

the board's commencing operations in the Goldfields.

I had intended to deal with the inadequacy of the basic wage, but as I have already taken up so much time I will leave that subject until the Estimates come down. There are many other matters which could be discussed, such as coal supplies, the indifferent quality of the coal being supplied to the railways in this State, education, and so on, but, having taken up something like one hour and twenty minutes of the time of the House, I will leave those matters to be dealt with on some future occasion.

On motion by Hon. N. Keenan, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 6.5 p.m.

Legislative Council.

Tuesday, 14th August, 1945.

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

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by Hon. C. B. Williams, leave of absence for twelve consecutive sittings granted to Hon. J. Cornell (South) on the ground of ill-health.

MOTION—FREMANTLE HARBOUR TRUST ACT.

To Disallow Bagged-Wheat Charges Regulation.

Debate resumed from the 7th August on the following motion by Hon. C. F. Baxter:—

That new regulation No. 148, made under the Fremantle Harbour Trust Act, 1902, as published in the "Government Gazette" of the 20th April, 1945, and laid on the Table of the House on the 31st July, 1945, be and is hereby disallowed.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. W. H. Kitson—West) [4.34]: In dealing with the speech made by Mr. Baxter when he moved for the disallowance of the regulation, I feel that I must repeat to the House a few remarks that I made on previous occasions because, as Mr. Baxter has done from time to time when moving for the disallowance of regulations dealing with the charges for the handling of bagged-wheat, he did not spend very much time on the actual facts of the case but, on the other hand, devoted quite a lot of attention to describing the disabilities under which wheat-growers are labouring. With his remarks in that connection I find no fault but, with reference to his statements regarding the regulation under discussion, I must admit that I found it very hard to follow him. Perhaps it is not surprising that that should be so because the regulation deals with quite a number of operations that are necessary in the handling of bagged-wheat at Fremantle. In addition to that, there have been so many different rates in operation during recent years that we can understand it is easy for any member not to be quite as clear as he might otherwise be with regard to those particular rates.

In the first place, I want to emphasise clearly that the regulation deals solely with the handling charges imposed by the Fremantle Harbour Trust in connection with bagged-wheat. Those charges represent an effort on the part of the Harbour Trust to endeavour to recoup itself for the actual expenditure upon services rendered in the handling of bagged-wheat. In the main, those charges represent wages costs which the Harbour Trust has to pay at the time the services are rendered. As I have remarked on previous occasions, I consider it only reasonable to expect that when services are rendered on that account, the least the trust can anticipate is that it will be recouped the actual cost under that heading. I have previously given to members some illuminating figures regarding the quantity of wheat handled at Fremantle by this method.

It may not do any harm to repeat now that in the early history of the operations of the Fremantle Harbour Trust the whole of the wheat exported from the State was bagged, and always a special rate applied to the handling of wheat in bags. So much was that so that when the bulk handling

system was inaugurated, owing to the very large reduction in the quantity of wheat handled by the trust and, to some extent, on account of the increase in wages that took place from time to time, the Commissioners showed an actual loss on the operations. Later on when it became apparent that bulk handling was going to supersede almost entirely the handling of wheat in bags, the Harbour Trust did not mind showing a small loss in consequence, but when, a few years ago, it became apparent that for various reasons there would be a large increase in the quantity of wheat exported from Fremantle in bags, the Commissioners of the Fremantle Harbour Trust considered it necessary to amend the regulation to provide that they should as nearly as possible recoup themselves for the actual cost of the services they were rendering.

At that stage this House first disallowed the regulation. At that time, the Harbour Trust regulation provided for an increase of, approximately, 100 per cent. Even if the regulation had been allowed to stand and the trust permitted to make that charge, a loss would still have been shown on the quantity of wheat handled. But this House disallowed that regulation. The Harbour Trust, finding itself in the position that unless another regulation was promulgated it would, under the then existing regulations, have to charge the ordinary cargo rates, which are very much higher indeed than the wheat handling rates, decided to make another regulation with a view to securing the agreement of this House to it. When the second regulation came before the House, Mr. Baxter was again successful in having it disallowed, notwithstanding the fact that the rates prescribed by the regulation were considerably less than those set out in the previous regulation which this House had disallowed. So we again reached the stage where, unless another regulation was made, the Harbour Trust would be legally entitled—indeed, would be expected—to charge the ordinary cargo rates for the handling of bagged-wheat. The Commissioners have no desire to do that, as those rates would be considerably higher than any rate which the Harbour Trust is likely to prescribe for this purpose.

Then, again, because of the fact that during the war-years there have been various alterations in the methods by which

bagged-wheat is handled at Fremantle, it was necessary for the Harbour Trust to revise its regulations in some respects. That has been done and the provision is embodied in the regulation which Mr. Baxter seeks to disallow on this occasion. I might say that, so far as bulk wheat is concerned—all wheat is, as members know, handled by the Australian Wheat Board—that board pays the actual cost of handling the wheat. The quantities are considerable, varying with the season and sometimes on account of the destination to which the wheat is to be sent. During the war period many ports, particularly European ports, to which we exported bulk wheat, have been so damaged that they cannot handle wheat in bulk and consequently bagged-wheat is exported to those ports. In order to meet that state of affairs the Australian Wheat Board has established on the waterfront a plant for bagging bulk wheat railed to Fremantle. Huge quantities of wheat are bagged in order to meet the requirements of the export trade.

We therefore have this position: Wheat which is received at Fremantle and exported in bulk pays the actual cost of its handling; but if it is bagged on the waterfront and then exported it does not pay at present anything like the actual cost of its handling. I contend, therefore, that the Harbour Trust Commissioners are perfectly justified in their action where they have no control over the quantities of wheat handled in that way, and it is not reasonable for the House to say that the rates which were established many years ago should prevail today, more particularly when it is remembered that if the wheat had been exported in the form in which it reached Fremantle it would at least have paid the cost of handling. Those are perhaps my main points, but I would like to add that the figures quoted by Mr. Baxter are hard to reconcile with the actual figures as I know them. I realise that if I read to the House the various operations which are involved and the various rates which apply to these particular operations, most members would probably find it difficult to follow me.

I will therefore put it to the House in this way: In order to meet the expressed desire of this House, through Mr. Baxter, the Fremantle Harbour Trust

adopted this method: It said, "We will go back to the year 1922 and take the rate that applied in that year, and we will add 35 per cent. to those charges," the 35 per cent. being arrived at because the Prices Commissioner had agreed to that increase in the handling of general cargo. I submit that that is a very fair proposition. I have tables of figures indicating what it means. I have to inform the House, however, that during the depression period—of which all members will have vivid recollections—the Harbour Trust, with a view to meeting the position as it then was, decided to give the wheatgrower a rebate on handling charges because the wages at that time had been reduced. The wages of the waterside worker were then 2s. 8½d. per hour; today, on ordinary time, his wages are 3s. 11½d. per hour, almost a 50 per cent. increase.

The figures with which I have been supplied show clearly that even if the rates which are included in the present regulation are agreed to, the Harbour Trust cannot pay its way so far as the handling of bagged-wheat is concerned. On the last occasion when Mr. Baxter moved for the disallowance of the regulation, he concluded his remarks by saying, "The Fremantle Harbour Trust should draft a new regulation on a more reasonable basis. Anything reasonable will not be objected to." I submit that the method adopted by the Harbour Trust Commissioners on this occasion is reasonable. The Harbour Trust has not worried with regard to the intervening charges, but has simply said that it would go back to 1922 when wages were very low, and take the rates that applied at that time and increase them by 35 per cent. That is all that happened with regard to this regulation.

On account of the form in which the regulation is framed, Mr. Baxter suggests there was an attempt on the part of the Harbour Trust, or someone else, to mislead. There was no intention at any time to mislead the wheatgrowers, the Australian Wheat Board or this House. On a previous occasion when the disallowance of this regulation was moved, I approached the Australian Wheat Board, through the chairman, and suggested to him that the Fremantle Harbour Trust was quite prepared to handle any quantity of bagged-wheat on a cost basis. He informed me at

that time that he realised there would have to be some increase in the cost, but at the same time his board would prefer that a fixed amount be established as otherwise, on account of the varying nature of the ships which take bagged-wheat from Fremantle, there would be varying costs per bag of wheat for the varying consignments of wheat. His board preferred to know where it was all the time rather than have to rely on the varying costs that would be incurred as a result of war disabilities.

There again, the Fremantle Harbour Trust, having that in mind, desired to do the fair thing. I think I can claim for the Commissioners that they have at all times in this matter endeavoured to do the fair thing by the Australian Wheat Board and also by their own organisation. It is recognised that conditions today, and for some years past, have been entirely different from what they were years ago. For that reason alone they have been quite content to carry some of the loss that has been incurred. But the Commissioners naturally feel that they must look after their own interests, and if they can show that they have taken into consideration all the varying circumstances I have enumerated, then they think they have done the fair and reasonable thing, and I think so too!

Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch: How do these rates compare with those disallowed by this House last year?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: As I have already pointed out, there are various operations for which charges are made. I will deal with several of the items. First of all there is, "Receiving into stacks." That is, in the main, taking bags of wheat from railway trucks into the stacks in the shed on the North Wharf. The original rate for this operation was 1.275d. per bag.

Hon. Sir Hal Colebatch: Do you mean that that is the rate we disallowed last year?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: No. That was the rate in 1922. The new rate, enacted on the 4th June, 1943, and which was disallowed by Parliament, was 2.5d. per bag. The percentage increase was 96.1. That regulation was disallowed. The next regulation provided for a rate of 2.375d. per bag. The increase in that case

was 86.3 per cent. The rate included in the present regulation, which we are considering disallowing, is 1.721d., or, in other words, an increase of 35 per cent. on the original rate. The reduction of the increase on the original rate is 61.1 per cent., while the decrease on the preceding rates is 27.5 per cent. So in that particular operation the Harbour Trust, on the third occasion, has provided for a reduction on the increase on the original rates of 61 per cent. In view of what I have said, surely that is a reasonable compromise.

With regard to delivery from stacks to vessels—that is taking the bagged-wheat from the sheds where the bags have already been stacked, and transferring those bags into the various vessels—the following charges were originally made:—per gantry—that is where they were transferred by means of a mechanical appliance—1d. per bag; where they were transferred by ship's gear, the same rate, 1d. per bag. The first new rate that was disallowed by Parliament was 1.75d. per bag for gantry loading, and 2d. per bag for loading by ship's gear. The increases on the original rates were 63.3 per cent. and 90 per cent. respectively. The position at present is that the rate in this regulation is 1.35d. per bag in both cases, showing a reduction on the increase on the original rates of 40 per cent. in the case of the gantry and 65 per cent. so far as the ship's gear is concerned.

Hon. G. W. Miles: You said that there was an increase of 66 per cent., but the rate went up from 1d. to 1.75d. Is that not a 75 per cent increase?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: No, that was disallowed. It was 1.75d. per bag. The rates I have just quoted show reductions of 40 per cent. and 65 per cent. The same argument applies there as in the previous case, that that is a very reasonable compromise. In handling from trucks direct to vessels—that is where there is no necessity to stack the bags in the shed in the first place and later move them from the sheds to the ships—the original rate for loading on to vessels from trucks, per gantry, was .75d. per bag. Where ship's gear was used the same rate applied, .75d. In the first regulation that was disallowed these rates were increased to 1.25d. for gantry loading and 1.5d. for loading by

ship's gear. In other words, the increases were 66.6 per cent. and 100 per cent. respectively. That regulation and in consequence these rates, were disallowed. The Harbour Trust in its endeavour to meet the desires of this House brought in another regulation which was disallowed. In that case the rates provided for an increase of 58.4 per cent. and 90 per cent. respectively. Under the present regulation, with its 35 per cent. increase on the 1922 rates, we find that the charge is 1.013d. per bag in both cases, and that represents a reduction on the increase on the original rates of 31.1 per cent. and 65 per cent. respectively.

One could quote quite a number of tables of this sort. I am quoting these figures to indicate as clearly as possible and with as few complications as possible just what the effect of the new regulation is with regard to these rates. I do not wish to quote a whole host of figures, but in order to give the House something like an accurate idea of the position, it would be as well to point out that in 1934 the quantity of wheat exported in bags from Fremantle was no less than 7,300,629 bushels. In that year the rates of wages of the waterside workers for bagged-wheat were 2s. 7d., 2s. 7½d., and 2s. 8d per hour. The quantity exported in bags gradually decreased from that year until 1940 when the quantity sent away was only 456,327 bushels. That is a very big difference compared with 7,300,629 bushels exported in 1934.

At that stage the loss on the handling of bagged-wheat was only £781, and the trust took the attitude I have described. It said, "Seeing that bagged-wheat is going out, we need not worry much about it." Of course, the quantity had been much higher in previous years. In 1942 we found that on account of the conditions then prevailing, more particularly in European countries, no less a quantity than 4,027,125 bushels was exported in bags. That was approximately nine times greater than the quantity shipped in 1940. The loss incurred by the trust in handling that quantity amounted to £6,169. Naturally the Commissioners, having some regard to their reputation as business men, considered that something should be done to rectify the position, and they took the action I have already described. In 1943 the quantity exported in bags dropped to a little less than a million bushels—to be

exact, 935,859 bushels. The loss in handling was £896. This year there has been another increase in the quantity exported in bags. The figures supplied to me show a total of 1,950,627 bushels—approximately 2,000,000 bushels—exported during 1945. I am not in a position to give figures of the actual loss because they are not yet available.

Hon. L. Craig: About £1,700 last year.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I would not like to say, because the regulation we are now considering has been in operation for a considerable time, and the rates, as I have stated, have been fixed with a desire to limit the loss as far as the trust could do so, and it may be that the loss is represented by quite a few hundred pounds, though I would not like to estimate the figure at this stage. I also point out that, as compared with the wages paid to waterside workers in 1934, the rate today for ordinary time—this rate has nothing to do with penalty rates—is 3s. 11½d. per hour. Consequently, it seems to me that the trust has a particularly good case, and notwithstanding the fact that this House has previously disallowed the regulation, the trust has, on this occasion, in the words of Mr. Baxter, endeavoured to arrive at what it considered the House would feel was a reasonable rate. I also point out what while Mr. Baxter claims that this is a charge which the wheat-grower must necessarily meet, it is a charge made against the Australian Wheat Board, which is handling the whole of the wheat in the Commonwealth.

If we take those figures and compare them with the quantity of wheat handled by the Australian Wheat Board in Western Australia, the cost is about one-tenth of a penny per bushel. If we spread that cost over the whole of the wheat handled by the Australian Wheat Board, then it is considerably less than that fraction. I think we should deal with this matter from the point of view of an organisation that is rendering a service for which it is entitled to be recompensed at least the actual cost of the service. The trust, having in mind the attitude of this Chamber on two previous occasions, has now adopted a formula which I think is fair and reasonable. In fact, I doubt whether any member could claim that it is in any way unfair or unreasonable so far as the organisations concerned in the handling of wheat are affected. There is one rate to which I desire to refer and

which apparently gave Mr. Baxter an opportunity to show that there had been a tremendous increase. It is one which enabled him to show, on the figures, a very large increase, although at the same time it is only a 35 per cent. increase on the 1922 rate. I refer to the item "re-stacking or re-handling for each service." The original rate in 1922 was 1.250d. per bag. In 1932 the trust gave a rebate on this service of .5d. per bag. That left the net rate at .75d. per bag. The rate that applies at the present time is 1.250d., which is the 1922 rate plus an increase of 35 per cent.

It was possible for Mr. Baxter to claim that there had been an increase of over 100 per cent. in that particular charge, but my reply is that a special rebate was given in 1932 in order to meet particular circumstances. Whether we consider that that rate should be continued or not does not matter, because not a single bag of wheat has been handled under that heading, and it is not anticipated that there will be very much at any time. Only a small quantity will require to be handled in that way, which is certainly more expensive to the trust. In order to have uniformity in these rates so that there could be no misunderstanding as to how the comparison was arrived at, the trust has adopted the following method: The 1922 rate plus an increase of 35 per cent., which is the rate agreed to by the Price Fixing Branch for increases in rates on general cargo handled. I also point out that this is the only State in the Commonwealth where wheat is handled by the port authority. In other States the wheat is handled by private interests.

Hon. C. B. Williams: Who are the private interests?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: All sorts of people who have to make a profit on the services they render; otherwise they could not continue to exist. So the rates at Fremantle, as members will understand, compare more than favourably with the rates ruling elsewhere.

Hon. G. B. Wood: Have you the figures to prove that?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I have not the figures here, but that fact is accepted by everyone in the trade. Therefore I suggest that, in view of all that has been said and the fact that the trust has shown its willingness to meet the desires of this House

to the extent it has done by this regulation, whatever objection members might have had previously is not a valid objection at present. Bulk wheat is handled at cost for the Australian Wheat Board. Wheat sent to Fremantle to be exported in bulk but which is then bagged by the board must necessarily show a loss because this House has not agreed to the rates in the regulation.

Hon. C. B. Williams: Why?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I submit there is no logic in that at all and, in view of the fact that the trust can have no control whatever over the quantities involved, and that the more wheat the Australian Wheat Board desires to export in bag as against bulk, the greater is the loss to the trust in handling it, we should on this occasion be reasonable and say that the 1922 rate plus 35 per cent. increase is a fair compromise. I have on previous occasions dealt with the question which is inevitably raised on such a debate and that is that the trust shows an excellent return to the Treasury. I think it can be said without any qualification at all that the export of wheat from Fremantle does not contribute in any shape or form to that revenue. Primary products are free of wharfage. I believe this is the only State in Australia where that applies. That is an additional argument why an institution such as the Harbour Trust, in handling a commodity of this kind, is entitled to the consideration I am asking for on this occasion—a consideration which still means that it must inevitably show a loss in the handling of that commodity.

I have spoken at length on this subject on previous occasions. The House is very well aware of the arguments I have used from time to time, and I do not know that I am going to do very much good by repeating all those arguments every time this subject comes up for review. I would point out that under this regulation the maximum increase on the 1922 rates is 35 per cent. It does not apply in every instance, because there is one case where there has been a considerable reduction arising out of that uniform formula. In some cases separate charges have been eliminated. Owing to the variations in method which have to be adopted at Fremantle, there has been, in cases, a revision of the charges in accordance with

those changes. I want to assure the House that in all cases where a charge has been split—in some cases into two portions—the rate is the same as applied in 1922, plus an increase of 35 per cent.

If this House disallows the regulation, we shall be faced with this position: We shall have no specific charge for the handling of bagged-wheat. Normally it would be expected that the trust would carry out its regulations; so it would have to charge the ordinary cargo rates, which it has no intention of doing. Therefore, it would again be necessary for the trust to introduce another regulation which, it appears, in view of past experience, would meet with the same reception as in the past, and perhaps the same fate. The only thing the trust could do under those circumstances would be to say, "We can only put up some sort of variation. We cannot accept the position that we have to stand by a rate that was fixed many years ago when conditions were entirely different, and bear the whole of that loss. We do not mind sharing some of the loss." Under the regulation we are discussing, there will be a loss; but at the moment it is not possible for anyone to estimate what it would amount to.

Hon. G. W. Miles: Do you know how these rates compare with charges at Geraldton and Bunbury?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I could not give those rates offhand, but I think it will be found that the rates there are higher than those at Fremantle. If that information is really desired, I can obtain it for the hon. member. I took the figures out last session and, speaking from memory, I think it will be found that the rate per bushel is a little higher than under this regulation. I hope that on this occasion the House will agree with the contention I have put forward: That in view of all the circumstances and in an endeavour to meet the special conditions existing at present, the method adopted by the trust in arriving at the rates included in this regulation is a fair and reasonable one. If that is agreed, the regulation will not be disallowed.

HON. L. CRAIG (South-West) [5.20]: On numerous occasions, this House has criticised the Government for showing losses on its undertakings. Hardly any member of this Chamber has failed to criticise the Rail-

way Department for its administration and lack of business acumen. Most members are pretty keen, sensible businessmen. Here we have a set of circumstances in which a Government instrumentality, the Harbour Trust, is placed in a position in which it is expected to carry out a job in the interests of the public. Commissioners are appointed who are selected for their ability, and who are required to do the best they can for the benefit of the State; but we have a commodity—wheat—which, as pointed out by the Chief Secretary, has been handled in toto at no profit to the Harbour Trust.

Hon. C. B. Williams: And very little, if any, to the railways.

Hon. L. CRAIG: Yes. All other primary goods are handled at some profit to the Harbour Trust, and we ought to condemn the trust if it does not show some profit. We here are believers in enterprise. We consider that there should be some profit over costs. If we are going to break away from that principle, we are going to break away from all the principles of business.

Hon. A. Thomson: You should carry that out in regard to the cost-plus system.

Hon. L. CRAIG: It is not a question of cost-plus at all. If we are going to use the argument that primary goods should be carried at a loss, I do not know where we shall stop. It is against all the principles of good business. Do not forget that wool is a primary commodity; and if the argument is going to be used that wheatgrowers have been having a bad time, I think it can be applied also to the woolgrowers. Why should not the woolgrower argue that his commodity should be handled at some considerable loss to the community?

Hon. G. B. Wood: That is only part of the story.

Hon. L. CRAIG: The point is that the handling of bagged-wheat resulted in a loss of as much as £6,000 in one year. Are we, as representatives of the people, going to say that this shall continue? I do not represent a wheatgrowing community, but the people in my district are fruitgrowers and dairymen. The export of butter is considerable today. Thousands of tons are sent away. From my province comes fruit, butter, wool, sheep skins, kangaroo skins, etc. I do not know that the wheatgrower has any

real claim over and above other primary producers. Do members think that he should have some preference?

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: You know very well he should!

Hon. L. CRAIG: I do not think he should. I do not think that the wheat-grower is any different from the wool-grower. Indeed, if the hon. member knew the circumstances on some of the North-West stations, he would say that the wool-growers above all are the people who should receive preference. Stations are being abandoned. I know of five of them in that position, and the people have been there for 30 years. In this matter where is one going to stop? One has to be reasonably sensible. We should not expect the community to carry a direct loss in regard to the loading of bagged-wheat. Let it not be forgotten that this loss is not borne by the wheatgrowers of Western Australia; it is borne by the wheatgrowers of the whole Commonwealth.

Hon. A. Thomson: That is no argument.

Hon. L. CRAIG: It is an argument. The whole question raised is that the wheat-grower is unable to bear the extra cost of handling. It is not the wheatgrowers of Western Australia that bear the loss but the wheatgrowers of the whole of Australia. We would be stultifying ourselves if we said to the Harbour Trust, "You must go on handling this bagged-wheat at a loss, irrespective of the amount that has to be loaded." It is quite possible that with the devastation of Europe and other places, the loading of bagged-wheat will be greatly increased. As the Chief Secretary pointed out, port facilities at many places have been knocked about. Are we to say that no charge shall be made for the handling of wheat, even though millions of bushels may have to be loaded? I think the House is being very foolish about it all in appointing selected men to such a job as this and then taking power out of their hands. The Chief Secretary put up an extraordinarily good case, and the House should support him and allow the Harbour Trust to make such charges as will recoup some of the loss. The Chief Secretary has indicated that it is not intended to recoup all the losses, but the trust should have power to recover some of them. I support the Chief Secretary.

On motion by Hon. A. Thomson, debate adjourned.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Eighth Day.

Debate resumed from the 9th August.

HON. L. B. BOLTON (Metropolitan) [5.27]: In view of my long personal friendship with the late Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin, I would like to add my tribute to the many that have already been expressed concerning the great service rendered by him to the Commonwealth, not only during his term as Prime Minister but during the whole of his public life. I am broad-minded enough to express the opinion that we were fortunate in having his counsel during the war period, if only for the reason that many unpleasant restrictions and alterations in our mode of living were probably made more acceptable to the masses when imposed by him than if they had been imposed by some other authority. I desire to express my sincere sympathy to Mrs. Curtin and her family.

I also desire to express to the ex-Premier, Hon. J. C. Willcock, my regret that ill-health has forced him to retire from the position he so ably filled for a number of years. I am glad to know that he took this step in time to enjoy—we all hope—many years of useful, even if less arduous, service to the State, service of a minor value that will not impair his health. Too many of us are inclined to carry on until the last and thus miss seeing the beneficial fruits of our labour on behalf of those we have endeavoured to serve. I wish to convey to Mr. Willcock the hope that he will experience a speedy return to good health and a continuance of it.

It is not my intention to touch on many subjects during my address, but I feel that I ought to say something about the position of our secondary industries, with which I have been associated for so many years in this State. Naturally, during the war period, there has been an increase in the number of our factories and in the number of workers engaged in industry. Unfortunately the proportion of increase does not compare with the progress that has been made in the other States. Speaking on this subject on previous occasions, and particularly during the last session, I gave many

figures in support of this, so I do not intend, on this occasion, to weary members with figures, as I feel they are well acquainted with the position. There has been a development of many new industries, due to the continued efforts of the Minister for Industrial Development, Mr. Hawke, and his very able assistant, Mr. Fernie.

Much progress has been made in dehydration, and the extension of the canning industry will be of great benefit to the State. It may interest members to know the actual increase made during the war period. In 1939 the number of workers in industry in Western Australia totalled 23,211 and at the 31st December, 1944, it had increased to 28,101. Wages paid in 1939 amounted to £4,923,000, and in 1944 to £7,770,000, while the value of production in 1939 was £8,776,000 and in 1944 it had risen to £12,511,000. The gross output for 1939 amounted to £19,549,000, against £29,208,000 for 1944.

Hon. L. Craig: Equal to the figures for primary production?

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Yes, and I think that is the first time that position has been brought about in this State. These figures are very illuminating, and it is sincerely to be hoped that we can maintain them.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: They have been brought about under very exceptional circumstances.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: They have been developed under war conditions, but I think members will agree that we hope our industries will be able to maintain something like the output that they have achieved in the past.

Hon. G. W. Miles: And increase it.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Like many others engaged in the industrial world, I am very concerned about the future welfare of the State. To me the most worrying problem is that of manpower, and when I refer to "manpower" I really mean skilled labour, that which is so necessary for the continuance of our stable industries. Still in the minds of many employers is the unfortunate position that our industries suffered through lack of work in the early stages of the war, when so many of our skilled and best artisans, seeking work, had to go to the Eastern States where the demand was so much greater and the opportunities of ad-

vancement so much better. This position, unfortunately, has never rectified itself and, with the call-up of our youth and so many apprentices from the age of 18, skilled tradesmen are very difficult to obtain. Certainly the release of large numbers of servicemen will ease the position somewhat, but in my opinion labour, and particularly skilled labour, will be at a premium in the Commonwealth for the next few years.

Hon. C. B. Williams: Because of the stupidity of the employers, or of the Trades Hall?

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: A little of each. If the hon. member wants me to refer to the stupidity of the Trades Hall, I will say this, and I think he would agree with me, that that stupidity was due to the fact that until very recently, when they saw the error of it, the Trades Hall endeavoured to keep the numbers of apprentices down just as low as was possible, instead of encouraging them and encouraging employers to take apprentices and make good and useful tradesmen of them.

Hon. A. Thomson: Hear, hear!

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: We would have a much better community today if we had more skilled labour and less unskilled labour. May I add that my experience—and I think the experience of many other employers—is that the worker who causes the most trouble, who wants most for his money and the greatest return for his labour, is the unskilled man and not the well-trained tradesman. That is my answer to the hon. member.

Hon. C. B. Williams: Do you approve of importing Italians and Slavs instead of using our own men?

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: I do not think that is being done.

Hon. C. B. Williams: Is it not being done in the building trades?

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: I do not think that is being done in the building trades.

Hon. C. B. Williams: It was.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: If our own people will get back to work, there will be no need for it. I suggest that to maintain our key industries we will require all our resources, and if those industries are to be placed on their previous satisfactory footing under private enterprise, too much interference cannot be tolerated from the dozens of con-

trols exercised at the present time, controls not only over staffs and employees generally, and over employers, but, worst of all, over necessary materials.

Much has been said and written regarding continuance of employment in the few munition annexes in this State. Unfortunately, the unenlightened public think it is only necessary to wave a wand to convert these, as well as many other businesses, from munitions to something fresh. Those who have had some little experience in this direction know that it is not so. I would suggest to the powers that be that, if they require these places to be carried on successfully, they should release the various plants as quickly as possible, and let private enterprise get back on to the job of producing some of the commodities that are so urgently required in this State. There is sufficient work offering to occupy the whole of the buildings and to absorb all the suitable machinery and plant, but it is not generally known that much of this plant in the various munition annexes is quite useless for any other purpose. A great proportion of it consists of single-purpose machines which cannot be adapted, or which, if they were adapted for anything else, would be much too costly, much more costly than new machines which would do the same or even better work. These must be scrapped, and if it means that they will not be required for munition-making again, we should all be thankful that this is so.

As the housing problem seems to be No. 1 priority with all and sundry, my suggestion is that many of these places should be turned into factories for the fabrication of houses. I understand that this is being done in the Eastern States. I know of one large factory in Melbourne formerly making a similar type of article to that manufactured in my own factory, that has turned to the fabrication of houses. Under such circumstances a great percentage of the work could be standardised, which would help to reduce the cost. We have had, of course, many new factories established here, particularly furniture factories. As we get more houses there will be a great demand for furniture. Much of the inner furnishings and fittings has, in the past, been imported from the Eastern States, and I think the great majority of that work could be done locally.

Another activity which we might undertake in this State, particularly with the few large buildings that we have that have been used for war work, is the manufacture of refrigerators. The demand in this State for refrigerators will be enormous for the next few years, and I think our factories could be put into production in that direction. Because refrigerators are bulky articles I think we would have a big freight advantage over our competitors in the Eastern States.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: Are you referring to the cabinets?

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Yes, mostly to the cabinets. I would again stress that if this is to be done quickly and successfully, the Government must withdraw many of the restrictions and controls.

Hon. C. B. Williams: Not this Government.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: The Commonwealth Government, to help this State.

Hon. C. B. Williams: You should make it clear.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: The Government that controls the controls—put it that way. If that Government does so, it will be surprised how soon private enterprise will tackle the job of supplying many of the articles that are so urgently required. I now come to a matter that is causing serious concern in the transport world. From time to time we hear of proposals for the nationalisation of this and that, and, whatever may be said to the contrary, Labour Governments—including our own—are pledged to socialise and nationalise everything that they can possibly socialise or nationalise.

Hon. C. B. Williams: That is pretty wide.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Notwithstanding the fact that the people of the Commonwealth refused to give the Commonwealth Government the power necessary to carry this policy into effect, no notice was taken—as we know—by the Commonwealth authorities, and, notwithstanding the definite promise of the late Mr. John Curtin that legislation of this nature would not be introduced during the war period, we all know what has happened. It is more with what is about to happen that I am concerned.

Hon. C. B. Williams: Here in Western Australia?

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Had the rumours been associated with some undertaking in which the Government had proved its ability to control and develop, to the satisfaction of the people and with advantage to the State, one could not—I suppose—have taken the same exception, but of all the instrumentalities under Government control, that receiving the most criticism—I am afraid it is justified criticism—is transport, for today not one good word can be heard from the public, or from those forced to use our trams, trolley buses and railways, about those services. For this unfortunate position I do not entirely blame the managements. It is because, unfortunately, the control seems to come not from the managements but, due to Trades Hall interference—

Hon. C. B. Williams: No.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Due to Trades Hall interference. I will try to demonstrate it to the hon. member.

Hon. C. B. Williams: I disagree; it was the two unions.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: The employees of these departments have practically assumed control of those services.

Hon. C. B. Williams: Not the Trades Hall.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: I can emphasise my statement by asking members to remember the case of a former Minister for Railways who, because he stood up for the Commissioner and opposed the unions concerned in a dispute, was placed in the position that when, following upon the next election, members had to be chosen for the Ministry, he was dropped from the Cabinet. It is generally known why he was dropped. It was because he was game enough to stand up on the side of the Commissioner against Trades Hall interference.

Hon. G. W. Miles: And he would not allow himself to be nominated as a Minister later on.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: That is so. When the recent re-organisation of the Cabinet took place that member of the Labour Party would not seek nomination for office. That is why I say that today, due to interference by the Trades Hall, control of our railways has been lost by the Commissioner and

those associated with him and that control has been practically assumed by the men themselves.

Hon. H. Seddon: You seem to have some inside information!

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: One does not require to have inside information to appreciate that fact. When trouble arises, we know what happens. Usually there is a strike that extends for a few days and, irrespective of whether the men are in the right or in the wrong, the Government has to give in, even if it has to transfer an officer from the metropolitan area to the Goldfields because of the trouble. That is my reply to Mr. Williams, and it makes me feel that it is all due to Trades Hall interference. I say definitely that in my opinion communist influences have a lot to do with it, and that is more apparent in railway and tramway circles than in other departments of Government employment—and particularly in tramway circles.

I agree with Mr. Williams with regard to his outspoken but truthful statements regarding a section of the workers in the Tramway Department. I support him in his remarks about the uncouth and careless manner in which many of the tramway employees carry out their duties. Of course, in saying that I refer to only a section of them for there are many good, faithful employees in the service, men who are most courteous and attentive to their duties. Unfortunately among the younger communist element that is not so. On many occasions I have seen trams that are not even half full of passengers, dash past stopping places where people were awaiting transport. The trolley bus service is even worse. Night after night I have seen trolley buses, not fully loaded, pass stopping places and leave workers standing for half-an-hour or so for the next bus. The wonder to me is that the workers themselves have not taken action against those concerned.

Another complaint I have to make about the trolley bus service is regarding the practice of drivers taking many street corners at much too fast a pace. The effect is to force the trolley pole off the wires and that often causes a serious stoppage due to the fusing of the overhead wires. At one particular spot the trouble was so acute that after many serious stoppages, which had caused the cutting off of all the power in that particular block for periods extending

from ten minutes to three hours, the department had to take precautions. On one occasion the whole of the machinery was put out of action. Sometimes the driver can be seen sitting in his seat waiting for the breakdown van to come along; and the irritating part is that he is usually to be seen grinning at what he thinks a great joke. Other members have doubtless also been affected by similar happenings. To overcome this particular difficulty the department was forced to place a new set of wires above those used by the trolley buses. Strange to say since that was done it is very seldom that trolley poles have left the wires at that particular spot.

What I am endeavouring to do in these remarks is to compare the slipshod, go-as-you-please, do-as-you-like methods of Government-controlled transport, in which there is absolutely no discipline whatever, with that apparent with privately-owned transport in connection with which one at any rate gets civility and attention. I next intend to deal with a serious matter. There is a suggestion that the Government intends to continue its socialistic programme by taking over the control of the privately-owned bus services in the metropolitan area, with the intention of having them operated by the State. What a tragedy it will be should that occur! My information is that a special committee of three Government officials has been appointed to inquire and report regarding the taking-over of all city and suburban services. No one can take exception to the three officials appointed. They are fair-minded men who are rendering excellent service to the Government in their various departments, but as Government officials I am afraid—I think members will agree with me here—they must be regarded as "Yes" men. They are asked to report on an extension of Government policy, and it is difficult to see how they could be other than favourable to the suggested project. In the circumstances it is but fair that I should place the names of those three Government officials before the House. The first is Mr. J. A. Ellis, the Commissioner of Railways.

The Honorary Minister: Would you describe him as a "Yes" man?

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Another is Mr. A. J. Reid, the Under Treasurer, and the third is Mr. R. L. Millen, the chairman of the Transport Co-ordination Board. I certainly

hope that they will not prove to be "Yes" men, but, being Government officials, it is difficult to see that they would submit a report contrary to the policy of their employers.

Hon. A. Thomson: Yes, on a matter of Government policy.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Quite so. Possibly the three gentlemen mentioned are the most suitable to handle such a question from the Government angle, but why should the Government confine itself to the appointment of Government officials? If Ministers are sincere and intend to give the matter careful consideration, why not invite one or two outsiders to sit on the committee with the officials? Another point is that I doubt if there are three other State officials more over-worked than those I have mentioned. Mr. Reid, for instance, seems to be placed on almost every committee possible.

Hon. L. Craig: He has no money to play with at present, so it does not matter.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Mr. Reid is a very able man, probably one of the most able in the Government service. That is probably why the Government seems to pin its faith to Mr. Reid. Mr. Ellis has his hands more than full with railway matters. He has been away for a considerable period but now he is back on the job, and for that I am glad. As to Mr. Millen he has done an excellent job, and I certainly take my hat off to those who have been in control of transport and liquid fuel matters. They have done excellently a most difficult task. Surely these three men are altogether too busy to afford the time requisite to make the investigations required and compile the necessary report. The Government was quite prepared to sit back and see private enterprise risk its capital in opening up the outer suburban areas. Had it not been for private enterprise and the expenditure of capital by private companies and individuals, who are now threatened with extinction, the development that has taken place could not possibly have been effected.

Although the housing problem is very rightly receiving priority No. 1, closely allied is the matter of transport, without proper provision for which houses that must be constructed mostly in the suburbs will be of little use. So perturbed are the various bus companies and owners that they sought an

interview with the Minister controlling transport matters, Mr. Hawke, who, I understand, confirmed the appointment of the departmental committee but added that until he received the report, which was expected within the next couple of months, he was not prepared to give the deputation much information. It was understood by some, however, that any drastic action would probably be deferred for a period of 12 months after the consideration of the report, and the impression was also gained that the Government would take over only such of the plant as it thought fit. One can just imagine that the Government in taking over these privately-owned concerns would not be prepared to buy many of the vehicles that are in the service of the companies today.

Hon. L. Craig: They would be compensated.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: The question of compensation was mentioned, and it was felt that the members of the departmental committee were fair-minded and reasonable men and as such would make a just recommendation in that regard.

Hon. L. Craig: The Constitution lays that down.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Here again the absence of any but Government representatives on the committee is to be deplored. I intend to show what a disastrous effect it will have if the State takes over the control of these transport facilities. Not only will it affect the companies and shareholders concerned but its effect will be noticed in other directions. Let members consider the huge amount that metropolitan bus owners alone pay for licenses, permits, traffic fees and other taxes. The Taxation Department will be a heavy loser. We may not deplore that, but we must remember that all Government-controlled instrumentalities are immune from the payment of taxation and many other charges that private interests have to pay.

It may interest members to know the enormous amount of revenue that is obtained from this particular source. They may be surprised to learn that the metropolitan bus owners alone paid for licenses, permits, traffic fees and other taxes no less than £97,000 in 1944, of which amount £38,925 was paid in traffic and license fees. This is not to be wondered at when we take into account the capital outlay involved, which amounts to

not less than £750,000. The bus owners are now faced with an urgent replacement outlay estimated at £300,000.

There is one other matter worthy of attention, namely, the question of manpower. It can be expected that if control of manpower continues—and it seems likely that it will—for quite a time, the Government departments, both Federal and State, will claim prior right to all required labour, particularly skilled labour; and what labour, if any, is left, will be placed at the service of private enterprise. This, to my mind, is what nationalism of transport will mean to the people of this State. Further, it would mean the creation of a new organisation, which, if run on usual Government lines, would be much more costly than private ownership methods. It is interesting to note that the cost of administration of transport comes entirely out of the funds I have mentioned. The total cost of running the Transport Board at present is met out of the revenue received, and this would, of course, be another loss in the event of Government control and would be a further charge on the State.

When we allow approximately £21,000, the amount paid over to local authorities—£8,000 of which goes to the Main Roads Board—it still leaves a matter of nearly £12,000 excess. These include road transport subsidies, purchase of equipment, maintenance, etc., but my contention is that, in addition to the loss of approximately £97,000 in revenue, as I mentioned before, the State would be forced to find £12,000; and then, if it intended also from some other fund to make the same payments to local governing authorities, an additional £21,000, making a total loss of revenue per annum to the State from the metropolitan area of £130,000. Surely, this is serious enough to warrant the House requiring to know all about it, not tomorrow, or next week or the week after, but today, and that is my object in bringing it before the House, so that the trouble may be nipped in the bud.

From the case I have endeavoured to make out, the Government would be very ill advised to proceed further with such a scheme. May I merely add that today Governments throughout the world are advocating and practising decentralisation. Here, again, the new order of things would be entirely opposed to this, as it would be

only a question of time when the whole of the transport required, other than the chassis, would be manufactured at the State works; and this, together with repairs and maintenance, could not be done nearly as satisfactorily under Government control as it is done at the present time in the various factories and shops in the metropolitan area. I sincerely hope that the Chief Secretary, in his reply, will be able to tell us that there is not as much in my story as I am led to believe. Somebody suggested that I might have some inside information. Well, I have sufficient information to know that unless the thing is stopped, it is the Government's intention to carry out this policy. I support the motion.

On motion by Hon. G. B. Wood, debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. W. H. Kitson—West): I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till 4.30 p.m. tomorrow, unless the Prime Minister of Australia officially declares before 10 a.m., Perth time tomorrow, that peace has been made with Japan, in which event the House stands adjourned till 4.30 p.m. on Tuesday next.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 6.6 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

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

QUESTIONS.

SOLDIER SETTLEMENT.

As to Purchase of Dairy Stock.

Mr. McLARTY asked the Minister for Lands: