

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 20th August, 1952.

CONTENTS.

	Page
Questions : Superphosphate, as to imported sulphur and costs	414
Loan funds, as to expenditure on forestry Timber, (a) as to Shannon River mill and State Saw Mills finance	414
(b) as to cost of jarrah scantling	414
(c) as to State Saw Mills log supply prices	414
Motion: Obituary, late Mr. W. M. Marshall, M.L.A.	415
Bill : State Electricity Commission Act Amendment, 2r., remaining stages	416
Address-in-reply, sixth day	422
Speaker on Address—Hon. G. Bennetts	422

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

QUESTIONS.

SUPERPHOSPHATE.

As to Imported Sulphur and Costs.

Hon. H. L. ROCHE asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Is the Government aware that the superphosphate manufacturers in Western Australia, intend making representations to the Tariff Board for protection against the importation of cheap brimstone (vide the "Daily News" of the 13th August, 1952)?

(2) As sulphur is one of the major costs in super manufacture, should not cheap brimstone assist considerably in reducing the cost of super?

(3) In view of the importance of super to agriculture in Western Australia, is he an advocate of cheaper superphosphate for agriculture in this State?

(4) If the answer is in the affirmative, will he urge the Government make strong representations to the Tariff Board on the need to have adequate supplies of sulphur available at the cheapest possible price so that costs of production can be reduced to as low a level as possible?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) I have no knowledge other than the announcement in the newspaper quoted by the hon. member.

(2) Yes.

(3) Yes.

(4) I do not desire to discourage any company that is prepared to establish a plant for the conversion of pyrites to sulphuric acid as without such conversion the State might find itself without superphosphate. I will at the same time be prepared to do everything necessary to keep superphosphate costs as low as possible.

LOAN FUNDS.

As to Expenditure on Forestry.

Hon. J. MURRAY asked the Minister for Transport:

What was the expenditure of loan funds on forestry activities for the years ended the 30th June, 1950, 1951, 1952, under the following headings—

- (a) total amount;
- (b) on the planting of softwoods;
- (c) other reforestation projects;
- (d) any other activity not included in the above?

The MINISTER replied:

(a) 1950, £113,596 19s. 10d.; 1951, £203,535 11s. 4d.; 1952, £296,426 18s. 9d.

(b) 1950, £85,773 7s. 5d.; 1951, £157,087 12s. 2d.; 1952, £202,848 0s. 5d. Includes cost of planting and maintenance of established plantations.

(c) 1950, £7,837 18s. 7d.; 1951, £10,100 18s. 8d.; 1952, £12,738 15s. 3d. Includes cost of planting and maintenance of established plantations.

(d) 1950, £19,985 13s. 10d.; 1951, £36,347 0s. 6d.; 1952, £80,840 3s. 1d.

TIMBER.

(a) *As to Shannon River Mill and State Saw Mills Finance.*

Hon. J. MURRAY asked the Minister for Transport:

Will he inform the House what was—

- (1) The total construction cost to date of the Shannon River mill?
- (2) The profit or loss on the State Saw Mills for the years ended the 30th June, 1950, 1951, 1952?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Not available, at present.

(2) 1950, £59,988 profit; 1951, £29,101 profit; 1952, information not yet available.

(b) *As to Cost of Jarrah Scantling.*

Hon. J. MURRAY asked the Minister for Transport:

Can he inform the House of the cost of jarrah scantling to 6in. x 4in. in—

(a) 1942;

(b) 1952?

The MINISTER replied:

Cost price of jarrah scantling to 6in. x 4in. as per metropolitan price list—

1942—41s. per 100 super feet.

1952—93s. 3d. per 100 super feet.

(c) *As to State Saw Mills Log Supply Prices.*

Hon. J. MURRAY asked the Minister for Transport:

Where part, or the whole, of the log supply for any State mill is let on contract, can he inform the House—

(a) What is the lowest price paid and the distance hauled?

(b) What is the highest price paid and the distance hauled?

The MINISTER replied:

It is considered that this information should not be made public in view of the fact that the State Saw Mills Department is at present inviting tenders for similar services.

MOTION—OBITUARY.

Late Mr. W. M. Marshall, M.L.A.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT

(Hon. C. H. Simpson—Midland) [4.40]: I move—

That this House place on record its sincere appreciation of the services rendered to the State by the late William Mortimer Marshall as member for Murchison in the Legislative Assembly, a Minister of the Crown and Chairman of Committees, and expresses deep sympathy with his widow and members of his family in the irreparable loss they have sustained by his decease; and that the President be asked to convey the foregoing to his widow.

The late Mr. Marshall was 67 years of age. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly as member for Murchison on the 12th March, 1921, and represented that constituency continuously for 31 years. At the time of his death he was the father of the House. He occupied the position of Chairman of Committees from the 8th August, 1939, to the 3rd August, 1945, and was appointed Minister for Mines, Railways and Transport on 3rd August, 1945, which position he occupied until the resignation of the Wise Government on the 1st April, 1947.

Probably I had a closer link with Mr. Marshall than had almost any other member present. He and I worked together on the Yuanmi mine at Youanmi in 1912 and again on the Queen of the Hills mine, Meekatharra, in 1913. The fact of working on the same mines does not necessarily convey that I had a close association with him, but we were actual shift mates. Although at times we worked on different tasks, we were able to arrange with the management to change over jobs on odd occasions for the sake of gaining experience. At Youanmi we were members of a small circle and played football in the same team, and after I left Youanmi, he joined a little establishment where four of us had set up batching.

His was a very likeable personality. He was frank, sometimes very forthright in his speech, but those who knew him best realised that a warmer-hearted man and a truer friend never lived. Last year I

had the pleasure of his company on a trip through the Murchison and we were then able to renew many old associations and revive many memories. I regard the experience of the week we then had together as a very delightful one indeed and feel particularly sorry that the hand of Fate has laid him low.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [4.45]: It is with deep regret that I find it necessary to second a motion of this description. It is hard for me to realise that Bill Marshall is no longer with us. I saw him a few weeks ago, and although he was a very sick man at the time, he still retained his fighting spirit and spoke about his contemplated trip, which he hoped would restore his health. I was associated with him for the greater part of 30 years. As the Minister has stated, Mr. Marshall was a forthright man. He was not afraid to tell the world what he thought. It mattered not if everybody was against him; so long as he was satisfied in his own mind that he was right, opposition meant nothing to him.

I know of no other man of whom I could say, "He was my mate 100 per cent." There were no half measures about him; he was entirely for one or against one. I hope that the high respect in which he was held by political friend and foe, all of whom appreciated him as a man, and the sentiments expressed in both Houses, will prove to be some consolation to his widow and family that Bill did not live in vain. The people of the State will remember him for his services, and amongst the people of the Murchison, his name will always be revered.

HON. W. R. HALL (North-East) [4.47]: I desire to support the motion and endorse the remarks of previous speakers. For over 15 years I was closely associated with Mr. Marshall and more so during the last three or four years when the Murchison district was included in North-East Province. I had the pleasure of travelling on the trip through the Murchison with the Minister for Transport and with Mr. Marshall and I realised that he was one of the most highly respected members I have ever known.

As a debater he was fearless; he had the courage of his convictions at all times, and I am very sorry that he has passed away. He gave great service to the State and made his mark in his parliamentary career. His example should be an incentive to those who follow as to what can be done by a member of Parliament. I tender my deepest sympathy to his widow and relatives.

HON. G. BENNETTS (South-East) [4.48]: I join with other members in supporting the motion so ably moved by the Minister for Transport. I knew Mr. Marshall for many years before I entered

Parliament and I am acquainted with the work he did for the Labour movement over many years. He was always a jovial man and people in the back country particularly were always pleased to see him. The Labour movement and especially the mining industry have lost a valued member whose services will be long remembered. He had a deep knowledge of the industry and of miners' compensation and other matters allied to the industry. He served on various committees, and for his able work in that connection, he will be sadly missed and difficult to replace. I was much grieved to hear of his passing.

THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. Sir Charles Latham—Central) [4.49]: My memory today goes back to 1921 when the late Mr. Marshall and I entered the Legislative Assembly as quite new members. I was associated with him for 21 years in that House. One gets to know a member very well, no matter whether he sits on the same side or the opposite side, and during 21 years of such association is able to judge his character. Mr. Marshall held very strong views, and he was always most generous in expressing them, but he was tolerant of the views of other people. So, while he was a member of the Legislative Assembly he set a good example which has culminated in the very good feeling which exists between the different parties.

I saw him the day before he left to go north, and I felt convinced then that he would not return to Perth. But he still had his old fighting spirit because he said, that once he got on to the boat he would be able to eat better, and he felt he would recover. That was typical of the man because once he set his hand to the plough he did not let go until he gained his objective. He at least always got a very good hearing. I shall miss him very much because during the 31 years that he was a member of another place I met him frequently; and I also did during the short period I was out of politics. He was always friendly with me, and we were able to discourse on matters outside of politics. I join with the Minister in conveying to his widow my deepest sympathy to her and to his relatives.

HON. E. M. HEENAN (North-East) [4.51]: I support the motion. While other speakers have paid all the tributes which are necessary, I feel that the electors I represent on the Murchison and the Eastern Goldfields would like through me to add their tribute to this worthy man. He fought strongly over a long period for the prospectors and miners and other people in the far outback. They have lost a real champion who always thought first of them. He never forgot their problems or the difficulties they were up against; or the part of the State which many people are prone to overlook. His memory in-

spires those of us who remain to represent that part of the State, to carry on as best we can in accordance with the example he set. We can best pay tribute to his memory by carrying on in that manner. Some words just occurred to me which, I think, are very apt when speaking of the late Mr. Marshall, and they are these—

One who marched breast forward;
Never doubted clouds would break.
Held, we fall to rise,
Are baffled to fight better;
Sleep to wake.

THE PRESIDENT [4.53]: Before putting the motion, I would like to associate myself with it. Time has brought many changes during the period I have been in Parliament. It was one of my first experiences to meet the late Mr. Marshall when I came into the House. When one goes through the Goldfields, one finds that Mr. Marshall's name is indeed a household word; that he had friends in every remote locality that he frequented. The Minister has spoken of his personal association with the late gentleman, and I can only bear witness to the cheerful courage with which he bore the affliction which ultimately resulted in his death. Those who had the opportunity of meeting him a short while ago did appreciate the cheerful way in which he carried the burden that had come on him after a lifetime which had been so conspicuous by good health.

Question passed; members standing.

BILL—STATE ELECTRICITY COMMISSION ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [4.58]: After looking at the measure I find it is really for the purpose of permitting the State Electricity Commission to raise loans, to issue debentures and so forth. I have no objection to these powers being granted to the State Electricity Commission because I know that for many years this State has suffered, so far as loan moneys are concerned, by comparison with some of the other States—particularly Victoria.

We realise that Victoria, because of the borrowing powers given to various of its governmental bodies, has been able to get a much larger share of loan moneys than this State, because the whole of our State instrumentalities have had to rely on the Government to borrow the money, in the first place, and then to make it available to them. This will remove the State Electricity Commission from participation in ordinary Government loan moneys, and place it entirely on its own feet. I hope that before the session is over we shall find

other State instrumentalities in the same position. Until that is done, we will always be at a disadvantage when compared with the other States.

The Bill deals mainly with loans; and the Minister spoke of the South Fremantle and the East Perth power houses, but I am assuming also that the money to be raised by these loans will be used by the Commission for the purchase of the electricity supply schemes of quite a number of the municipalities and other bodies that are at present distributing power. I do not know how the Electricity Commission can otherwise finance the propositions it is taking over. I have in mind the purchase by the Commission of the Fremantle power supply. I think the sum the Commission agreed to pay for that plant was somewhere about £550,000 and that is only one of several plants that have been purchased in recent years. Therefore, I would like the Minister, when replying to the debate, to give the House some indication of how these purchases are being financed.

I understand that last year the Commission purchased plants at Midland Junction, Guildford and various other places and no doubt large sums of money were expended. I believe that the Commission recently took over the power supply of the Subiaco Municipal Council and at the moment is negotiating for the purchase of the North Fremantle supply. Now that this octopus of the State Electricity Commission has spread its tentacles out in these various directions, it should not take advantage of the fact that it has been granted a monopoly by Parliament.

Hon. L. Craig: But do you not believe in State monopolies?

Hon. G. FRASER: Quite so, but that does not stop me from issuing a warning. The Commission should not forget that there is such a person as the consumer, and I hope that it will do everything possible to see that the price charged to the consumer is a fair and reasonable one.

I am forced to make these remarks because I am not sure that the Commission is starting off on the right foot. Investigations show that there has been an increase, or there will be, in prices. There has been an increase in the Fremantle area and I understand that the rates in North Fremantle will be increased too. I do not know whether the rates in Midland Junction, Subiaco and other areas taken over by the Commission have been increased or not, but I issue a word of warning.

Next I wish to make a comparison of the rates that have been charged. The price of electricity to a consumer in the Fremantle area, prior to the acquisition of the local concern by the State Electricity Commission, was about 5½d. a unit

for light and 2½d. a unit for power. Up to 12 months ago the price charged was about 4½d. a unit for light and 1½d. a unit for power. At the moment the increase amounts to 87d. a unit, but it is likely to be increased to more than 1d. a unit in the near future.

The State Electricity Commission has a good excuse because there was a long standing agreement between the Fremantle Tramway and Electric Lighting Board and the Government of the day—this was before the State Electricity Commission was established—wherein the Government agreed to supply the board with electricity at a price which in later years was less than the cost of generation. As the Commission has now taken over the concern, it is only natural to assume that it will increase the price to ensure that there will be no further loss in that regard.

While I can understand the necessity for a slight increase in the Fremantle area, I cannot understand the need for such an increase in the North Fremantle districts. In order to emphasise this point I have an account issued to a householder in that area. The State Electricity Commission has taken over as from the 1st August and we can only assume that the price that has been charged in Fremantle will be charged in this particular area.

Before stating the figures, I want to set out the position in regard to the supply of electricity in that area prior to the Commission taking over. The local authority had to purchase the electricity from the Fremantle municipality who purchased it from the State Electricity Commission. Even after using all those avenues, the price charged to a consumer in that area was only 4d. a unit for light and 1½d. a unit for power.

Hon. L. Craig: What date was that?

Hon. G. FRASER: This is up to the 1st August of this year.

Hon. L. Craig: It was 4d. then?

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes. This account is dated the 30th May, 1952, but the price stated there is the same as in the last account issued by the municipality.

The Minister for Transport: What are your figures?

Hon. G. FRASER: The net figures are 4d. a unit for light and 1½d. a unit for power. There is a 1d. a unit discount if the account is paid before a certain date, but I have given the Minister the net figures. This account shows that the householder consumed 38 units of light at 4d. a unit which amounts to 12s. 8d.—this is a monthly account. There was a consumption of 337 units of power at 1½d. a unit, a total of £1 15s. 1d. The total of the account for the month was £2 7s. 9d. As I cannot see any reason why there should be a difference in the rates charged in Fremantle and North Fremantle by the State Electricity Commission, the new price

for light to this particular householder will be £1 0s. 2d. as against 12s. 8d. and the price for power will be increased from £1 15s. 1d. to £3 6s. 6d. Consequently this householder will have to pay £4 6s. 8d. a month as against £2 7s. 9d., and do not let us forget that under the old method three avenues for supply were used.

Hon. Sir Frank Gibson: They will soon make a profit out of it.

Hon. G. FRASER: That will mean a difference of £2 in a monthly account. Under the new setup, accounts will be paid quarterly and that will mean a difference of £6 or £7 in each quarter. Those are rather startling figures and are worthy of investigation. Parliament granted the State Electricity Commission a monopoly covering the supply of current and the Commission should supply that current at the cheapest possible rates. I do not want to get into an argument with some of our Goldfields representatives about a flat rate throughout the State. That is another question which we will argue later on, but I mention those figures because I think the Commission should furnish some explanation.

I understand that at the moment the rate is 6.37d. for light and 2.37d. for power and I have been told that as from the 12th August those prices are to be increased. A lot of people are worrying about whether the Commission can make its increased charges retrospective to the beginning of the quarter if an increase occurs some time during the quarter. Some of these points require ironing out, and I hope the Minister will have the necessary investigations made so that he can inform the House exactly what the Commission intends to do in that regard. Apart from those remarks I have no opposition to the Bill and I am anticipating that members will agree to it. In future, if the Bill is passed, the Commission will have its own borrowing powers and will not claim moneys raised by the Government for other purposes.

HON. L. CRAIG (South-West) [5.12]: I intend to support the second reading of the Bill which contains a proposal to relieve the State from the necessity of providing money for the electricity development scheme. The borrowing powers of the State have been restricted by the Loan Council and I approve of that course because I think the State has been over-borrowing. However, it is desirable that undertakings which have been commenced should be continued, because vast sums of capital moneys have been spent by the State Electricity Commission and today much of those moneys are non-productive. Consequently, it is necessary that more funds should be made available so that these works may be continued and thus become productive.

Moreover, promises have been made to certain country districts to the effect that by a given date they would be supplied with power. To my knowledge many farmers have made their plans accordingly. Some have not installed engines for milking and other purposes while some have not renewed old plant because the State Electricity Commission definitely told them that by such and such a date—I think it was October—they would be supplied with power. Poles have been erected and some of the cables have been laid. But there the work has stopped and it is most desirable, not only from the point of view of the State Electricity Commission, but also from the point of view of those people who have received promises, that the contracts should be completed.

The State Electricity Commission will become a huge undertaking employing vast numbers of men who will be scattered throughout the State. It is not the practice of Government instrumentalities to pay rates on houses occupied by their employees, but as the State is becoming the largest employer of labour, and in justice to road boards and municipalities, the time has come when the Government should make a contribution to local authorities by paying rates on houses occupied by Government employees.

Hon. Sir Frank Gibson: Hear, hear!

Hon. L. CRAIG: Why should State employees receive the benefit of rate-free housing just because they are State employees?

Hon. G. Fraser: I think a number of Government departments do pay rates.

Hon. L. CRAIG: Some of them make an ex gratia payment, but the State Electricity Commission, although making an ex gratia payment on rates for business premises, refuses to make any contribution to the local authorities for the payment of rates on houses occupied by its employees. I do not think it is fair.

Hon. E. M. Davies: It applies to some Governments departments.

Hon. L. CRAIG: Footpaths have to be paid for and roads have to be maintained, all at the expense of people living in the locality. Why should that cost have to be borne by one section of residents, while others using the footpaths and roads to the same extent are exempt from any liability just because they are State employees? Now that the Government has become such a vast employer of labour, it should fall into line with other employers and pay its just proportion of rates.

Parliament has given the State a monopoly over the supply of electricity throughout Western Australia. The State Electricity Commission is a huge business undertaking. I hope it will be run on business lines and certainly that it will not be made use of as a social service. If we

are to have State instrumentalities, for goodness sake let us run them as they would be by a well-organised company or private concern. Let us see that there is no writing-off each year on account of mismanagement, undercharging or because of some of the other foolish methods that States adopt when they control undertakings of this description. I certainly hope the State Electricity Commission will be run on business lines and that proper allowance will be made for depreciation, replacement of plant and all the other requirements necessary in a big undertaking of this description.

HON. C. H. HENNING (South-West) [5.17]: I intend to support the Bill because I believe it essential to the progress of the State that the Electricity Commission should continue its operations and expand its activities. I am very hopeful that the money will be subscribed when the loan is floated, although I am given to understand that difficulty has been experienced in raising money at the rate of interest mentioned by the Minister. If the Government were a private company seeking more capital, it would give some explanation to the public as to the direction in which the money to be raised was to be expended.

I am not very familiar with what is happening in the metropolitan area, but I have some acquaintance with the position as it applies in the South-West. Most of the expenditure incurred by the Commission there has been on the buying of plants that were already operating in the various towns and also upon the extension of the mains. In other words, it was spent in connection with work that had formerly been undertaken by the local electrical plants.

When the original legislation was introduced dealing with the establishment of the State Electricity Commission, the then Chief Secretary made a statement to the following effect:—

The Government was fully aware of the necessity to bring electricity to a maximum number of persons and that the hard-working men and women in the country districts should be given the opportunity to enjoy amenities and to acquire labour-saving devices, as was available to people in the metropolitan area.

A great deal of clamour has been raised for electrical connections starting from the Wellard district near Fremantle and extending throughout the whole of the South-West. As far as I am aware, the connections made to farms have been negligible. In fact, only one man has had his property connected up with the scheme.

As Mr. Craig pointed out, many people are waiting to see what chance there is of securing connections. If more publicity is not given to the matter shortly, those people will have to renew their present

machinery and probably will have to instal lighting plants. I know that the State Electricity Commission will not connect up premises where there are fewer residents than four to the mile and those requiring connections in the country districts will be provided with free wiring from the main to the extent of only one chain. When he replies to the debate, I hope the Minister will give us some idea of the directions in which the money to be raised will be spent, and what the possibilities are of farms being connected up with the system, thereby helping to relieve housewives in rural areas of some of the drudgery they have to put up with at present.

HON. H. HEARN (Metropolitan) [5.20]: I rise to support the second reading of the Bill. I would like to be assured that the State Electricity Commission is conscious of its terrific responsibility to industry. Some of us who are actively engaged in manufacturing pursuits view with great alarm the steep increase in the cost of power, which is reaching a point where it will be made very difficult to carry on competitive business.

While I have a great deal of sympathy with Mr. Fraser regarding the accounts mentioned, I imagine that it will be found that the basis of the first costs quoted was on prewar levels as applied to the supply of electricity. I remind the Minister that industry can bear only a certain amount of the very steeply increased burden of added costs, and the time has arrived when it must be recognised that, if there is a recession, it means that we can only prosper by being able to reduce costs in all directions. The way electricity costs have spiralled during the last few years has been a matter of grave concern to industry generally.

HON. E. M. DAVIES (West) [5.22]: I support the Bill because I believe it is necessary to have sufficient electricity available for developmental purposes throughout the State. I agree with the remarks of previous speakers in relation to people in the country districts being entitled to an adequate supply of current reticulated through their areas, so that they can enjoy amenities that are available to the residents of the metropolitan area.

I do not know what the policy of the Government may be, but I believe it necessary, if we are to depend on the generation of electric current at the East Perth and South Fremantle power houses, that some centre for the generation of electricity should be adopted quite apart from the stations in the metropolitan area. I express that opinion because I believe that in the event of a breakdown of the metropolitan stations, another power house should be erected somewhere in the country, preferably close to the

centre of coal production, and that the country station should be connected up with those in the metropolitan area so that consumers in both metropolitan and country areas would not be without current in the event of a breakdown at one or other of the stations.

At this stage I desire to be somewhat parochial. I have a definite recollection of the transactions recently completed regarding the taking over of the electricity plant at Fremantle. The statement has been made that the price paid by the State Electricity Commission to the Fremantle Tramways and Electric Lighting Board was £550,000. I raise no objection to the price arranged. I believe it was based on a fair valuation, although I have been told that the value of the Fremantle plant was greater than £550,000. I understand, however, that much of the plant had reached the stage where renewals were required, and possibly that fact was taken into consideration when the valuation was arrived at.

May I remind the Government that Fremantle is still served with 40 cycle current, which is not world standard like that provided in the metropolitan area? Prior to the East Perth power station being erected and provided with a monopoly of the supply of current in the metropolitan area, the Fremantle power plant was controlled by the Fremantle Tramways and Electric Lighting Board which supplied current on the 50 cycle basis. That supply had to be scrapped under the new scheme and Fremantle went on to the 40 cycle basis in common with the rest of the metropolitan area. We were promised that when the South Fremantle power station started generating current, Fremantle would be one of the first to be supplied with 50 cycle current.

As a matter of fact, during the discussions on whether the Fremantle undertaking was to be sold to the State Electricity Commission—previously it was made clear that the Fremantle concern had an agreement covering a further 16 years—it was stated that there was a possibility of the Government introducing a Bill for the purpose of annulling the agreement. Naturally that forced the Fremantle board to dispose of the undertaking to the State Electricity Commission. The proposition was advanced that the agreement should remain in force and that the Fremantle undertaking would pay the State Electricity Commission an increase in the amount charged for the supply of bulk current, which was .85d. per unit.

The Electricity Commission announced, however, that it was hoped to break the agreement, and I am forced to the conclusion that that was used by the Commission to gain its point. The result is

that Fremantle is still being supplied on the 40 cycle basis whereas the rest of the metropolitan area is obtaining 50 cycle current, while at the same time we have the spectacle of current being transmitted from the South Fremantle power station to the East Perth power plant at 50 cycles, broken down there to 40 cycles and returned to Fremantle on that basis.

Hon. G. Bennetts: Surely the Commission would not go back on a promise.

Hon. E. M. DAVIES: To the average individual it makes little difference whether he obtains 40 or 50 cycle current, but quite a number of persons have purchased electrical equipment suitable for a 50 cycle electricity supply and only 40 cycle current is available. In addition, the voltage has dropped in some of the outlying districts because of the increased demand due to the augmented population. In fact, the voltage has dropped so low in some of the outer parts that refrigerators in the homes will not function.

The amount of light people can obtain from their globes is very low indeed, not sufficient for them to be able to read, because the lines are not built to carry the load that is required. That is no reflection on the Fremantle Tramway and Electric Lighting Board, because, during and since the war, it attempted to obtain loan funds for the purpose of purchasing heavier lines and equipment. But unfortunately it was not permitted to acquire the necessary loan money because the State Electricity Commission was using whatever was available.

We were told that when the State Electricity Commission took over the electricity supply we would be on 50 cycles within a period of at most two months. The two months have hardly expired, so I am not going to accuse the Commission of failing to adhere to its agreement. But I do not see evidence of any activity as a result of which that changeover will take place. Sir Frank Gibson has just informed me that they are working out in the industrial area, and I am pleased to know that. But I want to make a plea on behalf of the folk in the residential districts who at present are suffering great disabilities through being unable to use the equipment which they have purchased as suitable for 50 cycles; and also on behalf of those people who have electrical equipment and find that, owing to the drop in voltage, that equipment is not functioning as it should.

It has been mentioned to me that, as a result of the low voltage, refrigerators owned by some people have burnt out, and I understand that claims are being made against the Government department which is responsible for supplying the electricity. I raise no objection to the Bill. I realise it is necessary for the proper development

of this State that we should have an efficient electricity supply; and I believe that when the South Fremantle power house gets into full swing and the changeover to 50 cycles is made, we will not have the breakdowns in the electricity supply such as we have had in the past.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT

(Hon. C. H. Simpson—Midland—in reply) [5.34]: I am pleased with the support that has been accorded the Bill. I think members will realise that the essential purpose of the measure is to give the Commission power to raise a loan to assist it to carry on its programme.

Most of the debate has raised points which are rather divorced from the purpose of the Bill, and I suggest that members allow me to deal with quite a number of those points when I am speaking to the debate on the Address-in-reply. Obviously, as this is not my department, quite a lot of information that has been sought I cannot be expected to give. In regard to the financing of the project to take over the Fremantle electricity scheme, I think Mr. Fraser will recall that only a portion of the actual purchase price had to be found in cash and that was provided for in our loan commitments. It was arranged that payment of the remainder of the purchase price should extend over a term of years, and that also has been provided for.

Members may recall that when the Bill came before the House to give effect to the arrangement that was being entered into with the Fremantle Municipal Council, it was pointed out that the old arrangement under which the council purchased current for .85d. per unit was involving the Electricity Commission in a considerable annual loss. Although that may have been to the benefit of the people of Fremantle, it meant that other residents of the State were carrying the load, because at that time the production cost to the Electricity Commission was 1.6d. per unit, and on top of that there were distribution costs.

So, in providing that current at .85d. per unit, the Commission made a loss on every unit sold; and as the rising costs affected the production of electricity, and as consumption increased, obviously that loss over the 16 years lease, with the option of a three-years renewal, would have amounted to a considerable sum. In any case, the proposition was put to the Fremantle Municipal Council and a general agreement was reached on the question of an adjustment. That was the subject of a Bill, which was passed last year.

Hon. E. M. Davies: Could you inform the House whether it is correct that the State Electricity Commission was supplying current to industries around Perth cheaper than it was proposed to supply it to the Fremantle Tramway and Electricity Board?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: Offhand, I cannot remember the figures, but I should say that is correct. I think members will realise that there has always been a considerable concession to industry in regard to power, because that is a basic cost; and as the cost of power obviously enters into the cost of an article, it is very desirable that such cost should be reduced to the lowest possible point. On the other hand, the price to ordinary consumers has been built up so that the overall return would cover expenses and provide a small margin of profit. At least, that was the idea. Generally speaking, the State Electricity Commission has served this State very well in this respect at least. Instead of having the black-outs which are experienced over east, we have been complimented on the fact that our power supply is better than that available in any other State and, with the additions envisaged, our requirements in power should be guaranteed for quite a number of years.

Hon. G. Fraser: It showed great foresight on the part of the Labour Government.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: We will give credit where credit is due. I will say that one of the first acts of the present Government was to duplicate the existing plant to provide for future requirements, over and above what the previous Government had done. The remarks I have made will, I think, have a bearing on the specimen accounts furnished by Mr. Fraser. As the distribution authority at that time was able to purchase power below cost, obviously it could return benefits to the consumers according to its costs. But under the new agreement, where the price to the authorities is based on the actual cost of production, the charge to the eventual consumer had to fall into line with the new price. Taking an overall view, I think that was fair.

Hon. G. Fraser: But there is a big discrepancy.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: Not necessarily. The production cost, as I have pointed out, was 1.6d., which was almost double the actual price charged to the Fremantle distributing authority; so that if the cost at that time, which has been increased by the impact of basic wage rises, is taken into account, I do not think there is the discrepancy between the two accounts that the hon. member would suggest.

As regards the points raised by Mr. Craig, the programme of the Commission has been interrupted to a certain extent by the cutting down of the loan programme, and that is why we are anxious to float this loan, so that the original programme can be met. I think I explained when introducing the Bill that the object was to provide money to meet commitments in the way of machin-

ery ordered; construction costs; the development of country programmes; and essential extensions to consumers. I can assure Mr. Craig that this concern is being run as a business, and that as the State develops and the actual distribution rises, the overheads spread over the present consumers should be lessened.

That, in a sense, is a reply to Mr. Henning, who asked which way the money was to be expended. I think also I have replied to his point about how soon electricity will be available to the farms. That will depend on the success of this loan. We are very optimistic about the loan being met. Our advice is that there will be no difficulty in securing the money required. I have also replied in part to the point raised by Mr. Hearn in regard to the supply of cheap power to industry. It is true that those costs are rising, but that is only a consequence of the impact of rising costs.

Hon. H. Hearn: In addition, industry had a tremendous burden to bear in buying power plant during the period you were in trouble.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I will admit that. One of the points raised was that the Electricity Commission owns houses that are occupied by employees and are exempt from rates. That is something that may deserve investigation but must be considered very carefully. It will probably be realised that the Railway Department, for instance, has found it necessary to construct many houses for its employees. In order to obtain the services of men in the country, it has had to provide houses, sometimes in very remote areas. A railway going through the country, by and large, creates values which were not there before; and I think it is only equitable that an agency of that kind, which does confer great benefits on the country and builds up values, should be allowed some concession of that sort. So the question of demanding rates from houses owned by the Government is one that should be approached with very great caution and a certain amount of discretion.

In the course of his remarks, Mr. Davies referred to the desirability of arranging for construction in sections so as to isolate the effects of any breakdown. I think that is a standard practice in electrical undertakings and I would be surprised if it were not being applied to the system as a whole. When replying to the debate on the Address-in-reply, I will deal with the question that the hon. member raised regarding the change from 40 to 50 cycles at Fremantle. I understood him to say that there is some prospect of that work going ahead immediately. I am glad that members have supported the Bill because it will enable the programme to be continued and will considerably advance the potential development of the State.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee, etc.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment and the report adopted.

Bill read a third time and passed.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Sixth Day.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. G. BENNETTS (South-East) [5.47]: I desire first to congratulate our new members on their entry to this House and wish to compliment them on the excellent speeches they have made. Since last year there has been a great increase in unemployment in this State and it has become more accentuated since the substantial overseas credits accumulated by the Curtin and Chifley Governments have been whittled away by the present Administration. I believe that the recently-delivered Commonwealth Budget will place this State in a bad position, but there is a cycle in the changes of Government and I think a turn of the wheel is just about due. If that is so, we may next year welcome a Labour Government back into office.

Hon. H. Hearn: Do you think that would improve things?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I think so.

Hon. A. L. Loton: You might find yourself on the ministerial bench.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I wish to congratulate Sir Charles Latham on having succeeded to the portfolio of Agriculture and I hope he will follow in the footsteps of the late Mr. Wood, who did so much for my district. He was a hard worker who always paid great attention to his department and I hope his successor will give that same attention to the State in general and to Esperance in particular as was given by the late Mr. Wood.

The Minister for Agriculture: You have had a fair share of help up to date.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I hope the Minister will be present at the field days in the Salmon Gums and Esperance areas in the near future because we will then be able to show him what the district can produce and what should be done to enhance its progress. There is still room for a great deal of sound development in that district.

The Minister for Agriculture: I heard that you were advocating the formation of a new State in that area, with Esperance as its capital.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: There is plenty of opportunity for the Minister to do good work and earn himself great credit in that area. We have the land there awaiting development and it presents the Minister with a great opportunity to make a name for himself.

Goldmining is, of course, the main interest of my electorate and, were it not for our gold production in the past, the metropolitan area would not be what it is today. When wheat and wool were at a low ebb, goldmining was able to carry the State and, in part, even the Commonwealth. That time will come again though we are going through a bad period in the mining industry these days owing to the great increases in the cost of production. On the 18th September we will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the discovery of gold at Coolgardie, because it was that event which started to put Western Australia on the map. We intend holding a party there and members are cordially invited to be present. The 23rd June next is the 60th anniversary of the discovery of gold at Kalgoorlie and again members will be welcome to attend. We will certainly turn it on for them—

Hon. H. Hearn: What will you turn on?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: We will turn on the beverage of the Goldfields, straight from the water supply. As members know, prospecting is necessary for the discovery of gold deposits. We have heard it said that the ordinary prospector is not required today to the same extent as he was in the past, but that is quite untrue. He is just as necessary now as he ever was, but there are fewer prospectors in the field because there is not sufficient incentive for them.

At the annual meeting of the Chamber of Mines recently, the chairman, Mr. Agnew, said that the old-time prospector was badly needed today to discover new finds. There are plenty of metals and minerals waiting to be unearthed on the Goldfields and I recommend to the Minister for Mines that he do everything he possibly can to encourage experienced men to take up prospecting. Norseman is the second biggest mining centre in the State but there, also, we have suffered a setback due to the high and rising costs of production, together with all the disabilities usually found in remote areas. Were it not for the working of the pyrites deposits there, the industry at Norseman would not be receiving the help it is getting today. I would remind members that the production of pyrites is of assistance to the farmers and helps to increase the production of food throughout the State.

Hon. W. R. Hall: Have the farmers ever been in trouble in the Norseman area?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: The farmers will always say they are in trouble.

The Minister for Agriculture: Be careful! You represent some of them.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: The farmer is a very important man and, as one can see from the condition of some members in

this House, he is doing fairly well. Goldmining, as I have said, is one of our most important industries—

Hon. A. L. Loton: Would you compare gold with the production of wheat and wool, as regards returns, over the past few years?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: The price of wool has dropped back to half what it was not so long ago. We are now selling a certain amount of gold on the open market and that is of advantage to the industry, but I would remind members that the stabilised price has remained at a constant figure for a long time while the returns from most other avenues of production have increased tremendously. The time may yet come when we shall again have to look to the goldmining areas of the State to get us out of trouble.

The Goldfields Water Supply Scheme was instituted in 1903 and was opened by the late Lord Forrest. It has proved of the greatest assistance in the development of the goldfields but we are still paying very high charges for water in that area. It is about time that there was a flat rate for water throughout the State. Mr. Baxter, Mr. Cunningham and the Minister for Agriculture have mentioned the question of wooden pipes for the Kalgoorlie scheme, but Sir Charles said that they were used in the low-lying portions only—

The Minister for Agriculture: I said that they were not strong enough for use there but that they were suitable on the higher levels.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I would like Sir Charles to know that that is not the position and that what Mr. Cunningham said was also not correct. Some years ago I was assistant pipe fitter on the Sons of Gwalia mine and we had a main running from the boiler plant to a well a couple of miles away. It was proved that the head of water built up—

The Minister for Agriculture: On the rise—coming to the top?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: No, that is not correct. It is always down in the hollows that it builds up, as members can ascertain by consulting any competent engineer. The wooden pipes on the Goldfields main have been there for 20 years odd and are still in good condition. They will take a pressure of up to 300 lb. per square inch. They are always used up and down the sides of the hills. They are to be seen at No. 6 and No. 7 pumping stations, where they are run over the grades. I came down by car and made an inspection of these pipes.

The Minister for Agriculture: I shall have to take you up and show them to you again. You get out of your car next time and have a real good look at them.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I came down to Perth on Monday by car especially to have a look at them. I also checked my in-

formation to ascertain whether it was correct. These pipes, which are made of karri, are treated in the same way as were the Commonwealth railway sleepers. In that case different treatment was used but it was much the same principle. The makers placed wire around the wood which set up rust and caused the pipes to rot. The authorities found that by inserting something between the wood and the wire it gave the pipes longer life, and this innovation proved to be extremely satisfactory. This lack of maintenance is shown by all Government departments.

If one sees a badly painted establishment, one immediately says, "That is a Government building." That is the position with these pipes; they have been neglected for want of attention. If they are properly maintained, they are equal to the steel pipes. I support Mr. Baxter in his statement that the wooden pipes will prove to be an asset to the State. There are many firms that would be willing to manufacture them and if orders were placed with them, it would save the State a great deal of trouble. However, I have heard that with the settlement of the strike in the Eastern States and the stepping up of steel production, we may soon be able to obtain the steel for the manufacture of these pipes.

Hon. N. E. Baxter: If we have the money to pay for them.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: The wooden pipes would definitely be an asset to the State and prove to be equally as satisfactory as the steel pipes. I would like the Minister to check up and see whether I am right.

On several occasions in this House I have spoken in an endeavour to obtain a home for the aged people on the Goldfields. Those folk are the pioneers who were responsible for the discovery of many goldfields and who helped to place the State in the sound position it is in today. They are entitled to enjoy the benefits of a home in the same way as are the aged people in the metropolitan area. I have made an application to the Government to purchase a residence at Kalgoorlie which has been offered for sale at a reasonable figure and which would prove suitable for such a home. However, I understand that because of the shortage of loan moneys the Government will not be able to purchase it.

I think the only way we can achieve this objective is to appeal for funds from the local people and then approach the Lotteries Commission for a subsidy. In view of the fact that approximately £500,000 was spent on the construction of the Mt. Henry home for aged women, surely we on the Goldfields are entitled to £5,000 for the purchase of a home that was offered to me for a similar purpose.

The Minister for Agriculture: Did not the Lotteries Commission build the Mt. Henry home?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: Yes.

The Minister for Agriculture: I thought you said that the Government supplied the money.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: It was built through Government influence. Today I read in the Press that a mere £14 was allocated to the Kalgoorlie hospital from the funds received by the Lotteries Commission. We were the lowest on the list.

I have also endeavoured to have a hostel built on the Goldfields for the benefit of school children. In Kalgoorlie we have a high school equal to any in the State and the ordinary Government schools are teaching children up to the eighth standard. Those schools serve the children who live along the Commonwealth Transline and those in other remote areas who are housed in schools of only one room. We are not fortunate enough to enjoy the benefits that are provided by school bus services. The parents of those children are therefore forced to send them to Perth in order that they may receive proper education. I have had several homes offered to me which would prove to be suitable for a school hostel, but I cannot get the Government to see eye to eye with me.

Hon. W. R. Hall: It never will.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: The other evening I asked a question about hotels. I desired to know who owned a number of them. It appears that a monopoly is being set up over hotels in the same way as there is over breweries. Such a state of affairs is not good for Western Australia. The licensees of many freehold hotels are suffering great hardships, and I would like the Licensing Court to supply to the House the information for which I have asked.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: What restrictions are placed on them?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: At one time they were supplied with beer taps from the breweries, but they now have to pay rent on them and also make good any minor damage that is done to the barrels. The breweries say, "Your barrels were damaged on such and such a date and you are required to pay £1 for repairs." The hotel licensee concerned has no redress. If he says, "They were not damaged when they left here," the brewery replies, "You have to pay for the damage." It is about time, therefore, that we did something similar to what is being done in the Eastern States.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: What? A Royal Commission?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: That might be one way by which to deal with it. We should try to break down these monopolies and the system of one brewery owning a large number of hotels. One hotel should be allotted to each person.

On the Goldfields we are not receiving the requisite quantity of material that is necessary for housing. I will admit that the strike has greatly affected the position but nevertheless even up to the start of the strike it was difficult to obtain timber supplies. If one wanted several pieces of timber and went along to a timber yard to get them, one was lucky to obtain even one item. It was also difficult to obtain cement and the supply of that material is still exceedingly short.

There is need for a better system of supplying materials to outback areas. It appears to me that all building material supplies are being allotted to the metropolitan area. One has only to go along a street in any suburb and see many houses in the course of erection.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: Have you tried to build down here?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: No, but the number of homes that are being built in Perth is out of all proportion to those that are being built on the Goldfields. The limit there is about one every six months. Apart from new constructions, it is difficult to obtain building materials for necessary repairs to existing homes. Of course, the flow of immigrants into the country has aggravated the housing position. I have read a statement to the effect that it is intended that the number of immigrants to be brought into the country is to be halved, and such a step is long overdue.

There is no encouragement to new Australians to enter our State, when we have not the homes to offer them. The Government, of course, is doing everything possible. It has brought the people into the country and therefore feels obliged to make homes available to new Australians in preference to Australian citizens. As I said last year, the Railway Department is over-administered. When we had only one railway commissioner there was a scarcity of money, but now that we have four they have all the money they require.

The Minister for Agriculture: What! They have not got it.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: My word they have! The other day I asked a question about the purchase of some new Avery scales for the Railway Department. Sixty-four of them were placed on counters throughout the department for a total expenditure of £9,040. The old scales were of a good type and were always correct. These new scales will have to be checked and maintained by the Avery Coy., and the other day I saw one that was weighing incorrectly.

The Minister for Agriculture: At what station?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I cannot give the information to the House because it might get somebody into trouble. Nevertheless, I saw a parcel being weighed on those scales which were out of order. Extra cost

was also incurred because, as these new scales are of a heavy type, the counters had to be reinforced in order to hold them. I want to know why they were bought. It seems to me that the £9,000 odd could have been put to better use.

For example, the booking office at the Perth railway station is the biggest eyesore that can be seen in any railway station in Australia. It is actually a little hole in the wall between two pillars. There are little wire netting screens surrounding it and the booking clerks are like prisoners behind bars. No seating accommodation is provided and I have seen many women with babies in their arms standing in a queue waiting for bookings. Another fault is that no provision is made for tourists. I would like the Minister to have a look at the State Government Tourist Bureau and notice the excellent facilities that are offering there.

The Minister for Agriculture: They are put there to encourage people to do their bookings at that office.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: Well, there should be something similar done for the Railway Department in order to encourage people to travel by rail.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: Before the tea suspension I was speaking about the railways. I notice the Railway Department has handed over the race bus traffic to the private bus companies.

Hon. L. A. Logan: And the taxis.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: There are about 7,000 people who attend the races and the private bus companies get 1s. more for their fares than the Railway Department does. This traffic to the races, provided the Railway Department ran the buses, would be an appreciable asset. I believe it should have been maintained and I do not think it is too late to do something in that direction now.

I notice that the ballast train on the main line from Perth to Kalgoorlie was discontinued on account of the metal trades strike; I think the main cause was lack of funds because there is an old type of engine which is used for the job. As one who has worked on ballast trains, I think the Minister will admit that with the shortage of traffic the present time would have been ideal for ballasting operations. At least one-third of the delay in that job is due to the fact that the section is seldom clear. Now that the traffic is slack it may be possible for the work to proceed and a good job to be done.

I have commented before on the administrative staff of the Railway Department. I notice the department has set up a branch called the motor power engineering branch. In that branch alone I see there are to be about 37 employed on the administrative staff. If it is not so, I stand

corrected; but I understand that at present there are about 10 more loco foremen to be appointed on the administration side.

There are also a number of what are called breath inspectors whose duty it is to see that the enginedrivers have not had anything to drink before they go out on their jobs. There are too many people on the administrative staff; they outnumber the workers. I am afraid that the Electricity Commission may also fall into line in this matter. On account of this the railways have to increase fares and freights and the Electricity Commission will have to increase the cost of lighting. These increases will, of course, ultimately fall on the people.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Barker upon the excellent speech he made the other evening when he touched on the North-West. The hon. member understands the north country; he has it off to perfection and his statements are quite right. I have lived in the North and I am glad that he has brought the matter up. In the Kimberleys there are tremendous possibilities, but a great number of obstacles have to be overcome, and this, I think, could be done. This matter, however, concerns the Commonwealth. There are considerable possibilities in that country in the direction of splitting the larger holdings into smaller properties for the growing of tropical foods.

Before anything can be done with the Ord River, I think it will have to be dammed and walled up. It might then be used for irrigation schemes. There is a research party in that district at present seeing what can be done with the rivers for purposes of irrigation. There is the possibility that plantations will be established there. I understand there are also other disabilities like poisoned weed and so on, which are causing considerable anxiety in relation to both horses and cattle. That phase, is however, being controlled, but before it can be completely dealt with, the country will have to be divided into smaller holdings.

Hon. C. W. D. Barker: Closer settlement would do it.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: That is so. There is too much of the land being held by the big men; the smaller people do not get a chance at all. The other day I happened to read a statement by Sir Charles Latham in which he mentioned that he proposed to do the same thing in other parts of the State. I was talking to a farmer recently and he mentioned the matter himself. He said that some people have holdings which are far too large and that this factor is keeping back the State in the production of wheat.

I agree with Mr. Barker when he says that there are vast mineral resources in the North which will be of value to the

whole world. There is a large black population up there, but if we are to hold all the uranium that is being found in this country, we must provide better amenities and facilities to enable white people to live there more comfortably. The land is good to live on provided the amenities are there. People will not reside up there knowing that all the requisite facilities for living are to be found in the metropolitan area.

I would now like to congratulate Mr. Fraser on his appointment as leader of our party in this House. The hon. member has done a good job; he is an active man and I can see that we are going to have progress in our ranks. The Labour Party in this Chamber has gained another member, and it might provide food for thought when I say that the time is not far distant when we will have a majority in this House.

Hon. W. R. Hall: Then we will make the Opposition sit up.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: It may not be long before the Labour Party is in charge of the House.

Hon. L. A. Logan: It will not then be a House.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I would now like to say a few words about the one-man bus service. I think it is a disgrace that the Government should institute such a service. Last night I happened to be a passenger in one of the buses, and the same conditions applied then as on an occasion last week. We pulled up at the William st. corner. It was raining heavily and outside were to be seen women with babies in their arms standing in a queue. They were soaking wet while the bus driver collected fares and attended to his other jobs.

Hon. N. E. Baxter: That is an argument for bus shelters.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I think it would be a fine gesture on the part of the Government if it appointed a second man on each of these buses, especially on occasions when it is raining heavily. In fairness to everybody, more men should be made available.

Hon. C. W. D. Barker: The Victoria Park run is particularly dangerous.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I would like to see any hon. member in this House take on one of these jobs.

Hon. F. R. H. Lavery: I have done so.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: We find there is one man responsible for watching the traffic, driving the bus and taking the fares.

The Minister for Agriculture: It is done in Melbourne.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: We should not worry about what is done in Melbourne; we have minds of our own.

The Minister for Agriculture: And better workers, too.

Hon. G. Fraser: A lot of things that are done in Melbourne you would not do here.

The Minister for Agriculture: A lot of things you do I would not do!

Hon. C. W. D. Barker: The Victoria Park run should be treated separately.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I would now like to say a few words on behalf of the old-age pensioners. I notice they have been granted a small increase, but this has been overtaken by the increase in the cost of living. With its squeezing Budget, the Commonwealth Government is making it increasingly hard for the old-age pensioner. I cannot see how the money he receives can possibly keep up with the cost of living. I know we are paying out a considerable amount of money to all classes by way of pensions, but I do not suppose it is possible to get a pair of boots for under 25s.; the price of butter has gone up; rent has gone up, and so have many other commodities.

Hon. L. A. Logan: Why blame the Government for that?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: If it is good enough for everybody else to get £11 a week, it should be good enough for the pensioner to get the same.

I will now turn my attention to Norseman. On my travels during the last seven months I have noticed the material for 14 precut houses stored in the goods shed at Southern Cross. I believe there are one or two precut house components stored at Coolgardie. Yet railway men in the Norseman district have been crying out for homes for a long time. Why cannot this material be erected to provide homes for people instead of being left lying idle?

The Minister for Transport: We have not the money to pay for the erection.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: Some time ago the road boards of Norseman, Southern Cross and Merredin applied for money for the construction of swimming pools and the Government undertook to make the funds available. However, if a town has a population in excess of a certain figure, it is debarred from receiving such assistance. The Western Mining Corporation, one of the best mining companies in the State, has gone ahead and provided a swimming pool, but it experienced difficulty in obtaining the requisite cement, and the Government did not grant any assistance.

As I said earlier, credit must be given to the company at Norseman for its work in developing the pyrites mine. The Government has granted assistance for this purpose, because it was compelled to do so, as pyrites must be made available for the manufacture of superphosphate. I hope the Government will ensure that full consideration is extended to this company.

Now that the work on the Perth-Kalgoorlie road surface is nearing completion, I hope that attention will be given to the Norseman road, which should be made an

all-weather road. About five years ago a section of eight miles or more was surfaced and we were promised a grant each year towards doing the rest, but from that day to this, nothing more has been done. With the growing traffic between this State and the Eastern States, the cost of maintaining the gravel roads is very heavy. Probably what is paid for the use of graders would meet the outlay for an all-weather road.

I am always pleased to bring before the attention of the Minister the question of settling the land at Esperance. Thousands of acres of land are available, and I should like the Minister for Agriculture to press for the extension of the servicemen's settlement scheme to that area. The rainfall is good, ranging from 25 to 28 inches, and good water may be obtained at depths of 6ft. to 12ft. The land is easy to clear; on one holding 5,000 acres were rolled down in six weeks and the land was brought into production in two years. I heard a statement by the Premier over the air recently that clearing in the Albany district was costing £45 per acre, that the Government could not afford this outlay and that clearing in that area would have to cease. I suggest to the Premier, why not go to Esperance? It has one of the best seaports in the State and the land is suitable for producing milk and raising stock.

Reference was made by Mr. Henning to the time that must necessarily elapse before the milk and butter production of the South-West could be increased to meet requirements. At Esperance, similar production could be attained in one-third of the time that would be necessary in other parts of the State. We would want a factory there and a ship should be placed on the Fremantle-Esperance run. Settlers in the district have proved what is possible in the way of production. The late Minister for Agriculture, Mr. Wood, showed wisdom in establishing a research station there to demonstrate the capabilities of the district, and I should like to see that station named after him in recognition of his work.

I think I stated earlier that I hoped the present Minister for Agriculture would follow in his footsteps, but I did not mean to imply that he would die. Rather do I wish to see him remain in the enjoyment of good health and able to visit Esperance, as he proposes to do, on the forthcoming field day. I trust that after his visit, he will see his way clear to recommending land settlement there. The Kalgoorlie Municipal Council wrote to the chairman of the Land Settlement Board in Canberra asking that settlement be extended to the Esperance district, and received a reply that the matter should be dealt with through the State Government. Therefore I hope the Minister for Agriculture will take it up. I regret that the Government did not see fit to arrange for a

Reso trip to that district because it would have been instructive to members to see what is being done there.

Ever since I have been a member, I have been urging the need for improvements to the local hospital. We have still the old hospital building. Plans and specifications for improvements were prepared five or six years ago, but no action has been taken. For hot water, the staff has to rely upon pots heated on a stove. Surely the time is long overdue when a better hot water system should be provided! I hope the Government will take action to see that these improvements are effected. I appeal to the Government to arrange for the "Kybra" to return to the Esperance run.

Hon. C. W. D. Barker: Not at all.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: We lent the North a ship to overcome difficulties during the war period and it has not seen fit to return the vessel to us.

Hon. C. W. D. Barker: You would not deprive the people of the North of that service, would you?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: The Western Mining Corporation has done a lot of work at Bullfinch in building up a new town and the mine is expected to come into production at an early date. I read a statement in the Press by the Minister for Housing relating to the homes built in the Kalgoorlie road district. The Bullfinch, Kalgoorlie and Boulder local authorities and the 28th Battalion Association of Kalgoorlie have unsuccessfully sought government assistance on the workers' homes basis such as applies in the metropolitan area. On the Goldfields, however, we have to build our own houses. The Kalgoorlie council, of which I am a member, has built a number of homes.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: I think you said that you had some vacant and that the Government should buy two or three.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: One of those is a very large place which would be suitable for a home for aged people, and the other a delicensed hotel which would be suitable as a hostel for children. In addition, the Western Mining Corporation has built homes for its employees, and excellent ones they are, too. They were built fairly cheaply. We who live in these outback places are not as fortunate as are people in the metropolitan area and in the South-West. All possible help is given to them, but we have to provide for ourselves. Bullfinch has developed into an attractive town. I understand that the Minister has promised to consider running a diesel train there. I hope he will find it possible to provide that service.

Merredin is the centre of the wheat-farming area included in my province. Some time ago, an application was forwarded to the department requesting the

building of a junior high school. Merredin is the centre of a very large district and the children are brought in by bus. We have a hostel for them and, in addition, we are using the Salvation Army hall and also the church. A junior high school is badly needed and I hope the Minister will be able to see his way to provide it.

Commonwealth and State Governments are endeavouring to induce farmers to increase the production of wheat. We all appreciate how important this is, but I have been informed by farmers in my area that taxation imposts are terrific and that there is no incentive to grow wheat. I have spoken to farmers, some of whom I took down to Esperance for the field day, and was told that their taxation amounted to from £5,000 to £8,000.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: Is it more than in the metropolitan area?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: No, of course it is the same, but when taxation is so high, we can hardly blame farmers if they decide to run sheep instead of growing wheat.

Hon. L. A. Logan: A man growing wool would pay higher taxation.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: The farmers say it is better for them to grow wool than wheat, but as we want more food we must encourage them to grow wheat. At Southern Cross we are handicapped. For a couple of years or more we have been trying to get facilities for the schools. Certain jobs are now under construction, but we require a manual training centre. We have made application for it, and I have written to the department about it. In places like Southern Cross, young boys with plenty of time on their hands can go wrong in many different ways. Therefore, they should have their minds occupied in such directions as schooling, which will make better citizens of them. Children in the city have these amenities, and I hope more consideration will be given to the people in the outer areas.

In conclusion, I impress upon the Minister and the Government that they must give more consideration to the country districts. People living in these remote areas should have more facilities. We must study decentralisation. The only way to get people to go into the back country is to provide schooling, hospitals, railways and other facilities. The towns are becoming overcrowded, and today we can see the unemployed in the cities. If there were homes and amenities in the bush, people would go there, and that would be better for the whole State. I have much pleasure in supporting the motion.

On motion by Hon. H. S. W. Parker, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 8.3 p.m.