

Dromana, Saturday, August 7.

2.

SORRENTO TRAMWAY.

(Following is the continuation of the report held over from last week.)

The secretary read a letter from 60 ratepayers emphatically protesting against the shire council purchasing the Sorrento tramway system which is almost worn out; if not obsolete. The (sic) truck and rolling stock have been in use for 30 years and will at least require a thorough and most careful overhaul which is certain to involve the council in a large sum of money thus placing another great financial burden on the ratepayers. Another, signed by 41 visitors and others, urging the acquisition of the tramway system to the Back Beach, which is a great attraction to visitors, large numbers of whom have been conveyed thus during many years by the said tramway, the retention of which is essential to the prosperity of Sorrento. Another, by 31, urging the taking over of the trams on the grounds that the retention is an absolute necessity to safeguard the interests of the district generally. They also state that the evidence of past returns shows that good profits have been made by the present owners, which we trust the council will not lose the opportunity of securing. From this it would appear 60 were averse to the council acquiring the trams, whilst 71 urged the acquisition of same.

Cr. Macfarlan, pursuant to notice, moved "That this council exercise the right to take over and work the tramway system of Sorrento." He gave a brief history of same since its inception till its acquisition by the present company, who acquired it at a low rate from the promoters. When this company announced its intention to exercise the right for a seven years' extension opposition was raised and protests lodged. The Minister was waited upon and on the grounds that it was too far ahead refused to ratify the proposed extension. The company acting within their legal rights at the end of 30 years notified the council of its intention to apply for an extension. They had an absolute right so to do. He held it would be wrong to extend the right to the company.

The position now was entirely different. The company had notified the council that they withdrew their application for a further extension; also stating that an offer for the purchase of the plant had been received, which would be accepted should the council not agree to acquire same. A conference was suggested by the council, but the company stated such would be a waste of time unless the council exercised its right to take over the system, etc. The offer might therefore be considered as closed as to the grounds of protest. The same was urged years ago, but the trams still ran notwithstanding the croakers. They never stopped once even. There is not the slightest doubt that the Back Beach is the great attraction to Sorrento. Large numbers of people go thence. It is urged that the tramway track, which cost £15,000 to lay, should be torn up. Everywhere else people are clamoring for tramways. The Queenscliff people are agitating for a tramway to Point Lonsdale. A big share of the "bay trippers" come to Sorrento, 85,000, and most of these have been carried by the trams to the Back Beach. He had seen copies of the company's balance sheets. They had not been "faked" as some would urge, for the company had to pay income tax on them. The average carried by the trams had been over 30,000 for years. It had been urged that cabs, cars and char-a-bancs could carry these if trams ceased to run. He stated these could not do so as the time was very limited. It would soon become apparent that if there were no means that no one would come to Sorrento. Persons might be urged to come, but when they found that there were no means to reach our fine Ocean Beach, they would refrain from again visiting us. Notwithstanding "the strike" and consequent withdrawal of the "Weeroona"-the larger boat- the company stated that last year was the best they had. The many picnics which come to Sorrento testify to the popularity of Sorrento; the Back Beach undoubtedly being the attraction. Other places more easily accessible cater for picnics and where more time would be available are passed by for Sorrento where the is limited. The boats arrive between one and two o'clock and leave again at four. The greater number of visitors were conveyed to and fro to the Back Beach by the trams. As to the financial position he had seen last year's balance sheet of the company. It would appear that the nett profit was £520 after £60 had been paid as Income Tax. In previous years the average nett profit was £500. For the whole property the company was prepared to accept £4000. He thought this a fair proposition. The company would accept debentures bearing interest at 6 per cent. He was quite satisfied that it was a good business proposition for the council. He suggested that the secretary be instructed to get all information. As representative of that end of the shire he did not want it said that he was the man who lost the trams to Sorrento. The objections now urged were the same as seventeen years ago when £9000 was asked. There were 92 chains-and-double track of rails (at first there was but a single track) used only six months for three hours daily for this period. There were 4000 red-gum sleepers 8 by 4 by 6 feet long. The track on inspection was found to be in good order. Perhaps six rails would have to be replaced. He would defy anyone to say that that was not so. The sleepers were not rotten, as has been circulated. There were two

Cr Brown
President of Shire
at this period

engines; the rails were worth £15 per ton; 4000 sleepers, as already stated, with necessary points; cars, two practically new; shed of galvanized iron. The engines have had new boilers; probably they may require retubing and £150 would probably be required for repairs. This would put the whole in tip-top order for five or six years. The house and land was also worth £2000. A loan (for 30 years) of £4600 was raised some years back, the major portion of which was spent on the Back Beach road. The council metalled the narrow portion of this road which is now far from being in good order. This would entail, if the tramway was pulled up, an outlay by the council of at least £1000 and immediately, too, to put this road in repair, for the company could not be compelled to metal same. The council's main drain follows the tram track and through the tram property. If the tram is removed another immediate large expenditure would be necessary. This alone requires mature consideration. Should the removal take place a most serious blow to the place would be inflicted. The district is becoming well settled and property is increasing in value. Thinking people state it would be the worst blow that could be inflicted on Sorrento and the district. To do anything to get rid of the tramway will be criminal. They should use every effort to keep it. Their position at Sorrento was different to any other part of the shire. They at Sorrento had absolutely nothing but the summer visitors to depend upon. The trams led up to a better boat service. Take up the tram we would have a reduced boat service. This question requires most serious consideration. He held no brief whatever for the company. It would be a great pushback to Sorrento if the tramway were pulled up. They must look ahead. The bulk of the rates came from down our end. The remedy was in our hands. He suggested the postponement till next meeting, the secretary in the meantime to get in touch with the company and ascertain the exact state of affairs. As the only representative at that end (Cr. Wettenhall: 'Tis good for us that there are not two like you) he maintained it would be a retrograde movement on their fact to let the tram go. They had a good many things to do. The electric light was one. They should not allow Sorrento to stand still. He urged that they would in acquiring the trams secure good value for their money. On the list of protesters he noticed many who lived out of the district of Sorrento. This was most unfair. He would suggest a special meeting to consider this matter.

The president seconded the motion. When the matter came up at their last meeting, he was not favourably impressed with the proposal as he did not think it a profitable speculation. He had been seriously thinking over it since. He had carefully examined the rolling stock etc., and found that they were not as obsolete as it had been alleged they were. He found the sleepers to be in very good order; the rails were almost as good as new. The engines would be improved by retubing. The position had been placed before you by Cr. Macfarlan in his usual and thorough manner. It would be a great misfortune to lose the tramway. If they did not acquire it a large fleet of cars, char-a-bancs, etc., would be necessary to go to the Back Beach--that is, if there were anyone to go. A good road would be necessary and Cr. Macfarlan's estimate for same was a very low one.

Cr. Wettenhall: Cannot we ascertain what the company want?. Who would manage it if the council acquire it?. If the company agree to give the council the option would a special meeting be necessary?--He moved that consideration be postponed till next meeting.

Cr. Shand seconded the motion. This question should be very closely watched. The West Riding had nearly reached the end of its tether. To-day they were £867 behind; a sum of £224 interest had to be paid yearly till 1940; £240 more on the trams was suggested and then the extension of the electric light also had to be provided for. They had left this matter too long. It should have been dealt with months ago. In reply to his previous queries he had been assured the matter was being watched. Should the amendment be lost he would move a further one.

Cr. Macfarlan: There is nothing unusual in adjourning the matter till next meeting.

Cr. Shand was not favourable to any risk of legislation.--The amendment was withdrawn.

Cr. Patterson moved the suspension of the standing orders in order to hear Mr. M Martin. This being agreed to, Mr. Martin stated that he wished to remove the impression that the signatories on the letter of protest were opponents of the tramway. They wished a thorough investigation of the matter. They relied on the council giving nothing for the "goodwill," as it was not a going concern. The company would not be able to start again as the lease had expired as from 31st March last. They should not pay more than that named by an assessor to be mutually agreed upon. As to the assets the rails were about the best of them. The sleepers were fair to bad, a large number being only fit for firewood. He asked why was not the question

laid before the ratepayers and the price stated?. Regarding the overhead bridge and the rails leading thereto, had the company any right to place these there?. The Lands Department state they have no rights. What is objected to is that the ratepayers have not been taken in consideration. When Cr. Patterson was seeking re-election I myself asked would the ratepayers be consulted in regard to the tramway extension and Cr. Macfarlan said "Yes they would;" but this promise has not been verified. He would also ask was there not a bill of sale for £6000 over this tramway? --He was continuing to address councillors when the standing orders were resumed.-- After further discussion Cr. Shand moved that after careful consideration this council does not intend to purchase the Sorrento tramway and that the company be so informed.-- Cr. Haig in seconding, pro forma, stated that the council could not work as cheaply as the company. He did not consider it an economical proposition.-- Cr. Shaw agreed. He did not consider it a good proposition, but he was open to further conviction.--On being put the amendment was defeated Crs. Shand and Haig voting for it. Cr. Shand called for a division. The division list is as follows:-

For: Crs. Shand and Haig.

Against: The President, Crs. Shaw, Macfarlan, Patterson, Downward and Wettenall.

Cr. Macfarlan's motion deferring action till next meeting was carried.