayor, (Cr. G. Bolster), Councillors Mackenzie, Elsworth, Cooke, Stewart, Darling, Hoare, Lederman, Harrison, Martin and Bell, Mr. G.F. Morton (Town Clerk), and Mr. L.M. Finch (City Engineer), representing the Ballarat City Council.

The Mayor (Cr. E. Jones) and Councillors Aisbett, Ellis, Jenkins, Busch, Lewis and Kent, representing the Sebastopol Borough Council.

The Mayor of Ballarat presided.

SIR JOHN MONASH said that, before addressing himself specifically to the agreement, he thought it quite necessary to make a brief allusion to the previous history of the negotiations regarding the tramways. In doing so, he hoped they would forgive him if he were blunt and outspoken, because this was the fourth occasion on which his colleagues and himself - once with the Minister - had visited Ballarat in an endeavour to arrive at a friendly understanding with the Ballarat Council with respect to the future of the dual undertaking of electricity supply and tramways. He would not go back to the beginning, but to a point of time when a conference between the Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong municipal councils was held, with a view of formulating a common policy and coming to a common agreement respecting the operation of the tramways in all three cities. The Councils, of their own volition, then came to the Commission and asked what would happen to their tramways when the electrical sections of the dual undertakings passed to State control.

In reply, the Commission had made its position quite clear. It told Councils that it did not want the tramways and was willing that the Councils or some new authority to be created should operate them, or that they should be handed over to the Railways Department, or some such body, or that they should be eliminated altogether. Finally, should it be the unanimous wish that the Commission should operate the tramways, the Councils were informed that the Commission would be prepared to undertake the duty, provided (a) that it was given statutory power to do so, and (b) that the operation of the tramways in all three cities should be quite uniform and subject to a common agreement, to be entered into by each municipal council in every district concerned.

After a long deliberation, at which the Commission was not present, the Councils unanimously adopted the alternative of Commission control of the tramways, and the decision was conveyed to the Premier of the day (Mr. Hogan) by the Secretary of the Conference. Mr. Hogan, in turn, informed the Councils that the Government was willing to introduce legislation to give effect to the decision of the conference.

Unfortunately, while the municipal councils of Bendigo and Geelong adhered to the decision of the conference, the municipal council of Ballarat repudiated it; consequently, when the Commission made an attempt to get the three councils and their associated groups together, to negotiate the terms of a suitable and equitable agreement in relation to the tramways, the Ballarat Council declined to send any delegation, so that the Commission, instead of dealing with the Councils collectively, as it strongly desired to do, had to deal with them individually. Even then, the interests of Ballarat were put in the forefront, and, before negotiations were entered into with the other Councils, Ballarat was invited to meet the Commission alone to discuss the whole matter and try to arrive at some finality thereon. The letter conveying the invitation was merely "received" by the Council, and no further action was taken with regard to it, a course, as between two public bodies, which was very exceptional and very regrettable.

The Commission, in consequence, was left at arms' length,

and unable to do anything more as far as Ballarat was concerned. It was, however, faced with the position that the tramways franchise in Bendigo expired this year ¹⁹²⁹ and that in Geelong in 1930, and that the 1929 session of Parliament was the last in which statutory authority could be given to the Commission to go ahead with the tramways, because, failing action this session by Parliament to vest the Commission with the necessary authority, the tramways in Bendigo and Geelong would, in turn, be left without any statutory body with the legal power to operate them.

A conference was thereupon held with the Geelong group of Councils, and an agreement, based on that under which the Councils concerned had for many years been working amicably and satisfactorily with the Melbourne Electric Supply Company Ltd., was adopted, with very few amendments, some of which had been requested by the Commission and some by the Councils themselves. The Commission then went to Bendigo, where a similar negotiation was gone through, and an exactly similar agreement accepted by the Bendigo and Eaglehawk Councils.

This agreement, identical in every respect, had now been signed and executed by seven individual councils in the two districts named, and the Bill authorising the Commission to operate the tramways in Bendigo and Geelong was now in print, ready for submission to Parliament. In that Bill, the name of Ballarat did not appear, because Ballarat had kept the Commission at arms' length, had refused to negotiate, and had therefore left the Commission powerless in the matter of providing for the future operation of the Ballarat tramways. If matters remained as they now stood, nothing could happen but that at the end of the existing franchises the trams in Ballarat would have to stop running because, while the Commission could acquire tramways - and, in fact, had acquired the tramways in Ballarat - it had no statutory power to operate them. Furthermore, it would neither get the power nor seek the power without the full concurrence and co-operation of the Ballarat Council, on terms identical with those already agreed to by Bendigo and Geelong.

The position to-day was plainly and bluntly this: He had before him an agreement, as executed by the Councils in Bendigo and Geelong. Copies of this agreement had been placed in the hands of the councillors present, and the Ballarat and Sebastopol Councils had to accept that agreement verbatim and literatim, otherwise the Commission would not undertake the duty of operating their tramways.

He was there that day to clear away any doubts, misapprehensions and trepidations which the Councils might feel as to whether under the agreement the interests of the Councils, the public of Ballarat and Sebastopol and the Commission were adequately and equitably protected. But, if the Councils said they did not want the agreement, then the Commission would be compelled to wash its hands of the whole matter. [The Commission did not want to run the trams for itself. They were not a good paying concern, and the Commission did not desire to run them any more than the Councils did, but, like the Councils, it did not want to see the public left in the lurch. The Commission had, therefore, gone a long way, and made considerable sacrifices, to see that the public was not left in the lurch, but, if the Councils determined to have nothing to do with the agreement, the trams would have to go.

The time for negotiating the details and terms of the agreement had passed. Ballarat had had two separate opportunities of doing so, and had refused them. However, the agreement as it stood was open for acceptance by the Ballarat and Sebastopol Councils, and he was only too anxious and ready to explain its terms, and to give any assurances, but it was definite that no variation of the agreement could now be made, because it would not be fair to the other municipalities which had agreed to and accepted the agreement that fresh conditions, whether more or less favourable to the Commission or the Ballarat Council, should be inserted. Apart from that, the matter had gone too far, as, except for the temporary political crisis, the measure embodying the agreement would now be before the House.

He would now proceed to deal with the ten questions which had been submitted by the Ballarat Council in writing with reference to the agreement. Before doing so, however, he wanted to submit to them two fundamental considerations. The first was that the Councils were in this matter dealing with another public body. The Commission was just as sensitive to public criticism and public clamour, and public demands for fair play, as any other public body. It was not a private company existing for gain, out to make dividends for shareholders, and coming to the Councils for concessions. The boot was on the other foot. It was there to say upon what terms it would be willing to take over the onerous and disagreeable obligation of continuing a service to the public, which apparently the public wanted. That was the Commission's attitude on the position, and it was the only one which it could be expected to adopt. The second consideration concerned the Council's claims with regard to road maintenance, and the condition of the tramway services, claims which would be quite legitimate if the Commission were a private company wanting to make profits out of the citizens of Ballarat and Sebastopol. But they had again to realise that the Commission was a public body which had to do the fair thing to the public, and which could not afford to have a decrepit or discreditable system on its hands. Whether the Commission liked it or not, it would have to modernise the tramways for its own credit and in the interests of the public it had to serve.

The point he wished to make was this: Far from the Councils having trepidation as to how the Commission was going to behave, the Commission was intensely anxious and felt not a little trepidation as to how the Councils were going to treat them in the matter of 'bus competition. Here again, the boot was on the other foot. The Commission might get a very bad bargain if the present strained position with regard to 'buses and tramways were to continue. If the Commission came to Ballarat to operate the tramways, and the Councils should be

against it and put obstacles in its way, and exert their power against its interests, it would be worse than useless endeavouring to carry on the tramways at all. They could only be carried on with the friendly co-operation and understanding of the Councils, and the Commission, on its part, would co-operate with the Council in endeavouring to provide the best possible service to the public. It was just this friendly co-operation and understanding between the Commission and the Councils which had been cheerfully and cordially achieved in Bendigo and Geelong, and the mobilisation and retention of that co-operation with the Councils, in protecting the tramways from the competition of 'bus routes, was what the Commission, as the public tramways authority, had every right to expect. *From Councils*

He would now endeavour to answer the specific questions raised by the Ballarat Council.

1. Would the Councils of the Borough of Sebastopol and the City of Ballarat be treated as separate districts in connection with any loss on tramways?

He took it that this question referred to clause 22 (b) and (c) of the agreement. It was intended to give the Councils a rather important power, in cases where the Commission did not wish to make an extension which the Councils desired to have carried out. Under the agreement, the Councils could not insist upon such an extension if a loss on the tramways of over £5,000 a year would ensue, unless they were ready to foot the bill for the additional loss. If they were, the Commission would then have to make the extension. The particular Council initiating the extension would have to pay the excess loss. This applied to new extensions only.

THE MAYOR OF SEBASTOPOL: We will not be insisting, I think, Sir John.

SIR JOHN MONASH: As to losses on existing tramways, the two Councils in the Ballarat area would be regarded as one district.

2. If the trams are done away with, would the charges for electricity in Ballarat be more or less?

As to 2, the Council already held a document from the Commission, in the form of a letter dated 14th July, 1927,

guaranteeing that under no possible circumstances would the charges for electricity supply be higher than those at present. Consequently, so far as any increase in present charges is concerned, the Council was perfectly safe, no matter what happened to the tramways. If the tramways incur a heavy loss, the only effect will be that the prospect of reducing electricity charges will be to that extent lessened. The Commission's aim always was to have a downward trend in electricity tariffs, as far as the finances would permit. If there were no trams, and consequently no losses on the trams, it was obvious that the day of cheapening the tariffs would be nearer. If the tramways continued to exist, and make heavy losses, according to the loss made on the tramways would the date of making reductions in electricity tariffs be postponed. The more serious the damage by 'bus competition, the less would be the opportunity of reducing electricity charges.

CR. LEDERMAN asked what effect the loss of the load for the tramways would have on the revenues of electricity supply.

SIR JOHN MONASH: When we come to Ballarat, we will introduce a two-part tariff, and this, with our methods of exploiting the market, in encouraging the more general use of electricity, would very soon restore any load we might lose by the cessation of the tramways. The tramways load is slight. While it may be of importance to a local generating plant, it is not important in a large general supply system, such as that of the Commission.

3. What of the present 'bus routes will the Commission allow or disallow?

Sir John: In regard to 3, I would point out that the objection to 'bus routes is competition with the tramways. We don't care what 'bus routes there are if they do not compete with the tramways, but we care very much about a 'bus route that does compete with the tramways. Frequently, a 'bus route will fit in with the tramways, by acting as a feeder to them, and such routes we would welcome, as well as 'bus routes which serve territories which the tramways cannot serve.

We don't object to a 'bus route as such, but only when and where they operate to reduce tramways revenue. The clause in the agreement to regulate 'bus competition was received with applause at the Geelong and Bendigo Conferences, which regarded it as eminently fair and equitable. It asserts the principle. It would be perfectly futile for me, without a minute knowledge of the geography of the district, and the transport needs of the public, to say which routes should be allowed or disallowed. Independent of the fact that we object to motor omnibus competition with the tramways, we have no views on specific 'bus routes; that is a matter for subsequent determination. If you will accept clause 19 in principle, we will be prepared to meet you in Ballarat in conference, with, say, representatives of the Commission (the Commercial Manager, the Legal Officer and Mr. Jobbins), and, I think, one representative of the Company, on one side, and one representative of each ward and of Sebastopol, on the other side, to go into the question of 'bus routes. Then, with maps in front of each delegate, the conference could embark upon a reasonable and equitable interpretation of clause 19, and whatever the conference was prepared to agree to the Commission would be prepared to accept.

A COUNCILLOR mentioned one particular 'bus route which ran parallel with a tramway, but with the railway line in between. It served an area not served by the trams. Would it be allowed?

SIR JOHN MONASH: That is a matter which might very well be discussed at the conference. The representatives could inspect it. All we desire is a fair thing. We don't want to limit public convenience, but we don't want the tramways revenue damaged.

A COUNCILLOR mentioned a 'bus route along Sturt Street West and Hamilton Avenue, to Alfredton, to serve the golf links area. The Company said it would not pay to put a feeder on there. If the Commission were the owners of the tramways, would it put such a feeder on?

SIR JOHN MONASH: We would investigate it.

THE COUNCILLOR: It would receive every consideration?

SIR JOHN MONASH: Of course it would. I am now putting forward a definite proposal that, instead of discussing the details of specific tramway routes, and trying to come to an agreement thereon, we should have a conference on that matter at an early date. I don't know enough about the routes at this stage or the geography of the district to try and arrive at an equitable conclusion on the matter, which is one for tramway experts to investigate with all the facts before them. The Commission knows how very seriously the Councils and the residents of the Ballarat area are disturbed over the expressed intention of the Electric Supply Company of Victoria to increase the meter rents. We have already said in correspondence that we have no legal right to interfere between the Councils and the Company. Nevertheless, we regard the matter as so important that we have succeeded in prevailing upon Mr. Pringle to fall in with a suggestion that, provided the Councils accept the offer of an early conference on 'bus routes in the spirit in which I have made it, then he will postpone any further action in regard to increased meter rents - and he has authorised me to say so here to-day. (Applause.)

4. Why should provincial cities be treated less favourably than metropolitan centres regarding the maintenance of roadway between the tracks and 18" on either side?

This question evidences a misunderstanding of the position in the metropolis. It is only in existing contracts which were taken over by the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board that the provision for maintenance up to 18 inches on each side of the outer rails is embodied. The provision has been long obsolete, and rightly so. In all new tram routes the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board undertakes no such obligation. Its obligation for maintenance is limited to a period of six months respecting any portion of a road which is made by it. After this period, it has no further obligation

for maintenance. The reason why the provision is obsolete is that it is not fair that users of the tramways should maintain a roadway for the general vehicular traffic. The new provision has been enforced in Geelong in regard to all modern extensions during the last six years, and has proved quite satisfactory. It has been accepted by Bendigo and Eaglehawk, and Ballarat was asked to accept it in the same terms. It was not possible to give Ballarat a more favourable agreement than applied to all the more modern Melbourne tramway extensions.

5. The Council does not consider it reasonable that they should bear the costs of re-constructing tram tracks, realising the bad state the tracks are in at present.

The Councils are not being asked to pay the cost of reconstructing tram tracks. It would be very hard for us to find a tram track that we would consider to be good enough. In that connection, I wish you to regard what I am now going to say as strictly confidential. Following upon the execution of the agreements with Bendigo and Geelong, the Commission has been endeavouring to purchase some of the cars which the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board now has available as the result of standardising on larger types of cars. I foreshadow that the result of placing such cars on the rails in the provincial cities will end practically in the entire reconstruction of the tram tracks. It seems to be inevitable that this work will have to be carried out as speedily as possible when the Commission takes control. Mr. Jobbins can give you some idea of the nature of the cars I have mentioned.

MR. JOBBINS: The carrying capacity of the cars now in use in Ballarat is 35. The actual seating capacity of the Board's cars, mentioned by Sir John Monash, is 46, with an overload capacity of 90. They are known as the combination type of single bogie car, as distinct from the double-bogie eight-wheeled cars now in use by the Board, with a carrying capacity, possibly, of 130. The combination type consists of a closed centre, and open ends, and, although similar to those in use in Ballarat to-day, are superior and heavier.

SIR JOHN MONASH: We are under no illusions, and realise that a considerable amount of money will have to be spent on the existing tracks.

6. What is meant by the "contour of the road" in clause 6 (a), and does the Commission object to our present practice of keeping the crowns of the road 3 feet or more from the rails to suit the present surfaces?

We do most strongly object to having the tram tracks converted into main drains. In any street in which any reconstruction of tracks takes place, the City Engineer will have unqualified discretion and right to determine the level of the road, the cross sections and longitudinal sections, and the Council has the right to fix the levels. Once the levels are fixed, however, both the Council and the Commission must stick to them. We object to the crown of the roadway draining into the tram tracks, and to the tram tracks, because of better making and maintenance, being used as the main traffic section. Let the engineer advise as to the rational thing to do, with regard to proper grades and proper drainage points, and then let the Council and the Commission, as the tramways authority, work to the same levels, the City Engineer in the first place having the right to say what such levels should be.

7. (a). Does the Commission intend to put the tram tracks in order when they take over in 1931?

I have answered that in general terms. The simple answer is "Yes".

7. (b). If so, what is the estimated time this work will take?

I cannot explicitly answer that question at this stage, twenty-one months before the date of taking over.

7. (c). Can the Commission supply a list, setting out the order in which it is proposed to repair tracks?

We cannot set out a list now, but long before the date of change over we will, in consultation with the municipalities, determine upon the most convenient programme.

- 7 (d). Does the Commission intend to eliminate rail corrugations at an early date?

The answer depends upon an examination, and what requires to be done. The simple answer is "Yes".

- 7 (e). What is the estimated cost of repairs to tram tracks, and is this cost to be a charge on the consumers of electricity in the district?

It is not possible to state what the estimated cost will be at this stage, but it certainly will be a charge upon the undertaking in the district. This does not mean that we will send in bills to the consumers of electricity, setting out so much for repairs to the tramways. Of course not. It will all be merged into the general expenditure, and it won't affect the Commission's guarantee with regard to electricity charges, but it will mean that reductions in such charges will be longer in coming about.

A COUNCILLOR: Much longer?

SIR JOHN MONASH: I won't say much longer, but it will be longer.

8. Should the Commission erect new buildings, etc., are they prepared to pay extra rates on such improvements or additions?

The answer is "No". The Commission is already making a definite and unusual concession in agreeing to continue the payment made as rates on the tramways property. In this connection, it should be noted that rates only are being taken over from the Company, and that the Commission does not intend to continue any payments made by the Company for rental of any roadway.

9. What does the Commission propose to do with the present trams?

If the Councils accept this agreement, the Commission will go full speed ahead in trying to provide a decent tramways service for Ballarat, and will operate it as efficiently as possible. If the Councils do not accept this agreement, the Commission will scrap the trams, and sell them for what it can get.

10. Does the Commission recommend that the Council should force the Electric Supply Company to bring its tracks up to a good state of repair before the Electricity Commission takes over?

We cannot interfere between the Councils and the Company. You have your contracts with the Company for what they are worth. You have your rights and responsibilities, and so has the Company, and the Commission cannot, without prejudicing its own position, intervene. We have influenced the Company in a moral way with regard to meter rents, by inducing Mr. Pringle to stay his hand. We put it to him thus: "If we can get this conference on tramway matters to thrash the thing out, and the prospects are in favour of a fair and reasonable compromise, so that your revenues will be protected, you may never have to bring in these increased meter rents". On the strength of that, he agreed to postpone action until further notice. In this matter of 'bus competition, we are the people who are in a funk. We are the people who need to be assured of protection, and the assurance from you that, in exercising your legal rights, you will only license such 'bus traffic as will not do the tramways undertaking harm. The noise of past battles may be still echoing in our minds, but the time will come when the Councils and the Commission will realise that their interests are common, and that they are in common sympathy. The Councils will see that it is quite as much in their own interests as it is in those of the Commission, while conserving the reasonable interests of the travelling public, to prevent competition and interference with tramways revenues. If you can bring yourselves to that state of mind, then let me ask you to put it into force at the earliest possible moment, even though it may be to the temporary advantage of the private company. I say that for this reason: we want to take advantage of the time intervening between now and 1931, so that, by all stepping forward in the right direction, we may take over without any violent revolutionary changes. After the conference which I

suggested has agreed upon what is fair and reasonable in the way of 'bus routes, I ask that it be put into force as from next January, and got into working order. Before we take over, it will have had more than a year to shape itself, and in 1931 the undertaking will pass to new control with no violent changes, no revolutionary innovations, and no public hubbub or heartburning.

In reply to a Councillor, Sir John Monash said the Commission would not interfere with the present position of tram tracks. It was a matter of indifference to it whether they were laid in the centre or at the side of a road.

A COUNCILLOR: Sir John has stated that electricity charges will be no more than at present. What the citizens in Ballarat are concerned about is that, while in Melbourne the tariff is 5½d. a unit, they have to pay 9d. per unit, plus meter rental and fuel surcharges. If the trams are to run, and incur losses, there does not appear to be much likelihood of a reduction of electricity charges below 9d. a unit, and, carrying the trams, the electricity consumers of Ballarat will be at a disadvantage compared with electricity consumers in Melbourne. If the trams are done away with, we must have light cheaper.

SIR JOHN MONASH read the paragraph regarding rates and charges in the Commission's letter of the 14th July, 1927, viz.:-

"Rates and Charges.- The State Electricity Commission gives the absolute and unequivocal assurance that under no circumstances will its charges be higher in any respect or in any particular than the prices now being charged by the Company. The tariffs referred to by the Chairman of the Commission at the conference held at this office on the 6th instant are hereby confirmed, but the qualification that he then made must again be stressed, i.e., that the tariffs in question are those which the Commission is in a position to offer to the Cities of

Ballarat and Bendigo if it were at this date in control of the electric service in those cities. It is obvious that the Commission cannot be expected, in 1927, to enter into a binding guarantee as to its charges in 1931. The tariffs quoted are, therefore, based upon there being no material change in economic, industrial or financial conditions between now and 1931. It should be noted, for example, that the present charge for energy in the metropolitan area under the Two-Part Domestic Tariff is 1½d. per unit, as against 1½d. per unit quoted for Ballarat and Bendigo, thus definitely ensuring that, all things considered, a favourable standard of comparison will obtain in 1931.

The Two-Part Domestic Tariff which the Commission would, subject to the qualification hereinbefore stated, introduce into Ballarat and Bendigo as an alternative, optional tariff, is as follows, viz.:-

Service Charge.- One shilling and threepence per room per month, irrespective of the size of the house. Passages, pantries, porches, verandahs, lavatories, bathrooms and cupboards, being regarded as convenience rooms, are excluded from the count.

Energy Charge.- One penny and one half-penny per unit of electricity actually used.

Outdoor Lighting.- The service charge for outdoor lighting in the cases of garages, barns, dairies or yards, etc., is calculated on the basis that lamps having a consumption equivalent to 100 watts, or any part thereof, represent one room.

Meter Rent.- Nil."

The stipulation as to there being "no change in industrial, economic or financial conditions" meant such a thing as an earthquake or a civil war, or something of the sort. He repeated to them now, in 1929, the offer made in 1927, and they would have the same tariffs as then indicated when the Commission took over, if the general situation remained as it was to-day. The tramways would have nothing to do with the existing charges on electricity supply. There was

also the fact that the two-part domestic tariff would mean immediate reductions to a large number of consumers, should they decide to take advantage of it. In this connection, he might mention that there were some people in Melbourne who were content to remain on the flat rate, and pay from 10 to 50 per cent. more for their electricity because they thought there was some catch in the two-part tariff. It was too good to be true, they imagined.

THE CITY ENGINEER pointed out that, although the existing tram tracks were put down to the level of the streets at the time, the Council had had to build up its portion of the roadway afterwards, so that the crowns were now a bit above the tracks, making the latter drains to a certain extent. Would the Commission expect the Council to cut down its roadways to the original track levels? When the roads were modernised the Council would do so, but it anticipated this as a gradual process, occupying a good many years.

MR. JOBBINS, on being called upon by Sir John Monash, said the question was rather indefinite. It appeared to him that it would come into reconstruction, on which there would be consultation between the respective engineers, in order to bring about a mutual arrangement between the parties concerned. It was impossible to lay down a definite procedure at that stage. The purpose of the agreement was, he took it, to bring about co-operation between the responsible officers on either side.

THE CITY SURVEYOR: The Council would not like to have to do the work straight away, and the tracks will probably remain drains for the next 10 or 20 years if the Council's convenience is consulted. But some day you may want the roads cut down.

SIR JOHN MONASH: We might want you to lay a drain or cut down the road, but we can't compel the Council to do it. There is nothing in the agreement to embarrass you on that question.

THE CITY SURVEYOR: If we raise the roads in forming them in the future, we might have to cut them down again at big expense.

SIR JOHN MONASH: You are quite safe under the agreement. You, as City Engineer, have the fixing of the levels. You stick to them, and we stick to them. If at some subsequent date you alter the levels, you will have some expense in altering the tram tracks.

THE CITY SURVEYOR: If we fix the levels as at present, will you ask us to cut the roads down?

SIR JOHN MONASH: We might, but we don't think you will do it. You might leave it as a devout hope for the future that the Council will give you enough money to enable you to have proper cross sections for your roads.

CR. HARRISON: With regard to the 'bus business, in the event of a deadlock, it is suggested that there be an arbitrator? Proceeding, he pointed out that a number of 'buses in Ballarat were running 200 yards parallel with the tram tracks for certain distances. He instanced the Lydiard Street 'bus to the cemetery, which was a necessity, but which ran parallel with the tram for two blocks, and could not avoid taking some traffic away from the trams. It was an instance of the difficulty of the 'bus problem. It served an area half a mile further on than was at present served by the trams.

SIR JOHN MONASH: It looks like a question of an extension of the tramway service.

CR. HARRISON: Would you consider it?

SIR JOHN MONASH: Yes; it would be investigated.

CR. HARRISON: The 'bus serves a fairly well populated area to the north-west, and is a great convenience to the people visiting the cemetery. There are quite a number of cases in Ballarat where 'buses, which are a great convenience, are running well within half a mile of the trams. In the event of a deadlock at the conference, what would be the outcome?

SIR JOHN MONASH: Clause 19 of the agreement asserts a principle.

The conference I suggest could puzzle out the details, and my only reason for suggesting it is that we might thereby reach early finality. If the conference does not agree, and reaches a deadlock, clause 19 would still be there and operative. If the conference explores the matter, and fails to agree on any particular route, it would be a case for direct negotiation between the Council and the Commission. We only want a fair thing, in the light of clause 19.

CR. MACKENZIE: If you made an extension of the tram in any case, the question of a 'bus route there would disappear.

In reply to Cr. Kent, who instanced the case of a tram track in Sebastopol which crossed the road to the western side and continued there for half a mile, Sir John Monash assured him that in the event of reconstruction the Commission would leave the track in its present position, if the Council so desired.

THE MAYOR OF SEBASTOPOL said the anxiety of Cr. Kent was due to the fact that the Country Roads Board was reconstructing the particular roadway mentioned, and, before it was completed, the Council desired to know if the Commission was likely to require the position of the tram track to be altered.

CR. MARTIN: I understand Sir John Monash to say that, unless the Ballarat Council agrees to the Commission taking over the tramways in 1931, the tramways in Ballarat would stop running, because there would be no one with statutory authority to operate them. If the Council wished to run the trams itself, would the Commission be prepared to supply power to the Council?

SIR JOHN MONASH: Certainly; there is nothing the Commission would welcome more than the Council as the tramways authority.

CR. MARTIN: Has the Commission any power to stop local enterprises from generating electricity?

SIR JOHN MONASH: None whatever, for use on their own premises, but we have if they wish to sell electricity.

CR. MARTIN: If you are going to land the cost of the tramways upon the Councils, it may become a question of whether they should not run the tramways and generate for themselves.

SIR JOHN MONASH: If we can't sell below what it costs to generate by local or private plants, we deserve to lose the business. There are plenty of people going around and trying to sell crude oil plants on the plea of cheaper electricity, but, when it comes to the point of proof and investigation, it is a different matter.

CR. MARTIN: On the question of a flat rate, have you come to any determination of what would be the extra cost of sending electricity to Ballarat?

SIR JOHN MONASH: It is contained in the Commission's letter of the 14th July, 1927. It states - "The present charge for energy in the metropolitan area under the two-part tariff is 1½d. per unit, as against 1½d. per unit quoted for Ballarat, thus definitely ensuring that, all things considered, a favourable standard of comparison will obtain in 1931."

THE MAYOR OF BALLARAT: You have stated that the Commission has no power to prevent any private individual from generating electricity for his own use. Have you any power to prevent the Council from supplying its own citizens?

SIR JOHN MONASH: Yes; the Act has taken away that right from the Council.

CR. MARTIN: In connection with the charges on the trams: Has any consideration been given to what fares the Commission may charge?

SIR JOHN MONASH: There is no suggestion of any departure from the present fares.

CR. HARRISON: The trams would automatically go out of business altogether if the fares were raised, as there would be no one to carry.

THE CITY ENGINEER: Sir John has indicated a pretty fair chance of electricity charges declining more rapidly if we had no trams. Would the Commission have any objection to scrapping the trams, should the Council desire to run 'buses? Light 'buses might do the work.

SIR JOHN MONASH: If you don't want the trams, we won't have the slightest objection to scrapping them. At the same time, I think, as a layman, that the people have become used to the trams, and would expect to keep them. I do not think the tramways will affect electricity charges one way or the other, excepting insofar as they may delay the lowering of prices.

THE CITY ENGINEER: The lower prices will come much quicker without them?

SIR JOHN MONASH: I would not say much quicker. They will come quicker.

THE MAYOR OF BALLARAT pointed out that in the new agreement there was no clause setting out tram fares, thus leaving the Commission with a free hand. In the present agreement with the Company the fares were set out. These fares were up to the limit allowed. If the agreement were adopted, would it go on for ever?

SIR JOHN MONASH: It is a continuing agreement; there is no limit to it. Once the investment is made, it has to earn revenue. However, the agreement can be varied at any time by mutual consent.

THE MAYOR: It can be altered through Parliament at any time?

SIR JOHN MONASH: Yes. I would again say there is not the slightest intention on the part of the Commission to alter the present fares in an upward direction.

CR. HARRISON: The tramway agreement depends upon the 'buses. There will be a big outcry by the public if we interfere with the 'bus routes.

SIR JOHN MONASH: I am quite unequivocal in reply to that question: [The Commission will have nothing to do with the tramways unless the Councils decide to enter into an agreement to protect such tramways.]

CR. HARRISON: How far do you think you could go into the question of extensions which the suggested conference might regard as necessary in place of 'bus routes.

SIR JOHN MONASH: We are not going to commit ourselves at this stage with regard to any extensions of the tramways service.

CR. HARRISON: But, if the Commission's officers at the conference think that any case demands an extension, would it be a promise to the people that the extension would be made?

SIR JOHN MONASH: Yes, certainly. Proceeding, he said the date of the proposed conference regarding 'bus routes could be left to the Town Clerk and the Secretary to fix for some week in November. The Commission would meet the wishes of the Council as far as it was possible to go in fairness to the trams.

The terms of the resolution which had been carried by the Geelong and Bendigo groups of Councils were then discussed. In referring to this resolution, adopting the agreement and asking the Government to introduce the necessary legislation to empower the Commission to operate the tramways, Sir John Monash said the Commission felt that it had a public duty to perform. It recognised all the difficulties of the matter, and all the conflicting interests. However, it felt he thought with justice - that what was good enough for Bendigo and Geelong should prove good enough for Ballarat.

The Commission's representatives were then asked to retire, whilst the Councils discussed the matter amongst themselves.

Sir John Monash was recalled after a time and invited to answer further questions.

THE MAYOR (Cr. Bolster): The feeling of the conference is very much towards you, but there are one or two vital points. One relates to 'buses that are unlicensed, but which, owing to the inconvenience of the tram service, are under contract to convey girls and others to and from work. If you could see your way clear to grant a conference on such matters, I think it would clear the air wonderfully.

CR. MACKENZIE: The point is that the 'buses, in carrying these people to and from work, are not up against the trams.

SIR JOHN MONASH: You are setting the cart before the horse altogether. We don't care tuppence what routes they run or don't run. We do care about knowing whether you are going to live up to clause 19 or not. You cannot expect us to take over the trams if you are going to run 'buses in competition with the trams. That is the fundamental position. You have to elect to-day whether you want 'buses or trams. You can't have both, one in competition with the other. We won't touch the trams under any circumstances unless the Council is sympathetic. Have what 'bus routes you like as feeders, but we won't have 'buses in competition with the trams. If you want them, you must make some other arrangements. I am prepared to make an offer and hand over the trams to the Council free of charge and give them electricity at a fair price if they like to take it on themselves. We are not prepared to take on the trams on any other terms than those under which they were taken over in Bendigo and Geelong.

CR. MACKENZIE: Will you have any objection to an early 'bus?

SIR JOHN MONASH: I have no objection to any 'bus so long as it does not compete with the trams. We came here at the request of the Council which was afraid of us in regard to our obligations. Quite the reverse! We are afraid we will find an unsympathetic Council. That is not the position we are prepared to accept. If the Councils prefer 'buses to trams, by all means let them have the 'buses. If they want the trams,

must protect tram revenue. [I don't object to feeders to the trams and to 'bus routes more than a quarter of a mile away from the tram, or to an important public convenience being served, but, if it is competitive, we cannot consider taking on the trams.]

THE MAYOR: You want us to adopt clause 19?

SIR JOHN MONASH: In principle. Then we will meet you.

THE MAYOR: You will help us to supply these people in outlying districts?

SIR JOHN MONASH: Certainly.

CR. LEDERMAN: That will apply to those 'buses which are serving a useful purpose which cannot be served by the trams?

SIR JOHN MONASH: Certainly; we are out to serve the interests of the public in any way that is without prejudice to the tram revenue.

CR. COOKE: We cannot get anything fairer than that.

Sir John Monash again retired, to be recalled later, with the other Commission's representatives, when it was announced that the following resolutions had been carried, viz.:-

"That the representatives of the Councils of Ballarat and Sebastopol, at this conference, recommend to their respective Councils the following resolution for consideration:- That this conference, representing the Ballarat City Council and the Sebastopol Borough Council, requests the Government to introduce legislation authorising the State Electricity Commission to operate the tramways in the Ballarat and Sebastopol municipal areas, and that the conditions governing the operations of such tramways and auxiliary services as from the 1st July, 1931, be as set out in the schedule to the draft agreement.

"That, contingent upon the foregoing resolution being carried by the Councils, the following resolution be submitted:- That an early conference be arranged between five representatives of the Councils - four from Ballarat and one from Sebastopol - and three representatives of the Commission, and Mr. Pringle (representing the Electric Supply Company of Victoria Ltd.), to discuss in detail before the end of the year the 'bus routes which should be allowed or disallowed and the draft regulations under the Motor Omnibus (Urban and Country) Act, 1927, in the light of the principles set out in clause 19 of the draft agreement."

The conference closed with a vote of thanks to the Commission's representatives, moved by Cr. Lederman, and seconded by Cr. Jones.