

either as a prisoner of war or as gaoler of that particular man, was in charge of a winding engine which lowered and raised him to and from his work in the mine? This provision would allow Germans 'also to come here and qualify within 12 months. Many of them speak English fluently and, if they had a mechanical knowledge, would be able to qualify in a very short time. But they would be just as objectionable as the Southern Europeans.

It is true there are men of Southern European nationality, who drive hoists on the Golden Mile, but everyone of them is a naturalised British subject and I have no objection to them. No great hardship would be imposed on the few genuine cases that may be affected adversely by the amendment by being required to have a period of five years' residence in this country and to become naturalised, after which they would have all the liberties and freedom that British subjects enjoy. Enginedriving is a responsible occupation and great care should be exercised in deciding to whom we shall extend the privilege of engaging in it. Whether a man happens to be driving a winding engine in the mines or an engine on a timber mill or one in a factory, he has the lives and limbs of employees in his charge to a very great extent.

It would be wrong to leave this qualification wide open so that the nationals of any country could qualify, obtain a certificate and drive this particular type of machinery. The Enginedrivers' Union on the Goldfields has a distinct objection. It has no objection to the American or the Dutchman being permitted to qualify. The amendment will be suitable to the enginedrivers if agreed upon. While I admit there may be some objections, either real or imaginary, to my amendment, it provides everything the Minister asked for when he introduced the Bill, and it prevents many of the objections that could be raised by adopting the suggestion of the Minister, as outlined in the Bill, to strike out the words "British subject" and so leave the way open to every national under the sun to qualify as an enginedriver, and operate an engine in this State.

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 10.53 p.m.

Legislative Council.

Tuesday, 21st October, 1947.

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

QUESTION.

GOVERNMENT MOTOR VEHICLES.

As to Number, Control and Fuel Allocation.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER (on notice) asked the Minister for Mines:

(1) Seeing that further liquid fuel restrictions have been imposed, will the Minister state—

(a) What allocation of fuel is made to the Government?

(b) Has there been a reduction commensurate with that of private users?

(2) What is the number of motor vehicles used by the Government—

(a) motorcars;

(b) runabouts?

(3) What control is there over the use of such vehicles?

(4) Is it permissible for Government officers to use Government vehicles during weekends and holidays?

(5) What is the number of Government vehicles, other than ministerial cars, bearing private number plates?

(6) What is the reason for such?

(7) Will the Government initiate a pool to control the use of Government motor vehicles?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) (a) No definite allocation. Varies according to requirements. (b) No. It is impossible to curtail essential activities in the same way as pleasure motoring.

(2) This information is not readily available but will be prepared.

(3) In addition to ordinary departmental control, the Government has appointed a special committee to exercise general supervision.

(4) Generally no, but in some cases where it is necessary for duties to be carried out at these times, transport must be provided.

(5) Apart from cars in the Ministerial and Police Department garages—13.

(6) Varies according to circumstances, e.g., the confidential nature of inquiries by child welfare inspectors makes it undesirable that their presence at a house should be generally known in the locality. In some other cases detection of offences would be rendered more difficult by use of Government plates. A strictly limited number of senior officers (at present 5) whose duties require the constant use of a car are afforded this special privilege.

(7) An experiment in this direction is now being conducted and its scope will be extended.

BILLS (2)—THIRD READING.

1, War Relief Funds Act Amendment.

Passed.

2, Optometrists Act Amendment.

Transmitted to the Assembly.

BILL—MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS ACT AMENDMENT (No. 1).

Report of Committee adopted.

BILL—MILK ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 15th October.

HON. W. J. MANN (South-West) [4.38]: I have perused this Bill and so far as I can see the amendments proposed are quite reasonable. In fact, they aim at preventing any big firm or organisation from getting a monopoly of milk treatment plants and so possibly causing detriment to the general public. Apparently this matter was

overlooked when the principal Act was brought down, otherwise I feel sure provision would have been made to prevent such an occurrence. I support the Bill.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment and the report adopted.

BILL—MAIN ROADS ACT (FUNDS APPROPRIATION).

Second Reading.

Order of the Day read for the resumption from the 15th October of the debate on the second reading.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment and the report adopted.

BILL—ROAD DISTRICTS ACT AMENDMENT (No. 1).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 15th October.

HON. H. TUCKEY (South-West [4.45]): This Bill will tighten up the Act, but unfortunately it does not embody some very desirable amendments, and one in particular which I think is more important than any included in it. Something similar applied to the Traffic Bill which passed a few days ago. No provision was made in that measure to deal with glaring headlights, which I think are the greatest of all menaces to motorists, and there is no provision for absentee owners to vote at a loan poll.

Hon. E. H. Gray: That is a good idea.

Hon. H. TUCKEY: I have a case in mind where a loan poll was conducted, and it concerned 693 ratepayers. Of that number, 444 did not reside in the district. As a result, only about one-third of the ratepayers was entitled to vote. Large numbers of absentee owners possess more improved property in that district than do many who voted at the poll. To my mind that is unfair, if not

undemocratic. It does not seem right that because a man is an absentee he should not be able to vote on such an important question. The Act should be amended to allow those people to vote. More recently, the same road board desired to take a vote on the system of rating—whether on annual or unimproved values. The board was advised to use the loan poll machinery, but it was not satisfactory because the absentees, could not vote. Consequently, no vote could be taken. In other words, the question could not be referred to the ratepayers.

Section 74 of the Act provides that all ballot papers shall be initialled by the returning officer. The initials may be lithographed or stamped on the back of the ballot papers. The section was evidently badly drawn because as it stands a returning officer may initial the ballot papers on the day before the election. That was never intended by Parliament, and no sensible person would do it. So far as I know it has never been done, although the Minister for Local Government said he had received complaints that election irregularities had taken place at Irwin-Moore and at Murray. There is no knowledge of such a thing having happened at Murray. I have had a lot of experience with that particular board and I have not heard of any complaints. I have discussed these points with the secretary of the board, who has always been the returning officer, and he said he had not received any complaints, and furthermore he said that he never initialled a paper other than immediately prior to handing it to the voter. Any person who stamped ballot papers prior to the election would not be fit for his job. In any case, this measure will prevent that from being done in the future.

Another amendment which could be brought about is one to exclude the public from polling booths during an election count. It should not be permissible for anyone to walk into a polling booth and interrupt the returning officer while he is engaged on his official duties. At the present time the doors can be locked, but there is no provision by which the returning officer or anyone else can prevent members of the public from entering, or send them out of the polling booth if they come in. All the amendments included in the Bill are desirable and it is not necessary for me to refer to them in detail. The provision that will require pre-

siding officers, returning officers and scrutineers to sign declarations is essential and represents a distinct improvement.

That also applies to the clause regarding land that can re-vest in the Crown where rates have been unpaid for seven years. That provision will be satisfactory to local authorities. Then again, the suggestion that those authorities shall have power to contribute to a replacement or sinking fund will be of assistance to boards. In the past they have found it difficult to provide funds for the purchase of plant, which is very dear. I do not suppose a heavy truck or a tractor suitable for road board work could be bought for less than £1,000, or perhaps more. In consequence, when replacements become necessary a board has to borrow money for that special purpose. That is not a very desirable course, and it is certainly better for a fund to be created. Thus when plant has to be replaced, the necessary money will be available. •

In the past boards have tried to adopt this method, but the Government auditors have objected on the ground that no power was provided in the Act enabling the board to establish such a fund from which to obtain money to replace plant when it was worn out. In my opinion, that amendment is probably the best included in the Bill. I do not think it is necessary for me to deal with the measure at any greater length, but I reiterate that I have never been able to understand why absentee owners should not be allowed to vote in connection with a loan poll in the circumstances such as I mentioned earlier. In that case, two-thirds of the ratepayers were debarred from exercising the franchise although in many instances they were more interested in the development of the district—

Hon. G. Fraser: It looks like it, seeing that they were not prepared to live there!

Hon. H. TUCKEY:—than some of those who live there and do very little to improve their properties. I am quite sure that such a provision does not make for progress. Such absentee owners should be entitled to have a say in the affairs of the local authority concerned.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt in the Chair; the Minister for Mines in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1 to 12—agreed to.

Clause 13—New Section 286EA:

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: The proposed new section provides for a departure from the usual system regarding land the rates upon which have not been paid. After all, seven years is a very short period. While the Minister is to be given power to agree to or reject any such proposal as that outlined in the new provision, it should be necessary to advertise the intention of the board to adopt the course outlined. I realise that advertising along the lines adopted in the past is costly, and merely a simple notification in the local paper or in one circulating in the district would be required setting out that it was the intention of the board to apply to the Minister for the re-vesting of the land in the Crown. The owner of the property might happen to be out of the country for a lengthy period. He might be away for a year and during that period the board might decide to seek ministerial approval for the re-vesting of the man's property in the Crown. There is the sacred right of ownership, and I would be reluctant to see legislation passed that would take away that right.

Hon. G. Fraser: If he were away, he would not see the advertisement in the local paper.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: No, but his attorney or some friend of his might see it and advise the owner accordingly. I know nothing can be done about it at this stage unless progress is reported so that some consideration could be given to the point. I trust that when the Minister is called upon to take action under this provision he will be careful not to deprive an individual of the ownership of his property if that person should be entitled to retain it. I know that if a man allows his rates to remain unpaid for so long a period he must accept the consequences, but very frequently rate notices are sent to an individual's old address although he may have advised the board of a change of domicile. In consequence, many rate notices are returned to a board through the Dead Letter Office, and no further action is taken. As a one-time chairman of a road board, I know that has

happened and no notice has been taken by the secretary until someone interested himself in the matter. For that reason, I hope the Minister will take all necessary precautions to ensure that this particular power is not exercised lightly, so that due consideration may be given to the interests of absentee owners.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Mr. Latham need not have any fears on the point he has raised, because power to take the action he complains of already exists and if rates on a property remain unpaid for a period of five years the land can be sold.

Hon. C. G. Latham: But there is no provision for advertising the intention of the board to take action.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: That is so. If a man does not look after his property for seven years, I do not know why we should ask the road board concerned to go to the expense of paying for advertisements. I do not think we need worry about such an individual. We know that properties in respect of which rates remain unpaid for years, are usually of little or no value and the proposed new section will avoid the necessity for a board going to further expense in taking action to re-vest such land in the Crown. No Minister would allow action to be taken as suggested if there was any possibility of the rates being paid or the land being valuable. Many blocks of land are held by absentee owners and they take no interest whatever in them. Rate notices addressed to them are returned to the board year after year.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I pointed out the reason for that. Some are returned to the board because they have been sent to wrong addresses.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Letters are frequently sent to my private office. One such letter has been coming to me for years, but it has nothing whatever to do with me. It concerns land in one of the suburbs. The clause under discussion is designed to avoid the unnecessary expense of advertising.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I am not satisfied with the Minister's statement. Recently, a man came here from New Zealand. He was a beneficiary under his father's will. He knew his father owned land here and was quite willing to pay the rates on it, but he said

he had not at any time during which he was administering the estate received any notice that rates were due. Furthermore, he did not know whether the land was of any value or not. Although a person may have moved to another address and advised the secretary of the road board of his new place of residence, it often happens that the correction is not made in the register. The Taxation Department is frequently advised of changes of address, but notices are still sent to the previous place of residence. There is no need to bother about worthless land, but if the land is valuable we should be sure that some protection is afforded to the owner lest he should lose his property. Surely the Minister knows that land is sometimes redeemed a few days before it is put up for auction because of unpaid rates. The public should be protected in matters of this kind.

Hon. W. R. HALL: I am in favour of the clause. A period of seven years is ample for any person who desires to fulfil his obligations. No doubt many blocks on which rates are unpaid are of value, but the administrators of the estates may not know that the rates are due. It would be a difficult job for road boards to discover the whereabouts of all owners of land of this description. In the circumstances that are being dealt with, I think it is right that the land should revert to the Crown. Many blocks have been left vacant for a number of years. If the rates are not paid, someone else should have an opportunity to take up the land.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I do not know of any instance in which land has been put up by road boards for sale but has been redeemed before the auction day.

Hon. W. R. Hall: That has happened quite recently.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I thought you were quite sure to have known of such instances.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I do not know of any, although I have dealt with quite a lot of land on behalf of road boards. In the case cited by Mr. Latham, if the local authority had decided to sell the land within the five-year term the New Zealander would not be likely to have seen any advertisement in a local paper. The beneficiary no doubt thought the land was useless, and did not see why he should pay the rates.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I did not say that.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Subsequently he may have thought it advisable to pay the rates. Any man who owns land knows that it is ratable. If a person neglects his duty simply because he does not receive notices, why should the other rate-payers have to incur the expense of an advertisement stating that the land will be sold if the money due upon it is not paid?

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 14 and 15, Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment and the report adopted.

BILLS (3)—FIRST READING.

1, Supply (No. 2) £3,100,000.

2, Companies Act Amendment.

3, Street Photographers (Hon. C. G. Latham in charge).

Received from the Assembly.

BILL—STATE HOUSING ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 14th October.

HON. C. G. LATHAM (East) [5.15]: This Bill provides authority for local governing bodies to enter into an agreement with the Housing Commission for the construction of roads; makes provision for increasing the advances from the Commission for home building from £1,250 to £1,500; and provides for the appointment of two other persons to the Commission. I do not know whether putting a woman and another person on the Commission will help to expedite its business. At present it seems to me that what is needed is assistance in obtaining materials to overcome the arrears of house building. If I thought for one moment that an increase in the number of members of the Commission by two would help, I would be the first to assist in that respect. But members know how difficult it is to secure a reply to communications sent to the officers of the Commission. We receive quite a number of letters from people and in all good faith send them to the department for attention, but we have to wait weeks before we get a reply. I do, anyhow! I do not

know whether other members are more favoured.

Hon. E. M. DAVIES: I have not taken a trick yet.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I do not mind myself; but people expect replies from me. My correspondents expect answers to their letters; but while I get replies from the Commission occasionally, they take weeks to arrive. If we increase the membership of the Commission I suggest that a longer period will be occupied in the transaction of business. The fewer members there are on such bodies the more expeditiously is business dealt with. I do not know whether I am the only one who holds that view, but I cannot see that adding two members to the Commission is going to help us. I think that if we did exactly the same as is done in Tasmania and left people to work out their own salvation in this matter, we would get along far better than we do with boards of control. What is actually required is that we should see that the prices of homes are reasonable. The permit system does not appear to be satisfactory. People are told that they have a No. 1 priority, but it does not mean anything, so far as I can understand, because at the end of the year they are waiting just the same as they were at the beginning. If we had less interference, things would adjust themselves much more quickly.

I do not intend to oppose the Bill but I am taking this opportunity to express myself on these matters. If we want to hinder any project, all we need to do is to legislate; if we want to help it, then the best thing to do is to permit freedom of action. I know that in another place a member has made a serious complaint about the transactions of the Housing Commission. I do not know of anything of that kind. I have not been advised of any such occurrences. Nevertheless, I think there are too many people interfering with freedom of action. If we said to people, "Build all the houses you like," provided they were only being built for occupation, it would be better. We could pass a Bill providing that nobody should erect a house for sale but only for living in himself and could impose a heavy penalty for infringement of this law. We should also provide for some control over the cost of buildings. Such laws would be easy to frame and would be much more effective than

those under which we are operating. I understand that in Tasmania such freedom has been given and buildings are being erected far more quickly than in this State.

The difficulty is to meet present-day requirements, let alone catch up arrears that took place in the war years. That is a very serious matter. Lots of people write to me. The conditions under which some of them are living are deplorable. I know of families who are living on the verandahs of other persons' houses. If the appointment of two other people to the Commission would relieve that situation—but I have yet to discover how that can be achieved—I would be quite glad to see such appointments made. But my opinion is that the bigger an organisation the greater the difficulties, and I do not perceive how the adoption of that provision will help folk who are looking forward to getting a roof over their heads.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: There is already one woman associated with the Commission—an architect.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: What can these two people do? If they were qualified persons and could help in that way, it would be all right; but all they have to do is to say, "Yes, Mr. Brown can have a house"; or, "Mrs. Smith can have a house." But the greater the number of people on a body such as this, the greater the differences of opinion as a rule. To reach a decision must be difficult because there are so many identical cases, judging from the letters I receive requesting help. I sympathise with any Government in this matter, but it would be far better to let people have a free go provided we insisted on buildings being put up only for occupation and not for sale. It would be much better, too, if we could establish a ceiling price for houses. There are costly buildings being erected today, the materials for which would provide homes for twice the number of people.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [5.23]: Like Mr. Latham, I am not very enamoured with the idea of increasing the size of the Commission. When the State Housing Bill was before the House last year, I opposed a proposition for the inclusion of a woman on the Commission. I can see no gain to be derived from it, as I said on that occasion. However, the Government made this one of its

pre-election promises and I will help it to keep its word. But I cannot see that a woman on the Commission will be of any advantage. What we want is not an increase in the number of members on the Commission, but an increase in the number of houses erected; and enlarging the membership of the Commission by two or by twenty will not achieve that. The same remark applies to the inclusion of an ex-Serviceman as I have made with regard to the appointment of a woman. Whilst I am on that subject I would like to ask the Minister to tell us what will be the method of selection of this ex-Serviceman. Apart from the Returned Soldiers' League, there are several ex-Servicemen's organisations in this State. There is the Air Force Association, with a membership of from 9,000 to 10,000, and the ex-Servicemen's League, with 7,000 to 8,000 members. There is also the ex-Navalmen's League, but I do not know its membership.

The three organisations of whose membership I am aware have between 25,000 to 30,000 members and when the appointment of an ex-Serviceman is made, I would like to see all those organisations given some voice in the selection of the representative. I do not want the opportunity of nominating someone for selection to be given to only one organisation. All of them should be consulted. I do not know what method the Government intends to adopt in appointing the ex-Servicemen's representative, but I make the suggestion that before the appointment is finalised all the organisations be given an opportunity at least to nominate someone for the position. At the same time I do not consider that the appointment of even an ex-Serviceman will be of much benefit in solving the housing problem. However, it was the policy of the Government, enunciated on the platform, and on this occasion I shall help it to put its policy into operation. I think it is only buying a lot of trouble for itself, but we will not shed any tears over that. Another point I wish to mention is the raising of the advance from £1,250 to £1,500. I have never favoured high advances for this purpose, having considered that the higher the amount advanced the less the opportunity a person has to own his home. My recollection of the purpose of the institution of the old Workers' Homes Board is that it was established in

order to give an opportunity to people to own their homes who otherwise would be unable to do so. I think the original advance was about £600.

Hon. C. G. Latham: It was originally £450 and was then raised to £600.

Hon. G. FRASER: I knew it was in that region. At that price, there was a possibility, even with the wages of those days, of a person owning his home. As a matter of fact, I know quite a number of people who had houses built under the original Act about 1911 or 1912 and today they own those homes, which are still a wonderful asset to the districts in which they stand, even after the lapse of over 30 years. At that time the price was somewhere about £500. I have found that the higher the advance made the less opportunity a person has had of obtaining a house from the Workers' Homes Board, or, as it is now called, the State Housing Commission. I discussed the matter with the secretary of the Workers' Homes Board during the depression years. He said, "We have plenty of money to invest. Have you any applicants?" I said that I had hundreds of applicants but I would not fill in their forms because workers' homes had reached the stage of being a business proposition, the board having got away from the original intention of providing homes for those who could not make other arrangements.

At that period no person who was not in a permanent position could receive any consideration from the board and the amount of the advance was £800. The secretary of the board argued that there was no demand from people on a lower income for homes under the Act. I pointed out that because of the attitude of the board of that day I had told dozens of people who had come to me to help them fill in their forms that they were only wasting 6s. in submitting an application, because they were not in a permanent position. Since those days there has been an alteration in the attitude of the Commission regarding applications, but I am afraid that, if the maximum is increased to £1,500, the Commission will get back to its former attitude. As I have said, I advised many people—they took my advice—not to put in applications, and the secretary of the board argued that, because there were not many applications, there was no demand for the

cheaper type of home. He said, "The position is that every person whose application we approve requires the full amount of the advance." That was the truth, as in those days the only people who were being interviewed by the Workers' Homes Board were those in permanent positions. They were the people to whom the board wrote and with whom it entered into negotiations for the building of homes. If it was suggested to those people, that, taking a line on their salaries, the amount of advance they could afford would be approximately £600, they invariably asked for the full advance of £800.

It was during that period that agitation was commenced—particularly by Fremantle members—for the building of a cheaper type of home, and resulting from that, some years before the war the Workers' Homes Board commenced the building of weatherboard and asbestos homes. At that time our argument was that no man, in purchasing a home or paying rent, could afford more than one day's wages per week for that purpose. We desired the Government of the day to have plans drawn up for the building of homes costing in the vicinity of £500, which was getting back towards the original cost of workers' homes. So the weatherboard and asbestos house came on the market. In the early stages they were built for about £500, and later—just before the war—for about £600. When entering on a contract to pay even £600, any wages man is taking on just about all he can afford.

From memory I think the £500 or £600 weatherboard and asbestos house, to be paid off over a 25-year period, cost in repayment, in the form of rent, about £1 per week. On those figures I can visualise how much per week will have to be repaid on an advance of £1,500. If the original £500 or £600 meant a repayment of approximately £1 per week, how is any working man able to afford the repayments on a £1,500 house?

Hon. C. G. Latham: The rate of interest is now much lower.

Hon. G. FRASER: It is approximately 1 per cent. lower.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Wages are now much higher.

Hon. G. FRASER: And the cost of everything one buys is now much higher.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Portion of what he pays in rent becomes his equity. It is not all interest.

Hon. G. FRASER: That is the point I am coming to. If on £500 or £600, repayment was at the rate of £1 per week, I do not see how, notwithstanding the increases in wages and the reduction of approximately 1 per cent. in the rate of interest, many men will be able to pay 30s. per week out of their earnings.

Hon. W. J. Mann: They will have to pay more than that.

Hon. G. FRASER: If a man has to pay more than 30s. per week he and his family have to go without something.

Hon. R. M. Forrest: Does he not pay that now in rent?

Hon. G. FRASER: If he buys a new house he does, but most of the older rental places cost about £1 or 25s. per week. This scheme caters for the people who cannot pay a large deposit and I am wondering how long, at the rate of 30s. per week, it will take to pay off a £1,500 house. Even if he could pay £500 deposit—which very few wage earners can pay—there would still be a debt of £1,000 to the State Housing Commission. With interest at 4½ per cent. that would amount to approximately £42 10s. per year, and the difference between that and the 30s. per week would allow a man to reduce the indebtedness by only about £30 per year. I might add that that would be an extreme case, as very few would be able to pay £500 deposit. Even if a man could pay that amount we can imagine, at the rate of £30 per year repayment of a debt of £1,000, how long it would take to pay it off. Those who take on houses at a cost of £1,500 must be only those who do so viewing it as a rental proposition, which will give them security of tenure.

Hon. W. R. Hall: Goldfields people have to pay off their houses in a period of ten years.

Hon. G. FRASER: The hon. member can put up a case in that regard. The Act used to permit of a £5 deposit being taken, but that provision has been altered and it is now left to the Commission to accept any deposit, even as low as £1, though I can imagine the reception that would be afforded to anyone who offered a deposit of only £1 on a home costing £1,500. That is the position that I am afraid will be brought about if the increase of the maximum to £1,500 takes place. I would prefer to see the maximum remain at £1,250, though in my opinion

even that figure is too high. If the maximum remained at £1,250 I believe the Government would have to be more active in its endeavour to keep down the costs than will be the case if the figure is raised to £1,500, which simply amounts to chasing high costs all the time. I do not know of any move that has been made by the Government to keep prices in check. It is taking the easy way out, to raise the amount of advance instead of tackling the question of reducing prices.

Hon. W. J. Mann: You cannot reduce prices, with a 40-hour week.

Hon. G. FRASER: I think it could be done if the Government went into the question more thoroughly than it has hitherto. The cost of building today is outrageous and far in excess of what it should be. If the Government endeavoured to make builders' supplies more sure I believe a large slice of the cost of building today would be cut out. I do not know whether it is correct or not, but people in the building trade have told me that, because of the hold-up in supplies, many builders are allowing anything up to £300 as a safety margin when they tender for building houses.

Hon. C. G. Latham: There are terrific variations in the prices tendered.

Hon. G. FRASER: I have seen tenders for the same house varying from £1,300 to £1,900 odd. Evidently the builders demand varying degrees of safety. I do not suppose they can be blamed for wishing to be on the safe side when tendering a price for building, as they do not know what delays they are to be faced with. If the Government tackled the question of making supplies more sure than they are today, I feel certain that a considerable amount could be cut off present building costs. Last year in this House I mentioned building costs, and I was fortunate enough to have erected a building on which I was able to tabulate the costs right from the inception. Prior to the building of the house I obtained quotes from various builders. The lowest quote was £1,050, yet the actual cost of erecting the house, which was built by day labour—every workman on the job received £2 per week above award rates—was £830.

Hon. W. J. Mann: You must have been a wizard.

Hon. G. FRASER: I got an architect and the secretary of the Workers' Home Board to assess the cost of building the house. They said that no builder would tender for that house, in the same place, at less than £1,000. As I have said, the building actually cost £830, and I might add that the work was subject to all the delays usually experienced. It was commenced in February and was finished in August, and was an ordinary weatherboard and asbestos house. When I said last year that I thought houses were costing 10 per cent. more than they should, I gave that figure after allowing 10 per cent. extra on the actual cost of building. I believe there could be a 10 per cent. reduction in costs now, if there was a tightening up to ensure that builders would not be subject to the delays in obtaining materials, with which they are faced today. I would like the Government to give consideration to that aspect of the matter and keep the maximum at £1,250. That would be preferable to amending the Act every time that costs rise.

I come now to the point made by Mr. Latham regarding advances to local governing authorities. I can see nothing in the Act to say that the Housing Commission must pay any amount to local governing authorities, or that the whole of the amount advanced must be repaid by such bodies. I think the provision should be made sufficiently elastic that in some circumstances local governing bodies should receive assistance. We must remember that a number of homes will be built by the Commission in out of the way places, as it generally selects a site on which it intends to build anything up to 40 houses. In such a case the local governing authority is put to extra expense, not only in building roads in the area concerned, but very often through the construction of roads leading up to that area from other parts of the district.

If the local governing body is put to expense in providing all the usual services, it should be given some consideration in that regard by the State Housing Commission. I do not think the Commission should request, in such circumstances, that the whole of the amount be repaid. In the Fremantle district—Mr. Davies can probably tell the House more about this—the site selected is in an entirely new area, in which there were practically no roads. I do not know whether

the council has been put to extra cost in providing roads and services for the people there, but I believe some cost would be entailed.

I do not think any council should be put to such expense unless the State Housing Commission is agreeable to giving some concession in return. There are other remarks I wish to make on the subject of housing, but another opportunity will be available in the near future, I hope. I support the second reading of the Bill although I do not like the provision for the extra personnel on the Commission or the raising of the cost of homes, but I cannot adopt a dog-in-the-manger attitude because I dislike those features. If I opposed the Bill, such action might have the effect of stultifying the work of the Commission, and I should not like to see that happen at this stage. I hope that my anticipations regarding the personnel are wrong. If they are, we ought to get more houses, and I trust that will be the case.

HON. G. BENNETTS (South) [5.46]: I support the second reading, though I have one or two little growls to voice. One relates to the appointment of two extra members to the Commission. This will entail more expense to the country, and I consider we are already well served by the one woman attached to the Commission who is in a position to give the best possible advice. I do not think it is necessary to appoint an ordinary housewife to the Commission. The male members of the Commission are married men and know what is required. I am also opposed to an increase in the cost of homes which will impose a hardship on the people on the lower rungs of the ladder, who are the ones that require our help.

Along the Commonwealth railway, a couple of hundred houses have been built recently and they are a £1,000-job. They contain four large rooms, are constructed on the bungalow system with a verandah all round, have insulated walls, glass enclosed sleep-outs, beautiful bathrooms and laundries, and the blocks are fenced. There is nothing better to be found in Kalgoorlie. These houses have been built by contract, and the contractor had to pay freight on the material railed from Perth. I consider that homes round about the £1,000 mark are dear enough for the workers to pay for.

During a recent visit to Norseman, I found that the people there were not enamoured of a £1,000 home. Homes suitable for that district, they consider, should be provided for £600 or £700. In small mining districts, such a price for a home represents a large amount for the workers to pay. I am of opinion that the Housing Commission should pay municipalities and road boards one-half of the cost of constructing the requisite roads. Though I shall support the second reading of the Bill, I am opposed to the features I have mentioned.

HON. H. TUCKEY (South-West) [5.49]: A few days ago I had a conversation with the manager of a sawmill in my district, who invited me to inspect cottages being built for mill purposes. They are four-roomed cottages of jarrah, well built, and they cost only £600.

Hon. E. H. Gray: What is the size of the rooms?

Hon. H. TUCKEY: I cannot give the exact size, but the rooms were large for a cottage. The management told me that these homes could be built in a fortnight and that sufficient timber for one house could be cut in one day. Thus the timber for a house could be cut in a day and a house erected in a fortnight at a cost of £600.

Hon. G. Bennetts: Would green timber be used in those homes?

Hon. H. TUCKEY: Yes. I felt justified in taking considerable notice of what that gentleman told me. He knows his job, and the estimate he gave me can be relied upon. I cannot see why the Housing Commission cannot do something along similar lines, I cannot believe that there is any shortage of timber in the State; in fact some of the sawmills are choked with surplus timber, which they cannot get away quickly enough. His view is that there is no shortage of timber. If a house can be built for £600, why should we increase the amount from £1,250 to £1,500? I agree with the two previous speakers that the average working man cannot afford to pay interest on a dwelling costing £1,500, and he cannot expect to have a home of that value. Surely a well-finished jarrah cottage would provide suitable housing for such people.

It seems to me that all that should be done is not being accomplished with regard to

housing. The information I have given the House has been passed on to the Minister for Housing and possibly an inquiry will be made, but it should not be necessary to build houses costing £1,500 if such perfectly good homes as I have instanced can be erected for £600. I shall not oppose the second reading, but I hope the authorities will investigate the points I have raised and see whether something cannot be done to build similar homes. I am in accord with Mr. Latham about the time it takes to get decisions from the Housing Commission.

I have been assisting two returned soldiers during the past four months to obtain a permit for building a shop. It is a rehabilitation job. All that time has been taken to reach finality and now I understand that, although everything is in order, they will have to wait till the middle of next month to get a permit. They asked why they should have to wait so long before a permit would be issued, especially as there are no further obstacles to a permit being granted. I could not understand the reason for the delay. The men said they were told it was necessary for the permit to go through the usual channels, which meant following a certain routine, and that that was the reason for the delay. There should be no need for such delay. Surely these matters could be dealt with on business lines. No private firm could afford to carry on in that way. If their application is in order, why not give them a permit and let them proceed with the job? They are anxious about the delay because they are battling along doing odd jobs in anticipation of getting the requisite authority to enable them to build the shop. These matters should be expedited.

As regards the agreement with local authorities for the construction of roads, this is an important matter because houses are being built almost overnight and no local authority can construct roads when it is receiving no rates. Even if local authorities had been receiving rates, they could not finance all the costly road work that is required. It was necessary from the outset that an arrangement should be made whereby the Commission could assist the local authorities by providing the funds for the construction of roads. Twelve months and sometimes even more elapse before any rates are collected from the new homes. This creates a diffi-

culty and it has been impossible for road boards to construct roads to enable people to reach their dwellings. I support the second reading, but consider that some of the provisions could have been omitted, particularly the one permitting workers to build homes to a value of £1,500.

On motion by Hon. E. H. Gray, debate adjourned.

BILL—WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BUSH NURSING TRUST ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR MINES (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [5.55] in moving the second reading said: This is a Bill to authorise the transfer of funds of the Western Australian Bush Nursing Trust Fund to the trusteeship of the Silver Chain District and Bush Nursing Association. This association is a body that carries on excellent work throughout the country. The fund was inaugurated in 1920 as a result of a gift of money from the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England. The gift was to be applied in Australia for charitable purposes chosen by the then Governor General, and was a mark of appreciation of the Commonwealth services in the 1914-18 war.

The Governor General allotted £15,000 to Western Australia and directed that it should be used to establish, maintain and extend a bush nursing scheme. The original deed of trust is shown in the First Schedule to the Act. Members may be interested to know that the deed appointed Sir Walter Kingsmill, Sir Hal Colebatch, and Messrs. A. J. Monger, A. Carson and P. Collier as the first trustees. It provided that the persons for the time being holding the offices of Minister for Health and Leader of the Opposition should be trustees unless they declined appointment, in which event other persons might be appointed. In order to facilitate the work of the trustees, legislation was passed in 1936.

From 1920 to 1944, a committee consisting of Mr. Carson, the Commissioner of Public Health and representatives of the Silver Chain and Red Cross carried out the directions of the trustees. On Mr. Carson's retirement in 1944, he recommended that the

committee's work be the responsibility of the Silver Chain solely, and this was agreed to by the trustees. The Silver Chain's work has been so successful that the trustees recently recommended to the Governor General that the Silver Chain be appointed the sole trustee of the fund. It was considered that the present trustees, being busy men, could not give the same amount of time or work to the interests of the fund as could the Silver Chain, particularly from the point of view of raising money. In this proposal the Governor General has acquiesced and has asked that legal action be taken to discharge the present trustees and appoint the Silver Chain. The Silver Chain has a fine reputation extending over 38 years and is under the control of reputable citizens. The fund at present stands at £23,000, and there are other assets including land and houses. The Bill is a short and simple one and all parties are agreeable to the proposal and request that the alteration be made. I attended a meeting of trustees recently at which the Leader of the Opposition was present and the Attorney General was chairman, and the meeting expressed the desire that the fund be transferred to the Silver Chain. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment and the report adopted.

BILL—WATER BOARDS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR MINES (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [6.3] in moving the second reading said: This is a very short Bill. Its object is to permit of water board areas being divided into sub-areas, to define the boundaries of sub-areas and, if necessary, to alter the boundaries of sub-areas or abolish them. It is desired that water board areas should be divided into sub-areas and so give the boards the power, subject to ministerial approval, to levy varying scales of rates. At the present time all reticulated blocks within a water board area must be assessed at a uniform rate, irrespective of conditions, which may differ largely.

It may so happen that water may not be laid on to a particular block, yet the owner would have to pay the same rate as if it were. This, of course, is unfair. Under the Goldfields Water Supply Act, water board areas are divided into districts for the purpose of charging a varying scale of rates and this Bill will give similar powers under the Water Boards Act. Instances have arisen where obviously certain reticulated blocks should not be charged the same rate as other blocks in the same area. The Bill proposes to permit the division of a water area into sub-areas, as I have stated, as well as to charge separate and varying rates. I commend the measure to the House and move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

HON. H. TUCKEY (South-West) [6.7]: I support the measure, which I consider to be necessary. In various parts of the South-West difficulties have arisen with respect to rating various holdings on a reasonable basis. As the Minister has pointed out, some areas, which are not being serviced, should not be asked to pay as much in rates as other areas where people are receiving very great benefits from the drains which have been constructed. The object of this Bill is to make it possible for a local authority to charge the people receiving the greatest benefit a higher rate. That is a proposal of which I think the House will approve.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [6.8]: I wish to deal with only one point. I realise there may be occasions on which a water board must incur extra expenditure in order to provide water for some outlying portion of its district.

Hon. H. Tuckey: The boards do not provide water; they take it away.

Hon. G. FRASER: My impression is that the measure was designed to give a water board the right to provide water. This Bill will give the boards power to charge different rates for various areas of their districts.

The Minister for Mines: Sub-areas.

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes, thanks for the correction. There is a possibility that some trouble may arise in that connection with some of the boards.

Hon. H. Tuckey: It is subject to the Minister's approval.

Hon. G. FRASER: I was looking for some safeguard.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: Read Clause 2.

Hon. G. FRASER: In the few moments while the Minister was speaking I did not have time to read Clause 2. As long as the safeguard is there, I am satisfied.

On motion by Hon. C. H. Simpson, debate adjourned.

BILL—TOWN PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR MINES (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [6.10] in moving the second reading said: There are three amendments in this Bill, one being to correct a typographical error. The first amendment affects Section 6 of the Act, and seeks to ensure that any of the purposes set out in the First Schedule to the Act may be included in any town planning scheme. Section 6 at present details the objects in respect of which a town planning scheme may be made, but the legal advisers to the Perth City Council do not consider that it is adequate to cover a scheme required for the City of Perth. Members may recall that some years ago the Perth City Council sought to divide the city into zones. It proposed to do so by making bylaws. As members are aware, when bylaws are framed and gazetted they automatically become law unless either House of Parliament rejects them. But even should either House do so, there is nothing to prevent a local authority from making almost similar bylaws.

It was the intention of the Perth City Council to make bylaws to give effect to its wishes; but the then Minister in charge of Local Government refused to approve of the bylaws, as he contended the proper method was to implement the scheme under the Town Planning and Development Act. It was then found that there were certain legal difficulties and differences of opinion arose with respect to them. Numerous conferences were held from time to time with various Ministers and it has now been decided to amend the Act—in a sense, it is only a technical amendment—to enable the Perth City Council to put forward a pro-

per scheme under the Act. Proper protection would thus be given to the individual; in fact, far greater protection under the present Act than would be the case under bylaws.

The present Minister has agreed with the Town Planning Board and the Perth City Council that the method proposed by the Bill is much to be preferred to bylaws. Members will agree that it is essential there should be proper planning for the City of Perth and that the work should not be delayed any longer. This Bill will give the Town Planning Board and the Perth City Council authority to implement a thorough scheme for the zoning and planning of the city.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Will it take away any powers from the City of Perth?

THE MINISTER FOR MINES: No. All the parties concerned are satisfied that this is the best method.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Is the Town Planner satisfied?

THE MINISTER FOR MINES: Yes. I cannot say whether he is satisfied with the plan, but he is satisfied with this Bill. Before the measure, if passed, can be put into operation, notices will have to be served. The Bill also provides the right of appeal to a judge from the Minister's decision. Protection is therefore given to the individual and to the ratepayers at large, while power is given to the authorities concerned to plan the city properly. If members will read the Bill carefully they will find it is one which they can readily support. I have pleasure in moving—

That the Bill be now read a second time

On motion by Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch, debate adjourned.

BILL—ECONOMIC STABILITY ACT AMENDMENT (CONTINUANCE).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 14th October.

HON. L. A. LOGAN (Central) [6.12]: This Bill seeks to give power to the Commonwealth Government to continue rent control and price fixation for another 12 months. It is my intention to oppose the Bill, for the simple reason that under the Price Fixing Regulations there are too

many anomalies, and that remark applies also to the Landlord and Tenant Regulations. Under the present Price Fixing Regulations, many articles are lying on shelves for five or six weeks while prices are being fixed for them by the Prices Commissioner before they can be displayed for sale.

Officers of the Prices Commissioner are very busy running round picking up traders who are selling some article one half-penny above the fixed price; but the trader who is getting away with hundreds of pounds is left alone. Why, I do not know, but it is a fact. In almost all the cases that have come before the courts, the man charged has sold goods at 1d. or one half-penny above the fixed price, and generally on very small lines. I do not like these controls at all. I think that if the controls were referred back to our own State we could get much quicker decisions than we are obtaining today. For my part, although I think there may be one or two things that should be controlled, the great majority would be much better without control.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

HON. L. A. LOGAN: I cannot see how the passing of the Bill will affect our economic stability to any great extent. What is wrong with our economic stability is the value of our pound, but the worker and everyone else has lost sight of that fact. The vicious circle of rising wages and costs has to be reversed sooner or later. If it is not done in an orderly way, it will come about by way of depression or recession, which will be much harder on us all. Costs of housing and certain articles have been mentioned. A house that cost about £400 in 1937 would today cost £900. That is not altogether on account of wages. A fair amount can be attributed to rises in wages and the consequent increase in the cost of other commodities.

Taxation, both indirect and direct, has a big effect on our economic stability. Indirect taxation is probably the biggest burden we have to carry. No-one in Australia can say what tax he is paying. If we cut out all indirect taxation and paid a straight out tax on our income, we would know how much we had to pay. Today the ordinary working man is paying just as much tax on his pot of beer as is a man on £2,000 a year. That is an injustice to every working man,

and especially those with families. How a basic wage earner, with a family of four or five, can exist today, I do not know. We have to try to work our costs in reverse so that we can get value for our money. Unless we do that, this country will experience another depression. I oppose the Bill.

HON. SIR HAL COLEBATCH (Metropolitan) [7.33]: In deciding whether to support or oppose this Bill, I have asked myself two questions. The first is: Is the Act, which we propose to continue, contributing to the maintenance of economic stability in this State, or in the Commonwealth? The second is: What is the proper authority to legislate for and administer the matters covered by the Act that we passed last year? To my mind, they are the two essential points. The first question I feel bound to answer in the negative. I do not believe that this Act is contributing to economic stability. We all know that the great need in Australia is the production of real things, and in so far as this Act hampers initiative, it does to some extent stand in the way of that essential increase in production. I would not deny the necessity for some legislation to prevent the sky-rocketing of prices and to control black-marketing and other things with which we are threatened because of the present exceptional conditions. But I shall have something to say later as to the necessity for such legislation.

The Prime Minister evidently does not think that this sort of legislation is protecting Australia's economy. The other day he said that because of world problems it was unwise not to be prepared for a serious repercussion on the Australian economy in the very near future. Dr. Hislop, in his interesting speech the other night, told us many valuable things, and I have no doubt he was influenced a good deal by the considerable period he spent in what is now the centre of the world's economy—the United States of America. Anything in the nature of a collapse of the economy of the United States would be something from which no part of the world could escape—certainly, Australia could not. I suppose the Prime Minister had that in mind when he suggested the immediate fear of a serious repercussion on the Australian economy.

Australia's comparatively strong position since the war is due to two things. Firstly, we escaped not only the horrors, but also

the destruction that must have followed invasion. Ours is one of the few countries that escaped entirely the destruction of its resources. Secondly, and perhaps at present the greater of the two, are the extraordinarily high prices of our principal exports, wool and wheat. So far as the needs of the world go, I think the high prices of these commodities are likely to continue, but I do not think we can close our eyes to the fact that most of the countries in the greatest need of these things have not got the money to pay for them. They are dependent on the maintenance of world economy, and the Prime Minister says that that is in danger. I think he is right. But is he right in the methods he is adopting to deal with this repercussion on the Australian economy?

I am not going into any details, but two prominent methods are these: The nationalisation of banking—the taking of the control of the people's money—and the building of a fleet of Government ships, and restricting all interstate ocean transport to vessels built in Australia. Are these two things likely to help Australia if we get into economic difficulties? I think legislation of that kind would destroy the economy of any country, and in considering whether we should continue the operations of this Act, I think we are entitled to ask ourselves: Is the general policy of the Commonwealth Government calculated to strengthen or stabilise the economy of Australia? I think it is not.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the seriousness of world conditions. One cannot read the morning paper without a feeling of intense depression. It is brought home to us that not thousands, but millions of people are on the verge of starvation and suffering from diseases due to malnutrition. That sort of thing cannot continue without bringing some sort of collapse in the world's economy. We should be prepared for it, and I say the method of the Commonwealth Government is not the one by which we should prepare. I do not intend to discuss the question of nationalisation of banking at this stage, but I would remind the House that Professor Copland, who enjoyed the complete confidence of both the Curtin and the Chifley Governments, summarised his review of the last depression in these words—

There is sufficient evidence that political control of the currency would destroy confidence and abolish reasonable checks to the issue of

credit. We can, therefore, only reap the benefits of a liberal banking policy if the control of the currency is free from political interference.

That is the opinion of a high economic authority. Another objection I have to this Bill is that everything is to be done by regulation. Most of us are very diffident about giving large powers by the framing of regulations under the Bills we pass. But here we have the safeguard that any regulation framed under an Act passed by this Parliament has to be laid on the Table of both Houses, and it is open to either House to disallow it. In this case, what have we got? These regulations will be laid on the Table of the Commonwealth Parliament. What chance is there of disallowance? It is a dangerous thing to give this power of making regulations to a Government or a Parliament over which we can have no authority.

That brings me to my second question: What is the proper political authority to deal with this matter? It is a principle which I regard as of the highest importance, that in all matters the proper authority should be charged with power and responsibility. We can roughly divide these matters into three, namely, national matters, to be dealt with by the Commonwealth Parliament; State matters, to be dealt with by the State Parliament, and local matters to be dealt with by the local governing authorities. From the point of view of good government, there is extreme danger in departing from that principle, and from the principle that the proper authority should always be chosen for the administration of any Act of Parliament.

We know that the Commonwealth Parliament is constantly reaching out for more and more power, notwithstanding the refusal of the Australian people, by way of referendum, to grant those additional powers. What is the Commonwealth Parliament? Can it be pretended for a single moment that it represents the people of Australia? I would be the last to deny that our State Parliament is not as representative of the people of the State as it ought to be. I think amendments are required in connection with both Houses, and I hope that the necessary amendments will soon be put into effect. But whereas in the Commonwealth Parliament one party has complete dominance—no other party can be effectively heard—in our State

Parliament, in both Houses, each of the three parties has sufficient representation to make itself heard. The majority may pass from one to another at different times, but always, in both Houses, each party has sufficient representation to make itself heard.

What could be more ridiculous than the present composition of the Senate—a House particularly framed under the Constitution as a House of review, a House to protect the rights of the States? In that House, 33 out of the 36 members belong to one party, and that party is pledged to the destruction of the rights of the States. I think we are entitled to consider whom it is we propose shall continue to exercise these powers. I am quite sure that all these regulations and controls lead to frightful extravagance. The statement was published the other day that the Commonwealth employees this year would cost—this is entirely apart from the Defence Forces—no less than £40,000,000, and that this sum was steadily increasing. The number of Commonwealth employees is now 158,000 as against 60,000 before the war. How many of them are employed in this sort of work—hampering people, producing nothing, doing no good to anyone?

Then there is the question of social services. I have no complaint to make against the diversion of large sums of public funds for social services, but I would remind members that the efficiency of such services depends entirely upon one thing—the maintenance of the value of the Australian currency. Any effect upon the value of that currency affects in turn the value of the social service. It was stated in the Press the other day that the Australian pound in 1937-38 purchased 18s. 5d. worth of goods, while now it can purchase only 14s. 6d. worth. It would purchase far less if it were not for subsidies taken out of the taxpayers' pockets to make it possible for present prices to be maintained.

This afternoon Mr. Fraser referred to the large increase in the present cost of housing. I should say that that increased cost¹ is mostly, if not entirely, due to the decreased value of our currency. It is necessary to pay people higher wages because their money will not go nearly so far as in former years. I doubt very much if there is any increase at all in the cost of housing—if it were put on a gold basis. I think the same number of sovereigns as would have purchased a

house before the war and, one might say, before World War I., would purchase a house today.

Then we had the reference made by Mr. Mann the other night to the hanging-up of everything because of the go-slow tactics on the Sydney wharf. What is the Government doing about it? Those tactics are hampering very seriously the two things we are most in need of—housing and the quick turn round of shipping. What is the Government whom we propose to ask to continue these powers doing about it? Nothing at all. These factors are also crippling our efforts to do something to help the Mother Country in her dire difficulties.

Interesting references were made by Mr. Dimmitt to a statement by the Chief Judge of the High Court, and I think that hon. member's purpose was to show that there was no need for this legislation, as the Commonwealth already had ample powers enabling it to do what is required. I could use the argument both ways. If the Commonwealth has ample powers already, there is no need for the Bill. If there is need for this legislation, then it should be Western Australian legislation. Let me read again the extract that Mr. Dimmitt quoted, because it is very important—

The change of circumstances consisting in the surrender of the enemy and the passing of the military purposes with a view to which the country had been organised does not mean that the measures by which it has been so organised must suffer an immediate constitutional collapse—to place a country on a footing to take an adequate part in such a war as that through which we have passed requires a co-ordinated and systematic series of measures which must re-shape the economy of the country—it is apparent that the change back from a war economy to an economy appropriate to peace is a task calling for further measures of a legislative nature, and the defence power is not sufficient to authorise laws for that purpose.

I entirely agree with what Mr. Dimmitt said, but with a qualification. I do not think that the Commonwealth could exercise those powers merely by saying it was necessary to do so for defence purposes. The Commonwealth would have to demonstrate that it was necessary for defence purposes. Thus I think we come to the conclusion that the Commonwealth has certain powers it can exercise without the necessity for this Bill, that there is probably need for such legislation but that the legislation should be local legislation, administered locally by people

who understand local conditions. Should such a Bill be introduced, I would be very glad to support it.

I should also be pleased if there were sought an alteration in the definition clause, which states that the word "Minister" means the Commonwealth Minister. I should like to see that altered so that the word would mean the State Minister. References have been made by other speakers to the failure to appoint a committee that, under the Act, was to act in an advisory capacity, although I take it that the Commonwealth Minister would please himself whether or not he accepted any advice tendered to him by the committee. For the reasons I have outlined, I feel bound to oppose the second reading of the Bill.

HON. C. G. LATHAM (East) [7.53]: I intend to oppose the second reading of the Bill for the simple reason that the public cannot understand what this legislation means. Anyone who has had an opportunity to peruse the regulations promulgated under the Commonwealth National Security Act must realise how difficult it is to follow them, and how difficult it is to appreciate what we are supposed to deal with under the parent Act, which this measure proposes to continue. We are supposed to be dealing with National Security Regulations affecting prices, landlords and tenants, capital issues and economic organisation—other than the regulations appearing in Part IV and Part V. I defy any member to tell me what those regulations are. The last copy I saw showed that there were about 20 amendments to each of those sets of regulations.

I agree with Sir Hal Colebatch when he said that if legislation of this type is necessary, then it should be State legislation. It is very unfair to the public for the State Parliament to pass measures under which they are compelled to obey certain regulations when, I suggest, there are not two members of this Chamber who know anything about them at all. Then again, what is proposed represents a type of dual control. Since the introduction of the parent Act and the promulgation of the regulations that affected the State from the standpoint of control, it would seem that there would be no necessity for the appointment of the committee mentioned in the Act itself. The Com-

monwealth Government has exercised the power of control, and in those circumstances there would be no reference to the State Government respecting that aspect. As Sir Hal pointed out, we have legislation on our statute-book with regard to regulations framed by the Commonwealth authorities, and the Commonwealth Minister and his officers are in control of them. During my lifetime I have never before heard of such peculiar legislation being passed.

The State Fair Rents Act controls that section and so we already have power vested in the State to deal with that phase. That State Act was passed before I ceased being a member of another place. To indicate what I regard as indifference regarding these matters, when that measure was passed in another place, only two members spoke to it. They were the Attorney General and the Leader of the Opposition; no-one else took any interest in it at all. For that reason, I think members of this Chamber should particularly interest themselves in it. Should at any time the authority of the Commonwealth in this matter be challenged by way of appeal to the High Court, and that appeal should be upheld, the responsibility would revert to the State Parliament. As it is, we are asked to legislate respecting something of which we know nothing. We do not even know what the regulations might be at the time we are asked to take over the responsibility for them.

Then again, the Title of the Bill seems to me most remarkable—Economic Stability. The Bill hardly deals with that subject at all. The matters referred to by Dr. Hislop and Sir Hal Colebatch had some relation to it. I realise that the object of the legislation is to prevent people from exploiting others, and that may have some indirect effect upon our economic stability, but it has no very great bearing upon the things that really do count. Those matters have already been mentioned by other members, and I need not cover that ground again. I might ask the Minister in charge to refer the measure back to the Government and, if necessary, allow the legislation, when passed, to remain in abeyance so that effect could be given to it by proclamation, if it ever became necessary to use these powers. I hope the time is not far distant when we will be able to remove all the restrictions that are now imposed, and

thus stop hampering industry. If we do that, we will commence to make some progress. Until we do so, I am afraid there will be no advance.

As Sir Hal Colebatch indicated, the number of officials in control of Government departments is enormous, and many of them toil nor do they spin, from an economic point of view. In my opinion, for the last 18 months or two years the Liquid Fuel Control Board has been unnecessary. In fact, its continuance has rather encouraged the use of petrol to an extent much greater than it would have been used had there been an open market. In many instances, people at the end of the month find they do not require the petrol they can get, and so they make it available to others. It encourages the younger folk to purchase petrol and go for runs and so, were there not this inducement, a great deal of petrol would not be used. Throughout Australia, the Liquid Fuel Control Board must have not less than 10,000 employees, and today we know it is most difficult to get girls to take positions in offices as stenographers and typists. If many who are employed in this department were released, their services would be available to those engaged in industry.

I can see no reason why the House should pass this legislation, for it will not help the situation to the slightest extent. If ever the necessity arises to check black marketing, well and good; but I know of no better means of creating a demand for an article than for the whisper to go around that its sale is to be restricted. I know what goes on in one's household. When one says there is to be some restriction, up go the supplies of the article in one's home. Restriction in many instances deters rather than helps people in their everyday life. I intend to vote against the Bill and I will not have a silent vote. I will call for a division. That is not a threat but merely an intimation that I will not do here as was done in another place—two speeches and then the measure is passed as of no significance! This legislation is of vital importance, and it is essential that the people should know what it is about. The parent Act and the continuance Bill we are now discussing, contain nothing that will indicate to the people what their responsibilities are as regards the Economic Stability Act.

On motion by Hon. C. H. Simpson, debate adjourned.

BILL—LAW REFORM (CONTRIBUTORY NEGLIGENCE AND TORT-FEASORS' CONTRIBUTION).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from 14th October.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [8.0]: I have a few words to say regarding my attitude to this legislation. I do not like it, because it appears to me that it will increase the present heavy cost of litigation in respect of accidents of the description indicated by the Minister. I can imagine how cases at law would be lengthened by the arguments between opposing counsel regarding the question of the degree of contributory negligence by the parties concerned. Today the position is fairly plain and straightforward. A case is heard and a decision given setting out that one particular person is responsible and assessing the amount of damages. But if the Bill becomes law there is the obligation of deciding which person was mainly guilty and which person was partially guilty, of arriving at the amount of compensation to be paid, and in the event of an argument, the proportion payable by each party. If that is not going to increase costs I do not know what is!

In introducing the measure the Minister gave an illustration which I think went something like this: A motorist is speeding along a road. He is thus already committing an offence. Another person walks off a footpath and does not look where he is going and because of that, in the event of his being knocked over, he has contributed to the accident. If a case like that came before the court, I can imagine the long-drawn-out legal fight that would ensue, with one side trying to put the blame on the pedestrian for walking off the footpath and not looking where he was going; and the other side making out that the motorist alone was guilty.

The Minister for Mines: That happens now.

Hon. G. FRASER: That may be, but this measure will intensify the position. My idea is if a motorist is speeding, he is responsible for any accident that takes place. A pedestrian may proceed over a crosswalk and not look where he is going, but if the

motorist had not been committing the offence of speeding he would not have been at the spot at the time.

The Minister for Mines: Unfortunately that is not the law.

Hon. G. FRASER: I would say that if a person going over a crosswalk was knocked down in those circumstances, there would be no argument as to who was responsible.

The Minister for Mines: I am afraid you are wrong.

Hon. G. FRASER: If I am wrong, the Minister can show me where when he replies to the debate. It appears to me that this legislation will complicate any action at law and will make it more lengthy and more costly. There will be the dual requirement of attempting to prove where the responsibility for an accident lies and in assessing the proportion of damages to be paid. I can imagine, in the case of an accident proving fatal, the degree of mercy that the relatives of the deceased would receive when he was not there to defend himself.

The Minister for Mines: What happens now?

Hon. G. FRASER: Now it is much more difficult to prove that the responsibility lay with the person who was killed. In an occurrence of that description, with this Bill becoming law, the person committing the offence would be given another let-out, to my way of thinking, since he would be able to make out a very strong case that the other man had contributed to the accident.

Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch: That can be done now.

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes, but he has to win his case entirely; whereas if this Bill becomes law he does not have to do so, but can water it down by proving contributory negligence. The legislation appears to me to be likely to complicate actions at law and I therefore intend to oppose the second reading.

HON. E. M. HEENAN (North-East) [8.5]: This may seem a highly technical Bill but the principles it seeks to introduce into our law are really very simple. Throughout the ages a doctrine known as contributory negligence has come to form a very important factor in the law relating

to negligence. I do not want to presume by adding much more to what the Minister said when he introduced the Bill, because to my mind he made the position very clear. The doctrine of contributory negligence is simply that although one party may be guilty, for instance, by driving a car in a dangerous or reckless way, that does not mean another person can stand out in the middle of the road and look in an opposite direction and then secure damages.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Is that not the law today?

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: That is the law as it stands. That is contributory negligence. As I tried to explain, a motorist might drive along at an excessive speed or in a dangerous way but—

Hon. C. G. Latham: The other person must avoid an accident if he can.

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: —a pedestrian must exercise due diligence when he is on the road. If he stood looking in an opposite direction, the law, as it stands, declares that he was probably more to blame for the consequences than was the motorist who was driving too fast. The law asserts that the pedestrian who did not take proper care of himself was guilty of contributory negligence. If he were knocked over and his leg were broken and subsequently he made a claim for damages in the court, the law would probably hold—of course, all these cases differ one from the other, but I am speaking in general terms—that that pedestrian through his own carelessness, or through his contributory negligence, was the principal cause of the accident, and his claim for damages would in all probability be wiped out altogether.

Experience has shown that this law does not confine itself to cases similar to the one I have mentioned. I think it would be right to say that most of the claims do, however, arise out of traffic accidents. Experience, too, has shown that there is usually a good deal of blame on both sides. The motorist has been careless but the other person concerned may have been guilty of lack of judgment or want of care; and usually the blame can be sheeted home in some degree or other to both parties. This Bill seeks to introduce a principle into our law that damages can be apportioned in accordance with what the evidence disclosed and what the judge finds to be the

respective quotas of liability. That may not be a very good explanation, but it is the best I can do. However, the principle is set forth in Clause 4 of the Bill and anyone who reads that will readily grasp it. I might add that I think it is one which will improve the present situation. It is also one that the writers of our best text-books have advocated and which judges have frequently suggested should be introduced. I do not agree with Mr. Fraser that it will add to costs in any way.

Hon. G. Fraser: I would not expect a solicitor to do that!

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: It will not make any difference whatsoever to the question of costs. It will simply introduce the principle that a judge can say in a case such as I have instanced, that the pedestrian would not have been knocked over if he had taken some degree of care; but at the same time the motorist should not have been speeding. He might say that the pedestrian was to blame one quarter and the motorist three-quarters or vice versa. That is a pretty sound principle and I wholeheartedly applaud it. The Bill is divided into two parts. The first one deals with contributory negligence and the second with contributions between tortfeasors. Some of the older members here might recall that a Bill was passed—I think it was in 1941—that had the same effect as the second part of the present Bill, which simply introduces into this measure a principle of law already accepted by this House in the year mentioned. I support the second reading.

THE MINISTER FOR MINES (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban—in reply) [8.15]: I am afraid, Mr. President, that Mr. Fraser has misunderstood the Bill, which is designed to give effect to exactly what he wants—that is, to minimise the number of cases going into court. At present, as Mr. Heenan has said, the law of contributory negligence is such that although a person may be the major culprit in the causing of an injury, he may escape all payment because the person injured could, with the exercise of proper care, have avoided the accident or damage. The principle of the Bill is not new, as it has been adopted for many years in what is known as the Admiralty jurisdiction, which deals

with collisions on the high seas. The Bill is designed to give effect to that principle, which is well known and clearly laid down.

The law of contributory negligence often debarred an injured person from deriving any benefit by way of damages. Under the Bill the evidence given in such a case will be exactly the same as hitherto. Let us take the case of a man leaving a motorcar unlighted in the street. Another car crashes into it and the question arises as to who is to blame, the man who left the unlighted car there or he who ran his vehicle into it. The man driving the vehicle issues a writ against the owner of the stationary car, who in turn counterclaims against the driver of the other vehicle. They go to court and one wins entirely. Under the Bill we might say that the blame was equally apportioned, fifty-fifty, and in a case where the blame was obviously about equal, those concerned would probably take no action in court.

Hon. A. L. Loton: What do the lawyers think about the Bill?

Several members interjected.

THE MINISTER FOR MINES: I trust they will look on it more seriously than those who make foolish remarks about it. The Bill will avoid many actions being taken to court, and that is the desire and intention of those who framed the measure. When the blame is about equal, if people are foolish enough to go to law about it, they will have to bear their reasonable share of responsibility for the accident. The evidence involved in court will be no longer than it is at present when contributory negligence is fought. I think it will be less, as there will not be so much emphasis laid on contributory negligence. The only extra time involved will be that taken by the judge in arriving at his decision as to the proportions of blame. It will throw greater onus on him than was previously the case, as at present he has only to say that he believes A, and not B, and that therefore B is guilty of negligence and will have to pay.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Will that not increase the cost of the advocate?

THE MINISTER FOR MINES: No.

Hon. C. G. Latham: He will have to be at the court all the time.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: He is not there when the judge is considering his decision.

Hon. C. G. Latham: But he will have to go back to the court to hear the decision.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: It is rarely that a judge gives his decision on the spot in such a case. Generally he has to ponder the evidence carefully before arriving at a decision. This legislation will decrease the work of the courts considerably.

Hon. G. Fraser: Do you not think lawyers will put up longer cases in an effort to establish that the other party contributed to the accident?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Perhaps I have not made myself clear. At present A sues B, and B counterclaims. A's advocate endeavours to prove that B was at fault, and vice versa. Under the Bill the judge might say that he thought that the responsibility was 50-50, or perhaps 25-75, and give judgment accordingly. On the question of costs, if the decision is 25-75, the successful party gets 50 per cent. of the damages he suffers, and furthermore the other side has only to pay half the successful party's costs. That will discourage litigation.

Hon. G. Fraser: Do you not think it will encourage the man, who cannot escape responsibility, to attempt to put up a case to make the other party appear 25 per cent. responsible?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: No. If a man believes he is to blame he will know that he is likely to be mulcted in all the costs if he is proved to be to blame. In such a case he will probably compromise without going into the court. I cannot recall having seen an action for negligence in the courts for some considerable time.

Hon. G. Fraser: That strengthens my argument, that we do not need this provision.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: It will tend to force the parties to settle their claims out of court. If the hon. member cannot see it in that way, I hope that, if the Bill is passed, I will eventually be proved to be right.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment and the report adopted.

MOTION—RAILWAY OMNIBUSES, PURCHASE, DELIVERY, ETC.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

Debate resumed from the 7th October on the following motion by Hon. H. L. Roche:—

That a Select Committee of five members be appointed to inquire into and report upon all aspects of the negotiations for the purchase and delivery of, and the utilisation of the vehicles known as the "Landliner" and "Cheetah" omnibuses acquired on behalf of the Western Australian Government Railways.

THE MINISTER FOR MINES (Hon. B. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [8.27]: In view of Mr. Roche's remarks, it would be as well to recapitulate the whole history of the negotiations surrounding the order for two "Cheetah" type buses, and the subsequent decision to purchase the so-called "Landliner" bus.

On the 13th December, 1945, the Minister for Railways and Transport (Hon. W. M. Marshall, M.L.A.), in referring to proposed country road services to be operated by the Railway Department, forwarded details which the W.A. Transport Board had obtained at his request, of a new bus recently designed and constructed in Victoria and which had been named the "Cheetah" bus. These details were perused by departmental officials, who were impressed with the statement of claims made concerning the unit and expressed the opinion that it was highly desirable that a competent officer be sent to view the particular vehicle, it being agreed that the set up of the chassis had very definite promise. The following is a report from Mr. R. L. Millen, then Chairman of the W.A. Transport Board, dated the 13th December, 1945, to the Minister for Railways and Transport, summarising the result of the inquiries which had been made by the W.A. Transport Board:—

As requested, I have made inquiries concerning the passenger bus recently designed and constructed in Victoria for long distance interstate tourist traffic.

The vehicle was demonstrated in Melbourne recently to a conference of transport authorities from the various States. Unfortunately, Western Australia was not represented.

By courtesy of Mr. F. P. Mountjoy, Commonwealth Director of Road Transport, I have been able to obtain a copy of the relevant minutes of the conference and other valuable information. This is embodied in the following documents herewith:—

- (1) Letter from Mr. Mountjoy to myself.
- (2) Copy of the minutes referred to therein.
- (3) Letter from Mr. F. J. Fox, managing director, Fowler Constructions Pty., Ltd., Melbourne, to myself.
- (4) Three photographs of the vehicle.

The vehicle might best be described by reference to the semi-trailer buses operating in Perth. It has an overall length of 45 ft. and a maximum width of 8 ft. A semi-trailer bus of the same overall length would consist of a tractor unit absorbing 10 ft. and a trailer unit occupying 35 ft. The 10 ft. absorbed by the tractor unit and occupied only by the driver represents 40 per cent. of the bus potential carrying capacity. By a radical departure in design, the builders of the new bus have succeeded in making the whole 45 ft. of length of the new bus available for passenger space. The equivalent of the semi-trailer in the new bus is a 45 ft. passenger carrying unit. The tractor unit has been eliminated and traction is supplied by a specially designed power bogie which is situated underneath and flush with the fore-end of the passenger carrying unit. The result is that a bus has been evolved embodying all the advantages of the semi-trailer unit with what has been described as "amazing manoeuvrability" and capable of carrying a licensed load of 75 to 80 passengers. At the same time, by reducing the passenger load to provide comfort and amenities, 35 to 40 passengers can on long-distance journeys be provided with what is claimed on responsible authority to be comfort travel which has not hitherto been available in Australia or in the world.

Some of the comforts embodied in the new bus are refrigeration, a tea servery, lavatory accommodation which by chemical process will be obnoxious to no-one, and an observation car. A new type of seat gives the maximum of comfort. The passenger is able to lie back, put his feet on a foot-rest and "travel as though sitting in his own arm-chair at home." The seats are fitted with patented hydraulic backs compensating for any movement one may get from the bus in motion. It is proposed to fit the bus with air-conditioning fans in the ceiling. At the present juncture air-conditioning equipment is unavailable and impact air-conditioning, through adjustable ventilators, has been adopted.

The powering of the vehicle embodies novel features. The ordinary heavy diesel or other engine can be used in the tractor bogie, but the designers have not elected to use it. Instead they have used two standard Ford truck engines—one incorporated in the power bogie, and the other at the rear of the vehicle. One engine is capable of driving the vehicle alone,

but the maximum efficiency is attained by the use of two. The advantage of two engines over one in the case of engine trouble is obvious. Both engines are interchangeable, and the power bogie can be readily changed with another. The breakdown of a power unit will not immobilise a bus. The value of this feature will be appreciated when it is realised that out of 8,000 Greyhound buses operating on the coast-to-coast run in America 800 are at any one time off the road for servicing, checking and repair.

Again there is the cost factor involved. A heavy diesel unit would involve an expense of £1,200. The standard Ford engines, gear boxes, etc., cost £250 as an initial outlay, but the motors can be replaced at a cost of £40 each. The two engines are more than adequate to power the vehicle, and the simplification of servicing problems has much to recommend the two standard engines over the orthodox heavy unit.

The designed maximum speed of the vehicle is 35 m.p.h.

The cost of the actual vehicle under discussion, when finally completed, will be in the vicinity of £4,500, but it will be realised that, with standard production, cost will be reduced, and it is estimated that eventually the vehicle will be quantity produced at £3,000 per unit.

The bus is past the experimental stage. It has been built and tested. It is recognised that when unavailable materials such as light alloy steels, aluminium, etc., become available, further improvements can be made and the passenger-load increased. It does seem, however, that there is much in the statement that has been made regarding the vehicle that "in the past we in Australia have been inclined to look to America for leads in the motor world, but . . . today we have something that will be developed and which will lead America and other countries in the matter of road transport."

Australian designers and Australian engineers have produced something full of possibilities for the future. The problem of long-distance passenger transport is real and vital in Western Australia and it is suggested that here is an avenue of investigation that should be explored to the ultimate end of providing the most up-to-date equipment, and at the same time adapting that equipment to our own climatic and other peculiar needs.

On the 31st January, 1946, when reporting to the Minister for Railways on proposed new road services, the Commissioner of Railways wrote, *inter alia*:—

As mentioned above, the type of bus to be used is a matter of the utmost importance, and this applies equally for a small scheme as for a large one. The "Chcetah" bus referred to in the W.A. Transport Board's file herewith seems to show great promise and it is proposed to make an early inspection of this vehicle. At the same time it must not be overlooked that this vehicle is as yet untried, and before deciding that it is the type for this State, very careful investigation should be made and, as I

suggested in my report of the 28th November last, the quickest and best way of getting complete buses on the road would be for the Government to send someone to England, America and possibly South Africa, with authority to choose types and cable recommendations for the purchase of either chassis only or complete buses.

Early in 1946, the opportunity was taken when Mr. F. Mills, Chief Mechanical Engineer, was in Melbourne, for that officer to inquire into the "Cheetah" buses, and on the 8th April he reported as follows:—

As arranged efforts were made to inspect the recently developed "Cheetah" bus placed in traffic on the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, with a view to forming opinions regarding its suitability for use in Western Australia. Unfortunately, this bus had met with an accident and was out of commission.

A second bus chassis is nearing completion at the works of Fowler Construction, Pty., South Melbourne, and this was examined on the 3rd and 5th instant in company with Mr. W. D. Chapman who gained wide experience of road transport vehicles while O.C.M.E. in the Middle East and as O.C. Mechanical Experimental Establishment in the Army. On the 5th instant we rode on the chassis through the streets of South Melbourne making many sharp turns, accelerating, braking, starting and stopping. As only the chassis without body was used there was full opportunity to see the mechanism of steering, gear changing and braking in operation.

Both Mr. Chapman and I were favourably impressed by this demonstration. The vehicle handled easily, rode well and proved a surprisingly small turning circle by making a full circle turn well within the limits of a 50 ft. roadway.

The chassis inspected consisted essentially of a welded lattice underframe about 45 ft. long with a four-wheeled bogie under the front portion which rested upon a turntable carried by the bogie. All mechanical and hydraulic connections were exposed to view.

The bogie has a driving axle of conventional form with standard differential gear and this axle is square with the bogie frame at all times. Steering is by the conventional drag-links attached to the front wheels of the bogie but actuated by hydraulic cylinders transmitting motion from the steering wheel where similar hydraulic cylinders are mounted.

In action this steering arrangement is quite unique and rather startling at first because the bogie can be turned to a right angle to the main underframe. When the steering wheel is turned the leading wheels of the bogie are turned so giving direction to the bogie which acts as an ordinary motor vehicle. The bogie then runs at an angle to the main underframes which is constrained to follow because its forward end is carried on the bogie. It was noticeable that when making a sharp full circle turn the whole vehicle appeared to revolve round the

back axle and the rear wheels made very little forward movement.

Turning sharp street corners presented no difficulty and it was noted that the sweep of the front end was no greater than with a normal "rigid" type bus of much shorter length and the approach of the main frame to the curb also was similar to that of an ordinary bus.

There are two Mercury V-8 engines one being mounted on the bogie and driving the rear axle of that unit, while the other is mounted on a sub-frame to drive the rear wheels of the bus. Transmission in each case is by standard four-speed gear box and standard differential. The rear engine faces to the rear so that its radiator is the rearmost component. This radiator has been enlarged specially and has two fans. As the two engines face in opposite directions the rear differential has been reversed so that no change is needed in the engine or gearbox to obtain forward drive from the rear engine.

Gear change is effected by the usual lever which is connected to the gear box selectors by rods and bell cranks. No attempt has been made to apply hydraulically-controlled gear changing.

Brakes are operated by standard hydraulic gear but specially large brake drums and shoes have been fitted. The hand brake acts also on the hydraulic system.

The standard differential gears fitted have two ratios giving the bus eight speeds for operation. Selection of differential ratio is accomplished by push button mounted on the gear change lever.

Only the front engine is used for reverse gear and when this is to be engaged the rear engine is stopped. A freewheel is incorporated in the cardan shaft of the rear engine.

Attached for your information is a copy of the "Mornington Post," which gives a highly-coloured account of the accident to the first bus of this type. This article is reminiscent of other statements on new engineering concepts which have engendered opposition.

The makers of the bus discussed this accident quite frankly with me and I am convinced that no inherent defect of the bus design can be ascribed as the cause. Apparently the driver was a youth who would be tempted to speeding with a powerful vehicle in which only he and the conductor were riding. Even in the newspaper article mentioned there is evidence that speed was 45 m.p.h. or more and that the driver, having pulled off the made roadway to pass a horse-drawn vehicle entering from a side road was unable to recover in time and "lost his head." After leaving the road the bus carried away a concrete pillar about 30in. x 18in. section and jumped a ditch about 10 ft. wide and 10 ft. deep. It finally came to rest with the leading bogie on the crest of the far slope of the ditch and the rear wheels in the bottom. Damage, in the circumstances, was slight. Some members of the bogie frame were bent and steering drag-links were bent, but the hydraulic gear was not put out of commission. In my opinion this accident served to demonstrate the robust-

ness of the construction, but does not in any way justify doubts as to the road-worthiness of the design.

The existing turntable is of relatively small dimensions, but all future chassis will have a stabilising turntable about 7 ft. diameter. Apart from this, I was unable to find any feature of the design which appeared to call for alteration.

My impression after careful inspection is that this type of vehicle should be considered very seriously for long-distance road services operated or to be instituted by this Department. Advantages are—

- (a) ample power by using two engines.
- (b) low engine maintenance due to avoidance of overloading.
- (c) one rigid body in place of the more costly but less satisfactory body and driving cab of the semi-trailer type.
- (d) better springing than the ordinary semi-trailer bus.
- (e) availability.

The two latter points are important. Springing of the "Cheetah" chassis is an advance on existing vehicles without introducing any maintenance difficulty.

Availability arises from the fact that the whole unit is made in Australia and the long delay in obtaining chassis from overseas can thus be avoided.

At a conference between the Minister for Railways, the Commissioner of Railways, heads of branches of the Railway Department and the chairman and the secretary of the W.A. Transport Board, when discussions ensued regarding policy, etc., in connection with road services to be operated by the Railway Department, it was agreed that an order be placed for the construction of two "Cheetah" type buses to try them out and the Commissioner was requested by the Minister to submit an application for an increase in the authority for proposed road buses to provide for two "Cheetah" buses in addition to orthodox type vehicles already approved. Ministerial approval was given on the 1st July, 1946, prior to which the Minister obtained a further report on the "Landliner" in operation by Dyson's Peninsula Motors at Frankston, Victoria, regarding which in a statement dated 24th June, 1946, Mr. G. T. Broadhurst, Inspector of the Victorian Transport Regulation Board reported as follows:—

In compliance with the desire of the Hon. the Minister of Transport for Western Australia, it is requested that the following notes on the above subject be forwarded to him.

2. General Notes.—(a) The "Landliner" is an articulated type of passenger omnibus of revolutionary pattern, designed and con-

structed by Fowler Constructions Pty., Ltd., of South Melbourne and Dyson's Peninsula Motors.

(b) The major variations from conventional design for an articulated, or semi-trailer vehicle, are the special tractor or bogie unit of very short wheel-base, constructed in such a way that it is completely super-imposed by the semi-trailer section, necessitating the driver controlling the vehicle from a remote control position in the semi-trailer section, and the addition of an auxiliary power plant driving the rear or trailing wheels. The vehicle has, in consequence, the general appearance of a conventional 4-wheel or 6-wheel (tandem rear axle type) forward control omnibus.

(c) Advantages over the latter type gained by this method of construction are almost completely limited to the following points:—

(i) greatly increased manoeuvrability as compared with the vehicle of equal length but conventional design;

(ii) possibility of availability of the vehicle being much greater than is the case with one of conventional design, due to the ease with which the power unit can be withdrawn for maintenance and replaced with a spare. (The change-over should not take more than three to four hours);

(iii) much greater flexibility as a result of having both main and auxiliary power plants, either of which can be used independently to drive the vehicle, irrespective of the fact that the other has failed;

(iv) probability of a considerably lower centre of gravity, thus giving greater stability;

(v) the absence of the power plant from the passenger compartment reduces the possibility of noxious fumes affecting the passengers.

(d) Advantages over the conventional articulated type are as follows:—

(i) greater manoeuvrability;

(ii) increased accommodation for same over-all length;

(iii) psychological effect on passenger comfort of having driver in same compartment and visible to all passengers;

(iv) much improved visibility for passengers, particularly to the front of the vehicle.

(e) Disadvantages of this type of vehicle are mostly bound up in the fact that, being of revolutionary design and construction, a supply of spares much in excess of normal would require to be maintained. Mechanics would probably need specialised training at the works of the manufacturer, to ensure adequate maintenance.

The remote controls necessitated by the type of construction have not, as yet, to the best of my knowledge, received adequate long-term tests, but I have been satisfied by the manufacturers that very exhaustive tests have been carried out with complete satisfaction and

that a margin of safety much greater than is considered necessary by American manufacturers has been built into all controls.

(f) The manufacturers' statement in this regard is borne out by the fact that, in a recent accident in which the prototype vehicle ran off the road and through a creek, none of the controls failed or were damaged. I examined both the scene of the accident and the vehicle very shortly after the occurrence and am satisfied that the accident was caused by the driver losing his head while travelling at excessive speed.

3. Suggestions.—(a) Before installing this type of vehicle for road passenger transport, both Mr. Hopkins, of this Authority, and I consider that long-range exhaustive tests under local conditions should be carried out with a vehicle carrying freight. Neither Mr. Hopkins nor I am prepared to give unconditional approval to the vehicle until such tests have proved satisfactory.

(b) Subject to satisfactory tests as above, both Mr. Hopkins and I consider the type eminently suitable for road transport work. With an overall length not exceeding 35 ft. we are of the opinion that it would be most suitable for a metropolitan service and in a long model (say, 45 to 50 ft. over-all) it would be most suitable for long distance road work, provided that it would not be used on mountain type roads where it would occupy so much space on curves that it would become a serious menace to other road users.

(c) The shorter type vehicle suggested for metropolitan use could be designed without an auxiliary power plant, thus enabling the trailer wheels to be placed nearer the rear end of the vehicle.

(d) If the adoption of this type of vehicle is being considered, it is recommended that not less than 6 vehicles be obtained, together with at least two spare bogies. The vehicles need not all be of the one length, as the bogie would remain standard, irrespective of the length overall. Similarly, one or two rear-end assemblies, including the auxiliary power plant, should be obtained. One or more mechanics should be sent to the Fowler Construction Company's works for instruction in order to establish a competent servicing branch.

(e) The reason for the suggestion of a minimum number of vehicles in (d) above is that owing to the distance from the manufacturer and consequent delay in obtaining spares, the necessity of holding a stock of spares in Western Australia would render the use of any smaller number uneconomical.

4. Notes on Construction, Specifications and Road-worthiness.—(a) Vehicle is designed for approximately 60 passengers over reasonable distances. It is constructed for a gross loading of 14 tons distributed, 40 cwt. front axle, 120 cwt. rear bogie axle and 120 cwt. trailing axle.

In the prototype vehicle examined, seating accommodation was supplied for 59 passengers. Tare weights were 35 cwt., 93 cwt. and 82 cwt. respectively and gross loads (fully loaded at

16 passengers per ton) were calculated as 42 cwt., 120 cwt. and 122 cwt. respectively. The tyres fitted were 900 x 20 heavy duty singles on front wheels, duals on other axles, and are just sufficient to carry this loading. Fowler Construction inform me, however, that experience gained has enabled them to reduce tare weight by approximately 2 tons and that it is proposed to fit 825 x 20 tyres on future vehicles. These would be adequate if no overloading is permitted.

(b) The vehicle is remarkably manoeuvrable and when travelling as a passenger at what I estimated to be 45 miles per hour, I had no sensation of speeding. Visibility, from point of view of passengers, was good, and particularly to the front, much better than in conventional articulated type. The seating was suitable for journeys not exceeding say, 3 hours' duration. Road shocks at any speed were very slight and one had no feeling of sway or lack of control at any speed.

(c) General Specifications:—

Bogie—Fowler Construction Company's design and manufacture. Estimated weight: 35 cwt. Wheelbase: 72 in. Centre of turntable 16½ in. in front of rear axle. Front axle features independent springing, incorporating Ford Co. stub axle and wheel-hubs. Rear axle: Ford standard heavy duty, 2-speed. Engine: Ford Mercury.

Trailer Axle—Ford heavy duty, 2-speed.

Auxiliary Power Plant—Ford Mercury.

Semi-Trailer Chassis—Length, 45 ft. Longitudinal members: 10 in. U sections. Cross members: Include a number specifically designed to control twisting or torsional distortion. Chassis tested with 100 per cent. over load gave distortion (bending) of ½ in. approximately on 30 ft. span. Distance from centre of turntable to rear axle: 30 ft. Front overhang in front of turntable, approximately 7 ft. Rear overhang behind rear axle: 8 ft. Auxiliary power plant mounted behind rear axle.

Body—Designed and built by Dyson's Peninsula Motors Pty. Ltd. Length overall: 45 ft. 6 in. Height (external): 8 ft. 9 in. Height (internal—clear of bogie): 6 ft. Height (internal—over bogie) approx.: 4 ft. 9 in. Width (external): 8 ft.

Driver's Seat: On centre line of vehicle 3 ft. in front of centre of turntable and 2 ft. 3 in. in front of front passenger seats.

Note: The turntable is integral with bogie and carries a short false chassis. To secure the bogie to the semi-trailer, the bogie complete with part of front panel, false chassis and floor is backed into semi-trailer chassis and secured there by four heavy bolts.

Controls.—Mechanical throughout: Gear shifts for both engines. Accelerator and ordinary engine controls for both engines. (Revolution counters are fitted to enable synchronising of engines.)

Vacuum—Reverse gear on bogey. (No reverse gear fitted on auxiliary engine.)

Vacuum Electric—Differential 2-speed gear both bogie and trailer axles.

Hydraulic—Service brakes on all six wheels.

Vacuum Hydraulic—Emergency brakes on trailer wheels (including parking brakes).

Steering—The hydraulic system of control is merely to allow a flexible linkage between steering column and wheels. Two sealed systems are used. Hose connections are tested to 3,500 lb. per square inch pressure. Two drag links are used, one to each front wheel and the wheels are also connected by track rod.

It will be noted that this report confirms the favourable report previously submitted by Mr. Mills. Following further inquiries by the Chief Mechanical Engineer and discussions with the constructing firm (Fowler Construction Pty.), a firm order for the two buses was placed and these buses are now in course of construction and nearing completion.

The foregoing sets out the relative history leading to the decision to order two "Cheetah" type buses which had been developed following the construction and use of the "Cheetah" bus known as the "Landliner" and operated by Dyson's Peninsula Motors Pty. Ltd., of Frankston, Victoria.

Regarding the decision to purchase the "Landliner" itself the facts are that while in Melbourne in January, 1947, in connection with a meeting of the Commonwealth Advisory Council the Minister for Railways (Mr. Marshall), the Commissioner of Railways (Mr. J. A. Ellis) and the Chairman of the W.A. Transport Board (Mr. W. H. Howard) in company with Mr. Hopkins of the Victorian Transport Regulation Board visited Frankston and inspected the "Landliner" bus and were given a demonstration of its riding and travelling qualities. During this visit the proprietor of Dyson's Peninsula Motors (Mr. Hall) mentioned difficulties he was having with the traffic authorities in regard to licensing, owing to the length of the vehicle (45 feet) and, as he was operating on a temporary license which he feared may not be renewed, he felt that he should dispose of the vehicle. It was agreed that Mr. Hall would submit a proposition for sale of the "Landliner," delivered in Western Australia. Mr. Hopkins stated that one of the main reasons for Victoria's objection was that a considerable amount of log carting by road is done in the hill country, and it was feared that a meeting between a long log wagon and a

large vehicle like the "Cheetah" bus might have serious consequences. Similar conditions do not prevail in Western Australia. Following this visit, on the 14th January, 1947, Mr. Hall submitted an offer to sell the "Landliner" for £4,350 on the understanding that the chassis of a similar vehicle which his company had on hand, would also be purchased at a cost of approximately £1,750, delivery costs to be borne by the Railway Department.

This offer was not acceptable, and subsequently a further offer was made to sell the "Landliner" for £4,350 delivered at Fremantle, the company to bear the cost of transport to this State, without any obligation so far as the extra chassis referred to was concerned. Having ascertained from the Police Traffic Branch that there would be no objections from that branch to licensing the vehicle, also from the W.A. Transport Board that the chairman of the Traffic Advisory Committee would be prepared to recommend the approval of the Hon. Minister controlling the Traffic Act in regard to the proposed vehicles which exceeded the regulation maximum length, and having regard to the fact that there was no doubt that with the development of road services profitable use could be made of an additional vehicle of this type, also the fact that a relief bus was urgently required for the Kojonup run to relieve the semi-trailer bus on that run which was nearing the time when it must be withdrawn for complete overhaul, the Commissioner recommended to the Government that the latest offer for the "Landliner" be accepted, subject to satisfactory detail inspection prior to shipment, and this was approved and the purchase was consequently arranged.

Regarding subsequent happenings with this bus as outlined by Mr. Roche in his motion, taking the various points seriatim, I have been advised as follows:—

Cost of Bus.—As already stated, the cost of the "Landliner" was £4,350 delivered at Midland Junction, not £5,000 as stated by Mr. Roche.

"Landliner," built as experimental model.—This is correct. When purchased by the W.A. Government, however, it had completed over 12 months' service in commercial operations and it was considered that the special features of the Cheetah type of construction had been well tested in actual operation, and proved sound.

Bus allegedly idle for 12 months before purchase owing to Victorian traffic authorities' refusal to license it.—This statement is contrary to fact. The vehicle was licensed in Victoria to the 31st December, 1947.

Hon. H. L. Roche: When did you get delivery?

•The MINISTER FOR MINES: I could not say.

Alleged capsizing of bus.—This is also contrary to fact, as the bus has never capsized. The only accident in which it is known to have been involved is the one referred to in Mr. Mill's statement heretofore. The bus did not capsize, and there is no relation between this incident and the Victorian licensing authorities' reluctance to license it, which, as stated by Mr. Hopkins of the Victorian Transport Regulation Board and referred to above, was due to the danger of a large bus of this nature meeting a long log truck on one of Victoria's curving mountain roads. There is no question whatever regarding the safety of the vehicle in traffic.

Power units and steering.—The vehicle is powered by two V-8 engines as stated, and the driver sits in with the passengers. This is considered an advantage, as the driver is in sight of the passengers, and so engenders greater confidence than when he is in a separate unit, as with the semi-trailers.

The vehicle has hydraulic steering. While the hydraulic principle is unusual in motor vehicle steering, it is common in other avenues, such as the landing gear of aircraft, and is considered to be no more prone to faulting when used in steering. It is also in common use in motor vehicle braking, and does not require specialised knowledge.

When the bus was given its trial runs, a minor defect in the steering developed, which has been rectified. While hydraulic steering may be a novelty in Western Australia, it is so simple that it was only a matter of a couple of hours instruction from representatives of the vendors, who accompanied the bus to this State, for the whole operation to be made clear to all concerned, including the drivers. The steering gear is checked over each morning as a routine measure to ensure that oil lines are 100 per cent in order, and not because of any inherent defect in principle.

Emergency exit.—Mr. Roche is correct in stating that there is only one door. There is, however, a proper emergency exit in the shape of the large rear window arrangement which is easily opened by means of thumb-screws. This type of exit is permitted in Victoria, and has been approved for certain buses obtained from the Eastern States and now operating in Western Australia. It is considered to meet requirements.

Overhaul of power units.—Mr. Roche states that although this was a second-hand machine, it was not considered necessary to overhaul the power units. This is correct, but as the vehicle had done under 30,000 miles, which is far

below the normal mileage before overhaul, also having regard to the fact that the bus had been driven from Kalgoorlie to Midland Junction without trouble, and also on its initial trip from Perth to Cranbrook and return without incident, an overhaul was not warranted. It was given an ordinary examination which did not reveal any defects.

After concluding a successful trial run to Cranbrook and return, the vehicle was painted and subsequently returned to service.

Mishap to engine.—Mr. Roche refers to the engine breakdown at the 107-mile peg. The trouble on this occasion was due to overheating of the engine as a result of loss of water, the reason for which has not been ascertained. As a result of this, the front engine suffered damage and a relief bus was obtained to complete the run. The rear engine was unaffected, and the "Landliner" returned to Perth under its own power. Repairs were effected and the bus returned to service. The trouble experienced was not due to any defect in design, as the engine is a standard Ford V-8 Mercury. The bus was off traffic on Monday, 6th October, on account of a minor mechanical fault which was quickly and easily rectified. While off on this occasion the opportunity was taken to effect certain adjustments considered to be desirable, but which would not have necessitated taking the bus off traffic specially.

Luggage space.—Mr. Roche's final reference is to luggage space. The "Landliner" has luggage compartments in the side, which will take a large quantity of luggage, while there is also ample luggage space in the rear of the vehicle where seats have been removed. The hon. member appears to have been misinformed on this point.

The foregoing is a general summary of the "Landliner" and "Cheetah" bus transactions. The department and the Government have nothing to hide in connection with these vehicles.

It is difficult to see any justification for the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into their purchase, but if the House wants one, I will not oppose it. However, if we do have a Select Committee it is doubtful as to when it will be able to sit owing to the shortage of "Hansard" staff. It is regrettable that the "Hansard" staff is not available at the present time. I think, however, the information I have given about the "Cheetah" bus must have convinced all members that there can be very little value in five members solemnly sitting to get again the information I have already given. I leave the matter entirely in the hands of the House.

On motion by Hon. W. R. Hall, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 9.6 p.m.