

Legislative Council.

Thursday, 24th August, 1950.

CONTENTS.

	Page
Questions : New Causeway, as to construction and cost	429
Transport Board, as to administration cost and license fees	429
Leave of absence	429
Standing Orders suspension	429
Motion : Commonwealth Hospital Scheme, as to effect on Hospital Benefits Act	429
Address-in-reply, ninth day	435
Adjournment, special	438

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

QUESTIONS.

NEW CAUSEWAY.

As to Construction and Cost.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) On what date was the new Causeway started?

(2) What was the estimated cost at that date?

(3) What was the total expenditure to the 30th June, 1950?

(4) What number of men are now employed on the work?

(5) What is the greatest, and the least, number employed during the period of construction to the 30th June, 1950?

(6) What is the estimated date of completion?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Earthworks, May, 1947. Bridgework, mid-September, 1947.

(2) Bridges and roadworks, £375,649. Resumption and transfer of services, £118,787—a total of £494,436.

(3) Bridges and roadworks, £192,616.

(4) 101.

(5) Greatest, 109. Least, 12, at commencement on preliminary work.

(6) Bridges joining roadway and part eastern approach, December, 1951. (This date is contingent on full steel requirements being available.)

Final reclamation and approach treatment at Perth end, December, 1952.

TRANSPORT BOARD.

As to Administration Cost and License Fees.

Hon. H. K. WATSON asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) What was the total amount of the Transport Board's administration expenses for the year ended the 30th June, 1950?

(2) What amounts of license fees were collected by the Transport Board during the year ended the 30th June, 1950, from—

(a) railway buses;

(b) other Government buses and trolley buses;

(c) all other buses?

(3) What were the three respective amounts of gross revenue on which such fees were levied, and what was the rate per cent. of the fees so levied on such revenues?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) £19,298 5s. 9d.

(2) (a) £2,347 6s.; (b) £2,728 8s. 10d.; (c) £56,653 7s. 7d.

(3) (a) £136,816 17s. 8d. License fees from 1½ per cent. to 3 per cent.; (b) £235,630 3s. 2d. License fees generally 1 per cent.; (c) £1,126,140 13s. 9d. License fees from ¼ per cent. to 6 per cent.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by Hon. L. Craig, leave of absence for six consecutive sittings granted to Hon. W. J. Mann (South-West) on the ground of ill-health.

STANDING ORDERS SUSPENSION.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I move, without notice—

That Standing Order No. 15 be suspended so as to enable Notice of Motion No. 2, standing in the name of Hon. J. G. Hislop, to be taken before the resumption of the debate on the Address-in-reply.

Question put.

The PRESIDENT: There being no dissentient voice, I declare the motion carried by an absolute majority.

Question thus passed.

MOTION—COMMONWEALTH HOSPITAL SCHEME.

As to Effect on Hospital Benefits Act.

HON. J. G. HISLOP (Metropolitan) [4.38]: I move—

That this House requests the Government not to commit the State on any agreement with the Commonwealth Government or its Ministers which involves changes either in finance or in principle in relation to the Hospital Benefits Act until both Houses of this Parliament have been given the opportunity of discussing such proposed agreement.

I thank members for their generosity in allowing me to speak at this stage. I move the motion for several reasons. The first is that we have had experience of agreements being made by State Governments with the Commonwealth and brought to this House as fait accompli, and we have just been asked to sign, as it were, on the dotted line without any ability even to alter the details of such agreements. Sometimes these agreements have not turned out as satisfactorily as they might have done for the State, and I move this motion, therefore, believing that this method is against the interests of parliamentary Government within the State. I feel extra facts should be placed before this House, and especially given to the Premier so that he may be well armed when, at the end of this month, he goes to discuss this matter with the Commonwealth Government. I trust that in placing certain facts and views before this Chamber, so that the Premier can be advised of them, I can interest members in what must be a vital problem to the State.

I feel it is only following the introduction of uniform taxation that it could be possible for a Health Minister, or even a Premier, to agree to some of the vital changes that can occur with any alteration or further acceptance of this plan, without reference to both Houses of Parliament. Had there been no uniform taxation, then the charge on our hospitals, and the conduct of them, would have been a responsibility of the State Government and would have been placed before both Houses. At the time of the introduction of this measure and the acceptance of it by the State Government I drew attention to the fact that it might have repercussions on our hospital finances, of which at that time some of us were aware, but which all of us did not heed. Most of those warnings have come true.

What the man in the street actually thinks today is that the Commonwealth Government has provided free hospital treatment when, in reality, it has done nothing of the sort. It has only refunded to the State Governments the amounts they were actually collecting from the in-patients at the date of the introduction of the measure, and has made no arrangements for the increase of that amount to correspond with any increase in hospital finances. The result is that the added cost of hospitals has been borne mainly by the State Government. One might quite frankly say that today the State bears four-fifths of the burden of the hospitals and the Commonwealth one-fifth.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: It is only in respect of Government and committee hospitals.

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: That is so; not private hospitals. The State Government expenses have not benefited from this Act, although it was considered they would when the terms of the Commonwealth

were accepted. In the meantime hospital costs, from the State point of view, have risen to almost astronomical figures, but the actual amounts contributed by the Commonwealth Government have not increased at anything like the same pace. The abolition of the means test, which accompanied the Hospital Benefits Act, has had a curious repercussion on hospital administration. What it amounts to, in effect, is that the State provides a hospital into which all citizens may go without question—but in fact, of course, that does not occur. But it is believed by all citizens that they have the right to accept free treatment now in a Government hospital because there is no longer a means test, and they can go there if they so desire.

The reason why the means test was abolished was a simple, and, as expressed at the time, a laudable one. It was that no really sick man would be kept waiting at the door of a hospital prior to admission. If I remember rightly, it was a story of that sort told to the then Prime Minister, the late Mr. John Curtin, which started this agitation for the abolition of the means test. One has to admit that there have been occasions in the past when admission to a hospital has been controlled, even in the presence of a very sick man awaiting admission, by the questioning of his relatives as to what his or their means were. It was to obviate such happenings that the means test was abolished, and I feel certain that when it was decided to adopt that course, the warning I gave, and for which not only I was responsible, that it would greatly affect the honorary staff, was not taken into consideration.

Let us look for a moment at what the effect can be. From early times—hundreds of years ago—the treatment of the sick who could not afford to pay has been the responsibility of the members of the medical profession. At the same time, in return for their services to the hospitals they have been given the right to teach one another, and their students and the junior members of the profession, within the walls of those hospitals. There was always, of course, the means test to decide who should occupy the beds in those hospitals. Now that test is abolished, in theory everyone can go into those hospitals if they so desire.

If this were to be carried out in truth and in detail, the honorary staff must abolish itself, because it could no longer continue if everyone could receive free hospital treatment. Therefore the position with regard to the means test has been looked at very carefully all over Australia by those members of the profession who hold posts on the honorary staffs of the teaching schools. It is not untrue to say there has been a considerable agitation for payment for the work rendered at these hospitals because Governments think so little

of the honorary work that they say, "We are not unmindful of the work you do in an honorary capacity, but we simply want a political idea brought into force—the abolition of the means test." and many of the junior members of the profession have been questioning seriously their right to ask for payment for the services they render at the hospitals. Payment has not been asked for, because the whole profession realises what a two-edged sword it would be, and yet some solution of this problem is essential.

Last night Mr. Craig said it was no use just passing by difficult questions. They must be answered. This question is one that must be answered if the abolition of the means test is to continue. I have not been able to compute, with any degree of accuracy, what would be the cost to the State if all the work done by the honorary staffs in the various major hospitals were charged to the State on the same basis as their charges to private patients, but I am certain that it would not be one penny less than £500,000 per year. There is no intention—and never has been—of requesting that anything of that nature should be done, but there has been a suggestion that the honorary staff should be paid on something equivalent to the same basis as the payments they receive at the repatriation hospitals.

That payment is on a sessional basis, at a fixed fee. Even on that basis—on a rough computation—I believe it would cost the State £50,000 per year for the payment of the honorary staff at the Royal Perth Hospital alone. In addition to that, there is the work done at the Princess Margaret Hospital, the King Edward Memorial Hospital and the Fremantle Hospital, all of which is carried out by honorary staffs. Not one member of those honorary staffs has ever received payment for any work he has done within those hospitals.

I have recently reached the retiring age as an honorary at the Royal Perth Hospital, having contributed what would amount to very nearly one full working day per week for 22 years. I am not raising my ego about that at all as there are many others who have done likewise, but such work on an honorary basis is endangered if the abolition of the means test is to continue without the present safeguards, of which I will speak in a moment. I am referring to the position only as if it were possible to carry on the hospitals of the State without the means test. At present no such thing occurs, as there is a means test actually applied to admission to hospital beds. I will explain how that is done, as I go along.

If the honorary staff were to be paid—and the Commonwealth Government at one time made no bones about the fact that it would be quite prepared to pay the honorary staff, and have a paid staff rather than lose the abolition of the means

test—would that be wise? The whole of the work done at those hospitals in an honorary capacity would then come under the control of a Government department? We would have our senior men in the medical profession as a part-time salaried service. We feel that much of the work now being done purely for the sake of one's own advancement and interest in the practice of medicine, as well as the care of the patient, would be diminished and perhaps lost.

What would be the effect on the medical schools if these honorary staffs were to go? In the past all teaching in medical schools has been done by members of the honorary staffs appointed from the senior profession, and if there was a paid staff we are quite convinced that there would be appointed a smaller number of men than is doing the work today, with a consequent narrowing of the viewpoint in the teaching of medical students. Are such things wise? We think not. Therefore I say there are points in regard to the abolition of the means test that have not yet been made public; points that I am now attempting to place before the House in order that it may be appreciated that there are aspects to be considered, other than those such as finance, etc., that have received such publicity.

Recently Sir Earle Page stated, with regard to the means test in hospitals, that the rich are today taking up beds that rightly belong to the poor. I was sorry to see that statement as I believe Sir Earle Page has been wrongly advised, at all events so far as this State is concerned. From inquiries I have made through contacts in certain of the other States, I am equally convinced that Sir Earle Page's statement is also without foundation in fact as it applies to some other States. It is a statement which, unfortunately, is likely to appeal to the emotions but which, when analysed carefully, has very little foundation. There is at present a definite control over the abolition of the means test.

I would explain it in this way: the extreme shortage of hospital beds all over Australia, both in the teaching hospitals and other major hospitals, brings about its own control over admission, and therefore its own control over the abolition of the means test. If a patient desires admission to a hospital today he or she is referred almost automatically, to the out-patient department, where there is a means test because the Commonwealth grant did not abolish the means test in the out-patient departments of the hospitals. If it had abolished the means test in the out-patient departments of hospitals, it would have partially nationalised the medical profession overnight. Fortunately, that was not done, but the mere fact that there is a means test in the out-patient departments results in those who ask for admis-

sion to a hospital being referred to that department. A means test is applied there and only those who really earn admission to beds are admitted to the hospital.

If a patient is sent by a medical practitioner for admission to a hospital, the question is almost automatically asked whether he is a hospital patient or whether he could possibly go to a private institution. If it is stated that he could afford a private hospital, the public hospital is then in a position to say, "You realise that we are suffering under an acute shortage of beds." I would say that the number of patients who could afford private or intermediate hospital fees but who are going into public hospital beds, would not be more than two per cent. of the total, and probably not even as many as that. Therefore, the abolition of the means test today means nothing in regard to admission to hospital beds and the wrongful taking of hospital beds. However, it does mean that the patient who really deserves admission is admitted without question purely upon medical grounds and, while the abolition of the means test may have sidelights that are not nice, the introduction of the means test also has points about it that are equally undesirable.

The whole question must be considered carefully before any sudden action is taken to alter the existing position. If we had reached the stage where the number of hospital beds was ample and further hospitals could freely be built, then the abolition of the means test might be a very dangerous factor, whereas in fact it means very little at the moment. Our bed shortage in the Royal Perth Hospital is so acute that it would not really matter what system was introduced, because it would be only the very sick patient who would receive admission. I cannot help feeling that the Government which withheld the order of steel for the second half of the building for over 12 months deserves censure. That happened in the case of our own Royal Perth Hospital.

This is not a matter that should be left to political handling; it is one which should be dealt with by a body of people which is advisory in nature to the Commonwealth Government. I believe that the role the Commonwealth Government should adopt in all hospital spheres is advisory, and no other. This advisory body should advise the Commonwealth Minister as to the correct attitude he should adopt towards hospitals in general all over Australia. I make a plea for an expert committee to be set up to investigate the position.

Another statement of Sir Earle Page's, in which he says that the cost of a hospital bed today has risen to 30s. per day calls for a certain amount of comment. That statement is hard to analyse unless it is considered on figures something of this nature. Actually, the cost to the Royal Perth Hospital last year was 37s. 5d. per

bed per day, and that has now risen to about 38s. The costs are apportioned something like this: Drugs, 2s. 5d.; linen, etc., 1s. 10d.; electric light, gas and other heating, 10d.; nursing, medical staff, wages and board, 17s. 2d.; radiology and physiology, 6s. 2d.; patients' meals, 5s., and odd expenses about 3s. That makes a total of roughly 38s. a day. The out-patient cost is about 7s. per day per person attending.

Hon. L. Craig: That does not include overhead charges such as administration and interest on capital?

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: There are administration charges but no interest on capital. If the interest on capital were added, it would probably be in the nature of another £1,500,000 over 600 beds.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: But that would not be chargeable to the Royal Perth Hospital because the Lotteries Commission finances it.

Hon. L. Craig: But it would be so charged if it were a private hospital.

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: The interest charges are not included in those figures. The cost at the Royal Melbourne Hospital has risen to between £2 and £3 per day, and the cost at the repatriation hospitals is £3 per bed per day.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Including Hollywood?

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: Yes. The £3 per day is common all over the Commonwealth for such hospitals. The Commonwealth hospitals are by far the most expensive. Sir Earle Page's figure of 30s. per day may be worked out on the basis of what actually a patient could be charged if he eliminated certain costs. Not everyone would use the radiology and physiological departments, but almost every patient has some tests when admitted to the Royal Perth Hospital, because it is a teaching institution. If the patient is to protect himself against these costs, what would be included in the insurance scheme? Those costs should be carefully analysed before any scheme is introduced or any amount laid down as a contributing fee, because in these big teaching hospitals one must realise that there is the cost of training the nurse, and that must be debited against each bed. Then there is the cost of training the junior members of the profession, and therefore the wider use of investigational services. So there should be some basic cost against which the patient can insure.

If any scheme is to be brought about, such as the insurance scheme visualised by Sir Earle Page, it surely cannot be one left to the discretion of the individual. It should come under some compulsory heading. Why should one individual be prepared to shirk responsibilities in this

regard because if he falls sick it is essential that he be cared for, and he will be admitted to a hospital, whether he has contributed to the scheme or not? Therefore, it brings one to the point that surely there must be some wider application in a scheme of national insurance if we are to cover these hospital costs.

It has been said by one authority that if a family paid 3s. per week, that would cover the entire family against costs, both medical and hospital. If all these schemes are to be introduced, may I suggest that the contribution should be made possible on three bases? The man should be able, if he can afford only that amount, to insure his family for costs for admission to a Government hospital on a fixed basis; but the man should also be able to insure himself and his family, if he thinks he can afford it, for admission to an intermediate bed and, if necessary, the man should be given the right to insure himself for admission to a private hospital.

I assure members that even though a change may have occurred in the people who are now occupying beds at the various hospitals, there are very few people on the basic wage today who can afford even the intermediate beds, as they are called, or anything ranging around £11 11s. or £12 12s. a week. The whole question of hospital costs is one that must be appalling to the man who is attempting to exist today under basic wage conditions. If all were insured alike, a very real problem would arise. In fact, the same problem is arising in a different way. If we all accepted a basic insurance and were allowed to go to a basic hospital, where would be the teaching of nurses and where would we obtain the teaching of the profession? In the past, the teaching of both nurse and doctor has occurred in the wards of the indigent patients. If we are all to be covered by insurance, then there must grow up within the community a different idea.

That which today protects the hospital beds of the Government institutions more than anything else is the fact that once admitted there one must submit to the examination of not only one's own doctor but, in our case, junior residents, and in the case of teaching hospitals, students. If that is abolished, what happens as a result? The thing is proving difficult even now at the King Edward Memorial Hospital where they are no longer handling indigent patients. Each patient entering the hospital wants to be followed by her own doctor, and the number of cases that are available on which to train the nursing staff is so rapidly diminishing that it is producing anxiety to the administrator of that hospital.

All these things must be taken into consideration, because not only is the maintenance of the hospital at stake but there is the maintenance of the training and teaching of the nursing and medical professions. When we look at the costs of these various schemes, we must view them askance. There is one hospital of about 75 beds where the mere introduction of this Hospital Benefits Act cost it about £600 a year in collection of fees. They did not receive actually one penny more than they had been receiving in the past. It was only that they were receiving from the Commonwealth Government that which they had been normally receiving from their inpatients, but in order to fill in all these necessary forms and keep check of these contributions from the Government it became necessary to augment their clerical staffs. I think it costs about £600 per annum for a hospital of seventy odd beds. I believe it is true that the clerical staff of the Princess Margaret Hospital has already been increased considerably in order to keep check on what are free and what are not free drugs. It proves, therefore, that there can be nothing free in this world and the cost of these matters can grow out of all proportion.

When it comes to the question of deciding to accept certain agreements, as to hospital conduct, put forward by the Commonwealth Government, it surely is essential to know what the conduct of that hospital is to be in relation to certain factors. For example, no real attempt has yet been made to stabilise the training of nurses. Nobody yet knows whether our present system of making trainees do work in the hospital in the day time and subjecting them to the necessity to study at night is the most efficient one. Nobody has yet made any decision as to whether the trained nursing staff of hospitals shall be permitted to live in or out. All I know is that the Princess Margaret Hospital has decided to increase the nurses' accommodation there to cope with the additional staff. As I have said before, the cost of a nurse being provided with accommodation inside the hospital amounts to £800 per bed, as in the Royal Perth Hospital and in other training hospitals.

Hon. L. Craig: You are referring to the capital cost?

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: Yes.

Hon. L. Craig: It amounted to £1,000 per bed in Pinjarra.

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: Well, I am proving conservative. Another factor which should be discussed with Sir Earle Page, in relation to hospital costs, is the continual drain of nurses from the Royal Perth Hospital and other training hospitals in this State to the Hollywood Repatriation

Hospital. That is because there are two different systems for the payment of nurses existing between those hospitals and Hollywood Hospital. Just as this State is often involved in an argument with the Commonwealth Government as to who shall pay, a friend of mine once said to me it is much like a third person doing the family laundry and arguing as to who

was to pay for it. So we find that when the States and the Commonwealth come into conflict with each other it leads nurses to the institution conducted by the Commonwealth authorities. A nurse today is not badly paid and, for the information of members I quote the following salaries for nurses at the Royal Perth Hospital, taken out on the 24th August, 1950:—

	Gross salary per fortnight.	Tax Deduction.		Net Salary per fortnight.	
		Living in.	Living out.	Living in.	Living out.
"A" Class Sisters—	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
3rd Year	13 1 8	1 0 0	1 3 6	12 1 8	15 18 10
2nd Year	12 11 8	19 0	1 1 6	11 12 8	15 10 10
1st Year	12 1 8	17 6	1 0 6	11 4 2	15 1 10
"B" Class Sisters—					
3rd Year	11 7 7	16 0	19 0	10 11 8	14 9 4
2nd Year	10 17 8	15 0	17 6	10 2 8	14 0 10
1st Year	10 7 8	13 6	16 6	9 14 2	13 11 10

A Board and Lodging allowance of £2 0s. 4d. per week is paid to Sisters and Trainees living out. Uniform supplied.

It will be seen, therefore, from those figures that a "B" class sister, living in, would receive in actual cash after deductions, £9 14s. 2d. per fortnight or, if living out, £13 11s. 10d. The following shows the hours worked by nurses per week and the rates paid for overtime work at Hollywood Hospital:—

40 hours per week.

Overtime 1½ time Monday to Friday.

If on duty Saturday and Sunday, 50 per cent. salary added.

All night duty 10 per cent. extra.

Overtime—Saturday 1½ time plus the 50 per cent. Sunday, double.

Hollywood Hospital pays the same rates as Royal Perth Hospital, but it has added so many extras that there is a continual drift of our State-trained nurses to Hollywood Hospital. These young girls cannot be blamed if they seek higher salaries in order to travel to gain further experience in another State or even abroad. In order to make the conditions more attractive the Commonwealth Government has held out inducements which are most lamentable and pernicious, as can be seen by members from the information I have just quoted. Never in the medical profession have we felt it essential that we should be paid double time for Sundays or odd hours because it is realised that the hours of sickness cannot be regulated.

The result of this overtime system will be that the hospital authorities will be forced to place their junior staff on night and week-end duty in order to keep their costs down, and one can see the implications of that. It would be an extremely regrettable move. However, the young staff nurse is attracted because at the end of her fortnight's work she receives a cheque, without overtime rates, of £12 as against

£9 14s. 2d. and if paid overtime for week-end or night duty it is considerably greater.

Nurses have told me that they have received in cash as much as £18 for a fortnight's work after all deductions have been made. Let me make it quite clear also, that if a nurse is living in she receives board and lodging, which for income tax purposes is assessed at £1 8s. 8d. per week, but it has been estimated that it costs £3 per week. A nurse lives in under agreeable conditions in the main in the big hospitals, and in the nurses' homes in the future she will be boarded under ideal conditions. So her salary today is not small and there is no need for anyone to increase it to the detriment of the State.

When we speak of hospital costs we must realise that the cost entailed in loss of our staff nurses is considerable and it also means that there is a steady lessening in the efficiency of the State hospitals. I have spoken longer than I intended but I believe this is an important subject, and I make the plea that it should not be considered hurriedly but should be given considerable thought by our authorities before they make a decision. Further, I make the plea to Sir Earl Page that he takes this matter out of the realm of political argument and that he should appoint, to advise him, persons who have an over-all view of the picture; not departmental officers, not men drawn from only one profession, but men who have made a complete study of the problem—I venture to say that there are many of them all over Australia today—men who still do not know the full answers but are prepared to study the subject further. The trend should be to make use of the advice available to attend to the needs of this great country so as to avoid

adopting methods from time to time that might appear to be wise, but in the end might prove to be very foolish. It is for these reasons that I move the motion.

On motion by the Minister for Transport, debate adjourned.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Ninth Day.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. W. R. HALL (North-East) [5.22]: During the past 10 years I have noticed that each session there seem to be new faces amongst us. Naturally that is inevitable because from time to time members pass on, some retire and others go their ways in their several directions. I desire to associate myself with the remarks of others respecting the passing of Mr. Baxter and to extend my sympathy to his relatives. I tender my best wishes to Mr. Thomson on his retirement and to Mr. Daffen who did not regain his seat. I also extend a cordial welcome to our new members. They have already given a good account of themselves and I have no doubt they will be a decided acquisition to the House. I hope they will be with us for many years to come.

I would not have risen to take part in the debate this afternoon had it not been for the fact that the condition of the gold-mining industry in the eastern and northern goldfields areas is causing me some concern. Although I am by no means pessimistic, I am decidedly perturbed at the fact that so many of the towns, particularly in the outer portions of the Goldfields, are not now enjoying the prosperity that was theirs for so many years. Although there has been an increase in the price of gold, it has not been sufficient to give a fillip to the industry, and I hold quite definitely that the current price should be advanced very considerably in order to restore the industry to the prewar standard it enjoyed.

Recently I visited some of the northern areas and regretted to notice that the ghost towns, to which I have referred in this Chamber down the years, are still to be seen. Practically no mining operations are in evidence and what activity is apparent there is extremely slight. Apart from the Kalgoorlie mines, no extensive working is undertaken except at Gwalia, Big Bell and Mt. Magnet. The condition of Wiluna is most regrettable. I can imagine what the town was like in the boom period, but today it is just a ghost town, which is most deplorable. If something does not happen within the next few years, what has occurred there will apply also to the Eastern Goldfields.

Of course, there is a reason for all this. It is that the increasingly high cost of production has brought the industry to its present stage. There is no doubt that

with the high cost of stores and the value of the £ what it is, the large mining companies cannot see their way clear to make a decent profit such as will lend encouragement to their endeavours. I am convinced that there is still a lot of gold to be recovered from the big mines at Kalgoorlie. I think the companies could treat a richer grade of ore if they so desired. I am not one of those who say that they have some reason for what they are doing, and I appreciate that the companies received scant consideration from Governments during the war period and subsequently. It behoves each one of us, from the Premier and the Minister for Mines down to the newest member, to do everything possible in the interests of the goldmining industry itself.

Those of us who represent mining areas are indeed pleased that those associated with the wheat and wool industries are in such a fortunate position today, when they may be said to be sitting on top of the world. We ourselves have been in that position on the Goldfields in bygone years and, in fact, the goldmining industry pulled the State out of the mire at a time when wheat and wool production was in the doldrums. To some extent we look to those who represent industries that are flourishing today to do everything possible to assist the goldmining industry during its time of stress.

With regard to the workers on the Golden Mile, conditions for them are not like they were some years ago. Irrespective of whether or not they earn good money, they do not enjoy the spending power these days that they did formerly. The result is that the business people have to bear the brunt of it as well. The housewives have to be very careful in their endeavours to make ends meet because of the increased cost of commodities and of living generally. That is the reason why so many of them have to accept positions so that they may earn a bit more to keep their homes together.

We now have the Minister for Mines in this House. He is holding down three portfolios and has a pretty big job on his hands. It requires a very capable man to carry out such onerous duties. I know it has been done by other Ministers but in present-day circumstances, in view of the condition of the mining industry, a great measure of attention should be devoted to it. Every effort should be made to induce the International Monetary Council to agree to a further increase in the price of gold. This leads me to say that, unless cognisance is taken of the fact and something is done to foster the industry by assisting men to go out and find shows, goldmining will be doomed to go out of existence in the years to come. Members here may not live to see that day, but assuredly it will come if the industry does not receive greater assistance; it will simply die out.

I do not intend to enlarge on the subject of prospecting, but we have heard of prospecting from the air and that there is certain scientific apparatus which, from the air, can indicate the presence of ore bodies. The aerial surveys made by one company in the vicinity of Southern Cross have been productive of good work. I believe that the apparatus has been responsible for indicating from the air the presence of very large bodies of ore. I cannot say what the value of the ore may be, but it does indicate the presence of ore bodies. Still, even with this aid, men are necessary to locate the ore bodies and dig them out.

If the Government is prepared to help the prospectors to go out, the sustenance allowance of 30s. a week should be increased. The amount has not been increased for years, and I dare say the 30s. would now have no more value in purchasing power than about 5s. in earlier times. This is one reason why men are not going out seeking to discover new shows. Now is an opportune time for the Government to grant additional assistance, so that men may have an incentive to go out and prospect for new shows that will ultimately develop into good paying mines.

I suggest to the Minister that another way in which the prospectors could be materially assisted would be by arranging for the Mines Department to give them free battery treatment for the first 50 tons of ore or dirt they produce. This would be a substantial form of assistance. The 30s. a week sustenance would not maintain a prospector, who, unless he had financial resources of his own, would need outside backing. If a prospector produced 50 tons of ore and had it assayed, he would have a good idea of its value. This would encourage him to costeen the ground to ascertain whether the ore bodies were payable or not, and would obviate his being faced with a bill to meet, after living in the bush amongst flies and dirt and on a meagre allowance, if the ore were non-paying. I repeat that this, together with an increase in the sustenance allowance, would be a strong incentive to prospectors to go out, but the increase should be something worthwhile.

I am satisfied that in time the Goldfields will again experience their pristine glory. I should like the Minister to pay frequent visits to the eastern and northern goldfields. If, during those visits, he met the men who have shows and who need backing, and listened to their complaints, it would be very stimulating to the men who are battling along that hard road.

There is another matter I wish to bring to the notice of the House where I consider that an increase is justified. I refer to the people in receipt of old-age and invalid pensions. I do not feel at all proud about the present position, especially

after listening to Dr. Hislop's remarks about the means test. Although this is a Federal matter, I do not think we can take any pride in the fact that we sit here and do not protest to the Commonwealth against the inadequacy of the amount being paid to these pensioners.

There is nothing of political propaganda in my remarks; I am speaking in all sincerity. These people are those who are being hardest hit by the existing economic conditions. The means test has no significance whatever for them, because they have no means to bar them from receiving attention. To continue asking these people to exist on a pension of £2 2s. 6d. a week is no credit to us. The State Government should bring under the notice of the Federal Minister the position that exists and, if nothing can be done by the Commonwealth, the State Government should take action.

I am equally favourable to other people, such as the blind, the war widows and other widows, receiving an increase in their pensions. Unless a widow has dependants and is over 50 years of age, she is not entitled to a pension. The other day I was handling the case of a woman who was not sick enough to qualify for an invalid pension and yet she could not get an ordinary pension. The same argument applies to the men who come under the Miner's Phthisis Act and the Mine Workers' Relief Act, who know only too well how little can be obtained for a pound in these days of high costs of living. All pensions should be increased to a reasonable amount. Men who are suffering from active or advanced T.B. are deserving of more consideration from the powers-that-be. They are entitled to receive the best possible treatment during the time remaining to them on this planet.

We hear wails from those who are on big salaries regarding the cost of living, but if we compare what they receive with the £2 2s. 6d. upon which some people have to try to exist, we realise the need for something to be done for the less fortunate folk. You, Sir, as a member for the same province as that which I represent, know that on the outskirts of Kalgoorlie near the old Somerville reservoir there are pensioners living in humpies. These people, receiving the allowance I have mentioned, have not sufficient with which to clothe themselves adequately or to buy the food necessary to sustain them; and, being invalids or very old, most of them are not able to work to earn the additional 30s. per week which they are permitted to make. Some are capable, but the majority are not.

I recall what Dr. Hislop said with regard to the means test, and would point out that certainly some of the people to whom I am referring have not had enough

essential food to carry them through without sickness. Everybody is asking for an increase in wages, and the basic wage has been increased from time to time; but these people have had only an extremely small rise in their allowance over a very long period of years. We should do something to help them. Only the other day we discovered that there were approximately 1,000 pensioners in Kalgoorlie and Boulder. They were of all descriptions, but generally speaking they were old-age or invalid pensioners. Owing to the severe winter on the Goldfields, many of them did not have sufficient rugs to keep them warm.

The Lotteries Commission was good enough to provide a number of rugs, but could not see its way clear to distribute sufficient for everybody, with the result that the Town Clerk had to give one rug away instead of two when he thought the recipients could possibly manage with only one. It is a very sad state of affairs that people who have made it possible for all of us to be here in this State are just existing. I think that throughout the Commonwealth there would be very few people who would not be prepared to sacrifice something to help these poor unfortunates. I make this plea in the hope that something will be done very shortly to assist them.

Last night Mr. Craig said something about roads. He was perturbed at the damage that wheat trucks are doing on the highways and byways, particularly in various parts of the district he represents. I agree with him. I travel a good deal on the Great Eastern-highway, and I know that untold damage is being done to that highway by the wheat trucks. I am afraid there is not much that can be done to alleviate the position, because the roads were never built to stand up to the tonnage of the trucks alone, irrespective of what they carry. Most of the roads are of gravel, with perhaps a bit of clay. That is all the foundation they have, with a coating of bitumen no more than an inch thick. The consequence is that the roads cannot stand up to the wear and tear caused by 10-, 12- and up to 15-ton trucks travelling over them. During the summer some of the bitumen is lifted through friction.

The only way to overcome the difficulty would be to have a road like that near Alexanders garage on Stirling-highway which is constructed of metal nearly a foot deep. But we would never be able to find the money to make roads like that in the country. Those roads were not built to carry the wheat which is carted over them. The railways are trying to compete with the trucks; but because they have to work on a 40-hour week basis, they are suffering, and so are the highways and byways.

I would like to say a word about our telephone department. I read an article not long ago which mentioned that it was the department's intention to increase the telephone services in the metropolitan area. I thought it would be a good idea if the department gave a little better service to those who already had telephones installed rather than provide more telephones and a poorer service. It must be evident to members and to people outside the House that one can pick up a telephone and, if at all inquisitive, can listen in to conversations between other people.

At Parliament House it is possible to take up the telephone and hear conversations proceeding from heaven knows where. That is definitely wrong. A few years ago an advertisement was placed in post offices advising people to have a telephone installed for 2s. a week. The cost is a lot more than that today; but, instead of the service having been improved, I think it is slipping back, despite the increased costs. Something should be done to effect an improvement, particularly in the trunk line system, which sometimes entails hours of waiting. The time that one has to spend in this way is just as precious as that of some of the officials of the department. I hope that these facts will be taken into consideration by the Telephone Department and that it will endeavour to provide the service which it is supposed to give. The charges are certainly dear enough.

Another matter to which I wish to refer is the National Road Safety Council. A lot of the money spent by that organisation is wasted on trash put over the wireless and could be spent much better in other directions. At one time, when somebody was killed on the road, a cross was painted on the spot to remind people of what had happened. Now we have police in motorcars on occasions travelling city streets with loud speakers and blaring out comments on traffic breaches by pedestrians. I am satisfied that not too many of the motoring public or the general public are taking much notice of the piffle the council is putting over. From what I can understand at election times, wireless propaganda is expensive. I suggest as an alternative that more police officers, with motorcycles, be provided to control traffic. I feel sure they would eliminate accidents more than does the National Safety Council.

I know that the number of police officers is small, but the Traffic Department should endeavour to provide a better service to the motoring and general public at intersections at night-time. Between 7 and 8 o'clock at night, particularly when it is raining and misty, we want pointsmen on duty, but we find no-one there. Greater police control of traffic, both at intersections and by motorcycle patrol, would solve a lot of the difficulties which the National

Safety Council is trying to deal with over the radio today in an endeavour to educate the people to its way of thinking.

Hon. E. H. Gray: The country motorists are very careless.

Hon. W. R. HALL: I do not think they are any more careless than the city motorists. Any motorist, country or city, who goes to the Central Railway Station is likely, on returning to his car, to find a mudguard knocked off. I support the motion.

On motion by Hon. J. A. Dimmitt, debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT
(Hon. C. H. Simpson—Midland): I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till Tuesday, the 5th September.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 5.53 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday, 29th August, 1950.

CONTENTS.

	Page
Questions : Bush fires, as to Commonwealth aid and State contribution	438
Mining, (a) as to iron content in pyrites residues	438
(b) as to quarry control in unproclaimed districts	439
Housing, (a) as to assistance for purchase of existing homes	439
(b) as to payments in excess of instalments	439
Servicemen's land settlement, as to State holding farms and dairy stock	439
Hearing aids, as to issue to indigent people	440
Onions, as to items of production costs	440
Railways, as to improving footbridge, Cottesloe	440
Electoral, (a) as to Melville postal vote officer	440
(b) as to Boulder postal vote officers	440
Meat, (a) as to suggested de-control	440
(b) as to explanation of position	441
(c) as to accuracy of Press report	441
Fremantle Harbour, as to report on up-river extension	441
Coogee Beach, as to pollution	441
State products, as to total recorded value	441
Perth electricity undertaking, as to alleged condition of sale	441
Address-in-reply, twelfth day	442

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

QUESTIONS.

BUSHFIRES.

As to Commonwealth Aid and State Contribution.

Mr. HOAR asked the Premier:

(1) Has he had confirmation of the recent statement attributed to Mr. H. A. Leslie, M.H.R., that the Federal Government had approved a grant up to £10,000 for bush fire relief in this State?

(2) Does he consider this a reasonable contribution by the Federal Government to one of the State's worst fire disasters, the estimated cost of which to farmers approximates £186,000?

(3) If not, has he made further approaches to the Federal Government for a greater contribution?

(4) As the Federal contribution is a free grant, will this be issued debt-free to farmers suffering damage?

(5) Does the State Government intend to match the Federal Government £ for £ in debt-free money, or even increase that ratio if necessary? If not, why not?

The PREMIER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) A larger sum was requested but as the Commonwealth money is to be granted to distressed and necessitous cases only and is to be augmented by a like amount from the State Government, it may be sufficient. In addition to grants it will probably be necessary to make some interest free loans, and this money will be found by the State.

(3) If it is found that the Commonwealth grant is insufficient, an application will be made for more money.

(4) Yes, in distressed and necessitous cases.

(5) Answered by (2).

MINING.

(a) As to Iron Content in Pyrites Residues.

Hon. E. NULSEN asked the Minister for Industrial Development:

(1) Has an inspection been made by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, or other organisation, concerning the percentage of iron contained in the residue of Norseman pyrite, after treatment for the extraction of sulphur at the chemical works of the superphosphate companies, or elsewhere?

(2) If an investigation has been made, what is the percentage?

(3) What is the percentage of residue of the pyrite ore received from Norseman?

(4) What is the total accumulation of pyrite residue from the inception of Norseman delivery?

(5) Could the residue be commercially and economically treated for pig iron?