

I have been in the House, has complained bitterly about, namely, building individuals up to professional status and then losing them to the Eastern States. That is what the measure will do. I ask the Minister to let the Bill go overboard. The Trained Nurses' Association has no right to be interested in it because it has as its members only a few trained nurses, whereas the great bulk of the members of the union concerned are probationers. They are three or four times as powerful numerically as is the Trained Nurses' Association. The Treasurer ought to watch closely what he is doing with this measure. I seriously appeal to the Government not to go on with it.

On motion by Mr. Bovell, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 10.58 p.m.*

## Legislative Council

Thursday, 1st November, 1951.

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

### QUESTIONS.

#### MINISTERS' EXPENSES.

##### *As to Tabling Return.*

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND asked the Minister for Transport:

Will he lay upon the Table of the House a return showing the expenses incurred by each individual Minister of the Crown, for each of the past six years, as follows:—

- within the State;
- interstate;
- oversea?

The MINISTER replied:

(a) and (b) The preparation of this information would require a considerable amount of work. If the hon. member considers this should be undertaken, he should move for the return in the usual way.

(c) The only ministerial overseas visit in the last six years was that of the Premier this year, the cost of which appears in the Estimates now before Parliament.

### HOSPITALS.

#### *As to Expenditure at Pinjarra, Dwellingup and Yarloop.*

Hon. J. G. HISLOP asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) What is the amount of money expended to date on the erection of the new Pinjarra hospital?

(2) What is the estimated cost of the completed hospital?

(3) How many beds will the completed hospital provide?

(4) How many nurses will be housed in the nurses' home?

(5) How much money has been expended during the last three years on renovations and alterations of the hospitals at Dwellingup and Yarloop?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Hospital, £80,000; quarters, £16,000.

(2) Hospital, £140,000; quarters, £16,000.

(3) Twenty-four, plus eight midwifery and four native.

(4) One matron and 16 nurses.

(5) Dwellingup—New labour ward, kitchen, dining room, x-ray, sterilising, quarters, hot water and sewerage, and general maintenance, £19,605 17s. 2d. Yarloop—New midwifery ward, new kitchen and dining rooms, hot water and sewerage and general maintenance, £19,012 7s. 2d.

### ASSENT TO BILL.

Message from the Administrator received and read notifying assent to the Wheat Marketing Act Amendment and Continuance Bill.

### BILL—COUNTRY TOWNS SEWERAGE ACT AMENDMENT.

Read a third time and *passed*.

### BILL—BUILDING OPERATIONS AND BUILDING MATERIALS CONTROL ACT AMENDMENT AND CONTINUANCE.

#### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. J. G. HISLOP (Metropolitan) [4.36]: I have given considerable thought to the question of the control of building materials. As everyone knows, I was born a Conservative and I suppose I will remain a Conservative, within a degree, altering somewhat with circumstances,

possibly, but never being thoroughly happy about controls. One of the things that we must all take into consideration in discussing the question of controls is the effect that they are having upon the mental attitude of those who are engaged in the controlled industry or avocation.

I do not know that I have ever received so much advice on any Bill or so many letters, from even my personal friends, as I have received in connection with this measure. I have been amazed at the sense of frustration that is evident in the minds and hearts of these people. We have to face the question of whether we are doing a real service to the community by frustrating those who, in pre-war times, rendered great service to the community, or whether we are justified in continuing the controls despite that effect and so producing an altered set of circumstances in the hope that we will achieve what we set out to attain.

Frankly, I have been surprised at some of the attitudes that have been made evident to me in the letters to which I have referred. Quite a few of those who have contacted me are convinced that the maintenance of controls and the control of housing by the Housing Commission have set up a series of events whereby even the master builders have reached a state where they do not desire to see any change made in present conditions. There is no longer that sense of competition that made possible the excellent work that was done by builders generally in the days before the war. One of my correspondents asks me to look at the effect of these controls and what the cost to the community has been both directly and indirectly—directly, by the total administrative expense, including wages, of the Housing Commission, correspondence, telephones, transport, printing, rent collecting and so on; and indirectly by the added cost of all building operations, by the increase of staff to cope with the work of this department, and official delay, discussion, procrastination, lack of interest and consequent loss of efficiency through frustration.

Hon. L. Craig: Quite a number of reasons!

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: Members can see what is going on in the minds of these people and therefore it is with a great deal of hesitation that I have decided to vote for the continuance of this measure. I shall do so in the hope that controls will be lifted on some of the lines in the near future and that we will be able to see a change in a very short time. Some of them believe that virtually what we are doing with the State Housing Commission and with the control of materials is that we are building up within the State a manpower control which is more rigorous than it was in wartime.

Hon. H. K. Watson: And much more stupid.

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: If these consequences are being brought about, all tending to socialise our community, the sooner some real move is made by all of us to so alter conditions that we can permit a return to free enterprise, the better. I think one of the great tragedies we made was to emphasise the need for the building of houses and the appointment of a commission to erect them rather than the appointment of a commission to procure the requirements for building. I believe there is an honest move on the part of the Minister today to turn his department towards procurement of materials, and if he meets with the success which I hope he will, it should not be very long before we see some of these controls abolished.

I am quite certain that had we set out to procure materials right from the start rather than to control activities, we would never have been in the position we are today with regard to the supply of cement. A week or two ago in this House I emphasised that our output of cement for over 600,000 people is exactly the same as the output of cement for a little over 250,000 people who live in Tasmania, and therefore it becomes perfectly obvious that either the present cement plant should be duplicated and triplicated or there needs to be another separate cement company established. Once that happens we will find that the need for controls will, in the main, disappear, because we are assured by the Minister that the supply of bricks will be such that half-way through next year, there will be more bricks than we can actually use.

Hon. G. Fraser: I have heard a lot of statements like that made before.

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: We had a promise such as that 12 months ago, but I am taking it as a promise again. We can increase our cement output and if that happens then we will find that the need to deal with the few remaining items that we now control will disappear.

One matter that interested me during this debate was Mr. Craig's reference to migration and the statement that we should temporarily abolish, or stop, migration until we had overtaken the lag in housing. I do not think that is an answer to the problem at all because, as Sir Charles Latham pointed out, we need these people for defence. Also, to my mind, we need them for something more than that. They are bringing something to us in the way of scientific knowledge and culture which is essential for the proper growth of Australia, and I can imagine that this country will take its place among the nations much more quickly than it would do if we were deprived of the migration of these people to our country.

Unfortunately, I adopt the viewpoint, with almost every other person in Australia, that we have apparently grown to the idea that this is a land flowing with milk and honey and that everything comes to everyone without effort. I believe that if we frankly viewed this problem as one of urgency, it would be found that we could overtake this lag. Mr. Craig stated that we are growing at a rate relatively faster, and at a much greater percentage, than America did during the days of immigration to her shores, but that is not true when compared with the conditions that prevailed in California during the war period when the population was doubled.

The Minister for Transport: It trebled itself in 12 years during the gold boom.

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: We have to face the fact that other nations met emergencies such as this, and it is possible that America was faced with the same problem in its isolated areas. I feel we must look at this problem with an honest point of view as to whether every one of us is pulling his weight in regard to our national responsibilities. Once we have done that, I am quite convinced we will adopt a different attitude to work from what we all have at the moment. I am making no exceptions; I am not saying that one section is different from another. Australians generally have adopted the attitude that things will come to them without effort. They have never come to any race without effort.

If we regard the need for housing and the procurement of materials as vital to our nation, then we will achieve the objective; we will build houses and procure materials, because the Australian can do it, and the materials are here to procure. If I thought that by voting against this measure, we would receive a fair deal, I would be one of the first to do so. However, I frankly believe that the metropolitan area would look after itself very well, but I am not at all satisfied that the country districts would receive the same measure of success in the building of houses.

I am not at all convinced for that reason—and I have made inquiries myself—and I am also taking the words of the Minister because I believe they are genuine and honest, namely, that in the past it was a sense of frustration that prevented building in the country districts, but since he has been able to place all the materials for the building of a house at the disposal of the country builder, building has been allowed to carry on in many country districts. What I am not prepared to believe, however, is that that attitude cannot be adopted by the merchants or that all those in private enterprise have little or no responsibility to the State as a whole.

I feel that if the Minister were to make an approach to the Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Manufacturers and place the position fairly and squarely before them, we might within

a very few months set up a satisfactory organisation, imposing trust in the merchants to carry on the work he has so ably started. I believe it could be done, but I do not believe for one moment it would be wise to relinquish controls straight away until we are assured that the merchants could carry on. I believe a short period should be allowed to elapse before the Minister could be assured that some such method of spreading building commodities throughout the country areas could be carried out adequately and effectively by the merchants.

Certainly, I will accept the Minister's statement on this subject, because I believe one of the most urgent necessities in Western Australia is decentralisation, away from the metropolitan area. All through Australia we can see large cities isolated—half a dozen of them—and once we leave them, the townships become so small that, in the main, they cannot maintain what is possible in larger communities respecting culture, knowledge or industry. Take our own State, for example. Once we move out of the metropolitan area, it is hard to define what normally would be described as a large country town.

I have been in Western Australia for close upon 30 years, during which I have seen the metropolitan area grow at a surprising rate. On the other hand, I have visited country town after country town, and I find that today they are almost in identically the same stage as they were when I first visited them. Such a state of affairs is not healthy for the economic setup or the future of Western Australia. Therefore, I am not prepared to release controls until such time as I can receive satisfactory assurances that the country will not suffer by reason of any such action.

Until I can be convinced by the Minister, or by the House, that I am justified in agreeing to releasing controls because the country towns will receive their adequate share of building materials, that builders will not be frustrated in their efforts to increase the number of houses in country towns and that the desire of towns to spread will not meet with failure, I shall vote for some control over the supply of building materials. I would say to Mr. Craig, with respect to his remarks about immigration, that we will want food before many years are over, not only for ourselves and for the people of Australia but for those living outside the boundaries of the Commonwealth.

Unless we can induce some of our own native-born Australians as well as some of the newcomers from overseas to settle in the country districts rather than in the metropolitan area, the day of that food shortage will be much closer than some of us may imagine.

Hon. L. Craig: Scarcely any of the newcomers are engaged in production in rural areas.

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: And that is not right. We cannot persuade many of our young folk to leave the city where the amenities are easily availed of and cultural institutions are established, in order to go to isolated places far distant from those amenities and cultural attractions; and that is quite understandable.

Hon. A. R. Jones: What is the good of bringing migrants here if they will not go into the country?

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: We have to look at the matter from the other point of view, namely, that it is good to bring them here. We must take the amenities to the country districts in order to encourage not only newcomers but some of our own people to settle in rural areas. If the matter were thoroughly investigated, it would be found that the number of young people leaving the country and coming to the city is quite alarming.

Until such time as I can be satisfied that the larger centres of population along the coast will not expand to the detriment of the growth of country centres, I intend to vote for some maintenance of control, but I seriously ask the Minister to explore avenues whereby he could ascertain whether it is possible or not for private enterprise to maintain what he has originated. I believe it could be done. I believe that if it were done, we would get back to faith in our own community and eliminate the frustration now felt by those who have done good service in the past. If we were to adopt that course, we would not then restrict the methods of living we have known in the past.

HON. A. R. JONES (Midland) [4.56]: I must confess to mixed feelings regarding the Bill, because I believe we could have done without controls to a very large extent. On the contrary, the Bill asks us to agree to maintain all the controls we had, say, 12 months ago. The general theme adopted by members supporting the Bill seems to be emphasis on the fact that the country areas would not receive fair treatment regarding the supply of building materials, as against the metropolitan area.

If members believe that and if the Government has considered the problem in that light, I should think it would have been a very simple matter to relinquish controls completely with regard to the country districts and enforce them rigidly in the city. Naturally, I do not want the people in the city to have a worse deal than is extended to the country folk. To my way of thinking, however, it is just a silly and foolish argument advanced by those who support the Bill. If the Government had that in mind—quite possibly it did—it is interesting to note that during

the past 12 months more houses have been built in country areas than in the previous year, and the system employed is operating quite well.

I believe that if all controls were lifted as they affect the country districts, that system would be continued because the machinery is already set up whereby the manufacturers will continue to supply building materials to the rural centres. They have been in the habit of supplying their commodities under contract to the Housing Commission. Once a building organisation is established on the basis of an output of four or five houses or more per week, it cannot be dropped overnight. The machinery is there to sell in bulk to the big buyers. I believe plenty of builders are available. The State Housing Commission has been in competition with contractors throughout the metropolitan and country areas, to such extent that today men are clamouring for Housing Commission contracts.

Hon. G. Fraser: Send some of them down our way, for we have been waiting for six months for some houses to be built.

Hon. A. R. JONES: I know that some building contractors have dropped everything else because they know they can build for the Housing Commission, the only reason for that being the good pay offering. I have watched the building of a house from the clearing of the block, and I know that two men can erect a three-roomed dwelling, with wash-house, bathroom, small back verandah and front porch, in three weeks. I refer to a pre-cut home. Such men are receiving, I am told—though I have not been able to check the figure—in the vicinity of £400 for that work. No wonder people are beginning to jib at the price they are asked to pay in order to go into one of the butter-boxes being built in the country. I believe, as I have always believed, that if we could have lifted controls—and I refer to price controls as well—soon after the war, we would have had much greater production today.

Most members who are now supporting the measure have at some time expressed themselves as being opposed to controls. Even Mr. Hall said he was against price control but he intends to support this Bill. Mr. Fraser, who picked me up on several matters the other day, cited instances to demonstrate that the workers in this country are the ones who get a raw deal. In his opinion, if controls were lifted, the workingman would get the raw end of the deal.

Hon. G. Fraser: I never mentioned anything of the sort; I never referred to it. You have put up an Aunt Sally in order to knock it down.

Hon. A. R. JONES: When a person speaks, he uses words which mean something; and the meaning of what Mr. Fraser said was that if the spec builder had his way and was allowed to operate unchecked,

he would build a house in good time, but the price would be well and truly up, perhaps to £1,000 more than it should be. That may be so. I am not going to question it. But Mr. Fraser is the only one who has said that, and he produced no evidence in support of his contention. I am going to tell a story, with no evidence to support it, and will ask members to believe me, too.

Hon. G. Fraser: I gave the facts. I do not know what more you want.

Hon. A. R. JONES: Mr. Fraser gave the facts as he thought he knew them. I would like to tell a story to illustrate that it is not always the worker or the man on the lower income group who is penalised. I have a friend who is a builder, and he had a friend who was amongst those in the smaller income group, and who wanted a house built. The builder did all he could to erect the house as cheaply as possible, did a good honest job, and charged the man £2,500. The man moved in and was very grateful to be in his own home. He lived there for six months.

There was no change in his family and there were no abnormal circumstances to make him do what he subsequently did. He sold the house and everything in it as a going concern for £4,000. He did not go back to the builder and say, "We will split, fifty-fifty." I tell that story to illustrate to this Chamber that Mr. Fraser is not always right when he says that the man with the money or the big contractor—

Hon. G. Fraser: I never mentioned it.

Hon. A. R. JONES: —would take advantage of all the circumstances.

Hon. G. Fraser: You cannot accuse me of having said anything like that in my speech.

Hon. A. R. JONES: I would like to cite another case. A person owned a seven-roomed house in Subiaco which was let for 24s. per week to one of the smaller income group, a man who was receiving from £10 to £11 per week. He had a family. When another addition to the family was expected, the lady who owned the house, without being asked, put down a cement path so that the man's wife could wheel a pram more conveniently to the front street. No addition was made to the rent.

Later on, this lady's daughter was to be married, so she asked the occupants of the house to try to find other accommodation as she wanted the building for the daughter. They did not try to find other accommodation, so she obtained an eviction order by taking them to court. That cost her £10. The date arrived when they were to go, but nothing happened, and she wanted to know why they were not shifting. They said they had been to the Housing Commission and this wonderful Commission told them to sit pat because they had not been thrown out on the

street by a bailiff, and until that was done the Commission was not concerned with them and would not do anything for them.

The lady, therefore, had to employ a bailiff, at a cost of £4 7s., to have those people put on the street. She did not want to do that; she had been prepared to let them remain until they could obtain a place in which to live. But two months elapsed after the six months' notice was given, and she felt it was up to her to compel the Commission to do something. When those people had been forced on to the street, they again went to the Housing Commission and, by paying a fee of £1, obtained the key to a small place in Guildford. I do not know why there is a charge of £1 for a key. If I owned a property and charged ingoing or key-money, the law would be on my heels quickly.

Hon. G. Fraser: Who charged that?

Hon. A. R. JONES: The Housing Commission.

Hon. E. M. Davies: They do not charge for a key but they ask for a deposit.

Hon. A. R. JONES: These people had to pay £1 before they could get a key.

The Minister for Agriculture: I know some people who have paid £50 for a key.

Hon. A. R. JONES: Those people were put out on to the street by the bailiff. They had been prepared to leave the house if they could have obtained some place in which to live. Everything had been so arranged, but they approached the Housing Commission and were told that nothing could be done until they were put on the street. If that is the sort of thing we have to put up with, it is time we abolished controls.

Hon. E. H. Gray: How long had the tenants been in the house?

Hon. A. R. JONES: For some time. This lady, wanting to be fair, said to the man, "As you have a young family, I am prepared to help you in having your goods and chattels removed to your new home." Accordingly, she reduced by 30s. the rent owing so that they could hire a truck with which to shift their goods. The man, however, still quibbled, and said that when the person who had put down the cement path had done the job, he had given him a hand, and that was worth £1. So the lady deducted a further £1.

I have told that story because I want to be fair. I know, with Mr. Fraser, that there are some builders and contractors and spec builders who will put up the price, but I would like to point out that there are faults on the other side. When we pass legislation, I think it should be made to cover all people and not one section of the community, and I believe that this measure does apply to one section. I consider that we have a responsibility as a State, or as a Commonwealth, to look after the dependants of soldiers who are

away fighting in Korea. I do not think that is the individual's job but the responsibility of the Commonwealth or the State.

At the same time, we have to look after the interests of those people who want to build homes; and, as Mr. Craig said, if we gave everybody an open slather and abolished all controls immediately, we would have business interests wanting to extend their premises and consequently taking materials for that purpose. I suggest, however, that it would not have been hard for the Government to have controlled such building in the city and to have given to the country areas, as all members who have spoken in support of the measure have advocated, their fair share of what is available. If the country had been given an open go, plenty of homes would have been built; and if controls were lifted altogether, we would still have those homes built, because it would not be impossible for a person living in the country, who wanted to build a home, to bring his transport to Perth and receive a permit from the Transport Board to take back timber from local mills or yards.

Not very many bricks would be wanted, and bricks are available. They have been taken to the country and houses have been built. I think that if controls were lifted altogether now—never mind waiting until the middle of next year—we would get all we required, and building could take place. All that would be necessary would be to exercise control over the erection of business premises in the city, and houses over a certain squarage, say, 20 squares.

I do not intend to endeavour to sway this Chamber to oppose the Bill, because it is evident that it will be passed. Although most of those who have spoken have expressed a desire to have controls abolished, they do not intend that it shall be done this time but are going to tag along with the Government a little longer. I appeal to members, however, to change their minds during the next 12 months, and hope that every endeavour will be made to step up production so that the suggested need for controls will disappear. I oppose the Bill; and, if it goes to a division, I will be on the other side of the House.

**HON. J. MURRAY** (South-West) [5.13]: My reason for rising to speak on this Bill is that there is the possibility of its going to a division next week. I may not be here, and I want to make perfectly clear where I stand on the matter.

**Hon. G. Fraser:** That may be one less against it next week.

**Hon. J. MURRAY:** The hon. member is quite correct. I find myself in a difficulty in trying to confine myself to the amendments actually mentioned in the Bill. But

I will endeavour to tie up my remarks at some stage of my speech. In my view, the greatest incentive to the increased production that Dr. Hislop is so keen about is to remove controls, not only in relation to the sale of goods but also in relation to prices.

If a commodity is priced at an uneconomic level as far as, say, sawmillers or brick manufacturers are concerned, then they will not produce very much of it, but if a man is allowed a fair return for his product, whatever it may be, and he can sell it wherever he likes, then there is an incentive for him to go out and increase, to the greatest possible extent, the production of urgently required materials. Like Dr. Hislop, I feel that the function of the State Housing Commission is not to let contracts for the building of houses but to endeavour, possibly through industrial development, to encourage private enterprise in any shape or form and encourage it in such a way that it will increase its production and supply much-needed materials during this period of shortage.

My main concern regarding this Bill is that, if it passes, it means we are condoning the continuation of controls, not for a period on one year, as stated in the Bill, but for some five or six years. This must be so because the Minister told us about the programme that is laid down and the target for 1957 of 9,000 houses. There has been a constant outcry from various electors throughout the State about land that has been resumed by the State Housing Commission. This land has been resumed at a nominal figure only, and large areas in all districts have been affected. The Housing Commission has resumed the land for the building of houses and I guarantee that those areas could not be built up unless the Government continued to re-enact this legislation for some years to come.

**Hon. H. K. Watson:** According to the Housing Commission, 15 years.

**Hon. J. MURRAY:** I would not doubt that.

**Hon. A. R. Jones:** It is being resumed at a very unequitable price in a lot of instances.

**Hon. J. MURRAY:** Much has been said by the present Minister for Housing about what he calls the unco-operative action of the sawmilling industry towards the housing programme. When a permit is to be sold by the Forests Department the advertisement, concerning the area in question, stipulates that the permit will be sold at an upset royalty for the cutting of timber from that area up to so many loads per day. In the main, these permits are sold by auction and if a saw-miller obtains a permit he has to put up a mill to cut, say, 10 or 20 loads per day. He gears his mill up to do that. Most of these mills that were built were allowed

to cut anything from 20in. x 20in. downwards. Because a mill is set up to cut that type of timber, it is not possible merely to cut small timber for housing.

So, when the sawmillers were asked to switch from the cutting of big timber for export and other purposes and turn their attention to the cutting of timber for house-building, it was only natural that there should be a slight falling off between their prewar production per man and the production since that request. Despite that fact, and despite the fact that timber has been released from control, and despite the Minister's statement that they are not co-operating, we notice that at present there is no great complaint about the shortage of timber, with the exception of dried stocks and joinery.

Hon. E. M. Davies: What about flooring boards?

Hon. J. MURRAY: That comes under the heading of dried stocks and joinery.

Hon. H. Hearn: That is for want of kiln space, too, is it not?

Hon. J. MURRAY: That is so. Despite what has been said in this House, I doubt very much whether farmers and country people are better off with control by the Housing Commission. It is quite all right with cement because that comes under the direct jurisdiction of the Minister and so there is some regimentation as to where it shall go.

But, as for iron, there is no release for the farmer. If he wants to do a job he has to buy imported English iron at about treble the price of the local material. Even if local iron is available in the district, a farmer cannot get a permit to buy it. That state of affairs exists throughout Western Australia. The Minister stated that precut houses have eased the position. If a firm has set up an establishment to precut houses for various districts it is not likely, as Mr. Jones says, that that unit will be put out of production merely because controls are lifted.

I cannot find any power vested either in the Minister or the State Housing Commission to direct building materials, of any description, to any one part of the State. The Commission certainly has control over the material but it cannot be shifted from one part of the State to another unless the Commission purchases it. Take the case of a man in Denmark. If he gets a permit, the Housing Commission does not see that the required quantity of materials is sent to that district for him to build his house. When that man gets a permit he must chase up the materials himself.

Hon. H. C. Strickland: All he gets is the release.

Hon. J. MURRAY: Therefore, if the Government and the Minister had been genuine in their suggestion that they were endeavouring to taper off controls, a Bill would have been brought down which

would have ensured that the permits were issued by the State Housing Commission, but the control over materials would have been entirely lifted. If, as has been suggested by the Minister and some other members, migration has had a serious effect on our housing position, we can look for some serious difficulties in the future.

As I said earlier, we will be able to look forward to the renewal of this measure indefinitely because material, even timber, is not elastic and the sawmills are geared up to almost their maximum effort. Even when these new mills in the lower South-West are brought into production it will make little difference. Under the policy of the Forests Department, which is also controlled by the Minister for Housing, the department must allow for a continuity of cutting and a complete rake-off cannot be taken from any one area. Under forest policy we are trying to make our timber last for ever and a day through a process of regional cutting.

The other point that does concern me in regard to this matter is the question of spec builders. When the depression hit us in 1929 its effects were aggravated by the discontinuation of building by spec builders and others because rents promised to be uneconomic. Because of that there was no prospect of letting houses or selling them at a reasonable price. Therefore, spec builders closed down as far as housebuilding was concerned and other people followed their example. It is recognised that there is no other operation as good as building to act as a true barometer of the economic position of a country. If the building trade is on the up-and-up, we can rest assured that the State's economy is on the up-and-up also.

I was very interested to hear Mr. Craig suggest that he has building proposals to the extent of something like £500,000. But Mr. Craig must remember that the bulk of the materials he would use would be material not required, in the main, for housebuilding. Not so long ago, when the Premier attended a conference at Canberra, he was told that he had to make some reduction in his loan programme. Also, from the Press, we see that there is to be a similar tightening up on Government expenditure in Great Britain. In this State over one-third of the homes being built are being erected by the State Housing Commission, or at that department's instigation and under contract with money advanced by the Commonwealth Government. We can see what a tremendous sum of money is involved in this work when we realise that the target this year is close on 6,000 houses and one-third of them are being built by or for the Commission.

If there is any tightening up of finance from the Commonwealth Government every member of this House will be chasing

the spec builders to take up the slack because these houses must still be built, and without the necessary finance the State will not be able to do it. For that reason I very much regret that the Minister, under the protection of the Act, has not lifted controls over building materials. I agree with retention of controls over permits but the Minister could have given private enterprise an opportunity to demonstrate that it would play ball and increase production. I oppose the Bill.

On motion by Hon. H. K. Watson, debate adjourned.

### **BILLS (2)—FIRST READING.**

- 1, War Service Land Settlement Agreement.
  - 2, Gas Undertakings Act Amendment (Hon. G. Fraser in charge).
- Received from the Assembly.

### **BILL—RIGHTS IN WATER AND IRRIGATION ACT AMENDMENT.**

#### *Second Reading.*

**THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE** (Hon. G. B. Wood—Central) [5.30] in moving the second reading said: This Bill contains one very important proposal, that is the installation in irrigation districts of measuring instruments, or meters, as they are familiarly known. Strong and unanimous representations for the provision of meters have been made for a considerable time by the Irrigation Commission. This Commission, which is appointed by the Governor to advise the Minister on matters relating to irrigation or land drainage, comprises the Assistant Director of Works as chairman, other departmental officers and representatives of the irrigationists—that is, the settlers.

Members should bear in mind that these representatives of the irrigationists also agree that the installation of meters is desirable. The Bill provides that all water received by any irrigationist must be measured by a meter unless the board, in special circumstances, agrees otherwise. The intention of this provision is that should the meter fail or not function properly, the board could approve of the watering of the land by other means than passing the water through the meter.

It may seem rather peculiar that provision should be made for a meter that does not work, but I would say that a meter in an irrigation channel is not, of course, like an ordinary meter attached to a pipe; it is a cruder affair and consists of a wheel that goes around, and it is possible for it to be blocked up with mud or stones or some other obstruction. So if it is blocked up temporarily provision is made for other methods to be used. In referring to the board, I might say that this term is defined in the parent Act as an irrigation board, or a board constituted under the Water Boards Act, 1904,

or the Minister acting in the exercise of the powers and authorities conferred on a board.

The irrigation areas, as members are aware, are situated along the South-West railway line between the towns of Waroona, 70 miles from Perth, and Dardanup, 116 miles from Perth. There are three areas—these being Waroona, Harvey and Collie irrigation districts, the latter extending from Brunswick Junction to Dardanup. Irrigation in Western Australia commenced in Harvey No. 1 district in the year 1916 with the opening of the Harvey dam, which was a concrete gravity wall with a capacity of 520,000,000 gallons, and which served 3,000 acres of citrus-growing land allowing three 4in. waterings for each season. Owing to the failure of a number of citrus orchards through waterlogging of the subsoil, some were cleared and attention given to the dairying industry, with good results, following which a demand arose for increased storage of water to enable the pasture areas to be extended.

At this time the depression was developing and it was decided to raise the existing Harvey weir as a means of providing employment for a number of men. As a result the capacity of the weir was increased to 2,250,000 gallons and the irrigation area was extended to include the Harvey No. 2 district of approximately 14,000 acres. In an endeavour to find work to provide employment at a low cost per head, attention was given to the construction of dams and the irrigation of further areas in the South-West, particularly in the Waroona and Brunswick-Dardanup areas. A number of settlers in each district opposed the proposal bitterly and, as the Act required that irrigation works should not be proceeded with if a majority of the landholders objected, considerable campaigning was necessary to induce a majority of the land owners to accept the schemes.

Since that time additional dams have been built at Drakesbrook (500,000,000 gallons), Samson Brook (1,800,000,000 gallons), Wellington dam (approximately 8,000,000,000 gallons) and Stirling dam (12,000,000,000 gallons). At the present time work is in hand to raise Wellington dam to a storage capacity of approximately 40,000,000,000 gallons. When the extension of the irrigation areas commenced, the land was watered by pouring the water on, with the result that the area near the head ditches received too much and the further end of the fields received too little. A great deal of this land was uneven and, consequently, the quantity of water used per acre was abnormally high.

In those days the only pastures were paspalum and sub clover. Since then a great deal of attention has been devoted to developing balanced pastures but it has been found that these composite pastures require more frequent and lighter water-



ing, which has the effect of forcing the settlers to prepare and grade the land more carefully prior to the establishment of the pastures. This has had a further beneficial effect from the Government's point of view in that it reduced the quantity required for each irrigation. The Government has invested approximately £2,237,546 in its irrigation works in the South-West, and, in order to obtain a satisfactory return for this considerable expenditure, it has had to take the necessary steps to ensure that the water available irrigates the greatest possible acreage, and at the same time to induce the settlers to grow crops in the limited irrigation areas available, which would return the greatest possible value per acre irrigated.

In order to achieve the object of making the available water serve the greatest possible acreage of land, the department is doing everything possible, with the limited amount of mechanised equipment available, to increase the acreage of graded land within the irrigation districts, and in order to encourage the progressive settler to extend his graded areas, it is proposed gradually to introduce a system by which the charges for water supplied will be based on the actual quantity utilised. By this means the settler who grades his land and who looks after his head ditches and subsidiary channels, will use less water than the careless farmer, and will therefore pay less for his irrigation. In addition, his pastures on graded land, as a result of the even watering, will give a greater return than the pastures of the careless farmer, portion of whose land will be scalded by over-watering and portion of which will be under-watered.

It is proposed, as a commencement, to install a certain number of Detheridge meters, a type employed throughout the Victorian and New South Wales irrigation systems, and to extend the metering each year as the Commission gains experience. Where meters are not installed the present system of watering and rating will be continued.

At the present time, outside the original Harvey irrigation area of 3,000 acres in the Korejikup Estate, all other irrigation districts are rated on the basis of one acre in every three acres of irrigable land held by any owner. The rate at the present time is 9s. per acre rated and this includes provision of one watering on the area rated. For every additional watering the charge is 3s. per acre irrigated. Where meters are installed, the Commission will determine a price per acre foot, which is equivalent to 271,596 gallons, and the settler will be charged by actual meter measurement for the quantity used, just as now applies in the metropolitan system.

The Bill does not specify any particular type of meter to be used and it is anticipated that the Commission will experiment

with several types of meter until the most satisfactory one is found. Other provisions in the Bill are self apparent and are the result of difficulties which have arisen in the administration of the Act since it was first passed. Section 11 of the original Act provided for "clearing and deepening the channel of any water-course" and the amending Bill provides for the addition of the words "and straightening and otherwise altering the channel." It will be apparent that in any improvement to an existing channel this additional power is necessary.

The opportunity is taken, as is being done with other measures, to delete the redundant provision that all regulations made under the Act be laid before both Houses of Parliament. This requirement is contained in the Interpretation Act and it is therefore not necessary to have it in individual legislation. There has been some doubt in the minds of Crown Law officers whether the wording of Section 42 of the principal Act authorises the Minister to charge for water supplied. To overcome this legal doubt, the Bill proposes that the word "charges" be substituted for the word "prices" in Section 42. The Bill also provides for the prescribing of charges in respect of water in excess of that to which a ratepayer would be entitled for rates assessed, such provision being necessary, particularly in the case of metering.

Section 59 of the principal Act dealing with bylaws is amended in the Bill by removing the words "subject to the provisions of this Act" and inserting therein "with the approval of the Governor," in order to conform to the requirements of the Interpretation Act. There is also provision in the Bill for the prescribing of scales of charges for water supplied and in respect of minimum quantities in the case of metered services. I will explain the necessity for minimum charges when the Bill is considered in Committee. These are, of course, most necessary in the case of meter services. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

**HON. C. H. HENNING** (South-West) [5.45]: I am pleased to be able to support the Bill as I was on the Irrigation Commission at the time the recommendations went through and during the whole of the time the alterations were under consideration. Everyone of them, in my opinion, is absolutely necessary. Provision is made in Clause 5 to amend Section 42, and rightly so. Under that section, provision was made for only one watering, and none at all for additional sales of water which are absolutely necessary. However, it is not with that section that I propose to deal entirely, but rather with the new system that is being introduced.

We in Western Australia, comparatively speaking, have a very small area of irrigation land. At present, slightly over 18,000

acres are being watered, but with the additions to Wellington weir, we shall be able to water 27,000 or 28,000 acres. Then, if the irrigable areas are to be extended, additional works will be required. Where they will be located, I do not yet know, but we have the land to put under irrigation, and it is now for the department to find storage sites and supply the water.

The Bill is designed mainly to bring irrigation practices in this State up to the level of those operating in the other States; in other words, to modernise what we are doing. As the Minister explained, we have the old and wasteful system of pouring the water on, with the result that the area near the head ditches receives too much and the land at the further end too little. The land has not had to be reasonably accurately graded. If channels are put down 10 ft. or 12 ft. apart and the water allowed to run down, not only does waste occur, but it is necessary to wait until the water seeps through to moisten between. Irrigation was introduced fairly quickly during the thirties and some of the land was unsatisfactorily prepared, so it is easy to understand why we have not a better system.

As a result of visits to the Eastern States by officers of the Public Works Department, we have been able to learn what is necessary and it is desired that we should be able to adopt modern methods. In the first place, it is necessary to grade the land as accurately as possible. Where there are depressions in the surface, a Road Patrol grader is being used to smooth them out. It is not economic for a dairy farmer to have a grader of that type of his own for the simple reason that once the surface has been levelled, there is no further use for it. This, however, is a fairly expensive method to adopt. According to the report of the Department of Agriculture for last year, this levelling costs up to £7.10s. per acre and the cost is increasing. With a charge of £3 15s. an hour for the hire of a machine, it will be still more.

This grading, however, represents only the preliminary work. Banks 10, 15 or 20 ft. apart are required to hold the water and allow it to spread reasonably evenly over the area. If the land is left after it has been levelled by the Road Patrol grader, there will be depressions of 1 in., 1½ in. or more over the surface. These depressions encourage the growth of weeds such as rushes, and the result is a drop in the carrying capacity of the land. Following the grading by the Road Patrol grader, it is necessary to level off with a Murphy grader. The department four or five years ago imported three of these machines from the Eastern States at a cost of £65 each, and they are hired out to the farmers. Unfortunately, machines of this type are unprocurable at present.

The new system of rating will tend to help the good farmer. I can visualise in the not too distant future a state of affairs

where, instead of applying the water indiscriminately the supply will be spread evenly. The rate will include a watering of, say, two acre ft. When the farmer has used that quantity there will be a reserve possibly one acre ft. of water of his rated area, and he will have the right to purchase it under the proposal in Clause 5. At present, if a farmer has a block of 100 acres, he can water 33 acres, but by conserving the water and using it to the best advantage, he will be able to increase the area watered and naturally the productivity of his farm.

I may mention that the grading carried out last year amounted to 594 acres, which was not sufficient to satisfy those requiring it. On most holdings in the new areas, however, the rate is not struck immediately. There is an increase of 10 per cent. each year, irrespective of whether the farmer can get his land into production or not. Therefore, if we wish to secure the best system of irrigation, it is essential that graders should be made available so that, as the land comes into the rating system, it will be possible to grade, sow and plant to secure the best results quickly. Let me now refer to the meter proposed to be used for measuring the water. I know that the Detheridge meter is the instrument chiefly used for measuring the water in the Eastern States, but it is very susceptible to dislocation by small sticks, say, about 8 in. long.

The Minister for Agriculture: You do not think that the farmers themselves would put sticks in, do you?

Hon. C. H. HENNING: No. One disadvantage is that if a screen is placed alongside the meter, it becomes blocked in a short space of time. Most of our channels run along the roads, and the roads have not been cleared of timber with the result that the channels collect a lot of small sticks and leaves. To overcome the difficulty, a variable throat flume has been evolved by departmental officers which works on a similar principle to a door. This is most effective and it does not block easily. Unfortunately, the only way to measure the water is by the rate of flow and the height of the water passing through the flume. It is marked off with various heights and there is a sort of tell-tale float which moves up and down and leaves a mark. However, the Crown Law Department considers that such a record could not be used in a court as evidence of the water supplied, and so it is necessary for us to revert to the use of the Detheridge meter.

The capital cost of the work was dealt with by the Minister, the amount being about £2,250,000. Considering the outlay, the loss incurred on working operations last year of just over £25,000 was not so great. The interest on capital charges are not imposed on the undertaking. We must bear in mind that most of the capi-

tal was expended during the early thirties to provide employment, and I maintain that no more productive avenue could be found for providing work for the unemployed. We shall certainly get a slightly better return from the undertaking in future, though this may not come very quickly. We have to bear in mind, however, that the more the rates go up the higher will be the farmers' production costs.

About 91 per cent. of the area of the irrigated land is used for farming, namely, for dairy cattle, fattening stock, and probably running a racehorse or two. If we can work on the same basis as is done on the irrigation areas of Victoria and New South Wales, production will be increased. Where it might be £50 per acre here, in the Eastern States the estimate is £400 or more of production per acre, not from cattle, but from fruit and vegetables which are canned on the spot. It is quite possible that in the future the irrigation areas in the main will change completely over from dairying to fruit and vegetable canning and preserving. If that happens, where is the milk supply for the metropolitan area to come from?

The Minister for Agriculture: I have plenty of ideas as to where it will come from.

Hon. C. H. HENNING: I, too, have some. There is another matter I should like to mention. At times, not at regular periods, technical officers have visited the Eastern States to observe the latest practices in irrigation and have brought back some very interesting information. I regret that no provision has ever been made for a representative of the farmers on the Commission to make the trip. We need, not only information on the technical side, but also information such as the practical farmer would acquire. One representative of the farmers, Mr. Lowe, received ministerial approval to go provided he paid his fare and expenses. I suggest that when the next trip is taken the Minister should ensure that a representative of the farmers is included in the party.

This is purely an honorary job. Members of the Commission not only devote time to the work at the meetings, but also act in the capacity of trouble-busters in their districts. Having been associated with the Commission for 15 or 16 years, I know something of the troubles that are experienced. However, I can say that in all those years, the departmental officers have never enforced their views or called for a vote. We have discussed matters sometimes for hours before we reached a decision that satisfied all. In the 15 years since I was appointed by the late Alex. McCallum on the reorganisation of the Commission, only on one occasion have I ever known a member of the Commission to disagree with any resolution.

I think the Commission has lost a little of the balance that once prevailed owing to the fact that when an officer of the Department of Agriculture left, another from the same department was not appointed in his place. The result is that we have an additional representative of the Public Works Department. The engineering side is well represented by the Assistant Director of Works and by the Irrigation and Drainage Engineer. The Assistant Under Secretary is also a member. He became a member when he was the Public Works Department accountant. When the last vacancy occurred, the assistant accountant of the Public Works Department was appointed. I hope, when a vacancy occurs in the future, or even before, that the side of the Department of Agriculture dealing with production will be represented. In the past the Superintendent of Dairying was there, and he rendered immense assistance, not only to the Commission as a whole, but to the individual members.

The Minister for Agriculture: That suggestion will have my support.

Hon. C. H. HENNING: I thought it would. There is one final point: The department dealing with this—it is not the Department of Agriculture—has recently done something with which I am thoroughly in accord, and which, I think, a lot of other departments could follow. The Public Works Department has decentralised its system of accounts so that the drainage and irrigation accounts are now all kept within the irrigation districts. I have much pleasure in supporting the Bill.

On motion by Hon. L. Craig, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 6.1 p.m.*