

Legislative Council.

Wednesday, 1st September, 1948.

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

QUESTIONS.

TREEDOZERS.

As to Availability of Machines.

Hon. A. L. LOTON asked the Honorary Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Has the Minister had brought to his notice a machine called the "Treedozer" as shown in the "Western Mail" of the 12th instant, where it is stated that twenty-five of these machines have been exported to Tanganyika to help the British Food Mission?

(2) Will the Minister table any information that is available respecting these machines?

(3) Has the Minister made any efforts to secure some of these machines?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) The "Treedozer" is an ordinary bulldozer with an extra arm attached which has a higher range than the blade. The auxiliary arm gives a greater leverage and is therefore able to push over bigger trees than the standard equipment.

(3) The Government is having the attachment made at Rocky Bay for use with bulldozers. The first one will be completed shortly.

EDUCATION.

As to Additions to Caron School.

Hon. L. A. LOGAN asked the Honorary Minister for Agriculture:

(1) What alterations and additions have been approved for the Caron School?

(2) When were these approved?

(3) When are these works likely to be started?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) (a) Erection of a shelter shed; (b) general renovations and repairs including the complete lining of the classroom.

(2) 27th March, 1946.

(3) Delay in undertaking the work has been occasioned by the contractor's difficulties in securing materials. It is anticipated that he will commence the work this week.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLIES.

As to Loss on Current to Municipalities and Railways.

Hon. A. THOMSON asked the Honorary Minister for Agriculture:

Referring to the reply, which I consider incorrect, given to my question on the 10th August, regarding the sale of electricity by the Government to the Perth City Council, the Fremantle Municipal Council and the Commissioner of Railways:—

(1) (a) By whom were these figures prepared? (b) What officer was responsible for the reply?

(2) Will the Government obtain from the Auditor General a complete statement showing the loss incurred in supplying the electricity below cost for the years 1946, 1947 and 1948, respectively—(a) to the Perth City Council; (b) to the Fremantle Municipal Council; (c) to the Commissioner of Railways; (d) the total loss sustained from 1918 to 1946 inclusive?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) (a) Officers of the State Electricity Commission. (b) Chairman of the Commission.

(2) The questions contained in (a), (b), (c) and (d) will be submitted to the Auditor General for a report.

WATER SUPPLIES.

As to Scheme for Great Southern Towns.

Hon. A. L. LOTON asked the Honorary Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Has an agreement between the State of Western Australia and the Commonwealth been signed in connection with the Great Southern towns water supply scheme?

(2) If no agreement has been signed, what is the cause of the delay?

(3) Has the State Tender Board called tenders for the supply of piping for the above scheme? If so, for what length and for what dimensions?

(4) If tenders have been called, have they been called outside this State?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) No. The Prime Minister, however, in a letter has advised the State Government of his Government's undertaking to share equally with the State expenditure up to £4,300,000 within the amended boundaries of the scheme.

(2) The Commonwealth Government is now considering the form the agreement should take.

(3) The State Government has called tenders for—(a) 50 miles of 30in. diameter main to be laid between Wellington Dam and Narrogin; (b) the pipes to be laid between the G.W.S. main (near Merredin) and Bruce Rock; and is preparing specifications for the piping for first priority sections in other parts of the area.

(4) Tenders have been called through the Tender Board for supply from outside as well as inside the State.

BILL—PRICES CONTROL.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. E. H. GRAY (West) [4.40]: At the outset, I desire to express my sympathy with the Chief Secretary, who unfortunately is absent through illness. I do not think there has been a similar occurrence for about 12 years. His absence will throw an enormous burden on the Honorary Minister, and I advise him it would be much easier for him to agree to our suggestions in connection with this legislation. That would make his task much easier. I know by ex-

perience the difficult nature of the job with which he has to deal. It is two men's work and so I hope the Chief Secretary will soon recover and be back with us again. We will give the Honorary Minister all possible assistance in the passage of the Bill, contingently upon his agreeing to our suggestions.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Our amendments!

Hon. E. H. GRAY: This is a most important Bill. It is the second measure that the Government has introduced involving the acceptance of a large number of regulations which cannot be supplied to members. In fact, the Honorary Minister announced yesterday that he had one printed copy only, and, of course, it is absolutely impossible for all members to scrutinise that one copy..

The Honorary Minister: I have a copy for you if you want it.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I wish I had known that before. I have not seen the regulations. It is a tremendous handicap to members to be requested to consider legislation of this nature, particularly as the Bill is practically a skeleton measure. A protest was made in both Houses when the Bill dealing with increase of rent was introduced. In my opinion, the Government made a big mistake. If it were absolutely necessary for those regulations to be accepted, the Government should have had a sufficient number of copies typed or printed so as to enable each member to study them before the second reading of the previous Bill was debated. It is a reflection on Parliament and a new procedure that members should sternly discountenance, as all sorts of things could happen. It is not fair to ask members to swallow whole such a tremendous number of regulations, especially as the Bill is only in skeleton form. It contains but a small number of clauses.

I therefore protest vigorously against this new procedure, a procedure which, to my knowledge, has never before been adopted in this House. I repeat, I consider it an affront to both Houses to ask members to accept a Bill of this nature without affording them the opportunity of perusing and amending the Federal regulations which it is proposed shall become law in this State. I listened with great in-

terest to the Honorary Minister's speech when introducing the measure. I differ from many of his conclusions. The fact must be faced that the Liberal Parties and Country Parties—particularly the Liberal Parties—conducted a vicious, well-organised and expensive campaign throughout Australia on the referendum recently taken.

Hon. W. J. Mann: What do you mean by vicious?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Vicious—it was vicious.

Hon. W. J. Mann: What do you mean?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It was vicious propaganda. We heard it over the wireless and read it in the Press.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: It is an insult to the intelligence of the electors to make such a statement.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Unfortunately, the people have to listen to this propaganda every night on the wireless.

Hon. W. J. Mann: It is educational.

Hon. A. L. Loten: Turn the wireless off!

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It is too late now. We are reaping the harvest, to use a term which the Honorary Minister will understand, as he is a farmer. The Liberal Parties conducted this extensive and expensive campaign and persuaded the people to vote "No" at the referendum.

Hon. R. M. Forrest: They made a good job of it.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: There is no doubt about that, but the people are now waking up to this evil portent.

Hon. A. L. Loten: You are casting a reflection on the intelligence of the people.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Time will tell whether my statement is correct or not. Unquestionably, there has never in the history of Australia been so much money spent on organising propaganda by the anti-Labour forces.

Hon. W. J. Mann: By your side or our side?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: We have got no money.

The Honorary Minister: Where has it all gone?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The hon. member associates himself with the wealthy capitalist class of Australia. I am glad he has made

a frank confession. I ask the Honorary Minister when replying to the second reading debate, to tell the House why the Government embarked upon this hurriedly drafted skeleton Bill of only 17 clauses, but covering the acceptance of a large number of regulations that we cannot get hold of, especially when we already have on our statute book the Profiteering Prevention Act, which was passed in 1939. That Act contains sections which completely cover this exceedingly difficult subject. It contains ample safeguards and effective penalties. Will the Honorary Minister explain why this course was not followed?

Many members in this Chamber will recall the legislation that was passed in 1939 and we have only to read it to see how comprehensive and satisfactory it would be in this instance. It would not have prevented the State Government from co-operating with the Governments of the Eastern States. It would have been a tremendous help to them, and members would not have been asked to trust the Government implicitly and rely upon its promulgating regulations to cover its operations. I am informed that the Victorian Bill, which has been agreed to or is before the Victorian Parliament, includes the major portion of the Commonwealth regulations, the more important of them. I cannot say whether that is correct or not, but the Honorary Minister will be able to obtain the necessary information and correct me if I am wrong. The Bill itself contains a new departure, at least, in my experience. I refer members to Subclause (4) of Clause 15, which reads—

An offence against this Act shall not be prosecuted summarily without the written consent of the Attorney General, or a person there-to authorised in writing by the Attorney General, and an offence against this Act shall not be prosecuted upon indictment except in the name of the Attorney General.

In my opinion—I am open to correction—this provision, if agreed to, would place on the shoulders of the Attorney General an unfair burden and too big a responsibility. Why should the Attorney General be expected to do this? What would happen if, in the case of minor and major crimes, the Attorney General were asked to consent to every prosecution in the law courts?

The Honorary Minister: I think that means his department.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: A man who steals a case of jam is a thief and a business man who overcharges for a case of jam is also a criminal. There is no difference between them; both are thieves and should be dealt with by the courts in the ordinary way. Magistrates and Supreme Court judges should deal with these offences. If the Government were not keen on enforcing the legislation, it would be a loophole, particularly for large business houses, to transgress the regulations and rob the people ruthlessly. I would prefer the usual provision whereby offences are dealt with by justices and Supreme Court judges in the ordinary way.

Hon. L. Craig: The commissioners may not inform the Attorney General unless they think it is desirable.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Bill provides that an offender against the measure shall not be prosecuted summarily without the written consent of the Attorney General.

Hon. L. Craig: That is so.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: He has to agree to everything that is done under the Act. That is a big burden to place upon him. There may be a reason for it. The Minister may say that it will give the Crown Law Department an opportunity of using its own lawyers instead of leaving the offences to the Police Department. My reply to that is that it would be a reflection upon the Police Department. Then again, the Crown Law Department would not have enough staff to cope properly with infringements of the Act if the legislation is diligently and effectively administered.

An illuminating explanation was given by the Honorary Minister with regard to the necessity for the various measures taken to correct and stop inflation. He made, however, in my opinion, a big mistake when he mentioned the farmers in a particular way and told us what they had done to help in the control of prices and the prevention of inflation. He said it was strange that the wheatgrowers did not know how they were fleeced. He retracted the word "fleeced" and said they did not know how they were used.

The Honorary Minister: Forget the word "fleeced," because I withdrew it.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Honorary Minister has used that word before in this

Chamber in connection with wheat prices, and this is the first opportunity I have had to disagree with him. I emphatically deny his statement. The farmer has made no bigger contribution than has any other conscientious member of the community. The Honorary Minister is continually driving into the Press and into this Chamber the big sacrifices the farmers are making. That creates a wrong impression with the community.

The Honorary Minister: With whom?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: With the people, and the farmers themselves. The average farmer is too wise to be led astray. He recognises what a good wicket he is on now. The greatest contribution to the country's welfare was made by the members of the Fighting Services, and that is something we are apt to forget.

The Honorary Minister: No-one doubts that.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Honorary Minister placed the farmers first.

The Honorary Minister: There is no comparison between the two cases.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: That is so. Why does not the Honorary Minister mention the ex-Servicemen a little more often?

The Honorary Minister: They do not come into the picture at all.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Honorary Minister mentioned inflation and control, and the activities and measures passed to prevent inflation.

The Honorary Minister: I was dealing with inflation, and not the protection of the country.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The hon. member will please address the Chair.

Hon. G. W. Miles: The communists and strikers in the Eastern States are the main causes of inflation.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Please address the Chair.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: They do their part, of course. I want to correct the Honorary Minister because we should set an example to the people by giving praise and credit to those who do the job. Our difficulties are nothing compared with those of the members of the Fighting Forces, the medical units and the men and women who served in the factories to produce muni-

tions, etc., and the farmers. Every conscientious man and woman in the community did his or her job.

The Honorary Minister: I was only mentioning inflation.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I say emphatically that wheat will never be worth 20s. a bushel. The Honorary Minister expressed the hope that the present prices would be maintained.

The Honorary Minister: I did not say anything of the sort.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Honorary Minister did.

The Honorary Minister: I take exception to that.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I can quote the Honorary Minister word for word.

The Honorary Minister: I have never thought the present prices would be maintained.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Honorary Minister expressed the hope last night that the present export price would be continued—that is 20s. a bushel.

Hon. L. A. Logan: It is not 20s. a bushel at the present time.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It is more than 20s. a bushel. We should look beyond the farmers and the welfare of Australia—we should take in the whole world. It would be disastrous to millions of men and women in the world if the price of wheat were maintained at more than £1 a bushel.

The Honorary Minister: It is not more than £1; it is 15s.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am talking of what the Honorary Minister said last night.

The Honorary Minister: You must have misheard me.

Hon. A. L. Loton: Do you think the grower should stand to lose?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: No. What does the hon. member mean by that?

Hon. A. L. Loton: You say that if wheat is sold at less than 15s.—

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I say that in the interests of every nation in the world, when wheat comes down to a fair price—

The Honorary Minister: What do you call a fair price?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Well, £1 a bushel is not a fair price.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Will the hon. member please resume his speech.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I know that the farmers will not like this criticism, but I think it is in their interests for something to be said on these lines. I hope that from now on the Honorary Minister will not be continually driving into us the sacrifices made by the farmer.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Why are you against the farmer?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am not.

Hon. W. J. Mann: I thought you were. One would think so from your speech.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: No. I am saying that it will be in the interests of humanity when things get back to normal.

The Honorary Minister: Do you object to our getting 80d. for our wool?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I would like to see an arrangement made whereby every man, woman and child in the world could be fed and clothed at a decent price.

The Honorary Minister: We are all with you there.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I am glad of that. The Honorary Minister spoke of the 40-hour week. I also want to correct what he said there.

The Honorary Minister: What about that?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The Honorary Minister blamed the 40-hour week for the increase in costs. That view is continually expressed in every paper of the anti-Labour Press where the evil result of the 40-hour week is being pointed out.

The Honorary Minister: I said we had not felt the effects of the 40-hour week yet.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Personally I think the position will gradually improve. The real reason for the complaints is the fact that thousands of young men who gave years of their lives to the Army and other Fighting Services, were taken out of industry and so lost the opportunity to be trained as tradesmen or professional men, and they are now busily engaged in rehabilitating themselves. That is the cause of the apparent loss of production at the present time. Members cannot expect men who have spent from six to nine years either training in the Army or in some branch of the Fighting Services to rehabilitate themselves immedi-

ately. Many men in the Army lost their lives, but there were thousands of them being trained and we cannot expect young men who have been in camps for perhaps two or three years to revert immediately to civilian life. Where any job such as cutting wood, road-making, etc., was required by the Army as many as 20 to 40 men were detailed to do the work of half-a-dozen. We cannot expect them to be put straight into industry and be able to concentrate and do the work of a properly experienced workman. It will take some years to overcome these troubles, but I think it is improving every day.

That is one of our difficulties and we must expect it, and any businessman or production manager who understands his job recognises the fact that it will take a long time before such men can be properly rehabilitated. It is not possible for a young man who has been in the Army to be up to the standard of his mates who perhaps have not been away, and that fact applies to any trade. Consequently we have to be fair and reasonable to the men working in the workshops and factories and also on the land. Last evening the Minister used an extreme case of a dairy farmer who would not employ men because he considered their work did not make any difference. I consider that was an unwise statement.

The Honorary Minister: I can quote a lot of other cases like that.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I cannot imagine a man who claims to be an experienced dairy-hand not being able to make some difference to the running of the farm.

The Honorary Minister: I only told you what the owner of the farm said to me, and I believe him.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I think the man was exaggerating and was possibly unable to get hold of an experienced dairy-hand. I consider that is one of the results of the settling down of thousands of men throughout the Commonwealth after their Army service. After this transitional period has passed we will find a big difference in production. I would like members to remember that when the eight-hour day and the 44-hour week were introduced, we had the same outcry from business interests and factory people at that time as we have today. The same people made a tremendous noise when youngsters of six,

seven or eight years of age were taken out of the coalmines.

Hon. W. J. Mann: I thought you would bring that up!

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It extends to every section of the toilers.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: We have not experienced the rebound of the 40-hour week yet.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It will be of great advantage to Australia and will set an example to the rest of the world in the same way as when the eight-hour day was introduced. Production was increased and we were doing far more than people in other countries who were working from ten to twelve hours per day. Time will tell, because it takes time to re-adjust.

Hon. A. L. Loton: You are right.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: With the improvement in machinery such as for land-clearing, wheat-planting, and so on, it will be found that the men working 40 hours per week will leave standing the old people who used to work round the clock. The modern farmers will realise that and very soon the advantage of improved machinery, up-to-date methods and shorter hours will be felt. That has been the experience in every phase of shorter hours, and I know that that will be experienced with the 40-hour week. I therefore hope that members will refrain from blaming everything on to the 40-hour week.

Hon. G. Fraser: They must have something to blame.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I hope the Minister will reconsider the possibility of complying with the reasonable request to withdraw this measure and introducing an amendment to the Profiteering Prevention Act. I do not like the Government's tactics in bringing forward legislation of this type as it gives too much power to this Chamber.

Hon. W. J. Mann: You are being disloyal to the Chamber.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I do not want to place in the hands of either House power to make and unmake legislation. We must all support the Bill, but I do it regretfully. We cannot do without a price control measure, and it is imperative that each State should agree to it. It is good news that the conference of Ministers in charge

of price-fixing has been successful, and that arrangements have been made for the secretariat to be established in Sydney. I am also glad that the commission has been increased to three members by another place, and I hope this will be allowed to remain in the Bill. If it is, it will give the public, the manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce equal representation. It should be more effective legislation than that operated by the Commonwealth, but I do think that even at this late hour the Government should withdraw the Bill and re-enact the Profiteering Prevention Act.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: It is already on the statute-book.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It would need a proclamation to extend it. With these reservations, I support the second reading of the Bill.

HON. SIR CHARLES LATHAM (East) [5.7]: To a certain extent I agree with the remarks made by Mr. Gray. I still feel that a great mistake has been made by the Government in introducing this form of legislation. The Government is trying to emulate the Commonwealth Government which was operating under wartime conditions. Members will remember that the National Security Act, which was passed in the early stages of the war, gave terrific powers to the Commonwealth Government to act in a case of emergency. The outcome of that Act is the regulations that we are now more or less making a part of this Bill, although we have no information outside an odd copy of the regulations circulated among members. That is the result of the legislation and I believe it was very wise because at that stage of the war we did not know from day to day what emergencies might arise, and it was essential that the national Parliament should have power to deal with any such emergency if it did arise. It enabled quick decisions to be made.

The Bill puts me in mind of some European legislation that has been framed from time to time by ordinances and Parliament really existed more or less as we are going to exist if this Bill is passed—for the purpose of accepting anything submitted to it. It is, of course, extending power to Ministers instead of to Parliament. I hope to show members as I go on just what is

happening. I asked the Minister last evening whether this form of legislation had been introduced in the other States. I have since ascertained that three States have already passed legislation, and I have just been advised that it has been assented to. In South Australia the legislation was introduced on the 1st July.

Hon. G. Fraser: That was before the conference.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Yes.

Hon. H. Hearn: It was passed on the 5th August.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Yes. South Australia introduced its legislation on the 1st July, and the Governor assented to it on the 5th August. New South Wales has passed its legislation, which will be proclaimed on the day that the Commonwealth Act ceases to function. It was introduced on the 21st July, which was just about the time that this House first met. In Victoria the Bill was read a first time on the 7th July and was assented to today. Those pieces of legislation were set out very clearly more or less on the lines of the Profiteering Prevention Act of this State.

I want to make clear in the minds of members the point Mr. Gray referred to and that is that it will be necessary to deal with the measure that is already on the statute book. One of its provisions is that it should continue in force during the continuance of the war in which His Majesty was at the commencement of the Act engaged and for a period of six months thereafter, and no longer. We all know that peace has not yet been proclaimed with any of the enemy countries, and I do not know when it will be. It certainly cannot be proclaimed in Europe until there is a stable Government in Germany and in some of the other countries. Peace with Japan may, of course, be proclaimed at any time, so that the Act is still in operation. I notice that no provision has been included in the Bill before the House to repeal that Act, so if this Bill passes we will have two Acts on the statute book dealing with the same subject.

It is within the power of the Government to take action under the Profiteering Prevention Act and it will also be able to take action by virtue of the power embodied in this Bill unless the Government proposes

to repeal the Profiteering Prevention Act, as it has a right to do. The introduction of this class of legislation is quite new inasmuch as we are adopting the regulations under the Bill and those regulations will not be laid on the Table of the House as they were in the Commonwealth Parliament. All regulations made under the National Security Act had to be laid on the Table of both the Commonwealth Houses. Those regulations could be disallowed by members of either Chamber. That power is taken away from this House because, if I have read the Bill correctly, the regulations now become a part of the law. I venture to suggest that there are not five members of this House who know anything about the regulations, and it is a wrong principle to adopt.

I have always been very careful and I have always warned new members as far as it is possible for me to do so, not to set up precedents of that character. They are very dangerous because once a precedent has been established it can be carried on indefinitely. It could lead to such a state of affairs as exists in European Parliaments, and until quite recently in the Northern Territory. Matters could be dealt with by ordinances without consulting Parliament at all. If we pass the Bill as it stands, we shall be approving of a piece of legislation which has tacked to it regulations that I venture to suggest very few members have seen and, even if they have seen them, I doubt whether they can have reached an understanding of them in the time at their disposal since the second reading was moved last night.

I have tried to understand the regulations. Since the last reprint of the consolidated regulations, many amendments have been made, and they are very difficult indeed to follow. The draftsman, however, has taken out certain clauses and included them in the measure. No doubt the reason was that no regulations can be made under an Act of Parliament unless their making is authorised by the Act. Otherwise, if they came under consideration in a court, they could be declared ultra vires the Act, and that would defeat the object of the law.

I cannot see that it is too late for the Government to withdraw the Bill and rely upon the Act already on the statute book

and make the necessary minor amendments to it. It requires only a few alterations. One necessary amendment is that any processes or actions that may be under way when the Commonwealth ceases to function as a price-fixing authority may be taken over and continued by the State. Such an amendment is essential. Outside that, I cannot see why we should not operate under the existing legislation. When one peruses the Act and allows for the change of phraseology, one must realise that it covers almost everything dealt with by the regulations. I shall be interested to hear what the Honorary Minister has to say in the course of his reply, but I think it would be better to vote out this Bill and have the existing statute amended to give effect to the desires of the Government and, I believe, the desires of the people.

I wish to make my position perfectly clear. I consider that it will be necessary to have price-fixing legislation for a time, but that view has not been expressed throughout Australia. The Victorian Act is not a piece of price-fixing legislation; it is a measure to decontrol prices.

The Honorary Minister: So is this.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It does not say so.

The Honorary Minister: Yes, it does. Clause 14 definitely contains provision for the decontrol of prices.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I do not read it in that way.

The Honorary Minister: I do.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: We shall be able to discuss that point in Committee. The Victorian Act definitely provides for decontrol and the duration of the statute there is six months.

The Honorary Minister: That is so.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: The life of the New South Wales Act is indefinite while that of the South Australian Act is almost identical with the provision in this measure. Our Bill provides for continuance till the 31st December, 1949, and the South Australian Act is to continue until the 1st January, 1950. I do not know whether the Honorary Minister, acting on behalf of the Government, will agree to the suggestion I have made, but I still think that it would be easier for the people to

understand and certainly much easier for those who have to operate under such legislation, if we adhered to the existing Act.

This class of legislation has two purposes. Firstly, it must act as a deterrent against people charging unduly high prices. Consequently, apart from its value for permitting prosecutions, it has an important effect as a deterrent. Perhaps that is the greatest value of legislation of this sort. If business people engaged in the sale of goods are aware that there is a statute prohibiting them from exploiting the public, they will be extremely careful in what they do, especially when penalties are provided for offences. Therefore there will probably be very few cases of exploiting the public. Traders will know that fairly heavy penalties are provided for the punishment of offences.

I do not propose to enter into the history of the cause of high prices. The Minister gave a very good speech in explanation of his views when moving the second reading of the Bill, but I was greatly interested to hear Mr. Gray state that the fewer hours one works, the more work one does. That is a new theory to me. If a machine can turn out a certain number of articles in a given time, would the hon. member say that, if the time of operating were reduced by four hours a week, the machine would still turn out the same number of articles? Of course, it could not do so and therefore this makes the cost of the goods turned out by those machines so much higher. No great brain power is needed to appreciate that fact. Let us be sensible. Let us candidly admit that if we are going to have a 30-hour week, the cost of goods must increase proportionately.

I can remember when there was no limitation to the number of hours of work, and I am not aware that many people suffered in consequence, though in some industries the employees certainly did suffer. Then the 48-hour week was introduced and naturally goods became dearer. Just recently, at a time that was most inopportune, when the Commonwealth Government was preaching the gospel "Keep prices down"—that was the slogan of the Government and could be seen stamped on envelopes and exhibited in other places—it was advocating a shorter working week. That was neither sensible nor logical.

Hon. E. M. Heenan: The 40-hour week was granted by a properly constituted tribunal.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Yes, and the Governments acceded to the request for a 40-hour week. Even the State Government did so, the Commonwealth having given a lead. There was no opposition to it. I would not have minded so much had not the people been misled by the statement that the 40-hour week would not mean additional costs. Therefore it is of no use claiming that legislation of this sort will keep prices down if we adopt shorter hours of work.

Hon. E. M. Heenan: Do you advocate more hours?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: If the hon. member would cheapen the cost of goods, he must realise that the more hours machines work, the more goods will be produced. Everyone advocates increased production to lessen the cost of goods.

Hon. E. M. Davies: You did not think of that in the depression.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: At that time we had more goods than the people could buy, but the depression was not peculiar to Western Australia. It did not start here. If my memory serves me aright, it started in Russia, because that country exported a tremendous quantity of wheat to England with a view to acquiring goods needed in order to keep the Russian people going, and the wheat was sold on the London market at one shilling per bushel. The depression started in a country whose example some of our friends would advocate our following, and I do not know that that would be wise.

The Honorary Minister: You know whether it would be wise or not.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It is a remarkable fact that not long ago the Communist Party placarded footpaths and other places with the slogan "40-hour week and £1 a week increase." Would Mr. Heenan suggest that the adoption of those conditions would lead to the cheapening of the cost of goods?

Hon. E. M. Heenan: Do you suggest that the court was influenced by propaganda?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: The court was influenced by the belief that the Government wanted the 40-hour week. I do not intend to worry about the question whether these courts are impartial or otherwise. I shall not, as members in some of the Parliaments of Australia do—slate the judges of the court, but I do believe that judges can make mistakes, just as everybody else can. I remember a judge on one occasion stating that if an industry could not pay a certain amount of wages, it should be closed down. That was a very important industry, too. Would anyone suggest that that was a logical view to take? I remember that happening.

The Honorary Minister: That is right. I, too, remember it.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Of course, the industry concerned could pay the wages, provided the public was agreeable to meeting the increased costs. Every time we increase wages, there is a tendency to inflation. That actually is inflation; we cannot escape from that fact.

I am desirous of helping the Government in any way I can to keep prices down so that the value of money may not be depreciated to the extent it has been depreciated in other countries. We must have legislation rather than lose control of prices, and so I suppose we shall have to support this Bill, but I think the wiser plan would be to utilise the measure which was passed in 1939. It could be brought into operation with slight amendments and on the word of the Government that it proposed to act under that statute. As I have pointed out, only minor amendments would be needed. The first amendment would be to declare the duration of the Act, and another amendment would be required to give power to take over any actions pending when the Commonwealth ceases to function as a price-fixing authority on the 20th September.

I was interested to read in this morning's paper a statement by a member of another place—he evidently holds the same views as I do—that the Bill should be scrapped and resort had to the legislation already on the statute book, but he went on to say that this House was emasculating the Bill. He made that statement although the Bill was not even before us. I also thought it most extraordinary that a member of that House,

who had had an opportunity to voice his opinion on the Bill when the measure was under consideration there, should allow the opportunity to pass and then state his views on the Address-in-reply debate.

Hon. E. M. Davies: Which party does he belong to?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I do not care what party he belongs to; it is a question of being reasonably fair to this Chamber, irrespective of what one's views might be. Bills, when they are received here, are not emasculated but receive the consideration to which they are entitled, and nothing that anyone may say will stifle me or prevent me from expressing my opinions. I shall express myself and do what I think is right and, by so doing, I hope I shall be acting in the best interests of the State. I may be wrong sometimes, perhaps often, but who does not make some mistakes when attempting to do something? I hope the Minister will have the debate adjourned and discuss with other members of the Cabinet the points I have raised. This Bill is a bad piece of legislation; it is purely a skeleton measure framed somewhat on lines to meet an emergency that does not now exist.

The Honorary Minister: That is a reflection on another place, which passed the Bill.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It is not a reflection on another place. I repeat that it is a bad Bill and one can say that without reflecting on anybody. Another place is just as capable of making mistakes as I am. I believe that, if the other House had had a little more time to consider the matter, it would have realised that many things that ought to have been included have been omitted from the Bill. I cannot understand the action of members of that House in passing a Bill to enact regulations that they have not seen, and that is what this Bill proposes to do. Many members have not seen the regulations.

The Honorary Minister: They had an opportunity to see them.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: All of them?

The Honorary Minister: Yes, just as the regulations are available for the information of members of this House.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I do not think too many members of this House have seen them.

Hon. E. M. Heenan: How many copies are there?

The Honorary Minister: Eight or nine have been distributed to members of this House.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: There are 30 members in this House! I have a copy of the regulations and, so that members may have an opportunity of knowing what they look like and the possibility of consideration being given to them, I will show them to the House. Here, too, are the consolidated regulations, and there are many amendments to them. No man can read them and understand them in less than eight hours. Some of my friends advocate a 40-hour week! I stayed up till midnight trying to understand these regulations.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: And do you?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I know there is a lot of repetition in them, and some clauses of the Bill represent whole regulations, so that the measure in some respects just duplicates the regulations. When the Bill was introduced in another place, an important clause was omitted and had to be added on the advice of the Minister in charge of the Bill. Without that clause, he would have had no power to frame regulations. I want to know from the Honorary Minister how long we are going to have these regulations.

The Honorary Minister: The shortest time possible, so far as I am concerned.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I warn members that these regulations can continue to operate until the repeal of the Act. Do not forget that a threat is held over members of this House, as well as of another place, that if other regulations are introduced and are not agreed to, these regulations will remain in force.

Hon. G. Fraser: A very good thing.

Hon. E. H. Gray: That is very necessary.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Some day there will be regulations introduced on those lines that will have a very different reception from the hon. member sitting behind me. Mr. Fraser is encouraging a precedent for which he will be sorry some day! If similar regulations were embodied in the Workers' Compensation Act, or the Arbitration Act, I venture to suggest they would receive very little support from the hon.

member, and I would not blame him the slightest bit.

The Honorary Minister: You say these regulations will remain until the repeal of the Act. They cannot be enforced for longer than 12 months.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: They will remain until the repeal of the Act or until it ceases to operate. They are there for 12 months. Let me remind the Minister and the rest of the House that a little while ago a referendum was held. Mr. Gray is wrong—and very often is, the same as I am—about the attitude of the Liberal Party, or any other party, in connection with this matter. What is plain is that the people, with no uncertain voice, said, "No, we do not want the Commonwealth Government to have this power." But what we are proposing to take over is the very same power.

The Honorary Minister: For a month or two, or less.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I hope it is; but do not forget there is a clause that the Leader of the Opposition persuaded the Minister to insert. I can just imagine him pleading with the Minister sitting opposite to include this clause on the ground that it was a safety measure. It was on his suggestion that this clause was inserted making regulations, that he probably had not seen, permanent.

Hon. G. Fraser: It was on notice by the Minister and not as the result of an amendment proposed by the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Did the hon. member read the speech? The Leader of the Opposition was the man who brought the matter up and said it was necessary to have the clause inserted. The Minister said, "Yes, I forgot that, and will introduce it." It was probably a wise thing; but this is a very poor class of legislation. Let us know what we are legislating for and what we are legislating with. If we do not understand this measure, how can we expect the public to do so?

The Honorary Minister: You might understand it by next Tuesday. You have the regulations.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I like the Minister's statement; it is just about true. I might understand it. I venture to

suggest that even he will admit, with all his knowledge —

The Honorary Minister: I do not profess to have more knowledge than you.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I will be generous and admit that the Minister has more to do than I. He has his office work to attend to. But I have put in all the morning, more or less, and stayed up last night reading Eastern States Bills, which practically conform to our existing legislation. In the Eastern States they are going to introduce their own regulations, and I want to see that done here.

The Honorary Minister: We are going to do that. This is only for the transition period.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: The State is not taking over until the 20th of the month.

The Honorary Minister: That is so.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Let us have regulations of our own. What are our parliamentary draftsmen doing? We are working very much in the dark. I understand that there are thousands of articles to be decontrolled.

Hon. G. W. Miles: There are 30,000.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Not as many as that, I think.

Hon. G. W. Miles: That is what was announced.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I do not think there are quite as many as that, but I would like some knowledge of what they are.

The Honorary Minister: You will be told.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Can the Minister tell us how many are controlled today?

The Honorary Minister: I will tell you how many will be decontrolled.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I understand it is 20,000. Do not forget that items that are decontrolled can come under control the next day.

Hon. L. Craig: You do not trust the Government very much!

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I did not say they will; I said they can.

Hon. L. Craig: You are suggesting they will.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I might suggest anything. The point is that they can be brought under control. Will Mr. Craig say that they cannot?

Hon. L. Craig: The moon can fall from the sky.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It cannot! How the devil can the moon fall from the sky? What a nice interjection that is! That is typical of Dardanup, is it not? It is quite possible to bring every one of these articles under control the day after they have been decontrolled. There is no doubt about that. I think that if we had legislation which made it a very serious offence to overcharge for any article, that is all that would be necessary. I hope the Minister will agree to one or two amendments. I think, for instance, that he will have better service from one commissioner than from three commissioners. I hope he will agree to an amendment on those lines and that he will give power to that commissioner to call in qualified people to assist him. The commissioner cannot be expected to be an expert in everything.

The Honorary Minister: Would you have a standing advisory committee, or call in anybody?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: We could not have a standing advisory committee because the number of articles that would be controlled would be so varied that I do not see how we could get anybody well enough versed in all of them to be of assistance. A man who could deal with the price of drapery would not necessarily be able to deal with the price of hay in a paddock. During the last war there was a piece of legislation on the statute book which served its purpose very well. There were only a few prosecutions under it, but it acted as a deterrent and prevented exploitation of the public. I heard a statement that after the last war inflation took place because of high prices. But there can be no comparison between the 1914-18 war and World War II, because so many people were taken out of industry on the latter occasion.

Hon. E. M. Davies: Prices were higher in 1919 in many instances than they are today.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Without subsidies, I should say "No". Butter reached a maximum of 2s. 6d. a lb. I be-

lieve that if it were not for the subsidy, butter would be 2s. 6d. now. I do not know what the subsidy is. Tea has gone up in price, not due to any cause within Australia but because conditions have changed in the places where tea is produced. Mr. Gray talked about too much being charged for wheat. We did not charge too much. The price paid was one at which the Imperial Government was glad to get the wheat. That product was bringing 20s. a bushel when the Imperial Government offered 17s., which was accepted.

The Honorary Minister: The Argentine is getting 30s. a bushel.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: That is so. It must be remembered that the farmer has to pay the high cost of all the goods that he has to purchase, irrespective of where they are made. He is in a position different from that of everyone else. He is the one man who says, "What will you give me for my product?" It does not matter whether a man be a wool producer, a meat producer, a wheat producer or a producer of any other cereal, he says, "What will you give me?" But in the store from which he buys his goods, there is a fixed price for what he wants.

Do not forget, either, that the farmer has to pay freight both ways. He has to pay freight to the place to which he sends his goods, and also freight on goods which he gets in return. It is not the city folk who do that, but the farming community. These things should be looked at sometimes from the farmers' point of view. I agree that prices are too high. But I am satisfied that the farmers would be prepared to take a lesser price for their wheat if it would be of any great advantage to the British people. The contributions made by the Commonwealth Government to the Imperial Government from time to time may be some compensation for the high prices Britain is paying for our commodities. I think we presented £35,000,000 to Britain, which, however, in comparison with what Canada has done, is but a small amount.

Getting back to the Bill, I would like to feel satisfied that I am entitled to support it but I do not feel that way. I do not like the Bill. It is a skeleton piece of legislation. We do not know what powers we are getting under it or what powers are necessary. I think it would be sufficient if we

amended the legislation we already have and had our own regulations the same as the other States. Their Bills are different from this one. I suggest that the Government give consideration to that matter.

HON. C. F. BAXTER (East) [5.43]: It is unfortunate that the Commonwealth Government was so piqued as to pass this responsibility on to the States in such a desperate hurry. It has not given them an opportunity to begin on a different basis from that followed in the past by the Commonwealth Government.

Hon. G. Fraser: They said they were ready to take over before the referendum. They have had three months since.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Three months! Parliament was not in session. If the Commonwealth Government had had any common decency it would have allowed its term of control to run out instead of, in a fit of pique, throwing the responsibility on to the States. The hon. member is interjecting and trying to protect a Government which is not worthy of protection.

Hon. G. Fraser: It did what the public wanted it to do.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: It has forced us into this position, that I do not see how we can avoid supporting the Bill, although not fully. There is a large number of articles on which prices have been assessed for a considerable time quite unnecessarily, as the supply of those goods has in some cases been more than equal to the demand. Had price-fixing not been applied to them they would have been cheaper today. That in itself is of great importance. It must be understood that price-fixing is not only harassing but very expensive to traders. A trader receives commodities and must then wait a considerable time before he gets an assessment of the prices at which they can be sold. Of course, the cost of goods to the public is rising, but how can that be otherwise when all other charges are increasing in like measure. The trader must receive his percentage of profit in order to carry on, and price-fixing simply makes his position more difficult.

When the State takes over prices control the position will be different from that obtaining under Commonwealth control. The State Government must to a large extent be guided by the parliamentary repre-

representatives of the people, and those representatives are in turn responsible to the electors. Therefore when the State takes over from the Commonwealth we should have some measure of real control at last. The kind of treatment received by the States from the Commonwealth is well known. We have only to read reports of a recent conference to see what the attitude of the head of the Federal Government is. There are two provisions in the Bill that will receive my strongest opposition. One of them, Clause 6, will only make the position more difficult from an administrative standpoint and more costly for the traders. Why on earth are three commissioners necessary?

Hon. E. H. Gray: In order to protect the traders and the public.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I am afraid the traders will get very little protection from those with whom the hon. member associates politically. Who are the three commissioners to represent? If I have my way, the Bill will leave this Chamber shorn of Clause 6. I come next to a most iniquitous provision, Clause 12 (d) (iii), which states that nothing in the clause shall be deemed to prohibit —

The Commissioners, or any person so authorised by the Commissioners, from communicating to the Commissioner of Taxation, or a Deputy Commissioner of Taxation, any information for the purpose of the administration of any law relating to taxation.

What are things coming to when the price fixing organisation is asked to act as pimp for the Taxation Department?

Hon. E. H. Gray: That would not worry the honest trader.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: The Taxation Department is doing very well, without help of that kind. If we are to delegate such authority to other sections of government, where will it end?

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: But that is copied from the Commonwealth regulations.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I hope this House will remove that iniquitous provision from the Bill. If allowed to remain it would make the price-fixing organisation the scout of the Taxation Department, to report even little things —

Hon. E. H. Gray: Or big things.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: —and it could go right through a trader's business, reporting everything to the Taxation Department, which already has its own sources of information. While I will support the second reading of the Bill, I do not wish it to leave this Chamber without those two provisions having been removed. It is silly to have three commissioners and iniquitous to give the price-fixing organisation power to hand on information to the Taxation Department. Traders are suffering sufficiently today through rising costs, and yet members ask why various articles are becoming more expensive. With costs building up as they are, the cost of living generally must continue to rise.

What is the position today, with all the increases in the basic wage? The basic wage earner is now worse off than he was a few years ago, because the cost of living has risen by a greater percentage than have wages. I think the measure is necessary and that it should be passed as soon as possible. While the Government is taking over staff from the Commonwealth organisation, that staff must be co-ordinated and everything got ready to take over control towards the end of this month. Twenty days is not a long time. It is regrettable to find members of another place, as reported in "The West Australian," harping all the time on the Legislative Council. Nothing is more obnoxious and nothing points so clearly to the weakness of the attitude that members of that House are adopting. This State can well be proud of its industrial laws. There is no better industrial legislation in the world than that of Western Australia.

Hon. G. Fraser: That might have been so 20 years ago.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Then what has the hon. member's party been doing all the time?

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: They have made it worse.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. W. J. Mann: They had 14 years in which to muck it up.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: How were our industrial laws established, if not with the assistance and concurrence of the Legislative Council. Throughout, the attitude of this House towards industrial laws has been

helpful and the only time it displayed opposition was in the case of some legislation that would have acted to the detriment of the workers themselves. Mr. Gray will remember that his Government brought a Bill before this Chamber—I have never seen a more wretched Bill—and I practically re-drafted it. I received the appreciation of Mr. Gray, on behalf of his Government for doing so. That was a Bill to which this Chamber agreed in its amended form, although if it had gone on the statute book in its original form, it would have been nothing but a farce. That incident is characteristic of the attitude of this Chamber throughout. I support the second reading of the Bill but the two provisions I have mentioned will receive my strongest opposition.

HON. L. CRAIG (South-West) [5.55]: I feel that the State Profiteering Prevention Act would have provided a better basis on which to deal with this matter, but I have no doubt that the Government was subject to some degree of panic at having been forced to take over the control of prices within such a short space of time. Having the responsibility suddenly thrust upon them, Ministers, in their wisdom or otherwise, said, "Let us introduce a new Bill and, as a stop-gap, let us accept the regulations that are applied today." Those of us who have had a few weeks in which to examine the matter may now think that the Profiteering Prevention Act would provide a better basis, but I am not sure we would have been in a position to express that view three weeks ago. If the Government had had as long to think the matter over as we have had, it would perhaps have adopted that legislation.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: It could have seen what the other States did.

Hon. L. CRAIG: Had there been time, the Government might have done that. However, it has decided to introduce this Bill and I think we should do our best to make the measure workable. It would be unthinkable to withdraw the present Bill and endeavour to introduce another after all the difficulty and trouble that has been experienced over it in another place. We do not all agree with the Bill as it stands, but I feel the Government is to be trusted.

From speeches made in this House and another place it would almost be thought that

the Government was an alien body and that members should be careful, not knowing what it might do tomorrow, to cross every "t" and dot every "i." This House should not adopt that attitude. Even if we do not quite like the measure we should do all we can to improve it and to assist the Government in dealing with those prices that must be controlled. At the Premiers' Conference held on the 23rd June last there was passed a resolution that should be in the minds of members when dealing with this measure. It was carried unanimously, and read as follows:—

It is desirable to reduce to the greatest extent possible the incidence of price controls and action should be taken immediately to survey all existing orders with a view to their elimination when such a course does not interfere with the economic stability of the States concerned or of other States.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Victoria is the only State that has attempted to do it.

Hon. L. CRAIG: It rests with us to say how far we shall attempt it. We must be reasonable. By the 20th September we should be in a position where we can have a workable Act on the statute-book. Perhaps it will not be 100 per cent. what we would like, but at least it should be able to function, and would be subject to amendment from time to time. I am not too happy about the provision for the tabling of the Commonwealth regulations that we have to accept. Members have complained that they have not had opportunity of seeing those regulations, but they were not given that opportunity when the regulations became Commonwealth law, and if members did see the regulations nothing could be done about them. They are too complicated.

These regulations are merely a stop-gap and are simply a temporary measure. Having accepted this form of introducing price control, we must adopt the Federal regulations for the time being. Later on State regulations will be introduced and we can deal with them then. One point I do not like about the matter is that we shall not be in a position to disallow the State regulations because if we do, the Federal regulations will immediately operate.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: That is so.

Hon. L. CRAIG: In effect, we are saying, "We must have the State or Federal regulations in toto and we cannot disallow one of the State regulations."

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Do you think that is a good piece of legislation?

Hon. L. CRAIG: No, I do not, but if Sir Charles will allow me to proceed I will explain what is in my mind. In Clause 14, the Bill provides that the Government shall make regulations with respect to the various matters referred to in Subclause (1) and then in Subclause (2) it is provided that until the regulations are made, the Commonwealth regulations, with appropriate adaptations, shall take effect and have the force of law. The subclause says that that position shall apply until regulations relating to any matter—I quote the subparagraphs embodied in the subclause—

(i) are made pursuant to the provisions of the last preceding subsection; and

(ii) are published in the *Gazette*; and

(iii) are laid before both Houses of Parliament as required by Section 36 of the Interpretation Act, 1918-1938; and

This is the particular paragraph of importance that I draw attention to—

(iv) are no longer liable to be disallowed.

I have not had time closely to examine the position and I am not quite sure what the effect of that will be. It would seem that we are not to have power to disallow the State regulations. However, it would possibly be better to discuss this matter in Committee. We must agree to the second reading of the Bill and then in Committee we can thrash out the real meaning of some of the clauses.

There are in the Bill some anomalies with which I am not in agreement. I do not think three commissioners are necessary and I believe that single commissioner control would be much better. One man should accept the responsibility, subject to the Minister. I would certainly not relieve the Minister of his proper responsibility. If one commissioner were appointed, he should be provided with advisers of some description. I am not in a position to say whether the advisers should consist of a standing committee of three or whether, better still, a flexible committee should be set up with advisers who would deal with specific commodities. I am sure that the representatives of the clothing trade would greatly assist the commissioner with advice and the same would apply to those in the furniture trade and in other spheres of operations. Such advisers should confer with the Minister and not with the commis-

sioner, so that there would be access to the Minister direct and not merely to the commissioner.

The Honorary Minister: I would agree to that.

Hon. L. CRAIG: I think it would be a good idea. According to the Bill the commissioners are to have power to fix—

Different maximum prices according to differences in quality or description or in the quantity sold, or in respect of different forms, modes, conditions, terms, or localities of trade, commerce, sale, or supply.

I think that provision should be eliminated. I do not think the commissioners should be able to fix different prices for a person merely because he sold more of a commodity than someone else did. If a firm were able to treble or quadruple its turnover, it should not be penalised because it was able to sell more than another person could dispose of. The Bill places that power in the hands of the commissioners. The quantity sold has very little to do with the price charged. Then again the commissioners are to have power to fix maximum prices so that—

Such prices shall vary in accordance with the standard, or time, or other circumstance, or shall vary with profits or wages or with such costs as are determined by the commissioners.

I do not think the word “profits” should be included in that power. How much a man is making has nothing to do with the commissioners, so long as he is not selling at a price higher than others are charging.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: That has been lifted out of the Commonwealth regulations entirely.

Hon. L. CRAIG: Has it? At any rate, it is included in the Bill and if we pass it, that will be the law. I am sure Mr. Watson will not mind my referring to a case that he cited of a woman who before the war made sweets that she sold at 2s. a pound. During the war period she was able to increase her turnover to a large extent although the charges for the ingredients she used went up considerably. She was still able to sell her sweets at 2s. a lb. Then the price-fixing Commissioner told her she was doing so well that she must reduce her price to 1s. 9d. a lb. Just fancy that! She was able to maintain the price of 2s. a lb. only because of the tremendous increase in her turnover.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: It is exactly the same with the emporiums as compared with the small shops.

Hon. L. CRAIG: I do not think we should allow that power. If a man has acumen enough to enable him to increase his turnover and still allow a margin of profit, he should not be penalised because someone else has not the capacity to do the same thing. I shall support the second reading of the Bill and we must give the Government credit for wanting to do the right thing. We should not look upon the Government with suspicion. It is just as anxious as anyone else to decontrol commodities as soon as it can be done properly. I believe that some of the commodities that are controlled today should be decontrolled, including some that will not be controlled under this legislation. For instance, I believe meat should be removed entirely from control. I have it on what I regard as very good authority and am certainly not speaking loosely or foolishly when I say that I do not think that half the meat sold today is being controlled.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: It was not in Sydney.

Hon. L. CRAIG: According to what I was told, the departmental officers are just not hithering about it and the butchers themselves are not bothering either. I hope what I have said is not a misstatement. I certainly do not think it is. What applies to meat, I am informed applies to other commodities.

Hon. H. Hearn: No, not in Western Australia. We have enough officers here to police the regulations efficiently and successfully.

Hon. L. CRAIG: Does that apply to all commodities, to the hon. member's knowledge?

Hon. H. Hearn: Yes.

Hon. L. CRAIG: At any rate, that is the information I was given and I pass it on for what it is worth. I considered the authority of the individual who gave it to me sufficiently good for me to accept it. I was told that the officials were simply not bothering about meat today.

Hon. H. Hearn: Then the butchers are lucky.

Hon. L. CRAIG: At any rate, we will in time know just what commodities are under control. I am quite sure that if we eliminated control straight away, prices might rise temporarily but they would soon return to normal. We know what happened with regard to lamb sales. Up went prices for a while but then they soon reverted to normal and have not risen since. That will be the position with regard to other commodities. We know that some goods that are controlled were held by merchants who had heavy stocks of them and yet those merchants had to approach the Commissioner for permission to sell at the price to be fixed. I certainly hope members will give close attention to the Bill during its consideration in Committee.

HON. E. M. HEENAN (North-East) [6.11]: I have listened closely to the debate and have admired some of the contributions by previous speakers. The Labour Party to which I belong supports the principle of price control. I firmly believe that it is one of the most vital means by which the stabilisation of our economy can be achieved. We will not be out of the wood for a very long time and a wise, sensible piece of legislation will be urgently needed in the future. The people of Australia defeated the Commonwealth Government's referendum proposals and I really think that many of them considered, when they voted against them, that the result would be that price-fixing would be abolished. Many such people will have a rude shock when they understand the full implications of the Bill now before the House. I agree that legislation already on the statute-book should be made operative and be suitably amended.

I do not consider the Bill under discussion reflects much credit on the capacity of the Government to cope with the situation, in the establishing of which it played so large a part. Other members have pointed out that we have before us a measure that can be read in five minutes, but its principal part concerns a mass of regulations that have been passed in recent years. Some of those regulations have been amended from time to time so that no-one knows much about them. I am sure not many members of this Chamber have ever read the regulations or have any proper comprehension of them. As a lawyer, I have in recent

years received, month by month, copies of the regulations, but I find great difficulty in keeping up with the alterations. There is much to be said in favour of the objections raised by Sir Charles Latham, Mr. Craig, Mr. Gray and other speakers, but a measure to control prices is imperative. The time available is limited and I am constrained to support a Bill the provisions of which I do not like very much and which, as I mentioned earlier, does not reflect much credit on those who compiled it.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: I am disappointed that the vital cause of price control has been somewhat jeopardised by this scanty, unsatisfactory measure. I am sure that members were impressed by the resolution which was carried at the Premiers' Conference, that an effective system of price control is still vital. I hope the effect of this Bill will not be destroyed by amendments which experience might prove to be premature. Price control must be handled wisely and with extreme care. It was easy during recent years to rail against control by Canberra and to attack the Government which had the responsibility of piloting this country through the war years and the difficult post-war years. But in spite of all that, it is generally conceded that our Australian economy is on a better footing than is the economy of most countries of the world today.

Some people have short memories, yet many may recall America's experience when controls were removed in response to a clamour by a section of the American people. I hope we will be conservative in the matter of price control and proceed very warily indeed. Price control must have the support and confidence of the public. I am therefore sorry that the measure before us is not one that the people of the State can readily understand. Instead of this brief Bill, which is to be supported by a mass of regulations that people will have difficulty in procuring and comprehending, we should have a measure which could be easily understood by the public, who would have to abide by it. Severe penalties should be provided for those who break the law. It is difficult to realise how some people live, when one notes the price of children's

footwear, of shirts, overcoats and other vital necessities. One wonders how some people manage to get through at all.

The cost of living is mounting. It is easy to blame the 40-hour week. I find the popular impression is that the 40-hour week was a legislative enactment of the Commonwealth Labour Government. That impression has been sedulously fostered for the purpose only of creating prejudice in the public mind. The true facts are, of course, that the Arbitration Court, which is composed of the ablest and best men who could be procured in Australia, sat for many months, dealt with an enormous mass of evidence tendered by experts and others and then, in its wisdom, delivered a judgment which enacted the 40-hour week. Whether or not it was wise to grant the 40-hour week is a subject on which we can hold our own opinions; but the men in the best position to know—the judges—decided that it was to the interest of Australia to award the 40-hour week, and so it is the law.

Many other factors cause prices to rise. The dominating factor in this, as in other countries, is that civil production ceased for five or six years during a war the result of which meant our survival or fall. Everything was scrapped for the conduct of the war. It will take years to regain our equilibrium. Probably the present generation will never know the status quo as we knew it in the happier days. I am of opinion that production could be improved if men worked the 40-hour week conscientiously and well. There is a tendency, which is worldwide, for men to take things easy, to get something without working, to try to get easy money, but that tendency is not really associated with the 40-hour week.

The Honorary Minister: Can a tractor or a plough working 40 hours do as much work as it could do in 48? Explain that to me, and I will be with you.

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: I could give a satisfactory explanation, or an explanation which in my opinion would be satisfactory; but it is really beside the measure which we have before us.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: That is a good one!

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: As a matter of fact, I was surprised—

Hon. G. Fraser: That you got as far as you did.

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: —that the President did not restrain the member, I forget who it was, who gave us a lengthy discourse on the 40-hour week. I am afraid I have been equally guilty in discussing it at this stage.

Hon. G. Fraser: Don't contravene any more.

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: I commend to the House a reminder given to it by Mr. Craig. He told us that the Premiers' Conference was convinced that an effective system of price control was still vitally necessary. The Commonwealth regulations, about which I am afraid not many of us know much, at least have stood the testing period. It is said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and I am sure that the Commonwealth Government, if it had time to take note of our deliberations, would feel much flattered to know that the Government of Western Australia is simply transplanting what was the Commonwealth state of affairs into the State sphere, despite all the arguments which were used against Canberra control during the recent referendum.

The provision for the appointment of three commissioners appeals to me, as both the producers and the consumers will have representation. I am aware that it will involve the appointment of two more officials. We have many of them now, so one or two more will not make much difference. In effect, the chairman of the commissioners will function in the same way as the President of the Arbitration Court. He will be the final arbiter, but the public will know that its views will be expressed by their representatives. That, I think, will make for greater harmony and will give the public confidence, as they will know their requirements are being attended to. I support the second reading.

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

House adjourned at 7.15 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 1st September, 1948.

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

PRIVILEGE—NEWSPAPER STATEMENT.

MR. CORNELL (Avon) [4.32]: On a question of privilege, I desire to draw the attention of the House to an article that appeared in the issue of the "Workers Star" on the 27th August, 1948. In a column headed "Tintacks" the following appears:—

Electors who went up to Parliament House for the debate on the Prices Bill couldn't help contrasting Parliamentary wages and conditions with that of the average worker.

No speed-up in that joint—members sprawl in the soft leather armchairs, are allowed to smoke on the job, and doodle or whisper while speeches are being made, and when too bored can disappear for a drink.

They work a 15-hour week in three days until later in the session. But in the most strenuous week, they don't record 40 hours. But I haven't heard any of them come out against the Metal Trades Employers' demand for a return to the 48-hour week for workers.

To say that I take exception to the article would be an understatement, and I think members on both sides of the House will concur with me. Standing Order 142 reads—

Any member complaining to the House of a statement in a newspaper as a breach of privilege, shall produce a copy of the paper containing the statement in question, and be prepared to give the name of the printer or publisher, and also submit a substantive motion declaring the person in question to have been guilty of contempt.