

I have made these remarks to indicate to the Minister that the importance of the railway line has by no means ceased. Most of the Golden Mile treatment plants would be only too ready now to take nickel ore, wherever it was discovered. I feel that with the very intensive prospecting that is going on in the area from Kalgoorlie to Leonora, and even as far as Wiluna, it would be a very short-sighted policy on the part of any Government to close the railway line. I conclude my speech by leaving those thoughts with the Minister concerned.

**MR. McIVER** (Northam) [3.34 p.m.]: Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I join with previous speakers to congratulate you on your election as Speaker. I trust that your term of office will be a very memorable and enjoyable one. I also congratulate the new members of Parliament on both sides of the House and trust that their contributions to the Parliament and to the people whom they represent will be worthy ones.

Many speakers before me have addressed the House for the first occasion. However, I very much doubt if any one felt as proud as I do today. I say this for two reasons. Firstly, I have been given the honour by the people of the Northam electorate to represent them in Parliament; and, secondly, I have been given the responsibility to take over from a man whose deeds and services, not only to the people of the Northam electorate but to the people of Western Australia, will never be surpassed in the annals of the political history of this State! Of course, I refer to The Hon. A. R. G. Hawke. Mr. Hawke will be a legend. It does not matter where one travels throughout the State, he is always referred to with the greatest respect, irrespective of the person's political beliefs.

I sincerely thank Mr. Hawke for the guidance and the assistance he has given me over the years, and I trust he will have many years of happy retirement; he has certainly deserved them.

The Northam electorate is an expanding one. It could well be, in time, that the mineral development and the intensive tests that are being carried out in relation to the area around Northam could materialise, and we could certainly take our place with the rest of the State with regard to mineral development. Certainly we lack secondary industries in the area. That has a big effect on employment and, consequently, if the tests which are being carried out extensively around the various farming areas of Northam materialised, they would most certainly have a big effect on the district.

We have the facilities to attract and to carry on secondary industry, on either a large regional basis or in a minor way. We have power, land, water, and modern transport available. In other words, we

have the facilities to cater for all secondary industries, whether they are concerned with an export market or with the local scene.

Much has been said in the House in the last few days in relation to agriculture. In Northam we are certainly playing our part in research into agricultural methods, so that greater technical skills and greater knowledge can be applied by the man on the land and so that men may be enticed into this field. There is the C.S.I.R.O. at Bakers Hill, the Muresk Agricultural College, and the Department of Agriculture in Northam proper. In addition, the junior agricultural high school is situated at Cunderdin. Each one of these organisations is playing a very important part in a very important industry.

The effect of aerial spraying in the district of Northam has been considerable. As members know, Northam is largely surrounded by hills and, as a result of this method of spraying the hills around the area, and of the right grasses being consequently produced, the farmers in the district have been able to increase their sheep production—they have increased their flocks and improved the economy of their farms.

The farmers in this area, as in other parts of the State, are unanimous in their growing concern at rising costs of production, especially as they are related to wheat and wool. As legislators of this State we have a great responsibility to these men, and we must tackle the complex problem at far greater depth than we are at present because, as we know, the economy of the State and of the nation depends to a large degree on primary production.

Because of the great development of iron ore and other minerals in the north, the growing problems of the farmers tend to be pushed into the background, and I suggest that we get down to the fundamentals which are causing these men so much concern.

I also wish to bring before the House the growing concern that is being felt in regard to the encroachment of salt. This matter has already been ably dealt with by the member for Mt. Marshall, and I heartily support his remarks. I sincerely hope we will intensify our efforts in this field of research with a view to overcoming the problem of encroachment, which is taking more and more fertile land every year.

I would now like to touch on the employment problems which are facing the young people in the Northam area. As you are aware, Sir, there are several large Government instrumentalities in Northam, some of which are the Main Roads Department, the Public Works Department, the Water Supply Department and, of course, a very large section of the Western Australian Government Railways.



Each of these instrumentalities has its own motor pool, and I would make a strong recommendation to the Government that here we have one avenue of employment which could be used to cater for the young people of the district. They could be apprenticed to the motor mechanics employed by these instrumentalities and they could help carry out the maintenance work on the vehicles concerned rather than have them sent down to the city.

Once these young people leave the senior high school, there is not much opportunity for them—unless of course they continue in further academic fields—and, as a result, they generally migrate to the city in an endeavour to obtain jobs.

In the last few days a great deal has been said about housing and I, too, would like to bring to the attention of the Minister for Housing the shortage of homes in the Northam area. In all fairness I would say, however, that from the answers I received to the questions I asked in the House the other night, the Minister appears to be doing something about the matter.

When young people get married they do not, as a rule, have much money and, as a result, it is necessary for them to live with friends or parents. They have a very hard task ahead of them and it is this sort of thing which usually causes the breakup of so many marriages. The high prices they must pay by way of deposit does not enable them to commence their lives happily together—they just do not have the necessary accommodation—and it is not long before arguments develop between husband and wife, and then, of course, things go from bad to worse.

*Sitting suspended from 3.45 to 4.3 p.m.*

Mr. McIVER: Prior to the suspension I was speaking on housing in the Northam electorate. I now wish to speak briefly on the native situation in the area. Without doubt, we have the worst native reserve in Australia. This reserve was badly sited when it was first constructed. It is in close proximity to the Avon River and consequently during the winter months it is practically under water. At the present time there are insufficient homes on the reserve for these very confused people; and native families in the town of Northam are living in houses that have been condemned by the local authority. In many cases some of the homes do not have any toilet facilities, water, or electric light.

It is pleasing to know that the Government is going to build type 64 native homes in Northam; and I trust this can be expedited so that these people will have an opportunity to be adequately housed. The native problem is certainly a complex one, and here again the solution of the problem rests with adequate housing. It is also pleasing to see that the Department of Native Welfare is considering purchasing the old C.W.A. hostel in Northam. I feel

this is a step in the right direction, because if the younger native people can find employment and can live at this hostel under supervision, rather than have to go home to the environment of the reserve, it will be very stimulating for them, indeed.

I would now like to touch on a subject which is of very great concern to me: the resignation rate of employees of the W.A.G.R. In the last month or two there have been reports in the Press in relation to main-line derailments and derailments in marshalling yards. I cannot agree with the investigations into these derailments that have been undertaken, because I feel this information could easily have been obtained as a result of closer liaison with the senior administrative officers of the department and the senior unions.

The resignation rate has increased considerably during the last two years; and to be more specific I will refer to the motive power section and the traffic section. Within a period of two years there has been a resignation rate from these two branches of 1,137 employees. No enterprise, irrespective of its vastness or magnitude, can function efficiently and give service with a staff depleted to that extent. There must be something radically wrong to cause these increasing resignations of employees.

I hope to put forward some constructive suggestions and trust they will be viewed as such so that this problem can be investigated in an endeavour to have the resignation rate checked. As members know, in Northam there is a vast complex—it is the largest marshalling yard in this State at the present time. It cost thousands of dollars to construct and at the moment 75 per cent. of the grain yield passes through it.

If we are going to employ men in marshalling yards, then it is imperative they be trained in their job so as to eliminate the derailments, which seem to be increasing in number. Years ago, before a man joined the railways—irrespective of the branch—he had to pass a very stiff medical examination and had to have certain academic qualifications, but this is not so today. Any Tom, Dick, or Harry can go to a marshalling yard and be employed as a shunter and within a week be given such a responsible job as a pilot, piloting important freight trains into a marshalling yard. It is no wonder we are experiencing derailments. The whole working structure, as it is at the present time, has to be streamlined and looked at more closely.

I say to the members of this House: Would any one of them like to be a driver at the present time and be instructed to take a train in excess of 1,000 tons out of the marshalling yard in Northam and bring it down the Avon Valley route? How many would like to face the corners knowing that the braking system was not



continuous through the train. This might have been all right 20 or 30 years ago when trains were 20 to 30 trucks in length and locomotives were of small dimensions, but that is not the position today.

I would draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that several of the safety working rules are out of date. For months the E.D.F.U. has been trying to get the department to agree that when locomotives are multicoupled they be driven from short-end leading. This is in the interests of the safety of the public, and it is beyond my comprehension why the department takes a strong view in not allowing drivers to drive with short-end leading.

I draw attention to the siting of the standard gauge railway signals between Northam and Merredin. It is of paramount importance to remember that signals do not stop trains—brakes do. Therefore I cannot understand why the Government with this brand-new railway has installed a signalling system which is antique. A standard gauge train of 4,000 tons travelling at 45 miles an hour takes a chain under a mile to stop—that is, with the brakes fully applied. However, it is the intention to increase the speed once the standard gauge railway is fully operative to 60 and 70 miles per hour.

We have a signal siting committee, the specific job of which is to recommend to the department where the signals are to be erected. On this committee is a representative of the drivers' union, and I appeal to the Minister for this committee to be given far more co-operation than it is receiving at present, because it is most imperative that the signals be sited so that evasive action can be taken when a crash is imminent.

It would not have cost many more dollars to have apparatus attached to the signals, especially in the area of West Toodyay where there is a danger for three months of the year of particularly heavy fog retarding vision. The human element is always open to error and since the standard gauge railway has been in operation there have been instances of trains running past signals at danger.

Members of the Government have gone overseas and observed modern signalling devices in other countries. For the life of me I cannot understand why some modern methods of signalling were not adopted in this State. They are installed in Victoria and New South Wales, where they are attached to the signal. Once the signal is passed, when it is at danger, the apparatus on the signal makes contact with the brake on the train and stops it.

Perhaps I have painted a grim picture, but as one who has been associated with the railways and its problems and achievements during the past 25 years, I bring

these facts before the House. They certainly require attention and until they are adjusted and some proper agreement is reached as to where the signals are to be sited, the travelling public of Western Australia will be placed in jeopardy.

Referring to the amenities that have been provided in the last four or five years, I must say that the Government is to be commended. At Northam and Merredin the quarters have certainly come a long way from the days of the cyclone bed. In those days when one turned over every-one turned over. The silence of the night was often broken by the fall of a boot and then usually a raucous voice would call, "Go on, drop the other one."

We have certainly come a long way since those days, and when one considers that a railway man spends the greater part of his life in railway barracks, it is most important that the accommodation be modern. At Merredin and Northam the accommodation is certainly modern. In other parts of the State, conditions can be improved, especially where engine-men have to sleep in temperatures well over the hundred. I refer to areas such as Wyalkatchem, Cue, and Yalgoo. It is essential that the men rest. I trust that the building programme which I know is envisaged for these places can be expedited.

If the items I have mentioned can be given consideration—especially with regard to the safeworking structure of the department—there is no doubt in my mind that when the standard gauge becomes fully operative the railways of Western Australia will be the leader in the modern field of competitive transport.

I do not go along with the views expressed by the Commissioner of Transport that the container service will not be a success when the standard gauge line is in full operation. There will be an interstate interchange of wagons, and when the scheme reaches full operating capacity I am sure the people of this State will benefit greatly.

In conclusion, Mr. Acting Speaker (Mr. Mitchell), I wish to thank members of the House for their decorum and the close attention they have given to me. It is with interest, pride, and enthusiasm that I take my place in this Parliament—in its debates, and in its deliberations.

**MR. STEWART** (Merredin-Yilgarn) [4.20 p.m.]: Mr. Acting Speaker (Mr. Mitchell), it is my pleasure to speak to this House for the first time as the member for Merredin-Yilgarn. I am deeply conscious of the tribute the electors of Merredin-Yilgarn paid me on election day.

In following Mr. Lionel Kelly, who represented the electorate for so long, I indeed have a difficult task. Mr. Kelly