

# Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday, 12th September, 1950.

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

## QUESTIONS.

### BABY FOODS.

#### *As to Shortage of Supplies.*

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN asked the Minister for Health:

(1) Is she aware that all baby foods are in very short supply?

(2) If so, what action has she taken to improve the supply of these important commodities?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) I am in constant touch with the manufacturers of powdered milk products, and recently arranged in Melbourne for all available baby foods and powdered milk products to be given all shipping space applied for.

The recent shortages were due to the bad season in Victoria.

From the middle of August to date Nestles has delivered quantities equal to nearly two months average sales.

Although there may be isolated stores which receive only small stocks sold out and probably will be out of supplies until the next shipment, there are others which have plenty of stocks displayed.

### HEALTH.

#### *As to Deaths from Cancer and Tuberculosis.*

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Minister for Health:

How many deaths have occurred in Western Australia during the last two years, respectively, from—

(a) cancer;

(b) tuberculosis?

The MINISTER replied:

1948—Tuberculosis of the respiratory system, 157; other forms, 9; total, 166. Cancer, 620.

1949—Tuberculosis of the respiratory system, 123; other forms, 5; total, 128. Cancer, 658.

### STATE HOUSING COMMISSION.

#### *As to Employees and Cost.*

Mr. TOTTERDELL asked the Honorary Minister for Housing:

(1) What is the total number of officers and other employees employed by the State Housing Commission?

(2) How many are engaged on clerical work?

(3) What is the number of technical officers?

(4) What is the number employed on the outside staff, inclusive of tradesmen, labourers, supervisors and inspectors?

(5) What is the total cost to the State per annum of operating the State Housing Commission?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) Three hundred and eighteen.

(2) Two hundred and thirty-two.

(3) Thirty-one.

(4) Fifty-five.

(5) Cost for year ending the 30th June, 1950, £174,111. This figure is the total cost of operating all housing schemes, including War Service Homes, Commonwealth-State Rental, State Housing and McNess Housing, as well as building operations and materials control.

## WATER SUPPLIES.

*As to Extension of Comprehensive Scheme to Mt. Barker.*

Mr. ACKLAND (without notice) asked the Minister for Public Works:

Will he lay on the Table of the House the file dealing with the proposed extension of the Agricultural Areas, Great Southern towns and Goldfields Water Supply Scheme to Mount Barker?

The MINISTER replied:

Yes.

## CHANDLER ALUNITE WORKS.

*As to Negotiations and Legal Position.*

Hon. J. T. TONKIN (without notice) asked the Minister for Industrial Development:

(1) On the 1st August the Minister informed me that the matter of a lease between the Australian Plaster Industries and the Government was then in the hands of the Crown Law Department. As six weeks have elapsed and I have not been informed that the lease has been completed, will the Minister advise me whether it has yet been completed? If not, what is the cause of the delay?

(2) When is it anticipated that plaster will be produced at Chandler?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The agreement is not yet fully completed although it is rapidly approaching that stage. It will be realised that a considerable amount of negotiation had to take place between the lessees in Victoria and the lessors in Western Australia on certain items not altogether associated with the industry such as transport, etc., which occasioned some difficulty. It will therefore be difficult for me to say exactly when the agreement will be completed but I think I can safely say it will be in the very near future.

(2) Though I am not able to give an exact date I should say not longer than two or three weeks.

## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

*Eighteenth Day—Conclusion.*

Debate resumed from the 7th September.

THE ACTING PREMIER (Hon. A. F. Watts—Stirling) [4.39]: I propose to make some reference to one or two of the observations that have been made during the course of the Address-in-reply debate, because I consider it necessary that that should be done. I would say at this stage that there has been what one might call a plethora of speeches on the Address-in-reply. I think I am right in saying that every member on the other side of the House has taken the opportunity of addressing you, Mr. Speaker, on the motion,

and a fair number have also spoken to the two amendments which were moved in the course of the weeks that have passed since the Address-in-reply was first moved. From that large accumulation of words, not very many striking points have emerged.

There was, with the exception of one or two items, the greater number of which were involved in the two amendments that were before the House, a very limited amount of what one could call criticism, and an almost complete absence of constructive suggestions. I am not blaming members in regard to the last matter. I do not know that it is part of their duty to undertake it. I do not know that, were I sitting in the same place, I would undertake it myself. There are times when perhaps one might do so and other times when one would not. I mention it merely as a fact that there has been very little of a constructive nature that one could take into consideration seriously in dealing with the problems of the day.

There have, however, been quite a number of statements made to which I think the members that made them did not perhaps give the attention and concerning which they did not make the inquiries that they might have. At the risk of starting at the wrong end, I propose to say a few words about the speech of the member for Warren, particularly that part which dealt with land settlement. In the course of his remarks that hon. gentleman said—

I say, without hesitation, that the adverse effect of the change from a Labour Government to a Liberal Government was felt immediately. The first noticeable sign was the falling off in the purchase of properties for inclusion in the settlement scheme, and that was a severe setback. For some reason or other, in the change from the Labour administration to that of the present Government, the scheme lost its continuity and there was a tremendous lag in the purchase of properties.

That ends the part I intend to quote from the hon. member's remarks. In support of that, he detailed figures which he said had come from the 1947 report of the Department of Lands and Surveys, with which is incorporated a report by the then Director of Land Settlement. He also detailed certain properties purchased month by month from March to July, 1947 and 1948. I do not know whether the hon. gentleman has read the report of the Director of Land Settlement, which was published in 1947.

Mr. Hoar: Yes, I have it here.

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not know from what part of it he obtained the figures he quoted.

Mr. Hoar: Those figures did not come from that report.

The ACTING PREMIER: That was the indication the hon. member gave in his speech.

Mr. Hoar: No.

The ACTING PREMIER: I have taken the opportunity of examining the "Hansard" report—the rough "Hansard" report, I must confess; there is nothing else available as yet—and it certainly appeared to me that the hon. member stated he had obtained the figures from the 1947 report of the Department of Lands and Surveys.

Mr. Hoar: That is not in my speech. That is not so. I got them from an entirely different source.

The ACTING PREMIER: If the hon. member obtained them from an entirely different source, it was not a very reliable one.

Mr. Hoar: It could not have been higher.

Hon. A. H. Panton: It must have been the Minister.

The Minister for Lands: I got the idea that that is where you obtained the information.

Hon. A. H. Panton: We admit the Minister is not very reliable.

The Minister for Lands: The member for Warren led this House to believe the information came from the report.

Mr. Hoar: No.

The Minister for Lands: Yes, you did.

The ACTING PREMIER: I agree with the interjection of the Minister for Lands. That was the only impression that could be gained from the speech of the member for Warren. But I will pass from that and will give the actual figures of properties purchased by the Crown up to the 30th June, 1947. They numbered 111 and were purchased at a cost of £717,834. Now I will give the figures of those properties purchased from the 30th June, 1947, to the 30th June, 1950. They numbered 423, or very nearly four times the previous total. They were purchased at a cost of £2,115,988.

So it will be seen that there was no loss of continuity, nor any tremendous lag in the purchase of properties as suggested by the hon. member when addressing himself to the motion. On the contrary, there was a continuity and an increase in the number of properties purchased; and, in the net result, of the 533 ex-servicemen actually in possession of their properties by August of this year, the whole of them had taken possession since the 30th June, 1947, at which date there were none. So that from whatever source the hon. gentleman secured his information—and be it noted that he persisted in quoting two quarterly periods in 1947 and 1948—they do not represent any resemblance to the overall position for the full period of three years which, I suggest, is the really important time in this regard. The hon. member also said—

In 1949 the R.S.L. said that progress in the purchase of properties continued to be disappointingly slow

and that only 136 properties of all kinds had been acquired out of the 2,038 offered.

I have made inquiries as to those figures from the chairman of the Land Settlement Board and the actual position for the year ended the 30th June, 1949, was that 1,673 rural properties were offered for sale by their owners, and not 2,038.

These included all types of properties—small poultry-farms, orchards, vegetable farms in the metropolitan and outer metropolitan area and also dairy and wheat and sheep farms which were too small or which, for other reasons, were unsuitable for war service land settlement. So it will be seen that there again the sources of information apparently possessed by the hon. member were such as not to lead him to the actual facts but some distance away from them, and in addition, probably to mislead him as much as, in the net result, they might have misled this House.

Some comment was also made by the hon. gentleman about the changed system with regard to the inspection of properties prior to sale. The original scheme, I am advised, was that inspections of properties were made by Commonwealth and State officers separately, but under the present Administration steps were taken to ensure that Commonwealth and State officials carried out inspections together. They having agreed on the suitability of a property, it was recommended for purchase. Of course, no property was recommended for purchase—nor could it be under the arrangement between the Commonwealth and State, in which the Commonwealth has what might be called a controlling interest—before it had been valued by the Chief Valuer of the Taxation Department, who was the only person acceptable in that capacity to the Commonwealth.

It therefore seems to me that a lot of inaccurate information has been made available to the hon. member in regard to this matter. In the course of his address, he expatiated upon the board being a rubber stamp, and indicated that in these days of high land values graft can occur unless the acquisition of land is properly controlled. He also stated definitely that there was lack of control. Quite apart from the fact that the personnel of the Land Settlement Board should be some warranty against any possibility of graft, I suggest to the House that the management in recent days and recent years, under the very capable control of the present chairman, has shown outstanding evidence of ability to control, to make decisions and to avoid differences of opinion with the Commonwealth, all of which are attributes invaluable in a scheme that has to be worked in conjunction with the Commonwealth and that cannot be worked without its approval from many aspects.

I might mention that the members of the Land Purchase Board are Mr. G. K. Baron Hay, chairman; Mr. W. V. Fyfe, Surveyor General; Mr. V. L. Steffanoni, Chief Valuer of the Taxation Department; Mr. W. L. Devitt, retired valuer of the Taxation Department; Mr. A. R. Barrett, farmer and until recently chairman of the Narrogin Road Board, and still a member of the Land Settlement Board; Mr. E. A. Millar, farmer and member of the Land Settlement Board; Mr. E. C. Chambers, farmer and representative of the R.S.L., and Mr. D. Lyon, retired farmer and country president of the R.S.L.

Mr. Hoar: Yes, and very few of those men know what is going on.

The ACTING PREMIER: That is so much nonsense.

The Minister for Lands: It is absolute nonsense. Every property is brought under their notice.

Mr. Hoar: It is nothing of the sort.

The ACTING PREMIER: No property is purchased unless it has been inspected by at least one member of the Land Settlement Board.

Mr. Hoar: That is what I said.

The ACTING PREMIER: And such member is usually accompanied by the Commonwealth representative. Subsequently, the Chief Valuer inspects the property and places his value on it. The Commonwealth will not agree unless the Chief Valuer makes a recommendation as to the purchase of the property. It should be borne in mind that while at least one member of the board makes the inspection, very frequently more than one member is present and, quite apart from that, a Commonwealth representative is there as well.

The hon. member also referred in his speech to the work being done in the tobacco industry in the Manjimup district. He appeared to me to be critical in that respect. As everyone knows, in the years prior to 1947—for reasons that I do not propose to try to assess and in regard to which I do not intend to offer any criticism—there was a continuing falling off in the production of tobacco in that district. Production at one time reached a peak of about 1,000,000lb. per annum, but fell, in the course of a few years, to a quarter of that total, or thereabouts. It was obviously desirable that production should be resuscitated to whatever extent was possible, and so the scheme to which the hon. member referred was put in hand and prepared with all possible safeguards. The hon. member apparently understood that there were 100 people concerned, but I am informed that the number was but 60.

Mr. Hoar: The Government stated that there were to be 100 farms eventually.

The ACTING PREMIER: That may be so.

Mr. Hoar: That is what I said.

The ACTING PREMIER: That, again, was not made clear. I do not wish to misunderstand the hon. member, but it appeared to me that he was referring to the number already employed or affected under the existing scheme. Suitable land was selected by the Tobacco Adviser—who is surely as competent as is anybody for that job—and sheds and seed-beds were constructed on permanent modern lines under the advice of the Department of Agriculture. The applicants were given 12 months' practical training and it was considered that a decent living could be made and commitments met on a maximum of 10 acres. I do not think anyone will deny that that district is as suitable as any in Western Australia for this purpose, and so I presume that no exception will be taken in that regard—the venue of this set-up.

It was contemplated, as to sidelines, that passion vines, poultry and pig-farming might possibly be utilised in a small way to supplement, if necessary, the earnings from tobacco. The State average production last year was over 800lb. per acre—I am informed—and at the last sale 425,587lb. of tobacco realised £105,500, or an average of 59.55d. the maximum price obtained being 143d. per lb. It would be assumed that these ex-servicemen who were taken into this scheme, having been set up on good land and under well-advised conditions, could obtain a living something more than the average and, while costs have increased and labour always presents a difficulty, as it does in many industries apart from the field of primary production—

Mr. Hoar: The scheme will break down on that basis.

The ACTING PREMIER: I would suggest that that is a matter that can be gone into and that possibly some relief can be afforded. There are many schemes besides that which will break down for lack of sufficient or efficient labour, in Western Australia and elsewhere, unless we are very careful. That aspect of the matter could be examined, and some effort made to assist in that regard. However, the basis of the scheme was that, on the anticipated average prices, it should be possible for those men to meet all commitments and make a reasonable living off from five to 10 acres of production.

Mr. Hoar: Not on five acres. The commitments cannot be met on less than ten acres.

The ACTING PREMIER: It is the opinion of the Tobacco Adviser that the leaf from these properties will probably bring an average of 7s. per lb.

Mr. Hoar: That is on today's prices.

The ACTING PREMIER: Of course. Everything is being worked out on today's prices.

Mr. Hoar: But they will not last.

The ACTING PREMIER: Is it not time to jump that fence when one reaches it? For how long are prices to be fixed only at a very much lower level?

Mr. Hoar: Does the Minister know that the price is fixed at 3s. 6d. a lb?

The ACTING PREMIER: No, I do not, but I understood that it was based on 59d. a lb.

Mr. Hoar: It was based on 3s. 6d. a lb.

The ACTING PREMIER: I daresay, at the then costs, the figures on which it was based would have been fairly accurate, but I have already noted that forced costs enter into it and not only in the tobacco industry, either.

Mr. Hoar: You have not answered my last question. No man can grow 10 acres.

The ACTING PREMIER: Of course, as I said a moment ago, the labour question is undoubtedly a problem, but surely we are not going to condemn a scheme which is confronted with the same difficulties as various other schemes, not only in this State but also in other parts of Australia. The complaint is in the shortage of labour and in that I would like to take steps to relieve the hon. member's mind because I agree with him, but he now seeks to criticise the idea of the scheme because he has discovered the difficulty lies in the provision of labour.

Mr. Hoar: It always was.

The ACTING PREMIER: I think the hon. gentleman seeks perfection in this matter which he could not have achieved himself if he had been given the opportunity.

The Minister for Lands: The country is full of expert advisers.

Mr. Hoar: Yes, and look where we are!

The Minister for Lands: If we took the advice of everyone we would be in the rat house.

The ACTING PREMIER: I am surprised to hear that the hon. gentleman thinks the scheme is too ambitious when I realise the ambitions he has for the district. I should imagine that the complaint of the hon. member would be that not enough is being done instead of too much.

The Minister for Lands: Does the member for Warren remember addressing the growers and telling them it was only an experiment and that they were being experimented upon?

Mr. Hoar: Yes.

The Minister for Lands: What wonderful advice to give those young fellows!

Mr. Hoar: I do not like the idea of their being experimented upon now.

The Minister for Lands: What nonsense!

The ACTING PREMIER: As a matter of fact, I had a talk with one of the young people who had been engaged in that part of the State under the ex-servicemen's training scheme. I must confess that at that time I knew little or nothing about what was going on—this was five or six months ago. The man was convinced that the prospects awaiting him when he took possession of the land he was to work for himself—as he was then about to do—were excellent. He was thoroughly satisfied with the bona fides of the scheme, the sufficiency of the training, the reasonableness of the provisions that had been made and the assistance which he had been given.

Mr. Hoar: That is good!

The ACTING PREMIER: The only difficulty which he saw, and which I have already been prepared to concede to the hon. gentleman, was that of labour. However, in his case I am convinced that he was prepared to even try and face up to that difficulty and felt he could do so. I do not think that this person whom I had never met before and who came upon me out of the blue, as it were, was anything more than an average intelligent citizen who had sized up the pros and cons of this venture and had come to the conclusion that it was a reasonably good proposition for him to take on, and that it was going to bear out the expectation that he had formed when he first entered upon it.

Mr. J. Hegney: Those ideas fell through before. They became very enthusiastic, but the ideas fell through.

The ACTING PREMIER: Of course, the member for Middle Swan would doubtless have us engage in a policy of complete despair. He would say that because something is not a success then do not try anything.

Mr. J. Hegney: The same thing applied to Queensland as to the growing of tobacco leaf, and the project fell through.

The ACTING PREMIER: What happened in Queensland does not necessarily have to happen in the Manjimup district.

Mr. J. Hegney: Yes, but still—

The ACTING PREMIER: The people in Manjimup are determined to work reasonably hard—I think that requirement is necessary in most primary industries—and if they are prepared to do so a success can be made of their industry. I do not doubt that the people concerned in this venture—as with the young man to whom I talked—are prepared to work extremely hard.

Mr. Hoar: They will, and will not grow more than four acres; that is the point. There is nothing against the scheme so far as I am concerned.

The ACTING PREMIER: Dealing again with ex-servicemen's settlement, the hon. member complained about the types of house which he said were quite below standard and that the people were living

in patched-up group houses. I have every reason to believe that this is undoubtedly a misleading statement, even where temporary accommodation has been provided by making use of existing cottages, because even in those cases every effort is made to make them as comfortable as possible by lining the structures and installing stoves, effecting repairs and the like. In some cases, cottages have been erected for the settlers and I think, so far from being told that patched-up group houses are, as it were, the common rule, the board concerned should be congratulated on the provisions that it has made in regard to the houses and buildings erected upon these properties. In 1947 practically no progress had been made in this direction and undoubtedly the difficulty of erecting houses in these outer areas is pretty great, especially if they are at all isolated from centres of considerable population. I am told that the Housing Commission, in 1948, did not receive a single tender in some cases and in others the prices were so far beyond economic figures that they could not be accepted. Of the 156 allotted properties in the South-West districts, 149 were occupied on the 30th June last and of those, 132 houses have been completed—

Mr. Hoar: New houses?

The ACTING PREMIER: —leaving 23 properties on which no permanent homes have been erected.

Mr. Hoar: Did you say they were new houses?

The ACTING PREMIER: I have been given to understand that they were new erections. The use of prefabricated houses has, of course, been indulged in considerably. They cost approximately £1,100 each.

Mr. Hoar: Are you referring to the wheat belt?

The ACTING PREMIER: No, the South-West areas. I think I might even be able to give the names of the centres.

Mr. Hoar: I wish you would.

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not wish to mislead the hon. member, so I will now make certain whether I have the names of the districts concerned. I thought I did have them at one stage.

Hon. A. H. Panton: It would take a good many pints of milk to make up £1,100.

The ACTING PREMIER: No, I have not the names of the centres. I can only say, the South-West district.

Mr. Hoar: It is a surprising thing that I have seen extremely few of them.

The ACTING PREMIER: Well, perhaps the 23 homes that are not completed are all in the hon. member's district; on that I cannot comfort him. I can only deal with this matter generally. I cannot go and make a personal inspection of each of the houses in the member's district, but it

may be that he is unfortunate enough to have the whole 23 uncompleted houses in his electorate. However, so far as my knowledge goes, that is the total number which have not been provided and these will be erected as quickly as possible. So it seems to me, as I have said earlier, I think that the operations of the Land Settlement Board in the last three years have been conspicuously satisfactory as compared with operations in some of the Eastern States of the Commonwealth, and in proportion to the numbers involved I am fairly convinced that, upon inquiry, every member of this House will find that they have been excellent indeed.

Hon. A. H. Panton: They had a good foundation to work upon.

The Minister for Lands: We have never denied that, you know.

The ACTING PREMIER: I am offering to the member for Leederville no criticism of his administration.

Hon. A. H. Panton: I am not suggesting that you are.

The ACTING PREMIER: The hon. member said that a good foundation had been laid and I know that he did a lot of hard work and I therefore do not seek to discredit him at all. What I seek to do today is to discredit some of the statements made by the member for Warren, either because he has been ill-informed or, alternatively, he did not trouble to inform himself sufficiently.

The Minister for Lands: I think the Commonwealth Taxation Department valuers want a conference with him, too.

Hon. A. H. Panton: The Commonwealth has been a pest in some way or other, ever since it started.

The ACTING PREMIER: I propose to turn for a moment to the few remarks made by the member for Melville concerning what I believe is known as the loebnitz needle.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I am more concerned with the vessel than the needle.

The ACTING PREMIER: In the course of his remarks the hon. member said:—

I want to know who recommended the purchase of this vessel, what it cost to buy, what it has cost since we have had it and what is the value of the work that it has done?

He also said:—

I desire to make a few comments about something concerning the Bunbury harbour development. About last November or December I read in the paper that the Government was purchasing a vessel, which is a rock-breaking craft, and the Government intended to use a loebnitz needle for the purpose of smashing up the basalt in Bunbury harbour.

Then the hon. gentleman went on to say—

This blunder—and I can call it nothing else—must have cost the taxpayers many thousands of pounds.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I would say, tens of thousands now.

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not know whether the Public Works Department is prepared to regard it as a blunder. I think it is still satisfied that both the vessel and the needle will perform the work that they are intended to do. I do know, however, in response to the first question, to which the hon. member wished to have an answer as to who recommended its purchase—I am speaking of the vessel—that it was recommended to his colleague, the member for Northam, by the Director of Works, and that hon. member approved of its purchase in 1946. So, while I am not prepared to enter into any criticism of the vessel—the member for Melville has done all that—I simply state the fact that if he wants to criticise, he can criticise the member for Northam.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: No, that is not what I said. I wanted to know who recommended the purchase of the vessel. Give us the answer to the rest of the question: What was the cost? What has been the cost to date? What work has it done to date?

The ACTING PREMIER: That is information which the hon. member will get from the file, but I propose to give some of it.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I hope I shall be able to get it, but if this file is like some of the other files, I doubt it.

The ACTING PREMIER: The total cost of the rock-breaking vessel, including £6,500 for the needle equipment and £2,000 for the purchase of the lighter hull, was approximately £29,000. The negotiations were approved on the 11th July, 1944, and the purchase of the vessel was approved on the 9th November, 1944. The procuring of this equipment for breaking up the basalt floor of sections of the Bunbury harbour had the unqualified support of Mr. Debenham, the Chief Engineer of the Maritime Board, Sydney, who visited Bunbury in this regard. The rock-breaking vessel has been used to determine the depth of rock levels at Bunbury in the proposed swinging basin and approach. Structural weaknesses in which foundations and other minor defects were revealed after three weeks of this type of work, and repairs were completed in the middle of May. The equipment has not yet been engaged on any actual rock-breaking at Bunbury. This work cannot be started until the overlying layer of clay is removed by bucket-dredge.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I say definitely that is not true. It would not work.

The ACTING PREMIER: The hon. member poses as an expert. As we move through the days, we find the hon. gentle-

man becoming an expert in this, that and the other. He is now an expert in rock-breaking the bottom of harbours.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I know the facts.

The ACTING PREMIER: I am afraid the hon. member knows only half of them, and based the rest of his case on supposition.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: It is of no use your prevaricating about this.

The ACTING PREMIER: I am not prevaricating.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Yes, you are.

The ACTING PREMIER: I have perused the file, and the hon. gentleman will be at liberty to disagree later on, but at this stage he is in no position to disagree.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Am I not?

The ACTING PREMIER: No, because the hon. member does not know the facts. He has had a letter from a gentleman named Roberts, the master of the craft. That letter is on the file, because he wrote to the Public Works Department as well. It will be seen that this gentleman was not giving very satisfactory service to the department, as the file will also disclose, and it would not have been very long before his services would have been terminated. That occurred months before the matter was mentioned in Parliament, and that is what the hon. member will find on the file when it comes forward, as it will do.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Is it on the file that the vessel never worked a full eight-hour shift?

The ACTING PREMIER: I have not memorised the contents of the file, but I doubt the statement as quoted by the hon. member.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Is it not a fact that the vessel is laid up at present?

The ACTING PREMIER: No, it cannot be so—

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Of course not.

The ACTING PREMIER: —because the clay overburden is still there, and if the needle is put into the clay, it will stick there.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Is it not that the department overlooked the fact that the clay would stick to the needle and that the weight would be too great for the vessel?

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not know what the hon. member is seeking to make out of all this. If he wishes to criticise the acquisition of this machinery, I have told him to whom he should address his observations.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That is so, but I do not agree.

The ACTING PREMIER: If he wishes to criticise the effectiveness of the plant, it comes down to the same thing. If the plant was not going to be of any use, why

should it have been obtained? I hold the view that it was good and is still good, and that it was a proper purchase to make.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You are due for a rude awakening.

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not think any member will accept the opinion of the hon. member before that of the Director of Works.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Tell us what work it has done.

Mr. Bovell: When was it purchased?

The ACTING PREMIER: I have already given the year, 1944.

The Minister for Works: Does the member for Melville think his colleague would have made any more thorough investigations, bearing in mind that the same experts were there to advise him?

The ACTING PREMIER: My last word on this subject is that the vessel will be allotted to its original task, that is, rock-breaking, according to schedule.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: About 12 months behind schedule.

The ACTING PREMIER: It took about four years to get the needle from Tasmania. Probably the hon. member is not aware of that. There were difficulties in getting any ship to carry it direct, as well as other delays of that nature, and it did not arrive here until three or four years later, so that, whatever its original schedule might have been, that was departed from. When I said it did work according to schedule, I meant the work required of it.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: If the Minister knows something about it, he might say whether it is not a fact that the two berths, which the vessel was bought to prepare, have been prepared without it.

The ACTING PREMIER: I cannot answer that; I do not propose to answer anything of which I have no knowledge. The member for Guildford-Midland in the course of his remarks complained of the treatment accorded to a deputation from certain of the trade unions concerned which waited on the Minister for Railways in regard to operations in the Midland Junction Workshops. If the hon. member were to be believed, it would appear that these men comprising the deputation were treated in a very cavalier manner indeed.

Mr. Brady: That is so.

The ACTING PREMIER: Was the hon. member present?

Mr. Brady: Yes.

The ACTING PREMIER: My information is that both parties said all they desired to say, but that does not imply improper treatment. The Minister for Railways has assured me that nothing occurred to which the slightest exception could be taken. It was a meeting on the

basis of man-to-man, and in such circumstances straight speaking is expected of both sides. The observations of the hon. member indicated that matters went far beyond that, but I do not think there is any justification for the statement. I am convinced that the Minister for Railways would not permit any inappropriate treatment of men who had come forward to discuss the problems of their industry, whether he agreed with them or not. The Minister for Railways has taken the strongest exception to the remarks of the member for Guildford-Midland and has assured me that nothing took place to warrant them. The discussion was frank and, as I have stated, it was on a man-to-man basis. Everyone said what he thought, as he was entitled to do, in reasonable language.

Mr. Marshall: I wish we had the Minister for Railways here, for then we would have something to say to him. Have not you anyone here with the requisite ability to hold those portfolios?

The ACTING PREMIER: I shall have to ask for notice of that question.

Mr. Marshall: But you seem to be the spokesman for the whole lot of them.

The ACTING PREMIER: Perhaps the hon. member would like the whole of the front Bench to address him. I seem to recall that in years gone by, when the hon. member's party was in office, no Minister offered to reply to the criticism of the Opposition. I am satisfied that we, when in Opposition, said a great deal less than has been said on this occasion. As I stated earlier, we have had a plethora of words.

Another point the member for Guildford-Midland made was that of the utilisation of the railway workshops for new construction. I wish to state quite plainly that the Government has no objection whatever to that, but, on the contrary will use the workshops for new construction when that can be done. First of all, however, we have to consider the vast amount of work entailed in the maintenance of the existing rolling-stock in order to keep it on the road. During the first fortnight of July, this maintenance work accounted for 39.1 per cent. of all the work, and for the second fortnight of July, for 40.4 per cent., and I have been assured that this is a fair average of the percentage that goes into maintenance work. Construction work, including the manufacture of new components, and new work for the Chief Civil Engineer and the Chief Traffic Manager, etc., occupied in the first fortnight of July 53.4 per cent., and in the second fortnight 50.9 per cent., which would leave a remainder of 7.5 per cent. for the first period and 8.7 per cent. for the second period, made up of absenteeism or leave.



When the Royal Commission inquired into the railway workshops late in 1947, it came to the conclusion that they were definitely insufficiently equipped to carry out the work they were intended to do. It will be found in the Commission's report that the workshops were inefficient and inadequate, and that a great deal of expenditure for new machinery would have to be undertaken to fit them to carry out the work they were intended to do.

As members know, it is not easy in these times to get machinery, but some £600,000 worth has been ordered during the period of the present Administration, and some of it is arriving. That is only a first instalment of what is required to bring the Midland Junction Workshops to a state where they will be able effectively to undertake all the work required of them. Therefore it is expected that by 1953 the Midland Junction Workshops will be able to undertake the greater part of the new construction that is required. Supposing these schemes, as is expected, come to fruition, there will, of course, be virtually no importation necessary, but in the meantime, and while this vast quantity of maintenance has to be done and contracts let for ordinary rollingstock, not only to the Midland Workshops but also to outside firms, it is quite apparent that from somewhere there must be got sufficient machinery to enable the railways to carry out their functions.

So, while we are anxious to see the Midland Workshops do the maximum amount of new construction possible, it is quite clear that the facts are against their being able at once to undertake any considerably greater quantity of that work than they are doing. But when they are rehabilitated—and, in fact, a start has been made along those lines already—and the recommendations of the Royal Commissioners are carried into effect, the result will be that the workshops will be enabled to do what I believe they were originally intended to do, and possibly be able to carry out the services that they once performed in simpler times.

Mr. Brady: The employees complain that they cannot get new work, but private enterprise can.

The ACTING PREMIER: As I pointed out just now, taking an average period in July, about 40 per cent. of the staff was on maintenance, 50 per cent. on new work and eight per cent. on leave or absent. That does not seem to be unreasonable when one takes into consideration all the factors involved, namely, the extreme difficulty in regard to rollingstock and, secondly, the obvious and paramount importance of keeping what we have in running order. That, surely, is one of the most important things that can be done by any workshops. The more our rollingstock, which is not modern, is allowed to deteriorate, the worse the position must become. Surely it is the

responsibility of the Government workshops to look after it pending the time when it can be replaced and a better position achieved.

Mr. Brady: The tradesmen will not stay because they will not do the old work.

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not think the tradesmen's argument is very strong, nor is it induced by that cause. I think it is probably the more attractive conditions, by way of amenities and the like, that are being offered elsewhere. It is a matter of great regret to me that the Midland Workshops do not have provision for the amenities which I believe they should carry. Private enterprise, in some cases, can show those workshops the way in which facilities can be provided for the workers. But that problem, in my view, could or should have been tackled at a time when labour and building materials were easy of acquisition.

Mr. J. Hegney: The only difficulty then was that the money could not be found.

The ACTING PREMIER: Money had to be provided for some purposes, or the railways could not have been maintained at all.

Mr. Brady: I understand the State Housing Commission has a very high priority for amenities.

The ACTING PREMIER: I am referring to the time before the State Housing Commission had any priorities at all. A big staff was maintained, and I think it would have been possible—

Mr. J. Hegney: Retrenchments took place.

The ACTING PREMIER: —for some of the men to have been employed on providing amenities for themselves. However, as the hon. member knows, an attempt is now being made to afford some amenities there. In my view, the quicker the whole situation is improved, the better. I have looked around one or two privately held factories in the metropolitan area—of course, not as big as the one we are now discussing—where it is clearly demonstrated that the provision of amenities not only creates a better feeling between the employer and the employee and affords, very often, opportunities for mixing together at leisure periods but, in my opinion, gives the men the chance of doing a better day's work.

Mr. J. Hegney: Schemes for amenities were only developed during the war period.

The ACTING PREMIER: Other countries have advanced a long way during the last 20 or 30 years.

Mr. J. Hegney: In Australia it was mostly during the war years.

The ACTING PREMIER: Yes, but outside Australia they were conceived long before. It must be at least 20 years—because I was not in Parliament at the time and I have been here more than 15 years—

since I read a book detailing the work being done in the provision of amenities in certain factories in Europe and the United States. It is a subject that was much written about in Australia by various people, even as long ago as that. It is true that the public conscience has grown on the subject since, or during the war, but nevertheless there were ample opportunity and reason for it to have been considered prior to that even if not upon the large scale that we now contemplate.

Hon. A. H. Panton: I think the munitions factories started the provision of amenities in Australia.

The ACTING PREMIER: May be.

Mr. J. Hegney: You could not boil the billy 20 years ago without the boss kicking it over, whereas today the men sit down and have their morning and afternoon tea in comfort. You could not smoke either. Quite a transformation has taken place in the last 20 years.

The ACTING PREMIER: They were too mean, if that were so. I would like now to make some comment on a point raised by the Leader of the Opposition. I have extracted some short remarks from his address. He said that it was very difficult to get more than a meagre portion of money spent in the North-West; that not £100,000 a year has been spent on roads there in any full year, and that, he says, is a fact. I propose to give the hon. gentleman some details regarding expenditure in the North-West and the Kimberleys—areas virtually north of the 26th parallel—indicating the expenditure during the last three years compared with that in the period from the commencement of the Federal Aid Road Agreement in 1926 to June, 1947. The figures are as follows:—

1947-48	.....	£118,830
1948-49	.....	£132,179
1949-50	.....	£222,941
Total for last three years		£473,950

So it is not a fact that £100,000 has not been spent in any full year.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: How are those figures made up?

The ACTING PREMIER: Unfortunately I cannot itemise them, but only give the totals as they have been given to me. The total expenditure for the 21 years from 1926-27 to 1926-47 was £517,900, or £44,000 more than in the last three years only. An indication of the extent of the activities of the department can be gained from the following comments concerning the operations of major plant owned by the department as at the 30th June:—

Large diesel graders—Approximately one-third in the North-West.

Bulldozers and angledozer—Approximately one-quarter in the North-West.

Tractors—Approximately one-third in the North-West.

The hon. gentleman also made some references to the road from Northampton to Carnarvon. The Main Roads Department informs me that a recent traffic census, taken over a period of two weeks, shows that the number of vehicles using that road is an average of 15 a day. On account of the whaling station, and other things, many hundreds of tons of materials have been carted over that road. The operations of this heavy cartage have naturally had an adverse effect on the road, but in recent months quite substantial construction and maintenance work has been carried out, and at the present time the road is in reasonably good condition.

Expenditure during the past three years on construction and maintenance between Northampton and Carnarvon has been approximately £63,000, and about £10,000 of the authorised funds remains to be expended. I hardly think, therefore, that it can be said, with justification, as was stated by the Leader of the Opposition, that the road today is being allowed to crumble and decay. The member for Hannans referred to a ready-made house at Bayswater which was incomplete—"holding fire," I believe he said—because of the absence of plaster.

I asked the secretary of the State Housing Commission to obtain a report from the builders on this question, and I propose to read the relevant portions of the letter, which will indicate that the reason the hon. member gave was not by any means the cause which was responsible for the delay in the completion of these premises. It was quite a different one, mainly associated with weather conditions, and, so far from there being undue delay in the erection of these particular dwellings, they were probably completed with much more expedition than is usual in these days. The builders wrote, under date the 29th August, 1950, as follows:—

With further reference to telephonic conversation between yourself and the writer regarding ready made brick and tiled five-room house now being constructed on Lot 281 at the corner of Kelvin and Stone-streets, Maylands, and which the State Housing Commission has approved being sold to H. A. McCulloch, Esq., M.L.A., we note your inquiry as to the delay thereon and in reply would advise as follows:—

State Housing Commission permit for this job was issued on 14/3/50 (Your RMH 0083 for group of five houses) and construction began towards the end of May.

The foundations, brick work, roofing timbers and guttering, etc., were completed according to schedule but a

delay of several weeks took place whilst waiting for roofing tiles, delivery of which to the job began on 27/7/50. This delay, of course, was occasioned by circumstances quite beyond our control.

That was the delay in obtaining roofing tiles. It continues—

During the time the job was standing waiting for the roofing tiles, the walls caught the full impact of some very wet weather and became thoroughly soaked. This being the case, we then, of necessity, had to wait until the walls were properly dried before the plasterers could begin their work, and when a fortnight ago Mr. McCulloch inquired as to the reason for the delay, he was apprised of the true position as above and advised that for his own benefit it would be best to let the walls dry out thoroughly before going ahead with the plastering, as, if the plastering were gone on with before the walls were properly dry it would only mean further delay later on and not such a good finish. We might add here that even if Mr. McCulloch had said to go on we would not have done so as we would not have been able to give a first class job.

So far as we can see at the time of writing this letter it would appear that the walls will have dried enough to make a start some time this week.

In conclusion, we would like to point out that reference to your records will disclose that all the houses so far built and controlled by us under your ready-made house scheme have been finished in what we consider a very reasonable time considering the difficult position so far as the supply of labour and materials is concerned. Furthermore, we venture to suggest that by the time Mr. McCulloch's house is finished, even allowing for the delay that has already taken place, the job will still be finished in a reasonable time, considering that it was only started towards the end of May last.

I have taken the trouble to read that because I really think the member for Hannans, who apparently knew all about these premises, must have been aware that what he said was not true. I can conceive of no reason why he should have made the statement he did. He must have been aware that it was not because of the shortage of plaster that this place was not completed, unless the contractor—who had no reason to tell the Housing Commission that he had explained the position to the hon. member—is the untruthful party. That, of course, I cannot believe. Why should the hon. gentleman endeavour to make this House believe that a reason, totally unconnected with the real reason, was the one which had delayed the completion of the premises in which apparently—and quite rightly—he is personally

interested? I cannot fathom it for a moment. Therefore, I take him to task on the subject, although it is unfortunate that he is not in the Chamber at the moment.

During the course of his further remarks the member for Melville dealt at some length with the question of the Claremont Hospital for the Insane. He expressed the opinion that the Government had taken a most improper action in prosecuting before the police courts the hospital attendants who were the subject of reference in the Royal Commissioner's report. He contended that that line of action was not a proper one. I entirely disagree with him, as do other people—I shall mention who in a moment. The Royal Commissioner's report left the position in regard to those people—if I remember aright—as follows:—"They did it but do not charge them with it because the responsibility belongs somewhere else." I cannot conceive of a more unsatisfactory state of affairs than that.

According to the Commissioner these men had actually been guilty, or had actually committed these practices of which we could not approve, but as the responsibility belonged somewhere else, the Commissioner did not recommend any charges being brought against them. I have a proper respect for the Royal Commissioner but to have left the matter there would, to my way of thinking, have been very unwise and improper treatment so far as the employees were concerned. I was of the opinion that the charges should be laid against them to allow the men to stand trial. The net result was that all but one were acquitted. As I said a moment ago, I was not the only person who thought that. In "The West Australian" of the 11th August, 1950, appears a letter from one M. Scott, secretary of the Male and Female Mental Nurses' Union. The letter is as follows:—

In "The West Australian" of Wednesday, August 2, Mr. Tonkin, M.L.A., is reported as having criticised the Government for prosecuting attendants at the Claremont Mental Hospital contrary to the advice of Judge Curlewis. May I point out that it is the considered opinion of the Mental Nurses' Union that the Government acted correctly in doing so. In no other way could men who had been alleged guilty—in our view on very meagre evidence—be given a chance to clear their names.

As is well known, four out of the five men prosecuted were exonerated completely. Throughout the proceedings of the Royal Commission and since there has been no division of opinion whatever between the medical and nursing staffs on the issues involved. My union would be very sorry indeed to see any such alleged division used as a political issue.

Mr. McCulloch: Is that the fellow who told you about Kelvin-street?

The ACTING PREMIER: No, that man was the contractor, and he put his story into writing. I have the letter here.

Mr. McCulloch: Ask the Minister for Housing; he will tell you about it.

The ACTING PREMIER: I received it from the Housing Commission. I did not seek the information from him myself.

Mr. McCulloch: He may be another "Scott."

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not think the hon. member heard what I had to say. Therefore, he is probably only half-informed, as no doubt he was when he made his speech. The people most concerned in this business disagreed with the member for Melville. Therefore, I think I can leave the question of the Claremont Mental Hospital.

Mr. Graham: It is the easy way out.

Mr. Marshall: Are you the Minister who said that the Commissioner's report was unbalanced and illogical?

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: No, that was the Minister for Health.

The ACTING PREMIER: I might have said that of the hon. member. Now I will turn to a few more remarks made by the member for Melville and they have reference to the teaching profession.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: He is getting a good hearing.

The ACTING PREMIER: The hon. member has some attainments; nobody has ever denied it, least of all me, and one of them is that he usually makes himself crystal clear as to what he is grumbling about, even if the facts upon which he relies are not altogether accurate.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: That is a left-handed compliment.

The ACTING PREMIER: I cannot always help that. I used to find myself in the same position when I was over there. One gets half the story and not all of it always.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I gave you the whole story.

The ACTING PREMIER: I am not being uncomplimentary to the hon. member when I suggest that sometimes his facts are only half accurate.

Hon. A. H. Panton: He usually convinces himself.

The ACTING PREMIER: It is comparatively easy to convince oneself.

Hon. A. H. Panton: No, it is not as easy as that.

The ACTING PREMIER: I think the hon. member is an expert at it, and once or twice he has convinced me.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Once or twice he should have done so.

The ACTING PREMIER: No, I said that he has.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: He should have—on transport matters and such things.

The ACTING PREMIER: Once or twice he has convinced me, although I will not say when, on what occasion or on what particular subject. The fact remains that he has, and I think even I could say that once or twice I have convinced him.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I believe you have.

The ACTING PREMIER: After that small attempt at back-scratching we will now proceed with the subject matter of the discussion.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: It is a mutual admiration society.

The ACTING PREMIER: Yes. The member for Melville said that he and the member for Cottesloe know that there is a shortage of teachers but the Minister does not.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The Teachers' Union said so, too.

The ACTING PREMIER: I prefer to confine it to this House.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I thought you would.

The ACTING PREMIER: It is good enough for the moment. I would like to ask the hon. member a question. If he had 200 more teachers today, where would he put them?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I would do exactly as the teachers suggest.

The ACTING PREMIER: What is that?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Employ two teachers where we now employ one in cases where classes have a large number of children. In some instances the classes are up to 70 children.

The ACTING PREMIER: And put two in the one room? That is far too many.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I would divide the class but use the same room. What is wrong with staggering the hours if necessary?

The ACTING PREMIER: It would not be very favourably received, I fear.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: It has been done before, in England. The employment of more teachers than you have now would alleviate the position considerably, so far as the present teachers are concerned.

The ACTING PREMIER: I am afraid I do not agree with the hon. member; because as the circumstances exist, there would either be two teachers for the one class at the same time, or, alternatively, very widely staggered hours. Both of those circumstances would be completely unsatisfactory, and, in many cases, impracticable.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Surely the Minister knows that there is nothing new in having two teachers in the same room at the same time. That has happened over the last 30 or 40 years.

The ACTING PREMIER: And the more it has gone on, the more unsatisfactory it has been found.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: It has gone on, and it is better than having all the children in the charge of one teacher.

The ACTING PREMIER: It should not have gone on, and I do not know that it has before. Most of the teachers with whom I have discussed the question take a view contrary to that of the hon. member. They are teachers who are teaching at the moment and in some cases facing up to such difficulties as the hon. member knows exist.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Do not forget that I am not speaking without personal experience of it myself.

The ACTING PREMIER: I know; but other times, other manners. As I have said before, the aim of the department and myself is to provide (a) sufficient accommodation to break down these large schools, and (b) sufficient teachers to teach at them. The one is as difficult as the other at present.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: If you do not train teachers now, you will not have them in three or four years' time.

The ACTING PREMIER: As I have said before, there is no class vacant nor is there any classroom or small school without a teacher. So the only alternative, supposing we had a substantial addition to the number of persons employed, is a very undesirable one, not only in my opinion but also in the opinion of those better qualified to judge than I am.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Surely the Minister knows that even now, when classes are not over-large in infant rooms, monitors are placed there to help the teacher in charge!

The ACTING PREMIER: I know that very well.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That relieves the teacher of the strain of having to control and teach over-large classes. If you do not train teachers now, you will not have them in three or four years' time.

The ACTING PREMIER: We are quite aware of that.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Then why not do something about it?

The ACTING PREMIER: We are doing quite a lot of things, which I dare say I shall discuss with the hon. member when the departmental Estimates are brought down. I have some figures for the information of the hon. member, who very shrewdly suggested that there had been a diminution, or lag, or wastage in the supply of teachers in the last five years amounting to an average of 58 per annum.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I took the figures from the "Teachers' Journal."

The ACTING PREMIER: If they were true, they would disclose a very serious state of affairs. I shall also show presently that what lag has occurred had accumulated before I entered the department.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That is impossible.

The ACTING PREMIER: It is not impossible.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You must admit that you have fewer teachers in training this year than there were before.

The ACTING PREMIER: I shall not admit anything of the sort for one moment. I intend to make my speech in my own way, and not have it made for me by the hon. member. I say that the period 1945-46 was mainly responsible for the wastage or lag in teaching staff quoted by the hon. member as having occurred in the last five years, but it does not amount to an average of 58 per annum.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Having said that, prove it!

The ACTING PREMIER: I will give the hon. member the figures, which have been carefully taken out and, on the memorandum supplied to me, are subscribed, "I have had the latest returns checked with the following results. E. C. O'Mahoney, Chief Administrative Officer." I hope the hon. member will not suggest that, in giving these figures, I am deliberately misleading the House, because, if he does, I shall not be the one who is doing it. The figures are—

	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
Resignations ..	182	162	155	128	113
Retirements ..	20	36	21	22	20
	202	198	176	150	133

Appointments ex Teachers' College .. ..	59	69	159	213	228
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Wastage or excess .. ..	-143	-129	-17	+63	+95
Average wastage .. ..		-289			
		+158			

—131 over five years  
equals 26 per annum.

If the minus of 289 were spread over three years 1945, 1946 and 1947, there would be an average annual minus of 96.3 per annum. Obviously, the hon. gentleman's quotation of the figures was shrewd, because it indicated to the public a lag over all the five years, and gave no indication of any plusage in the ultimate two years. He created the impression that throughout the time there had been a growing deficiency. The figures I have given indicate that that is not so.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Will not you be slipping back this year?

The ACTING PREMIER: It is anticipated that there will be a plusage, but a small one.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: And in the following year a smaller one still.

The ACTING PREMIER: Many difficulties confront us, as the hon. member well knows. I think I am right in saying that the Director holds the opinion that we are getting a fair proportion of the students who pass the leaving standard, and that one of the chief possibilities of improving our recruitment, short of reducing our standards, is to encourage those who reach the junior certificate to proceed with their studies on some understanding that they might enter the teaching profession. It is suggested that some contribution might be made, quite apart from reclassifications and the like. When I stated that we had not been dilatory in giving consideration to these matters, it was a perfectly true statement of fact. At present, although there are 335 students in the Training College, the number of monitors who have been recruited and have entered the Training College this year has not shown the decline in percentage expected. The decline is in the C.R.T.S. trainees. The Director expressed himself in the circumstances as being reasonably well satisfied with the recruitment.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: How many monitors did you get this year?

The ACTING PREMIER: I have not the figures, unfortunately. Speaking from memory, I think the number is 156, but I do not like to quote such figures from memory.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I think it would be less than 100.

The ACTING PREMIER: I said that I did not like to give the figures, because I am not certain of them. From this aspect, however, I think that the hon. member can, to some degree, at least, stand corrected. Now let me deal with some of the questions of outsize classes. Admittedly, there are a number of large classes, and the enrolment at State schools has increased by well over 5,000—probably it would be 6,000—in the last three years. That increase represents about double the anticipated figure. If we divide the number 3,000 by 50, we get 60 extra classes required to accommodate them, over and above those we expected to get from the normal population and on top of those that were overcrowded or urgently in need of additions or remodelling. Consequently, though the hon. member was inclined to ridicule the fact that the Governor's Speech made reference to the amount of money spent, I claim that, even in these days, it is some index to the work being done.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: It is a very unreliable guide.

The ACTING PREMIER: I can see that it is not a very reliable guide, but I still claim that it is some index to the position. If we had spent no money, obviously

we would have done nothing. Therefore, if we spent £1,000,000, we must have done something that cost £1,000,000. Any person of average intelligence would grasp, from the fact that a sum of money was mentioned, that at least something had been done, and he would not be wrong, because something considerable has been done in the course of the last three years, and I trust that something even greater will be done in the course of the next three years. That is the situation. I do not want the hon. member to misunderstand me. The total was quoted as an indication of what had been done and I do not think, remembering his remarks as I do, that the observations made in the Governor's Speech placed education in a position any more inferior than did the observations in the Lieut.-Governor's Speech when the hon. member was Minister for Education, because Heaven knows they were scanty enough. If the hon. member would like me to read them, I shall oblige.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You are Deputy Premier and I was a very junior Minister.

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not think it is the importance of the Minister that matters, or that mattered in the hon. member's case. I fancy it was the importance of the subject that counted, and the subject was just as important in 1946 as it was in 1949.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You were able to get more into the Governor's Speech than I could.

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not think that is so. In the 1946 Speech, this is what His Excellency said—

It is hoped that the necessary facilities will soon be available to give effect to the decision to raise the school-leaving age. Recent improvements in education include the payment of allowances to afford country children greater educational opportunity and the employment of itinerant teachers to supervise the work of correspondence pupils. No less than 150 bus services now convey pupils of former one-teacher schools to large country centres where they are afforded opportunities of a wider and more liberal education. More than 6,000 ex-servicemen are receiving vocational training in the State's technical institutions.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I think it reads pretty well.

The ACTING PREMIER: I shall deal with the matter further when the House resumes.

*Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.*

The ACTING PREMIER: I was referring to the Lieut.-Governor's Speech in 1946, and I was showing that it did not contain anything in particular about education which would lead the member for

Melville to suggest that the one in 1950 was so totally inadequate. I will now return to the Lieut.-Governor's Speech of 1945. I find that the reference there to education, which was smaller, was as follows:—

Plans are well advanced to give effect to the decision to raise the school-leaving age and also undertake the educational rehabilitation of discharged service personnel. Technical education is constantly being expanded and valuable service is being rendered by the Vocational Guidance Bureau. Facilities for education in agricultural subjects are to be extended and area schools will be established in suitable localities.

That was all.

The Minister for Lands: He said he was only a junior Minister.

The ACTING PREMIER: Maybe he was, but it was not a junior subject. I suggest that the importance of the subject should transcend any position of the individual.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: I think the whole Speech was very short in 1945 on account of war conditions.

The ACTING PREMIER: I want to go back a bit further and read what was said by the Acting Minister for Education in this House at that time, when the Hon. W. H. Kitson was Minister for Education in another place. The Acting Minister for Education on the 6th October, 1943, dealt with the Education Act Amendment Bill, which proposed to alter the law concerning kindergartens and to provide for the raising of the school-leaving age to 15 years. This was on the 6th October, 1943, a matter of seven years ago next month, and it was almost two years before the cessation of active hostilities in the recent world war. At page 1102 of "Hansard" of that year appears the following:—

The plans already formed by the Education Department will, when completed, give it the right to inaugurate this measure—

That was the measure for the raising of the school-leaving age to 15—

—in certain portions of the State within a short space of time. Other areas will have to wait a little longer on account of the shortage of both manpower and material. Members are aware that we cannot immediately put into operation a proposition of this magnitude just now.

I would like the House to pay particular attention to this phraseology. It is well worth repeating. It says that plans already formed would enable a certain thing to be done in a short space of time. Then we turn to the Lieut.-Governor's Speech of 1945 and the only paragraph regarding education, which I have already read, starts off—

Plans are well advanced to give effect to the decision to raise the school-leaving age and also undertake the educational rehabilitation of discharged service personnel.

Members will note that at that particular date, which was the 26th July, 1945, plans were well advanced to give effect to the decision to raise the school-leaving age. On the 25th July, 1946, the following year, the paragraph on education begins—

It is hoped that the necessary facilities will soon be available to give effect to the decision to raise the school-leaving age.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The Minister went one better. He said he would do it—in 1947.

The ACTING PREMIER: I thought the hon. member might fall into the trap I laid for him. I was waiting for him to say that. To what conclusion does he suppose I could come in trying to study the affairs of this country—if, as was stated, plans were well advanced in 1945 and it was hoped to bring them to fruition in 1946—other than that it would be practicable to do it soon after 1947? To what other conclusion does the hon. member suppose any sensible man could come?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You do not come to conclusions like that!

The ACTING PREMIER: What other conclusion could anybody come to on the evidence put before him in the Lieut.-Governor's Speech unless he was to regard him and the persons associated with him as those who delight to indulge in untruths, which I am not prepared to do.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: You are a past master at that when it suits you!

The ACTING PREMIER: I am suggesting that what the hon. member said the Government was prepared to do in 1943 and 1945 and 1946, it was only reasonable to assume could be done in 1947. The greater proportion of the utterances on education indicated that the plans of the then Government were well advanced and that it was about to do these things. How is it to be supposed that anybody sitting on the Opposition side at that time and not fully acquainted with the internal workings of the department, could come to any other conclusion than that it was reasonable to suppose these things could be done as we said?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That is a lot of nonsense!

The ACTING PREMIER: Of course, it is not a lot of nonsense!

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The plans were there.

The ACTING PREMIER: If the hon. member wants to talk about misleading people, the one statement is more misleading by a long way than the other one would ever be.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That does not mislead anybody. The plans were there and you found the plans.

The ACTING PREMIER: The Speech said the plans were well advanced.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: So they were!

The ACTING PREMIER: It was said that the plans already formed would enable things to be done within a short space of time. What is a short space of time? Is it seven years?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You should know, because you said in 1947 that you would do it.

The ACTING PREMIER: Yes, and we would have done it had the facts been as indicated in the Speeches.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The facts were as indicated.

The ACTING PREMIER: They were not.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Yes, they were!

The ACTING PREMIER: Nothing of the kind! The department at that time was slipping back at the rate of 113 teachers a year to begin with, and virtually no provision for increased accommodation was being made.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: It may be too much to expect the Minister to be fair, but surely he will agree that we could not have teachers in training when we allowed them to go to the war. And when you came into office you reaped the advantage of the teachers we had trained.

The ACTING PREMIER: I am not going to argue the point about that. I am saying that the indications, to students of current happenings and of what we heard from Ministers at various times, were that the Government in those years was not in the difficulties that afterwards appeared to be quite clear in regard to this matter. That is the position. I think no reasonable man will deny it. Three times in a period of three years and a half the assertion was made that these things were going to be done; that plans were well advanced. To what conclusion could any normal man come other than that it was practicable to do them in a short space of time?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Those statements were perfectly true. As a matter of fact, we had reached the stage in discussions with the Education Department where we were giving serious consideration to making a start, but it was realised that unforeseen circumstances might occur which would bring about a very serious state of affairs.

The ACTING PREMIER: It is still being given serious consideration. If that is an effective solution of the problem, then the problem is solved. But, of course, the hon. member knows that serious consideration is not an effective solution.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I am saying it proves that the statements made were absolutely correct.

The ACTING PREMIER: It proves that they may have been correct insofar as they did not fix the date, or did not say actually what was to be done. But I say—and I believe I am completely justified in saying—that they would create the impression in the mind of any reasonable person, who was not au fait with the internal workings of the department, that it was impracticable to do it in a short space of time. Therefore it was not unreasonable to say, as did the hon. member quoted, that we would make provision for the actual raising of the school-leaving age to 15 years. There was nothing unjustifiable in that in face of what the hon. member said.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I think there was.

The ACTING PREMIER: At every opportunity in the last two or three years the hon. member has kept on claiming that.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Now that you have the knowledge, what date do you fix?

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not fix any, because I see as many difficulties now as there were when the hon. member referred to these things being done in a short space of time.

The Minister for Lands: How would you accommodate them?

The ACTING PREMIER: There are today, excluding technical teachers, 2,385 teachers in the Education Department—that was at the beginning of this year—as against 2,311 in 1946. The number of schools was reduced from 649 in 1945 to 518 in 1949, mainly, of course, as a result of the closure of very small country schools and the consequent consolidations. There has not been a reduction of teachers in the last four years. There has, on the contrary, been an increase, mainly in the last two years. There are today 489 classes which have fewer than 40 children and 395 which have fewer than 50, the balance having over 50.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: How many have more than 60?

The ACTING PREMIER: I have no data. So, well over 800 classes have fewer than 50 children and, of those, 489 have no more than 40. While the position is not as good as it should be, of course, the demand for the reduction of classes to 30 in other than secondary schools is—not only in my opinion but also in the opinion of educationists of very great merit to be found in this State as well as elsewhere—quite unnecessary and not at all advisable.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Were you always of that opinion?

The ACTING PREMIER: My figure has been 45 as a maximum.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Are you sure you did not state in this House that it was 30?



The ACTING PREMIER: I might have done so, but the figure I have always followed and which, as a matter of fact, is the policy of the party to which I have always belonged, is 45. That can be verified by the hon. member, whenever he wishes to do so. I may have mentioned 30 as the figure, at some time, because it is a figure so often espoused by other people but, having gone into this matter in an endeavour to discover what is the essential, I am still of the opinion that to from 40 to 45 is all that is desirable as a reduction, except in the fourth and fifth years in the case of high schools.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Forty is my idea.

The ACTING PREMIER: These people who talk about 30 as a maximum are not only making a proposition that is impossible for any community, but also one that I do not think would be more likely to improve the position of the children. It is certainly one that would so weight the expenditure of the State or other authority controlling education that I do not think it could be financed, even in these fairly generous days. The strange part about this question is that, from what one can hear, whatever is wrong—I have admitted that neither perfection nor any approach to it exists here—is equally wrong in nearly every other civilised country in the world, and certainly in all the States of Australia.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Of course, that did not matter in 1947 when you pointed out how many teachers they had in South Australia.

The ACTING PREMIER: I do not know that it matters now, because it does not remedy the position, but it is interesting to note under the heading of "Things I Have Learned," that this state of affairs exists in nearly every civilised country in the world. I was not responsible for that heading. "Things I have Learned" was the heading of an article in the "Teachers' Journal" of the 3rd July, 1950, by one C. E. Beeby, who, I understand, is the Director of Education in New Zealand and who, on his return from Paris, where for two years he had been Assistant Director General of U.N.E.S.C.O., wrote a letter that was published in the "Teachers' Journal" on the date I have mentioned. In it he said—

In all countries one finds the obvious problems of shortage of buildings and shortage of teachers. Indeed in most cases with the effects of the war and of rapidly rising population, nearly everywhere one discovers the curse of too large classes.

So I say, without fear of contradiction, that the state of affairs in Western Australia is by no means worse and in all probability somewhat better than in most other countries.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That was equally true in 1947.

The ACTING PREMIER: The position here is certainly better, in that steadier progress is being made towards general improvement. It must not be overlooked that, apart from the 100 or more teachers on long service leave, partly consequent upon the lag that had to take place during earlier years, there has been a considerable number of teachers seconded to the various arts and crafts, to other sub-departments of the Education Department and to extra curricula subjects generally, which have been steadily expanded in recent years. I refer to such matters as visual education and the special opportunities given to spastic children, and the like. They have all to be provided for.

If one were to endeavour to bolster up the number of teachers available for service in primary schools, supposing one had the accommodation to warrant it, by taking teachers away from these other fields, what an outcry there would be at the neglect of what I have called these sub-departments. It seems to me that the job being done by the Education Department at present, and likely to be done by it in the very near future, is of such a nature as to indicate with confidence that all possible steps are being taken to improve educational facilities in this State. I have not and never have had any desire unnecessarily to make education a political football. To my mind it is far too important a subject for that, but, of course, it must occasionally come under fire.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You turned the heat on it during the election in 1946.

The ACTING PREMIER: There was not much heat turned on it during my election campaign.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That was one of the subjects you concentrated on.

The ACTING PREMIER: Of course I concentrated on it, as it was one of the subjects in which I was most interested. Apparently the hon. member expects one at election time to make a speech by saying nothing. I suppose if one were to endeavour to make a speech which was a complete blank, that would gratify the hon. member.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: At election time you would not concede that the war could be advanced as a reason for some of the difficulties of the Education Department, but you would admit it now.

The ACTING PREMIER: The hon. member seems to have a complete record of all I said, which is more than I personally have.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I have a good memory.

The ACTING PREMIER: My recollection of the phraseology that I used is that it was of moderate character. However, I see no reason to argue further with the hon. member in this regard. I have established that much of what the hon. member said a few nights ago was not in accord-

ance with facts. I have demonstrated clearly and on statistics from what I think even he will admit is an unimpeachable authority, that the figures he quoted were inaccurate and that the place from which he got them was presumably an inaccurate source.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I got them from the "Teachers' Journal."

The ACTING PREMIER: My duty is to put the hon. member, the House and the public right as to these figures, and I submit that I have done that.

MR. RODOREDA (Pilbara) [7.52]: I do not know that I should have the temerity to enter into the debate on the Address-in-reply, which seems to have developed into a private discussion between the Acting Premier and the member for Melville. About an hour has been taken up with that aspect of the debate, and the longer I listened to the Acting Premier, the more convinced I became of the subtlety of the legal mind in dealing with various matters.

The Attorney General: Had you not a legal training?

Mr. RODOREDA: Thank the Lord I had not! Earlier today I was inclined to regret that I had not made my contribution to this debate before the Acting Premier spoke, hoping that he would deal with some of my complaints and requests in what I supposed would be his reply to the debate. After having listened intently to the Acting Premier's speech, I am glad that I did not precede him, because the way in which he has dealt with the other matters put up to him by members leads me to believe that had I placed my grievances before him he would practically have convinced me that there was no ground for them at all, that everything was for the best and that this Government was the most perfect that had ever occupied the Treasury Bench in this State.

Mr. Marshall: A one-man Government!

Mr. RODOREDA: There was not one matter complained of during the debate that he did not brush off as of no account, and with an air suggesting that all was for the best in this best of all possible worlds. I was amazed at the frank admission of the Acting Premier that he made a promise about education during the 1947 election without knowing anything at all about the situation. He made a definite promise that he would do a certain thing, to wit, increase the school-leaving age to 15 years, presuming, on something he had heard someone say, that he was able to do it. On those grounds alone, on his own admission, he said to the electors, "Now you will get a real Government. We will put this into operation."

The Acting Premier: Statements from the Governor's Speech are not hearsay.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The Acting Premier knew well at that time that materials and labour were in short supply and would remain so for years.

Mr. RODOREDA: The Acting Premier knew—as well as did members of this House and the public generally—that the promises made in 1947 in regard to education and other matters were impossible of fulfilment. There is no question about that. It is not a matter of a legal mind arguing a way out of it; those were dishonest promises—there is no other word to describe them. They were insincere and dishonest and made with the full realisation that the Government could not possibly honour them, yet here we have the Acting Premier, after three full years of government, telling the House that the promises of his Government are as far from fulfilment as they were when it took office. I am glad to have that admission from him. It is the first such admission he has made since the coalition Government took over the Treasury Bench. This is the first time that the House has heard me make a complaint about political propaganda, but the admission of the Acting Premier was so frank that I could not let it go without comment.

I do not often take part in the debate on the Address-in-reply, and would probably not have risen tonight except for one matter that the Leader of the Opposition was asked to bring before the House but with which he had not time to deal. As a matter of fact, I believe he had already spoken in the debate when the subject was raised. I refer to the question of the Indian Ocean air route, which has received some publicity in the Press in recent weeks. I have been keenly interested in this proposition ever since Mr. C. L. K. Foote first introduced the question to the Labour Caucus 12 or 14 years ago and we have had a local committee working earnestly and consistently on this project. It was responsible for the first trip that was made by a Catalina which was chartered years ago to make a flight from Port Hedland over the proposed route to Africa.

That flight was a success, and a few years ago a further flight was sponsored and another flying boat, leaving from somewhere in the vicinity of Port Hedland, made a preliminary survey of the route. Since then the matter seems to have come to a standstill and this committee requested the Leader of the Opposition to bring the matter before Parliament to see whether the State Government could get the Commonwealth Government to act in this proposition which is vital from both the defence and the commercial points of view. Portion of the letter written by Mr. S. W. Perry to the Leader of the Opposition reads as follows:—

We have approached the Prime Minister of Australia the Right Honourable R. G. Menzies and asked that during the Jubilee celebrations a survey flight should take place from Perth to Great Britain via our route. He replied stating that the matter had been passed on to the director of the Jubilee celebrations and since then Mr. Hamilton, M.H.R., has informed us that the matter had been passed on to the Civil Aviation Department for a report. Our previous experience in the matter with the Civil Aviation Department has been one of complete apathy in respect to this route, but I feel sure that you will agree that with the position in the Far East and with perhaps an indifferent India our position in respect to air communication is a very serious one.

Apparently this committee has reached a dead end and can get no consideration given to its proposals. The matter is of such vital importance to the State and to Australia as a whole that the Government should do its utmost to interest the Federal Government in this proposition. To anyone who studies this subject, the arguments in favour of this route, as against the current one to England, must be convincing. For instance, it would result in a considerable saving of mileage. Some details given by this committee may be of interest to members. They are as follows:—

#### Defence.

1. The proposed route is of great strategic importance in the defence of the Empire.

- (a) It travels over British and Allied Territory.

- (b) Its distance from Perth to London is approximately the same as from London to Darwin.

The establishment of this route between England and Perth, the terminal point in Australia would mean an enormous saving. It would result in reduced mileage and much saving of petrol. The aeroplanes used by the company could have their usefulness increased, if the terminal were at Perth, by enabling migrants and others using that air line to tranship at the Perth terminal to local air lines in order to reach their destination. Therefore, from every angle this proposal is one in which everyone should be interested, including not only the defence authorities but also the business community. We should anticipate a great deal of trade between Australia and South Africa. At present we have no direct connection with that country, but by means of this proposed air line route we would have a direct link not only for the carriage of passengers and goods but also for the carriage of light freight.

Recently the Commonwealth Government through the Press has been expressing concern regarding the huge cost of providing landing facilities at Cocos Island in

particular, where a heavy rental would have to be paid to Clunies Ross, the owner of this island. Those who are fostering this proposed new air route have suggested the use of flying boats as an alternative to land-based aircraft, as that would overcome the difficulty of having to provide landing facilities. The Leader of the Opposition told me that whilst he was in England Sir Hugh Dalton showed tremendous interest in this proposition when it was submitted to him but said that he could not initiate the scheme because of the restrictions imposed by the British Government. However, it is time that the State Government took steps to induce the Commonwealth Government to lend more enthusiastic support to the proposition. Everything seems to be in favour of it and I am at a loss to understand why some progress is not being made.

The financial set-up between the States and the Commonwealth, is, I am sure, causing all members a great deal of concern. Today, the Premier of each State is forced to travel annually to wait upon our Commonwealth overlords in order to obtain the wherewithal to provide for the essential needs of his State, and that is something which should not be tolerated. Steps should be taken to remedy the present situation. In relation to this matter, I notice that earlier in the debate, or during the discussions on the Supply Bill seven or eight weeks ago, the Leader of the Opposition had something to say. He was talking about the Premier and the purport of his remarks was—

I assure him he will get less consideration from his colleagues in the Federal sphere than he received from Mr. Chifley. The present Commonwealth Government would not even appoint a Western Australian to its Cabinet, whereas previously there were two. Although they may have been ardent State righters, almost overnight, as soon as they become Federal members, they lose all interest in the States.

I think we can all agree with that because our own experience has shown it to be a fact.

Mr. Mann: Quite true.

Mr. RODORED: Continuing to quote—

It will be found there is an anti-State attitude in most Federal members and I think our Premier will be batting on a sticky wicket at the Canberra Premiers' Conference.

That is what the Leader of the Opposition had to say a few weeks ago and, of course, events have proved him right. Our Premier is on a very sticky wicket, according to what we can deduce from newspaper reports. Apparently, there may be some conference convened shortly to decide this most vexed question or to arrive at some basis whereby our Premiers will not be forever mendicants at the door of the Federal Treasurer. As to this, we read in

the Press that Mr. McLarty had moved for the holding of some such convention. The sole credit for suggesting that this conference be held is given to him. Let us deal with the matter in retrospect for a little while. I have an extract here which was taken from a speech by the Leader of the Opposition on the Supply Bill during 1947, in the course of which he gave a detailed report to the House of his speeches at the Premiers' Conference which he had attended in 1946. Mr. Wise had this to say—

In those issues are disclosed tactics that are neither creditable nor honest. Dealing with uniform taxation, the following statement appears:—

I might mention that this was in relation to election propaganda. Mr. Wise quoted this statement which had appeared in the "Liberal News." It was—

Liberals should remember Mr. Wise selling out on the restoration of State taxing powers at the Premiers' Conference.

That was part of the election propaganda and was published in the "Liberal News," which is the official organ of the L.C.L. Further on, during the course of his speech on the Supply Bill in 1947, the Leader of the Opposition said this—

The Premier, in his policy speech, promised to have the State resume control of its own finance and to arrange for taxation reductions on a substantial scale. His comments on Governments being puppets of the Commonwealth I will pass over, generously, as one of his election-time indiscretions, until we see results later.

Following that, I will now quote an extract from a report on the Premiers' Conference, which appeared in the Press last week. It says—

The Western Australian Premier (Mr. McLarty) showed emphatically that he had little sympathy with the proposal of the Premier of New South Wales (Mr. McGirr) that the States should have their taxing rights restored almost forthwith.

Mr. W. Hegney: What a somersault!

Mr. RODOREDA: There are the views of the Premier three years ago and those he holds today. What a difference! Of course, that election promise was made in absolute total ignorance in the same way as were the promises made on education by the Deputy Premier. They did not know what they were talking about when they advocated that the State's rights should be restored to them. I suppose we in Western Australia receive a better deal under the uniform taxation system than any other State, in the same way as we do under the Federal Aid Roads Agreement. The Premier, in his election propaganda, told the people that he was going to have States'

rights restored to them; that he was going to reduce taxation and increase social service benefits.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: And reduce prices.

Mr. RODOREDA: The people will believe anything. Nobody who gave a thought to that sort of propaganda could possibly have believed it. The people did not think. So now we have the Premier as an ardent supporter of uniform taxation—all in a short period of three years. What an about-face! He now finds that the Commonwealth Government is refunding to the State millions of money, and he does not know what to do with it. Of course, no man in his right senses would support an application for the return of the State's taxing rights.

In the same way, the Government, after realising the difficulties involved, makes statements today that are very different from earlier ones made in ignorance in its election propaganda, telling the people what it was going to do. I wish the Premier had been here this evening and I would like to have heard him talking himself out of that argument in his affable manner. No doubt he would have done so, but hardly to the satisfaction of myself or anyone else.

As to the Press publicity given to the Premier's move for the holding of a convention to discuss the financial arrangements between the States and the Commonwealth, I again quote some remarks made by the Leader of the Opposition in 1947 on the Appropriation Bill. He was telling the House what had been done at an earlier Premiers' Conference. During the course of his speech at the 1946 Premiers' Conference he had, he informed members, said this—

At the appropriate stage I shall move—

That a conference be arranged between the representatives of Commonwealth and States—on a basis of representation mutually agreed upon—to review the whole of the financial relationships between Commonwealth and States.

Although that notice of motion was given by the Leader of the Opposition, as Premier, in 1946, no credit whatever is given to him. At least the Press could have been fair enough to have said that the motion submitted by the present Premier was originally intended to have been moved by the Leader of the Opposition, who had given notice to that effect at the 1946 Premiers' Conference. That proposed motion, by the way, was not discussed at that conference. The Commonwealth authorities talked out time which resulted in the conference finishing before the notice of motion could be reached. Nevertheless, the proposal that is being lauded now, and which probably will be put into effect in some form or other, was submitted at the 1946 Premiers' Conference by the present Leader of the Opposition.

I thought the Press would at least have been fair enough to have given credit where credit is due. However, I hope the conference will eventually be held and that something tangible will result. I doubt whether any formula can be devised to meet the expenditure and differing needs of all the States concerned. Later on, I will have a better opportunity to deal with matters of immediate interest to my electorate, but at the moment I wish to have a word to say about the proposal for the formation of plant pools.

As mentioned by the member for Mt. Marshall the other evening, I asked a question in this House late in the session of 1947. I wanted to know how much money had been spent out of the special grant for the provision of plant pools and what had been done with the expenditure. As a matter of fact, there was a lively debate on this question and I almost had to fight a duel with the then Minister for Works who took apparent exception to what I said as to his virtues; but I was successful in talking my way out of it.

The reply given to me was that there was no special fund, and therefore nothing had been spent from it. I think that reply, given by the Commissioner of Main Roads through the Minister, was a deliberate evasion. To indicate where we stand I shall quote the relevant provision—Section 6, of the Commonwealth Aid Road and Works Act of 1947. After detailing the usual grant conditions of three-fifths area and two-fifths population basis, and so on, which were part of the Act previously, the section provides by a further subsection, as follows:—

(4) There shall be payable for the purpose of financial assistance to the States out of the Trust Account an amount of one million pounds out of each sum payable yearly to the Trust Account and to which paragraph (b) of section four of this Act applies.

(5) An amount payable to the States under the last preceding subsection shall be apportioned in accordance with subsection (2) of this section and any such amount paid to a State shall be subject to the following conditions:—

(a) That the amount shall be expended upon the construction, reconstruction, maintenance and repair of roads through sparsely populated areas, timber country and rural areas or, if the State thinks fit, upon the purchase of road making plant for use in areas where the purchase of such plant is beyond the resources of local authorities.

If that is not a special grant, I would like to know what is. It is entirely new in this 1947 Act, and is quite distinct from anything that occurred before. A special sum of money was made available, and special

conditions were prescribed which did not apply to other Federal aid road moneys. Yet, I was told by a Minister of the Crown that there was no special grant! Of course, the Commissioner of Main Roads has somehow blinded everyone with science, and has kept control of this money which should have been given to the boards that could not buy their own plant. That is the complaint I made three years ago; the boards are still waiting for plant, and this money would buy it.

I think the road boards which may have been bamboozled into agreeing to this proposal when it was originally put forward, have now come to their senses. The pooling of plant is ridiculous. It has never worked and will never work anywhere. We could not get two adjoining farmers to pool their plant and agree, not even for one season. Everybody wants to use it at the same time, and it is always the other fellow who is blamed for neglect of the plant. That any Minister should have allowed himself to be talked into this by the Commissioner of Main Roads is beyond my comprehension. I hope that something will be done to get away from this plant pool idea, and that a decision will be arrived at whereby this money will be spent in accordance with the intention of the Commonwealth Government.

Of course, the point cropped up as to what were the financial resources of a board—anything at all to sidetrack the issue and get away from giving this money to those to whom it rightly belongs. This phase, therefore, was referred to the Crown Law Department. Once anything is sent on to a Crown Law Department, State or Federal, all commonsense goes by the board and we get down to the involved meaning of this word and that word, and so on. The intention of the Act was that this money should be given to hopelessly broke road boards so that they could provide themselves with plant, but it was sidetracked. I hope the new Minister for Works will come to his senses and have this plant sent out.

The Minister for Works: Comes to a decision, not comes to his senses.

Mr. RODOREDA: I hope the Minister will have the right idea and that some plant will be quickly shot out to these boards so that they can do something with it. The Commissioner of Main Roads seems to have an idea that no-one in the country can build roads except his department. Whilst I believe some road boards are incompetent, I think they are in the minority.

Mr. Nalder: Give the boards the money and let them purchase their own plant.

Mr. RODOREDA: That is the idea of the Act.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Some three years have gone by since the passing of the Bill.

Mr. RODOREDA: Yes, and we have waited approximately three years for a decision in the right way, but I now deduce from the Minister's interjection that he has seen the light.

Mr. Hoar: Do not be too sure.

Mr. RODOREDA: I think he has. This money should be given to the boards who originally made application for it, but the attitude has been, "No, we shall not let them have the money. We will retain a greater hold on everybody. We will control everything that is being done." It is obvious that labour is the greatest problem that road boards have to face. How they get men to work in the outback areas under the conditions which the Main Roads Department imposes on its employees is beyond my understanding. Because labour is as scarce as it is, the Government should make the greatest possible use of what is available to do road work, by providing the necessary plant or the money with which to buy it. By that means one or two men could do work which now takes a dozen to carry out and which is not being half-done. Light graders are useless on bush roads. We must have heavy plant and the men could then do decent work.

In addition to that, every mile constructed in a road district imposes an additional burden on the board by way of maintenance. The more the roads are extended the more work the local authority has to do, and it must have plant for the purpose. Many road boards have not the money with which to buy plant, and the intention of the Federal Act is to make money available to them, but so far that has been evaded in this State. A request was made by the Roebourne Road Board to the Public Works Department for money with which to buy new plant. That board is in a desperate position with hundreds of miles of road but no plant or money with which to buy it. I recently received a letter from the secretary of the board in which he states—

This board has been endeavouring to secure new plant for urgent road works in the district and desires your full support and co-operation in an effort to bring this to fruition.

Later he has this to say—

As you are aware, plant owned by this board is negligible (two trucks that are almost beyond repair and causing heavy expenses to maintain each year for the very small amount of work they are capable of doing, and a Fordson grader).

That board has to maintain about 200 miles of graded earth road, rocks, gravel and what-have-you, with a broken-down Ford grader. The letter goes on—

The board cannot hope to purchase new plant by way of loan as two loans are being repaid at present, one is on

the Fordson grader, so you can see this board is making some effort to provide machinery.

The trucks are worn-out, and the loan on the grader has not been repaid. The board made a request to the department in the middle of August for some money with which to buy plant. All this money is in the plant pool, yet we cannot get a penny of it. I hope the Minister will do something quickly about getting that position remedied.

Another matter which concerns some of my electors living in Wittenoom Gorge is that of the rent—this might interest the Minister for Housing—of the houses they occupy. Some of the information about prices might be an eye-opener to members. Recently the house rents were raised 6s. per week because of the increasing cost of building there. The big contention of those people is that in the cost of each house about £250 is represented by freight on materials which go from Fremantle to Roebourne and then 200 miles inland. It is considered that that sum should not be taken into consideration, and that the tenants should not be charged the economic rent on the full amount simply because they are situated some 1,250 miles from Perth. They have made a request to the Government to have that point reviewed.

The houses at Wittenoom Gorge are of a good type, and the costs might be interesting. These buildings have been erected during the last three years, and the first ten were constructed for £1,247 each; the next ten for £1,350 each, and the last 18 or 19 for £1,341 each. Those are rather startling figures. These houses will accommodate a family. From memory they consist of three rooms, concrete floor, verandahs all round, and kitchen and bathroom. The dearest of these houses completed a few months ago cost £1,341, and out of that it is calculated that £250 was freight.

A similar type of house in Perth could be built for £1,100 at the outside. I do not know the squareage of the house but it would probably be about ten or 11 squares. It is an amazing achievement for the company to have erected them at that cost. The request that the freight money should not be taken into consideration when arriving at the economic rent, is, I think, a fair proposition. I understand that the State Government has really no say in the matter of the economic rent but that it is a question of agreement between the State and the Commonwealth Governments. I would say that if proper representations were made to the Commonwealth Government the difficulty could be overcome and an exception made in the case of these people who are living in such an isolated area and being charged such a high rent for a house which would not cost more than about 25s. a week in the metropolitan area. That is about all I have to deal with

at present. I will await the opportunity on the Estimates to discuss other matters of more detail.

Question put and passed; the Address adopted.

#### BILLS (21)—FIRST READING.

- 1, Transfer of Land Act Amendment.
- 2, Fauna Protection.
- 3, Public Trustee Act Amendment.
- 4, Prices Control Act Amendment (Continuance).

Introduced by the Attorney General.

- 5, Reserve Funds (Local Authorities).
- 6, Traffic Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Minister for Local Government.

- 7, Country Areas Water Supply Act Amendment.
- 8, Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Minister for Water Supply.

- 9, Inspection of Scaffolding Act Amendment.

- 10, Public Works Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Minister for Works.

- 11, Bush Fires Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Minister for Lands.

- 12, Western Australian Government Tramways and Ferries Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Minister for Education.

- 13, Building Operations and Building Materials Control Act Amendment and Continuance.

- 14, State Housing Act Amendment.

- 15, Roads Agreements between the State Housing Commission and Local Authorities.

Introduced by the Honorary Minister for Housing.

- 16, Public Service Appeal Board Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Acting Premier.

- 17, Health Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Minister for Health.

- 18, Licensing Act Amendment.

Introduced by Mr. Cornell.

- 19, Electoral Act Amendment.

Introduced by Mr. Rodoreda.

- 20, Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act Amendment.

Introduced by Hon. A. A. M. Coverley.

- 21, Wood Distillation and Charcoal Iron and Steel Industry Act Amendment.

Introduced by Hon. A. R. G. Hawke.

*House adjourned at 8.44 p.m.*

## Legislative Council.

Wednesday, 18th September, 1950.

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

### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

#### *Fourteenth Day.*

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [4.34]: As I must be about the 24th or 25th speaker to participate in the debate on the Address-in-reply, that in itself provides ample justification for the objection raised last session by members on this side of the House against the discontinuance of this feature of our proceedings. We voiced that complaint because of the procedure adopted by the Government at that time. Instead of having the routine orderly session, for reasons best known to itself, Cabinet decided to abolish members' age-old privilege of speaking to the Address-in-reply, thus denying them an opportunity of referring to many subjects with which they desired to deal. If one cares to peruse the speeches made by members to date, it will be found that almost every subject under the sun has been dealt with. In fact, so many topics have been aired that I am almost at a loss for words—

Hon. H. Hearn: Do not give us that!

Hon. G. FRASER: —with which to refer to any matter. Therefore, if, during the course of my remarks, I touch on questions already dealt with, I hope members will forgive me. However, before I proceed with general matters, might I say how much I regret the passing of the late Mr. Baxter. For something like 20 years we were colleagues in this House, and although on many occasions we clashed politically, we still had time to engage in many pleasantries. There was one exception, of course, when he called me a "parrot" and I retaliated by calling him a "screeching cocky." Notwithstanding our few differences, I sincerely regret the ending of his long and successful political career.

To Mr. Daffen, who was defeated at the last elections, I offer, shall I say, my commiseration, but he, of course, left this Chamber in circumstances that could apply to each one of us. We know full well that at some stage or another in the future we may go before the electors for the last time. However, I do regret that Mr. Daffen is not with us again this session. He was not a member for very long but his presence was lengthy enough for