

# Legislative Council.

Tuesday, 24th October, 1950.

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

## AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT.

### Section "A," 1950.

The PRESIDENT: I have received from the Auditor General a copy of Section "A" of his report on the Treasurer's statement of the Public Accounts for the financial year ended the 30th June, 1950. It will be laid on the Table of the House.

## STANDING ORDERS.

### Report of Committee.

Report of Standing Orders Committee now considered.

### In Committee.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt in the Chair.

### Standing Order No. 3:

The CHAIRMAN: Members have before them the report of the Standing Orders Committee, also the Standing Orders. We shall take each proposed amendment separately. The first recommendation is—

After the definition of "clerk" insert the following:—

"Elect" means after nominations have been taken a ballot shall be held, if necessary, to decide who shall be elected;

"Elected" shall have a corresponding meaning.

Recommendation put and passed.

### Standing Order No. 15:

Delete the words "or unopposed."

### Standing Order No. 19:

Delete all the words after the word "put" in line 4, down to and including the word "Council" in line 6.

The foregoing recommendations were agreed to.

## Standing Order No. 31:

The CHAIRMAN: The next recommendation is to amend Standing Order 31 as follows:—

(1) Insert the words "or a deputy Chairman" after the word "President."

(2) Delete all the words after "Chair" in line 2.

Hon. A. L. LOTON: I suppose I should have gone through and checked the proposed amendments with the Standing Orders affected, but I think members ought to be given a little explanation as to what is proposed in regard to the deletion or addition of various words in the Standing Orders, as I feel sure that most of us are in a complete fog as to what is taking place.

The CHAIRMAN: I would draw the hon. member's attention to the fact that one week ago the Standing Orders Committee's report was distributed to members, who have been given a week to study the proposed amendments.

Hon. A. L. LOTON: I quite understand that. In my view, however, it is like introducing a Bill without having a second reading speech. If members had been able to have a general debate in the first place and then gone into Committee, to deal with the recommendations, I feel sure much more good would be derived from the proposed alterations of the Standing Orders.

Hon. W. J. MANN: I, too, must plead guilty to not having perused this report. Though I had been looking out for it, I was not aware it was on my desk. I have gone through a number of the amendments, which appear satisfactory. I wonder if I would be in order in moving that progress be reported and leave given to sit again.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member may move that progress be reported and leave asked to sit again.

Hon. W. J. MANN: I shall do so.

Progress reported.

## BILL—RESERVE FUNDS (LOCAL AUTHORITIES).

### Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 19th October.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [4.42]: I intend to support the second reading, but there are one or two phases about which I am not too happy. I believe that the Bill may be discussed more freely in Committee, and so I shall reserve my queries until that stage is reached. I am not too happy about that part of the Bill which provides that where a local authority submits a request for authorisation, it shall be by notice in writing specifying particulars of the request to a meeting of ratepayers.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: A meeting convened by notice.

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes; it would be convened by notice given by the local authority. The point is that in the event of 20 ratepayers being present, they would be sufficient to upset the desires of the local authority because the number of ratepayers is stipulated. In the event of 20 ratepayers not being present, the request may be submitted to the Minister, but if 20 ratepayers attended, they could veto the proposal of the local authority.

Admittedly the meeting would be convened by notice, but a district may desire something urgently from the point of view of the local authority but something not of great public importance—not a football ground, for instance, or something of that description when the attendance would probably be large—and if only 20 ratepayers vetoed the proposal, that would be the end of it. This seems to be a very weak ending to an issue. In Committee we shall be able to discuss it more freely and perhaps arrive at some more acceptable proposal.

The other point is that a local authority may have a reserve fund for a particular purpose but, under the Bill, the money may be used for something else if there is no pressing need at the moment for the item for which the money has been reserved. I am aware that the Bill contains a safeguard that the money so invested must be readily convertible, but while that might appear to be so at the time when the money was invested, something might occur between then and the time when it is desired to convert into cash and the object of the local authority may thus be defeated.

The two points I have outlined need much more clarification than they have received and I hope that in Committee we shall be able to arrive at something better. I believe that in a general way the provision of reserve funds is highly desirable, and I do not wish to do anything to prevent local authorities from functioning in the best possible manner. However, further discussion is needed in order to improve the Bill.

HON. W. R. HALL (North-East) [4.46]: I support the second reading because I consider that, in the circumstances, the proposal represents a very wise move. Needless to say, numerous local authorities will not have an opportunity of placing money in reserve funds. I am afraid that this Bill has been introduced largely because some local authorities have had their electric light plants taken over by the State Electricity Commission and have received considerable sums of money therefrom. Another reason for the Bill is that it will permit of 5 per cent. of the general revenue of a local authority being utilised, and

thus these bodies will have an opportunity to set aside money for work that they may desire to do in future.

The ratepayers of any local governing authority would be entitled to a reduction of rates if the Bill were not passed and the local authority had a large sum of money in hand from realised assets. Such money would rightly belong to the ratepayers. The 5 per cent. stipulated is not a large proportion, and the boards fortunate enough to have money with which to establish reserve funds will be able to use those funds to advantage in future.

As to the point raised by Mr. Fraser, I believe that provision is already made in the Act for an attendance of 20 ratepayers at a meeting convened by notice. Usually the notice is given by advertisement published in the local newspaper.

Hon. G. Fraser: The point is that an ordinary meeting of ratepayers has no authority, but this meeting of 20 ratepayers would have full authority.

Hon. W. R. HALL: That is so. Ratepayers ought to attend these meetings. The trouble with a lot of organisations is that the people who belong to them do not take an active interest in their affairs. Should a meeting be convened, the ratepayers ought to attend so that they may give a direction to the local authority as to what shall be done with the money or for what purpose it shall be reserved. The Bill is a worthy one and I hope it will be passed.

On motion by the Minister for Transport, debate adjourned.

#### **BILL—ROADS AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE STATE HOUSING COMMISSION AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES.**

Received from the Assembly and read a first time.

#### **BILL—STATE TRADING CONCERNS ACT AMENDMENT.**

Returned from the Assembly without amendment.

#### **BILL—STATE HOUSING ACT AMENDMENT.**

##### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 19th October.

HON. H. K. WATSON (Metropolitan) [4.53]: One of the objects of the Bill is to remove in part the prohibition hitherto existing against the imposition by local authorities of rates on vacant land held by the State Housing Commission. At the moment, the State Housing Commission owns or controls over 3,000 acres—say, 10,000 building lots—so it can be gathered that the question is of considerable importance to local authorities, some of which feel that the Bill does not go far enough in removing the disabilities under which they labour. Having looked into the case they put up, I am inclined to agree with them.

Under the principal Act, as it is to be amended by the Bill, rates levied on land owned by the State Housing Commission must not be greater than the amount of rates which were collected on such land before it was acquired by that authority. That is to say, if today the local authority rate is 3s. in the £1, and it happened to be 2s. in the £ when the land was acquired by the Housing Commission some years ago, then 2s. in the £ would be the maximum rate that the local authority could impose on that land. Similarly, if the unimproved value of a piece of land happened to be £200 today, but was only £50 when acquired, say, five or ten years ago, by the Housing Commission, then £50 would be the maximum value which the local authority could place on that piece of land.

That state of affairs could create all sorts of anomalies. We could have side by side two blocks, both purchased at the same time, in say, 1940, one by the State Housing Commission and the other by a private individual. Let us assume that they were purchased for £50 each and are today worth £300. Under the law as it stands, and as it is proposed in the Bill, the block owned by the private individual would be valued at £300 and rated on that amount, whereas that owned by the State Housing Commission would be valued at, and be rated on, £50. That seems to be anomalous, and it also raises the point that, not only does it create administrative difficulties by compelling road boards to make these valuations for special classes of land, but, insofar as any one class of ratepayer is given a special privilege, that special privilege can be granted only at the expense of the general community, or the other class of ratepayers. For this reason, I think the Bill should go further than it does, and when it is dealt with in Committee I propose to move that it be amended accordingly.

The measure also provides that the maximum salary at which anyone can qualify for the purchase of a worker's home shall be increased to £750 per annum. To that proposal I offer no objection. I do, however, seriously question the third proposition in the Bill, which is to increase the amount which can be advanced for a worker's home to £2,000, repayable over 40 years, with the purchaser putting up a deposit as low as £5. That proposal appears to call for critical examination by this House, particularly as the advance will be made from loan funds borrowed on the security of the State.

I might remind members that the Workers' Homes Board, which was formed in 1912, filled a niche and served a useful purpose in the community, but it never dominated the housing position or the building industry as the State Housing Commission does today. The Workers'

Homes Board was by no means the sole or major building constructor. It merely supplemented, in a small degree, the home-building activities of the community in general. After 38 years of operation, the board—or rather the State Housing Commission now—has 783 properties on its books. I am a little afraid that the Commission is about to enter into the workers' homes business on the same grand scale as it has engaged in the construction of rental homes in recent years; and I suggest that would not be any good for the people of Western Australia.

The scarcity of homes for the private home-builder has, in recent years, been due largely to a shortage of materials. But it has also been due, in no small measure, to the fact that the controlling authority—that is, the State Housing Commission—is withholding from the market enormous supplies of materials for its own aggrandisement and for its own excessive activities. When we remember that up to the 30th June, 1950, the State Housing Commission constructed 3,566 rental homes at a cost of just on £5,000,000; and that at the moment it has in the course of erection 1,016 rental homes at a cost of £1,400,000; and that it contemplates commencing between the 1st July last and the 30th June next a further 2,500 of these homes at a cost of £3,500,000, members will realise and appreciate the inroads which the State Housing Commission has made into the home-building activities of the community in general. On top of that we find that it still owns approximately 10,000 vacant blocks.

Before we ever had a Housing Commission, the community built all the houses it required and it could do the same tomorrow if the Housing Commission were wound up. One of the principal reasons for the creation of the Workers' Homes Board in 1912 was the lack of finance for the small home-builders or purchasers. In those days there was no such thing as the Commonwealth Bank credit foncier department. Today there is adequate finance available from a variety of sources. We find that the credit foncier department of the Commonwealth Bank, which was established three or four years ago, is adequately looking after the class of person the Workers' Homes Board catered for in pre-war years.

Hon. G. Fraser: I question that.

Hon. H. K. WATSON: And the credit foncier department of the Commonwealth Bank lends up to 85 per cent. of the valuation of the property with a maximum advance of £1,750 repayable over 33 years at 9s. per £100 per month and with interest at the extraordinarily low rate of 3 7-8 per cent per annum. The Western Australian figures of the operations of the credit foncier department of the bank are not available, but it appears from the bank's last annual report

that from January, 1946, to the 30th June, 1950, that particular department throughout Australia advanced £14,500,000 on 13,000 properties.

In those circumstances I see no justification for our State Housing Commission staying in the home-building industry on a grand scale. I submit that the Housing Commission should be the supplementary authority and not the dominating authority in the building industry in this State. I can see no justification for the State Housing Commission, in these times, lending £2,000 on a deposit of as low as £5. In this particular connection I would remind members that Section 60 of the principal Act governs the erection of war service homes by the State Housing Commission. An applicant for a war service home not only has to have all the special claims and qualifications of an ordinary applicant for a worker's home but he also has to have the further qualifications of an ex-serviceman. Even that type of applicant is still required to put up a deposit of at least 10 per cent. of the valuation of a property. That is to say, the maximum advance granted under the war service homes system is 90 per cent. of the valuation.

Hon. G. Fraser: That is not correct.

Hon. H. K. WATSON: Have a look at Section 60 of the principal Act.

Hon. G. Fraser: I can tell you what is operating; never mind about the Act.

Hon. H. K. WATSON: I am afraid I can gather my information only from the Act. The Minister has said, on top of all this, that workers' homes will be built in the very near future at a cost of approximately £1,400 to £1,500. In view of these circumstances, it seems to me that the existing provision of a £1,500 advance for a worker's home is more than adequate. Subject to the points that I have made, I propose to support the second reading of the Bill.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [5.5]: I intend to support the second reading of the Bill but I am not too happy about the rating section of it. I quite realise, and am prepared to support a move which will give to local authorities some rates for the land. We have to realise that the State Housing Commission has a large number of blocks. Mr. Watson has just mentioned that the Commission has something like 10,000 blocks throughout the metropolitan area.

Hon. H. K. Watson: And 10,000 too many.

Hon. G. FRASER: The possibilities are that the Commission will purchase more land, and I hope it does. This will mean that some of those blocks will not be built upon for 10 to 20 years. So, if we agree that rates shall be levied on those blocks from, we will say, the moment the land is purchased by the Housing Com-

mission, there will be a tidy little bill, so far as rates are concerned, to go on to the value of the blocks when they are allotted to applicants for homes. Therefore, this question of the imposition of rates worries me, and I am wondering how we can possibly lighten the burden.

I know that proposals have been put forward. One suggestion is that it shall operate only from the time the land is subdivided. Another proposition is that the rates shall be levied from the moment the State Housing Commission takes over the land. Just how we will overcome the difficulty I do not know, but I am inclined to support the proposal that the rates shall be levied from the time the land is subdivided. I would assume that within a reasonable time from subdivision, the land will be built upon by the State Housing Commission. We have to realise that the Commission has purchased large strips of country that is purely bush land. In many cases the local authorities have no intention of building roads and so on until such time as homes are built on the land. In those circumstances the road boards are not being put to any expense and I do not think they will be placed in an awkward position if they are not receiving rates from that land.

But I will agree that the moment the subdivision takes place and the local authorities begin to spend money on the building of roads and so forth, then they are entitled to some return by way of rates. There are areas in my province where bush strips have been taken over by the Housing Commission and they have been permitted to remain in that state for some considerable time. I would not like people who purchase this land from the State Housing Commission to be forced to pay large sums of money merely because the Commission adds the rates on to the value of the blocks. My endeavour is to see justice done to both the clients of the State Housing Commission and the local governing authorities. Up to date I have not arrived at that happy frame of mind where I could say that I would support any particular move in that regard.

I do not share the same thought as Mr. Watson regarding the value that is to be placed on the blocks of land. I realise that anomalies will be created if different values are made in respect of land that comes under the State Housing Commission as against land held by private persons. But the point I am concerned about—and I have given some thought to it—is that a lot of the land I have referred to has been held by the Commission for many years and a large amount of it is merely bush country. If it is sold at present-day values it will mean a considerable rake-off to the Housing Commission. So there is an angle to which we must give thought. Much of the land bought by the Housing

Commission many years ago would probably be six or seven times its original value. One portion of my own province comes to mind. This area is at East Fremantle and in the early stages it was dedicated as workers' homes land—I think that was prior to the 1914-18 war. It is still in its virgin state and I can imagine what value would be placed on that land today.

It is not fair that the State Housing Commission or any Government department should capitalise on these increased values when it is dealing with its clients. Although the land was dedicated for workers' homes, we did hear recently that there has been considerable agitation in the Fremantle area over the last six or twelve months, in connection with this particular land and certain interests have been pushing for the building of workers' homes in that area. We have been informed, rightly or wrongly, that owing to the increased value of the land—brought about not because the Government has done anything as the land has lain idle all these years, but because of the activity in the district and the buildings being erected by other people—the Commission considers that this land is now too good for the building of workers' homes.

So I can imagine that if the present-day value is placed on that land it will be a prohibitive price to a person desirous of building a home there, for which purpose the land was originally dedicated. Therefore, some thought must be given to that aspect. I want to meet the local governing authorities in the best possible manner, but in meeting them I do not want to place a burden on people who will be building homes. During the course of his remarks, Mr. Watson mentioned that there was no justification for advancing more than 90 per cent. under the Workers' Homes Act. He spoke of the War Service Homes Act and stated that 10 per cent. was required as a deposit under that legislation. That is correct in certain cases. But several different sections operate under that Act. I suppose there would be eight or nine different ways of gaining finance under the War Service Homes Act. I will admit that in the marginal note on the application form it states that the applicant must find 10 per cent., and that 10 per cent. is charged under some sections of the Act.

There are other sections of the Act under which, for instance, the war service homes authorities sell dwellings under contracts of sale. They have a sliding scale of charges in that respect and accept as little as 5 per cent., the graduated scale applying to higher amounts until 10 per cent., if I remember aright, applies to the £2,000 home. Those are the actual charges made by the War Service Homes Department, notwithstanding anything that is in the Act or on its application forms. I hope Mr. Watson will check up

on that, because if he does so he will find that is what happens regarding the charges. I trust that no move will be made to restrict the amount to be advanced for workers' homes. If that step were taken, we might just as well wipe that portion of the Act out altogether and allow the State Housing Commission to continue erecting rental homes under the Commonwealth-State agreement.

One reason why the Workers' Homes Act was originally introduced in 1912 was to provide dwellings for those who could not make any other arrangements. Mr. Watson suggested that because of the *fancier* system adopted by the Commonwealth Bank and also by other institutions, that need has been met. On the contrary, it has not been met. We have been told that the Commonwealth Bank will advance a greater percentage than will any other financial institution. But it will not advance beyond 85 per cent. If members recollect the position that prevailed in pre-war days, they will appreciate that possibly the greatest advance was made by a building society which advanced about 70 per cent.

The Commonwealth Bank has not gone to the extent that the old Workers' Homes Board did, but has merely gone about half-way. The board accepted deposits according to the circumstances of the individual concerned. It could almost be said that it advanced the full 100 per cent. because even on a £2,000 home it was empowered under the Act to accept a deposit as low as £5. The Commonwealth Bank has never gone more than half way between the 70 per cent. and the 100 per cent. in advancing up to 85 per cent. If we were to provide any maximum amount in the Act, it would prevent people in whose interests the original Workers' Homes Act was passed from deriving any advantage at all. We must realise that it is much harder in these days to provide a deposit of 15 per cent. than it was to pay over £5 in the old days.

Hon. H. K. Watson: But you must remember that you are now dealing with applicants who earn up to £750 a year.

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes, and that seems to be a lot of money, but after all it is not much if the person concerned is rearing a family. The individual I have in mind is the man who is receiving less than £750 a year, and I do not want the Act to be altered so as to debar assistance being forthcoming to those in whose interests the Act was originally passed. I can remember the time when we amended the Act in pre-war days. That amendment was not along the lines suggested by Mr. Watson by providing for 10 per cent; the amendment was in the contrary direction. The Act originally permitted a deposit of £5 to be accepted, but that pro-

vision was deleted and the matter of the deposit was left to the discretion of the board.

I can well remember the debate. The idea behind the move was that there were many who could not pay even £5 by way of a deposit. For that reason, the Act was amended to allow the board to accept a deposit of £1. I certainly have a strong objection to any percentage bar being applied to advances under this legislation. I readily agree that with a house provided at a cost of £2,000 on a deposit of £5, the effect is to make conditions such that it will be impossible for the person concerned ever to own the home.

Even so, it is much better to accept such a low deposit because the individual concerned will, while having no chance of ever owning the premises, be building up a small equity in his dwelling which will increase as the years go by and will give him greater security than he would enjoy if he were merely paying rent. As a matter of fact, in practice the Housing Commission is not accepting deposits of £5 from applicants. The average deposit would be about £25. I know of some who have put down £50 or even £100. The average individual would provide the deposit that he can afford. For that reason I do not want a percentage to be provided for in the Act, because that would possibly exclude many who need the greatest assistance under the legislation.

Hon. H. K. Watson: Do you not think the applicant should cut his coat according to his cloth?

Hon. G. FRASER: In what way?

Hon. H. K. Watson: Instead of getting a £2,000 home, he should get one at a more modest price.

Hon. G. FRASER: Experience shows that that is exactly what is happening. During my remarks, I keep referring to workers' homes when, of course, I really refer to the State Housing Commission's operations. I do so in order to distinguish between the old system and the Commonwealth-State rental homes arrangement. There is confusion in the minds of many people who consider that Commonwealth-State homes are workers' homes, but they are not. I speak of workers' homes so that members will understand the type I refer to. I think that since the war about 28 dwellings have been erected under workers' homes conditions, and if they were checked up I think the cost would average between £1,400 and £1,500. In view of the increased costs during the last 12 months, the value of those homes would now be greater than £1,500.

Members would find that the largest portion of those granted assistance under the Act are those who obtain their dwellings at the cheapest possible prices. As a matter of fact, it is, to my mind, a turn of the wheel because I can remember in

1936 or 1937—at any rate, it was just after the depression period—when Fremantle members were very busy endeavouring to secure the erection of workers' homes in their district. We found, however, that the outlook of the Workers' Homes Board had become similar to that of building societies, and in consequence it had developed into a business proposition.

Hon. H. K. Watson: Are you not suggesting that a State activity should not be run on business lines?

Hon. G. FRASER: No, the hon. member cannot inveigle me into making an admission of that sort. I suggest that when a particular Act is being administered by a particular department for a particular purpose, that purpose should be observed by it—even though it might mean incurring a loss. In those days the Workers' Homes Board was not carrying out the intention of the Act because those in authority had started to investigate just what sort of an investment the applicant would prove to be. If he were in a permanent position, he would be brought within the scope of the Act and would be able to secure a home. On the other hand, if he were in casual employment he had no chance of getting one because the board had developed the idea that it had to be conducted on business lines.

Hon. A. R. Jones: A caravan would be the thing for a man in casual employment.

Hon. G. FRASER: Possibly, but he is entitled to a house.

Hon. H. K. Watson: What you are suggesting would be at State expense.

Hon. G. FRASER: It was not at State expense at all because he had to make his weekly payments. Because a man was in casual employment, the board would not build a home for him. At that time the type of home that I refer to cost about £800 and the salary range for applicants was between £500 and £600. What we sought to achieve was to have the Workers' Homes Act administered in accordance with the original intention and so provide homes for men who could not make other arrangements. We took the matter up with the Government of the day and as a result plans and specifications were drawn up for a cheaper type of home that would cost about £400, which outlay was to be repaid at the rate of approximately 15s. a week, after which applications were called. Some hundreds of applications were received and homes were built. Today that type of home is costing up to £2,000.

Hon. H. K. Watson: It is a long call from £400 to £2,000!

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes, but what I refer to was the first introduction of the asbestos-weatherboard type of home that in those days cost £400 to erect.

Hon. H. K. Watson: A comparable amount today would be a maximum of £1,200.

Hon. G. FRASER: But we cannot get that type of home for £1,200.

Hon. H. K. Watson: There are plenty of self-help homes.

Hon. G. FRASER: I am talking about homes built by contractors. Such homes were being built at a cost of from £600 to £650 at the time when building operations ceased because of the war.

The Minister for Transport: What type of house would that be?

Hon. G. FRASER: They were constructed of asbestos and weatherboard. The type was the forerunner of the asbestos-weatherboard house we have today. It was the cheapest type then.

Hon. L. A. Logan: You would not get a cheaper type.

Hon. G. FRASER: It is unfortunate that such dwellings today cost up to £2,000. Since the war they cost about £1,500. I am assuming the greater cost I refer to because of the increased charges that have applied during the last 12 months. If we include in the Act a bar regarding deposits, we shall thereby exclude from its provisions many of those in whose interests the Act was originally passed. Rather than do that, I would prefer the Act to be discarded altogether. I would make a suggestion whereby the applicant for workers' homes could be relieved to a very large extent of the necessity for heavy weekly commitments, by an extension of the amortisation provision. I have suggested that the period should be somewhat similar to that operating in connection with the Commonwealth-State rental homes, namely, 53 years. Some members might point out that they are brick homes. But they are not all brick homes: quite a number are of weatherboard and asbestos.

Hon. A. R. Jones: They will not last 53 years, either!

Hon. G. FRASER: I do not know about that. I believe that those who drew up the plans should know something about their business and would not have advised the Government to advance money on something which would go out of existence before the repayments had been made. The period of repayment for war service homes is 45 years; and I suggested last year that consideration should be given to that phase, and that the term be altered from 40 years, in respect of the homes I am discussing, to 45 or 53 years. There should not be any distinction between the period of repayment for Commonwealth-State rental homes and that for workers' homes.

By that means, although these houses are costing quite considerable sums—anything up to £2,000—the burden of repayment would be lightened for those taking them over. We find that even though a period of 53 years operates with the Commonwealth-State rental homes, some people are now making repayments at the rate of £2 2s. per week. That is a very large slice out of a man's salary. I can imagine that if the 40-year period of repayment for workers' homes remains in force, some of the people occupying those places will reach the stage of having to make a repayment of £2 per week. That is too high altogether, and the Government should give some consideration to bringing the period into line with that operating in connection with Commonwealth-State rental homes.

Hon. H. K. Watson: If that were done, half the population of the State would be killed in the rush to get workers' homes.

Hon. G. FRASER: Nothing of the kind! The average individual with money to enable him to make private arrangements will continue to make provision accordingly. Nine out of 10 people turn to workers' homes or to other building schemes because they cannot make any other arrangements.

Hon. A. R. Jones: And never will, either!

Hon. G. FRASER: Possibly not. That might be because they are doing a job for Australia by rearing a family. For that reason a number of them are not in a position to have sufficient money to put down a deposit on a home. That is one class of people for whom this measure was intended. I will admit that in all communities there are some people who will never have 10s., even though they might earn £10 a week, but my plea is on behalf of the average individual. I want to do something for people who, through no fault of their own, are not in a position to go to the Commonwealth Bank and put down 15 per cent.

Hon. W. J. Mann: What, in these days?

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes.

Hon. A. R. Jones: There are many who cannot.

Hon. W. J. Mann: If they looked after their money they could.

Hon. G. FRASER: I have had a lot of dealings with some of the most genuine people it is possible to find in this State, and they have not been as fortunate as the hon. member.

Hon. W. J. Mann: You mean that they have not been able to raise £15?

Hon. G. FRASER: I said 15 per cent., not £15. There is a big difference.

Hon. W. J. Mann: That is a different thing. I withdraw what I said.

Hon. G. FRASER: At the moment, I happen to be handling the case of an individual who is as good living a man as it is possible to find. He works hard but is on the lowest wage paid—the basic wage. He is a good, genuine toiler, and is getting a war service home built.

Hon. A. R. Jones: He is a rarity.

Hon. G. FRASER: I do not know what company the hon. member keeps, but it must be very bad company if he believes that such a man is a rarity. I do not move in exclusive circles, but this man of whom I speak is not a rarity. Evidently the people of the Midland Province must be a very bad type if that is the experience of the hon. member. This individual struggled on and discovered the disadvantage of the rise and fall clause in the housing contract. It may happen that, after contracts have been signed for the building of a home at a certain figure, there is some other direction, and the result, under the rise and fall clause, is a call for additional money, which the person concerned is unable to find.

A number of people have found themselves in that position. They have raised every penny it was possible for them to obtain and have expended the money they have saved through the years, such as deferred pay, gratuities, and so on. These are genuine people, who have spent their all in an attempt to purchase homes; but because of some slight alteration in the basic wage which has resulted in increased costs, they are unable to get their homes built.

Hon. A. R. Jones: I would say we should give such a man as that a home. But how are we to decide who is genuine and who is not?

Hon. G. FRASER: The hon. member will find that the majority of people are genuine. It is the odd ones who are not. I believe in the old saying that there is a lot of good in the worst of us, and a lot of bad in the best of us, or something to that effect. If such a person were able under this Act to take advantage of conditions such as obtain in relation to workers' homes, he would be in no trouble when faced with increased costs and would be able to have his home built. That would not be so if some members had their way and 10 per cent. were insisted on.

I welcome the Bill and hope it will be passed. I refer chiefly to the first portion, concerning the increase in the amount of advance, and that dealing with the definition of worker. I am giving more thought to the reference to rates. I will possibly vote in favour of the suggested provision, but at the moment I am not keen about it. Like some other members, I am worried about the advance of up to £2,000. I believe that we are going be-

yond the stage when any worker will be able to own his house. That is one of the reasons why I suggest an alteration in the period of repayment from 40 to 53 years.

Even with repayments spread over 40 years, there are very few people who will be alive when the last payment is made. The extension of the period to 53 years will place people in a much better position as they will have to make lesser payments per week during the period specified.

Hon. A. L. Loton: You believe in a man being able to own his home?

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes. I want it to be made possible for a person to own a house; but if it is necessary for a man to pay £2 per week, then a number of people will never begin with the idea of owning their houses because they will realise that it is impossible. I do not want people to have to deny themselves things throughout their lives by having to take a large slice each week out of their salary to make repayments on a home. I support the second reading, with the reservation that I shall give further consideration to the provision dealing with rates.

On motion by the Minister for Transport, debate adjourned.

## BILL—INSPECTION OF SCAFFOLDING ACT AMENDMENT.

### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 19th October.

HON. L. A. LOGAN (Midland) [5.40]: Apparently this Bill has been introduced for the express purpose of repealing the old schedule to the Inspection of Scaffolding Act with the intention of replacing it with regulations. As the Act stands, before the schedule can be altered, it is necessary for the measure to be brought before Parliament and be amended. Over a period of 25 years there have been only four amendments to the schedule. Now there seems to be a desire to rush this Bill through and to repeal the schedule before regulations have been framed for tabling. In effect, this means that we have to give the Government an open cheque in regard to what is put in the regulations. I do not think this House should let the Government get away with anything like that.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: There must be an Act before there can be regulations.

Hon. L. A. LOGAN: I realise that. But the regulations are not even ready, and in reply to a question in another place, the Minister said he hoped to have them gazetted before the adjournment of Parliament. Since there have been only four amendments in 25 years, I think that this Bill could have been left for another month until regulations had been drawn up ready for tabling in Parliament im-



mediately the measure became law. I object to what has been done. I also object to the powers it is proposed to give to inspectors. Some of them are very strange. Whoever he may be, or whatever his qualifications are, an inspector will be given authority to direct men who may be master builders with 20 or 30 years' experience, or architects who have been engaged in their profession for a similar period. An inspector who may not have had very much experience at all will be able to direct these people to do certain things.

What those things are, we do not know, because we have not seen the regulations and we have to guess what they will be. However, there is enough in this amendment to make us a little wary of passing on such power to inspectors. It may be said that the inspectors are all qualified men. As to that, we have had experience in the past of inspectors, especially those connected with the Housing Commission, who have not done their job properly; and it can happen under this measure that inspectors without qualifications will be directing qualified men with lengthy experience. I am not a builder, but apparently builders are not happy about this position. We should go carefully into the matter before giving inspectors the powers suggested. I would also like to ask why it was necessary for this Bill to be introduced with such haste before regulations were thought about.

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: There has been no haste.

Hon. L. A. LOGAN: I do not see what else there has been. To begin with, it is proposed to repeal the schedule. As there are no regulations, does not the hon. member think that it would have been only proper for the Minister to have such regulations framed before introducing the measure?

Hon. H. S. W. Parker: It has never been done yet.

Hon. L. A. LOGAN: That is no reason why it cannot be done now. I maintain that the regulations should have been framed so as to be available immediately the Bill was passed by both Houses. I do not know how we are to overcome the difficulty and it seems that we must agree to the second reading, but at all events I have voiced my protest.

On motion by the Minister for Transport, debate adjourned.

#### **BILL—HEALTH ACT AMENDMENT.**

##### *Second Reading.*

**THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT**  
(Hon. C. H. Simpson—Midland) [5.47] in moving the second reading said: The proposals in this Bill have been recommended by the officers of the Department of Public Health for the purposes of—

- (a) the improvement of health conditions within the State; and
- (b) providing local authorities with financial and other authority to implement their responsibilities under the Act.

The parent Act was passed by Parliament in 1911, and, since then, to keep abreast of the rapidly improving methods of health control, it has been amended on no less than 18 occasions. In order to obviate confusion the Act and amendments have been consolidated, and the consolidation appears in Volume 3 of the Reprinted Acts of Western Australia, which was published this year.

The first amendment, which affects Section 22, has been requested by several local health authorities and the Local Government Association. Section 22 provides that, for health purposes, any area of land outside a municipal district may be placed under the control of the municipality. This provision was inserted in the Act at a time prior to all road boards becoming local health authorities. In those days it was necessary, on occasions, to provide supervision over offensive trade premises and as the road board, in whose district the premises were located, did not possess the required health powers, the only alternative was to place the premises under the jurisdiction of the nearest municipality.

Nowadays, all road boards are local health authorities and as such they naturally desire to exert control over their entire districts. However, it has been ascertained that there is no legal power to return the areas in question to road board control. The amendment, therefore, proposes to give authority for this to be done whenever necessary.

The second and third amendments, which refer to Sections 40 and 41, respectively, provide for increases in the maximums of general health rates and sanitary rates, levied by local authorities. In districts which are declared from time to time by the Governor, the proposals are to increase the general health rate from a maximum of 9d. to 1s. in the £ on the annual assessment, or when rates are based on the capital unimproved value, to increase them from 1½d. to 3d. in the £. In districts not declared by the Governor, the increases are from 6d. to 8d. in the £ on the annual assessment, and from ½d. to 2d. in the £ on the capital unimproved value.

In regard to sanitary rates it is proposed to increase these from a maximum of 6d. to 8d. in the £ on the annual assessment, and from ½d. to 2d. in the £ on the capital unimproved value. These proposed increases have been brought about by agitation on the part of many local authorities, who submitted that the limits im-

posed by the Act did not return them sufficient revenue to provide adequate health services. On investigation by the Public Health Department this was found to be correct. Twenty-six out of 81 local authorities whose finances were examined ended the year 1948-49 with overdrafts, although 10 of the 26 had commenced the year with credit balances.

The department is satisfied that the present health rate limits preclude the provision by local authorities of adequate health services, and that the relationship between the maximums allowed where rates are based on annual values and unimproved values, respectively, discriminates to the disadvantage of the latter. These maximums were provided in 1911 and since then, of course, money values have changed appreciably. In addition, motor transport in connection with sanitary services is much more expensive than the old horse and cart method.

In the past, too, many local authorities did not employ health inspectors, while now the provision of qualified inspectors is considered essential. The payment of these inspectors constitutes a further drain on the health vote of local authorities. It may be postulated that unless local authorities are given authority to obtain additional revenue for health purposes, there will be demands for increased participation by the Government in such matters. This would result in a most unwanted degree of centralisation. It appears obvious that unless rates are increased there will be curtailment of many health services.

The next amendment provides a new section for the Act. This gives the Commissioner of Public Health power to order the compulsory chest x-ray of all persons over 14 years of age. At the meeting of Premiers and Ministers for Health in Canberra in 1948, it was decided that this provision was essential to the Commonwealth's plan for the eventual elimination of tuberculosis, and all States were asked to implement the necessary legislation. It was considered that the effect of such a provision would be the location of, and attention to, unreported cases of tuberculosis.

It is possible that many cases in the early stages of the disease will be discovered, and that the majority of these will be cured completely. Unsuspected carriers of the disease are a great menace to their contacts, and are a greater danger to the community than the known cases. It does not follow that all persons over 14 years of age will be examined compulsorily. It is proposed to select certain classes, such as handlers of food and persons such as teachers and hairdressers who are in close contact with the public.

Then again, it will also enable the examination of non-assisted migrants, many of whom have active tuberculosis.

The non-x-ray of these persons prior to their leaving for Australia constitutes a serious leakage in our control programme. It is possible that some persons may consider that compulsory examination infringes personal liberty. However, the protection of the general health of the community and the building up of virile future generations have to be considered. Wage earners requiring treatment need have no fear now that their families will be in want, as the Commonwealth Tuberculosis Act provides adequate financial assistance. In order that all members may be au fait with the details of such assistance, I have arranged for the distribution of copies of the latest pamphlet on the matter.

Another amendment gives the Commissioner of Public Health the authority to inform the parents of any child under 16 years of age, if the Commissioner suspects or knows that such a child is suffering from venereal disease. At present all persons engaged in the administration of the Act are required to maintain close secrecy in regard to matters concerning venereal disease, the penalty for infringement of such secrecy being £100. Now, if the Commissioner learns that a child has venereal disease he cannot inform its parents. All he can do, if the child is not undergoing treatment, is to place it in an institution, without divulging the reason to the parents.

It is considered that it would be far preferable to inform the parents and give them the responsibility of having the child treated. The parents would have to comply with the provisions in the Act relating to treatment of the disease. It is proposed to repeal Section 322 of the Act, which provides that local authorities may recover any expenses incurred in the maintenance or treatment of hospital patients. The reason for this is that the Commonwealth-State Hospital Benefits Agreement provides that no charge shall be made against patients for treatment in a public ward of a public hospital.

Local authorities are responsible, under the Health Act, for the control of infectious diseases in their districts. When a local authority arranges the admission of a patient to an infectious diseases hospital, the hospital receives the usual allowance of 8s. 3d. per day under the Hospital Benefits Agreement. This, of course, does not cover all the cost of treatment, and the balance is charged by the hospital against the local authority. Some local authorities have endeavoured to exercise the power of recovery to which I have alluded, but this has constituted a breach of the Commonwealth-State agreement. It has therefore become necessary to exercise this power of recovery from the Act.

The penultimate amendment is designed to permit local authorities, if they desire, to increase their financial assistance to district nursing systems, infant health

centres and hospitals. Under the Act each local authority's annual subsidies to these organisations must not exceed a total of 10 per cent. of the ordinary income of the authority. The amendment provides that the total annual subsidies shall not exceed 10 per cent. of the ordinary income, or £100, whichever is the greater. These subsidies are made by local authorities at their own discretion, and are not controlled in any manner by the Public Health Department. Some small local authorities have a very meagre ordinary income, the bulk of which is realised from services provided by the authority.

For instance, sanitary services may be operated by contract, and the local authority would not handle the money involved. In such a case the ordinary income of the local authority might be as low as £50. The present maximum of subsidy allowed in the Act restricts local health authorities which wish to assist amenities in their districts, such as hospitals and infant health clinics. It is a fact that road boards and municipalities may subsidise infant health clinics from their respective funds, but it is considered that as local authorities are empowered under the Health Act to conduct health activities, they should be given the power under the same Act to finance such enterprises.

The last amendment refers to Section 343, under which the Governor may prepare model bylaws in regard to health matters, and have these published in the "Government Gazette". Any local authority may then adopt, by resolution, the whole or part of these bylaws, with or without modification. The resolution of the local authority is then published in the "Government Gazette". It so happens that there are frequent amendments to the model bylaws, in order to keep pace with modern methods of health control. Some of these amendments are adopted by all of the 150 local authorities. This means that the resolutions of all of these 150 bodies have to be published in the "Government Gazette". To do this it is necessary to submit 150 files to the Crown Solicitor for checking purposes and for the preparation of documents. Then each of the 150 files is placed before Executive Council for approval, and 150 notices are published in the "Government Gazette". Members will agree that this is not only a cumbersome procedure but also is a drain on Ministers' time and that of senior Government officers.

The same difficulty was experienced in adopting bylaws made under the Road Districts Act, but this was overcome by amending that Act in a manner similar to that proposed in this Bill. That is, it will empower the Government to make regulations in respect to all health matters regarding which a local authority

may make bylaws, and to declare that such regulations shall apply in any or all districts or portions of districts throughout the State. This will enable universal general standards to be applied without cumbersome administrative procedure, and will save considerable time, especially as regards local health authorities in the more remote parts of the State. It will be necessary to exercise this power only where uniform general standards are required, and it will not prevent local authorities from making bylaws to adapt the regulations to local conditions.

At present, the Governor and the Commissioner have power to make bylaws and to require local health authorities to adopt them, so the amendment will not impose further control by the Commissioner on local authorities. It will be conceded that it is preferable to have uniform regulations covering such matters as food, drugs, meat inspection and sanitation, than for each of 150 local authorities to make its own local bylaws. It will be noticed that this amendment validates regulations already made in regard to camps and caravans and Argentine ant control. It was erroneously thought there was authority to make these regulations, but it has been discovered that this was wrong. These regulations are examples where uniform general standards are desirable, and where regulations which are applicable throughout the State are preferable to the making of bylaws by numerous local authorities. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. J. G. Hislop, debate adjourned.

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

### *Second Reading.*

**THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT** (Hon. C. H. Simpson—Midland) [6.4] in moving the second reading said: As members know, the Building Operations and Building Materials Control Act was passed in 1945, following the announcement of the Commonwealth Government's desire to surrender its powers of control over the supply of building material and the construction of buildings. Swift action was taken by the then State Government in order that control could be continued under State authority. The Government, after full consideration, is of opinion that it is necessary to continue the Act for another 12 months, that is, until the 31st December, 1951. An object of the Bill is to provide an expeditious method of easing controls at any time, without having recourse to the far slower system of amending the Act which, of course, can be done only while Parliament is in session.

The Bill proposes that the Governor shall have power by proclamation in the "Government Gazette" to exempt, at any time, any person or class of persons, or building operation or class of building operations, wholly or partially from the restrictive provisions of the Act. This means that, if necessary, any person or any building operation may be exempted from control practically immediately. The Bill also provides that proclamations may be issued to amend the maximum amount of money a person may spend each year without permit on his residential or business premises. The limit allowed each year at present is £50 for a house and £100 for business premises. It is quite possible that circumstances might arise during the parliamentary recess where an amendment of these maximum amounts is warranted. If this can be done by proclamation instead of waiting until Parliament meets to amend the Act, the public will have the advantage earlier of the increased limits.

At this stage I should like to present members with some information regarding the building programme generally. I do not propose to go into too many details, but if members desire any further information I will be only too pleased to endeavour to supply it when replying to the second reading debate. I am glad to say that there appears now to be a gratifying improvement in the building rate. Members know that before the war about 2,000 homes were built annually. The war, of course, presented us with a tremendous lag to overcome, which was accentuated by the increase in population. For these reasons, allied to the twin shortages of basic building materials and labour, it became necessary to ensure that building was guided into the most deserving channels. It is interesting to note that in the past three years our population has increased by more than 50,000. During the year ended the 30th June, 1950, 3,509 homes were completed, and there were 5,031 in course of erection. I will quote some comparative figures which will indicate the progress being made—

	Houses completed	Houses in course of construction.
1946-47	1,792	2,448
1947-48	2,771	3,075
1948-49	3,244	3,843
1949-50	3,509	5,031

These figures reveal that the completed rate has risen by 96 per cent. in three years, and that there are 105 per cent. more houses under construction than there were three years ago. In the two years that have elapsed since the 30th June, 1948, the building labour force has increased from 5,591 to 6,908, an improvement of 23 per cent. This does not include owner-builders, who are doing a very fine job.

The labour force is being augmented by the nomination of tradesmen from Great Britain, a procedure approved by the trade union movement, provided the necessary material is available for the men to use. At the 30th June, 1950, 3,653 homes had been built under the Commonwealth-State Rental Agreement and 1,016 were under construction, 319 of these being in rural areas. Steps are being taken for the manufacture of small pre-cut homes, which will be of particular value for country districts, and another effort made to solve the housing difficulty was the calling of tenders overseas for prefabricated homes. These tenders are now under consideration and it is hoped to finalise negotiations soon. The contract provides that successful tenderers must supply their own material and labour, and must erect accommodation for their workmen.

I do not intend to digress upon the subject of costs, but must say that the cost per square, despite recent rises, still compares favourably with those of the other States. A recent survey indicated that by the 30th June, 1955, we will need another 30,000 homes to cater for our population, exclusive of migration, which we are informed will be about 15,000 each year. This means that to keep pace, we require at least 8,000 or 9,000 homes each year for the next five years. Then, on top of this, is the realisation that housing is only one facet of the problem. More schools will be needed, as well as hospitals, clinics, kindergartens, shops, etc. It is for these reasons that control is needed to ensure a balanced and necessary building programme. I propose to quote a few production figures.

Bricks, of course, have been a big problem, and the Government has been forced to establish further brickworks, owing to private enterprise being wary of entering the industry. In 1939, there were 53,000,000 bricks produced. This fell to 7,000,000 in 1944, but, by the efforts of the Department of Industrial Development and the Housing Commission, this was built up to 57,000,000 in 1950. This is a very gratifying increase, but it is only sufficient to build 3,500 houses. However, it is hoped, as a result of the activities of the departments I have mentioned, to produce 90,000,000 by the end of 1951. The shortage of bricks is one reason why it is necessary to maintain control to divert building into the most deserving channels.

To improve the position, the Government has given every assistance to the production of alternative building materials, such as cement, concrete blocks and board sections. These have been a great assistance both to home building and industrial construction. The future is bright so far as tiles are concerned. In 1944 the annual production was 575,000. By 1947 it had risen to 4,500,000 and for the 12 months ended the 30th June, 1950, it was 8,000,000.

About 3,500,000 of this output are cement tiles. The opening of new works at Welshpool will greatly step up production and, as I have said, the future position is brighter, although shortages still recur at present.

Cement production is not satisfactory, but every effort is being made to improve the situation. Present production amounts to 1,250 tons per week. The local company is arranging to duplicate its plant, but in the meantime demands far out-reach supplies. There is a possibility of another works opening in Western Australia, but this is still in the negotiation stage. Production of asbestos cement sheets has been more than trebled since the war and extensions by the local company are expected next year to double the present output.

Importation of vital necessities from the Eastern States, such as galvanised iron and piping, is most worrying. Industrial disputes have affected production and the shipping position is a tremendous problem. I must say, however, that the most strenuous efforts have been made to improve the situation. No stone has been left unturned and there is nothing that can be done other than to continue these efforts. Timber, of course, is another problem, and every effort is being made to improve the position. The output of three large mills was lost owing to fire, and several other large mills have been producing only 40 per cent. of their permissible output.

A regulation has been gazetted recently to insist that sawmillers must cut at least 75 per cent. of their permissible intake, and this should help to increase production. The production of timber in this State in 1950 was less than in 1937-38, when it amounted to 285,000 loads. By 1946-47, this had fallen to 199,000 loads, and in 1950 it was 216,000 loads—69,000 loads, or 25 per cent. less than in 1937-38. One of the difficulties is shortage of labour, practically all mills being undermanned, owing to the refusal of men to leave the more settled areas. It is hoped that, when several new mills come into operation, a happier story can be told.

The overall local production picture is such that it is still necessary, and will be necessary for some time, to import from oversea materials such as galvanised iron, water piping, cement and asbestos, at costs considerably greater than the local products. I trust that the information I have given will assist members to decide that, in the interests of a balanced building programme, it is still necessary to continue the operations of the Act. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. A. L. Loton, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 6.15 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday, 24th October, 1950.

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

### AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT.

#### Section "A," 1950.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have received from the Auditor General a copy of Section "A" of his report on the Treasurer's statement of the Public Accounts for the financial year ended the 30th June, 1950. It will be laid on the Table of the House.

### QUESTIONS.

#### MEAT.

##### As to Price Increase.

Mr. J. HEGNEY asked the Attorney General:

Is it a fact that the master butchers have, on their own initiative, made a substantial increase in the price of meat?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied:

The Prices Branch has no knowledge of any such action. If individual cases of overcharging come under notice, the necessary investigation will be made.

### PARLIAMENTARY SESSION.

#### As to Probable Date of Conclusion.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE (without notice) asked the Premier:

Has he given any consideration to when the House may conclude its business for this session?