EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Australia.

Corowa, New South Wales, Australia, March 20.— The New South Wales Political Labor League held its annual conference last month, when the following addition was made to the fighting platform:

That a graduated unimproved land value tax of one farthing in the £ be placed on estates over £5,000 unimproved value, increasing one farthing in the £ on each additional £5,000 up to £25,000 and one halfpenny in the £ on each additional £10,000. The net revenue from this source to be devoted to railway extension and reduction of freights. Provided that in event of any effective Federal land tax being imposed, this plank shall not be operative.

The amendment, moved by Mr. John Grant, and defeated by 46 votes to 18, was as follows:

That in order to provide closer settlement a uniform tax of 2d in the £ on the whole of the unimproved land value privately held should be imposed for State revenue purposes. The net revenue from this source to be devoted to railway extension and reduction of freights."

Had the amendment been carried it would have received the support of many people outside the Labor party, but it is not likely that a law in the terms of the plank adopted will be passed. Such a tax would be very unfair and to a great extent could be evaded. The Federal Labor party is advocating a Federal tax as given above to provide revenue for a Federal old age pension scheme. At present only New South Wales and Victoria pay old age pensions.

Federal elections for the House of Representatives and half the Senate (three Senators from each State), will be held towards the end of the year, unless the House should be previously dissolved. In Victoria the Labor party has twenty-three candidates for the three seats in the Senate. To reduce this number to three and so enable a solid vote to be given, it is proposed to hold an election among all the members of the party in Victoria under a system of preferential voting. This, I believe, will be the first primary election in Australia.

A commission consisting of six members of the Federal parliament, which was appointed last year to enquire into the tobacco industry (which is said to be controlled by a ring), has now issued majority and minority reports. The majority, all labor members, recommend the nationalization of the whole industry, on the grounds that better tobacco would then be supplied to the public and that there would be a gain to the revenue of £400,000 per annum. The minority report contradicts these assertions, and estimates the cost of acquiring the industry at £8,750,-000. It would also be necessary to amend the Federal constitution.

From a recent decision of the Federal High Court it appears that Australia is liable to a postal censorship. The Post Master General, by virtue of a section in the post and telegraph act, ordered that no letters be delivered to a "medical" firm which advertises "tales of countless cures," on the ground that the business is fraudulent and immoral. An action was brought against him but the high court ruled that it could not interfere. The delivery of letters is held to be not a ministerial act which the postmaster general is bound by his position to per-

form; nor is the refusal a judicial act, as the party against whom the order is made is not heard. It is decided to be an executive act, and for such the postmaster general is responsible to Parliament alone. As it is very unlikely that Parliament would interfere unless a flagrant case of abuse occurred, the postmaster general appears to be possessed of a dangerous power.

ERNEST BRAY.

NEWS NARRATIVE

To use the reference figures of this Department for obtaining continuous news narratives:

Observe the reference figures in any article; turn back to the page they indicate and find there the next preceding article on the same subject; observe the reference figures in that article, and turn back as before; continue until you come to the earliest article on the subject; then retrace your course through the indicated pages, reading each article in chronological order, and you will have a continuous news narrative of the subject from its historical beginnings to date.

Week ending Wednesday, April 25.

The San Francisco Disaster.

The earthquake at San Francisco and the fires that followed it (p. 56) have proved more disastrous than seemed probable even from the terrifying reports that first came over the wires.

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On the 19th the fires were still raging. They were believed to be under control on the afternoon of the 20th, but they broke out afresh in the evening and devastated a further great area. After four days of destruction, however, they were finally subdued on the 21st. A new outbreak near the ferry on the 23rd caused alarm, but did comparatively little damage; nor was any done by another earthquake shock which was felt near midnight on the 23rd. The devastated territory may be described as follows: Beginning at Market and Buchanan streets, and running thence southerly to 20th, thence easterly to Mission, thence irregularly north to Channel, thence irregularly east and northeast along the north of Channel and west of Townsend to the Fremont pier, thence north and northwest along the water front of San Francisco bay to Mason street, southerly along Mason to Bay, westerly along Bay to Taylor, southerly along Taylor to Chestnut, westerly along Chestnut to Hyde, southerly along Hyde to Lombard, westerly along Lombard to Larkin, southerly along Larkin to Greenwich, westerly along Greenwich to Van Ness, southerly along Van Ness to Clay, westerly along Clay to Franklin, southerly along Franklin to Sutter, easterly along Sutter to Van Ness, southerly along Van Ness to Golden Gate, westerly and irregularly along Golden Gate and McAllister to Octavia, southerly and irregularly along Octavia to Market at Haight, and southwesterly irregularly along Market to Buchanan.

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It is impossible even to make a reasonable estimate of the loss of life. Whenever and wherever a body was found it was buried immediately, without formality, and by different groups of searchers, who