

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: If the Minister for Lands wants to say there are more I will tell him all about it next week. I have the figures and I say definitely there are no more houses now than there were then.

The Minister for Lands: But we say that there are.

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: And that is one of the reasons why I am not too cheerful about granting this Supply, because the Government has broken every promise it has made. At election time the Government said that there were no hospitals but with the exception of the Royal Perth Hospital—most of the planning of which was carried out by the previous Governments—the hospital position is worse now than it was when the Government was elected. Even the member for Wagin on the opening day complained of the state of affairs in the hospitals in his district. The Government also complained about the costs under a Labour Government, but we now have the spectacle of the Premier this evening complaining about the cost of living and a few moments ago he turned to his colleagues and said that more money must be obtained from the railways. I would like to know what the Country and Democratic League think about that and what they are going to say when extra charges are made on the railways. I have been a member of this Parliament for approximately 24 years and I think the most hypocritical thing I have ever known a Government to do was the promised amendment of the Legislative Council franchise. To save its face it brought down a Bill—not a bad little Bill either—but it objected to this side bringing down a Bill because it said that was the function of the Government.

The CHAIRMAN: I think the hon. member is getting rather far from the preamble of the Bill.

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: I am giving my reasons for not granting Supply cheerfully. The Government said it was going to amend the franchise of the Legislative Council and when the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party introduced a Bill to amend the franchise the Government turned it down. Then the Government brought down a Bill and passed the word to its mates in another place to turn the Bill down, and then it asks us to grant Supply cheerfully. I say it should not

cheerfully be given 3s. let alone £3,000,000 and I move an amendment—

That at the end of line 4 the word “cheerfully” be struck out.

Amendment put and negatived.

Preamble put and passed:

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment, and the report adopted.

Third Reading.

Read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

House adjourned at 12.21 a.m. (Wednesday).

Legislative Council.

Wednesday, 28th July, 1948.

CONTENTS.

	Page
Questions: Communist activities, as to ensuring State's security ...	74
Pastoral industry, as to re-appraisal of leases ...	75
Bill: Supply (No. 1), £8,800,000, Standing Orders suspension, all stages ...	75
Address-in-reply, second day ...	82

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

QUESTIONS.

COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES.

As to Ensuring State's Security.

Hon. H. HEARN asked the Chief Secretary:

In view of the recent disclosures of the subversive activities of Communists in Britain, Canada, U.S.A., South Africa, South America, Malaya, Indonesia, Italy, France, Germany and other countries, and in view of the continuous industrial unrest caused by the disruptive tactics of Communists in Australia, is the Government satisfied that the measures taken to ensure the security of this State are adequate and

that full information has been obtained regarding their activities?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

The security in this respect is primarily a matter for the Commonwealth Government but the State is alert to the position.

PASTORAL INDUSTRY.

As to Re-appraisal of Leases.

Hon. R. M. FORREST asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Has the re-appraisal of pastoral leases, which was due in 1942, been completed?

(2) If so, what is the reason for the delay in notifying pastoral lessees?

(3) When is it anticipated that the re-appraisal notices will be issued?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) No.

(2) See (1).

(3) It is anticipated that the issue of the re-appraisal notices will commence before the end of August.

BILL—SUPPLY (No. 1), £3,800,000.

Standing Orders Suspension.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, resolved:

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as is necessary to enable a Supply Bill to be passed through all its stages at the one sitting.

First Reading.

Bill received from the Assembly and read a first time.

Second Reading.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [4.40] in moving the second reading said: This is the usual Supply Bill brought forward at the commencement of each session by which Supply is sought to maintain the services of the State until such time as the Estimates are passed by Parliament. The Estimates, which are in course of preparation, will be submitted as soon as possible after the Premiers' Conference and Loan Council meeting in August, at which Commonwealth-State financial relations will be discussed. Ob-

viously, details of the amounts cannot be given until after the conference takes place. The sum required under this Bill is £3,800,000 comprising—

Consolidated Revenue Fund ..	£3,000,000
General Loan Fund	500,000
Treasurer's Advance	300,000
Total	£3,800,000

This sum is £700,000 in excess of that asked for last year and is accounted for by rising costs and wages. It was estimated that last year's deficit would amount to £681,778, but after taking into consideration the special grant from the Commonwealth of £1,000,000, the actual loss totalled £352,082. The revenue for 1947-48 amounted to £16,710,310, an excess of £967,660 over the estimate. This does not include the special grant of £1,000,000. The excess was made up as follows:—

	£
Taxation	146,191
Territorial	63,004
Law Courts	16,569
Departmental	307,820
Royal Mint	3,240
Trading Concerns	12,460
Public Utilities	418,376
Total	967,660

Last year's expenditure was £18,062,392, this being £1,637,964 in excess of the estimate. The excess expenditure was accounted for by—

	£
Interest and Sinking Fund ..	11,981
Exchange	38,755
Social Expenditure	298,894
Pensions	36,286
Other Public Works	15,813
Public Utilities	1,042,724
Other Expenditure	193,511
Total	1,637,964

The general increase in the cost of materials and in wages and salaries and the gradual overhauling of deferred maintenance have substantially added to the State's financial obligations. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

HON. A. THOMSON (South-East) [4.44]: As has been pointed out by the Chief Secretary, it has been the custom to pass a Supply Bill at this stage of the session and, generally speaking, Supply has

been granted without debate. In view of the discussions that have been taking place and the criticism that is being levelled at the Government, I feel justified in passing a few remarks, though there has not been time closely to investigate the figures that have been placed before us this afternoon. I recall that many years ago the term "gone a million" was considered to be rather a joke and the then Premier brightly asked, "Well, where is the deficit? It is in the pockets of the people." Nowadays we are asked to deal in sums of money that those who have been in Parliament for a number of years scarcely dreamed would ever be reached.

It seems to me that a certain amount of the criticism that is being levelled at the Government is rather hypocritical, seeing that those who are indulging in severe criticism today were in control of the finances of the State for over 14 years.

Hon. G. Fraser: But never let them drift to the extent they have drifted now.

Hon. A. THOMSON: The amount of money that is required to meet deferred maintenance was a legacy to the present Government, and I consider that the people to whom I have referred might be a little less critical and more constructive in their criticism. Notwithstanding the appalling state into which our railways have fallen and the difficulties confronting the State, I hold that the present Government is doing a very good job. In saying this I am speaking off my own bat and not necessarily in defence of the Administration. The Government has a very difficult task ahead and those members who are criticising the Administration should appreciate the tremendous increase that has occurred in the cost of material and labour. I regret to say that there has been frustration as regards reaching that golden age of which the Prime Minister speaks so freely and which certainly seems to be remote, especially for the securing of increased production, which he is seeking to obtain. For my part I hope he will obtain it. He can be sure that the Government and Parliament of this State will assist him to their utmost in that direction.

I intend to support the second reading of the Bill. I have never known this House to object to the passing of a Supply Bill, but I desire to take this opportunity to

direct attention to the position in which members are placed as a result of the actions of Government servants. Parliament is supposed to be supreme in the land. With a general desire to obtain information, I asked a question of the Chief Secretary yesterday. For what I am about to say, I do not hold the Government to be entirely blameless, because those of us who have been in Parliament for some years are aware that questions put on the notice paper by members are handed to the departments and the replies are given by the departments.

I contend that when a member sets out to obtain information as to how some of our finances are drifting, he is at least entitled to be given the particulars he is seeking. Yesterday I asked this question—

What were the conditions made by the Government when it entered into a contract to supply electric current to the City of Perth and the price per unit?

That should not have been an impossible question for the Government or the departmental officer to answer. But what do we get? The reply was—

Conditions of supply and the basis on which the price per unit is calculated are as set out in Act No. 30 of 1913.

A most interesting reply! Everybody knows that is where it came from. But—if I may use the term—the dogs have been barking in the street for many years that the Government has been losing an enormous sum of money annually through having entered into that contract. It has been a very profitable contract for the Perth City Council! That Act was passed in 1913, and I think the time is opportune to revive public interest in it and to let the people know just exactly where we stand. If we can judge by a statement made in another place, there are to be increased fares and freights on the railways. That is excellent as far as the people living in the metropolitan area are concerned. It will not cost them a razor. The increases will be paid by those living in the country areas. They are the ones who will meet the added fares and freights.

Hon. G. Bennetts: They are the ones that produce the wealth, too.

Hon. A. THOMSON: Quite true. They are the ones who create the wealth of the State; and the amazing part is that they pay freight on goods going out to the country

and also suffer a deduction from the returns for their product when it goes to foreign markets. I wanted to find out what was the position with regard to the cheap supply of electricity to the metropolitan area. There was nothing personal in the matter. I merely asked questions with a desire to seek information. Surely we are entitled to have such information supplied to us instead of receiving an impudent reply like that! It is nothing more or less than downright impudence for an officer of a public department to dare to send a reply of that kind to any member of Parliament.

Hon. G. Fraser: It shows the weakness of the Minister in allowing him to do it.

Hon. A. THOMSON: Nobody knows better than the hon. member—and I am not going to allow him to sidetrack me—that the Ministers of his Government did just exactly the same as the Ministers of the present Government: they handed the questions to the department. The Ministers of the present Government have no more hope of supplying this information than had Ministers of the Labour Government, and nobody knows that better than the hon. member.

Hon. G. Fraser: They could send the answer back and tell the department that they wanted a proper reply.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I am not going to enter into an argument. I am dealing with what I consider an insult to Parliament. My second question yesterday was—

What were the conditions made by the Government when it entered into a contract to supply electric current to the Fremantle Municipality, and the price per unit?

The reply was—

Conditions and prices are contained in an agreement entered into by the Premier of Western Australia and the Commissioner of Railways on the one hand, and the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Board on the other hand. Copy of agreement may be seen by the hon. member at the Electricity Commission's office, Murray-street.

Hon. G. Fraser: They did not even tell you that the option of renewing the contract was with the consumers and not the producer.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I am seeking information. The hon. member, judging by his interjections, knows more about it than I do. Here is the position: As a member of this Parliament I ask a question of the Chief Secretary and am told that if I will

go to the Electricity Commission's office I may see a copy of an agreement. I think it is time a strong protest was made against any Government and any Government official taking such a high stand and telling us that if we will condescend to go down to a certain office, we will get what we want.

Hon. G. Fraser: It looks as though the Government is prepared to let understrappers do the job.

Hon. A. THOMSON: The present Government is merely carrying on the same policy as the previous Government. I certainly received the information, in reply to another question, that the generating cost per kilowatt-hour for 1947-48 was 1.03d. Here is an amazing thing! The Government is being severely criticised for the drift in its finances. But it has not been in office long enough to alter the financial arrangements.

Hon. G. Fraser: It has been in office long enough to let the finances drift.

Hon. A. THOMSON: Yes, and the hon. member's Government was in office for 14 years and let them drift very badly.

Hon. G. Fraser: Not a drift like this one.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: It is hard to stop a bolting horse, you know.

Hon. A. THOMSON: When we ask what is the loss we are told—

Losses over the 31-year period of the contracts have not been separately recorded for the two consumers referred to.

The Electricity Commission will be in charge of a scheme which will involve the expenditure of millions of pounds, yet those in charge calmly tell us that they are not in a position to state what the loss from these contracts has been to the Government over a period of 31 years.

Hon. E. M. Davies: The Electricity Commission has not been in existence for 31 years. The Public Works Department formerly administered it.

Hon. A. THOMSON: I asked the Government to supply the information, not the Public Works Department, and I think we are entitled to know. I want to ascertain what the loss has meant to the Government of Western Australia. We have to realise that the Perth Municipal Council and the Tramways Department have been receiving

electric current at a loss to the Government for many years, and I and the people I represent in the country have to bear a share of that loss. Surely, therefore, I am entitled to seek that information. Publicity having been given to this matter—and I think it ought to receive publicity—I consider that these Government officials should be put in their place and told that when Parliament wants information members have a right to obtain it.

One of my reasons for speaking in this debate was to voice my protest. For far too long we have been governed by boards and bureaucratic institutions. It is not the Government that is governing. I strongly object to receiving such replies to my questions as were given yesterday. I feel it is an insult to Parliament and I offer no apology for drawing attention to the matter. I consider it is time we received decent replies when we are genuinely seeking information. I do not ask my questions idly. I had a specific object, with which I will deal during the Address-in-reply debate.

Hon. G. Bennetts: You never got replies like that from Labour Ministers.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: They were worse.

Hon. A. THOMSON: Whether we did or not, I am referring to the future and think it is time that something was done to prevent such insulting replies being received from departments. While I congratulate you on the position you now hold, Sir, as President in this House, I remember that when you were on the floor of the House you were one of those who dealt with the finances of the State and generally gave them a keenly critical examination. For that reason you are missed from the floor of the House. I support the measure.

HON. E. H. GRAY (West) [5.2]: This Bill is usually taken as a formal matter. As Mr. Thomson has said, you, Sir, were our financial expert when on the floor of the House, and always gave a most informative criticism of Government finance, both on Supply Bills and when the appropriation measure came before the House. Referring to Labour Party members in this Chamber, I cannot remember even the late Mr. Drew, when he was the Labour leader in the House, speaking on a Supply Bill. It was always

taken as a matter of course. Members must be careful what they do in this Chamber with money Bills, as our authority is limited.

I have risen to reply to some of the remarks of Mr. Thomson, who took the opportunity to have a shot at the Opposition in another place for the criticism they voiced last night when speaking on the Supply Bill. He also referred to the bad financial administration of Labour Governments, but there he made a big mistake. I will repeat the figures given in another place, which I have found on inquiry to be correct. From 1916 onwards, with 20 years of Labour Governments in this State, the deficits reached a total of £2,500,000. From 1916 to 1924, when anti-Labour Governments were in power, the deficits reached a total of £4,779,000. Therefore anti-Labour Governments were far worse financial administrators than were the Labour Governments. The indications given by this Supply Bill should point out to the people of Western Australia the necessity of quickly changing the Government of the State.

Hon. L. Craig: There is not an election on now.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Leader of the Opposition and other members in another place had every right to criticise the biggest Supply Bill that has ever been introduced into that House. In 1945 the Supply Bill was for £2,500,000. In 1946 it was for £2,700,000. In 1947 it was for £3,100,000, and this year £3,800,000, or £700,000 more than that of last year.

When introducing the Bill to this House the Chief Secretary blamed the 40-hour week for a lot of the increased expenditure. It is time that public men, members of Parliament, and business people were more careful in their utterances on the cause of increased expenditure. The same thing used to be said when the movement for the 8-hour day started in Australia. It was held then that the 48-hour week would ruin business but, when the 8-hour day was brought into force in Australia, the workers produced more than they did in other countries that were still working 10 or 12 hours a day.

I do not contend that there is no increased cost, but instead of blaming the increased expenditure on to the shorter hours being worked, I feel it is the duty of public men,

Ministers, members of Parliament, employers and workers, to get together and cut out as far as possible all useless labour and expense. If the Railway Department paid more attention to its employees at Midland Junction and if those who conduct factories all over Australia did likewise, it would be found that there are many avenues for economy in the present system of producing goods. It would then quickly be realised that we are blaming the wrong causes for increased costs.

It may be found in the near future that we are in the same position as we were in years ago, and that we can produce more goods in a 40-hour week than we did in 48 hours. What is most wanted now is closer co-operation and not criticism such as is being voiced through the Press. Let the workers' organisations and the bosses get together, and let the bosses provide all possible assistance in the workshops to enable men to do their jobs efficiently. I refer to better lighting, feeding facilities, other amenities and so on. If that is done, production will be increased. I protest against Mr. Thomson having got in that shot under the lap. He was wrong, as it has been proved over the years that Labour Governments are better financial administrators than are anti-Labour Governments in this State. I support the measure.

HON. SIR CHARLES LATHAM (East) [5.8]: I suppose that the Supply Bill is to cater for a period of two months, though the Chief Secretary did not say so. Presumably the Estimates will be introduced in another place at the end of August or the beginning of September; otherwise there will have to be another Supply Bill before the House. It is necessary, of course, for the Government to have Supply, and over a very long period it has been the custom for a Supply Bill to be introduced. Mr. Gray has pointed out the deficits that occurred during the administration of Labour Governments, but he did not tell the House the value of the assets at the beginning of that period and at the end of it, and the maintenance costs.

When the Government changed in 1930, I remember, conditions were deplorable. No matter what Treasurer had been in charge of the affairs of the country at that time, it would have been impossible for

him to make ends meet, or anywhere near it. Thousands of people were out of employment and, instead of maintaining our railways and other utilities at the requisite high standard, they were neglected. We can change deficits into surpluses if we neglect maintenance costs, and that is what happened in the past. I believe that Governments during the last 14 years were responsible for the bad condition of our railways today.

During the war years it was impossible to maintain the railways at a high standard and since then, if one reads the requests put up to Ministers of the day asking for money for new engines and rolling-stock, one must feel convinced that the Labour Government was not awake to its responsibility in the matter of maintaining the railways. It is in the railways that our big deficits are occurring today, as well as in other public utilities.

Hon. E. H. Gray: It is unfair competition.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I cannot believe that Mr. Gray thinks that, any more than he thinks a man working 40 hours can do as much as he could if working 48 hours.

Hon. E. H. Gray: It needs better organisation.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Of course, we can have machinery and so on to help the men, but when referring to the sums of money asked for by Treasurers in the past, let it be remembered that our currency has depreciated in comparison with what applied in those days. Today £1 buys about what 12s. would buy in 1921. In fact, I am not sure that £1 today would be equal to 12s. at that time. Governments must therefore increase their requests for money in proportion to the depreciation of their currency. In the circumstances, I do not think that the amount requested in this Bill is excessive, or that the Government is asking for an unreasonably large sum of money.

The Government must give consideration to how it can save money and still maintain its responsibility in the matter of expenditure. I believe we can get far better service by letting out jobs by contract in this State than having them done by day labour. I think the men would be better off and that they would be willing to work harder if it

were not for the fact that some of their advisers are telling them they are being exploited.

Hon. G. Fraser: That is not borne out by State housing.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: We may some day find out what State housing means to us, and I am not sure that we have yet been told the actual cost of these buildings. I hope we will eventually have a clear financial statement as to what they are actually costing. I can refer members to other expenditure in this State as, for example, expenditure on farms acquired by returned soldiers. On many of those farms, the improvements carried out have been at a cost far out of proportion to their value. If the war service homes are costing anything like as much in proportion, it is just as well that the Commonwealth Government is facing the liability of having to write that cost down, though the taxpayers of the country have to pay for it, even then.

Hon. G. Fraser: Houses can be built more cheaply by day labour than by contract.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I do not believe it, though I do not know whether Mr. Fraser has more information on this subject than I have. I suggest that the time of the architect, draftsmen, supervisors and so on, is not charged against the building, but the private individual has to charge his own expenses, as he has to find that money. I think the cost of buildings with the supervision that is necessary under the contract system will be found to be cheaper than that under the day labour system.

In Sydney recently a bricklayer, working on a building, said to me, "This is child's play today. When I was contracting for myself I laid 900 bricks a day, but now my limit is 350." That must mean additional cost for the building. I presume the fact that only about one-third of the former number of bricks is now laid is due to the 40-hour week as against, perhaps, 50 hours in other days. Apparently 350 bricks is the maximum number bricklayers are now allowed to lay.

Hon. G. Fraser: I have checked on that, and it is incorrect.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: We will find out what is correct. This man

was a contractor in the old days, and I have told the House the information he gave me. We cannot expect our money to be of the same value today as it was when work was performed in the way I have mentioned. We should not be too critical unless we are prepared to show how it is possible to get greater value for our money at the present time. I believe the Government would be well advised to let out a lot more work by contract. Naturally, supervision would be necessary in order to ensure that the work was thoroughly and properly done.

I support the remarks of Mr. Thomson and agree that we must be very careful about the so-called new order. I do not know what that actually means, but we know that in some countries the Governments control the people whereas in Australia the people have been allowed to control the Governments. We should understand what a Government consists of. It comprises the Governor and his Ministers, two Houses of Parliament—and the Public Service. Members should not forget that the Public Service enters into the question of government. With Mr. Thomson, I object to the service dictating to Parliament. I do not care whether a Labour or an anti-Labour Government be in power; such a state of affairs should not be tolerated.

Recently, the House Committee, which comprises representatives of both Houses of Parliament, submitted a request to the Public Works Department and the reply received was certainly impudent and should not be permitted by Parliament itself. I agree with Mr. Thomson that when a request is made through the Minister for certain information, the reply received should be reliable and it should be couched in terms satisfactory to Parliament. After all, we represent the people and the people control the Government. We should not lose sight of that fact. Possibly even what is said on the subject in this House may have some effect on those whose duty it is to supply information to hon. members, who are entitled to information on any subject at all that is not of a private nature.

The electricity agreement entered into in 1913 was not a private document, and therefore the people have a right to know all about it. It may have been considered a very good

agreement at the time it was made, but it covered a very lengthy period, and who can tell at any time what is ahead of us? We might have either a deflated or an inflated currency in the future, and we certainly have noticed the inflationary tendency recently. I do not blame the Government of the day for entering into the agreement because the effect might have been to help industry. My information is that the Perth City Council has made very large profits out of the agreement and, instead of the benefit being felt by industry, the money so derived has been spent on roads and footpaths which, to my mind, has been quite wrong.

If electricity is obtained cheaply, in the interests of the State it should be made available to industry at a low cost. If a bad contract was made with the Government and the Government was responsible for it, we must not forget that the Government represents the people and if any profits are made as a result of such an agreement, the money should be used in the people's favour, which could be done by helping to build up our industrial development. That could have been accomplished had the City Council supplied cheap current to industries established within its boundaries.

That remark might also apply to the Fremantle City Council, the contract with which is somewhat similar to that entered into by the Perth City Council. As there are some members in this Chamber who are associated with those bodies, possibly they will give consideration to the provision of cheap current to industries. I realise that the House must pass the Supply Bill, but I would like to know from the Minister whether provision is made for two months or three months.

The Chief Secretary: The Bill speaks for itself and sets out that it is to make temporary advances, and so on, for the financial year.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I know that, but usually we are told whether the Supply is for two months or three months. As the figures for last year amounted to something like £18,000,000, I should say the supply is for two months.

The Chief Secretary: It is the usual Supply Bill introduced at this stage of the session.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Of course, we will have to deal with another Supply Bill before the Estimates are passed in another place and the Appropriation Bill reaches us.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: At any rate, most of this money has probably been spent.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban—in reply) [5.20]: Replying first to Mr. Thomson's remarks, I regret that the answer to his question was handed to me only just before the House met, and I read it as I received it. I agree that he should have further information, and I trust he will obtain it. The criticism indulged in by Mr. Gray seemed to me somewhat strange. He alleged all kinds of extravagances, but he did not mention one of them. I understand that in another place the Leader of the Opposition, when questioned on the point, was not able to mention any single instance of extravagance. Mr. Gray did say that during the term of Labour Administrations deficits had not been very great, but it is curious that immediately they left office their successors, in order to rectify the situation confronting them, had to incur substantial deficits.

No-one wishes to spend money if it can be avoided. Take the point mentioned by Sir Charles Latham. A Liberal-Country Party Administration assumed power in 1930, only to find that there was an error of £1,000,000 in the Public Accounts and that a further £1,000,000 worth of trust funds had been used. Thus there was a difference of £2,000,000 for the one year, and that had to be straightened out during the depression period. It avails very little and serves no good purpose if we indulge in criticism of what has been done in the past. We must look to the future. If any hon. member, irrespective of what party he may belong to, can offer any suggestion of means by which expenditure can be reduced, I am perfectly sure that the Treasurer will be delighted with the proffered assistance.

Hon. G. Fraser: You will get all that help during the Address-in-reply debate.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I certainly hope that the criticism offered will be constructive, because that is what helps considerably in the administration of the af-

fairs of government. It is quite true that during my earlier remarks I mentioned the question of increased costs and shorter hours. Obviously, shorter hours of labour must mean an enormous increase in costs. As a matter of fact, the reduction of the working week to 40 hours will probably cost the State between £500,000 and £600,000. Then there is the alarming rate of increasing charges apparent on goods and supplies.

Strange as it may seem, the workers do not appear to realise that they are the ones who are paying for it. The workers are the only ones who can do so. We are very apt to speak of costs in terms of money but, in point of fact, costs should be considered in terms of labour. The greater the production in the lesser hours, the greater the wealth enjoyed by the community. The only way we can attain that result is to expand production, and then prosperity will increase. We all appreciate that figures mean little in the consideration of this question. Any astute accountant can twist figures around to suit any purpose. While we are in the habit of looking upon wealth in terms of £.s.d., we shall always go astray. If we regard it in terms of production, we shall advance. We must get people to understand that it is not the £.s.d. wage they receive that will be of advantage to them but rather the amount of purchasing power that they can enjoy for the labour they perform. When we can attain that stage, it will be much better for the people as a whole. If Mr. Gray would peruse the latest quarterly report of the Railways and Tramways Department, he would notice the following extract:—

Earnings show increases of £94,160 for the quarter and £491,200 for the nine months as compared with last year, but the improvement is overshadowed by the effects of the 40-hour week, basic wage rises and increased payments under industrial awards, which are reflected in the heavy rise in working expenses.

Hon. E. M. Davies: Granted by the Arbitration Court.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Of course, granted by the Arbitration Court. As soon as people realise that the Arbitration Court merely gives the worker an £.s.d. wage and not a purchasing power wage, which can only be acquired by the worker as the result of his own labour, they will then realise that the goods they require will be

obtainable at cheaper prices. That is the only way we can revert to more pleasant conditions.

I am sure Mr. Gray will agree with me entirely when I say that wages 20 years ago were higher in purchasing power than present day wages. The Government has been in power for only 12 months or so and the charge cannot be reasonably made that it is responsible for the increase in costs all round. The existing position has been built up over the years. No good purpose will be served by blaming anyone and I trust that members will assist the Government, by their constructive criticism, to make Western Australia really and truly progressive and the leading State in the Commonwealth.

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.

Second Day.

Debate resumed from the 22nd July.

HON. E. H. GRAY (West) [5.31]: I listened very carefully to what the Chief Secretary said and noted that he asked for constructive criticism. During the long period I have been a member of this House I have always tried to be fair and to offer constructive criticism. My record here will prove that. As a matter of fact, in the bad old days, when we were passing through the financial depression, I was severely criticised on one occasion for being of great assistance to Sir James Mitchell's Government.

Before proceeding further, I join in the welcome to the new members, two of whom are well-known metropolitan businessmen who have been prominent in public life for many years. I think we shall find they will be of great assistance in analysing the measures that will be brought forward for our consideration. I feel sure they will be of great help to the Chief Secretary as he is piloting legislation through the Chamber. I did not know Mr.

Cunningham until he arrived on the opening day of the session, but I consider he made a splendid start. I wish him every success in this Chamber.

I desire to congratulate Sir Frank Gibson and Sir Charles Latham on the honour that has been conferred upon them. Both have earned it. The people of Fremantle, particularly those who have worked under Sir Frank Gibson, will take the honour conferred upon him as a recognition of their work, too; because during the depression years and the serious times we passed through in the war period, he led a committee of men and women, of fairly large numbers, who, I consider, did one of the best jobs performed in the Commonwealth. Sir Charles Latham has been a Minister of the Crown. He is well known in every corner of Western Australia and merits the honour bestowed upon him.

Members will appreciate that I do not want to talk for the sake of talking, but there are some subjects we must speak on, and the Address-in-reply gives us the opportunity to express our views on what has happened during the recess. It is my desire to obtain as much information as I can from the Ministers and also to try to make out a case against them. This, I think, will not be difficult to do.

One of the most serious problems facing Australia today is the coal shortage. The Commonwealth is literally starving for coal and the shortage has compelled every State to impose severe restrictions upon the use of electric power, which has retarded production. The problem is one of great magnitude. The three Governments of Queensland, Victoria and South Australia are making tremendous efforts to increase their coal supplies. The Queensland Government is to be congratulated on pioneering a new scheme to augment the coal supplies of that State.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: What is New South Wales doing?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: New South Wales is doing everything to overcome the difficulty and increase the quantity of coal produced.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: With very poor results.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The three Governments I mentioned are doing outstanding work in order to increase coal production.

Queensland, if successful, will be a wonderful example to all the States. I point out that the work in that State is being done by the Government, not by private enterprise. That leads me to ask for an explanation from the Chief Secretary as to why the Black Diamond leases were restored to the coal company at Collie. In my opinion, that was a major mistake in view of the fact that the State was short of coal and that the previous Government had taken the opportunity to retain the leases.

The present Government is to be censured, in my opinion, for not adopting the plan of the previous Government under which the leases were to be transferred to the Electricity Commission, which would thus have had an opportunity of providing the coal which it requires for its own use. The action of the present Government will, in my opinion, adversely affect every wheat farmer and dairy farmer in the South-West and Great Southern districts. It must impede the work of the Electricity Commission. The Minister may reply that the mining company understands the business and will be able to exploit the Black Diamond leases to better advantage than the Government can. I point out that had the Victorian Government adopted such an attitude, it would not have been able to exploit the Yallourn coal deposits today.

The Chief Secretary: What is it costing the Victorian Government?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I have visited Yallourn. It is an education for any person to go there and study the marvellous transformation that has taken place in the way of amenities provided for the men. The township has a theatre and a hostel and all the profits of the town go to the Yallourn trust.

The Chief Secretary: All the profits?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: All the profits made from the business in the town.

The Chief Secretary: Not the profits on the coal?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am not talking about coal in this connection, but about the business undertakings and amenities at Yallourn. Victoria would be in a bad way had the Government—and it was not a Labour Government—not exploited those wonderful brown coal deposits. It will be difficult for the Government to explain why it handed the Black Diamond leases back to the coal company.

What had the company done to deserve that rich gift, because it is a rich gift? It is a well-known fact that a prominent Perth contractor is operating the new open cut at Collie. He probably knew nothing about the coalmining industry when he started the work.

The leases could have been worked by the Electricity Commission, and the coal produced used to light the towns in the South-West and Great Southern districts and also to supply power to the farmers, who will be severely hampered by this major mistake. I hope the Minister will refer to this matter when he replies, but I think he will have a difficult job to justify the Government's action, particularly when we consider the tremendous mistake made by the management of the coal company lately. Many people blame the men for the trouble over the horse, but I challenge any member, particularly any country member, to uphold the action taken by the coal company management in regard to the animal.

The Chief Secretary: We are waiting for Mr. Gallagher to decide that.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The trouble is over now. Mr. Gallagher showed common sense. Imagine a company endeavouring to settle such a dispute and the manager getting his own brother to make a report on the horse! That is absolutely absurd.

The Chief Secretary: What do you suggest the Government should have done?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It should have done what the previous Government did. The previous Government had trouble at Collie and the Minister went down there to talk with the men and also to talk plainly to the management.

The Chief Secretary: I did so in the presence of the Leader of the Opposition on a prior occasion.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am dealing with the trouble about the horse. I cannot imagine any person unconnected with the industry who could not convince the mine management how ridiculous it was to precipitate industrial trouble on the question of the alleged fitness of a horse worth about £15. We saw comments in the Press on the matter by half a dozen business people, all of whom said they could supply a horse for the work required. Mr.

Baxter could have sent a horse from his farm, or Mr. Craig from his.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. E. H. GRAY: This trouble has caused severe inconvenience and loss to people in the metropolitan area. Nevertheless, the Government has been spoon-feeding the coal company by restoring to it these valuable leases. No-one outside the Government knows why it was done. I hope the Chief Secretary will make a satisfactory explanation to the House.

The Chief Secretary: Did not the Leader of the Opposition tell you that he went to Collie and listened to what took place?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: He cannot tell us. The Government will not let him have the files.

The Chief Secretary: He heard it all.

Hon. G. Fraser: He wanted to know what arrangements were made, but the Government is not game to produce the files.

The Chief Secretary: Pardon me, he asked for the files in the ordinary way.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr. Gray will proceed.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am extremely interested, as many people know, in the wheat question. In today's issue of "The West Australian" appears a report that the President of the United States is calling a special session of Congress to consider the re-imposition of controls, as well as to ask Congress to concur in the International Wheat Agreement.

It must be disconcerting to millions of people to read in the Press that, the United States Government is asking farmers to reduce their wheat acreage next year by eight per cent. Today they have a carry-over of 94,000,000 bushels. Most people would wonder why this was so, and those who do not know much about it would say, "If they have any human feelings at all, why do they not cancel all the tourist traffic and fill the saloons and cabins of the big liners going to Europe with wheat, and give it to them?" That will not stand investigation. In a world where there are 30,000,000 or 40,000,000 people starving, it appears to be a real reflection on farmers,

business men and Governments. There is a tremendous surplus in America and yet in face of the present starvation the farmers of that country are being asked to reduce their crops by eight per cent.!

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: The Commonwealth Government asked our farmers to do something like that two or three years ago.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Yes, and it was a big mistake, too. That is an introduction to the questions I am going to ask the Honorary Minister. We live in such difficult times that those of us who hold responsible positions should not hesitate to lead. I do not think the Honorary Minister has taken a very strong attitude on the wheat agreement and the trouble we are in today because of the attitude of the U.S.A. in refusing to come into the International Wheat Agreement. The next thing was that the United Kingdom had to drop out. The wheat position of the world is now in a state of flux. If America decides to come in and sign the International Wheat Agreement, it will be a big step forward. There is every possibility of the agreement being in operation in 36 countries.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Many of the buying countries have not ratified the agreement.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It is necessary that wheatgrowers in every country should come to some agreement to have a stabilised marketing scheme. The objection to the Commonwealth scheme, referred to by the Honorary Minister who opposed it, is that the Minister in charge has got too much power. Under the scheme he has the right to say "Yes" or "No."

Hon. A. L. Loton: It gives the Minister the power to direct.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The argument is that, if the Commonwealth scheme is agreed to it gives the Minister too much power in the operations of the Wheat Marketing Board. Anticipating there would be considerable trouble, the Honorary Minister introduced a Bill last session—the Wheat Marketing Bill—which we passed and which will be implemented if the Western Australian farmers require it. I think I read a statement in the Press that the Honorary Minister has refused to accept responsibility. That is a sign of weakness. If anyone today is in a position to direct or advise he

should say, "I advise you farmers of Western Australia to support the Commonwealth scheme." As far as wheat farming operations are concerned, we are a small State and can do no good with a State scheme. If the U.S.A. signed the International Wheat Agreement and it came into existence, what would be the good of a State scheme? We must have our Commonwealth Government representative on that scheme. Therefore I am hoping—I think many farmers have the same opinion—that the United States will agree to come into the International Wheat Agreement. The Commonwealth Government will then be the one to handle matters.

Hon. G. W. Miles: That Government gave our wheat to New Zealand for 5s. 9d. a bushel.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: That is a different matter altogether from this. We passed a measure last year giving the State Minister far more power, or at least as much, in an underground way, than the Federal Minister has today.

The Honorary Minister: That statement is definitely untrue.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am sorry, but I do not like that sort of language.

The Honorary Minister: I will withdraw if you like, but you do not know what you are talking about.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Honorary Minister is a farmer and prides himself on being an authority on wheat.

The Honorary Minister: I have never done so in my life.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: If I were in the Honorary Minister's position, I would give advice and not say, "I will take no responsibility. Let them take a ballot and please themselves." That is what he actually said.

The Honorary Minister: You read the section in the State Act which defines the Minister's power of veto.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It is contained in Section 16. The Act can be used by any unscrupulous Minister.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: There are not any, surely.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Honorary Minister will not trust the Federal Ministers.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: This is not the Federal House.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Since I have been in Parliament, I cannot recall any Minister of any Government, Liberal or Labour, who has not taken his duties seriously and done his work properly according to his lights.

The Chief Secretary: But we look to what might happen in the future, do we not?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: We are returned by the public and we are not going to appoint crooks as Ministers. Section 6, Sub-section (2), of the Wheat Marketing Act provides—

The Board shall not put into operation or commence to put into operation any resolution of the Board when the member nominated by the Minister . . . notifies the Board that in his opinion to put the resolution into operation will be reasonably likely to result in—

(a) jeopardising the repayment of any advance under Section 20, paragraph (c), or Section 37 of this Act, or

(b) the charging to consumers of wheat in the Commonwealth of Australia of a price for wheat greater than—

(i) Export value for Western Australian wheat, or

(ii) The price for wheat fixed or reasonably likely to be fixed pursuant to any Act passed or reasonably likely to be passed enabling the price-fixing of wheat.

The Honorary Minister: You do not know what that means.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It means that if the Minister is the type of man that some people think Mr. Pollard is, he can do anything. He can stop the operations of the board. The Minister can recall the Government representative at any time. If he refuses to do what the Minister wants, all the Minister has to do is to publish a notice in the "Gazette" and the man is finished, and another is put there. The other member of the board is elected by the farmers. But the Government representative can be taken from the board at any time by the Governor, which means the Government, and someone else put in his place.

The Honorary Minister: You do not understand it.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Section 12 provides—

The member nominated by the Minister shall hold office during the pleasure of the Governor.

If anything goes wrong with the State scheme, according to the Government, or the

Government decides to do something to stop a man who appears to be doing something contrary to Government policy, it can withdraw him from the board and put someone there who is in accord with its wishes.

The Honorary Minister: What power has the Minister got over the farmers' representative?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The important part is Sub-section (2) of Section (16). The Minister has no power over the farmers' representative at all. That was put in the Act to pacify the farmers. I saw the danger when it was passed.

The Honorary Minister: Why did not you object to it?

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: He wanted to pacify them.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I believe the Government should be the supreme authority in the country. No board should have the power to inflict injustices on any section of the community. The Government should have the power to step in and prevent it. Under this section the Minister, who very eloquently persuaded the farmers to adopt it last year, can do anything.

The Honorary Minister: Do you say he can sell wheat to New Zealand at 10s. less than it is worth?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: He can, if he chooses, under this Act, make the legislation inoperative and useless, if the board decides to do something contrary to the wishes of the Government. It is necessary that the Government should have that power too, but it would be a lot better for the Commonwealth scheme to be approved. The farmers should be advised. They have taken a ballot. Why cannot the Honorary Minister review his ideas on the matter?

The Honorary Minister: What ballot has been taken?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: There is one to be taken.

The Honorary Minister: Do you not think they should have the right to determine the disposal of their own property?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: When we hold referendums or elections, everyone who takes a leading part in the community gets on the platform and advises the people what they should do, or does it through the Press.

The Honorary Minister: That is an insult to the wheatgrowers.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: This is an important matter to the wheat farmers.

Hon. A. L. Loton: Do you not think the owners should have some control over their product?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Yes, and they have got it. Surely the farmers can trust the Government.

The Honorary Minister: Not the Commonwealth Government.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The personal honour of each member of the Government returned by the people of Australia can be trusted. If we agree to the Minister's contention it will be like the tail wagging the dog. Why should the farmers have supreme control?

Hon. G. W. Miles: Of their own wheat?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The farmers cannot exist without the rest of the people. If they decide not to have a scheme at all, they will, in three or four years' time, be starving. This should be done as quickly as possible because every indication in the world today is to the effect that within two or three years there will be a sharp reduction in the price of wheat. From Press reports I have read, the Canadian harvest looks to be fair.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: It is very poor, according to the reports.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Argentine harvest will be excellent. The wheat harvest in England is showing every sign of being a bumper one.

The Honorary Minister: I do not think your information is correct, except in regard to America.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Honorary Minister will, no doubt, agree that, according to the Press reports, the Canadian harvest is not good, the harvest of Great Britain is excellent and so is that of the Argentine, and the European harvest is fairly good.

The Honorary Minister: You have forgotten about the increased consumption in the world.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: If the Honorary Minister argues that there is not likely to be a reduction in price, why does he want a stabilising plan?

The Honorary Minister: I am not having a stabilising plan unless the farmers want it, except a voluntary one. What is wrong with that?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Personally, I think there is every indication that within one or two seasons there will be a very sharp reduction in the price of wheat.

The Honorary Minister: We heard that years ago.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Supplies in the United States this year are twice as large as they were last year.

The Honorary Minister: Tell us the other side of the story about the increased consumption.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: If there is no danger to the price of wheat, why does the Honorary Minister need a scheme at all? I think he will agree that a marketing plan is necessary in the interests of the farmer, the public and the consumers. If we rely upon a public demand and throw everything out on the world's markets, we will be reduced to a state of affairs such as existed when I was a farmer. I think the price was then 2s. 3d. per bushel and the price of wheat will get down to that figure unless we are very careful. I want the Honorary Minister to advise the farmers to vote for the Commonwealth scheme, as I think it is sound, not because it is a Commonwealth Labour Government that is in power, but because I consider it is preferable for all the States in the Commonwealth to work together rather than for every State to implement its own legislation.

The Honorary Minister: Mr. Pollard would not agree to that.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: You wanted to keep the Commonwealth Minister right out of the picture.

The Honorary Minister: I hope the majority of wheatgrowers in Australia will agree with my view.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I think the Honorary Minister has made a mistake.

The Honorary Minister: Tell us about the stock feed position.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I would like hon. members to allow Mr. Gray to finish his speech without interruption.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am very interested in the wheat industry and I would like to

ask the Honorary Minister whether any consideration has been given to the suggestions I made last year and which were recommended by an expert from London, for a scheme for the grading of wheat. I have not read anything about it nor have I had any information from the Government, but I consider the scheme was absolutely necessary not only in the interests of the public but also in the interests of the farmers themselves.

If there is in future a greater consumption in the Asiatic countries there will be increased competition from other wheat producing countries, and unless we can produce and sell wheat under a guarantee for white bread, biscuits or cakes, we shall lose our present markets, and that will be a great disadvantage to the farmers of Australia and particularly to the farmers of Western Australia. I am not now quoting my own opinions but the opinions of the most eminent authority in the British Empire. He recommended, in the interests of the farmers and the public, that wheat should be graded, but I have heard nothing about it since my remarks last session, although New South Wales has instituted a trial on a small scale this year.

In the Lieut.-Governor's Speech there is an interesting paragraph on the War Service Land Settlement Scheme. The Lieut.-Governor mentioned that 110 wheat and sheep farms, 68 dairy farms and two poultry farms, making a total of 180, have been allotted, and that 28 additional farms are to be allotted in the near future. The Minister for Lands made a Press statement to the effect that 285 properties have been purchased at a cost of £1,875,000, and that offers of properties for sale are still being received at the same rate as last year. The disturbing fact is that there are 1,279 approved applicants for farms, 416 applicants requiring practical training, and 199 still to be classified—this makes a total of 1,894—who are still awaiting properties.

The Honorary Minister: Give the Chamber the figures for 15 months ago.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It is no good talking about 15 months ago.

The Honorary Minister: I want a comparison.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am trying to give some constructive criticism. It was not too

good at that stage, but it is a Commonwealth proposal and it is a streamlined scheme. They are not going to commit the mistakes which we made in our land settlement scheme, and I am offering a suggestion which might improve the present arrangements. The Minister also announced that the board is preparing plans for the development of Crown lands, which is to operate as soon as equipment is available. I understand information has been given in this Chamber that these farms are prepared for the applicants and the houses are built for them before they take over the properties.

In view of the shortage of skilled tradesmen, would the Minister give some consideration to approved applicants building their own homes, as I consider it would be of great assistance in view of the definite shortage of skilled men in the building industry. In the early days and even in my time, men built their own houses in the bush and had to do all the pioneering. Very often in those early days homes were built from bush timber. When the Agricultural Bank commenced operations these men were able to obtain a loan to purchase materials to erect their own homes, which they built themselves. Surely among the 1,800 men there would be 400 or 500 who would be capable and willing to build their own homes if the materials were made available. This would appreciably assist the quicker settlement of men under this scheme, and I would ask the Minister to give some consideration to that suggestion. To my own knowledge of what was done about 30 years ago in this State there was, and I think there still is, a class of settler who will build his own home if given the materials. In common with other members, I am very perturbed about the unfortunate incident which recently occurred in the milk industry.

The Honorary Minister: Why rake that up?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: When thousands of people were without milk, I cannot understand why this state of affairs was allowed to continue, and I want to express my indignation at the co-operative society involved in the hold-up. I would like the Minister to make investigations, for, in my opinion, it is the first time in the history of the co-operative movement that such an action has taken place. The Pascomi Company and other depots should have been strong enough

to have stopped those "goats" from acting so foolishly.

The Honorary Minister: You do not blame the Government for that?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: No, but I think the Minister should have made a Press statement about the Pascomi Company. This company is a branch of Westralian Farmers Ltd., and for it to participate in such a senseless strike, which was a danger to the young people and babies of the metropolitan area, was a disgrace. I have taken an interest in the co-operative movement for many years, and I have never known a branch of that movement to do such a despicable thing. This company should have been drastically castigated by the Government.

Hon. G. Fraser: I thought you were going to criticise the Government for the handling of the situation.

The Honorary Minister: We took steps to break up the strike.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I consider the action of the retailers was a challenge to the Government and that the Government should put into operation the recommendations of the Royal Commissioner because the retailers in the metropolitan area let the people down very badly. Legislation should be introduced to give the Milk Board power to take over and analyse the milk supply and distribution in the metropolitan area along the lines of New Zealand. The Government cannot afford to ignore this question, and the recommendation is in the Royal Commissioner's report. I consider that legislation should be brought forward and early steps taken to control the distribution of milk in the metropolitan area.

The Honorary Minister: Are you going to commend the Government for keeping down the price of milk to the consumer?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Yes. I have a very high opinion of Mr. Stannard who was the Royal Commissioner and is also chairman of the Milk Board, for I consider the Milk Board is doing a very good job.

The Honorary Minister: All that was in his mind was to keep the price down to the consumer.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I would now like to refer to the building position. The unfortunate fact is—and I am not criticising any-

body—that the housing position is worse now than it was 12 months ago.

Hon. G. Fraser: It is a long way worse.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: That is not the fault of the Government. It has a national effect, but there are thousands of people who are living in deplorable circumstances. Last quarter the returns were slightly better and I wish to commend the Government for introducing the expansible home.

Hon. G. Fraser: It is not worth twopence as far as I am concerned.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I think it is a good idea.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Before I proceed to deal further with the matters I was discussing before the tea adjournment, I should like to express my regret at the loss of Sir Hal Colebatch from this Chamber. He proved himself to be a great student of public affairs and his speeches were always enlightening and were listened to with great attention. No doubt his journalistic training gave him a tremendous advantage in debate. Indeed, Sir Hal was an astute debater. He was absolutely fair, and no matter what party a man may belong to, if he wishes to be a good debater he must keep his wits sharp, and that is what Sir Hal did.

To hold his own as a speech maker, a man must be called upon to keep all the points at issue well in mind so as to provide no loophole through which he can be attacked. There is no doubt that Sir Hal was of great assistance in this Chamber. He was a very keen supporter of the Government. He had ideas that were far ahead of the Liberal Government and I think he fell into disgrace because he tried to include in his campaign provision for a wider franchise for the Upper House. He rendered great service both as a Senator, a member of Parliament, a Minister and as Agent General for Western Australia.

At the tea suspension I was referring to the housing position and was talking about the cost of building. Some objection has been raised to what are known as expansible houses; that is, the construction of part of a house such as was carried out in earlier times. In those days many young married couples

wanted their own homes. They had not the means to enable them to employ a builder and it was decided that the young husband should build the house. That appertained particularly on the Goldfields as well as in other parts of Australia.

Generally speaking, the young people were permitted to build a lean-to as the back portion of the house, with the result that over the years the dwellings were never really finished. If it became necessary for a family to move to some other centre and follow their employment, these lean-to shanties were left behind and gradually created a slum condition. Although Mr. Fraser does not agree with me, I think the present proposal would be a distinct advantage in ameliorating the housing trouble.

Hon. G. Fraser: How do you think people would finish their houses if they had insufficient means?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Housing Commission will see that these homes are properly built and that there is adequate accommodation for a man, his wife and one child. Something out of the ordinary will have to be done to cope with the distressing position found in the metropolitan area. I could quote dozens of instances where the present conditions are inimical to the progress and health of the people concerned and of their children, especially when there are three children in one room and only a small kitchen attached to the building. The rentals are generally exorbitant. Under such conditions the youngsters are not given a chance to develop and their mothers are greatly handicapped.

I am not reflecting on anyone, but I am informed that the housing shortage is as bad today as it was 12 months ago, that applications are still coming in and will continue to do so. The Minister for Housing, in some comparative figures he gave for the June quarter, stated that 602 houses were then built during this year compared with 480 built in 1947 and 295 built in 1946 for a similar period. Something out of the ordinary will have to be done to cope with the desperate shortage of houses. I am sure I have the support of thousands of people when I say that the Commission made a good start with the idea of allowing expansible homes to be built.

Hon. G. Fraser: You know you are advocating the starting of slums.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I do not think so, provided the scheme is properly laid down and properly controlled. It is quite different from the old idea of an expansible house, namely, starting with two rooms, a lean-to and a kitchen, which was intended to be the back portion of the house but which was never finished. Under the new scheme the front portion of the house will be built first and proper arrangements made for extensions as the family grows. That would be a lot better than allowing hundreds of young married people, as well as older people, to live in crowded tenements with crude sanitation and everything that offers disabilities.

A contradictory statement by the Minister appeared in the Press recently with regard to the release of bricks. Apparently a Mr. Schwenke, a brick manufacturer, complained that he could not sell the bricks he had made. I think the Minister for Housing made a very definite statement. We have to recognise that the Housing Commission is working under very difficult circumstances with its officers scattered all over the place. It looks as though there was some miscarriage of instruction with regard to the bricks, because I met a man who wanted to build in a timber yard the other day, and he could not find the necessary bricks. I told him there were plenty of bricks and sent him to the Housing Commission. He later said that he did not seem to be able to get them.

Mr. Schwenke was very definite in his Press statement with regard to it. With the rapid completion of the new accommodation for the Housing Commission it will be much better for the public, and far easier for the staff to deal with the work they have to do in connection with the tremendous number of applicants for houses and building permits. I have dealt with coal, bricks, milk, housing and wheat. I now propose to say a word or two with regard to fish, which should appeal to the North-West members particularly.

Hon. G. W. Miles: Bread, too?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am not going to deal with bread because I might be here till midnight. There is ever-growing dissatisfaction with regard to the fish position. Mr. Johnson, the manager of the Metropolitan Fisheries Company, made a statement in last Saturday's paper that there was over £6,000 worth of fish in the freezing chambers of the Perth metropolitan area, and that boats were being tied up and men were unable to

carry on their occupations because of the glut of fish.

He said that first-grade fish from Shark Bay is being sold wholesale in the Metropolitan Markets for 5½d a pound and there has been no reduction in the retail price in the shops. Local fillets and bream are costing 2s. 3d. a pound, dhu-fish 3s. 7d. a pound, and snapper 3s. 4d. a pound. Surely this statement by a responsible business man should be investigated because it seems incredible that fish should be sold wholesale at 5½d. a pound, including dhu-fish and snapper, and retailed at 3s. 4d. a pound.

Hon. W. R. Hall. What have they done with all the crayfish down your way?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I think the imported fish is being sold at 1s. 9½d. a pound and that must have a decided effect on the sale of fresh fish. This statement has been made by a responsible business man, and although, of course, the control of the price of fish is under the Commonwealth at the present time, I think some steps should be made by the Government to see that an examination is made of this statement not only in the interests of the large number of new men who have started fishing, but in the interests of the public who are paying this enormous price. If this man's statement is correct it seems incredible to me and it should be examined. I hope the Minister will issue instructions for inquiries to be made by the controlling officers. There is, of course, for many months, a high price obtainable for fish in Perth and particularly for fresh fish.

There is one other subject I wish to deal with. I refer to the impending visit of Sir Patrick Abercrombie, the leading British authority on town planning. During the night, I have been criticising the Government, but I wish to commend Ministers on adopting the suggestion of the Town Planning Commissioner that Sir Patrick Abercrombie should come to Perth when he visits Australia at the invitation of the Commonwealth Government.

The Town Planning Commissioner has suggested that all the details of the town planning scheme should be submitted to Sir Patrick for his opinion. This should, I think, have the effect of either substantiating or otherwise the stand taken by the Town Planning Commissioner, and the many arguments he has had with the various local authorities, particularly the Perth City

Council. I think he got on very well with the Fremantle City Council, but there have been tremendous arguments between him and the Perth City Council. The advice of this eminent authority on town planning schemes will be most welcome and should be of great assistance to the authorities.

If the Perth City Council or any other local authority were proved to be right, the Town Planning Commissioner could withdraw his opposition. On the other hand, if the Town Planning Commissioner were proved to be right, the Government could go ahead and implement the decision. At this stage when an increase in industries, particularly in the metropolitan area, is impending, it is highly desirable that these differences should be reconciled once and for all. I know something about these disputes because, when Labour was in office, I had charge of the Town Planning Department. Therefore I say it would be an excellent idea to get the opinion of this eminent authority so that the various conflicting opinions might be reconciled and a definite scheme adopted.

Another matter to which I wish to refer is that of education. Anyone with the slightest knowledge of the position will realise the difficulty confronting the Education Department. In spite of all the department's efforts to increase the number of teachers available, the result is largely nullified owing to the large number of teachers who leave to get married. I understand that the Training College has about 440 trainees, of whom 230 are expected to become teachers, and the Minister announced at Busselton recently that the net gain from that total would be only 70, owing to the losses through resignations. This is a very disturbing position, and the department cannot undertake to reduce the size of classes, as arranged for, until the shortage of teachers is overcome.

I should like to ask the Chief Secretary whether any attempt has been made to obtain teachers from the Old Country, from the Eastern States or from New Zealand. I believe there is a shortage of teachers everywhere, but it might be possible to persuade families containing one or two teachers to come here from the United Kingdom. If it were made known that there were opportunities here for the teacher members of the family to obtain posts in this State, it might prove sufficient induce-

ment for the whole family to migrate. In this way we might be able to get a desirable class of migrants.

Hon. L. Craig: What about housing for them?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: That is another problem. I appreciate the great difficulties that confront the Education Department and I think the Government ought to exhaust all possible avenues to obtain additional teachers. With a net gain of only 70 teachers and a present shortage of over 200, it will take years to overcome the shortage unless other means are adopted to meet the difficulty. I understand that the Housing Commission had an idea of obtaining skilled married tradesmen—carpenters and builders—from the Old Country.

Hon. L. Craig: The unions will not allow them to come in.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Yes, they will. The hon. member should not make a statement like that.

Hon. L. Craig: Some of the unions object.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: If skilled tradesmen come here, they will be welcomed by the unions concerned.

Hon. G. W. Miles: Then that has happened only in recent years.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: We should deal with the present instead of digging up the past. The reason given by the Housing Commission is that accommodation cannot be provided for migrants while so many of our own people require homes. I do not know how long it would take a man to build a house, but I suppose that if he worked single-handed, he would need about two months. If we could persuade, say, three bricklayers and three carpenters at a time to come here and could provide accommodation for them in flats, they would at once be put on to the job of building homes.

The Commission should set aside a few houses for such migrants and, if this were done, I believe there would be no difficulty whatever in obtaining skilled carpenters and bricklayers, and as many of them as we wanted. The Agent General for Western Australia, Mr. Kitson, will tell us that. Only yesterday I received a letter from him. Such men are keen to come here, but are barred because the person nominating

migrants must be prepared to provide accommodation for them before they are permitted to leave the Old Country. I suggest that we depart from the old policy and make, say, half a dozen flats available for such migrants, and thus arrange to have a few skilled men coming here all the time. It would be an excellent investment and, I believe, would produce results.

The report issued by the Royal Commission on Workers' Compensation is a very interesting one and has received a good deal of attention from organised Labour and employers. The recommendations are of great importance to the workers. I should like the Chief Secretary to inform us whether the Government has given any thought to the recommendations of the Commission and whether it proposes to introduce legislation along the lines suggested.

The Honorary Minister: I am surprised at you, an ex-Minister, asking for that information.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The matter is mentioned in the Lieut-Governor's Speech.

The Honorary Minister: But you cannot expect the Government to disclose what it proposes to put in a Bill.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Chief Secretary could tell us whether the Government intends to introduce legislation. I assure the Honorary Minister that the report of the Royal Commission affects many workers and has created widespread interest. If the Minister made a statement that the report was being considered and that legislation would be introduced, the announcement would be welcomed by the workers of this State. I support the motion.

On motion by Hon. G. W. Miles, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 7.55 p.m.