

Hon. J. G. Hislop: Is that Kathleen Mavourneen?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: No; in cases of hardship the time can be extended up to six months.

Hon. C. H. Simpson: It could be seven or eight months in actual practice?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: It is the time from when the court deals with it, and the court will say what it should be.

Hon. H. K. WATSON: I ask the Committee to stand by the provision already in the clause; namely, three months and not six. We should vote against the Assembly's amendment. In its wisdom the Committee decided that three months was a fair limit. To summarise a few of the reasons, I would mention that it is a nominal three months, but an effective five months. The tenant has to be given 28 days' notice, and then the case has to come before the court, and the court has the discretion to extend the period by three months.

In December last the Act was amended to provide that as from the 1st May, any person could obtain possession of his property by giving 28 days' notice to the tenant. Many hundreds of young married couples bought houses on the assurance that they could get possession after 28 days' notice; and we are now telling them that, after 28 days, they must wait a further three months. I think even that is unwarranted; but I will not oppose a three-month period.

Hon. J. G. HISLOP: Would not this be one of the cases in which the State Housing Commission would provide a house within three months, after the special extension given by the court?

Question put and negatived; the Assembly's amendment to the Council's amendment not agreed to.

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 4.28 p.m.

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 12th August, 1954.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 2.15 p.m. and read prayers.

QUESTIONS.

EDUCATION.

(a) As to Promotion of Trade Class Instructors.

Mr. JOHNSON asked the Minister for Education:

Further to my previous questions relating to promotions for instructors in trade sections of technical education, what promotion is available to instructors who have passed the examinations mentioned in the Minister's reply?

The MINISTER replied:

When an instructor completes the examination requirements of regulation 205 he is eligible to apply for a promotional position of instructor in charge when a vacancy occurs. In addition, subject to satisfactory service, he proceeds automatically by annual increments to the limit of the instructors' salary range.

(b) *As to Physical Education Syllabus and Playing Fields.*

Mr. JOHNSON asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Has a new syllabus of physical education been adopted?

(2) Is this new syllabus designed to encourage youngsters to join competitive sporting clubs when leaving school?

(3) Is it not anticipated that this policy will increase the demand for playing fields?

(4) Is anything being done to increase the number and availability of playing fields—

(a) at present;

(b) in future years?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) There is no new syllabus as such. A new approach to the subject relates all activities done to the physical needs and interests of the children. Quality of movement, improved techniques and training in games, athletics, dances and swimming are the basic elements of this new approach.

(2) Yes.

(3) Yes.

(4) Yes. (a) Most local authorities have programmes involving work on greater sports grounds schemes.

(b) A recent wide survey done by the associated sporting committee of the National Fitness Council supplied material for the Town Planning Commission and Professor Stephenson to be used in determining the present and future needs of recreational facilities.

Another review carried out by the National Fitness Council of areas set aside for recreation by local governing authorities throughout the State indicated that most authorities had set aside sufficient areas, and, in most larger centres, swimming pools were proposed.

RAILWAYS.

(a) *As to Destruction of Telegraph Poles, Kulikup.*

Mr. HEARMAN asked the Minister for Railways:

(1) Can he state the cost to the department of a stack of telegraph poles 22 feet long, that until recently was in the Kulikup railway yard?

(2) Is he aware that the Upper Blackwood Road Board alleges that recently these poles were destroyed by a gang, by sawing them in half and burning them?

(3) Can he say how much it cost to destroy these poles?

(4) What was the reason for their destruction?

(5) Was any effort made to sell these poles to the State Electricity Commission or private buyers?

(6) Who was responsible for ordering the destruction of these poles?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) There were 189 poles costing £212.

(2) No. Forty of these were used to repair telephone lines in the vicinity. Of the balance, 19 which were affected by dry rot and white ants were burned.

(3) These poles were culled out as a result of inspection and the cost would be very little.

(4) Answered by No. (2).

(5) No effort was made to sell these poles to the State Electricity Commission as they were unsuitable for use by that department. A private buyer wrote to the district supervisor regarding acquiring the remaining poles but no sale has yet been effected.

(6) The signal and tele-communications engineer.

(b) *As to Items Included in Losses.*

Hon. A. F. WATTS asked the Minister for Railways:

(1) In calculating the losses on the State railways for the year ended the 30th June, 1954, were the following included as items of expenditure—

(a) Amount allowed for depreciation;

(b) interest on written-off capital;

(c) interest on other capital?

(2) What were the amounts for—

(a) Depreciation;

(b) interest on written-off capital;

(c) interest on other capital, all for the year stated?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) (a) Yes.

(b) and (c) Not yet, as railway accounts for 1953-54 are not complete.

(2) (a) £888,062.

(b) and (c) Answered by No. 1 (b) and (c).

(c) As to Railway Crossings and Flashing Signals.

Mr. HEAL asked the Minister for Railways:

(1) How many railway crossings are in the metropolitan area?

(2) How many are fitted with automatic flashing signals?

(3) Is it the Government's intention to install automatic signals on the remainder?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) 56.

(2) 16 and another six by gates or booms.

(3) Crossings which cannot be dispensed with or which do not permit of a clear and uninterrupted view will ultimately be equipped with automatic flashlight signals.

HOSPITALS.

(a) As to Departmental Hospitals, Bed Average and Expenditure.

Mr. CORNELL asked the Minister for Health:

What was the daily bed average for the undermentioned departmental hospitals and what was the cost of maintaining each of them (on a per patient per day basis) for the year ended the 30th June, 1954—

Narrogin;
Busselton;
Katanning;
Merredin;
Margaret River;
Wagin?

The MINISTER replied:

	Bed average	Expenditure per occupied bed per day
		s. d.
Narrogin	38.1	58 1
Busselton	27.7	51 11
Katanning	23.4	56 6
Merredin	19.2	78 2
Margaret River	22.5	47 4
Wagin	13.3	59 6

(b) As to Subsidies to Hospitals.

Mr. CORNELL asked the Minister for Health:

What amount of subsidy (on an occupied bed basis) is it expected will be paid to the following hospitals in the current financial year—

Pinjarra;
Kellerberrin;
Bridgetown;
Manjimup;
Norseman;
Harvey?

The MINISTER replied:

Estimates are now under consideration by the Treasury.

(c) As to Non-Departmental Hospitals, Bed Average and Cost.

Mr. CORNELL asked the Minister for Health:

(1) What was the daily bed average for the undermentioned non-departmental hospitals for the year ended the 30th June, 1954—

Pinjarra;
Kellerberrin;
Bridgetown;
Manjimup;
Norseman;
Harvey?

(2) What was the cost of maintaining these hospitals (on a per patient per day basis) for the same financial period?

The MINISTER replied:

	Bed average	Expenditure per occupied bed per day
		s. d.
Pinjarra	26.8	66 0
Kellerberrin	20.2	46 5
Bridgetown	19.9	47 8
Manjimup	19.0	51 3
Norseman	18.2	59 11
Harvey	16.2	44 3

(d) As to Committee-Controlled Hospitals, Subsidies and Grants.

Mr. CORNELL asked the Minister for Health:

(1) What amounts were paid from State funds to committee-controlled hospitals in the country districts in maintenance subsidies and special maintenance grants for each of the following years:—

Year ended the 30th June, 1950;
Year ended the 30th June, 1951;
Year ended the 30th June, 1952;
Year ended the 30th June, 1953;
Year ended the 30th June, 1954?

(2) What amount is it estimated will be paid in this regard in the current financial year?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Subsidies and special grants to country non-departmental hospitals:

Year ended the—	Subsidy £	Special Grants. £
30th June, 1950	182,902	3,309
30th June, 1951	212,209	1,718
30th June, 1952	284,505	1,718
30th June, 1953	236,319	4,242
30th June, 1954	250,297	4,323

(2) Estimates are now under consideration by the Treasury.

(e) *As to Non-Committee-Controlled Hospitals, Deficits.*

Mr. CORNELL asked the Minister for Health:

(1) What was the total deficit incurred in maintaining non-committee-controlled hospitals in the country districts for each of the following years:—

Year ended the 30th June, 1950;	
Year ended the 30th June, 1951;	
Year ended the 30th June, 1952;	
Year ended the 30th June, 1953;	
Year ended the 30th June, 1954?	

(2) What deficit is it expected these hospitals will incur in the current financial year?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Annual deficits—country departmental Hospitals:

Year ended the—

	£
30th June, 1950	271,074
30th June, 1951	314,595
30th June, 1952	452,190
30th June, 1953	456,456
30th June, 1954	436,352

(2) Estimates are now under consideration by the Treasury.

ELECTORAL.

(a) *As to Assembly Enrolments and Quotas.*

Hon. A. F. WATTS asked the Minister for Justice:

(1) What are the present numbers of electors enrolled for each of the 50 Legislative Assembly districts?

(2) What are the present quota figures for—

(a) metropolitan seats;

(b) mining, pastoral and agricultural seats?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The enrolments are as follows:—

Metropolitan Area	
Canning	16,077
Claremont	9,913
Cottesloe	8,200
East Perth	7,458
Fremantle	8,353
Guildford-Midland	10,209
Leederville	7,626
Maylands	9,251
Melville	14,178
Middle Swan	14,147
Mt. Hawthorn	11,666
Mt. Lawley	8,290
Nedlands	9,556
North Perth	6,991
South Fremantle	10,767
South Perth	8,837
Subiaco	8,045
Victoria Park	8,225
Wembley Beaches	14,162
West Perth	7,098
Total	199,049

North-West Area	
Gascoyne	1,630
Kimberley	1,187
Pilbara	1,167
Total	3,984

Agricultural, Mining and Pastoral Area	
Albany	6,592
Avon Valley	4,177
Blackwood	4,088
Boulder	4,164
Bunbury	5,637
Collie	4,874
Dale	6,632
Darling Range	6,197
Eyre	3,264
Geraldton	5,351
Greenough	4,643
Hannans	4,053
Harvey	4,575
Kalgoorlie	3,739
Katanning	4,732
Merredin-Yilgarn	4,113
Moore	5,387
Mt. Marshall	4,375
Murchison—	
Sub-District, Cue	2,041
Sub-District, Leonora	980
Murray	5,173
Narrogin	4,666
Northam	5,151
Roe	5,569
Stirling	5,371
Toodyay	5,643
Vasse	5,578
Warren	4,992
Total	132,557

TOTAL ENROLMENT

Metropolitan Area	199,049
North-West Area	3,984
Agricultural, Mining and Pastoral Area	132,557
Total	335,590

(2) In their final report of the 21st December, 1949, the commissioners fixed the legal quotas, namely—

Metropolitan area, 8,602.

Agricultural, mining and pastoral area, 4,449.

A hypothetical calculation based on these quota figures and enrolment figures as at the 30th June, 1954, gives the following comparative result—

Metropolitan area, 9,478.

Agricultural, mining and pastoral area, 5,098.

(b) *As to Implementing Electoral Districts Act.*

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY (without notice) asked the Premier:

When will a decision be made by the Government in regard to the carrying out of the provisions of the Electoral Districts Act? I understand that a report

has been received from the Chief Electoral Officer that five districts are either above or below quota.

The PREMIER replied:

This matter has received a fair amount of consideration recently, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, and will receive additional consideration in the near future.

(c) As to Cabinet Consideration.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY (without notice) asked the Premier:

What does he mean by the "near future"? Would he agree that this matter should be considered at the next meeting of Cabinet and the decision conveyed to the House next week?

The PREMIER replied:

I think it is not quite so simple as that; Cabinet might give consideration to the advisability of amending the existing legislation. If a decision were made to attempt that, it might take more than one meeting of Cabinet to arrive at a firm decision.

ROADS.

As to Condition of North Coastal Highway.

Mr. NORTON asked the Minister for Works:

(1) Further to my question, without notice, on the 4th August, will he advise the House if he has had an investigation made regarding the condition of the North Coastal Highway between the Murchison River and Carnarvon?

(2) If so, what action is being taken to have the necessary work carried out on this road?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The Main Roads Department reports indicate that the North Coastal Highway between the Murchison River and Carnarvon is in a reasonable state of repair.

(2) Maintenance graders are working on the road between Northampton and Carnarvon.

AGRICULTURE.

As to Site for Horticultural Research Station.

Mr. OWEN asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Has any finality been reached with regard to the selection of a site for a central horticultural research station?

(2) Is so, when can it be expected that work will commence on this project?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No.

(2) Work cannot commence until a decision is reached whether or not a site can be made available.

POLICE.

As to Construction of Station and Quarters at Mundijong.

Hon. Sir ROSS McLARTY asked the Minister for Police:

(1) Has approval been given for the construction of a police station and quarters at Mundijong?

(2) What is the estimated cost of these buildings?

(3) When is it expected to make a start with this work?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No.

(2) A preliminary design and estimates for this work were prepared in 1951 and tenders authorised, but authority to proceed with this work was subsequently withdrawn.

(3) No indication can be given.

CAUSEWAY.

As to Substitution of "Clover Leaf" for Roundabout.

Hon. D. BRAND asked the Minister for Works:

(1) As it has been published that he stated that the bridge over the Narrows will take a period of four years to complete and that the existing Causeway has now reached the limit of its capacity at peak traffic periods, will he advise whether it is proposed to replace the existing roundabout with a "clover leaf," or any other feature for traffic dispersal, in order to avoid chaotic conditions of traffic, which must arise in the near future?

(2) What would be the cost of such alteration?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) It is not proposed at this stage to provide "clover leaf" treatment to the Causeway approaches. The cost of such treatment would represent a substantial part of the cost of providing another bridge such as the one at the Narrows.

(2) Approximately £500,000.

BRIDGES.

As to Cost of New Bridge at the Narrows.

Hon. D. BRAND asked the Minister for Works:

What is the estimated cost of the proposed new bridge and approaches at the Narrows?

The MINISTER replied:

It is not possible to say until surveys have been made, foundations tested, and preliminary designs prepared.

WATER SUPPLIES.*(a) As to Decision on Canning Vale Proposal.*

Mr. WILD asked the Minister for Water Supplies:

When is it expected that a decision will be reached in connection with representations made for a supply of water to Canning Vale?

The MINISTER replied:

Within the next few days.

(b) As to Inspection of Canning Vale.

Mr. WILD (without notice) asked the Minister for Water Supplies:

Apropos to my earlier question, before the Minister arrives at a decision will he be prepared to go out to Canning Vale and look at the position himself?

The MINISTER replied:

Yes.

(c) As to Continuation of Roleystone Scheme.

Mr. WILD asked the Minister for Water Supplies:

(1) What amount of loan money is to be made available this financial year for the continuation of the Roleystone water scheme?

(2) When is it expected that work will commence on this scheme?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) £17,000.

(2) A commencement is anticipated about the end of October.

FREMANTLE HARBOUR.*As to Tabling Report of Committee.*

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN (without notice) asked the Minister for Works:

Is it the intention of the Minister to lay on the Table of the House a copy of the report of the committee regarding Fremantle harbour extension work?

The MINISTER replied:

I shall be very pleased to comply with the request.

FUMES NUISANCE.*As to Guarantees by Kwinana Industries.*

Mr. LAWRENCE (without notice) asked the Minister for Labour:

Having regard to the statement by Professor McHenry, published in "The West Australian" of the 11th August, with reference to Kwinana fumes, would the Minister be prepared, in view of the answers given to me on this subject on the 24th June, 1954, and appearing on page 72 of "Hansard", to discuss with Anglo-Iranian Oil Co., B.H.P. Pty. Ltd., Cockburn Cement Co. and other industries which may establish themselves on the southern portion of

Fremantle's coastline, as to whether they will give written guarantees that no nuisance or damage to human, animal or vegetable life or soil would be caused, and if this guarantee is broken that full damages be paid? Further that penalties under the Shops and Factories Act for these types of offences be increased to provide for very severe punishments?

The MINISTER replied:

I shall be very pleased to have the matter investigated as early as possible and discuss it further with the member for South Fremantle.

BILL—INQUIRY AGENTS LICENSING.

Returned from the Council with amendments.

BILL—PRICES CONTROL.*Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

MR. PERKINS (Roe) [2.32]: After a long period of price control, it was reasonable to fear some reaction when control was terminated. For that reason, I thought, when we were considering the Bill last year, that it might have been safer to try to taper off controls by inserting a schedule in the Act rather than just by ending the control of certain items. As things have turned out, reactions have been very much less than anyone could have expected, and actually the traders generally have played ball with consumers by avoiding, in the vast majority of cases, the taking of undue profit during that period which had to elapse before conditions settled down into what might be termed normal trading channels.

Now that we have got rid of price control, I would not have it reintroduced at any price. I believe there was a dangerous period during the change-over, but now that we have surmounted that period, it would be very undesirable indeed to consider the reimposition of control.

Mr. Lawrence: What about the price of wheat?

Mr. PERKINS: It was never intended, under price control, to fix the price of wheat to producers. Members are aware that the price has been receding for some time. I believe that, by suggesting to consumers that price control is an effective remedy against exploitation by traders, we shall be merely deluding them. Our experience of price control during the war years and postwar years gave a good indication of what happens when such restrictions are applied. I do not accuse the prices officer of being inefficient, and I do not think the Minister for Labour would make such an accusation against him, but if a prices officer were going to administer price control effectively, he would have to be something in the nature of a genius.

If he fixed prices too high, there would be a danger and certainly the fixing of them could not have the effect of bringing about a reduction. If, on the other hand, the price was fixed too low, the effect on the consumer would be serious. In some instances, a slight advantage might accrue to the consumers in that they might obtain the goods they needed a little cheaper, but it would be easy to revert to the conditions that prevailed during the war when people had to queue up for goods or find that the goods they wanted were unprocureable unless they obtained them on the blackmarket.

I appreciate the position of members sitting on the Government side of the House. They probably represent a larger number of people in the low income brackets than do members on this side of the House. However, we all represent quite a proportion of those people and we are concerned about their welfare, but many of us on the Opposition side are closely connected with primary industries—this also applies to some members on the Government side, particularly those representing goldmining constituencies—and nobody has so much to lose through a steeply-rising price spiral as have producers who have to sell their commodities on the world's markets, whether they be foodstuffs or any other sort of product. In fact, I might include in that category any goods that have to be exported and marketed in competition with goods produced in other countries under all sorts of conditions.

Mr. Lawrence: Does that apply to all classes of goods?

Mr. PERKINS: Yes. Such industries have to bear the burden of increased costs, and far too many of our industries which in the past were building up substantial export credits for Australia are now unable to market their commodities overseas at a profit, and are asking for Government assistance. Whether members represent industrial constituencies or rural constituencies, or others in between, there is a strong incentive to keep costs down as low as possible. I am trying to view the position dispassionately, and I maintain that price control cannot be effective.

Mr. Lawrence: Would you control the price of a man's labour?

Mr. PERKINS: That subject is not under discussion now, but the member for South Fremantle should keep in mind that throughout industry big margins are being paid over and above the minimum wage fixed by the Arbitration Court.

Mr. Lawrence: What about increased margins for tradesmen?

Mr. PERKINS: I do not want to get into an argument about Arbitration Court awards. The basic wage was originally fixed on a needs basis, and it was never suggested that that should be the maximum rate any worker should receive. We know quite well that wages very much in

excess of the arbitration awards are being paid in many industries, but there are industries reaching a stage where they cannot afford to pay a margin over and above the award rate if they are to continue to operate on a sound basis.

The Minister for Lands: Do not you not consider that a case could be made out for a reduction in price of some agricultural implements and machinery?

Mr. PERKINS: I am not in a position to say.

The Minister for Lands: It should be well worth while investigating.

Hon. D. Brand: Then why does not the Minister have it investigated?

Mr. PERKINS: Price control did not have much effect in that direction, and we should only be deluding the people if we led them to believe that it could be effective. When the Commonwealth administered price control, and during the time the State administered it, no attempt was made to fix the price of primary commodities. Naturally, the emphasis was placed on those essentials that came particularly within the "C" series index. It was only right to deal with those goods that play the largest part in the everyday lives of the people; but even then the control exercised could not be very effective because of the magnitude of the task.

If the price of all goods cannot be controlled—and it is impossible to control the price of luxury goods—we do, by maintaining rather rigid control of prices for the necessities of life, tend to induce labour and capital to leave the essential industries and gravitate towards the uncontrolled luxury industries where much higher profits may be made. I suppose one cannot blame employers or employees for gravitating in that direction, but the effect on the general economy is disastrous. An essential article, of which there was an insufficient supply originally, thereby leading to some increase in price, tends to become in even shorter supply under price control, and very quickly we get back to the position where Governments have to make an attempt to ration essential articles to the public. We had enough of that during the war and I feel that now, when most articles are in reasonably sufficient supply, there should not be any need for rigid price control.

I understood the Minister, when introducing the Bill, not to stress that there was any particular emergency at the present time. The arguments which he put forward would have been just as valid at any time in the last ten years and could probably apply equally well at any time in the next ten years. Apart from two or three items which he specifically mentioned, he was rather asking for legislation to enable the price controller to be given some sort of reserve power to deal with the exorbitant prices asked by traders if that emergency were to arise.

The Minister mentioned a couple of specific items and those that I remember particularly were rents and meat, together with a couple of services, namely, plumbing and electrical work. As the member for Stirling has pointed out, there is already legislation before Parliament designed to deal with rents. Before members attach undue importance to the arguments in favour of price control over meat, I think they should examine the report of the select committee of which I was chairman and of which the members for Blackwood and Cottesloe and the present Ministers for Railways and Labour were members.

The Minister for Railways: You gave us some very bad advice. You said that if we agreed to the lifting of control over prices, competition would keep them down.

Mr. PERKINS: It is for the Minister for Railways to show that the decontrol of meat prices has made the position any worse than it would have been had that control been continued. The Minister knows how disastrous the control of meat prices proved.

The Minister for Railways: I know how disastrous the lifting of controls proved to the consumer.

Mr. PERKINS: The Minister must remember some of the evidence given before that select committee, because we were all most concerned about the position. The evidence showed that price control over meat was very rapidly undermining all business morality in the meat trade. I think he will agree also that the control was having very little effect on the prices which the consumer had to pay for his meat. It could even be that the consumer was paying more because of the control and certainly some of the constituents of the present Minister for Railways were paying more for their meat. As the Minister will remember, approximately 40 per cent. of the meat requirements of Kalgoorlie were being supplied through normal channels in that area and the rest of it was coming into the district by various backstairs means from other parts of the State.

I think he will agree that consumers of meat in Kalgoorlie were paying much more for that commodity than were those in the metropolitan area. Not only that, but as the select committee agreed—

All witnesses except the Prices Commissioner have agreed that price control on meat is ineffective in most areas and in the only part of the State where it was effectively enforced, meat supplies decreased seriously and the area, the Eastern Goldfields, is receiving less than 40 per cent. of its meat requirements through its butchers' shops. As price control on meat is ineffective, it cannot have any material effect on prices paid for livestock on the hoof but witnesses have generally agreed

that price control, even though ineffective, discourages producers of livestock for slaughter by creating uncertainty.

The Minister for Railways: The Minister would not enforce the law. That was why.

Mr. PERKINS: He enforced it in Kalgoorlie. Make no mistake about that!

The Minister for Railways: You have just told us that we were paying above the fixed prices in Kalgoorlie and what you are saying now is a complete reversal.

Mr. PERKINS: Meat was being sent to Kalgoorlie in parcels from other parts of the State and therefore control was impossible. I know that consumers in Kalgoorlie were ordering meat from country butchers with the result that the meat was made up in parcels and sent to Kalgoorlie and the consumers were then sending the money to the country butchers. How was it possible to obtain a conviction for overcharging in those circumstances? If such a case had been taken to court, what would the court have said? There were too many opportunities for tampering available in those circumstances, between the forwarding of the meat and its being received by the consumer.

The Minister for Railways: Was the law relating to the control of meat prices enforced in the metropolitan area?

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Of course it was.

The Minister for Railways: See what the evidence of the master butchers before the select committee was in that regard.

Mr. PERKINS: I do not want to go into all the underground methods that were being used at that time to get around price control. That is something which we discussed at the time and I do not propose to go into the details now, but the fact remains that whenever price control was tried, if there was a great shortage of supplies it could not be effective, and never was, and that applies to many commodities besides meat. I maintain that we do not want to get back to that position once more.

If by any chance this legislation were passed and the Government reintroduced control over meat prices, as I have already stated in this House, Western Australia could easily be faced with a meat famine. The quantity of meat available for export from this State has been falling gradually, and with a buoyant wool market many present producers of meat are wondering whether it would not be better to change over to wool production. There is a flush period of the year when any amount of meat is available at export parity prices and if a private trader or the Government wished to do so that meat could be bought at that time and stored in order to meet the demand in the short supply period during the winter.

A great deal of meat is, in fact, so stored. I understand that it costs 1d. per lb. or a little more to store meat from the

late spring period till the next winter, and naturally that increase in price has to be paid for the frozen meat in the winter, over and above the cost of the meat in the earlier period. A great many consumers, however, prefer to have fresh meat and are apparently prepared to pay for it. That being so, it is not for us to tell them what they must or must not eat. There is no reason, if the Government were so minded, why it should not take action to store some of the available meat in the way I have mentioned.

The previous Government did that in an effort to control meat prices but unfortunately the result financially was not good, and I understand that considerable losses were made. At all events the intentions were good and there was an attempt made to protect the consumers. What I am leading up to is that we now have before the House a proposal to protect the consumers by way of price control. Apparently members on the Government side of the House have some faith in it, but, in view of past experience and having considered all aspects of the question, I have practically no faith in it and for that reason will not support the Bill.

The Minister for Works: Would you support price control under any circumstances?

Mr. PERKINS: I would like to know the circumstances first.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: What about the price of wheat?

The Minister for Works: In wartime, for example.

Mr. PERKINS: There are emergencies that occur in wartime and there is then such a big gap between supply and demand that it is difficult to meet the position without some sort of arbitrary control.

The Minister for Works: But you said you could not use price control effectively. Then why use it at all?

Mr. PERKINS: I am doubtful whether it can be used effectively for more than a short period. If the Minister had been listening to what I said—

The Minister for Works: I have been listening very carefully.

Mr. PERKINS: —he would have heard me say that the tendency is that by controlling only some articles—I do not think the Minister would say that the controls should cover everything—we drive capital and labour away from essential commodities and towards non-essential production, thus making the position worse.

The Minister for Works: You know that the price of bread is controlled, of course.

Mr. PERKINS: That is a new one on me. I am going to suggest that there are other ways of handling this problem and protecting the consumer. I understand that various objectives are enumerated in the Labour Party platform, one

of them being price control and another the fostering of co-operative enterprise. If that is not correct, I will be interested to hear some member on the Government side of the House correct me. I suggest that there is something of a contradiction between those two objectives.

If members on that side of the House believe in one, they cannot have much faith in the other, but at all events I am suggesting an alternative to price control and I think that the Labour Party has that alternative. I do not say that because there are certain goods in somewhat short supply, or because there are difficulties in the trade and the margins between producer and consumer are too great, nothing can be done about it. I believe we must be constructive and I would like to be able to suggest an alternative. My suggestion to members on the Government side, as I have already said once previously during this session, is that the Labour Party should try the other plank in its platform and see if that will work. It is already being tried in some places. The member for Collie—

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: We often want you to co-operate with us, but you will not.

Mr. PERKINS: The member for Fremantle is being facetious. If there is such a big margin between the price of meat on the hoof and the price of meat delivered to the consumer, as the Minister for Labour would have us believe, there is a golden opportunity for action along the lines of a co-operative meat shop somewhere in order to test the position, and I repeat that the position must be tested in order to find out. Unless members sitting opposite are prepared to do something concrete and try all other means available to them in regard to this matter, I do not think they are entitled to come to this House and say that there is no other solution to the problem except the introduction of price control. As far as the metropolitan area is concerned, I am afraid that those other means have not been tried.

An attitude is growing up in the community, unfortunately, and anybody who thinks that he is being exploited or is getting into difficulties of any kind, has the idea that he can go to the Government and it will do something to get him out of those troubles. That is a point of view with which you, Mr. Speaker, would not have much sympathy because I know that it does not apply in the part of the State which you represent. It does not apply to the country districts to the same degree as it does in the metropolitan area. The farming community has been concerned about the question of margins between the wholesale price and the final cost to the consumers and has taken some action to correct the position. Co-operative

stores are spread throughout the country districts and in some cases they have been extremely successful.

I believe that that points the way for members opposite and they could suggest to some of their constituents that they tackle this problem by their own efforts and not ask the Government to do it for them. Australia was not built up by asking Governments to do everything for the people. This country has developed to its present stage because of the spirit of self-reliance of its citizens. If we encourage an attitude that as soon as people get into some kind of difficulties they can go to the Government and ask it to do something, we shall reach a stage where progress will not be as great as it has been in the past. There have been spectacular successes elsewhere by the use of co-operative enterprises in the control of margins, and I suggest to members that they might do some research on their own account in regard to that question.

Members may be interested to know that I have read a good deal about Sweden and that country has had amazing successes in tackling monopolies far greater than those which are complained of here and which have exploited the consumers. One article which comes to my mind is electric light globes and I have no doubt that the member for Guildford-Midland knows something about this. I understand that the General Electric Co., back in the 1920's, maintained a price of about 37d. each for electric light globes. The people in charge of the Swedish co-operative considered that the figure was excessive and in that country they have a system under which the individual co-operatives pay into a central fund which can be used for the purpose of tackling a problem of national magnitude, such as the one in question. Consequently they decided to start an electric light globe manufacturing company on a co-operative basis and in opposition to the General Electric Co.

Can members imagine tackling a bigger combine than the General Electric Co. which, I understand, plays a dominant role throughout the world in the electrical industry! The result was the establishment of the Co-operative Lumar factories which had the immediate effect of reducing the price of electric light globes in Sweden from 37d. to 27d. each. Finally, when the new Lumar factory started, the globes were sold at 22d. each. The Lumar enterprises extended throughout Scandinavia and finally throughout England and Scotland. So I suggest that members who are concerned with this particular problem should look at the alternative, and I maintain that we could get over some of our difficulties by our own efforts rather than rely on the Government to solve them for us. Such a policy enables us to obtain cheaper articles for the consumers and

also has the effect of building up a character of self-reliance in the individuals who have taken that course.

I do not want to go into the question of margins and the applications that are before the Arbitration Court; but the question of costs to the consumer is a most important one. As I have already said, it is of equal moment to all of us, whether we represent people in the lower income groups or whether we represent producers, particularly those producing for the export market. Whatever action we take should be a reasoned one and I maintain that if we apply to this problem what I call the shortsighted remedy of price control, we will not reason out the problem. If we maintain competition in industry, we will be providing a long-term solution to it. Surely no one would suggest that price control should be a permanent feature of our economy! If anyone did suggest that, I hate to think that it would be accepted, because we all realise the difficulties in enforcing price control and, in addition, there is the terrific cost which the taxpayers finally are called upon to meet. In any case, there is no real progress in that direction and we should not be content with merely stabilising the position at present-day figures.

Over the years progress in industry has resulted in the reduction of costs and if we encourage a static attitude—which, in my opinion, price control is liable to do—we will stifle the urge towards progress. Because some particular organisation or factory is able to make large profits, it does not necessarily follow that the public is being exploited. Any individual or company that discovers a new way of doing things, naturally, for some considerable time—until his competitors adopt his methods—will show a rather spectacular rise in profits as compared with his competitors who are using older methods.

Mr. Lapham: Would you say that that applies to the Holden Motor Co.?

Mr. PERKINS: I do not know much about the Holden Motor Co.

Mr. Lapham: Do you know anything about its profits?

Mr. PERKINS: No, and it is rather difficult to follow—

Mr. Oldfield: It is bringing down its prices all the time.

Mr. PERKINS:—through the position without making a close examination of all the company's affairs. Sooner or later the company which has been able to make spectacular advances renders a real service to the whole community, because it is only a matter of time before the improved technique and the improved way of doing things is copied by its competitors, and then costs to the consumer are lowered.

Mr. Johnson: Then you mean they all make larger profits.

Mr. PERKINS: I think profits tend to stabilise prices because under a system of free competition, it is only natural that if any particular industry is making large profits, one finds more people flocking to that industry and the supply of the particular commodity concerned is naturally increased, with a resultant drop in price. In the kind of economy which has been built up over many years, we have relied on prices as the indicator of demand. The price structure is so delicately balanced that I do not believe any price control system can ever take the place of the law of supply and demand, which works to stabilise the supply and that eventually stabilises the price.

If any kind of monopoly operates, admittedly, it can throw conditions out of gear and from time to time it has been necessary for Governments to take action to curb monopolies. But I believe that the really effective way to tackle monopolies is for the consumers to take a hand in the question themselves. I have pointed out to members this afternoon the spectacular successes achieved in other countries. If we look around Australia itself, we find many examples without looking overseas; unfortunately those examples are not to be noted around the metropolitan area. I think the member for Collie could give his colleagues some useful advice on this question. In any case, my contention is that price control is not the right way to rectify the position.

MR. MANNING (Harvey) [3.13]: I desire to express my opposition to the proposal to reintroduce price control. This type of legislation is not the sort we expect at a time such as the present. Price control is the class of legislation we expect in times of war or in a transitional period from wartime to peacetime conditions. The energies and financial resources of the Government should be devoted to assisting production and the extension of trade, and this type of measure is certainly not designed to increase the production of a commodity that is in short supply.

Apart from my hostility to the policy of price control, I am particularly interested in the fact that the Minister has listed meat as one of the reasons for the introduction of this measure. Meat is a commodity, the price fluctuations of which are influenced almost solely by the law of supply and demand. With the production of stock for the meat trade, there is a flush and a lean season of the year. The flush season in the agricultural areas extends over the late winter, spring and early summer months; the lean season includes the months of March to July. During the months I mentioned the supply of trade stock is limited and competition for what is offering is very keen.

The farmer producing fat stock goes all out in an endeavour to market as many head as possible during the lean period so that he can cash in on the good prices offering. There is, of course, no comparison between the cost of fattening stock during the flush season and the cost in the off season. Stock fatten quite readily during the spring and early summer, but if animals are to be marketed as fat stock during the lean season it becomes an expensive proposition. It is usually done either by hand feeding or by means of irrigated pastures. Both these methods need a price incentive to make them worth while.

Another factor that we should take into account is the greater demand for fresh meat during the cold months of the year. So there we have two factors: A limited supply and an increased demand which cause an upward trend in the price of meat. There is no argument for the price of meat to be controlled in any way during the flush months of the year as the supply of trade stock is plentiful; nor is there during the summer months when the demand for fresh meat tends to ease. Accordingly the argument for price fixing is narrowed down to that short period of limited supply and buoyant demand.

We have had experience under price control and surely we can profit by that experience. We know that under price control there was insufficient incentive to ensure an adequate supply of fresh meat throughout the recognised lean period. We know, too, that at that time the Government of the day bought a quantity of carcass meat during the flush of the season and held it in cold storage to be supplied to the trade when fresh meat was scarce. But the meat concerned in that scheme was not very favourably received by the public. Retail butchers were faced at that time with many difficulties under price control and supplies at the time were far below their requirements.

The quality was not always good and the margin between the purchase price and the sale price did not allow a reasonable income and many of these butchers at times found themselves in some difficulty financially. Today the price fluctuations influenced by the law of supply and demand have given producers an incentive to meet the market. I am certain that the public prefers it that way rather than have the alternative of stored meat. If the price of meat is to be confined to the retail price, the small business man will be placed in the unfair position of having to sell at a fixed price a commodity which he has bought on a free and buoyant market. But if price control is to be carried further and the price of stock on the hoof is to be fixed, then great difficulties will be encountered and the auction system will have to be replaced by another method.

Any attempt to depress the price of stock can have only one result. That is to turn the farmer from raising meat-producing stock to some other form of production. That meat supplies dropped during the previous control period is something that cannot be overlooked. It is obvious that an all-out effort is needed to encourage the production of meat because of the requirements of a rapidly growing population. During the recognised lean period of the year the main supplies of meat come from cattle purchased in the irrigation districts.

Irrigation has turned out to be not only the main means by which summer milk supplies are produced, but it has also proved to be the means of fattening hundreds of cattle out of season. Here is a field in which the Government could very effectively assist production and indirectly keep the price level down. A tremendous amount of work remains to be done fully to exploit the irrigation potential of the State and any money expended on the expansion of these works will be money well spent.

As I see it, the only answer to overcharging, whether it be for foodstuffs, goods or services, is good healthy competition. By that means alone can the public be assured of quantity and quality. I believe we are approaching a time when competition in many trades is more noticeable, and to introduce a system of price control now must be a retrograde step. Price control is a negative policy; it is irksome and restrictive. A positive policy to assist production and encourage competition would achieve far better overall results, and I am sure it would be a much better method of using the taxpayer's money.

MR. OLDFIELD (Maylands) [3.22]: I rise to oppose this legislation on certain grounds. I propose to take a different view from that presented so far. I shall at least be honest and tell the public of Western Australia that my reason for opposing the legislation is that I am a Liberal.

Members: Hear, hear!

MR. OLDFIELD: I will tell the public that it is because I belong to a party that is opposed to restrictions and controls. We have heard many statements here on this issue; we have heard the Minister when he introduced the Bill. It was noticeable, however, that he did not tell the public why he introduced the Bill. He merely said that it was necessary because certain people were profiteering and that it was essential for the economy of the State.

The Minister for Works: Do you believe that the price of bread should be controlled?

MR. OLDFIELD: The reason the Government is introducing this legislation is not to help the economy of Western Australia; it is not doing so because people are overcharging; it is doing so because it is in conformity with its socialistic policy. Members may well laugh, but I would like to draw their attention to page 73 of their own constitution and platform.

MR. JOHNSON: That is something you have not got. You would not understand it.

MR. OLDFIELD: I have read it and I have understood it.

MR. JOHNSON: The Liberal Party has no platform.

MR. OLDFIELD: I know that the hon. member is inclined to get niggardly because he does not like the knife being twisted in the wound; and the Minister looks sick as usual!

The Minister for Works: What about answering that question?

MR. OLDFIELD: The Minister for Works has far too much to say for himself in this Chamber!

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: You deserved that.

MR. OLDFIELD: There is a reference to this on page 73 of this publication of doggerel—I believe Kirwan Ward has one from which he gets his subject matter—and under the heading "Economics," item 3 is "Price Control." We know the history of price control so far as the Federal Labour Party is concerned. The people of Australia voted it out as unconstitutional and that party is now trying to introduce it through the various State Labour Governments; it is merely adhering to the socialistic policy of the party in attempting to introduce price control and inflict it on the people of Australia for all time.

MR. HEAL: On the people of Western Australia.

MR. OLDFIELD: I say, Australia. If it is done State by State it is eventually done throughout Australia. Why does not the Minister say to the public, "We have introduced this price control measure because it is our policy, and we think it is the best thing for the people."

The Minister for Labour: Mr. Menzies has it in Canberra.

The Premier: And the Liberal Party's Premier in South Australia also has it.

MR. OLDFIELD: For the first time in the history of Australia price control was introduced by a Liberal Government; it was introduced by the present Prime Minister of Australia, but that was at a time of necessity and of danger to the country from outside aggression. He did not merely introduce price control, but he also pegged wages. One must go with the other.

Mr. Johnson: Wages are pegged now.

Mr. OLDFIELD: If prices are pegged and wages are not pegged, we revert to the iniquitous practice we had during the period when there was the spiral of inflation; I refer to the cost-plus system. We know what happened at that time. We then had a prices commissioner and endless people rushing around checking up on green-grocers and small tradespeople who might have been charging 1d. in the £ more and fining them under the cost-plus system. We know that cost-plus did away with efficiency. It was at a time of shortages. The manufacturer did not care if he had to pay his men more than others; he did not care whether he had efficiency in his workshops because all he did was to apply to the Prices Control Branch with the necessary figures; the officers would have a look at the figures, examine them and say it had cost him so much to produce and he could charge so much, plus so much per cent.

Mr. O'Brien: That is fair enough.

Mr. OLDFIELD: For years the hon. member and his mates have suffered because of the inefficiency caused by the cost-plus system.

Mr. O'Brien: By enormous profits, not fair profits.

Mr. OLDFIELD: It would seem that what I have said is not clear to the hon. member.

Mr. O'Brien: You are off the beam.

Mr. OLDFIELD: Under cost-plus, the hon. member would pay plenty.

Mr. O'Brien: You are telling me!

Mr. OLDFIELD: The hon. member talks about fair profits. I will quote an example of a manufacturer who produced an article for £5 prewar—or in 1940—and was allowed by the Prices Commissioner to make 5 per cent. profit; he sold the article for £5 5s. When his cost rose to £10 for the production of the article, he was still on the 5 per cent. basis and sold his product for £10 10s. So where he made 5s., he now makes 10s. under the cost-plus system. That was one of the greatest contributing factors to the prices spiral in Australia.

Mr. Hutchinson: It was a premium on inefficiency.

Mr. OLDFIELD: Certainly. As I said before, I oppose the Bill and I at least have the courage to tell the people of Western Australia that I am doing so on account of my political views.

The Minister for Works: Why do not you tell them whether or not you want the price of bread controlled?

Mr. OLDFIELD: Has the Minister for Works spoken on this measure yet?

The Minister for Works: Tell the people about the control on the price of bread. I know it is much too awkward for you.

Mr. Johnson: You wanted to control Snowden & Willson.

Mr. OLDFIELD: Let the hon. member speak to his Minister for Housing about that; he will put the hon. member right on the point.

Mr. Johnson: You just cannot take it! What about bread?

Mr. OLDFIELD: I do not eat it; it is far too fattening. The hon. member made an interjection about profits. He seems to think there is something dishonest in them. But for many years he did very well out of bank profits.

Mr. Johnson: Did very well! You talk of things you know something about! I did not have any shares.

Mr. OLDFIELD: I do not know about that; but I know that every Friday afternoon the hon. member was one of the first in the queue to get what he could from the bank.

Mr. Johnson: That shows how much you know about it. They did not pay every Friday.

Mr. OLDFIELD: I wondered what the hon. member's grievance was; now I know!

Mr. Johnson: His grievance is that the member for Maylands does not know what he is talking about, either now or at any time he speaks.

Mr. OLDFIELD: I am expecting the member for Leederville to put on an exhibition such as he gave last Thursday, and just jump up and down in his seat for about five minutes. The member for Leederville, like every other member—

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: No!

Mr. OLDFIELD: —under private enterprise, has received money in the way of wages or salary—I will call it salary if the word "wages" is objectionable to the hon. member—by medium of the profits earned by the bank for which he worked.

Mr. Johnson: It did not come out of profits, but out of costs. I got none of the profits.

Mr. OLDFIELD: Now we are learning from the member for Leederville that there are two kinds of profit. The money which a man gains from the buying and selling of an article, and out of which he pays his employees, is all right; but what he has left over, after he has paid them, is not all right. How is the boss going to live if he does not make a profit?

Mr. Johnson: He could work for his money.

Mr. OLDFIELD: I would like to see this wonderful socialistic State come into being under which the boss has to work for his money and there is no profit! I would like to know who would pay the member for Leederville under this socialistic scheme of his, where everything was run by the Government.

Mr. Hutchinson: The member for Maylands!

Mr. OLDFIELD: The member for Leederville is living on the profits of Western Australia now.

Mr. Johnson: What profits?

Mr. OLDFIELD: Who pays the hon. member to sit there with that silly grin on his face? The people of Western Australia who are working! The men at the Midland Junction workshops, the farmers, the girls in the factories who make clothing. It is from the profits derived from the labours of people in industry that each one of us is being paid at the moment.

The Premier: Where did you get him, Ross?

Mr. OLDFIELD: No one who is unbiased can see anything dishonest in profits. They provide an incentive for people to go ahead in creating things and building up industry and providing work for others. The only reason we have been given for the need to reintroduce price control has been the cost of meat. However, reading the Bill, we discover that, as before, the retail price of meat is to be controlled, but not the wholesale price. If we ask why that should be, we are told that the wholesale price cannot be controlled, because that is a matter of primary production.

But the fact is, that if the wholesale price of meat were controlled, meat would not be put on the market. I want to know how we can control the retail price if we are not going to control the wholesale price. About two years ago, retail butchers in the metropolitan area were expected, with a pegged price for meat, to sell the commodity for less per lb. than they are paying for live weight at the Midland Junction saleyards. No one can deny that.

The Minister for Labour: Say that again.

Mr. OLDFIELD: About two years ago, the retail butchers in the metropolitan area, under price control, had a fixed price at which to sell meat, and it was less per lb. than the price they paid at the Midland Junction saleyards.

The Minister for Labour: No.

Mr. OLDFIELD: I think that figures can be produced to prove that. If the Minister makes inquiries, he will find that that did happen; and there was a time when the Minister was approached by retail butchers about the matter.

The Minister for Labour: No.

Mr. OLDFIELD: They asked how they were expected to live when they had to sell a product for less than they paid for it.

The Minister for Works: How did they?

Mr. OLDFIELD: We know how they did it. They did it by over-charging; by defying the regulations. They either over-charged or they short-weighted. That is

how it was done two years ago. I would not be certain of the exact date—it might have been two and a half years ago—but we all remember the time. That was because of seasonal fluctuations in the market. It was a time when the wholesale price was at a peak. But the Prices Commissioner did not take that into account.

The Minister for Labour: Yes he did. Ask the previous Minister. He will tell you that is correct.

Mr. OLDFIELD: I remember the arguments we had with the previous Minister.

The Premier: I bet you do! I bet the previous Minister remembers them, too!

Mr. OLDFIELD: The same thing can occur again. I am referring to meat because that is the only commodity the price of which was mentioned by members opposite as a reason for supporting the reintroduction of price control.

Mr. Heal: That is not right. Plumbing and electrical appliances were mentioned.

Mr. OLDFIELD: That is all poppycock! Electrical work can be done cheaper today than it was under price control.

The Minister for Works: Why do you answer all questions except the one about the price of bread?

Mr. OLDFIELD: When I first came into public life, I was told that whatever platform I went on to, I would always find somebody who would keep on raising his voice. I am satisfied that that is true; and here, it is the Minister for Works:

The Minister for Works: He has very good reason, too.

The Premier: What about the price of bread?

The Minister for Works: What about answering the question?

Mr. OLDFIELD: I do not think that the Government can ask the question as to how the retail price of meat can be controlled without control being exercised over the wholesale price. I know why the Government is reluctant to control the wholesale price. It is because it knows that meat would not come on to the market.

Hon. L. Thorn: They are friends of the master butchers, that's what!

Mr. OLDFIELD: I do not want to go into figures or deal with extraneous reasons as to why price control should be opposed, such as the effect on the economy of the country, and so on. The whole point is that for the last 12 months, when prices have not been controlled—

Mr. Johnson: Except the price of bread.

Mr. May: And the cost of living is still going up.

The Minister for Housing: And the basic wage is still pegged.

Mr. OLDFIELD: If members opposite have had their fun, I will continue.

The Minister for Housing: We are having fun while you are continuing.

Mr. OLDFIELD: So the Minister has come back to the Chamber!

The Minister for Housing: I have been here all the time, and I have not learnt a thing.

Mr. OLDFIELD: I know the Minister disappeared, when the member for Canning had a shot at him.

The Minister for Housing: I was in the Chamber all the time.

Mr. OLDFIELD: Then I presume the Minister will speak to him later. Twelve months ago in this House, we were told what would happen if price control were abolished. We were told that prices would rise to an exorbitant figure; that the inflationary spiral would recommence; that the public would be held to ransom; and that the standard of living would be reduced because of the excess profits that people would want to make and the excess prices that would be charged. Let the Government compare prices today with those of 12 months ago. The only commodity that can be instanced as having risen in price is meat; but the percentage increase is considerably less here than in the Eastern States. I put forward no reasons for opposing the Bill beyond the one that I am proud to belong to a party which opposes all forms of control.

MR. JOHNSON (Leederville) [3.41]: I wish to support the measure; and if anything had been needed to make me do so, it would have been provided by the fact that the three previous speakers on the other side opposed it for quite inconclusive reasons. I would have thought that the member for Maylands would be pleased to produce figures to support his argument, because it needed a great deal of support. I see that the hon. member has had to take refuge in flight, so we will let him be. Now I perceive the hon. member has returned. Did someone tell him I had mentioned his performance? He is under the seat now.

The Premier: He is like a jack-in-the-box, isn't he?

Mr. JOHNSON: The object of the Bill is to give to this Government something which is in the hands of Governments of other States, and those of most civilised countries—and that is, the power to control prices. Let nobody take the view that this Bill—even with the amendments on the notice paper—makes it mandatory for every article that is in the schedule to be controlled. The object of the Bill is to give power to the Government to carry out its own financial policy. With regard to that, I would like to seek the support of a very prominent person—to wit, the late Mr. President Dwyer—who, when speaking to the matter of the basic wage declaration in 1932—

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: That is a bit out of date, is it not?

Mr. JOHNSON: This is the statement he made then. This is not in connection with the last basic wage; there has been one since then.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Several, I think.

Mr. JOHNSON: I think the member for Mt. Lawley would regard President Dwyer as having been a fairly prominent legal man, with sound opinions.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: In the day when he officiated; not today.

Sitting suspended from 3.45 to 4.10 p.m.

Mr. JOHNSON: Before the suspension I was about to read an extract from a judgment given by the late President Dwyer on the basic wage declaration of 1932. He said—

The court is not at liberty to use the basic wage as an instrument for the furtherance of a general economic theory. Questions on general financial policy remain the responsibility of the legislature.

That is a statement by an eminent legal representative and it is one in which I believe. That is, it is the responsibility of the Government to control the financial and economic policy of the country under its care.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Which Government?

Mr. JOHNSON: The Government of the country.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: That would be the Commonwealth Government as far as finance is concerned.

Mr. JOHNSON: As far as the economics of this State are concerned, a good deal of responsibility rests on the State Parliament. Has the hon. member got that idea into his head? Governments have responsibilities and one of the responsibilities of any Government is to have regard to the economic position which it controls. Any Government which shelves that responsibility is neglecting its duty. That contention, I think, should be quite clear.

There is a need for price control in this State and the power should be in the hands of the Government. I am not going to say, in detail, which items should be controlled. Several definite examples have been quoted regarding which I thought there would be no argument. One of the items mentioned was meat. I know that it has been extremely dear on occasions but it is a long time since a butcher became bankrupt. In the Press we have seen reports of the cost of electrical installations and plumbing. Those reports have been appearing for quite a long time.

Members appreciate that there are a number of factors affecting the economy of the State which could be controlled or the prices of which could be reduced to

the benefit of the consumer. It is my opinion that the power to control prices is something which, being in the hands of the Government, does assist in keeping prices down without a great deal of application. I would remind members of the Opposition in particular, in view of the fact that they espouse private industry and advocate the waiving of controls, that the home of that theory is in the United States of America where it is preached by all and sundry. Nevertheless, for many years that country has had a form of price control which is known as the Sherman Anti-trust Act, which, among other things, states:—

A combination formed for the purpose and with the effect of raising, depressing, fixing, pegging, or stabilising the price of a commodity . . . is illegal.

That may not be direct Government price control, but those who have read anything of the cases taken under the Sherman Act will realise that the evidence which was used in those cases is very similar to that required for prosecutions under price control Acts in States such as our own. That policy which they have and which is an integral part of their philosophy is the same in effect as price control that is required here. It is a power to do certain things when the occasion demands it, and if this Government does not have the power to control prices, how will it be able to control the economy of the State in any manner?

If I were to be accused of believing that price control powers should reside in the Federal Government as well as in the State Government, that would be correct. I believe quite strongly that price control on a Federal level is more effective than on a State level. I doubt, as I doubted when the referendum was being debated, the policy which the member for Murray enunciated on the platform of the town hall in my area, that the State can carry out price control better. I do not think, even with a Labour Government, the State can carry out price control as well as the Federal Government.

I think the power to control prices should reside in all Governments. It is one which Governments should have. I repeat, having the power does not mean it is to be exercised all the time. The traffic authorities have the power to prosecute every person who double parks in Hay-st., but they do not prosecute every time; they have the power to prosecute everybody who crosses the white line, but that is not done every time. The fact that this power does reside in the Government is one of the controls which prevents breaches of the laws and prevents conditions from getting completely out of hand.

No one would deny that those laws are necessary and that controls are necessary. But no one will say that because a power

resides in the Government, it will be totally used. No one will suggest it ever was so used. The point is that if we have not got that power, what is to control prices? The theory of free competition? That theory, of course, is one built up by economists on a model. A model is constructed for an economic theory and taken as an example of what happens in certain circumstances.

Under certain circumstances free competition would work. The only circumstance which is not available in actual practice but which occurs in the model constructed by the theorists, is that businessmen should behave like machines. It happens that business people behave like human beings to some extent, and, like the member for Roe, business people have some leanings towards co-operation. They show it when they co-operate to get a greater profit into their own pockets than they would secure if they were to go in for free competition.

Mr. Hearman: The formation of co-operatives would overcome that.

Mr. JOHNSON: If the member for Blackwood thinks that the formation of co-operatives would overcome that, I suggest that he encourages more co-operatives in his area and perhaps put some real money in to support them. There is no doubt that real competition, whether given by co-operatives or by businessmen, would tend to reduce prices, provided that the competition continued. Further, experience of human nature is that competition will never continue beyond the point where it hurts financially.

The model of free enterprise which is constructed by the economists requires a constant stream of people going out of business through bankruptcy, and that stream should at least in theory be about equal to the amount of new business coming in at the other end. We all know that this is not so. The theory of free enterprise and free competition is only a theory; but based on actual facts, it does not exist.

Mr. Perkins: I have not heard it explained this way before.

Mr. JOHNSON: The hon. member has never tried to find out.

Mr. Perkins: You will have a job in finding any authority to support your theory.

Mr. Hutchinson: The member for Leederville is one authority.

Mr. JOHNSON: I am not suggesting that members should take me as an authority; I am expounding, fairly crudely, the theory put forward by such leaders as Lord Keynes, who tells us that free enterprise and free competition do not exist.

Mr. Perkins: Does he quote the theory that as many traders go bankrupt as those coming in at the other end?

Mr. JOHNSON: It is implicit in all expositions of the theory of free competition that competition will drive the inefficient out of business. The only way we can think of people going out of business is by their going bankrupt. There is no other way.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Or getting something better, or going into another business.

Mr. Cornell: Or going into Parliament.

Mr. JOHNSON: Getting into Parliament may be all right as a side line. Those who enter Parliament as a full-time occupation do not do very well.

Mr. Cornell: Why do they stop in Parliament on that basis?

Mr. JOHNSON: I shall answer that interjection. The reason I stop here is because I am paid to abuse Liberals; I like doing it and I would do it for nothing.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: And enjoy it?

Mr. JOHNSON: I think it is a duty which is owing to the people of Western Australia, that wherever possible they should be shown how false are the theories and philosophies, if they can be called such, on which the Liberal Party bases its assumptions.

Mr. Oldfield: We are on facts, not assumptions.

Mr. JOHNSON: The philosophy which is supposed to emanate from the Liberal Party is a difficult one to follow, because the party is not prepared to put it in print. The only way available by which to guess what that philosophy may be, is by reading the leading articles in its organ of propaganda, the daily newspaper.

Another rather interesting statement which the member for Roe made, and which I gather he believes in, is that price control drives capital and labour out of industry into non-controlled industry. If he makes a statement like that, he should produce evidence to prove it. Just what does he mean by it? It is possible that when there is an established factory dealing with food lines such as canning beans, tomatoes and peas, and the price of beans and peas is controlled, for the factory to turn to the canning of tomatoes solely. It would not go out of the food canning industry to toy making,

Mr. Perkins: I can give a concrete instance if one is required, the change-over from meat production to wool production. Meat was controlled but wool was not. I quoted those.

Mr. JOHNSON: That actually was not a change from one industry to another. It still uses the same land for the production of sheep, though perhaps the channel of disposing of the goods has changed.

Mr. Perkins: A butcher may not reckon it is.

Mr. JOHNSON: But the land or any industry does not change that easily. It goes on doing the same thing. A factory goes on producing what it is designed to produce. We cannot deny that fact. If one could show that a considerable part of industry, in particular the factories which employ labour, changed very materially as a result of price control, one would say there was something in the argument, but by far the vast majority remain in the same industry, whether it is profitable or not.

Mr. Perkins: You are putting too narrow an interpretation on my remarks. You should look at it from the point of view of new capital coming in to a new industry.

Mr. JOHNSON: I was about to refer to that. All that can be suggested as a result of price control is that it may prevent new capital coming into an industry which should otherwise expand; but that is a different matter to saying it drives capital out of industry.

Mr. Hearman: Is that a desirable aspect?

Mr. JOHNSON: It is not desirable but it is possible to prove that it meets emergencies. That is entirely different from the statement of the member for Roe that price control drives people out of industry.

Mr. Owen: Why did some dairy farmers change over to horse raising?

Mr. JOHNSON: There may be a highly profitable reason for it, but that was not because of price control. It is because the trotting industry is an exceedingly prosperous one, and it would have happened whether there was price control or not. The trotting industry is one which requires very little labour compared with dairying. Dairying is a most unattractive industry as I know, because I have lived on a dairy farm.

One other point I wish to make is that we hear that under price control there is a little blackmarket.

The blackmarket price is the price that would be charged under free enterprise and competition were there no control. It is the price that free competition gets from an uncontrolled market. Even if there is a blackmarket, price control does not drive the whole of any product into that market. There has always been a considerable proportion of the goods sold at something approximating the controlled price, and the average price paid by the consumer would therefore be far less than it would have been in the absence of control. It averages out better, if nothing else.

Mr. Hutchinson: You are not condoning blackmarketing?

Mr. JOHNSON: No. The fact that certain goods are controlled has the effect of keeping a large number of people

who have consciences out of the black-market. It reduces the pressure on the demand for the commodity which would otherwise tend to cause the price to rise. The blackmarket is the price at which open competition will sell. That is the open market price for the people engaging in it, but price control exerts a moral pressure on a large number of people that keeps them out of the open market and in the controlled market. If it does nothing better, it averages a lower price.

As I said at the outset, nobody would suggest that every item needs to be controlled; control is necessary only where prices are excessive in relation to costs. Human nature being what it is, I have no doubt that many customers prefer to deal in a legal manner and keep within the control prices when control is called for. Therefore, the fact that there is control tends to keep prices down. I hope that in the limited number of lines that require control at present, control will be exercised actively and that the policing will be active, and that the penalties imposed upon those caught breaching the Act will be exemplary. It is the responsibility of the Government to control economic policy, and a breach of the Government's economic policy committed by infringing price control is a direct breach aimed at governmental authority.

Mr. Hutchinson: When price control was in force, people on the Eastern Goldfields a few years ago had to go short of meat.

Mr. JOHNSON: That is a matter on which I am unable to express an opinion because I do not live there, but I have reason to believe that most of the people on the Eastern Goldfields were able to obtain some meat.

Mr. Hearman: You ought to speak on a State-wide basis.

Mr. JOHNSON: I am trying to do so. I do not wish to be led into speaking of something of which I know nothing, because I do not know what happened on the Eastern Goldfields. I doubt whether the member for Cottesloe is aware of what happened.

Mr. Hutchinson: I was a member of the select committee, and ought to know.

Mr. JOHNSON: Then the hon. member may know something about it. However, I do not wish to be led into discussing an aspect about which I know nothing. The proposition I was dealing with when the interjections led me a little astray was that I hope the penalties under price control will be severe, because breaches of the Act will be an infringement of a very important factor in the Government's policy. Previous controls were not enforced on a State-wide basis, and one of the difficulties during the war and since was that the penalties were far too low, and anyone who was convicted of a

breach of the Act felt that the penalty was no more than a slight inconvenience. Some of the offenders should have been gaoled.

Mr. Hutchinson: Two of the present Ministers were members of the select committee.

Mr. JOHNSON: Whenever an offender is found guilty of a second offence, imprisonment should be imposed without the option of a fine, because it is a particularly heinous crime to make a definite attempt to wreck the economic responsibilities of the Government. This is a responsibility of the Government and should be recognised as such. I hope that the power that resides in the Government will not be overworked, but that when it is availed of it will be exercised really thoroughly, that the Act will have teeth in it and that they will be used to bite and ensure that all profit is removed from any blackmarketing that occurs. I cannot believe that much blackmarketing will then be indulged in.

MR. HEARMAN (Blackwood) [4.38]: I cannot say that I am in favour of the Bill. The Minister for Labour, when moving the second reading, advanced as justification for the measure the need to control two items, namely, rent and meat, those being the only two items that he mentioned coming within the "C" series index. As to rents, I need not discuss that subject because we have dealt with it on several occasions since the last Parliament, and the Government must, on account of its attitude to the previous Bill, accept some responsibility for the recent rise in rents.

As regards meat, I was a member of the select committee and have reread the report submitted by it. Having done so, I am satisfied that the report was not only quite sound, but may almost be described as prophetic, because it envisaged a continuing difficulty in securing meat at this season of the year and put forward constructive suggestions as to steps which the Government of the day should take in an effort to overcome the shortage. I believe that if the advice of the select committee had been acted upon by the present Government, a great deal of the existing difficulty in connection with meat would not have arisen. Admittedly, difficulty was experienced by the previous Government, which made some effort to meet the situation, but the result of that effort should not be deemed sufficient to condemn the report or recommendations of the select committee. It merely indicates a defect in the administration inasmuch as the Government obtained the wrong sort of meat.

Mr. Hutchinson: There was no minority report.

Mr. HEARMAN: That is so. There were other recommendations such as that an effort should be made to assist Air-Beef to fly frozen beef to Derby, and to

make provision for its storage there so that it could be picked up about once a fortnight by the Blue Funnel boats and brought to Perth during a period of shortage. If we are to control the price of meat we are up against the question of shortage, and unless the Government is prepared to face up to that problem and attempt to bridge the gap in supply, quite obviously the position is not going to be improved.

It is idle for people to suggest that price control was effective in the case of meat. It is true that there are some items in respect of which price control is more effective than it is with regard to others; and rent is probably one of them. But meat is particularly difficult to control because not only is it hard to control the price of meat on the hoof—it has not been suggested by the Minister that he would control it that way—but it is extremely difficult to control it in the butcher's shop. That is so because there are various cuts of meat for which different prices are fixed. It is a simple matter for the butcher to sell rump steak as fillet steak; and the butchers made no bones about saying that that is what was happening.

At a meeting of South-West butchers that the member for Cottesloe and I attended in Bunbury, the butchers stated quite openly that that sort of thing was going on; that they were selling beef sausages as pork sausages, etc. I suggest that the difficulties in policing the control of meat are such as to make its control impracticable. Furthermore the member for Roe and the member for Harvey gave sound reasons why we should encourage production to supply the market during the lean period. The Government would, morally, be in a much sounder position and its case would be stronger if it had done two things—firstly, had taken the opportunity that presented itself last April to control rents; and, secondly, had made some provision to meet this shortage.

Incidentally, it was suggested by the select committee that the most effective method of controlling meat prices would be to make provision for storage of meat, and that, in itself, could be controlled. Some butchers, to my knowledge, have made an effort to store on their own account. They have stored good quality meat and then sold it to the public, and they have not received complaints from their customers. But under price control there is no incentive for a butcher to do that. It becomes a Government responsibility. I think that far from putting further restrictions on the butchers, we should encourage them to endeavour to cold store meat against the period of shortage. I think the other method by which the price of meat can be controlled is fairly well determined by the amount consumed.

Australia has about the largest consumption of meat per head of anywhere in the world. I think the consumption in Australia is about 210 lb. per head as opposed

to about 180 lb. per head in the United States, and considerably less in Great Britain. An indication that the price of meat is too high and beyond its economic value, would be a falling off in consumption, but so far there does not seem to be any evidence to that effect. I agree that the members of the Government subscribe to a political platform that includes price control and to that extent it is perhaps quite reasonable for them to introduce this measure, but I suggest that their platform, like others, should be overhauled from time to time.

If we cast our minds back to the days of the war, we will remember that Mr. Chifley, who was then Prime Minister, was a very ardent and frank socialist, and he made no secret of the fact that the various controls that were considered necessary by the socialists to make up their controlled economy, were complementary to each other, and if one was taken away, the others became less effective. In order to get an effectively controlled economy it is necessary not only to have price control, but wage pegging and direction of labour and materials.

If we take three of them away and leave one, we do not get the results that the socialist theorists consider should flow from a particular control. The member for Leederville said that the member for Roe was wrong when he suggested that price control on its own drove labour and materials into uncontrolled industries. I remind the member for Leederville that until very recently—certainly during all the time when we had controls in Western Australia—it was possible in most country towns to see a washing machine offered for sale in the window of the local store, but not a coil of wire.

If anyone asked for a coil of wire the storekeeper would say that he did not have one and could not get one because supplies were restricted. This was the position a couple of years ago. The same thing applied to agricultural implements. The reason was because the profits, possibly, on the uncontrolled items were such that both labour and materials flowed into them.

Mr. Johnson: Which agricultural implement maker went out of the agricultural implement business and into the production of washing machines?

Mr. HEARMAN: I did not say any of them did that, but that they could not get enough materials to fill their orders. Anyone who wanted to buy agricultural implements knew that there was a tremendous lag in their supply, yet for some considerable time we had the spectacle of such articles as washing machines, wireless sets and refrigerators being available.

Mr. Johnson: They were not available.

Mr. HEARMAN: They are available now. The hon. member can see them in the shop windows, but let him try to buy a harvester! The position has arisen probably

because materials, money and manpower that should have gone into the production of harvesters have gone into the production of refrigerators. The point made by the member for Roe is a sound one, and I cannot altogether agree that what he said does not happen, but I say that the underlying part of the socialist theory is that for control to be effective it must be complete.

I suggest that the people of Australia have rejected the theory of complete control to the extent that the present parties do not even mention it in their platforms. For that reason, I consider that price control cannot be as effective as the Labour theorists would have us believe. There have been various interjections during the debate, and the Minister for Works has talked about bread and the Minister for Agriculture about implements, so it would seem that the control is envisaged as going beyond the two items referred to by the Minister for Labour.

As regards bread, there is an indirect control through the price of wheat and the present Government—I do not say it was wrong in doing it—agreed with the people who supported the fixing of a home consumption price for wheat. There the Government did not support those who wanted to keep the price down, but rather those who wanted to keep it up, and again I say I do not think that was wrong. But I would point out that there is that degree of control in the price of bread, owing to the action the Government took.

In the matter of farm implements there is a much more difficult field for control. As members know, many implements are imported into this country and I do not know how we could control the prices of them inasmuch as the landed cost must be taken into account. As the Minister for Agriculture well knows, there is a line of implements popular in my electorate and in his, the manufacturers of which have a world-wide policy of selling a tractor at a relatively cheap price and charging relatively high prices for the implements to go with it. I might add that the only implements that can be used with that tractor are those made by the firm in question.

I do not know whether that is a good policy or a bad one, and I do not know how this Government could alter the policy of that firm by any system of price control. If it did interfere with the price of those implements, they would go off the market and then the people who had purchased that particular make of tractor—there are many hundreds of them—would find that they could not buy implements to use with that tractor, because all the implements are covered by patents and can not be made here. There is therefore a considerable practical difficulty in control in that direction. I would like to know how the Government proposes to impose controls in instances such as that.

It is true that certain Australian-made implements are now coming on the market at competitive prices and are underselling their imported equivalents. I feel that that is the most effective answer. The solution of the problem is competition and I do not think that the difficulty can be overcome by legislation. These imported implements could be driven off the market by competition, but the manufacturers could not be forced to bring their prices down in Australia. The answer is to make them feel the pinch of competition and then if they wish to stay in the Australian market, they will have to sell competitively.

Control might sound easy enough in theory, but there are considerable difficulties associated with it in practice, and I feel that the best means of overcoming high prices is to endeavour to obtain a greater supply of goods. The question has been asked as to when we think prices should be controlled. The only time I think controls are justified is when supply is nowhere near demand, thus leaving the door wide open for exploitation. In such circumstances it is possible that controls may be the lesser of two evils, but today that does not apply with regard to most commodities.

In relation to a few lines such as meat, it has been conclusively demonstrated that price control is not effective. It is obvious that control of meat prices did not bring more meat on to the market, and, in fact, its effect was rather the reverse. For the reasons I have enumerated, I cannot support the Bill. I do not think it would do anything to achieve the objectives put forward in its favour. I think the position of the Government would have been more logical had there not appeared on the same notice paper a price control measure and a Bill to amend the Industrial Arbitration Act with the intention of forcing wages up. To endeavour to control prices and force wages up at the same time is scarcely logical.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. H. H. Styants—Kalgoorlie) [4.55]: I did not intend to enter into this debate originally nor do I propose to discuss the merits of price control, as the Minister in charge of the Bill is quite capable of doing that, but as my association with the select committee which inquired into the question of the control of meat prices—or the lack of control—some years ago has been mentioned frequently, I would like to place on record the actual reason why I agreed to the removal of price control from meat—from the costing system. Everyone knows what the primary reason was and the fiasco and muddle which occurred in regard to the supply of meat and the prices charged for it in this State. That was brought about because the Government of the day would not set a price for meat on the hoof at Midland Junction.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Do you think that was practicable? Try it out and see what a muddle you get into. Have a go at it!

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I know that the Leader of the Opposition, being a big primary producer, and particularly a producer of meat, and many others on that side of the House, are hurt by an observation of that kind; but how did they expect the butchers to keep within the prescribed retail prices when there was no control of the price of meat on the hoof? The retail butchers were set an impossible task, as no one knows better than does the present member for Mt. Lawley, who was the Minister in charge of price control at that time, or who was supposed to be.

That was the primary cause of the trouble. The butchers had to pay double the price for meat on the hoof—double the fixed retail price—and consequently they had to break the law. Although the Minister in charge of prices at that time knew that that was the position, nothing was done and, because of the number of primary producers in his own party, he was not prepared to do the fair thing as far as the retail and master butchers were concerned.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: How would you fix the price of meat on the hoof? Give us a practical scheme.

Hon. D. Brand: Do you intend to fix the price of meat on the hoof under this Bill?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: We were told by the experts—the member for Blackwood and others—and the member for Moore, who is also a producer of meat, and the member for Roe and the member for Cottesloe—they were members of the select committee—as well as by the master butchers and everyone else with the exception of the present Minister for Labour, that if price control were lifted, the cost of meat would immediately come down because of competition, but what happened? In fact, the price sky-rocketed. Those people were speaking with their tongues in their cheeks or else knew nothing about the subject. Prices have, in fact, soared to the sky, as far as meat is concerned—

Mr. Hutchinson: That is wrong.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Members opposite have proved to be very poor judges and prophets in regard to what would happen when the price controls were lifted from meat. I do not believe—and I do not think my colleague believed—what was said, but nevertheless that was the theme of the argument of members opposite all the way through; that if price controls were lifted from meat, competition would bring the price down.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: And you agreed to something you did not believe?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I will tell the House why I agreed. I am just as consistent as is the King of Pinjarra in this regard.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: But you agreed to something you did not believe.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I will explain why I agreed. I agreed only because of the robbery and exploitation of the worker which was taking place under the regime of the Leader of the Opposition, who knew very well it was going on.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Who was doing the robbing?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The Leader of the Opposition knew it was going on, and he had power to prevent it. He knew as well as I did that the controlled price of meat was being put in to the Government Statistician's office for the purpose of assessing the basic wage and that the worker was being fleeced for anything up to 11d per lb. in excess of that figure for his meat.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: That is incorrect.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: What did the member for Mt. Lawley do to prevent it?

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: The Minister knows the statistician did not do that.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: We had an admission from the master butchers, before the select committee, that they were putting in the controlled price to the statistician. The retail butchers also told us that they were charging anything up to 11d. per lb. above the controlled price for meat, yet what did the member for Mt. Lawley do?

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: The statistician never accepted the fixed price. He always put in the actual price.

The Minister for Labour: He did not.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Nothing of the kind, and it is on record.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The Minister must address the Chair and members must refrain from interjecting.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The master butchers who appeared before the select committee were quite candid and frank in connection with this matter. When asked what prices they submitted to the statistician for statistical purposes—which figures were used for the computation of the basic wage—they said that they gave the controlled prices. They also admitted, quite frankly, that they were charging anything up to 11d. per lb. over the controlled price. That is in the evidence and is therefore on record. The member for Cottesloe need not take my word for it; it occurs in the master butchers' evidence.

Mr. Hutchinson: You are relying on your memory.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: No, it is on record. What did the Minister, who was then in charge of price control, or the Leader of the Opposition, do to see that the worker was not exploited to the extent of 7s. to 8s. a week? That is the sole reason why I agreed to the recommendation of the select committee. I knew that meat prices would not come down. I knew that there would be no competition to bring down meat prices and I knew, also, that if controls were lifted, the actual costs of meat would be supplied to the statistician and would be reflected in the basic wage. Thus the worker would get some compensation, and I want that to go on record as the sole reason why I agreed to the decontrol of the price of meat.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Why did not you say so?

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: That is entirely fallacious because the statistician always took the actual prices. He made his own inquiries.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The statistician did nothing of the kind.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Yes, he did. Did you ask him about it?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mt. Lawley can make a speech on this subject later on.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: The master butchers were quite candid and truthful about it and gave us the correct position.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Did they admit they were committing perjury?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Yes.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: They told you that?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: That they committed perjury?

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Yes.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Does the hon. member think they would be foolish enough, when they knew that the price of meat was controlled at 2s. per lb., to put in figures to show that they were charging 2s. 11d. per lb.? The hon. member knew, as well as I did, and as well as any man in this country, the fiasco and hypocrisy that existed in the price of meat. The hon. member also knew the primary cause of it. He was not game to fix the price of meat on the hoof—

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Is your Government game to do it?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: —because of the primary producers in his party. That was the cause of the whole trouble.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: I know that the statistician made his own personal inquiries, and the figures were accurate.

Mr. Oldfield: What is the policy of the Government on price control?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: In fairness to everybody, prices should be controlled. If price control is to be completely eliminated, any man, with any spark of justice or fair play, must admit that the quarterly adjustments of the basic wage must not remain frozen. All members opposite must agree that if price control is to be abandoned and rent controls are abandoned, we should not continue to freeze the quarterly adjustments of the basic wage.

Mr. SPEAKER: I think that is a subject for debate on another Bill.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: That being so, I am in favour of price control. This is not a question of controlling the price of meat and rents only; it is a question of controlling the price of every article that is included in the regimen of the basic wage—some 49 altogether.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: You have not provided for them.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: We have provided for all those articles in which we think exploitation will take place.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: You have not provided for meat on the hoof.

Mr. Hutchinson: Unless you control the price of meat on the hoof, the same state of affairs will be brought about as existed when you voted against the price control of meat.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: What did the hon. member's Government do to control it?

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: It at least brought down the price.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: Do not let the hon. member talk about what happened on the Eastern Goldfields and in the metropolitan area in connection with the price of meat. He knew, as well as I did, but he was not game to face up to the problem.

Mr. Hutchinson: You must take all things into consideration.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: The Minister criticised us for storing meat.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I do not think I did.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Some of your party did.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I am not responsible for all the members of my party. I think the hon. member will find that one of the recommendations of the select committee, with which I agreed, was that it should be stored. I think some sections of the Farmers' Union and the primary producers protested about the storing of meat because they thought it might keep the price of fresh meat down. They wanted the same sky-rocketing prices that had operated previously.

Let me repeat, if price control is not reintroduced, we cannot continue to freeze the basic wage; otherwise it will have a detrimental effect upon the welfare of the people of this State. It will have a tremendous effect upon industry. If the actual increase in the cost of commodities were added to the present basic wage, it would be increased by about 19s. 10d. per week. It is impossible for the secondary industries of this State to continue to operate under a disadvantage of that kind when compared with industries in the Eastern States. If we do not agree to price control, we will completely wreck the economy of this State.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Minister is getting on to another subject altogether.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I think it is all associated with price control.

Mr. SPEAKER: It has nothing to do with price control. We have another Bill which is to be introduced, and the subject now being discussed by the Minister can be mentioned during the debate on that Bill.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I wish to refer to the one-eyed and parochial attitude taken by the member for Blackwood. While he had no fault to find with the action of the Government in agreeing to price control as far as wheat was concerned, he refuses to support a measure which provides for price control in the interests of the wage-earners of the State. Like most of his colleagues, when it is a question of price control in the interests of the primary producer, he has no objection to it; he objects to its application in specific instances.

However, I have placed on record my sole reason for agreeing to the decontrol of the price of meat—it was because of the robbery of the workers that was taking place. Controlled prices were being used for the purpose of assessing the basic wage.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: You have no evidence of that.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: It was clearly set out in the evidence of the master butchers. They were charging anything from 5d. to 11d. per lb. in excess of the fixed price, and by that means the workers were being defrauded of 8s. a week.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: A very belated statement.

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS: I agreed to the decontrol of meat so that the wage-earners of the State could obtain some justice.

THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR (Hon. W. Hegney—Mt. Hawthorn—in reply) [5.9]: I will be as brief as possible in my reply but I will deal with the few points that have been raised. After listening to

members opposite, particularly members of the Country Party, I feel that a most liberal attitude will be adopted when the Bill reaches another place.

The Minister for Railways: Liberal is right!

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: Firstly, the member for Mt. Lawley indicated that if price control were reintroduced, it could force wages down. To bovrilise the position, that is what he said. He asserted that there would be low production and lack of competition. The member for Cottesloe enumerated 11 items, one of which was included in those I have just mentioned. It is strange that, in the other States of the Commonwealth and, indeed in the Australian Capital Territory, price control still exists and it is not suggested that production has been lowered in that Territory or in other States. The only evidence that has been submitted is that, in each of the States, including South Australia, which has a Liberal Government, it has been definitely indicated that the time is not yet ripe for the decontrol of prices.

I will now refer to the main point raised by the member for Cottesloe. He said that some people have the idea that the making of profits was immoral. I am not one of those people. I do not think I made any such suggestion in my remarks.

Mr. Oldfield: The member for Leederville did.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I will deal with the member for Maylands later, too. The member for Cottesloe made that remark but I certainly said nothing to justify it. I say quite candidly that any person in business, be it an individual trader or a company, is entitled to legitimate profit, but in the present-day circumstances, there should be reposed in the Government of the day power to ensure that exorbitant profits are not made to the detriment of the people generally. During his speech the member for Nedlands suggested that price control would fix minima prices on various commodities. There is no provision in the Bill to fix minima prices. A maximum has been proposed.

Mr. Court: I did not say that.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: The note I have here indicates that that was the case.

Mr. Oldfield: The maximum becomes the minimum.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: There are plenty of instances which can be cited to prove that the maximum does not become the minimum. If there is free competition, as members opposite suggest there should be, then price control, despite the arguments to the contrary, will not eliminate competition. What price control can do, in a limited measure, is

to make an effort to protect the people where there is any undue combination to keep prices up. The supply of commodities can be quite ample, but if a combination decides to keep the prices up, the people will only get supplies at the price decided upon by the combination.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Is that happening?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: That can happen. I will deal with that phase when I come to it.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Be sure that you do! We will remind you.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I shall be glad if the Leader of the Opposition will remind me, but there will be no necessity to do so. The member for Nedlands also stated that during the last six months there had been stability. I admit that the major portion of the last increase in the cost of living, which amounted to 13s. 8d., was due to the increase in rents, but the price of meat was also a major cause for that increase.

Since meat has been prominently mentioned in the arguments put forward by members of the Opposition, I will deal with that item and challenge any member of the Opposition, particularly the member for Mt. Lawley, to deny this: When the price of meat was controlled, a select committee, regarding which so much has been said, made public its deliberations. At that time, when I asked Mr. W. O. Johnson, the president of the Meat and Allied Trades Federation of Australia, what percentage of meat was sold on the blackmarket, he replied, "Almost 100 per cent."

Mr. Johnson is a very honourable man and when I asked him what would be the overall increase charged by butchers, above the fixed price, he said, "From 5d. to 11d. per lb." I have a note of what the member for Mt. Lawley said and at this stage I will quote a question that I asked in the House of him when he was Attorney General, on the 22nd August, 1950. It reads—

What amount of increase in the basic wage under the provisions of the Industrial Arbitration Act would follow an increase of 5d. per lb.—

I asked this after Mr. Johnson had given me his figures. Continuing—

—in the price of the various cuts of beef and mutton as taken into account by the Government Statistician in compiling index figures relating to prices of commodities, in any quarter, over the previous quarter assuming that all other factors taken into account by the statistician remain unchanged?

The answer given by the then Attorney General was as follows:—

An increase of 5d. per lb. in the price of the various cuts of beef and mutton would result in an increase of 5s. 11d. in the State basic wage for the metropolitan area under the present quarterly adjustment procedure.

I asked a further question along similar lines but I have not the answer with me and I am open to correction when I now quote it from memory. However, I will check on it and in the Committee stages I will produce that further question and the answer to it and I will apologise if I am incorrect in what I say now. I asked the Attorney General at that time a question to this effect: "Did the statisticians use the fixed price for meat in the calculation of their figures, or did they use the actual price?" From memory, the Attorney General replied that they used the fixed price.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: I think you will find that you are wrong.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I think the hon. member, when he was Attorney General, corrected himself at a later stage. This is where I do not need any reminder from the Leader of the Opposition. The point is that today prices are not under control. At that time they were, and today the people are being charged any price at all for meat. However, despite that, the basic wage remains pegged. My argument is that if the basic wage is pegged, despite the fact that the cost of living figures, in any quarter, show an upward trend, is it not fair and reasonable that the Government should have the power and authority to try to do something for the masses of the people in the State?

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: The basic wage is not assessed on the needs basis now. You know that.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I will deal with the needs basis and the economic capacity of industry to pay under another Bill. I am not going to be sidetracked into that argument at this stage. Suffice to say that those are the figures. From September, 1953, to the present, there has been a net increase in the basic wage—or should have been, according to the statistician's figures—of 19s. 11d. per week which has been caused by increases in the price of some commodities or services which relate to the regimen on which the basic wage figures are computed.

The Government should have the power to do its utmost to stabilise the price of meat and ensure that the ordinary family man gets this basic commodity at a reasonable figure. I am not saying that if this Bill were placed on the statute book tomorrow, meat prices would drop by 10d. or 1s. per lb., but I suggest that the Government should have the authority to make

the closest investigation into meat prices and if, after that investigation, it is shown that some modification is justified in the price of this basic and essential commodity for 99½ per cent. of the people of Western Australia, then I make no apology for saying that the Government should have that authority vested in it.

Mr. Hutchinson: Would you suggest that another select committee should be appointed to inquire into meat supplies?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: No, I would not. I think the last select committee on meat did what it thought was right at the time. It has often been thrown up at the member for Kalgoorlie and myself, but one of the reasons why we subscribed to the recommendations of the select committee at that time was that prices were fixed but people were being charged from 5d. to 11d. per lb. over the amount and the retail butchers were thus getting higher prices than those supplied to the statistician.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Every State in Australia had the same difficulty.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: The member for Nedlands asked me to explain the personnel of the committee which it is proposed to set up by this Bill. If it became law and the Premier deputed me to continue price control, I would consult the Chamber of Manufactures, the Chamber of Commerce, the Grocers and Storekeepers' Association and the primary producers, and invite them to nominate their best man to give information, assistance and advice in the administration of the Act. The committee would be appointed at the pleasure of the Minister and if the Bill did become law, I believe the various organisations would see that they sent along the most appropriate representative.

The member for Stirling dealt mostly with the price of meat, and I have answered him briefly. The member for Roe said that if price control was introduced there would be a famine so far as the supply of meat was concerned. I can only say that if the present position continues there will be a famine in the amount of meat which people on the basic wage who are trying to raise families will be able to buy, particularly with the present upward trend in prices.

The member for Maylands said he was against price control because he was a Liberal. I will not criticise him for that, because everyone is entitled to his or her own political beliefs. I would point out, however, that not so long ago representatives of the Chamber of Commerce saw me in my office and asked for modifications concerning price control; of course, they believed that price control should be abolished altogether. After they had left my office, representatives from the Perth and suburban bread manufacturers asked me in no circumstances to relinquish price control.

Mr. Court: That is because they cannot keep prices up.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: The hon. member is now starting to whistle a different tune. One of the reasons advanced by the Bread Manufacturers' Association was that there were people coming in from other countries and buying bakeries and businesses in the metropolitan area, and they were afraid that they would be undercut. When competition is such that it will interfere with their livelihood, they want the price of bread controlled.

Mr. Hutchinson: It cuts competition.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: The hon. member cannot argue in that strain. One section wanted price control to continue and another asked that in no circumstances should we relinquish price control. For the benefit of the member for Roe and the member for Maylands, let me briefly indicate that the price of bread is controlled not under a prices control Act but under the Wheat Products (Prices Fixation) Act, 1938.

Mr. Court: Is the committee operating now?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: If necessary, a committee will be set up to ensure that the price of bread remains at a reasonable figure and will cater for reasonable modifications in increases and decreases.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: You cannot apply that Act because it fixes the maximum price for flour.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: It is on the statute book. If it is necessary to implement the Act, or make it active, we will do so.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: You will amend the Act?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: We will carry on for the purpose of ensuring that the price of bread is controlled. Even in this Bill provision is made for the prices control commissioner to fix prices for cheese and butter, after they had been determined on a Commonwealth basis. I would now like to refer to the remark made by an hon. member who said that price control is all right during a period of war, but that once that danger had passed a measure like this should not be on the statute book.

Hon. D. Brand: Does that apply to pegging wages?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: Let us examine the position to see how hollow that assertion is. The war finished in 1945, and Commonwealth price control eased in May, 1948, but from 1948 to 1952 inclusive the then Government, each and every year, introduced a price control measure into this Chamber. The first year that Labour was on the Treasury bench and introduced a similar measure, it was

hotly debated by the Opposition and defeated in another place. I am giving the member for Maylands undue prominence: but, in his usual honest way, he referred to the A.L.P. constitution. We do not apologise for the A.L.P. constitution.

Members: Hear, hear!

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: We are always out to find recruits and I would like every member of the Opposition to closely study that constitution.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Let me have a copy, will you?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I think I might be able to get the hon. member a few copies—

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Thank you very much.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: —provided he gives me a few copies of the constitution of his party.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: We will exchange.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I have said that all other States still have price control and some of them are controlling quite a number of commodities and others decontrolling them, as circumstances permit.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: They are getting away from it, are they not?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: In reply to that interjection I would say that, as an indication of our bona fides, and after consideration, we have decided to include a schedule in the Bill, and this will be moved as an amendment in the Committee stage. It will ensure that the fears of the Opposition that we want to put a blanket control on everything are unfounded. Even if certain items are included in the schedule, it does not mean that we will control everything. There may be some items that do not need to be controlled. Members opposite say that they are against controls of any kind. Are they against the Arbitration Court controlling wages? Are they against the Arbitration Court declaring the minimum basic wage from time to time, or do they believe in the Arbitration Court?

Hon. D. Brand: You can deal with that on the appropriate Bill.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I am dealing now with the point raised by members of the Opposition to the effect that they are against controls of all kinds.

Let them answer this question straight out: Are they against an industrial tribunal in this State controlling the price of labour?

Hon. D. Brand: We believe that a tribunal should make its own decisions.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: Does the Opposition believe in the arbitration system?

Hon. D. Brand: We do.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: A section of the Arbitration Act makes it obligatory for an appropriate tribunal to fix the price of labour power which is regarded by some people as a commodity. If that is the case, and the provision that quarterly adjustments should be made is set aside by the court, and wages are fixed, which is a cost in industry, why should not the Government have power to control the price of commodities which the basic wage buys?

Mr. Hutchinson: We cannot answer that, otherwise we will transgress the ruling of the Speaker.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I shall not touch on the industrial arbitration Bill. I only mentioned it in relation to the argument of members opposite against price control.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Cannot the Arbitration Court make an adjustment if it considers it should?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: Should not the Government have power over the commodities which the basic wage could purchase?

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: That is not an answer to my argument.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I shall not be trapped into referring to the industrial arbitration Bill.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: You are a past master! You have been on it for the last 10 minutes!

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: This is relevant to the Bill before us: If the court continues in its attitude to peg wages—that is, by not applying the quarterly adjustments—it will be necessary for the Government to possess some power to control prices because the purchasing power of the wages is reduced. Conversely, if the court decides tomorrow to reintroduce the quarterly adjustments, I have no doubt that the tendency would be for prices to rise. The Government again should have the power to determine that any rises are commensurate with the obvious increase, so as to prevent exorbitant increases being imposed on the community. I indicated that the price of bread was fixed under another Act. The Government will not hesitate to make arrangements necessary to the best of its ability, if the time should come, to control the price of bread.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: The Government will have to subsidise the price of flour to do that.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I refer to the price of wheat and bread products because there is an Act covering that phase.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: But you cannot fix the price.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: My final remarks are these: As I indicated when introducing the Bill, the Government is not anxious to impose controls if it can be avoided but believes that under present day circumstances it should possess the power to control prices. The Government does not want to impose a blanket control, and to ensure that there is no misunderstanding the Government has introduced a schedule to indicate the commodities to be controlled.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Can you not control anything by regulation?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I shall come to that. There is a provision that by regulation any other commodity can be brought under control, but that regulation would be subject to disallowance by Parliament.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Is that why you put it in the schedule?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: The items were put into the schedule, and the provision for extension by regulation is a natural one. It can be disallowed by Parliament. The discussion which has been so sustained and interesting during the second reading debate, indicates that very few clauses will be contentious during the Committee stages.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Tell us about the combines which are having a detrimental effect.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I am doubly pleased that the Leader of the Opposition has mentioned this aspect. During the discussion the point was raised that petrol had not risen in price in this State without the necessity for price control. I wish to express my belief. The price of petrol has not risen in this State because it was controlled in the five other States. If it had increased in price in this State in which there is no price control, an indication would be given to the other five States that they should apply price control rigidly. Can any member tell me that the oil companies do not amount to a combine? Have members not heard of what is going on from day to day? The Leader of the Opposition indicated one of the best examples of the oil companies as being a combine. If one is not satisfied he need only go up the street and inquire at the various garages in the metropolitan area to check up on the combination.

Question put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	20
Noes	19
Majority for	1

Ayes.

Mr. Andrew	Mr. Lawrence
Mr. Brady	Mr. Norton
Mr. Graham	Mr. Nuisen
Mr. Hawke	Mr. O'Brien
Mr. Heal	Mr. Rhatigan
Mr. W. Hegney	Mr. Sewell
Mr. Hoar	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. Jamieson	Mr. Styants
Mr. Johnson	Mr. Tonkin
Mr. Lapham	Mr. May

(Teller.)

Noes.

Mr. Abbott	Mr. Nalder
Mr. Ackland	Mr. Nimmo
Mr. Brand	Mr. North
Dame F. Cardell-Oliver	Mr. Oldfield
Mr. Cornell	Mr. Owen
Mr. Court	Mr. Thorn
Mr. Hearman	Mr. Watts
Mr. Hill	Mr. Wild
Mr. Manning	Mr. Hutchinson
Sir Ross McLarty	

(Teller.)

Pairs.

Ayes.	Noes.
Mr. J. Hegney	Mr. Mann
Mr. Guthrie	Mr. Bovell
Mr. Moir	Mr. Doney
Mr. McCulloch	Mr. Yates
Mr. Kelly	Mr. Perkins

Question thus passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Mr. Brady in the Chair; the Minister for Labour in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1 to 9—agreed to.

Clause 10—General powers of commissioner:

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I move an amendment—

That after the word "declare" in line 29, page 3, the words "with respect to any goods and services that are specified in the Second Schedule to this Act or such other goods and services as may be prescribed by regulation" be inserted.

As I indicated when replying to the second reading debate, the amendment provides for the inclusion of the schedule of commodities and services in the Bill and for any commodity being prescribed by regulation.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: I am a little surprised at the amendment. The Government has power by regulation to bring goods under control, and the Minister argued that it would not be done unless it was necessary. The schedule is a large one, and I thought the Minister would have watched and considered what goods it was necessary to place under control. In his speech he mentioned only three. Why not wait until he found it essential and then pass a regulation? The amendment is not necessary.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: The schedule contains a number of commodities and services and provides that any additional commodity may, by regulation, be brought within the purview of the Act.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Why not do it all by regulation?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: The schedule sets out the main commodities that may be brought under control.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: They will be brought under control by the passing of the Bill.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: If it is desired to include any other item, it can be brought in by regulation. Such a regulation would be subject to disallowance by Parliament. If the circumstances were such that action was deemed necessary in the interests of the people, we should not have to wait until Parliament meets.

Hon. A. V. R. Abbott: Does the Minister suggest that the goods and services mentioned in the schedule will need a further regulation before they can be brought under control or will they be brought under control ipso facto by virtue of their inclusion in the measure?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: The Bill provides for the declaration of any goods or services and the amendment contains limiting words.

Mr. Court: Does not that make the schedule unnecessary because it is all-embracing?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: We have included the schedule to indicate the main goods and services which it may be necessary to control. If the amendment be passed, the schedule will be brought within the purview of the Act and also such other items as may be brought in by regulation.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: The Bill provides—

- (1) The commissioner shall have and may exercise such powers and functions and be entitled to such immunities as are prescribed by this Act and the regulations in operation from time to time pursuant to the provisions of this Act.
- (2) In particular but without limiting the generality of the last preceding subsection, the commissioner in the exercise of his powers under that subsection may fix and declare—

Then comes the amendment. Thus the commissioner could fix prices immediately without any regulation so far as the goods in the schedule are concerned. That is why the schedule was included.

The Minister for Labour: No.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: That is the effect of the measure. If the Bill be passed, the commissioner may at once fix the price* of the goods set out in the schedule and no regulation would be needed.

The Minister for Labour: It would have to be gazetted.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Of course it would, but the measure would bring the goods in the schedule within the power of the commissioner. All he would have to do would be to fix the prices. Of course, the Minister may bring other goods under the control of the commissioner, but the Minister will have no say in these except in so far as the commissioner is subject to him. Without reference to the Minister, the commissioner may fix the prices and Parliament would have no say.

The Minister for Labour: Yes, it would.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: It would not, because a proclamation is not subject to disallowance by Parliament.

The Premier: How would the proclamation come to be issued?

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: It would be issued by the commissioner and he could also act by issuing an order.

The Minister for Labour: That has always been so.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: The commissioner would not have to issue a proclamation. He could say the price for a certain commodity was so-and-so and from that moment that would be the fixed price.

The Premier: Do you think the commissioner would work without consulting the Minister?

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: I think he should, because that is his job. He is charged with fixing prices in the same way as the Abattoir Board is charged with controlling abattoirs, subject to the Minister.

The Premier: Yes, of course.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Also, the Child Welfare Department is administered subject to the Premier, but does he interfere with day to day routine matters? Of course not.

The Premier: No, but the Minister in charge of prices would be consulted, and he would decide finally whether any particular class of goods set out in the schedule was to be covered by a price order.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: If the Premier gave directions to the Child Welfare Department that it was not to do anything without reference to him, whatever was done would be referred to him, but the State could not be administered on that basis.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Does that mean, in effect, that the Minister would be the prices controller?

The Premier: No. The Minister would decide policy.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Yes, and policy relates to what should be controlled, not the individual prices. It is perfectly clear why the Minister has put this in.

The Minister for Labour: You have not said it yet.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: He desired that these particular goods—and he was perfectly entitled to want this—should be subject to immediate control.

The Premier: That is quite wrong.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Why did he distinguish between the goods set out in this list and the others which he said he might control by regulation.

Mr. May: Because these are the most likely items.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Not at all. The commissioner, without reference to the Minister, can deal with them at once; and he would, because this charges him with that responsibility. He would fix the prices as he always has done, and he would vary the prices from time to time. Of course, he is theoretically subject to the Minister.

The Premier: Not theoretically, but legally.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Well, legally.

The Premier: Why say, theoretically?

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: I say, theoretically, because legally the Child Welfare Department is under the direction of the Premier, but actually does the Premier interfere with it?

The Premier: He decides policy.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Of course, but once a departmental head is told to do something, and he is told by this measure—

The Premier: No.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: I suggest he is. Why put these in the schedule?

The Premier: Why make the commissioner of prices subject to the Minister?

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: For the same reason that we make the Child Welfare Department subject to the Premier.

The Premier: Yes, so that the Minister concerned decides policy.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: I realise that, but is it policy for the Minister to interfere when the commissioner is charged with the duty of fixing prices for these commodities?

The Premier: Yes, for the Minister to decide, after the Bill becomes law, which items in the schedule shall be brought under price control.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: They are under price control.

The Premier: Yes, theoretically.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: They are.

The Premier: They could be.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: They are, because this brings them under the jurisdiction of the Act.

The Premier: Which states that the commissioner of prices may issue a proclamation or an order.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Yes.

The Premier: What does "may" mean?

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: He may fix and declare prices.

The Premier: What does that mean?

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: What it says, that he may fix and declare prices.

The Premier: Up till now you have been arguing that he shall.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: Certainly, because if they are not under his control, they should be taken out of the Act. That was the invariable practice. When something was to be withdrawn from price control, it was not left to the policy of the commissioner; it was a matter for the Minister. That is the practice throughout Australia. When clothing in the Eastern States is withdrawn from price control, it is done by direction of the Minister, and that is policy. But while the item is under price control, it is the duty of the commissioner to investigate it and, where he thinks fit, declare the price.

The Premier: Do you think he declares without reference to his Minister?

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: I am sure he does.

The Premier: Not under this Government. It might have happened in the hon. member's day.

Hon. A. V. R. ABBOTT: I am not going to say what direction the Premier gives, but I do say that this does occur in every other State, and it was the practice in this State.

The Minister for Labour: Not since the 23rd February, 1953.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member's time has expired.

Mr. HUTCHINSON: The amendment could be put in much more simple language, and the subject could be more honestly dealt with by a simple amendment that I could suggest. It is apparent that by the amendment all commodities can be brought under price control. If the amendment is included, the schedule will be quite useless. I suggest that after the words "may fix and declare" in Subclause (2), where the Minister has inserted his amendment, he should insert three words, "for all commodities." Then he could delete the schedule and have no further bother. The subject could be more honestly dealt with in that way. At present it is confusing to have some items in a schedule and others included by regulation. Why not say, "for all commodities," because that is what the Government is after? Why was the provision not included in that way in the first place? I suggest that the Minister withdraw his amendment and put in these three words.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: The Minister said he introduced the amendment with the idea of imposing some restrictions on price

control. I believe him, because I cannot otherwise see any sense in putting the amendment before the House. But I am not at all certain that he has achieved his objective. Subclause (1) is very wide. Subclause (2), to which the amendment is to be attached, provides that the commissioner may fix and declare prices with respect to any goods, services, etc. I do not know that the Minister ought not to amend the previous part of the subclause because I am certain this will, at least, give rise to a lot of argument in the future if the words, "but without limiting the generality of the last preceding subsection" remain in.

Because it seems to me that if we give a man wide power in Subclause (1)—although we have the intention of cutting it down in Subclause (2)—and leave the original words there, which indicate that it is not intended to be cut down, and that is what is surely meant by the words "but without limiting the generality of the last preceding subsection", we run the risk subsequently of being told that the power is general and not particular as the Minister seeks to make it, and as I have no doubt he intended. That was something to which I could see no objection until I examined the provisions of Subclauses (1) and (2). If the Minister intends to carry out his original intention, not only is it requisite to add these or words of similar effect, but also to go back further than Subclause (2) and ascertain the precise effect of the words which I quoted earlier, and see whether they conflict, as I think they do, with what is now proposed.

THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR: Although I do not think he used the word in a derogatory sense, the member for Cottesloe said we would have been more honest to do something else, but I assure him this was an honest attempt to indicate to members opposite that we did not want a blanket control. That is why we put the schedule in. Should a particular commodity require control when Parliament was not in session, we would need power to bring it under control, and that is the reason for what we are doing.

The wording of Clause 10 is identical with that of the provision in the measure introduced by the member for Mt. Lawley in 1948 and continued from year to year until 1952. All I did, after consultation with other members of Cabinet, was to include the schedule to show that we were not anxious to bring everything under control, but desired the right to extend the schedule by regulation. As regards the point raised by the member for Stirling, I will undertake, if the measure is passed by this Chamber, to have the matter examined by the Crown Law Department and have an appropriate amendment moved in another place.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I thought the Minister might take the opportunity of examining the position over the week-end, and

that he might temporarily withdraw the present amendment and, after consultation with the Crown Law of course, put something else forward.

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 6.5 p.m.

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 17th August, 1954.

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

QUESTIONS.

DAIRYING.

As to Artificial Insemination of Herds, Wokalup.

Hon. C. H. HENNING asked the Minister for the North-West:

(1) When is it expected that artificial insemination will be commenced on herds, from the proposed centre at Wokalup?

(2) What breeds of bulls is it anticipated to use—

(a) at the commencement;

(b) when the scheme is established?

(3) Has the Government any bulls at present which would be used?

(4) If so—

(a) what is the production record of the bulls' dams;

(b) what is the production record of daughters?

(5) Is it proposed to use bulls the quality of which will be based on the production of dams?

(6) If so, what is the minimum production considered to qualify for use?