

# Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday, 22nd October, 1946.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT.

### Country Areas Water Supply Bill.

**THE MINISTER FOR WORKS** (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and the indulgence of the House I would like to make a statement in connection with the Country Areas Water Supply Bill. When I was explaining the provisions of the Bill last week I mentioned that the new maximum rate to be imposed would be 5d. per acre. The Leader of the Opposition inquired as to whether the rebate of 1d., which now applies to the maximum rate of 6d., would apply to the proposed new maximum rate of 5d. I told him it would. As I continued my speech I began to argue with myself as to whether I had been right or wrong. I finished, feeling that I had given incorrect information.

The matter was checked at the department the next morning when it was found that the rebate of 1d. would not apply to the proposed new maximum rate of 5d. per acre. I telephoned the office of the Leader of the Opposition and left a message for him which I later confirmed in writing. I also wrote to the Leader of the Liberal Party and I made the information available to as many as possible of the members representing the districts concerned. The actual posi-

tion, therefore, is that the new maximum rate will be 5d. as against the existing rate of 6d.; there will be no rebate of 1d. on the new maximum rate of 5d. but there will be a discount of five per cent. for the prompt payment of all rates, irrespective of whether the rate imposed is 5d. or less.

## QUESTIONS.

### BUILDING TRADES OPERATIVES.

#### As to Wages, Output and House Construction Costs.

Mr. WATTS asked the Premier:

1, What were the wages payable as at the 1st July, 1938, in the building trades to—

- Plasterers,
- Bricklayers,
- Slaters and Tilers,
- Plumbers,
- Carpenters and Joiners,
- Builders' Labourers?

2, What are the wages payable to the same tradesmen now?

3, What portions of the increases have in each case been due to increases attributable to increased living costs?

4, Since the 1st July, 1938, has the output per man increased, decreased, or remained stationary?

5, What are the approximate increases or decreases (as the case may be) per man in respect of—

- Bricklayers,
- Slaters and Tilers,
- Plasterers,
- Plumbers,
- Carpenters?

6, In the case of a two-bedroom brick house erected—

- in 1938,
- in 1946

by the Workers' Homes Board, what are the respective percentages of the costs in respect of labour and materials, respectively?

The PREMIER replied:

1, The following rates were payable in the building trades on 14th October, 1938—

the date when the present award became operative:—

	£	s.	d.
(a) Plasterers .. ..	6	0	4
(b) Bricklayers .. ..	6	0	4
(c) Slaters and Tilers—			
Roof Tilers .. ..	4	17	4
Inside or shop fronts	6	0	4
(d) Plumbers .. ..	6	0	10
(e) Carpenters and Joiners—			
i. In joinery shops	5	10	7
ii. In shops or mills	5	14	10
iii. In building construction ..	6	0	10
(f) Builders' Labourers—			
A Class .. ..	5	1	9
B Class .. ..	4	18	9
C Class .. ..	4	13	3
D Class .. ..	4	9	6

2, The following are the rates payable at the present time:—

(a) Plasterers .. ..	7	1	4
(b) Bricklayers .. ..	7	1	4
(c) Slaters and Tilers—			
Roof Tilers .. ..	6	3	5
Inside or shop fronts	7	1	4
(d) Plumbers .. ..	7	1	10
(e) Carpenters and Joiners—			
i. In joinery shops	6	11	7
ii. In shops or mills	6	15	10
iii. In building construction ..	7	1	10
(f) Builders' Labourers—			
A Class .. ..	6	2	9
B Class .. ..	5	19	9
C Class .. ..	5	14	3
D Class .. ..	5	10	6

3, All the increases indicated above have been due to increases in the cost of living.

4, and 5, It is not possible to state what variations have taken place since 1938 in the output of men engaged in the building industry, and to obtain authoritative information would require a considerable amount of research into the costs of individual builders, if these were available. From general statements made by different building contractors, there is a feeling that output today is lower than it was in 1938, but this reduction is not necessarily the fault of the workman. Delays in the delivery of material to jobs causing wasting time are contributory factors to the reduced output.

6, In 1938 all houses erected for the Workers' Homes Board were built by private contractors who tendered for individual houses. Today groups of houses are erected for the Board under an arrangement with the master builders whereby the base price is agreed upon between the builders and the Board. Comparing these prices in 1938 and today, the answer to Question No. 6 is—

	1938.	1946.
Materials .. ..	56.66%	55.8%
Labour .. ..	33.34%	35.2%
Administration, etc. and profit	10.00%	9.0%
	<hr/> 100.00%	<hr/> 100.00%

The information for 1946 is based on actual figures, whereas that for 1938 consists of estimates based on tenders received and a discussion with builders who operated at that time.

### STOCK DISEASES.

*As to Central Research Laboratory, Field Work, etc.*

Mr. WATTS asked the Minister for Agriculture:

1, With reference to representations made by local authorities and members of Parliament concerning the necessity for an experimental farm in the lower Great Southern districts, is it to be understood that the departmental view is that the diagnosis and control of stock diseases can be carried out more efficiently at a central laboratory at Hollywood than they can in the districts where sheep problems are prevalent?

2, Is it not considered essential that field work in the actual districts concerned would be a vital part of such investigations?

3, If so, how is it anticipated that such field work can be carried out approximately 200 miles away and satisfactory results be anticipated?

4, If, as stated in a recent letter, the department is fully in accord with the proposal to establish a research station in the lower Great Southern, is it to be understood that steps will be taken to found such a station in the near future?

5, Would it not be desirable for the State Government to press for assistance out of the Wool Research Funds in conjunction

with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in view of the problems associated with sheep in the districts concerned and the very considerable quantity of wool which makes contribution to the research funds from those districts?

6, Have such representations been made or will they be made, and if not, why not?

The MINISTER replied:

1, No, but the facilities which only a central laboratory can provide are essential.

2 and 3, Yes, and this is an important aspect of all investigations which have been and are being carried out. The work done in the field and at the central laboratory is complementary.

4, 5 and 6, The Department of Agriculture is co-operating closely with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in various problems, including those associated with infertility in sheep.

Certain funds have been made available already by the Wool Board for the latter investigation.

The question of establishing a research station in the southern districts has been discussed already by the department and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

Investigations have not yet reached a stage when such a station is essential.

### CORNSACKS.

#### *As to Shortage of Supplies.*

Mr. TELFER asked the Minister for Agriculture:

1, Is he aware of the very acute shortage of new corn sacks?

2, Will sufficient corn sacks be available to supply wants of wheat farmers for this season's wheat marketing?

3, Will sufficient bags be available for delivery of super. to farmers for the coming season?

4, What steps are being taken to deal with this most serious problem?

The MINISTER replied:

1, Yes.

2, Yes.

3, On present indications, it should be possible to meet requirements. Manufacturers are holding sufficient bags for more than half

of the anticipated season's delivery, and shipments on the way should be here in ample time for use this season.

4, The Australian Wheat Board, on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, is doing everything possible to arrange early delivery of additional supplies from Calcutta.

To further safeguard the position, fertiliser manufacturers are—

(a) requesting farmers to send in second hand bags for filling;

(b) requesting farmers who have no second-hand bags to take early delivery of portion of their requirements, to store it in bulk, and return the bags for refilling.

### WATER SUPPLIES.

#### *(a) As to Consumption from Barbalin and Goldfields Schemes.*

Mr. LESLIE asked the Minister for Water Supply:

1, What is the average annual total consumption of water from the No. 1 (Barbalin) Water Scheme for the years 1943, 1944, 1945?

2, What was the number of consumers served by the No. 1 Water Scheme for the years 1943, 1944, 1945?

3, What is the average annual total consumption of water by farmers situate east of Northam serviced from the Goldfields Water Scheme for the years 1943, 1944, 1945?

4, What was the number of farmer consumers situate east of Northam serviced from the Goldfields Water Scheme for the years 1943, 1944, 1945?

The MINISTER replied:

				gallons.
1, 1943-44	..	..	..	45,652,000
1944-45	..	..	..	57,446,000
1945-46	..	..	..	54,827,000

		No. of Farmer Consumers.	No. of Farmer Services.
2, 1943-44	..	224	388
1944-45	..	217	386
1945-46	..	217	389

				gallons.
3, 1943-44	..	..	..	130,739,000
1944-45	..	..	..	136,445,000
1945-46 (wet year)	..	..	..	123,050,000

	No. of Farmer Consumers.	No. of Farmer Services.
4, 1943-44 ..	822	1,590
1944-45 ..	816	1,605
1945-46 ..	813	1,677

Requests for a number of extensions have had to be held over during these years owing to shortage of pipes.

(b) *As to Kondinin Scheme Finance.*

Mr. SEWARD asked the Minister for Water Supplies:

1, What was the capital expenditure on the Kondinin water scheme?

2, What revenue has been received by the department from, and what expenditure has been incurred on the scheme since its inception?

The MINISTER replied:

1, Capital expenditure to the 30th June, 1946, £40,646.

2, Income to the 30th June, 1946, £30,804; expenditure excluding interest and sinking fund to the 30th June, 1946, £23,231; interest and sinking fund to the 30th June, 1946, £9,642.

### RAILWAYS.

*As to Goods Traffic at Boddington and Ranford.*

Mr. SEWARD asked the Minister for Railways: What tonnage of goods traffic of all classes was handled by the department and consigned to and out of Boddington (including Ranford) during the years ending the 30th June, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944 and 1945?

The MINISTER replied: Figures for the complete year 1939-40 are not available, but the figures for the six months to the 30th June, 1940, and for the 12 months ended the 30th June, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944 and 1945 are:—

	Boddington.		Ranford.		Total.	
	Fwd.	Rec.	Fwd.	Rec.	Fwd.	Rec.
	tons.	tons.	tons.	tons.	tons.	tons.
6 months ended— 30th June, 1940	659	1880	1212	9	1871	1895
12 months ended						
30th June, 1941	3285	2451	3340	62	6605	2513
30th June, 1942	2705	1164	4877	78	7672	1242
30th June, 1943	2372	1088	3258	103	5630	1101
30th June, 1944	3020	967	3389	65	6409	1022
30th June, 1945	2364	1503	3336	98	5700	1002

### BILL FACTORIES AND SHOPS ACT AMENDMENT (No. 3).

Reports of Committee adopted.

### BILL—STATE HOUSING.

*Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 15th October.

MR. WATTS (Katanning) [4.47]: As I view this Bill, it seeks to do five things that are of major importance. Firstly, it gives a new name to the Workers' Homes Board; secondly, re-enacts with some alterations the provisions of the Workers' Homes Act; thirdly, enables the newly-constituted housing commission to direct local authorities to condemn dwellings that are regarded as of slum character; fourthly, enables the commission to erect community houses which, in the Bill, are called hostels and rent accommodation therein, and to erect community centres, shopping centres and the like; and, fifthly, gives power to carry out the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement.

I am not disposed to oppose the suggestion that the Workers' Homes Board should be renamed the State Housing Commission. Such a name has been conferred on housing authorities in other States for a considerable time. As a matter of fact, in Victoria, a Government politically closely associated with myself instituted many years ago the State Housing Commission of Victoria, concerning which I shall have something more to say later on. In South Australia, constituted also by a similar Government, I believe, is the State Housing Trust, of whose operations I have seen something and whose activities I think I can in general whole-heartedly approve. In those two States, at any rate, such names as commission or trust have been given to the instrumentalities of the State which are responsible for the management of that portion of the housing of the people that is entrusted by legislation to State organisations. So it would be a queer thing, I should say, if one offered any opposition to this change unless on sentimental grounds; because the Workers' Homes Board has been in operation in this State for, I think, 35 years. From time to time it has had its functions and powers enlarged and it has, up to the present time, operated in a manner which has won the substantial commendation of the

great majority of people in the ambit of its activities as prescribed by law up to the present.

It is borne in on me that the change of name will not of itself create one new home or erect one new building or provide any more new materials. It is simply a change of name which cannot be complained about but which, of itself, so far as I can discover, will make no very considerable contribution to the solution of the housing problem in this State. The other institutions I mentioned, in South Australia and Victoria, never had any name other than that which they have now, and in consequence the sentimental grounds, to which I think some credence might be paid, do not exist in their case. Still, if the Government thinks it should adopt the recommendation of the committee of which Mr. Davidson was chairman in 1943, in regard to this matter—and it was one of the committee's recommendations—that the housing authorities should be re-named a commission or a trust, I have no objection to offer. But I do hope that in the net result the provisions of this Bill, if and when it becomes an Act, will provide a much greater speed in regard to the solution of the housing problem than has been the case up to the present.

That provision in the Bill which makes reference to the condemnation by local authorities of some areas, at the direction of the housing commission, it seems to me is incomplete. The division of the Act is headed "slum clearance" but the relative clauses of the Bill only provide for the commission being able to direct local authorities to issue condemnation orders; and the Commissioner of Health, I think, at its request to carry out similar functions. But it does not state what procedure is to be followed subsequently in regard to the replacement of the premises in question. While I suppose it may be taken for granted that an order or request issued by the housing commission for the condemnation of an area classed as a slum area would be followed by some activity on the part of the commission in replacing the buildings thus condemned, there is nothing clearly set out in the Bill which indicates that that is the course to be followed, and it seems to me it would have been wise had some such reference been made.

At any rate, it is clear to me that any activity of that nature will comprise a long-distance activity; because it seems to me

that at the moment the whole of the resources and the activities of the Workers' Homes Board, or the commission, or whatever it might be called, will have to be directed towards providing homes where there are none. What has been found to be the experience in other States, will, I am sure, be the experience here: the replacing of slums wherever they are condemned in Western Australia will be one thing that will be long delayed; because I cannot see from anything that the Premier has stated or from anything in the Bill that there will be available in the reasonably near future the necessary requirements to enable such projects to be undertaken. No matter how anxious it may be to undertake those projects, or how necessary the undertaking may be, the commission will be hampered for a long time by circumstances that exist and, from all the evidence before us, are likely to continue to exist. So it did occur to me that the reason for making no specific provision in the Bill under this heading of slum clearance for doing anything after houses had been condemned, was because it had been anticipated that this particular provision of the measure could not be taken much advantage of for a considerable time.

I do not know that I am enthusiastic about the provision in the Bill that enables the commission to erect community hostels for aged and infirm persons and others. I heard such proposals, when mentioned from European sources by the member for Subiaco some years ago, roundly condemned by one or two members who are usually sitting opposite to me. One of them is at present not in his place in the House and therefore I shall not make reference to him. But whatever may be the advantage to be derived from this method of erecting community hostels, particularly for aged and infirm persons, I question whether they are desirable. I am prepared to receive and consider evidence calculated to convince me to the contrary. I do not think anybody can ever accuse me of being entirely incapable of conviction on any subject where evidence can be brought forward. But it seems to me at present they are not desirable types of buildings in which to house aged persons.

I do not subscribe altogether to the very strong views expressed by Mr. Cruickshank—I think—of Osborne Park, who roused

himself into a fury—whether synthetic or otherwise, I do not know—in regard to a duplex McNess home erected in that area; but it seems to me, whatever his views on that particular cottage may be, that a dwelling of that character, housing only two couples, would be far more desirable for the persons he had in contemplation than a community hostel of the type contemplated by this measure. That is as I see it now, but I am open to conviction if facts and information can be adduced to establish to my satisfaction that they are more desirable than appears to me to be the case. It seems to me at this stage that such people are entitled to better accommodation, more convenient accommodation, than I should imagine could be provided for them in a communal institution of this character.

As for the remainder of the proposals that are associated in that clause of the Bill, I do not hesitate to say that power should not be given to the housing commission to erect shops and to let them and become, as it were a glorified landlord, unless the premises are required entirely in respect of a large community of houses erected by and under the control of the commission and that there are no convenient shopping facilities to be found in their near vicinity without the intervention of the commission. I do not think we want to replace one type of landlord, to whom the Premier apparently has some objection—to which I will make reference later—by the commission itself, on a glorified scale.

It seems to me that what we want to ensure is that the commission's money, time and energy are expended on providing homes for the people, and I think it can reasonably be left under suitable regulations, which it should not be beyond our capacity to prescribe, to private enterprise to handle other aspects of those buildings. The carrying out of the provisions of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, is, of course, a matter which obviously must be entrusted to the commission, as it has been, in essence, entrusted to the Workers' Homes Board. Somebody has to carry out the provisions of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, to which this Parliament has agreed, and in my opinion there is no reason why we should set up a separate authority for that purpose.

At this stage, of course, with the end of the third session of the Parliament drawing near, I can understand completely the speech of the Premier—which was somewhat decorative in character—in regard to this particular matter, which made it appear essential to create a housing trust at this stage, giving the public the impression that it would have been quite impossible to have amendments made to the Workers' Homes Act in order to carry out exactly the same proposals by that means. We know, of course, that a suitable opportunity presents itself at this stage for a little decorating of the Governmental shop window, and I do not doubt that other and no less wise people have, in the past, in similar circumstances adopted the same attitude, but I thought it might be as well to make some reference, in passing, to the fact that that aspect of the matter had not altogether escaped notice.

From his speech it was obvious that the Premier realised that there is not the greatest satisfaction existing in this State with the position of housing at the present time, and I thought he proceeded to justify that fact by his reference to worse positions that existed elsewhere, notably in the British Isles. But I tremble to think of the conditions that would exist here were the same proportion of homes in a damaged or destroyed condition as was the case in Great Britain. We know that the number of houses there destroyed or damaged as the result of enemy action ran into hundreds of thousands. We know that whole towns were blasted out of sight, or virtually so, and we can therefore appreciate—notwithstanding the magnificent recuperative qualities of the people of that country, which are well known throughout the world—the very involved position in which they are placed when not only have they to cope with the natural increase in the demand for housing, but also to replace the hundreds of thousands of dwellings that have been obliterated or damaged almost beyond repair. In this country, of course, I think not one house or building of any kind was actually damaged by enemy action, let alone obliterated altogether.

The Premier: That is not quite so, further north.

Mr. WATTS: I must subscribe to that. There was some action north of the 26th parallel. I am afraid I was confining my remarks to the areas where this Bill will

operate mostly; that is the more settled areas of Western Australia. I do, of course, subscribe to the most unfortunate position in which a portion of the northern area of this country found itself in the early stages of the Japanese war. There, fortunately, the population is small, and the problem is a minor one in comparison with that which might have existed had the southern part of the State been similarly affected. As far as the more closely settled areas of Western Australia are concerned, instead of having to cope with extensive damage caused by the enemy, plus the normal requirements, we have only to cope with the latter, and I think the Premier's estimate of a shortage of 10,000 homes at present is an underestimate.

From the reports that I have read and the indications that one can gather from those reports—and indeed from the report of the committee of which Mr. Davidson was chairman, and other statements made since that time—one could estimate that the existing shortage today would not be less, in Western Australia, than 12,500, but whether it be 12,500 or 10,000, both only matters of estimation and perhaps neither exactly reliable—whatever number it may be—it is obvious that it is going to tax all the resources of all sections of this community for a very considerable time before it can be overcome. The Premier, in the course of his remarks, said that planning for housing and the provision of homes in the past had been left in the hands of speculators. Of course, it depends upon the interpretation of the word “speculators”.

The Premier: That was a quotation from the report of the Commonwealth Housing Commission.

Mr. WATTS: Supposing it was, it still depends on the interpretation of the word “speculator”. The Workers' Homes Board, prior to the war, erected a considerable number of houses in this State. The greater proportion of them were those that were in course of purchase by the persons for whom they had been built, but they represented a very small fraction of the houses that had been built before the war. A great many other houses in this State—in fact I think by the time the war commenced the majority of the houses in this State—were either the property of the persons occupying them, or were on the way to being their

property under contracts of purchase, some what similar to those that were entered into with the Workers' Homes Board, a great number of which had been entered into between private persons. I have no hesitation in saying that up to that time had it not been for the activities of those private persons there would have been a chronic shortage of homes before the war. There would have been a state of affairs, I submit, worse than that which exists at the present time and so the Commonwealth Housing Commission is, in my opinion, not justified in making that statement or the Premier in repeating it, without some very substantial qualifications.

I am aware—and admit—that there were some, a minority, of the houses of the character that I have just mentioned, built by private enterprise and disposed of in some cases and rented in others, that were not of the type that ought to receive any commendation from us, but obviously the course to pursue in rectifying that state of affairs was to provide legislation, either legislation—if it were desirable—to control that type of contract or, alternatively, some other scheme of providing houses which would not allow the purely private interests of persons interested only for the purpose of profit to enter into it, but so far as I know, neither activity was indulged in in Western Australia. I find that in New South Wales and Victoria there are what are known as Co-operative Housing Acts.

In New South Wales, I am given to believe, this particular type of legislation has operated with great success. In Victoria it was a newer production, which was just going on to the statute-book in the early part of 1945, when I had an opportunity of discussing it with Mr. Forrestal, the accountant of the State Treasury, who had done considerable research into the advantages likely to accrue from the Co-operative Housing Society's proposal which had just then been before Parliament. That measure made provision for the creation of co-operative societies which should consist of not less than 40 persons and those societies enabled their members to erect houses and to purchase them on a time payment system, and, I believe, in New South Wales where the system has been in operation for a considerable time, it has given the greatest measure of success. I find some

reference to it in the report of the State Advisory Committee on Post War Housing, of June, 1943, in which appears the following:—

In order to encourage home ownership and home building by private capital a Co-operative Housing and Credit Act similar to that of New South Wales be considered as suitable legislation for Western Australia.

But this is the point I wish to make; the note underneath that recommendation, which is on page 7 of the report, reads—

This legislation enabled Co-operative building societies in New South Wales to build, purchase or improve 18,103 homes to the value of £14,500,000 in four years without recourse to second mortgages or speculative building and to a high standard of specification and inspection without loss to the State.

That entirely confirms the views that were put before me by Mr. Forrestal, when in Victoria, in 1945, and I say without hesitation that if it is feared—although I do not altogether share the fear—that the activities of speculative builders ought not to be allowed to supplement the activities of such instrumentalities as the State Housing Commission, then I commend to the Government the suggestion that it should regulate the activities of these enterprises as between person and person and/or—I would say “and”—introduce legislation similar to that which is in operation in New South Wales and which more recently commenced in Victoria, on the basis I have mentioned, as a substantial contribution to the solution of this problem. But I repeat that had the position before the war been left to Governmental activity, without the intervention of the private agreement, I have no hesitation in saying that what is a bad position now would be calamitous beyond all calculation, so I do not think we can subscribe—without some reservation—to a condemnation of the building contracts and arrangements that were made irrespective of the Government prior to the war and which I believe, properly regulated, would make still a most important contribution to the solving of our housing difficulties in Western Australia.

I also notice the absence—as I have noticed it before in other measures—of any proposals designed to relieve the position of the farm worker or his employer whose housing conditions are unsatisfactory. There is, indeed—as I understand it—no repetition in this Bill of a slight amend-

ment, passed in 1941, to the Workers' Homes Act, where some reference was made to the funds of the board being made available in certain circumstances for the renovation or improvement of homes on farms. There is nothing in this Bill at all in that connection, and I do not lose sight of the fact that there ought to be. It seems to me that we are making the position of the worker who lives in town, or can live in town, far better by comparison with the worker who lives on the land, but we are also not giving any great assistance to the farmer himself who might be in the same position as the worker—when he is in that position—who is entitled to a reduction of rental under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. I was interested to read, at page 17 of the report of the State Advisory Committee, what the committee had to say on this subject. It is as follows:—

Inquiry by your committee shows that—

(1) The Agricultural Bank—

That was its name at the time, Mr. Speaker—

has 10,716 accounts and that the Commissioners are not prepared to advance beyond £250 for the construction of a farmer's dwelling, and the bank could not state the number of clients who had received advances for house building.

(2) The Workers' Homes Board has limited its advances to land within townsites and the metropolitan area.

The committee then goes on to say—

These two facts show that a farm worker can obtain a good type home in a townsite for as low as £5 deposit, but his farmer employer can get only a £250 home and then only if the farm can “carry” it.

I would add that if the farm worker finds it inconvenient to live in a townsite, where he can obtain such a home as is contemplated by this clause, then he will be compelled to rely on what he can obtain on the property itself, while at the same time his employer may be in an economic position which is no better than that of those who, under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, are given the right to pay what is a rent that does not exceed one-fifth of the family income, irrespective of what the value or cost of the premises may be that are necessary to accommodate the person concerned and his family. We have all subscribed to that point of view; none of us has offered the slightest objection to



it. My suggestion, however, is that it should or could be extended a little further in order that it might take into consideration what the committee seems to recommend in these words—

Recommendation No. 3. It is recommended that a substantial proportion of post-war funds for housing be allocated to the improvement or replacement of sub-standard rural houses outside of townships.

But, as I pointed out previously, there is nothing in this Bill which will contribute towards that end; nor is there any provision, as I understand the measure, to assist persons working in various types of industries whose duties take them from place to place. We find them for a year or two here, a year or two there, and five years somewhere else, until finally they have no place where they may lay their head. Some of them—many of them—are bent upon becoming the proprietors in fee simple of a dwellinghouse and land. They acquire a dwelling in one place and live in it for a year or two, or perhaps a few years, and then find they must move in order to get promotion or betterment in their employment. They go elsewhere, leaving the premises that they had to somebody else, and it may be very many years—in fact, it may be the whole of the remainder of their working life—before they can come back to those premises.

The great majority of such people are consequently dissuaded from taking any opportunity at all to acquire their own premises and so remain on a rental basis, with no real pride of ownership, until finally they reach the retirement age and settle down to spend their declining years in premises not satisfactory to them and in which they have no real interest. I am convinced that some way could have been found within the ambit of the Workers' Homes Board or the housing commission—whatever one may call it—that could have provided for these people to become the proprietors of a house in a centre where they desire it at the end of their working days, if they could not have moved to it before. I find a proposal in the Bill that where the commission has acquired land, but it is not convenient for it immediately to utilise the land for the purpose of erecting dwellings, it shall not pay rates to the local authority concerned for a period of two years; and after the period of two years it shall be in

the discretion of the commission to pay a sum of money in lieu of rates, provided the commission—as I understand the Premier's remarks—thinks the local authority has been co-operative. I suppose in all the circumstances of the case that is a reasonable proposition.

When land is resumed for a Government instrumentality I take it that it becomes Crown land while it is still unused and Crown land does not, I should say, pay rates. At the same time, I do not like the reservation about the local authorities being co-operative. I feel that if land is resumed and held out of occupation, it should, after two years, become liable to make some contribution to the maintenance of roads and so forth in the district of the local authority concerned. The Premier may hold different views. If he does, perhaps he will give me this assurance: That there will be no departure from the system that has been followed in the past by the Workers' Homes Board whereby rates will be paid to local authorities on unoccupied properties. That is a matter of grave concern to the local authorities and will be of even graver concern to them than it has been in the past, if the provisions of this measure and the underlying schemes that one may anticipate will be developed in the course of years come to what one might hope to expect; that is to say, large numbers of dwellings, under the control and management of the commission, to be found in almost every local authority district. Of course, if there is not some distinct and clear understanding that the authorities will be able to collect rates from those premises when they are occupied, half the township could be on a non-ratepaying basis.

The Premier made some references to the shortages of labour, the great need for artisans in the building trades, and the probable decrease—at least alleged elsewhere—in the output of the individual worker. There have been many assertions made on this subject and I asked the Premier some questions today on it to which he was good enough to give me an advance reply, so that I might consider it before the House met, which I did. In that answer I find that the average increase in wages—all stated to be due to increased cost of living in Western Australia—is approximately 16 per cent. The increases are, roughly, £1 1s. on £6 in a great number of cases, in others £1 1s. on

a little less. Therefore, the percentage is a little greater, but it certainly does not exceed 20 per cent. However, from the figures the cost of buildings in Western Australia has gone up approximately 45 per cent., and it is alleged that in the other States of the Commonwealth the cost has gone up a great deal more. Therefore, at present we can take it this way: A medium-sized dwelling which used to cost £800 now costs anything from £1,150 to £1,300. In consequence, notwithstanding some rise in wages—which rise it may be mentioned is of no increased value to the worker, as it merely compensates him for the increased cost of living—it is obvious that it takes now about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  times the worker's full year's income, assuming he is fully employed, to pay for a home, as against  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times, or a little less, in 1938.

Therefore, if there is any inclination on the part of those engaged in the building trade to reduce the output per man—and it is alleged in Victoria that that is distinctly so, and I am gratified to know that it is not noticeable in this State, according to the Premier—if there is such an inclination, it can only work ultimately very strongly against the worker himself, because he is bringing about a state of affairs where the home, and incidentally any other assets which he agrees to acquire and to which the same process is applied, is going to cost him much more in proportion to his earning capacity than it would have cost him prior to the commencement of the war, and so his chances of a reasonable standard of comfort, in reasonable surroundings, are rather more remote than they were formerly. Therefore, instead of making a contribution to the social welfare of the people generally and himself in particular, any activity of that nature which diminishes a fair day's work is only going to contribute, as I see it, towards his own ultimate undoing as far as costs and prices are concerned.

I think, therefore, that it is not asking too much of any of us to discuss that point of view with all the people with whom we come in contact that are engaged in this type of work, letting them realise that nobody expects more than a fair day's work, but that one does not expect a reduction below a fair day's work is going to make any contribution whatever either to the solution of the problem of the individual worker or to the solution of the problems of the people as a whole, not only connected with

housing, but of course much involved in that activity. So, I cannot do other than quote from the observations of Mr. Wallwork, the commissioner appointed by the Government to deal with this fascinating problem of homes, which appeared in "The West Australian" of a little while ago. Mr. Wallwork, who seems to be a very thoughtful and capable man, was addressing a meeting in Perth about the 27th August. He is reported to have said that—

He was not at liberty to go into details of the scheme at the moment—

the scheme was one which he was about to recommend to the Government—

—but he could say that it provided for an increase in the building programme and a broadening of the classes of persons now entitled to obtain permits to build houses. He did not think that it was any good stepping up the building programme unless the conditions regarding persons who could obtain permits were made more liberal. At present only those persons who were in circumstances of extreme hardship could get permits. His object was that in addition persons who were really deserving homes, but who were not suffering extreme hardship, should also receive permits.

He continued—

"We know that we are going to have a headache regarding the labour position," said Mr. Wallwork, in answering a question by one of the members, "but we are going to try to force more tradesmen to be admitted to the building industry. If we create a demand, we may be able to persuade the unions to open their books to admit trainees. I feel reasonably sure that the unions will do that."

At or about the same time, at a meeting in Midland Junction, Mr. Wallwork was also present and spoke, and the report of his remarks is as follows:—

He had already taken steps to have this State's allocation altered to suit local needs.

That was in regard to the supplies of timber.

There was no constitutional bar to prohibit the export of timber by the millers. The present production of W.A. was 90,000 loads a year, compared with about 190,000 loads before the war. The trouble millers were faced with in increasing production was to get men to go out and work in the timber country.

At this gathering, a Mr. Davies, a representative of the R.S.L., said—

A serious difficulty in accelerating the building of houses would be the lack of sufficient tradesmen. Larger quotas of trainees were required under the reconstruction training scheme. Mr. Wallwork said that this had been taken into account in his proposals and an endeavour would be made to get the unions

to open their books and admit more trainees. He was confident that this would be done. The matter was well in hand.

It is a peculiar state of affairs when Mr. Wallwork at that stage of the housing problem—the 27th August, 1946—had to make a statement of that kind. Governments were supposed to be preparing post-war planning in regard to these matters since about 1943, and they were assumed to know all about the difficulties that would arise in these various matters—and I will confine myself to the building industry. We have here an estimate of post-war resources and employment numbers in Western Australia prepared by the assistant secretary of the Western Australian Industry Expansion Commission, in June, 1944. At page 11 of that document he says—

The provisional estimate for post-war building is 3,500 houses per annum, which is more than double the pre-war figure. An increase of 70-77 per cent. is postulated for building labour.

That paragraph did not take into account the additional labour that would be required for other forms of building, some of which, of a most important and outstanding character, the Minister for Education will know all about and which can be the subject of discussion at some later time. At page 15, of the report, this gentleman dealt with the estimated labour surpluses and deficits in 1947, and gave the following information:—

#### Building Industry:—

Estimated numbers engaged in industry in 1939	5,819
Numbers engaged in industry in 1943	4,138
Estimated employment opportunities in industry in 1947	10,000
Estimated number of civilians intending to remain gainfully occupied in industry in 1947	4,473
Estimated numbers in forces in 1947 classified according to previous industry. Excludes post-war military establishment, and makes some allowance for post-war intentions of demob. men	1,968
Estimated labour deficit in industry in 1947	3,559

On that information, which I think can be taken as reasonably reliable in view of the manner in which it was prepared, and who prepared it, there was going to be a deficit, in coping with the building requirements of Western Australia, of 3,559 operatives and it was as clear as the sun in the sky that some steps would have to be taken to in-

crease the number of persons to be employed in the industry. But no such steps were taken and we find that Mr. Wallwork, on the 27th August, 1946, informed us that, in his opinion, some such steps would have to be taken and that he was formulating ways and means whereby the difficulty could be overcome. Meanwhile, in "The West Australian" of the 11th September, 1946, Mr. Calwell, the Minister for Immigration, is reported to have said that—

At the request of the Commonwealth Government, the United Kingdom Government had now agreed to accept applications from a small number of intending British migrants with experience in the building trades. It was anticipated that the first group of 200 men would leave for Australia in November, and other groups, following later, would bring the total to 600. The first group would include 22 operatives with experience in brickmaking.

So, while these opportunities that everyone apparently foresaw a considerable time ago would become available to the local people—trainees and others that could have been started—we now have to fill some of the gap by importing personnel from Great Britain. That will not cure the position because it takes time to make a skilled artisan. It is not a job that can be done in a few days or weeks. In the majority of cases there has to be knowledge, and it has to be acquired by both study and experience. Even if Mr. Wallwork gets over the difficulty that now stares us in the face he will not, in any reasonable time, make a contribution sufficient to solve the problem.

It is quite apparent, therefore, that in connection with housing and building generally in this State, we are in a difficult and serious position. We have not made the contribution by planning that ought to have been made. We have had too many targets set, and publicity of those targets, but there does not seem to have been any straight shooting at them because very few, if any, have been hit. I say quite frankly, and without fear of successful contradiction, that there is a long story behind the difficulties that exist today in the building trade, as well as in other trades, many of which could have been removed if there had been more practice and less planning.

I now want to say a word or two as to the necessity of utilising other methods of house building than have been used in this State up to the present. It seems to me that

all we will be able to do under the present system, for the next couple of years, is to keep up with the annual demand; we will not in that period, be able to make any contribution towards overtaking the lag which I have variously estimated at from 10,000 to 12,500 dwellings unless we adopt a system that will enable some type of mass production to be put into operation. Mass production does not necessarily imply unsatisfactory results. Let us remember that the Ford Motor Coy. was one of the earliest exponents of mass production, and it still is. Will anyone deny that properly organised with efficient methods and workmen mass production—as is the case with that company and, indeed, with many others who have since adopted it—produces very satisfactory results?

Hon. W. D. Johnson: One is concentrated and the other is scattered.

Mr. WATTS: Well, what is wrong with its being concentrated?

Hon. W. D. Johnson: That is difficult.

Mr. WATTS: For once in my life I have misunderstood the hon. member. I believe that there are ways and means of undertaking mass production in house building.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: Hear, hear!

Mr. WATTS: Mass production ought to be commenced, and it is a sin that it has not yet been started in this State. I have here a letter from the Chairman of the Housing Commission of Victoria, dealing with the construction of concrete houses by what is known as the Fowler system of reinforced concrete buildings. I will make reference to that later on, but in order to show that this system has not been entered upon lightly by the Victorian Housing Commission, I propose to read from Mr. O'Connor's letter to me. He states—

Before the Commission commenced building operations it conducted an Australia-wide architectural competition for designs and systems of building. Several of the competitors based their entries on the Fowler System and one of the successful competitors used this particular form of building in their design. The Commission was impressed by Mr. Fowler's proposals and when the Panel of Architects was selected they were asked for a special report on this system. They were all impressed.

It was disclosed that Mr. Fowler had built houses under this system as long ago as twenty years. Also a prominent Melbourne architect, Mr. Leslie Perrott, had built a pair of houses

at Brighton using Mr. Fowler's system. We commissioned Mr. Fowler to build an experimental pair at Port Melbourne.

After this experimental unit was completed, it was thoroughly tested, and we were satisfied that a sound, comfortable, hygienic and weather-proof home was produced.

Mr. Fowler was then given a contract to build 20 houses. These buildings were considered to be satisfactory, and several other contracts were let for houses to be erected using Mr. Fowler's patents.

I had the opportunity of entering one or two of those houses and discussing the matter with the tenants occupying them. They were thoroughly satisfied. The houses contained all the facilities and amenities that were to be found in brick houses, the same floor space, ventilation, conveniences, cupboards, etc., which had cost £150 more in a brick house—£150 more of the commission's money. These homes were proving on all the evidence to be durable, suitable and much less expensive than brick houses, and the commission at that time—this was over two years ago—had not started building them on anything like a considerable scale. I do not know what the commission is doing now, but I came across an article in the magazine "Australian Home Beautiful" the other day, which paper published some delightful pictures of the homes that had been erected. This is what the Housing Commission of Victoria said in its 1944 report—

Concrete Houses and Fowler System of Construction. In previous reports brief references have been made to the use of this system of construction of concrete houses and illustrations have appeared of units which have been erected. As 267 of these (including 50 built for the Commonwealth Government) are now completed and tenanted, and another 138 are in course of erection, and the system of construction is regarded as completely satisfactory, it is appropriate that the development of the method of construction should now be recorded.

Some years ago, the late Mr. T. W. Fowler, of Werribee, invented a method of manufacturing walls for houses by casting them on an elevated flat metal table, and at the same time making provision for door and window openings, conduits, pipes, &c. The casting of the wall in a horizontal position and vibration of the concrete ensured a dense and water-proof wall.

He also devised a method of tilting this table to bring the concrete walls into a vertical position and of transporting the walls by means of jacks and trolley-ways to their respective positions in the house.

On arrival at the site of the house, which in all of Mr. Fowler's operations was close to the

casting table, the walls were jacked up on to concrete stumps already fixed and then bolted together to create the complete house . . .

After the death of Mr. Fowler in 1942, the commission took over his plant, formed a day labour gang of operatives, and continued the erection of these houses.

Then the report goes on to speak of the way the method is carried out, how the houses are completed, what machinery is required, and to publish pictures showing the finished article in the shape of a number of dwellings. Mr. O'Connor himself, chairman of the commission, assured me in person of the saving in cost of these buildings, and he anticipated the greatest saving when homes were produced in larger numbers, which I believe has since been done, and I can verify it from my own observation that they are entirely suitable and just as good as—in fact in appearance somewhat better than—the houses we have inspected at such places as Tuart Hill and Graylands, erected by the Workers' Homes Board.

I have no hesitation in saying that, if activity is not being indulged in here in the carrying out of work of a similar kind, it is high time there was activity. I understand that in Victoria all the parts are obtained by mass production and that up to a house per day can be erected, because the walls are prefabricated. At any rate I believe it is possible to erect a house in two days if all the gear is assembled and the constructing authority sets itself out to do the work. This does not mean that one house takes two days to build, but so many can be in course of construction at once that the output is one house every two days out of the bulk number.

Mr. Fox: We have not a crane in Western Australia to lift that weight.

Mr. WATTS: Who is worrying about a crane in Western Australia to lift the weight?

Mr. Seward: If there is none here, get one!

Mr. WATTS: Cannot cranes be acquired? If the hon. member is interested in the crane, there is a picture in the magazine "Home Beautiful." I will ventilate this aspect for the benefit of the member for South Fremantle—

The upper picture shows the new 10-ton crane taking up two walls.

Mr. Fox: The private individual could not bring a crane over from Victoria.

Mr. WATTS: Who wants a private individual to bring a crane from Victoria? Have I not been pointing out for the last five minutes that this is the procedure adopted by the Housing Commission of Victoria?

Mr. Fox: Socialistic?

Mr. WATTS: It is my ambition to see houses built. If that is not the ambition of the hon. member, he had better say so. Anything that may successfully contribute to that end should be adopted without a moment's delay. So far as I can see, what has been wrong in this country for the last few years is that there has been too much planning and not enough activity, as I said before.

Mr. Fox: Only in 1937 you kicked at a Bill to provide homes for renting.

Mr. WATTS: The hon. member should be more careful in the statements he makes. I suggest that he look up "Hansard" to ascertain just what I said on that measure. The hon. member is one of those folk who can see no good in anything unless it has existed for 10 years and to whom progress means standing still.

Mr. Fox: Just the reverse.

Mr. WATTS: I believe in taking advantage of any and every opportunity to effect a change for the better, but if the hon. member is not prepared to take steps to effect some change for the better, he would be of those who would still be wandering around chasing their breakfast with a club were it not for other people making progress for him. That is what our forefathers did a few thousand years ago, and without the establishment of precedents that usually make for progress, that is what the hon. member and others would be doing today. The hon. member is undoubtedly of that frame of mind in relation to this matter. Immediately any suggestion is made to take us off the beaten track which the hon. member has so studiously followed during the last seven or eight years I have known him in this House, he is opposed to it.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: The problem of adopting the Fowler scheme is cement.

Mr. WATTS: Yes, but we have already been advised that the demand for cement in this State can easily be overtaken provided coal supplies are maintained. This

afternoon I am not feeling so pessimistic as to suggest that coal supplies will not be maintained. If the position is that the output of coal cannot be maintained, at least we shall be no worse off than we were before, but if the output is maintained and a decent job can be made of building such dwellings, we shall be making some contribution to a more rapid solution of the problem that faces the people of Western Australia as well as those elsewhere.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It is the fact that cement has not been available that has largely caused the problem.

Mr. WATTS: Quite so. Although I have had this information in my possession for the last 18 months, I have said nothing about it on that account, but I think the time has arrived when something was said about it and this system was put in train. If those responsible had any confidence in their ability to overcome existing difficulties, they would have made an investigation and put the matter in train against the time when material was available. I am not aware that they have done so: neither am I aware that they have not done so, and I have raised the matter to the end that I may be informed. I do not propose to speak further at this stage. I shall support the second reading of the Bill and move amendments in Committee.

**HON. N. KEENAN** (Nedlands) [5.55]: This is a Bill to constitute a commission to take the place of the Workers' Homes Board and, for this purpose, it is proposed to repeal the Workers' Homes Act of 1911 and all the amending Acts up to 1945 that were designed to improve the original powers and authorities of the board created under that Act. The objects of this newly-designed body are set out in the Bill. First of all it is intended to improve existing housing conditions. This may be described as a pious opinion to which anyone might give utterance, and means nothing unless we point out in which way the commission is to proceed to achieve that object. The second object is the provision of adequate and suitable houses and housing accommodation for persons of limited means and for certain persons presumably who have not limited means but have unlimited means. I take no exception to that.

Hon. J. C. Willcock interjected.

Hon. N. KEENAN: If the hon. member will allow me to proceed, I shall be glad.

The Minister for Works: It might mean people of no means at all.

The Minister for Lands: No visible means?

Hon. N. KEENAN: That is possible, though not at all likely under the provisions of the Bill. The measure is also designed to assist other persons not adequately housed. The term "limited means," as will be seen on a perusal of other parts of the Bill, is somewhat generously interpreted. To this I take no objection personally for many reasons, but for this reason if for no other that the pound sterling and the pound Australian have certainly changed their purchasing power and are continuing to do so from day to day, unfortunately, in the wrong direction. Therefore, what may appear to be generous in comparison with the past may be of a very stingy character if regarded from the view point of the future.

The first outstanding feature of the interpretation clause is the care taken to preserve the State's interests. I do not suppose that statement will evoke much opposition. For instance, the capital value of a house or worker's dwelling, which of course becomes a matter of importance under other provisions of the Bill, is defined to be the capital value as fixed by the commission. Then the commission is directed how to proceed to fix that value. First of all it is to take the unimproved value of the land and then add the value of all improvements made on the land. Then it is to add a figure representing part of the cost of survey and subdivision of the estate of which the land forms part. To that is to be added the cost of all road making that is to be carried out in connection with the subdivision and then the value of the roads that have been constructed, and finally there is to be added to that lot the figure to be fixed by the commission representing an adequate proportion of the cost of administration. It cannot be denied for a moment that everything has been included that could possibly be included in arriving at this capital value. Possibly some items have been included that might reasonably have been left out. In these days when the supposedly bottomless public purse is so generously called upon, it is no matter of complaint to find that steps are taken to conserve, even if in a some-

what strict and severe manner, the interests of the State.

In the definition of holding, I notice is included the possibility that some applicant under this measure might be the legal possessor in his own right, by virtue of a lease or other instrument, of land which would be held under the trustees of the University endowment lands. I personally hope that will be so and that it is not a mere chimerical structure; because we know that those authorities in the past have unfortunately tied up an immense amount of land that would be of the greatest value from a residential and business point of view on some policy that they have pursued and which has not inclined them to let any portion of that land. So as regards that part of the Bill, it is dealing with something which may happen but which is only at the best a "perhaps".

I propose to say a few words on the peculiar construction which one finds in this statute—almost a bizarre construction—and which is common nowadays and, I am afraid, has been common in the past and which we are certainly more addicted to than ever. For instance, a house is defined in this Bill as including a tent which is designed for occupation, or any part of it. Apparently if a willy-willy took place and only a rag were left hanging on the ridge pole, it would still be a house within the meaning of this Bill. We should not encourage drafting which could include such impossible results. Then again, I turn to the definition of "worker". In 1911, this term was one of great importance, because in that year the idea was that the relief to be given by the statute was to be given to those who were possessed of only limited means. But in the course of years, a larger and larger sum was made available to the Workers' Homes Board for the erection of each individual house. I do not complain of that, nor does anyone of whom I know; and for two obvious reasons.

One reason is that to which I have already referred; namely, that the purchasing value of the pound has fallen considerably during those years; and the second—which is perhaps more important—is that there has been a wider distribution of wealth and a greater elevation of the economic status of the people, and therefore they have expected better homes. For that reason, this

House, especially in the time of the member for Geraldton as Premier, gave a generous measure of additional money to the Workers' Homes Board. A worker, for the purpose of this Bill, is defined in language that would compare in simplicity with the conversation between the walrus and the carpenter in "Alice in Wonderland," because "worker" is defined as one who works in any kind of way and that, of course, is tautology.

The Minister for Lands: Even a member of Parliament could come under that definition!

Hon. N. KEENAN: It is doubtful. But it might be allowed.

The Minister for Lands: The member for Nedlands might not, but the member for Leederville would.

Hon. N. KEENAN: It is always advisable to have a good opinion of oneself. At least one knows there is one person in the world who appreciates one.

The Minister for Lands: That is mutual.

Hon. N. KEENAN: There is a financial definition of "worker" which is very specific. It is that he must not draw a salary in excess of £500 a year, with the proviso that that salary may be increased by £25 for each child of his—or, if the worker is a lady, of hers—and also that overtime is not to be counted. Conceivably, therefore, a worker with a family of four, who works sufficient overtime in a year to earn £50, which would not be very excessive, would still remain within the definition of worker, although he might enjoy a salary of £650 a year. That, of course, is a generous figure, and again one to which I offer no objection; because I think we should always aim at the highest ideal we can possibly reach. I consider that if it is possible to contemplate that figure as a legitimate figure for a worker to receive, we should not readily raise an objection to it. But, merely as a person of an inquiring turn of mind, I wonder what would happen in the case of the children growing up beyond the age of 16. It is perfectly clear that somebody who was an applicant under this Bill and receiving the advantages of the Bill as a worker, would be a worker one day and not a worker the next day. Because a child had passed the age of 16 the amount of the man's qualifying richness would be correspondingly reduced and the position might be difficult to adjust. But

the view I take is that although that might be so, we need not worry about trivialities that cannot possibly occur for a number of years and which, even if they did occur, could readily be brushed aside.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: We would not abrogate a contract, anyway.

Hon. N. KEENAN: I think the hon. member is correct. Even if the man were no longer qualified, the contract would have been entered into when he was qualified. I expect that was the meaning the member for Geraldton intended to convey.

The next thing on which I wish to comment is the constitution of the commission. The powers of the commission are set out in the Bill here, there and everywhere. For instance we find some in Subclause 2 of Clause 8. Then again some are in portion of Clause 14, others in portion of Clause 19 and others again in Clauses 20 and 21. The powers are scattered all over the place. Obviously it is desirable that the powers of the commission should be grouped in one section if possible; and there does not appear to be any reason why it should not be possible. I also desire to draw attention to the fact that members of the commission are appointed entirely at the Governor's pleasure. In other words, at any moment the Minister can notify any member that he has ceased to be a member, and that is not desirable.

If this commission is to have any standing, it is obvious that the standing must be one that cannot be destroyed at the mere will of the Minister, especially as in some matters—to which I shall draw attention—the Minister can act only on the recommendation of the commission. It is difficult for a private member to move in matters of this kind, because I understand that under our Standing Orders no amendments would be in order that might lead to a greater burden on the public purse, and as, under the Bill, that burden can be swept out of existence at any time, by the Minister, it might be that it would not be held in order to move that the members of the commission should remain in office for a fixed number of years. But subject to being ruled out of order, I propose, when the Bill reaches the Committee stage, to suggest that that course should be taken.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: Some members do not receive any remuneration.

Hon. N. KEENAN: Civil Servants?

Hon. J. C. Willcock: Some of the members.

Hon. N. KEENAN: Yes. Again, amongst the powers given to the commission by this Bill is one enabling it to manufacture and carry on the manufacture of building materials, not for the purpose of this Bill, not for the purpose of supplying its own wants or the wants of its contractors, but just the same as any merchant generally. That is perfectly clear from the language which grants this power, for it is permitted—

to manufacture, produce, or purchase building materials, equipment, fittings or appliances, and to supply the same or any of them to any person or body of persons, corporate or unincorporate upon such terms and conditions as the Commission determines;

In other words, this body which, as the Leader of the Opposition rightly pointed out, would have its hands very full indeed in attempting to deal with the problem of supplying houses for the people who want them, is going to be invited almost, by being given this authority, to become a merchant and deal in building materials and their supply to the whole world, corporate or unincorporate, that happens to want them. I can see no possible use in including that power. The Leader of the Opposition referred to the clause under which the commission may, under certain circumstances—"may," not "will"—pay rates in respect of land held by it. That, as he pointed out, is not very liberal and is, to some extent, a departure from what was agreed upon under similar conditions in the past.

*Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.*

Hon. N. KEENAN: When the House rose I was drawing attention to the clause in the Bill which provides for the payment, under certain conditions, of rates to local authorities, in respect of land that has been acquired by the commission and which has not been used, but is held in its original state. That was commented on by the Leader of the Opposition, who pointed out that that provision might possibly be used to coerce local authorities into becoming what the Premier called "co-operative," though I hesitate to accept that as being the object or intent of this clause, because it would amount almost to blackmail. Another aspect of this clause, which was not pointed out by the Leader of the Opposi-



tion, was that under its provisions the value of the land is restricted to a valuation made at the time when it was acquired. Though the land may have been held by the commission for years it can only be rated on the valuation when the land was first taken up or acquired. That would mean that in certain districts that are rapidly advancing, and where settlement is going on, whilst the ordinary ratepayer would have to pay some considerable amount, the provision made in favour of payment by the commission would relate only to the valuation of the land at the time when it was first acquired. I leave any further observation on that clause to the member for Williams-Narrogin, who is conversant with all those matters and who, having made a special study of them, is therefore in a position to speak on them with much greater authority than I can.

The Bill also contains power for the commission compulsorily to take land with the approval of the Minister and, in the words of the clause giving that power, it is stated that the power is to be exercised in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Act. At first that would appear to be perfectly complete protection for those from whom the land is to be acquired. The Public Works Act gives power compulsorily to acquire land for a public work, and it would therefore appear that the provision could not be used for any purpose other than that, but another subclause gives the Minister power at any time to declare anything which is intended to be accomplished under the Bill to be a public work, and therefore the first clause to which I have referred might as well have said that the local authority or the commission can acquire land compulsorily at the discretion of the Minister, which would have had the same effect.

The Premier: Nothing of the sort!

Hon. N. KEENAN: I turn for a moment to the clause dealing with workers' dwellings. They are houses erected on land for the purpose and intended to be used by a worker, as defined in this Bill. In the Bill the cost of a house as erected is allowed to reach £1,250. Before the tea adjournment I pointed out that over a period of years the amount allowed to be spent on the erection of houses for workers had increased, from year to year, but this is a considerable increase on

anything allowed in the past. I do not offer objection to that, and I have no objection to the provision made over the years and particularly during the time when the member for Geraldton was Premier of this State, but it must be remembered that the land is not included. The land is let on perpetual lease and the worker who obtains one of those workers' dwellings has to enter into all the covenants prescribed in the Bill respecting the perpetual lease, and has strictly to observe those covenants or, again in the terms of the Bill, the lease becomes forfeit and he can be put out, and possession taken by the commission. Those conditions are not onerous, but are very strict, and among the strictest of them is the condition that compels the worker to comply with all the provisions or else take the risk of forfeiture. Usually, in civil life, there is relief given from forfeiture, and very properly so. Every precaution is taken in the Bill to prevent any possible loss by the State, and that has gone so far as to prescribe what might almost be called harsh conditions.

Before leaving the portion of the Bill dealing with workers' dwellings, I welcome the fact that in this measure we are to repeat the legislation, that was only accepted after a great number of years by this Parliament, to enable those who had obtained such dwellings and had paid off the whole cost of them, together with the last appraisalment of the land, to get the freehold. That is a very debatable matter, in respect of which I think the member for Geraldton accepted the view that is now put forward only after considerable hesitation, but he did accept it, and I can assure the House that it has been appreciated in very high degree by those who have had houses and have entered into possession of them under the legislation that brought into existence the Workers' Homes Board. There is an enormous difference in the feeling of security of the householder who knows he has nothing to pay and that, no matter what happens, if he can only get sufficient on which to keep alive, he is safe. I am personally aware of the wonderful feeling of satisfaction that that state of affairs brought about when, during the depression, some who were barely earning sufficient to enable them to live, because they had their houses, and roofs over their heads, were able to carry on, with a considerable amount of satisfaction, as compared with others. I am

glad to say that, in repealing all legislation affecting the Workers' Homes Board, we are re-enacting that particular provision.

Hon. J. C. Willecock: That was your baby.

Hon. N. KEENAN: Yes, and it grew up. There is another provision to which I desire to refer. It is obvious that there will sometimes be more than one applicant for a house or a block. Sometimes there will be two or more applicants for the same block of land, and in the Bill it is set out that priority shall be given to the one having the least financial resources. I suggest that a better and more equitable distinction would be that the priority should go to the one with the greatest number of dependants, the largest family, who is therefore in a position to require more urgently the advantages and protection which the Bill, if it becomes an Act, will give. When the Bill reaches the Committee stage I hope the Chamber will accept my view that priority should be given not on a question of money value but on the question of the responsibility of the individual applying for priority.

Hon. J. C. Willecock: That was the policy of the board, originally.

Hon. N. KEENAN: I am calling attention to the Bill, not to the board.

The Premier: It is still the policy.

Hon. N. KEENAN: The present section—if I can refer to it without committing a breach of the Standing Orders—gives priority to that applicant who is possessed of the least means, or of lesser means if two are to be compared. Where any worker applies for a special block of land, and for a house to be built on that block, if the application is successful the commission buys the special block and erects a house on it, and the applicant enters into possession under certain conditions. In the first place he has to comply strictly with the definition of "a worker" and in the second place, besides making a certain deposit with the commission to prove his bonafides, he has to enter into possession as soon as he receives notice to do so, or forfeit his deposit. He is not allowed to transfer his interest, except to a worker approved of by the commission, and in the event of his death his legal representative cannot dispose of the asset which in this case represents a house built by the commission on

this land, except to the commission itself. The commission is then empowered to take it over at a value.

When the Bill comes into Committee I will ask members to agree to put the word "market" in front of the word "value," because otherwise it might mean that the only estate that the deceased had would be lost, through a value being placed on the property, far below its real value, by the commission. In my view, the policy of restricting the transfer of land under these conditions to a worker is quite right, as is the requirement that in the case of a man who has died his executor must transfer the land to the commission. But the land should be paid for at its market value; I feel the House will agree with me in this respect. Clause 30 of the Bill sets out a number of conditions all of which must be complied with in order to avoid forfeiture and none of which can be criticised with the exception of one, and that is that the applicant, as he is called, or the lessee as he would be then, cannot vacate the house or land without the leave of the Minister—not of some official whom he could easily reach and ask for leave to go away for a week or a fortnight—but of the Minister.

Hon. J. C. Willecock: The Minister would delegate that power, surely.

Hon. N. KEENAN: And the Minister himself even cannot exercise that power under the terms of the Bill except on the recommendation of the commission. That is going beyond what is necessary. I quite agree with and support the view that we must require the applicant, or the lessee, to show he is genuine by remaining on the land and living there, and not leaving it for the purpose of trade or to make a home elsewhere. But, whilst that is so, we should not impose on him so onerous a condition as to make the lease liable to forfeiture if he leaves the land at any time without the consent of the Minister, who cannot grant him that consent except on the recommendation of the commission.

Hon. J. C. Willecock: The Minister would not exercise that power capriciously, would he?

Hon. N. KEENAN: It all depends. A great deal might depend upon his physical condition, upon whether he has indigestion, for one thing.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: We have responsible Ministers.

Hon. N. KEENAN: At any rate, we cannot gamble on these matters. The man who is in possession of the land should be entitled to certain absence without leave, and on other occasions, when leave is necessary, to obtain such leave from some other authority—I do not mean the local authority, but some authority connected with the commission.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: It could be abused.

Hon. N. KEENAN: Yes. I turn for a moment to the Commonwealth Housing Act, 1937-38, which is included in the Bill. Apparently the State will act as agent for the Commonwealth under that Act; and as such agent it will be entitled to spend a considerable sum of money in respect of each house to be erected. The amount authorised is £1,800 and it is stated that that sum is to represent 90 per cent. only of the value of the land and house. In other words, the applicant must be possessed of just on £2,000 in value.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: £2,000?

Hon. N. KEENAN: £1,800 and 10 per cent. of £1,800.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: But he would only have to find £200.

Hon. N. KEENAN: His liability would be in the nature of £2,000. It is clear that it is reaching a figure which no-one can say is anywhere near the figure which any worker could contemplate. There is no doubt that the amount could and would be availed of by people in more fortunate circumstances. Lastly, there is the weekly tenancy. This provision apparently was originally included in the Workers' Homes Act as a kind of stop-gap, something between the building of a home for a man and making provision to shelter him. So it is in this Bill. These weekly tenancies are dealt with in this wise—

The commission may use any available land dedicated to or purchased or acquired or set apart by the commission for the purpose of erecting dwelling-houses thereon, to be let out on a weekly tenancy basis to workers.

It is provided that the commission may purchase, acquire or contract for the lease, use or control of military huts. If my memory is correct, these were referred to by the Premier as having been already ac-

quired. As we know, the Disposals Commission has been at work and it is only a matter of time when none of the huts will be left. I have been told by those who have been endeavouring to acquire them that all the best are gone. As soon as the Disposals Commission announced a sale, returned soldiers and other people who wanted the huts bought them. For instance, a resident at Nedlands purchased one for £500. I am sure that it will not be possible to obtain these huts in the future, if the Workers' Homes Board has not got them now among its assets.

The Premier: I mentioned that because it was necessary to validate what we have done in this connection.

Hon. N. KEENAN: I accept the correction, which only shows that my recollection is not as good as it ought to be.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: You need not start worrying about your powers of recollection; they are pretty good.

Hon. N. KEENAN: The weekly tenant can become, if the commission so approves, a tenant under Part V of the Bill and enjoy all the privileges of the holder of a worker's dwelling, including the right, if he pays all his liabilities, to acquire the freehold. That is therefore a step in the direction of getting permanent homes for some of our people, but it bears on its face the stamp of being temporary. These huts are wooden and are only capable of being erected in certain areas. In Bunbury, which is a very advanced city, I suppose they would not be allowed to be erected.

Mr. Withers: We do not want them if we can get better.

Hon. N. KEENAN: And so, too, in very many other parts of the State where brick areas are compulsory, it would not be possible to erect these huts. As a temporary measure, there is no doubt they might mean a great measure of relief to those who are seeking houses at any price. Then there is general power given to the commission to lend money to householders to improve their homes. That is, I presume, the last way in which the commission would spend its money. If we are in the position we are in today, and which was depicted so clearly by the Leader of the Opposition, of starving for houses, it is not in the least likely that money will be lent to those who already have a house to

make it a little more convenient or to adorn it. Therefore, I do not suppose this power will be exercised for some considerable time.

I do not propose to say anything regarding the agreement of 1945 with the Commonwealth, except to make one observation which appears to me to be pertinent. It is this: That in the provisions of the Bill dealing with the agreement, power is given to the Treasurer to pay moneys into a fund at the Treasury which will be used for the purpose of carrying out that agreement; and the Treasurer has power, so far as this Bill goes, to pay what amounts he chooses into the fund. That would not be a very great danger if the matter had afterwards to be ratified; but in a subsequent provision of this Bill, all those payments are ratified, whatever they may be. Certainly, some person may wake up later on to the fact that a large sum in excess of our capacity to pay in that direction has been appropriated for that purpose. I do not think Parliament should agree to the provision.

Those are all the observations I intend to make on these particular clauses of the Bill, although there are other clauses that will be discussed later; but the first question that suggests itself to one's mind, after reading the whole of the Bill and considering all the clauses, is, why is it necessary to put an end to the Workers' Homes Board? As was well said by the Leader of the Opposition, all these functions could have been discharged by that board. All that would have been necessary would be to give the board some additional powers which this Bill gives the commission and the board could have exercised such powers as successfully as it has carried on in the past. I join with the hon. member, too, in saying that no very strenuous opposition can be offered to the change of name, although it would be satisfactory to know that the change was based on some real desire to do something which would lead to greater despatch.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: A contribution to the new order!

Hon. N. KEENAN: A change in men. Perhaps the hon. member might consider that. This whole subject is one of the gravest interest. There can be no question that the building problem is immense, and there can be no question but that our resources to meet it are unfortunately very meagre. It may well be that they should not

be as meagre as they are, that we should have been better prepared, but still we have to face facts as they are, and the facts as they are have been put by the Leader of the Opposition. It is hopeless to imagine this problem can be solved by this Bill. This Bill will not solve anything. It is true that the machinery created under it may be useful, but in itself it solves nothing. The real solution is to be obtained in two ways; first, by a greatly increased supply of building materials and building requirements, and secondly by getting labour to accept the obligations of the trade.

It is a fact, unfortunately, that many people are today disinclined to accept the obligation to work in one particular place, but prefer to work only in a place that suits their present wishes. For instance, I have been personally told by some that they will accept no employment other than driving a motor van. They have been driving Army trucks with more or less success, and think now that that is the occupation they should pursue. If that is to be encouraged—absolute selection by the individual not only of the trade he will follow but of the locality where he will work—I greatly fear the problem we are facing today will be with us at a long-distant date in the future. In the meantime, this Bill will no doubt be of some use and, subject to the remarks I have made, I propose to support the second reading.

MR. NORTH (Claremont) [7.57]: I support the second reading in common with other members. In view of the elaborate analysis made of the measure by other members, I do not desire to go over that ground, too, but would say generally that I think the remarks made have received the approval of the House and are constructive and inspiring. The only point in the Bill to which I wish to draw some attention in detail is the part dealing with community activities. I was fortunate recently in coming into contact with information about a settlement in Yorkshire. I attempted to bring this information before the Chamber on another phase, but was quickly called to order—quite correctly, of course—and I promised to bring it forward again on the right occasion. I never dreamt, until this Bill came before the House, that provision would have been made to enable the plan now operating

in Yorkshire, at Birkenhead, I think, to operate here.

Mr. Doney: Birkenhead in Yorkshire?

Mr. NORTH: I mean Lancashire.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: It is just across the border.

Mr. NORTH: It is not a matter of the place, but of the plan. This part of the measure dealing with community activities and hostels is something quite new. Thousands of homes have been constructed since and even during the war under new construction schemes but, so far as I am aware, no attempt has been made to introduce new designs of streets or layouts, or any new form of what might be called new ways of living. So far there has been simply a repetition of straight streets and houses in line. In Birkenhead, however, what is called the Reilly Plan has been put into force. Mr. Reilly has an ambition to make the life of the average homedweller more effective, give him a better standard of living, more freedom and get more value for his money. If it is true that the plan is a success—and it has been operating for three or four years—we would, in supporting the measure, be interested to know that we were supporting one which would enable such a scheme, if so desired in any part of the metropolitan area or in any country town, to be put into force.

One of the features of the Reilly Plan is that two-thirds of the houses of each unit of the plan—each unit consists of some hundreds of houses—are built around a green so that the individual owner or tenant faces a green outlook and not the ordinary street outlook. That has the great advantage that the children do not have their lives endangered by cars passing along the street. It also has the advantage of enabling the children to go to school without any fear of being run over. Living is made cheaper to the average buyer or tenant by reason of the fact that many homes do not include kitchens which are replaced by a central kitchen run by a chef giving the best of food and, it is claimed, at a lesser cost to the housewife. If she is out at work or comes home late at night she gets her food cheaper from the central kitchen than if she cooked it herself.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: How do the children get on?

Mr. NORTH: There is a nursery to which all the children are taken or pushed. It is run by a paid nurse.

Mr. Mann: What happens if the cook goes on strike?

Mr. NORTH: That comes in the last chapter. I feel that the measure should, if it does not do so already, cover the necessary framework to permit of these things. I believe that the Premier would not object to adding a few words here and there so as to allow these points to be covered. Should the local authority have a little land to spare, and should Mr. Davidson and the Town Planning Board be attracted or invited there, they might lap up this scheme with avidity. I shall deal in detail with the last portion of the plan which covers the question of costs. If anyone suggests a plan to give a better way of living the usual reply is that it will cost too much. This is what is claimed—

What of the cost of the Reilly Plan? The answer is that it costs very considerably less than any orthodox scheme that has seen the light of day so far. There is a 50 per cent. saving on roads. The communal garage saves the greater part of the cost of some hundreds of individual garages. The kitchenless houses, for families who do not wish to do their own cooking are cheaper to build than ordinary houses; district heating is far less expensive than the isolationist arrangement of domestic boilers, open grates and other fuel-wasting apparatus.

There is a system for the disposal of refuse by which the householder takes his bucket of rubbish to the end of the plot and throws it into some kind of receptacle and it is said to be sucked away underground. That sounds a bit like Bernard Shaw or H. G. Wells.

The Premier: It sounds more like Jules Verne.

Mr. NORTH: This plan has been in force for three or four years, and that is why I urge we should, through our Agent General, or our new Agent General who is to go to London shortly, arrange to have the full details of the scheme and its costs sent to Western Australia for perusal by the Premier and members, and any local authorities that might be interested. In regard to the question of costs, the article on this plan states—

From the individual's point of view the Reilly Plan represents an immeasurably higher standard of living than is possible under the

isolationist system, at no extra cost. This point has been challenged in connection with the catering proposals, which are a crucial feature of the Reilly Plan.

Well, here are some facts. First, the meals service saves a considerable amount of fuel and, at the housewife's option, the rent of a kitchen and the capital invested in its equipment. In addition, the meals service and the nursery/nursery school between them enable the housewife to add to the family income. Second, under proper management and at prices current at the time of writing, the central kitchen can supply three good meals per day at only 8s. 9d. per head per week, afternoon tea being prepared on the electric cooker which is fitted even in kitchenless houses and flats. Third, and finally, the central kitchen does not waste any part of the foodstuffs which enter it, and is able to keep pigs and poultry for the benefit of the community.

As to the 24-hour nursery (the nursery school is provided by the local authority) all expenditure is covered by fees. These fees are very moderate, for two reasons—first because meals are paid for as stated above, and second, because part of the staff is always composed of marriageable girls and young married women who, in contrast with their sisters of the isolationist world, want to learn something about children before they have them. The equipment of the hobbies section, and all other educational facilities of the community centre, are supported jointly by the residents and the education authorities, while purely social organisations are run on ordinary lines.

I have said enough to show that here is a ready-made plan—and there are many others in existence today—that could be fitted into the Bill if there are any local authorities with sufficient courage and initiative to undertake it. It includes features which would save money and give better service. There is a certain hint of socialism about the idea; even a tinge of the communal system in it. It has, however, already been operated in Birkenhead. It is purely voluntary and those who are associated with the plan are under no compulsion. Whether our local authorities would have the power to adopt such a scheme is open to question, but the Workers' Homes Board, under its new name, would be able to commence schemes such as this, under the new Bill, so it seems to me that this gives us a chance to extend our ideas on living. I do not for one moment say that I favour this kind of thing.

I shudder at the whole idea of having my life run for me, and living in a schoolroom or barrackroom atmosphere. At the same time the tenor of the age is to try to get

more for our money than we do. In whichever way we turn there seems to be world unrest caused by the desire to get more value for money. All the orthodox schemes seem to have broken down. Most of the crackpot schemes and new ideas of achieving a better way of living have been turned down by the experts, but here is one, containing no unorthodox methods which will, perhaps, achieve a better way of living merely by bringing about a certain amount of joining-up and sharing. The scheme proposes that those who go in for it shall share their kitchens, their nurseries and various other things.

The Minister for Lands: What are the other things?

Mr. NORTH: There are many. I urge the Premier, in thinking of his measure, and hoping for its success in the other Chamber as well as here, to endeavour to obtain the full details of this plan and how it has operated in Birkenhead with a view to having it brought into force in this State if some local authority so desires. I support the general measure. I do not know how far the local authorities have been consulted about the Bill, but I cannot see any objection to that part of the measure affecting local authorities. Without further information from my district I have much pleasure in supporting the second reading.

**MR. McDONALD** (West Perth) [8.13]: This Bill largely re-enacts the provisions of the Workers' Homes Act which has been legislation in this State for many years and has operated successfully, and everyone would wish to see it continued and extended. In addition, the Bill contains a number of new and important features. This legislation obviously is of importance and deals with a basic question, namely, that of one of the prime necessities of life. Moreover, it deals with a problem which, at present, is of great social importance. That problem is one which we cannot help feeling could have been largely alleviated if there had been better forethought shown by the administrations in power. It is with something like dismay that the general public read, less than two months ago, a statement from Canberra to the effect that the Commonwealth and State Governments had decided on a vigorous campaign to overcome the housing shortage and extend employment in the building industry.

It seems incredible that at this late stage a campaign is being initiated—though it is one we would support—to overcome the housing shortage and expand the personnel required to meet the necessary demands in the way of home-building. This shortage was in evidence many years ago. At that time it was claimed, and I believe with complete justification, that much could have been done to prepare materials and place the country in readiness to erect homes if the greatly swollen numbers in the Defence Force had not been maintained. Had the advice given at the time by competent authorities been heeded that men in various defence units in Australia, with no prospect of seeing service and deteriorating through idleness and weariness, should be withdrawn to their civilian occupations, the position of housing would not have reached the acute stage it has today, and the prospect of overcoming the shortage would have been much nearer fulfilment. That opportunity has gone and the only lesson we can take to ourselves is to pay more realistic attention to the conditions to ensure that we adopt adequate measures in future.

With the change of name proposed in the Bill, I am in agreement. The new housing authority is going to have very much wider powers than the Workers' Homes Board ever had. In view of those wider powers, the limited name signified by the Workers' Homes Board would not be commensurate with the activities the new organisation will be required to undertake. Some legislation is necessary because we in this country are now entering on new principles in relation to housing and many activities for the social betterment of the people at large.

The first new principle is the association of the Commonwealth with the responsibility for housing, for slum clearance and for community betterment. This is a very important departure from anything we have known in the past. It is not merely an association with the State in the sense of organisation; it is an acceptance by the Commonwealth of financial responsibility for the obligations which those things entail. This new departure has become necessary, in fact inevitable, under present conditions, because the financial power has passed from the control of State Parliaments into the hands of the Commonwealth Parliament and Government. So we face, financially and constitutionally, an entirely new state of affairs

with regard to housing and the activities associated with it.

The second principle is that the community has decided to accept a wider responsibility in the case of those persons on the lower incomes who are not able to meet what is higher than an economic rent. So we have it in our legislation that it shall be the responsibility of the community to enable people on the lower incomes to occupy dwellings at a rental proportionate to their income. If for no other reasons than these, some more extended type of legislation is necessary to meet the changed conditions and ensure the co-operation between the Commonwealth and the State that is to be a feature of dwelling-construction and associated work for future years. Further, there is a crisis in the matter of homes. That crisis will not be resolved for years. We shall be fortunate if we overcome the difficulty reasonably well inside the next 10 years. It is the duty of the community to endeavour to set up adequate agencies to meet the factor that is causing so much social distress in so many directions. I hope this measure will do something towards meeting the difficulty that now exists.

This Bill, although comprehensive, may become very little more than a facade. We can do a certain amount by legislation of this description; we can create machinery; but if the objects of the measure are to be attained, much more must be done. There is something infinitely more important in the solution of our problem and the raising of our housing and other standards and that is the attitude of the people at large. In tonight's Press, we read of widespread industrial stoppages throughout the Commonwealth with the exception, fortunately, of Western Australia. I listened to the broadcast at 7 o'clock tonight and learnt that the ironworkers of Victoria had decided to continue their ban on overtime. If this legislation is to achieve its objects to any degree at all, I suggest to the Premier, and through him to the Government of Australia, that it will be done only through a better appreciation by all the people of the duties that devolve upon each individual to contribute to the general wellbeing of the whole nation.

There is, without exaggeration, a growing feeling of pessimism as to the future

that will not assist the recovery of this country, and there is a growing feeling of helplessness in starting new enterprises that will militate against the standard we all hope to achieve. One of the first duties of the housing commission—if this will lie inside its compass, as I hope it will—and of the Government, is to educate the people at large in the elementary and basic facts of housing, production and other standards for the benefit of the community generally. If, as in Victoria, and as referred to by the Leader of the Opposition and much featured in the Press of that State, there is to be a deliberate go-slow policy in the building trades and there is to be a frequent cessation of production, if no effort is to be made to meet the emergency by producing as much as possible, then the continuance of the present period of misery and distress for many people will be prolonged for many years more than is necessary.

In my view, that is the first requirement of any housing measure. There should be a realisation that, only through the individual responsibility of each person in the community shall we achieve the possibility of overcoming the difficulties that exist in Australia, including our own State. On the 1st January of last year, we in Australia were short of 300,000 houses and, to overcome that shortage, we need to build 700,000 houses in Australia in the next 10 years. That represents an average programme of 70,000 a year. In the statement made in Canberra in August about a campaign being commenced to overcome the housing shortage, it was stated as a new discovery that one of the difficulties was the lack of efficient personnel. The Leader of the Opposition referred to the absence of measures being taken to increase the number of trained personnel in the building trades. A lad who had served in the war came to see me a few days ago. He had been engaged in the building trade and was entitled to rehabilitation through the Technical School. He had not served a full apprenticeship. He told me that, supported by a benevolent Government, he had been sitting at his home in one of the suburbs doing nothing for months waiting for a vacancy in the training scheme. From what he told me, he did not see any possibility of resuming his trade for a further series of months. He is a man of 30.

Mr. Leslie: What is his trade?

Mr. McDONALD: Painter. He could not enter the trade because he had not served an apprenticeship in the ordinary way and had not had an opportunity to undergo training as a returned soldier. So his services are lying completely unutilised. In England the problem is very much more serious than it is here. The problem here should be overcome almost without difficulty as compared with the problem in England. There, however, the authorities are tackling the problem with some degree of realism. Boys of 15, 16 and 17 are allowed to enter the building trades without any apprenticeship. I do not wish to break down standards; we all desire to see the best standards preserved in any trade and the best opportunities made available for men to become skilled, but when there is a building shortage and people are sleeping on verandahs and in garages, something must be done, and the authorities in England are doing it. These boys in their teens work in the building trades, and have been certified to be remarkably efficient in various branches of the work. Theirs is proving a most important contribution to the total labour force available for reconstruction in Britain. After they have served under the supervision of skilled men for a period of two or three years, they become entitled to receive a certificate that they are artisans and are eligible to follow the trade in the ordinary way.

I hope that one of the first things the new organisation will do, as has been suggested by Mr. Wallwork, is to see that the fullest contribution is made to our labour forces and that vested interests and red tape are not going to limit those labour forces that are needed to give the workers a roof over their head. When other conditions improve there may be reasons why we should return to normal conditions regarding trade arrangements, but in the meantime it is hoped that red tape and conservatism are not going to keep a not inconsiderable section of the people in a state of extreme distress for want of a home for many years. I am not going to enlarge on the social consequences which are existing, to my knowledge, by reason of the impossibility of people getting a home. If any inquiries are made, they will show that in the case of young people who are not married and in



the case of young people who are married, as well as in the case of those who are married and have families, there are not merely physical distresses associated with the lack of homes but social problems of a far-reaching nature which the absence of homes is creating. So it is a matter not of trying to solve the position by old methods which obtained in peacetime and were applicable to peace conditions but of using new methods to meet the situation existing.

Now I want to turn more particularly to some of the details of the Bill. In the first place I am concerned somewhat about its general principles. It seems to me to tend to concentrate in one small body an immense amount of power. I do not know how far local authorities have been consulted in connection with the Bill but I should have been much happier if I had seen in the measure more decentralisation of power in the hands of local authorities. The only decentralisation I can see is the very limited power by which local authorities or other persons may assume the control and management of hostels and one or two things like that. In the report of the Commonwealth Housing Commission, to which the Premier referred, one of the chief recommendations was that the State housing authority should delegate powers, and I can well appreciate that recommendation. I assume that the intention was that there should be decentralisation of power and that the experience and local patriotism of the district authorities should be utilised to a substantial extent in carrying out housing, community and other schemes.

In the report of the Commonwealth Royal Commission it was specifically emphasised that the widest possible public interest and advice should be secured by the State housing authority. The report recommends that the housing activity should be on the basis of what is referred to as the organism; that is to say, it should be brought into direct and close relationship with the life of the whole community and with all worthwhile institutions operating in the community. With that in view, one of the specific recommendations was that there should be in every State a community facilities committee which would be associated with the State housing authority and on which would be represented local authorities, educational organisations, physical fitness groups, and

all kinds of bodies which are working in the general community and public interest.

These bodies would represent the contact between the State housing authority and the general public. But I see no provision in this legislation for any such committee being set up as a feature or part of the housing organisation proposed by this Bill. It seems to me of the utmost importance that there should be brought into association with the housing authority all elements in the community and State which may make a contribution to the solution of this particular problem; and, if there is a weakness in this Bill, it is that it is a centralising Bill; that it is taking more and more power out of the hands of the local authorities, of the Town Planning Board and of the community generally and placing it in the hands of five men and the permanent officials who will be associated with them in the direction of these enterprises.

I hope that through the power which is vested by this Bill in the housing commission to make investigations, there will be some original thinking done by the commission. Very many other countries have their distinctive architecture. In our State we appear largely to have followed slavishly the tradition we have taken, or which our ancestors took, from Great Britain. I think it is time an investigation was made into a distinctive type of architecture suitable to our climatic conditions. If that were done it might be possible to evolve a type of house here which would be much cheaper to erect than anything contemplated by the present measure. The Leader of the Opposition has referred to the progressive worsening of the position against the worker in relation to home buying. His position was bad enough, in all conscience, a few years ago; but now, in relation to home purchase, his difficulties are greater than ever. I can see no reason why some attention should not be given to building a type of house here with a life of from 30 to 40 years—quite long enough for the average family to want in one generation; and doing so with materials that would be substantially cheaper but at the same time would provide a house with a sufficiently good appearance and conforming to all the standards we wish to see associated with our housing.

In this State the figures which we saw in the 1933 census regarding the types of buildings are an indication that a large section of our people, perhaps under compulsion—and of course by no means in any state of great comfort—had found it possible to live in types of dwellings which would be very economical indeed. I am not going so far as to suggest we should extend or approve those types of buildings; but our housing conditions, as shown by the 1933 census, are a clear indication that, climatically, people can live in much less substantial houses than those that are constructed of brick or stone. In 1933 in Western Australia, there were roughly 97,000 occupied private houses. Of those, 38,000 were constructed of wood, which was the major type of construction in this State at that period, and no doubt is today. Of wood, 38,000 houses were constructed—I am giving the quantity in round figures—31,000 were constructed of brick, 4,000 of stone, 11,000 of iron, and over 6,000 of calico, canvas or hessian.

Houses constructed of calico, canvas or hessian are not what we want to see under any housing scheme. But the figures do suggest that climatically something less substantial than brick or stone is able to afford, and has been affording, shelter to a great many people. Out of 97,000 houses, 6,000 were constructed of those flimsy materials. I do not want to be misunderstood. Houses of that type are a reflection on the housing position of any community, except so far as they are merely temporary shelters in the outback. But there is room for some original thinking by those designing our houses to determine whether a different type of house—less substantial, less costly, but still of a good standard—might not be achieved in the light of the climatic conditions that prevail on our Goldfields, in our wheat areas, and in many other parts of the State.

Like the member for Nedlands, I hope that the policy of the commission will be to encourage the ownership of homes. I regard few things as having greater social consequences for the better than the ownership of the home in which one lives and I am glad to say it has been the ambition of the Australian people to achieve that. According to the 1933 census of 713,000 urban private dwellings in Australia, no fewer than 334,000, or nearly half, were either owned

by or in course of purchase by the people by whom they were occupied.

The Minister for Lands: That is something that will prevent the growth of communism, too.

Mr. McDONALD: It will do something more than that. It will give people the sense that they are included in the corporate life of the community in a way that they would not feel they were included if they had not the satisfaction of having security in the home they occupied.

Hon. J. C. Willecock: A stake in the country.

Mr. McDONALD: Yes, a stake which in this country everybody is entitled to have. There are some suggestions that I hope the Committee will consider when the Bill reaches that stage. In the first place, I wish to see the commission subject to the ordinary liabilities of any other organisation or person; that is to say, that it can be sued either for contracts or for wrongs, in the same way as can any ordinary individual. This new commission will, in one sense, be a trading organisation, in that it will be able to build houses and sell them. In the Committee stage I propose to insert into the Bill the same provision as is contained in the State Trading Act, 1917, Section 6, under which the housing commission will share with anybody else the responsibilities involved in the transactions that it undertakes. I propose to suggest the elimination of that part of the Bill which authorises the commission to undertake the manufacture of articles of all kinds related to the building trade.

Hon. J. C. Willecock: Would you include joinery?

Mr. McDONALD: The power is quite general. The commission is to manufacture anything at all, virtually, but presumably it would be limited to things associated with the building trade or with the various powers contained in the legislation.

Mr. Needham: What about bricks? What is the difference?

Mr. McDONALD: There is a big difference. We already have a State trading concern which manufactures bricks, and another which manufactures, or supplies and manufactures, timber, and also such items as window-frames, doors and other articles of joinery. If we are to have another State trading concern to manufacture bath-tubs,

porcelain ware and things of that kind, that could be brought up under a different Bill and could be included under the terms of the State Trading Concerns Act.

Mr. Needham: The commission would be useless without that power.

Mr. McDONALD: The commission might undertake all kinds of responsibilities, in the installation of plant, which might possibly make a contribution for some years, but then, when the position became more normal, it would have either to go out of existence or be in competition with other people in the same class of trade. If those engaged, both here and in other States, in supplying materials to the building trade, are unable to get labour or basic ingredients, there seems little reason why the State Housing Commission should enter into a field of production or manufacture to which it can make no additional contribution. Moreover, I think that if this part of the Bill were eliminated and the housing commission confined itself to its proper functions, it would be regarded with much more confidence by the building trade and the community generally than would be the case if it sought to enter into fields not at all closely associated, in my mind, with its main function. As I have said, I am reluctant to invite people to start new enterprises and risk their capital in this State while holding out legislative notice that as soon as we can we will try to run them off the road in the commercial or industrial sense. I think we would be ill-advised to allow this Bill to pass beyond its true function.

Powers are included for the compulsory acquisition of land by the State housing commission. I think some such power is essential. When the commission has to appropriate land against the will of the owner, it is to do so under the powers contained in the Public Works Act. That Act is really a machinery Act which merely provides for a tribunal which will assess fair compensation for the dispossessed owner. In the past, when it has been necessary compulsorily to acquire land, it has been for public works of a kind that are not very numerous and that would involve only a small fraction of the land privately owned in the community. When it comes to compulsory acquisition for the purposes of housing schemes, community centres, slum clearance and so on, practically all the land in any urban area

in the State becomes liable to a demand by the commission that it should be compulsorily acquired for the purposes of the commission. I agree with all that, but suggest that there should be a right of appeal by the owner, under which he may be able to show cause to some independent authority, such as the magistrate of the local court, where he considers he would be oppressively dealt with by the acquisition or that it would occasion him undue hardship, the magistrate being entitled, at the same time, to take into consideration all proper matters of community and public interest.

I am also going to suggest that the commission, instead of being liable only to actions taken against it within six months, should stand up to the ordinary position of any worker or other person, and be liable to make good damage done to anybody by action taken within the ordinary period prescribed by law. We support the Bill, which re-enacts well-tried and valuable legislation. There are the factors I have mentioned and certain other details, to which I will refer in Committee, that I think require further consideration. I have my doubts on the main principle, and think we are going rather too far in centralisation, preserving too little of the contribution that could be made to this subject by local authorities. It might possibly be within our compass to suggest something to safeguard that position. I have the greatest reluctance to encroachment by the Government on local enterprise and local responsibility as expressed through the local authority. I hope to see the commission raised to a more independent position, and I shall have something to say on its composition. I would like to see it in a position that might be called one of self-respect, instead of being entirely under the direction of the Minister.

A tendency has been growing in recent legislation to call such bodies boards or commissions, whereas in reality they are merely a facade behind which the Minister acts. I can understand the feeling of the Minister, that his discretion is superior to that of other people, and in some cases his control or last word is very desirable, but I think we should either say in our legislation, "This Act is under the control of the Minister and will be administered by him," and have no commission—which I think would be more candid and nearer the mark—or else, if we set up a commission,

give it some power and responsibility, and a chance to show what it is made of. If it fails, it can be dealt with, but at all events it would be a commission and not merely a name. In this Bill, the commission is to be too nearly a shadow to be entitled to be called a commission. It might just as well be a departmental committee set up to advise the Minister, without being called a commission at all. I hope the Minister and the Committee will see the desirability of giving this body some substance and backbone, to a greater extent than is provided under the Bill.

**MR. LESLIE** (Mt. Marshall) [8.56]: There is one matter that I desire to bring to the attention of the Premier before the Bill reaches the Committee stage, in order that he might give it some consideration. At present, the Workers' Homes Board acts as the agent of the War Service Homes Commission, and the proposed State Housing Commission will also act as agent for the War Service Homes Commission. The Premier might as well know—probably he does know, because most others do—that it is the wish of the returned soldiers' organisations to have a separate branch of the War Service Homes Commission established in this State. Representations have been made to the Commonwealth Government, with that in view, but it remains to be seen whether they have been successful. We feel that we shall have accomplished part of our objective if we can obtain an alteration to the constitution of this commission. I would like to point out to the Premier and to the House that 4,700 applications were lodged for homes under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement up to the end of August, and 1,705 applications were lodged for war service homes, which was equivalent to 35 per cent. of the total applications for war service homes.

Of the number of homes completed up to the end of August, 371 were completed under the Commonwealth-State Housing Scheme, but only 19, or .05 per cent. of the total number, were completed under the War Service Homes Scheme. That was out of all proportion. I know that in reply it can be said that a considerable number of ex-Servicemen have been provided for under those 371 Commonwealth-State homes. In fact, there have been about 240 or 250.

About 66 per cent. of them have gone to ex-Servicemen, but they are not satisfied. They have taken those places only as a temporary measure, and would prefer their own homes. Under the War Service Homes scheme they have a choice of design and where the home shall be built, whereas under the Commonwealth-State Housing Scheme they have to accept whatever is offered to them. Although it is suggested that eventually these Commonwealth-State homes will be available for purchase by the present tenants, there is no guarantee of that happening. These men do not wish to purchase the homes in which they are living and therefore they regard the rent they are paying as so much money poured down the drain.

The State Housing Commission is to consist of five members, three of whom shall be public servants, one a representative of the trade unions in the building trades, and the other a registered or qualified builder. It seems only reasonable to me and to the ex-Servicemen's associations that, as the commission is to be the agent for the War Service Homes Commission, the ex-Servicemen's organisations should have a direct representative on the board. The Government has been good enough to establish a good liaison between the R.S.L. and the Workers' Homes Board. We are satisfied with that. At the same time we are not content with the proposed set-up of the commission. I do not know whether the Premier has been waited on as yet by representatives of the ex-Servicemen's organisations, but I have been asked to mention the matter before the Bill reaches the Committee stage so that the Premier may give consideration to the request. If the ex-Servicemen had direct representation on the commission, they feel that they could give an adequate explanation of what is happening. I hope the Premier will give sympathetic consideration to the request and have the requisite alteration made to the constitution of the commission.

Mention has been made of the provisions stipulating that the commission may pay rates to local authorities. One aspect was mentioned by the member for Nedlands, but there is another phase to which attention should be directed. Where the land has not previously been alienated but is still Crown land, the local authority is receiving no rates. If that type of land is transferred

to the housing commission, the local authority will lose nothing. The clause, however, deals with land subdivided and rateable, that is, land which was previously privately-owned and on which rates were paid. If this land is acquired, the commission may or may not pay rates. It would pay rates only after it had held the land for two years and had not developed it. Then, as the member for Nedlands pointed out, the commission would be limited to paying the amount of rates that ruled before it took possession of the land. This would constitute a very serious injustice to local authorities. The clause can apply only to land already rateable.

The Premier: Surely this is a very generous approach to it!

Mr. LESLIE: As to that, I have serious doubt. A local authority may already have spent money, perhaps under a loan commitment, for roads, footpaths and improvements in a locality in which there are four or five privately-owned blocks of land. The commission decides to acquire those blocks and does not pay rates. It may pay rates, but it may decide not to. The local authority has committed itself to the improvements and will immediately lose the rates it had previously collected.

The Premier: Do not you realise that Crown land as such would not be liable? This is a very generous approach to the matter.

Mr. LESLIE: It would be more generous if the limitation were deleted and the commission paid the rates. This scheme is in the nature of a trading concern and the commission should abide by the ordinary terms and conditions.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: Not a trading concern when people can get homes at half the rental cost.

Mr. LESLIE: But the Commonwealth will compensate the State for the difference.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: No.

Mr. LESLIE: Admittedly the State would have to pay a proportion.

Hon. J. C. Willcock: Two-fifths.

Mr. LESLIE: Eventually, I presume, these homes will be bought by the tenants.

The Premier: If you do not like the provision in the Bill, we can easily delete it.

Mr. LESLIE: I have no wish to see it deleted; I should like the Premier to be

more generous. I think it will be conceded that the local authority should not lose revenue that it has previously collected from such land.

The Premier: The local authorities have been consulted on this point.

Mr. LESLIE: What I have stated is the information supplied by two local authorities in my electorate. One of them has a string of railway cottages in its townsite from which it does not receive a "skerrick" of revenue, but it does get many complaints about services not made available to those cottages. Another set of cottages, because of their situation, have been served with roads and footpaths, but no revenue is received from them. This is unfortunate for the ratepayers who have to find sufficient money to provide services for people who are paying nothing at all.

I should like to know whether the debentures which the commission will be empowered to issue will be subject to approval by the Loan Council, or whether the commission will have a free leg to go ahead. If the raising of money in this way is not subject to approval by the Loan Council, I cannot understand what has prevented our going ahead with the housing scheme before this. Of course, if the raising of money in this way is subject to approval by the Loan Council, one can the better understand the limitations.

The Premier: We got this power only a year or two ago.

Mr. LESLIE: It is a fine power to have, because now we can proceed with the housing scheme without any limitation whatever. I am pleased to see the provision in the Bill for hostels, but I am not at all happy about the proposed community centres. We have heard a lot of talk about community centres, but there is only one way by which their value can be assessed and that is by a practical trial. One local authority in my area wisely decided before committing itself to expense to give the people an opportunity to prove that such a centre was justified. It provided a local community centre at very small cost and without any long-term obligation, but that centre went out of existence inside of 12 months. It was simply not wanted; it was of no use. Such a centre might be satisfactory in an industrial area where people are living under slum conditions, such as in England, where there are

no backyards or where people are living in flats.

I should imagine that a community centre would be most needed in districts like West Perth, or in the middle of St. George's-terrace or in parts of East Perth, where people are living under conditions most unhygienic. With all the land we have available in the State, why should it be necessary to build in the air instead of along the ground? I do not know. There are places where a community centre is required; for instance, where people are living in large blocks of flats with rooms not much larger than dog kennels. But community centres provided by Government finance will be no more than a burden on the people as a whole. Any such public asset or public facility is only of value if it has cost something to the people using it.

I am quite willing that any place should put up a community centre where it is justified, but I believe it should be established by a local community effort. The people should do the work and strive for themselves, and not go to the Government, as they have done in the past, asking for this or that. Government property is nobody's property. No-one will deny that fact. Look at the way in which people take away towels and drinking glasses from the railways; they believe they are entitled to do so, in just the same way as some people think they are entitled to cut their names or initials on park benches. School hostels are necessary. A local governing authority in my district approached the Government for assistance to secure a hostel, but without success. The local governing authority then took the matter into its own hands and today it has a school hostel which is accommodating 30 children and is supervised by a local committee. That is at Koorda and the hostel is an outstanding success.

I wish to say a few words about the training scheme we have heard so much of. Incidentally, I do not know whether I need remind members of this fact, but as far back as 10 months ago the country was warned that the position we have reached today was going to arrive. We are faced with a shortage of labour, particularly in the building trade. Unfortunately, 10 months ago we could get no-one to see the position from a long-range point of view.

I then said that the policy enunciated was one which seemed to indicate that everyone believed a depression to be inevitable, and that we must guard against it by being very careful not to over-expand. The way in which we were to overcome the difficulty was to make certain that nobody would be in a better position than he was at that time or before the war. The idea was, it seems to me, that a man would starve far more comfortably if he were out of work and entitled to only the basic wage than he would if he were out of work and entitled to earn a tradesman's wage. Why that should be so is more than I know.

In my opinion, if a worker is skilled he has a much better chance to take advantage of an opportunity when it arises. I am not condemning any one section of the community. Everyone is concerned in this position. On the one side we have vested interests; on the other side we have entrenched interests. Both have joined together in order to protect themselves and keep out other people that definitely are entitled to come in. Because of the limitations that have been imposed on the training scheme today, thousands of people are suffering hardship, as they cannot obtain houses. The Workers' Homes Board has between 12,000 and 14,000 applications on hand for houses and applications are rolling in at the rate of 800 a month. We are building homes at the rate of 35 or 40 a month and on that basis it will take 100 years before we can make up the present leeway. Mr. Wallwork has put the position as clearly as possible. He speaks of the serious bottle-neck that has arisen.

As a matter of fact, the position was put recently to a meeting of those interested in the building trade, both employers and employees, but the meeting reached no decision about the intake or increase of trainees in the skilled trades. I suggest to the Government—and I do so without in any way committing myself to the adoption of the suggestion as a general principle—that we have reached the stage where the housing commission will have to adopt the day-labour principle, employing labour not on contract but on wages. I do not want to enter into a discussion of contract versus wages conditions, nor do I want it to be accepted that because I want these wages conditions to

apply in this connection that that is my policy generally; but I believe we have reached the stage when day labour presents a practical solution of the housing problem.

The Premier: You know we are doing that.

Mr. LESLIE: I know that it has been done on a small scale and that it is successful; but it applies only to bricklayers at present.

The Minister for Lands: We have a lot of bricklayers, but no bricks to lay.

Mr. LESLIE: Yes, we have.

The Minister for Lands: Where are they?

Mr. LESLIE: I think the Premier can tell the Minister for Lands.

The Minister for Lands: The Premier will not tell me.

Mr. Triat: He has them planted.

Mr. LESLIE: I know the bricks are available. There are two reports stating that the brick position is satisfactory, although not fully satisfactory. We have bricks to lay.

The Premier: We are building houses on day labour.

Mr. LESLIE: I am very pleased indeed to hear the Premier say so. I think, however, that that practice ought to be extended by taking in trainees or apprentices—call them by any name.

The Premier: We are doing that, too.

Mr. LESLIE: In a very limited way. Unfortunately, the Government has not a free hand. The Leader of the Opposition spoke earlier in the evening about the planning in the early stages, but the Government sold its right to govern the country.

The Minister for Lands: Good on you!

Mr. LESLIE: The Government did so. Who is it today that dictates the industrial policy of the country? The employer and the employee! We have had talk about absorptive capacity. I have been going into that matter and find that five other countries in the world have also been trying to get at the bottom of this absorptive capacity myth. The Commonwealth Government sent notices to the legations in various countries asking the officers to collect as much information as they could about this absorptive capacity. The officials did so, but could not obtain any information of

value, or, indeed, any information at all. After having made some investigation into the matter myself, I would say that before anyone could arrive at the absorptive capacity of the building industry, or any other industry, one would first have to ascertain the industrial potential of the country. What is the industrial potential of Australia?

The Minister for Lands: You tell us.

Mr. LESLIE: I want someone to tell me, and then I will pass the information on. If any man in Australia can answer the question, I would say that he deserves to have an asylum of his own, because no man can answer the question. Thousands will be denied the opportunity to better themselves, and how are we to get over the difficulty? As an alternative, we shall have to import labour, and the Australian worker will be a mere hod-carrier, a swinger of the axe and a player of the banjo.

The Minister for Lands: I like the player of the banjo!

Mr. LESLIE: I offer to the Government as a solution the extension of the scheme that applies today whereby trainee bricklayers are put out on the job at an earlier stage than under the ordinary scheme. A way could be found for other sections of the building trade to be included in that plan and a bigger attempt could be made to have the bricklayers and other sections placed on a wages basis. The reason it is necessary for day labour to be extended is that the majority of bricklayers are at present contract workers. They are laying bricks at so much per thousand and they are consequently not going to bother about taking trainees. I can see a position arising in a few years' time as a result of which we will have to compel tradesmen to take trainees, or we shall not have skilled artisans. They will not be bothered with apprentices because they can lay so many thousand bricks and be paid for so doing and are not prepared to waste their time training others. I suggest that the Government should find ways and means of increasing the number of trainees in the building trades in order to make certain that our own Australian lads benefit from the prosperity we have today.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to the question of houses on farms. That is an outstanding question for me, because

I have received correspondence over a number of years from farmers desirous of having some move made whereby they can be provided with houses under similar conditions to those enjoyed by industrial workers. I see no reason why they should not. It is an injustice that whereas the man who is in an industrial area can obtain a house at a very small repayment and at a very low rate of interest, the farmer has to mortgage and pledge the whole of his property at a high rate of interest in order to obtain the same benefit. I cannot see why something has not been done for the farmer before this. I cannot imagine the enormous difficulties that appear to be in the way and I would like to hear the Premier tell me why what I suggest cannot be done and why the difficulties seem to be insurmountable. I hope the Premier will give consideration to our request for the inclusion of an ex-Serviceman on the commission. I do not propose to move an amendment in that regard because I do not want to be ruled out of order by suggesting something that will incur extra expense. Such an amendment, of course, can come only from the other side of the House.

The Minister for Lands: What could a representative of the R.S.L. do to help the housing problem?

Mr. LESLIE: I do not know; but I think he could do quite a lot.

The Minister for Lands: That is a general statement. What can he do? It is no good making statements like that.

Mr. LESLIE: Well, he could bring forward some of the views I have submitted tonight.

The Minister for Works: He would not have a bar of that!

Mr. LESLIE: Evidently the Minister does not read the paper and he does not hear everything. What I have said here has emanated from the ex-Servicemen's organisation. There has been a fight going on for nine months, but evidently the Minister has his head in the sand, like the ostrich. I am not expressing only my views but the views of the organisation. So far as housing is concerned, I cannot tell the Minister for Lands how an ex-Serviceman on the commission could assist because I have not delved deeply into that subject. God knows I have enough pro-

blems of my own so far as the training scheme is concerned! But we have people in the R.S.L. with a knowledge of these matters, and they would be able to give the commission information which its members do not possess and perhaps could not obtain in any other way. I know that members of the present Workers' Homes Board are mostly ex-Servicemen. But they are not accountable to the organisation, and members should not forget that the man who is a public servant is always suspect. It is always considered that his first allegiance is to his boss—the Government.

The Minister for Lands: That is a fallacy.

Mr. LESLIE: Such a man is suspect, whether he is an ex-Serviceman or a unionist, or whatever he is; and he will never give the satisfaction to his organisation that is expected of him. It is not that the organisation does not trust him, but he is suspect. But let such a man be appointed from the organisation, and answerable to the organisation, and dissatisfaction and discontent are removed. And surely it is the task of a Government to make people contented, even if it be only one section of the people! I support the Bill and hope the Premier will give sympathetic consideration to our requests.

MR. ABBOTT (North Perth) [9.26]: This Bill is one of great importance. It has been largely discussed and many of the points I wish to make have already been emphasised.

The Minister for Lands: Especially the day labour one!

Mr. Leslie: Do not worry; I am not expecting that!

Mr. ABBOTT: The Victorian Housing Commission has been very successful and on that commission the public has been represented. It includes a woman to represent the point of view of the housewives. I suggest that course might well have been followed in this instance. This commission is to be not merely a building commission. It is to have authority to allocate houses, and to establish community centres, and to do a hundred and one other things. It will cease to be merely a workers' homes organisation for the building of houses. It is to have a much wider scope and very much



greater authority and increased duty. Consequently I would have expected to see a greater representation of the general public in its membership. As the Bill stands, the building trades and the workers are, no doubt properly, represented; but I think the general public should be represented on the commission directly and the commission should have, as in Victoria, a woman representing the housewives.

The Minister for Lands: Who do you suggest should elect or recommend the woman representative? Where would she come from?

Mr. ABBOTT: She would be nominated by the Government, I presume. The Government usually wants to do that. The public is represented on the Milk Board and on all the other boards. Why should it not be represented on this board?

The Minister for Lands: We would have some board, with the R.S.L. and the housewives and the rest of them represented!

Mr. ABBOTT: It was found successful in Victoria.

The Minister for Lands: I am not objecting; but I am wondering from what section of the community such a woman would come. Would she come from the housewives or the nurses or what?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. ABBOTT: Something has been said by the member for West Perth about materials for house building. I think there is a good deal in the statements he made. In Victoria a panel of architects is employed; and I think that the venture has been a success in that State probably because buildings are continually being modernised in accordance with experience. They have had the advantage of obtaining the latest ideas from individuals and departments and from leading architects in that State. That is a suggestion that might well be adopted by the commission here. Something was said by the member for West Perth about the use of the powers of resumption under the Public Works Act. I suggest that some notice of intention to resume should be given to people before the actual resumption takes place so that they could put their views before the Minister or the commission, if nothing else. At present, the first advice these people receive is the notice of resumption of the land. Admittedly I know of

people who have been allowed to have the land retransferred to them.

Mr. Needham: Are they not notified in the Press?

Mr. ABBOTT: Not of the intention; only of the resumption. What is desired more than anything else by all members of the community is security.

Mr. J. Hegney: In Parliament, too?

Mr. ABBOTT: Yes. Had the Bill contained a provision whereby a purchaser, on his death, would have the mortgage redeemed, it would have been an improvement. With a small increase in the rent, that protection could be given.

The Premier: It is exactly the same amount as the premium on a life policy for the amount owing.

Mr. ABBOTT: Yes, but I would like to have seen that applied generally to these houses. The purchaser could be given the option of paying a little more and having that protection in the case of death. I know they can go elsewhere, but sometimes that is not thought of. I would also like to see the commission given power to guarantee mortgagees. I am not thinking so much of the present, but the future, when building becomes more available to the general public. Such a provision would constitute a great advantage to many workers who wish to have their homes erected outside the scheme. If the Government could guarantee mortgagees under suitable conditions, it would encourage private building. There is nothing more worthy, in my opinion, than assisting a man to own his home. If some amount of money were lost owing to such guarantees it would be lost in a worthy cause. We have lost millions of pounds in establishing the dairying industry, by means of group settlements, and thousands of pounds in other ventures, so surely it would not hurt, even if we lost a little money, to assist people to own their homes. In normal times it would be impossible for the commission to do everything, or to supply the whole of the money.

Mr. J. Hegney: That is not sound finance.

Mr. ABBOTT: It is. It is just as sound as in the case of the group settlements or the iron industry, or any other. I quite agree that every encouragement should be given to assist people—even those unfortunate enough not to be able to pay a

normal rent; such as have been furnished with a Mc Ness home—to have their own homes. I see that the Bill allows gifts to be accepted. It also provides that gifts, by will, shall not be chargeable with probate duty, but I would like to see a little more encouragement by providing that, to the extent of any gift, the rate for probate shall be reduced. As the Bill stands, the rate will be established and then the portion of the estate that has been given to the commission will be remitted for duty. I suggest that the measure might go a little further and provide that the amount given to the commission shall be deducted from the estate so that no probate duty will be paid on it and the rate reduced accordingly. I support the second reading.

**MR. SEWARD** (Pingelly) [9.37]: Previous speakers have discussed the Bill pretty thoroughly, and I am not going to add to the debate except to say that I was keenly disappointed to see that the Bill contained no provision for the erection of houses on farms. Such a provision was inserted in the Workers' Homes Act, by an amendment moved from this side of the House a year or two ago, but it has been excluded from the Bill. There is not the slightest doubt that the disinclination of people to remain in the country, or to go into the country, is due to bad housing conditions. I recently had the pleasure of the company of the Minister for Lands on a tour of my electorate. We met a number of settlers in one place and from those people I have received requests for the erection of 26 houses. Many of those settlers have been there for 14 or 15 years. They each have a house, but in many instances it has no flooring and it is imperative that some steps be taken to enable them to acquire a house on easy terms, such as apply in the city. On the same tour I was able to show the Minister a house constructed a few years ago at a cost of £800, but which could not be built in the city today for £1,700. It was a cement-brick house of, I think, five large rooms, about 16ft. x 16ft., with a fine verandah all round. There were three such houses in the locality. If contracts were let for similar houses, they would have a wonderful effect on the farming community generally. Consequently, I express my sorrow that provision has not been included to permit houses to be erected on farms.

I join with the member for North Perth in regretting that a woman has not been included in the personnel of the commission, which is one that will be suited to the advice of a woman, and which will be poorer for the lack of a woman. No-one knows the requirements of a house better than a woman because she spends a great deal of her life there. Provision should be made, without enlarging the commission, for a woman to be appointed to it. Workers and others are to be appointed and, if a woman were included, I feel sure that the result would be good, from the point of view of the types of houses that would be constructed.

I am pretty certain that if a woman were appointed she would not consent to the building of houses without verandahs in this country. It is wrong. I would delicense any architect who built a house in this country without a verandah. A verandah is essential, especially where there are children, to provide sleep-outs, and to make the house cooler, generally. In our climate a house without verandahs must be very hot to live in. I believe a woman's vote or advice on the commission would be beneficial in matters of that kind. I think the tenure of the commission should be altered. I do not like to see a commission appointed subject to the whim of the Minister. I would not ask for a better Minister than he who is in charge of this Bill, but he may not be there forever.

The Minister for Lands: He will live for a long time.

**Mr. SEWARD:** I hope he will, but he may not always be Minister in charge of housing. In the future we might have a Minister who would be dictatorial, and the commission might not be able to put its policy into effect, particularly if it ran counter to the views of the Minister. Consequently I think it should be appointed for a term of years. It would be carefully chosen and I think would give better service if the legislation gave it security of tenure. I support the Bill and hope it will be possible to include farm housing under its provisions. At all events I appeal to the Government, if that cannot be done, to bring down a Bill to that effect. I would also ask that a woman be appointed to the commission, and that the tenure be altered.

On motion by the Minister for Agriculture, debate adjourned.

## RESOLUTION—WAR FUNDS REGULATION ACT.

### *To Approve of Proclamations for Transfer of Assets.*

Message from the Council received and read requesting concurrence in the following resolution:

That under the provisions of Section 5, Sub-section (4) of the War Funds Regulation Act, 1939, this House approve of the issue of proclamations authorising the transfer of the assets of the Australian Comforts Fund (Western Australian Division), the Naval Welfare and Comforts Fund, and the R.A.A.F. Comforts Fund, in the terms set out in the proclamations.

## BILL—PLANT DISEASES ACT AMENDMENT.

### *Second Reading.*

### THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE

(Hon. J. T. Tonkin—North-East Fremantle) [9.45] in moving the second reading said: The purpose of this Bill is to amend the Plant Diseases Act, to provide a scheme for compulsory baiting for fruit fly. The fruit fly is a serious menace, and from time to time, when infestation has increased, heavy losses have been occasioned to growers. Practically all types of fruit are infested. Departmental action has prevented the spread of the fly to such districts as Bridgetown, Manjimup, Mt. Barker and the Albany-Denmark area, but there is the ever present danger of an increased infestation, with serious loss to the State generally. Even the knowledge that fruit fly exists in the country is sometimes sufficient to cause great loss of trade. Some years before the war a serious position developed in relation to our fruit trade with Colombo and Java.

In 1938-39 our trade to Colombo was about 30,000 cases of fruit, and the authorities in Colombo and Java, on learning of the existence of fruit fly in Australia, placed an embargo on the importing of fruit into those places. Happily for this State the then Minister for Agriculture, the present Premier, found it possible to make a personal visit to Colombo and Java. As the result of his representations the authorities in those places lifted the embargo so far as this State was concerned, but they nevertheless imposed some severe conditions. However,

it was possible for our fruit to be sent away. I have mentioned that to indicate how serious this pest can become to our producers. There is always the danger that the infestation might increase in any year and so cause the fruit trade to suffer severe losses. In addition to the technical and inspectorial officers of the department who deal with fruit fly, there is the Fruit Fly Advisory Board, which is comprised of representatives of the growers in the infested areas, plus two officers of the department.

The chairman of the Fruit Fly Advisory Board is Mr. Barrett-Lennard, a prominent grapegrower in this State. The board recommended to me that the Act should be amended to provide for a compulsory fruit fly foliage baiting scheme. This recommendation was strongly supported by the W.A. Fruitgrowers' Association. After consideration, the Government decided to accede to the request of the advisory board and the Fruitgrowers' Association, and to introduce the necessary legislation; hence this Bill. It is not expected that the provision for compulsory baiting will completely eradicate the fruit fly, but that it will enable the fly to be controlled much more efficiently and satisfactorily than can be done at present. The Bill then provides the machinery by which the compulsory scheme can be put into operation.

Under the Bill any incorporated fruitgrowers' association, any road board or municipality can, in writing, demand of the Minister that a poll be taken in certain districts or areas on the question of the introduction of a compulsory fruit fly foliage baiting scheme. Upon the demand being received, the poll must be taken not earlier than 21 days and not later than six weeks after the delivery of the request from the fruitgrowers' association, road board or municipality. Upon the poll being taken, if there is a majority of 60 per cent. in favour of the scheme, it is to be introduced and a committee appointed by the Minister. The committee will consist of five members, four of whom will be persons who were entitled to vote at the poll and who have been nominated to the Minister by the local authority or fruitgrowers' association that asked for the poll. The remaining member of the committee will be an inspector of the Department of Agriculture. Thus the committee will consist almost entirely of members of

the organisation that asked for the poll. The committee will have power to enter and spray the trees in an orchard where the work has not been done.

**Mr. McLarty:** Including the backyard orchards?

**The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE:** Only in the districts where the people, as the result of a poll, have decided that this be done. In any district where a poll has been taken, upon a 60 per cent. majority being in favour of the proposal, a committee will be formed and the committee will be empowered to enter the property of any person within that district and spray the trees at a cost of 3s. per acre for orchards of one acre or more and ½d. a tree where the orchards are of an area less than one acre.

That is an outline of the provisions of the amendment. The Bill is a simple one. The intention is to amend the Act to make provision that where a 60 per cent. majority of the people concerned in a district decide that they would like a compulsory scheme put into operation, they may have it under certain conditions. In some districts voluntary baiting schemes have been tried with a good deal of success, but they broke down because some growers refused to pay for the cost of the work that had been done. Bad debts were created and accumulated to such an extent that the voluntary schemes broke down. The Fruit Fly Advisory Board and the Fruitgrowers' Association recognise that, if this scheme is to be successful, it must be compulsory. There must be power to recover the cost of the work done so that the burden will not be unduly great upon those who are prepared to meet their obligations and that other people who have the work done for them after being too neglectful to do it themselves shall not receive this service for nothing.

**Mr. McLarty:** Why a 60 per cent. majority?

**The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE:** Sixty per cent. is regarded as a reasonable majority to decide the question. A bare majority of one more than half the total number would indicate that there was an even division of opinion, and it would be unfair in such circumstances to enforce upon one half of the district the opinion held by the other half. Therefore it is felt that the majority should be something more substan-

tial than a bare half, and 60 per cent. has been selected as representative of a majority of the people concerned. It could have been made more or less, but I consider 60 per cent. reasonable for a compulsory scheme of this nature seeing that, once it is brought into operation, it will affect everyone in the district. I would not like to have 51 per cent. imposing their will on 49 per cent. because it might mean that only one or two persons had decided the question. It would be far better to have a margin, and therefore I selected 60 per cent. as being fair and reasonable in the circumstances. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Owen, debate adjourned.

## **BILL—VERMIN ACT AMENDMENT.**

### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 16th October.

**MR. SEWARD** (Pingelly) [9.57]: I must say that I am disappointed with this Bill and I feel that this must be a general complaint. Last year when we asked whether action was to be taken on the report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the depredations of vermin, we were told that nothing could be done that session because the Minister had not had time thoroughly to digest the report. Since he has digested it, I am afraid the whole of the report has disappeared, seeing that these amendments are all that he considers necessary to be made to the Act. There is one provision with which I thoroughly disagree, namely, that it is not proposed to grant exemption from the rate to an owner of a property who has enclosed his property with netting fences.

**The Minister for Agriculture:** I suppose you are aware that that is a recommendation of the Royal Commission?

**Mr. SEWARD:** I am aware of it and I think it is wrong. The most effective way of coping with the rabbit and dingo pests is to erect a rabbit-proof fence. This entails considerable expense, and any man who goes to that expense shows his bona fides in endeavouring to cope with the pest and should be relieved of payment of the vermin rate. In many instances, I believe, the rate is not a heavy one and the vermin boards would not be affected to any extent if they were deprived of the amount of revenue involved

in granting this exemption. The exemption has probably been the strongest incentive to owners to erect rabbit-proof fences. The more that such fences are erected, the more easily can the rabbit menace be dealt with.

The member for Mt. Magnet, in speaking to the Bill, said he could not place a value on the destruction being caused by rabbits in the agricultural areas. I suggest that no-one knows the loss, but some very capable farmers have told me that their wool clip has been reduced by 50 per cent. as a result of the depredations of rabbits. I think it can be said that the destruction done by the rabbits in the farming areas would mean that 40 to 50 per cent. of the carrying capacity of the land had been lost; in other words, farmers could carry 40 to 50 per cent. more sheep before the rabbit put in an appearance than they have been able to carry since. The numbers have been considerably reduced in recent years, largely because of the excessively wet seasons; but I noticed when travelling about lately that the rabbit is increasing again fairly rapidly. Last summer I did not see too many; but recently I have noticed a large number of small rabbits. Unless effective means are taken to destroy them, there is not the slightest doubt that the numbers will increase rapidly, because there is an abundance of food and ample water available for them.

The Royal Commission stated that certain difficulties arose in dealing with the rabbit pest during the war. One of the difficulties with which I was confronted, as well as farmers and road boards, was the obtaining of strychnine, which was in short supply. A suggestion was made to the Agricultural Department that road boards should get priority of claim to the strychnine that did come in, but it was not adopted. The trade seemed to get the preference. Steps should be taken by the department to ensure that a certain proportion of the strychnine coming into the State is made available to the department for use by the settlers through the road boards. The farmer is able to get it much cheaper by that method. During the war strychnine was made available to the road boards, but only in limited quantities. I draw the Minister's attention to that matter in the hope that action will be taken in the future to overcome the difficulty.

The Minister said that the farmer could not afford not to get rid of vermin, that is, the rabbit. Of course, there are two sides to that question. I agree with the Minister, but many others do not. Many hold the opinion that the fox is as great a menace as the rabbit, and that by getting rid of the rabbit the fox turns to the lambs. I stress the fact that this year the depredations of the foxes have been enormously above those experienced in previous years. Even in my own home town of Pingelly, I know of a farmer within three miles of it who is losing lambs every night owing to the depredations of foxes. He had between 250 and 300 ewes, but has only 40 lambs left now. Steps will have to be taken to destroy the foxes because it is not much use destroying the rabbits when that has the effect of turning the fox on to the lambs.

The Minister for Agriculture: Do the rabbit-netted properties keep out the foxes?

Mr. SEWARD: I would not like to say so. The fox is very cunning.

The Minister for Agriculture: That is why we are going to rate the netted lands, because we have to deal with vermin other than rabbits.

Mr. SEWARD: Of course, the definition of a rabbit-proof fence can always be altered so as to make it a little higher. Then it would keep out the fox. Ordinary rabbit-proof netting will not keep out rabbits. I have seen rabbits climb over netting, particularly when the netting is on the inside of the fence. The rabbit climbs up the post and gets over the top. The fence is a deterrent, as the rabbit will not try to get through it if there is a property on the other side of the road which is not netted. The Bill deals with the rabbit pest, but there are other pests besides rabbits. The Royal Commission also dealt with noxious weeds. An alarming increase in the growth of cape tulip is taking place in certain parts of the Great Southern district. Those parts are almost over-run with the plant. Effective measures will have to be taken to cope with this pest.

I do not know what the department does about this and other matters. I heard it said the other day that if cape tulip were reaped while it was in flower it would seriously affect its spreading. Whether that is so I do not know, but has the department

any information on the point? It is said that the plants spread from the seed and not from the bulb. I know of two places—I shall not mention them—where cape tulip flourishes. If the farmers were told they could check the spread by reaping it while it was in flower, I feel certain they would make the attempt. There is a proposal to increase the personnel of the board from three to five and to appoint as chairman an officer of the Department of Agriculture. I do not like the proposal. Far too many civil servants are being made chairmen of boards. I am not casting any reflection upon their capabilities but they have their duties to perform in the department. If not, they should not be there. If they have a full-time job in the department, they will have no time left to devote to these boards.

The Minister for Agriculture: It surely is the job of the Chief Vermin Inspector to be interested in the board.

Mr. SEWARD: Yes, but not to be the chairman. There is the matter of the cape tulip which I mentioned. It is the function of the department to investigate that matter, as well as others, so that it can advise the property owners of the best methods to deal with the pest. The vermin board exists, or should exist, to do its job, just as the landowners must do his job. When a departmental officer is in charge of the whole show, he is placed in a position he should not occupy, because he is an interested party. Somebody else should act as chairman, such as a retired farmer who is not actively interested in his farming operations but who has the experience to guide him in seeing that the provisions of the Act are carried out, and who can make sure that not only the farmer does his job but that the department does its job also. I wish to say a word in favour of a recommendation of the Royal Commission that the responsibility for the destruction of vermin should be lifted from the farmer and placed on the vermin boards. I agree with the recommendation.

The Minister for Agriculture: You surprise me!

Mr. SEWARD: The Minister has not had the experience I have had. As I stated earlier, some farmers hold the opinion that the effect of destroying rabbits is to turn the fox from rabbits to lambs.

The Minister for Agriculture: Surely it is their responsibility.

Mr. SEWARD: I know of more than one instance where farmers have ploughed a furrow round their properties but have not put a bait of poison in it. That was done to deceive the road board inspector. If the onus were placed on the vermin board, it would send its representative to inspect the property. It would not matter whether the farmer had ploughed the furrow or not; if the inspector were not satisfied then the board could undertake the ploughing of the furrows and the baiting of them with poison. The board would do the job properly.

The Minister for Agriculture: At half the cost. Bonus laziness!

Mr. SEWARD: I am not interested in the cost, but in who is responsible. If it were done, the farmer would probably do the job. There will always be some cantankerous individuals who, no matter what law is made, will try to evade it. Rabbits can be seen on these properties, and everybody knows that the people are not taking steps to destroy them. The furrows are there, but no poison has been put in them. The responsibility should rest on a disinterested body to see that proper effect is given to the law. There is very little in the Bill. There is, of course, a lot that might have been included but which has been left out.

The Minister for Agriculture: As, for instance?

Mr. SEWARD: There are, for instance, noxious weeds. The spread of cape tulip is a serious matter. There are some places growing nothing else. That weed will spread.

Mr. McLarty: It is in every part of the State.

Mr. SEWARD: It is the same as Watsonia in the hon. member's district.

Mr. Watts: McLarty's curse, they call it.

Mr. SEWARD: The other weed is a curse, too.

The Minister for Agriculture: Surely it is not necessary to include a provision in the Bill to deal with that.

Mr. SEWARD: No, but it could be included. The department is supposed to be in charge of these matters. If it is the department's job to attend to these noxious weeds,

the job is not being done, because this plant is growing more extensively every day. Somebody is falling down on the job; I do not know whether it is the department or the farmer. But the spread of the weed should be stopped. It is only interfering with the carrying capacity of the country. The Government has introduced an outrageously expensive water Bill designed to enable the land to carry more stock and, at the same time, is allowing the carrying capacity of the land to be depleted by permitting weeds to obtain control. Somebody is falling down on the job, and it is up to us to see that whoever is responsible is brought to book and that there is an alteration in conditions. I have seen these weeds grow in the Eastern States. There they have Bathurst burr and other pests, and we will get them here as well. We are getting them now. The longer land is cultivated, the more the weeds grow and the greater the amount of work that has to be done to cope with pests. I disagree altogether with the removal of totally fenced property from the provisions of the Vermin Act; but, like the Leader of the Opposition, I support the Bill, though I think it should contain much more than it does.

**MR. McLARTY** (Murray-Wellington) [10.13]: In common with other members who have spoken on this measure, I am disappointed that it does not contain more amendments to the Act. The Minister said that the honorary Royal Commission made extensive inquiries. That is true. Its members visited many parts of the State and took evidence from a great number of people, and they sought the most practical evidence it was possible to get. They sought it from those who had had practical experience in dealing with vermin and their eradication and who had suffered financially from the ravages of pests. The views of such people are of great value, and it was on those opinions that the commission drew up its report. The Leader of the Opposition gave an estimate of the losses incurred in this State through vermin, but it is not possible to get even near what the figure would be. When the Leader of the Opposition drew up his estimate in regard to certain districts, the price of wool was nothing like what it is today. We know there has been a steep increase in that price,

and that makes a very great difference in regard to the estimate reached when the report was published.

I wish we could all get a greater appreciation of what losses are incurred through the ravages of vermin. If members read the evidence—it is certainly very extensive, and I do not think we could expect them to wade through all of it—they would find that what the Leader of the Opposition said was true; namely, that hundreds of thousands of acres of land in this State have had to be abandoned because of the impossibility of coping with vermin. The Bill proposes to increase the tax which landowners will pay, and the evidence which it obtained favoured that point of view. Those who came from the towns, both in the metropolitan area and in the country, agreed that their prosperity was dependent wholly upon the productivity of the land, and that if that productivity were decreased as a result of the ravages of vermin, every town and every individual must suffer. That being so, the commission felt that a case had been made out for a tax on all land in this State.

I believe that if vermin are to be tackled, as they should be tackled, we must tax all land to obtain the necessary revenue. We suffer from a number of curses, amongst them being drought, fire and, to a minor extent, flood. But I believe that one of the greatest curses consists in the ravages of vermin and the resultant loss. The Leader of the Opposition spoke of the north of this State where vermin other than rabbits are causing tremendous loss. I was very interested some time ago to hear a speech by the member for Roebourne in regard to his part of the country. I do not remember his exact words, but he said something to the effect that a great deal of the carrying capacity of the district he represented was being considerably reduced because of over-stocking.

Much country is being over-stocked by vermin, and we have huge areas where there are more kangaroos to the acre than there are sheep; and that country, I think the member for Roebourne will agree, will suffer just as much damage through being over-stocked by vermin as it would by being over-stocked with sheep. That indicates how serious the position is, and I

think on that account the Government should accept the recommendation of the Royal Commission that £12,000 should be found to do something to try to cope with vermin in the northern areas. The evidence clearly proved to us that all types of vermin are increasing, and not only increasing but doing so very rapidly. I ask members what this Bill will do to minimise that in any way. I want to say a word or two about the mobile units that were recommended by the commission. That recommendation was not made without serious thought.

The Minister for Agriculture: Did you give any thought to their cost?

Mr. McLARTY: Yes. After all, what is it? It is a three-man unit with a truck and one or two implements, perhaps. It would not be very costly. The Minister would be well advised to give it a try-out.

The Minister for Agriculture: What is your estimate of the cost of one for 12 months?

Mr. McLARTY: The three men would be paid the basic wage plus a camping allowance. The cost of a truck would not be very great. I think the total cost would be moderate. I am sure that if the Minister were to give this suggestion a trial on certain Crown lands—

The Minister for Agriculture: You surely know that it has been given a trial by some road boards and abandoned.

Mr. McLARTY: I am not satisfied with the trial that has been given. We have proof that in the Mingenew district such an experiment was successful. In the huge forestry areas, where rabbits are being bred without doubt—although we do hear people say that the forestry lands do not breed them, we know positively that the rabbits breed there in thousands—the mobile unit would be an effective way of coping with them. I believe that only a half-hearted attempt is made at present to deal with them. I do not wish to cast any aspersions on our forestry officers. I know they are amongst the most efficient of our public servants, but I think the destruction of rabbits is a minor consideration with them.

The Minister for the North-West: Which forest area do you think is rabbit-infested?

Mr. McLARTY: I think they all are in the South-West.

The Minister for the North-West: I do not agree with you.

Mr. McLARTY: I have had some experience of them.

The Minister for the North-West: So have I.

Mr. McLARTY: People who set out to farm in the forestry areas quickly find the rabbit. In those areas there are damp patches that are green all the summer, and the rabbits live on them.

The Minister for the North-West: I have recently toured all the forest areas, and know that the departmental officers cannot catch a rabbit today.

Mr. McLARTY: Just at present there is a scarcity but it will not last. The Minister may have read in the Press the other day that rabbits are coming across the Nullabor Plain in their millions and, as the Minister knows, they are prolific breeders. We should not take the present scarcity of rabbits as an indication that we will get rid of them. The Minister for Agriculture also objected to responsibility being taken from the landowners. As a member of the Royal Commission I supported this proposal, and I will tell the Minister why.

The Minister for Agriculture: I am anxious to hear you.

Mr. McLARTY: The Minister also referred to the report of a Select Committee that was issued in 1918. The committee recommended that the responsibility of getting rid of vermin should not be lifted from the landowner. But I remind the Minister that the circumstances today are different from what they were in 1918.

The Minister for Agriculture: Whose responsibility is it?

Mr. McLARTY: Let me continue. I am dealing with the report of the commission.

The Minister for Agriculture: You are dodging the question.

Mr. McLARTY: Circumstances today are different from those of 1918. In those days the farmer did not have anything like the number of diseases that he has to cope with today. Footrot was hardly ever heard of then, but take the time that a farmer spends today dealing with that trouble! Again, the blowfly menace was then nothing like what it is today. It was then practically non-existent in those districts. We did not have



the braxy-like disease, which has given the farmer such a lot of work, and we did not have such things as lucerne flea and red mite. I could go on enumerating pests that the farmer did not have to contend with in those days, but which he has to deal with now, and which take up a tremendous amount of his time. So the suggestion that the responsibility should be taken from the landowner is, I think, a sound one. I believe also it is the only effective way to get rid of vermin.

It is true, as the member for Pingelly said, that it is difficult to police vermin-control, particularly poisoning. We know from our experience on the commission that some vermin inspectors are engaged on work other than vermin inspection and they have to travel over very wide areas. It must be exceedingly difficult for them to know whether poison has or has not been laid and particularly what amount of poison has been laid. If the proposed scheme were adopted we would know that all the holdings were being dealt with, and properly dealt with. Under the present method we will never have efficient control. Even though this proposal will cost extra money it would, if effective, as I believe it would be, undoubtedly benefit the farmer.

The Minister for Agriculture: The cost is prohibitive.

Mr. McLARTY: I would like the Minister, when he replies, to tell us just how the cost is prohibitive.

The Minister for Agriculture: I promise to do that.

Mr. McLARTY: The farmer must pay portion of it. For every man who goes on to a farmer's property he has to pay half the cost, or up to 12s. 6d., per day, so I fail to see how the cost would be prohibitive. The Minister objects to the agriculture protection board, and says that with eleven members it would be unwieldly. I do not think it would, but I think it would be a practical board composed of representatives of all parts of the State who could give us a true picture of the vermin position in the whole of the State, and that is necessary. There can be no objection to the cost of this board. I am sorry that the Minister has not made provision for the Railway Department to make the payment suggested by the commission. The Com-

missioner of Railways is one of the largest landowners in the State, and we have it in evidence that the only times that he makes any effort to cope with rabbits is when he is asked to do so by the adjoining landowners.

The Minister for Agriculture: You have that in evidence?

Mr. McLARTY: Yes.

The Minister for Agriculture: Reliable evidence?

Mr. McLARTY: Yes.

The Minister for Agriculture: It is not true.

Mr. McLARTY: That is what we were told, and let me tell the Minister that I can quite understand that attitude. We were told that if a farmer was poisoning and he requested the Railway Department to poison as well, it would do so. But let us take the position of a farmer who never poisons; what is the use of the Railway Department poisoning its land when the adjacent land is not poisoned?

The Minister for Agriculture: What is the use?

Mr. McLARTY: I am saying how unsatisfactory is the position in regard to the railways. As was pointed out, the Railway Department is mainly concerned with damage done to the track by rabbits burrowing. But it is not so concerned with what is happening some distance away from the track. I say to the Minister that we will never have satisfaction regarding the railway reserves until there is a system for poisoning the whole of those reserves. I think the only way in which it can be done is to have a mobile unit, as suggested by the commission. The representative from the Railway Department said he thought the Commissioner would agree to providing revenue in order to deal with rabbits on railway reserves and railway property generally.

Mr. Cross: It is to be hoped that the farmer looks after the poisoning better than he did in the case of noxious weeds.

Mr. McLARTY: I will say something about noxious weeds shortly. I do not think there is much more I need say, as the matter was so fully covered by the Leader of the Opposition, and I do not wish to traverse the same ground. Generally speak-

ing, I support the amendments contained in the Bill. Reference has been made to noxious weeds, and I am sorry that there is not some legislation dealing with that aspect. It is true, as the member for Pingelly said, that they are spreading rapidly. In districts where the land is badly infested with noxious weeds we found this attitude; once the landowners lose control they are apt to say, "This matter cannot be dealt with. We are still carrying on, and it does not matter very much." I would have liked to see something in the Bill regarding the stricter control of saleyards. There was a lot of evidence about diseases, noxious weeds and so on being spread from saleyards, and I think the Minister should give that aspect some consideration.

**MR. LESLIE** (Mt. Marshall) [10.35]: I can sum up my remarks by reading the Minister an extract from a communication that I received from one of the boards to which I forwarded copies of the Bill. It says—

The Bill appears to be a very poor effort and not much reward for or acknowledgment of the time and thought put into the recommendations of the Select Committee.

I have to agree with that.

The Minister for Agriculture: I have also letters from the boards, saying they approve of the Bill.

**MR. LESLIE**: If there were not differing opinions we would make no progress. All the boards in my electorate gave evidence before the commission, and an examination of the evidence will show that they were almost unanimous in asking, in part at any rate, for what was recommended. At the request of various organisations in my electorate I adopted what I believe is not a usual procedure for a member of this Chamber, and appeared as a witness. My reason for doing so was that the farmers in my area, as the member for Murray-Wellington pointed out, are fed up with paying a double vermin tax and then being called on to do the work without getting any benefit, or little benefit from the amount they contribute. Not only that, but the whole of the onus for destroying vermin is put on the farmers, who are called upon to do this work at the time of the year when they are engaged in cropping. They might spend valuable time at an im-

portant part of the season destroying vermin on their properties and then, having belatedly put in their crops, find that they are infested with vermin coming from Crown land.

The Minister for Agriculture: No.

**MR. LESLIE**: There is no doubt about it. I presume that railway reserves are Crown land. Though rabbits are scarce in that area at present I can show the Minister well populated burrows inside the railway fences.

The Minister for Agriculture: Adjacent to property that has been treated?

**MR. LESLIE**: Yes, adjacent to property on which there are to be found few rabbits, if any. There are more occupied burrows on railway property than on the private property alongside it. The unalienated Crown land is not free from rabbits or other vermin, and that is the greatest cause of the trouble in my part of the State. My electorate at the present time acts as a buffer for the rest of the State, in the matter of vermin. At present more rabbits are to be found round Armadale and Kelmscott than in the whole of my electorate. Nevertheless my areas serve as a buffer, preventing vermin from coming down to these districts. Rabbits are to be found near the metropolitan area in greater numbers than they are to be found outback at present, yet the people here are not taxed for the rabbits.

The Minister for Agriculture: Who is not taxed?

**MR. LESLIE**: The people of the metropolitan area.

The Minister for Agriculture: There are no rabbits in Perth.

**MR. LESLIE**: There are. I have seen a rabbit in a garden at Nedlands. Unless the rabbits in the metropolitan area are destroyed they will multiply. It is no use expecting that they will keep away from the luscious food to be found here. Dead rabbits can be seen at any time on the road between Victoria Park and Kelmscott, and at night time a band of them may be seen playing there.

The Minister for Agriculture: That land will be rated, under the Bill.

**MR. LESLIE**: The land in the inner metropolitan area should also be rated. It

must be remembered that the owners of farm land do not breed the vermin. The Minister asked, by way of interjection, whose responsibility it was to destroy vermin. I say it is not the farmer's responsibility, because he did not breed it.

The Minister for Agriculture: You say it is not his responsibility to destroy the vermin on his own property?

Mr. LESLIE: No. It is the responsibility of any individual to destroy something that he has created or brought into being and, if the farmer was responsible for the vermin being there in the first place, it would be his pigeon.

The Minister for Agriculture: Is the farmer responsible for fallowing his own land, in order to kill weeds, though he is not responsible for them being there?

Mr. LESLIE: What are weeds to one farmer are feed to another.

The Premier: The same thing applies to rabbits. Some people like to eat them.

Mr. LESLIE: What is a curse to one farmer may be good feed to another, but the amount of destruction caused by rabbits—

The Minister for Agriculture: Whose responsibility is it to get rid of poison growing on a man's property?

Mr. LESLIE: It is in his own interests to do that. It is in his own interests to destroy poison, but it would not pass off his own property, and therefore would not be endangering his neighbour's property.

The Minister for Agriculture: Is it not in his own interest to get rid of poison?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

The Premier: The hon. member is on very thin ice now.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. LESLIE: When a man has vermin on his property, it is a danger to his neighbours.

The Premier: Therefore he is not a good citizen if he does not destroy it.

Mr. LESLIE: I do not agree with that statement. The farmer has probably got the vermin from a neighbour, and the neighbour doubtless got it from someone who was neglectful. Why saddle the farmer because somebody else was neglectful in time gone

by? The destruction of vermin is a national responsibility. Vermin on a property would endanger neighbouring properties, but poison will not infest a neighbouring property in the same way and it is in the interests of the farmer on whose land the poison is growing to destroy it. That is not a national danger. If the farmer can be compelled to destroy it, well and good; it is certainly in his own interest to do so.

When I gave evidence before the Royal Commission, I advanced the argument that the farmers wished to be absolved from the responsibility of having to destroy vermin on their own properties and, at the same time, find money to pay inspectors to tell them what to do. Rabbits appear on a farmer's property. An inspector goes along and tells him he must take action to destroy them. The farmer, according to time and opportunity, does what he can in the circumstances to destroy them. Of course, he has plenty of other work to do. The inspector pays another visit and points out that there are still rabbits on the holding and so the farmer takes further action as circumstances permit. Another visit is paid by the inspector who on this occasion probably leaves a notice with the farmer. The farmer by this time is getting fed up; he has done all he can. The inspector pays yet another visit and issues a summons. The farmer is brought before the court and a fine is imposed, but not so much as a flea on a rabbit has been destroyed as a result of the inspector's visits.

Farmers are prepared to pay the vermin rates to have the rabbits destroyed and also to co-operate in their destruction. The Minister seems to think that the cost of such a scheme would be prohibitive. He appears to lose sight of the tremendous loss that is being sustained by the national economy, which is a tragic figure even if the figure contemplated by the Minister is prohibitive. Therefore this work of destruction should and must be carried on. It is in this respect that farmers in my electorate find the Bill so disappointing. The measure will not relieve them of one bit of the burden of responsibility they have been compelled to carry in years past. Evidently they are to be required to carry that burden in future. They have grasshoppers, emus, foxes, galahs, dogs, eagles and other sorts of vermin to deal with and the onus

is on them to destroy all vermin. I concede that the Government has assisted in the destruction of grasshoppers.

The Premier: I received a letter from London asking for three emus. Can you supply them?

Mr. LESLIE: Yes, I could supply 300, if necessary. I am afraid that the Minister, in adopting the attitude he has done, has not considered the evidence tendered to the Royal Commission and the weight of that evidence, and has not compared it with the report of the commission, but rather has paid heed to some bogeys in the minds of the experts in the Department of Agriculture. These men have their ideas. I know that some so-called experts insist upon certain methods being adopted to destroy certain kinds of vermin. One can prove that other methods are far more effective, but these experts insist upon their own methods being adopted. This is one cause for complaint by farmers.

The Act provides that the farmer shall take such action as the inspector directs for the destruction of vermin. The farmer may be directed to do anything the inspector likes. I know farmers who have destroyed rabbits effectively by poisoning water, but the rabbits come in again from neighbouring properties or from Crown lands and, when the inspector returns, he sees that rabbits are still there. The farmer has probably gone to the extent of filling in all burrows, but the inspector finds rabbits or indications of them, the pest having come in again from neighbouring properties. The inspector says that the method adopted by the farmer is not satisfactory and that he must plough his land and lay poison baits around the property.

There is one aspect to which I wish to draw attention. I pointed out to the Minister that the conditions in my area are different from those prevailing in other parts of the State. My boards are not at all happy about the half exemption from rating being granted to netted properties. On this question there is room for a difference of opinion. The northern boards are quite prepared to agree to those properties paying the full rate. Rabbits, as they point out, constitute only one class of vermin. I have a communication which states—

In this district, rabbits are our least pest. Yet, because a property is rabbit-netted at present, the farmer has full exemption, and

under the proposed amending Act, he will have half exemption. Rabbit-netting does not keep out emus, foxes, grasshoppers, galahs or eagles, all of which are declared vermin here.

The Minister for Agriculture: They do not want any exemption at all?

Mr. LESLIE: No. Every farmer should pay the vermin rate, and this is in accordance with the principle suggested that the rate should apply throughout the State.

Mr. Seward: The letter you have just quoted is from a road board.

Mr. LESLIE: Yes. The board objects to one man paying vermin rates and to another not paying when their work is so vital to the national interest.

The Minister for Agriculture: What is your opinion?

Mr. LESLIE: I want to see the tax spread equitably throughout the State, everybody contributing.

The Premier: Subiaco is not enthusiastic about it.

Mr. LESLIE: The point is that everyone should realise that upon him devolves a measure of responsibility.

Mr. Cross: You always advocate that city people should pay the losses incurred by country people.

Mr. LESLIE: All I desire is to see the city people getting off the backs of the farmers for a little while. The letter I have just quoted continues—

I think the present arrangement is absurd when you see places exempted from vermin tax but a breeding ground for grasshoppers which infest and re-infest surrounding properties.

And the local authorities are called upon to spend rates to assist in eradicating those grasshoppers. I am afraid that this Bill is anything but satisfactory to me personally, to the local authorities, or to farmers as a whole in my district, because it falls far short of what was expected would be the outcome of the very fine efforts of the Royal Commission and of the farmers' own efforts to get the Commission to view the problem in the light of their experience.

On motion by Mr. Hoar, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 10.50 p.m.*