

Hon. W. J. MANN: That is so. It was one of those foolish happenings that should never occur. By and large, we have received a very fair deal from our coalminers and, on the other hand, they have been well treated. I do not think they have any real grounds for complaint in that direction. However, there is a feeling among them that if the coalmining industry of Western Australia were placed under the control of a competent commissioner, he could deal with the various little troubles as they arose. If such a commissioner were given a fully qualified coalmining engineer as adviser, the future value of the industry would be greatly enhanced.

The coalminers generally complain that the coalfields have not been scientifically worked in the past and that there has been too great a desire to get the coal out with as little trouble as possible, while neglecting those essential principles of mining that should not be lost sight of where an industry is expected to live for many years. I understand that the Government has expressed itself as being in accord—if not wholly, then considerably—with the idea of placing the industry under a commissioner, and I trust that that course will be followed. It would make for smoother working in the industry. A man with high qualifications would be required and I believe there is such a man in this State at present.

I listened with pleasure to Dr. Hislop expressing his views about our hospitals. I do not agree with all he said, but there is a great deal in what he put forward. While his idea is that regional hospitals should be installed at some future date, it must be remembered that it is necessary to carry on all our hospital services in the meantime. The goal he has in mind is a worthy one but there remains the necessity to accelerate improvements in our present country hospitals. That also applies to our schools, but in both instances the position is governed by the difficulty experienced in securing the

necessary materials and labour. I support the motion.

On motion by Hon. E. M. Heenan, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.10 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday, 17th August, 1948.

CONTENTS.

	Page
Assent to Bills	453
Questions : Shipping, interstate, as to freight charges	453
Wheat, as to preparation of case for Commonwealth scheme	454
Free medicine scheme, as to statement by Honorary Minister	454
Bill : Prices Control, Message, 2r.	454

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

ASSENT TO BILLS.

Message from the Lieut.-Governor received and read notifying assent to the following Bills:—

- 1, Supply (No. 1), £3,800,000.
- 2, Increase of Rent (War Restrictions) Act Amendment.

QUESTIONS.

SHIPPING, INTERSTATE.

As to Freight Charges.

Hon. E. NULSEN asked the Honorary Minister for Supply and Shipping:

- 1, What are the sea freights from Hobart, Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide to Esperance, Albany, Bunbury and Fremantle?

2, What are the freights from Adelaide and Melbourne to Esperance on refrigerators and solid furniture?

3, What are the differentiations in freight charges on various classes of goods, including perishable goods, and also on goods carried by measurement?

4, Is it possible to get a sea freight rates book, or a comprehensive list of freights?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

1, Freights as follows:—Adelaide-Fremantle—65s. per ton. Melbourne-Fremantle—71s. 6d. per ton. Sydney-Fremantle—78s. per ton. Newcastle-Fremantle—81s. per ton. Hobart-Fremantle—90s. per ton.

Same freight applies to Albany, Esperance, Bunbury and Fremantle, plus surcharge of 5s. per ton.

2, Freights are the same as above, except that where a package is heavy and compact freight is charged on dead weight. If bulky, it is charged on cubic feet calculated on 40 cubic feet to the ton.

3, Perishable goods cased or crated are charged at ordinary rate plus insurance policy as stated above, and are not in refrigerators.

Freight differentiations are too numerous to answer, and can be answered by ship owners or agents.

4, There is no sea freight rate book, but I understand that there is a freight list the size of a family Bible and, no doubt, it can be seen on request at any shipping office.

WHEAT.

As to Preparation of Case for Commonwealth Scheme.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN asked the Minister for Lands:

1, Why will he not invite the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation to prepare the case in support of the Commonwealth wheat marketing scheme?

2, Is Mr. Braine assisting in the preparation of the case for a State scheme?

The MINISTER replied:

1, The Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation is composed of representatives from five States. It would be unreasonable to request the Federation to call a special meeting to

prepare the case for the Commonwealth wheat marketing scheme.

2, No.

FREE MEDICINE SCHEME.

As to Statement by Honorary Minister.

Mr. GRAHAM (without notice) asked the Premier:

1, Does he consider it proper that a Minister of his Government should take advantage of a civic reception to embark upon party political propaganda?

2, Is he aware of the report in the "Daily News" of yesterday's date wherein it was stated that "Doctors and others loudly applauded the Honorary Minister (Mrs. Cardell-Oliver) today when she spoke against the nationalisation of medicine"?

The PREMIER replied:

I did see something in the "Daily News" about the speech of the Honorary Minister, but the views expressed by the Honorary Minister were her own. She was speaking at a civic reception and I think she is entitled to express her own views.

Mr. Marshall: Was she not representing the Government?

The PREMIER: Yes.

Mr. Fox: Does she not speak for the Government when she represents it?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! Let the Premier make his reply.

The PREMIER: The Honorary Minister gave voice to her own views.

Mr. Marshall: She plays a double part, evidently.

Mr. Graham: I would like an answer to my first question as to whether the Premier thinks it proper for a Minister to take advantage of a civic reception to embark on party political propaganda.

The PREMIER: I am not aware that the Honorary Minister took advantage of anything.

BILL—PRICES CONTROL.

Message.

Message from the Lieut.-Governor received and read recommending appropriation for the purposes of the Bill.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 12th August.

HON. F. J. S. WISE (Gascoyne) [4.39]: We on this side of the House are greatly concerned with the effect of this sort of legislation. We believe in and have sponsored such legislation as the Profiteering Prevention Act of 1939 and when, under the economic stability enactments of the Commonwealth during the war, it was found necessary to refer such matters as prices, we supported—with other States—such reference to enable adequate control in regard to prices on a Commonwealth-wide basis to be brought about. I was interested to hear the very scanty statement of the Minister regarding price control generally. He certainly gave the House an outline of Commonwealth control of prices and of the National Security Regulations, as contained also in the Commonwealth defence transitional powers legislation, the Act of 1946. The decision of the Government of this State to introduce the present measure was arrived at after many happenings, including and following the referendum. The people of Australia decided by referendum, in overwhelming majority, that price control should be handled by the States of the Commonwealth, and the States found themselves, very shortly after the referendum, with the responsibility of picking up controls of various kinds. It seemed that price-fixing, land sales and rent control were the principal matters with which they had forthwith to deal.

I will not comment on the campaign that preceded the referendum except to say it was freely stated, by those who took active part in it, that every State Government was willing and ready to take over the control of prices and rents immediately the Canberra control ended. Such statements will be found in many advertisements published at that time. It was said that the States, including Western Australia, were ready to take over the controls whenever control from Canberra came to an end. It was surprising, after the public had expressed its view in unmistakable terms, to see the perplexed attitude of Governments, particularly those that strongly supported the return to them of authority over prices. It was surprising to see their consternation at having the responsibility given to them after a stated

period. Although the Commonwealth had given three months' notice and more, there were headlines in the newspapers stating that the Commonwealth Government was actuated by pique in handing back the controls. That seemed a strange attitude to adopt, when prior to the referendum it was maintained that all States were ready to pick up the controls immediately Canberra relinquished them.

The responsibility placed on the States gave to those most concerned an altered attitude in many respects. Some of the State Governments were actually alarmed at the prospect of having to deal with the matter. The position was reached in mid-June that the Prime Minister notified the Premiers of all the States that he intended to assist them, as far as he could, by the use of administrative staff, in order to make the change-over as easy as possible for the States. He gave the assurance that the administrative staffs would assist in the change-over from Commonwealth to State control in every way, in order to give the States the opportunity to undertake the types of control that they considered necessary and adequate. In the course of his speech the Attorney General gave an outline of the periods at which Commonwealth controls were to end. The legislation that passed this House last week and is now law covers the control that would otherwise have expired today. I understand that Commonwealth authority and control over prices—the subject of the Bill with which we are now dealing—is to end on the 20th September.

The Attorney General: I believe that is correct.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: The States have been given the opportunity, from the 16th June to the 20th September, of considering the kind of legislation necessary to be introduced better to enable them to take over the controls that the Commonwealth had under its jurisdiction, and of amending such legislation as they thought fit. Following the indication from the Prime Minister on the 16th June, the Premiers of all the States met on the 23rd June, and at that Premiers' Conference many decisions were reached as to the attitudes the States would adopt and the arrangements they would make to enable smoothness to obtain during the change-over.

At the preliminary meeting of the Premiers—the report will be found in “The West Australian” of the 23rd June—they agreed unanimously that “if the economic stability of Australia is to be maintained it is vital that an effective system of price control be continued.” In the course of his speech the Minister gave in detail the decisions arrived at by the Premiers, at the conference on the 23rd June, with regard to price-fixing and the transference of price control. After reaching those decisions Ministers of the various States assembled again early in July. It is very interesting to learn what was stated by the Premier in this connection on his return from the Premiers’ Conference. In the course of a statement he said—

The States would proceed at once with preparations to take over prices, rents and land sales control. In Western Australia, rent control had remained a State matter. The Commonwealth had agreed to the States having the services of those required from existing prices and land sales staffs to facilitate the setting up of State administrations.

The State control of prices should assist trading activities in more speedy decisions on price determination. Every effort would be made to assist the trading community in the operation of price regulation so that unproductive expense could be avoided and savings passed back to purchasers.

The only comment I make on that statement is that although land sales control also expires on the 20th September, there has been, so far as we can gather from public statements, no move yet on the part of the Government to enable it to take up the control of land sales, which now obtains through the Commonwealth Sub-Treasury. If price control is as urgent as I believe it to be—that is to say, we must not allow the 20th September to be reached without definite control being set up or without an extension of time being granted by the Commonwealth, as happened when an extension of time was granted to Queensland with regard to rent restriction legislation—certain legislation will of necessity have to be passed by both Houses of Parliament in this House before that date expires.

I want to stress that although the 20th September is the date selected for this legislation, there is no reason, judging by the attitude of the Commonwealth following upon representations by the Queensland Government, why the Commonwealth law,

which this Bill re-enacts or continues, should not be further extended, if it is shown that this Bill now before the House is not suitable here for the purpose set out. It might easily be that if legislation better suited to our needs can be introduced in this Parliament as compared with the Bill now under discussion, the 20th September need not be necessarily regarded as the deadline date. Following the return of the Premier, there was a further conference on the 30th July at which the Attorney General attended. On his return from that gathering the Attorney General stated—

He had returned with the conference recommendations concerning items to be decontrolled which would be put before all State Cabinets. A further conference would be held in September at which, it was expected, announcements would be made dealing with the States’ abandonment of certain controls. Legislation would be put before the State Parliament “very shortly.”

It is very important to observe that there was no mention by the Minister in the course of his speech when moving the second reading of the Bill, of any ideas he had in mind or any method he might employ on behalf of the State Government concerning decontrols. I realise it might be impolitic at this stage to make such a statement. I appreciate that if certain sections of the community trading in commodities were to learn what the Government had decided to do with respect to relinquishing controls, there might not only be a rush for those commodities but also increases in prices. On the subject of decontrol, we might have had some comment from the Minister with regard to the Government’s policy of tapering off controls where there was ample evidence to show that the supply of goods was approaching the demand. Our attitude on this side of the House has always been the same in that regard. We believe that controls should be lifted, or at least tapered off, as trade offers and the supply of goods is found to be comparable with the demand for those goods—provided always that every effort is made to prevent profiteering in the commodities concerned.

Following on these conferences I have mentioned, the Bill before the House emerges. It proposes nothing new, nothing different from the existing type of control. As a matter of fact, it really carries on exactly from the point where the Commonwealth relinquishes control. To accomplish

that, the same regulations are to be used and the same type of control. In fact, it proposes to set up a sort of secretariat in Sydney instead of in Canberra. Thus, with all the objections that, it is said, were to be found with regard to control by the Commonwealth from Canberra, there is to be perpetuation of exactly the same sort of control, at least for the time being—we do not know how long it will be—with the same regulations and presumably with much the same staff. The difference will be that the central authority will guide State Ministers instead of commissioners in each State, with regard to matters that are common to all States and furnish decisions acceptable to all States.

The Attorney General: The secretariat is to be composed of only two men; it will not be large.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: It is quite true that the secretariat may start with two men. I have known some departments to start with one man, but they grow. The allocation of staff necessary to control prices will, I venture the opinion, be somewhat similar in respect of its growth when the matters at issue are solely within the control of the State. I presume the States will have to accept responsibilities with regard to the cost of research work that will be necessary and for the payment of the staff that will engage in research work respecting prices and methods of production, all of which will have to be determined, whether commodities are to be decontrolled or not. These things will have to be weighed similarly by State Ministers as they were formerly by Commonwealth commissioners or directors who had control of price-fixing in the respective States.

Before I deal with the Bill in detail, I would like to mention one or two matters that cannot be controlled by the legislation if it is enacted. It was very interesting to note the comments of the Minister with regard to the close co-ordination that has been promised as between the States. The Ministers at their conference agreed that—

In the case of goods which will be the subject of interstate trade, the State in which the goods are produced will determine the price and will communicate its decision to all States. Subject to any adjustment that may be required, the price determined by the investigating State will be the price in other States.

That is the decision of Ministers with respect to commodities produced in one State for export to another; but I am wondering whether any kind of co-operation exists between the States in order to get over the difficulties of Section 92 of the Constitution if it is challenged. The Attorney General was absolutely silent on that point. As he is a legal gentleman, I should have thought he would have taken the opportunity to clarify an exceedingly clouded position. I would like him, and any other legal member of Cabinet, to tell us for public information what their opinion is, so that we may better understand the limitations of the Bill, if it becomes law, so far as Section 92 of the Constitution, as to freedom of trade between the States, is concerned. In the past, my understanding was that the High Court had ruled that the States had no power to fix the price of any goods if there were any possibility of those goods passing from one State to another. I think that decision was a majority decision and I understand it is now the legal position affecting movement of goods interstate as controlled by Section 92 of the Constitution. I would like the Attorney General, or the Minister for Housing, who I know is preparing to make some comment on this Bill that I think the House will welcome—

The Minister for Housing: I am just about to note down what you say.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I hope the Minister for Housing will favour the House with comment on this Bill and particularly on the point I have raised. Much was made of that point of view during the referendum; and it is not sufficient for this Chamber, or any other House of Parliament in Australia, to be assured that Ministers have agreed upon close co-operation. It is most desirable that as the States have accepted the responsibility for price control as the result of the decision of the people—at which no-one can cavil—those in authority should clearly elucidate just what the position might be if an attempt were made to fix a price in Melbourne or in Sydney for a commodity to be exported to Western Australia, and whether there may not be some infringement of the Constitution, in spite of the close co-operation, collaboration and desires of State Ministers that the point shall not be challenged. All of us, I am sure, who have followed the challenges of this section of the Constitution in the Mac-

Arthur case, the James case and the Milk Board case, know that there was a difference of opinion even in the High Court of Australia on the point.

I hope that the desires of Ministers that this legislation shall work smoothly in practice will be realised when this State is purchasing goods manufactured in another State, because, unless we can be assured on that point, many relevant things can be introduced as to the difficulties of Western Australia's situation. What assurance have we, for example, that under State control—in spite of the collaboration of State Ministers—we shall obtain the materials requisite for our home-building programme? What assurances will we have that the price factor will not be the determinant insofar as the place where the goods are to be sold is concerned? We are dependent on the Eastern States for our supplies of galvanised iron, piping and other building requisites.

It is vital we should know, when prices are arranged between State Ministers in Sydney, that Western Australia will be assured—in spite of a higher cost to her consumers—of a supply commensurate with her needs, or at least of a fair proportion of the materials to be made available. I hope Ministers will go to some pains to explain that point to the House and so clarify the public mind, because it was one of the vital issues in the referendum campaign. How is Western Australia's building programme to proceed if the requisite commodities manufactured in another State cannot be made the subject of price control, if such control is a State responsibility. Therefore, irrespective of the legal argument that the previous cases brought forward, it is important that there should at this time be some clarification for the better working of this legislation and for price control, which I support.

This Bill contains at least one new principle in regard to legislation introduced in this Chamber. It is a provision similar to the one contained in the Bill which passed through this Chamber last Thursday. I refer to making law of regulations by the passing of a parent Act. In this measure will be found the same provision whereby regulations in force at the time of the passing of the Act will, without challenge, without tabling, become the law. I can under-

stand the point of view of the Government that there are strong reasons why in such emergency circumstances as this, that that is a desirable procedure. It may be that such a procedure might militate strongly against the best interests of the public. The Commonwealth rent control regulations are now embodied in the State regulations; and the position now is that, as from today, any amending regulations submitted to this House by the Government to take the place of those which the Act made law, could be the subject of sharp controversy and disallowed.

In the circumstances, how easy it would be to have regulations accepted by this Chamber because they are the regulations in existence. They are adopted as the law as a means of releasing the controls which the Bill pretends to support because, by a simple motion of disallowance or by the leaving out of substantially required regulations, those controls disappear. I am wondering whether the Attorney General fully appreciates the strength which this clause in the Bill, as well as the section in the Act just passed, gives him, and whether he realises how it might re-act prejudicially to the public if in either House of Parliament there is strong objection to regulations which are now the law and which, when presented in an amended form, may be disallowed. The whole structure of price control could disappear overnight when the regulations to take the place of these are presented to the House for its approval. I shall have something more to say at a later stage when dealing with that part of the Bill. But before reaching that point, it is necessary for me to show how altered is the opinion of members of the Government on this sort of legislation and on government by regulation. In a friendly way I shall draw the attention of members of the Government to their altered opinion when sponsoring legislation for government by regulation.

The Attorney General: No-one approves of it except in a state of emergency.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I will show in a few minutes that the Attorney General two years ago thought that the state of emergency had then passed. I will show that two other members of the Government sitting with him on the front bench held the same view when the Economic Stability Bill was introduced by me in 1946. One of the

objections made to that Act to refer powers and to have control by regulation—and the objection was made by two present Ministers on the front bench—was that, although it might be advisable in the case of an emergency, the period of emergency had passed.

The Premier: How can you get away from regulations with legislation of this kind?

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I shall show the Premier shortly.

The Premier: Good!

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I hope the Premier will be patient and allow me to tell my story. Let there be no mistake about this: I support this type of legislation if it is properly introduced and becomes law in a valid way. Allow me to quote from page 2632 of Vol. 2 of "Hansard," 1946. The subject was the Economic Stability Bill. This is what the Minister for Housing said—

It is a most unprepossessing offspring for any Parliament to bring forward. It has a number of the worst features that any Bill can have. That does not mean that in the circumstances Parliament can, in my opinion, do otherwise than support the second reading.

The Minister for Housing: Hear, hear! I think that is the crux of the whole matter.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: Continuing—

I think a measure of this description or of a like description is necessary to meet the circumstances that exist at present. The Bill is undesirable, because it is one to legislate by regulation. I do not think any Parliamentarian with a feeling for democratic principles will pretend to defend government by regulation regarding major matters, and this Bill provides for matters that are major in an extreme degree. Although government by regulation has been unavoidable in time of war when speed of action was necessary, now that peace has come the sooner we see the end of that feature the better it will be for the government of the country.

The Bill proposes to continue controls, and I confess that some degree of control is unavoidable for the time being, but I think Parliament sooner or later will have to ask itself to balance up controls with the disadvantages that follow in their wake.

I agree with the last sentence.

The Minister for Housing: I feel rather proud of that.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I think, as an expression of the position at the time, the Minister for Housing has reason to be quite

proud of it, but two years have elapsed since he said that now we are in a period of peace there is no necessity, because we do not have to rush through legislation of this sort, for us to have government by regulation.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: The statement the Premier made brought him to heel.

The Attorney General: Do you not think the Prime Minister gave us an unreasonably short time to take over price-fixing?

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: No, and I think I will convince the Attorney General of that before I resume my seat because I consider that in some ways he may be reasonable.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Which way?

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I think I will be able to convince him of what I say, not only by expressing my own opinions, but those of others who have also given much thought to the problem, and among them I include one or two of his colleagues. The Minister for Housing at that time made, I think, one of his best speeches in this Chamber, and I always listen to him intently. But I sharply disagree with his attempt to apply the first three paragraphs of the speech he then delivered to the circumstances of today. There was an interesting point in the speech of the hon. gentleman, dealing with the aspect I touched on a few moments ago, namely, that of the ability of the State to control interstate trade. He said—

All my advices by merchants and traders are that it is a distinct advantage to have Commonwealth regulations, because they are Australia-wide in their effect, and by means of them prices can be controlled in respect of interstate commerce and trade in a way that might be difficult or impossible under a purely State Act. At all events my advices are that if we are to continue price control it should be as provided by Commonwealth regulations and should remain as far as possible under Commonwealth legislation. The prices regulations are agreed by all to be necessary for the time being, but there are certain features about their administration that have given some concern to a number of people.

That was a very interesting statement by the Minister for Housing. He said there was no other way of effectively controlling prices than by Commonwealth legislation and Commonwealth regulations. I say, as I intimated in answer to an interjection, there is ample time to present to this Chamber a better Bill than this one. If three months is an insufficient period for the Government to

introduce a new sort of law, it should look at the existing State laws, which some of its members regarded as being appropriate and suitable to meet the needs of Western Australia in regard to price control.

This Bill includes a provision to vest authority in the commissioner, but it does not specify who the Minister shall be. It does not say, although there are many references to the Minister, that the Minister shall be the Minister in charge of the measure for the time being. It further states that the commissioner shall exercise such controls and enjoy such amenities as are prescribed in the Act, and are pursuant from time to time, to the operations of the Act and the regulations under it. If we want an example of control by regulation, this Bill is the acme of perfection. But I think the House is entitled to know what the regulations are. That is one of the vital things in passing the measure.

The Minister gave to me, on Thursday evening last, this bundle of papers which purport to be the regulations which the Bill, if it becomes law, will include as part of the Act itself. They include regulations under the Defence (Transitional Powers) Act of 1946, and many regulations, in typed form, but not specified, which have been amended. They also include a printed document called the "National Security (Prices) Regulations" which include and also repeal certain statutory rules. This conglomeration of papers, from which the commissioner is to get his power, are to be, without this House knowing their full import or the complete authority given, the regulations if we pass the Bill. I am privileged to have these copies. No-one else has the opportunity—

The Attorney General: Yes, they have. I told the House I had copies for anyone who cared to ask for them.

Mr. Hegney: What an insult!

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I have studied the speech of the Attorney General very carefully, and I am sure, if he looks through it, he will find no mention of such intimation. But he did hand to me these documents which could only give, even to the Attorney General, a most garbled idea—will the hon. gentleman agree with that?—of the regulations which are to be repealed, continued or enacted. Unless these regulations are properly consolidated and printed

this House has not the right to pass them as part of the measure. From them alone the commissioner gets his direction and authority, and is able to decide just how the authority vested in him shall be exercised.

So it is not fair, to say the least of it, that this Parliament, which has at least a responsibility to the community equivalent to that of the Commonwealth Parliament, should be asked to pass a skeleton measure which includes a provision to give to the commissioner the inheritance of the existing regulations, without our knowing what they are. If the Attorney General has half a dozen copies, I say it is still unfair. Whatever regulations are to be part and parcel of the Act, whether as a schedule or whether under the appropriate clauses they become implicit in it, we certainly should have a clean print of them. Does the hon. gentleman agree with that? Of course, he must.

It is right and proper for all members to know whether regulations made under the National Security (Prices) Regulations or those under the Defence (Transitional Powers) Act are to be picked up under this law. I think that what is being done is quite unfair and it is no excuse to plead that time renders this action necessary. I repeat, if there were any doubt about these controls finishing on the 20th September, there would be no difficulty at this stage—I am certain of this because of the Commonwealth Government's agreement with Queensland in regard to the rent regulations—in having them continued until the 31st October.

The Attorney General: There would be considerable difficulty because the States want to act in unison in the matter of price-fixing.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: That cannot be so because I have noticed in my study of this subject, following the Premiers' Conference, and the States' Conference that the States are not acting in unison in regard to this legislation. Is it not a fact that Queensland is going to act under her profiteering prevention laws?

The Attorney General: As amended.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: Of course. But they cannot be consistent or identical with the law we are now asked to pass. We cannot get over it that way. There is no consist-

ency between this Bill, together with the several documents of regulations, and the law which will be introduced and approved in Queensland to cover the same points and the same subject. So, there is time for consistent action, even though it be taken under different statutes. I would like to see, in legislation of this sort, some specified authority given to the commissioner and not for him to obtain it per medium of regulations. In spite of criticism of regulations, which has come from both sides of the House, Governments like government by regulation because it means simpler statutes. I think there is not a case in Western Australia, in laws that have been passed in the last 15 years, where the instructions have been conveyed by regulation rather than being specific in the Act.

I point out to the Attorney General not only the dangers I initially mentioned of the disallowance of vital regulations when the amended ones come before both Houses of Parliament, but the development of the wrong principle of vesting authority in the commissioner by regulation instead of under the Act. The National Security (Prices) Regulations cover 30 closely typed pages and contain 51 regulations, without the schedules. It will be found that the Prices Commissioner at present operating in Canberra has given to him authorities which are never referred back to the Minister. That is a danger which we in this State, with the necessity thoroughly to control prices, and with a separate Minister detailed to undertake the responsibility, must be careful to avoid.

The Attorney General: Under the Bill the Prices Commissioner has the control delegated to him by the Minister.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: If we follow the experience of the Commonwealth and the other States, just how much say will the Minister have if the commissioner, with the power vested in him, makes a far-reaching decision which need not be referred to the Minister at all? I am concerned, and I am sure that the Honorary Minister will share my concern and would be very averse to having someone else making decisions for her, about this aspect.

Price control was initially provided to meet an emergency, but I think at this stage it needs rigid control and a thorough over-

haul. On examination it will be found that some people are making fortunes because of price control, which in some aspects has enabled the maximum price to be charged which is neither commensurate with costs nor comparable with the ability of the consumer to pay.

Mr. Wild: Does that apply to fish?

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: It might apply to fish and I think it would apply to very many articles of foodstuffs. The maximum price having become the minimum, the public, because of shortages or alleged shortages, are prepared to buy, and that has enabled profits to be made. Record turn-overs have been experienced because of the purchasing power of the people and tremendously increased profits have resulted. I could mention the name of firms in this State, but if members will look at the balance sheet as presented this year to the shareholders of a very large concern, they will find reference to record profits not only in total, but also to heavily increased dividends. This is not an isolated case, but the profit yield is now considerably higher than it was in 1939.

I am approaching this matter in a non-party way but, believing in the principle of it, I think there is a responsibility on every member before this skeleton Bill is passed to scrutinise it thoroughly. I was interested in the remarks of the Minister for Education who is unfortunately absent today because of illness. The Minister said, following the referendum—and I would like the Attorney General to listen carefully to this—

As far as price control is concerned, steps can be taken to implement the provisions of the State Act which have simply been in abeyance for a number of years. Regulation of land sales is covered by the Economic Stability Act of the State. Necessary legislation for continuance of these measures and amendments to bring them up to date can be introduced immediately Parliament assembles in the near future.

To that I say, hear, hear! The Deputy Premier gave the Government a lead on the 2nd June when he made that statement. He said that in Western Australia we had existing laws which could be suitably amended to meet this situation.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The Deputy Premier's views could not have suited Mr. Downing.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I will go further on that point. When the Minister for Education was debating the Economic Stability Bill in 1946 he stated—

I doubt whether there is ample justification today for the retention of the full force and effect of those regulations, but as to the control of prices and goods, I am wondering whether it would not be desirable to return to the legislation that was passed in this State in 1939, and that still remains on our statute-book, known as the Profiteering Prevention Act.

Those words will be found on page 2631 of Volume 2 of the 1946 "Hansard." The Deputy Premier continued—

I find, from looking at the Profiteering Prevention Act of 1939, that the widest possible powers are given to the Commissioner to be appointed by the State to fix and declare for any commodity the maximum price

I will interpolate and say that this Bill does not give that authority, but the regulations under it do. As pointed out by the Deputy Premier at that time, the Profiteering Prevention Act gives the widest possible powers to the Commissioner to declare any commodity the maximum price, different maximum prices according to differences in quality or description or in the quantity sold, different maximum prices for different parts of the State, maximum prices on a sliding scale, maximum prices on condition or conditions, maximum prices for cash delivery, credit or time payment, maximum prices on a percentage basis on landed or other costs, and so on. If members will go to the trouble of studying the Profiteering Prevention Act they will find that the merits which were seen at that time by the Minister for Education are still there. The Act is still law, and it will be found in the last section that the Act remains in force for six months after the cessation of hostilities, and to make it appropriate and applicable to this case it could be easily amended. That section could be repealed and the Act made a continuing one. Hostilities have not ceased in so far as the verbiage of the Bill is concerned.

I would like to examine a few of the sections of the Profiteering Prevention Act, which brings me to the point to which I have been leading, and that is that there is no need at all for this Bill in its present form. There is no need at all for it to have regulations, some real and some imaginary, when we have in the statutes of

Western Australia an Act designed to meet present-day circumstances and written into that Act are the specific provisions with which we are anxious to clothe the commissioner even under this skeleton Bill. The duty of the commissioner as to investigation is the first vital principle specified in the Profiteering Prevention Act and reads as follows:—

The Commissioner may at his own discretion, or at the request of any member of the public, upon good cause shown and shall when required so to do by the Minister, investigate and report to the Minister upon all or any of the following matters:—

(1) The state of the prices of any commodity in this State or in any part thereof, and at any time or times;

The Minister for Housing: What section is that?

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: It is contained in Section 11. I would mention that if members of the Government will peruse Sections 11, 13, 14 and 20 of the Profiteering Prevention Act of 1939 they will find that sufficient authority is given to them and to a commissioner to carry out the work required in the Bill introduced by the Attorney General. Section 11 continues—

(2) The quantity, situation, demand, supply, or possession of any commodity in this State or in any part thereof;

(3) The means or sufficiency and cost of the supply or transport of any commodity;

(4) The probable requirements of the people of this State or of any part thereof in regard to any commodity;

(5) Any Act or attempt by any person to raise or maintain the price of any commodity;

(6) As to what from time to time should be the maximum selling prices of any commodity, under the existing market conditions and circumstances

In Section 13 will be found the very power we intend to confer on the commissioner by regulation if this Bill is agreed to.

I point out that these provisions met with the approval of members on the Government side when we were discussing the continuance of Commonwealth regulations two years ago, and, this being so—we can find in the bound volumes of "Hansard" ample criticism of this form of measure, and the desire of at least two members of the present Government to be specific in laws of this sort—the Government has a datum per from which to start. The Government should not rush the adoption of this legislation when a simple amendment to the Profiteering Pre-

vention Act and the implementing of the appropriate regulations would meet the case. The regulations required would be very meagre; they could be written on a sheet of notepaper, because the authorities are to be found in the Act itself, and that legislation has received the approval of both Houses of Parliament.

Before the circumstances of war were felt by this community, that Act was passed, and not one amendment made by the Legislative Council was of sufficient importance to be challenged in this Chamber on the return of the Bill. This shows not only that the Act on the statute-book has met with the approval of Parliament, but also that its specific provisions have received the endorsement of both Houses. This Act has not operated since 18 months after its passing when the Commonwealth, under its National Security Regulations, undertook the responsibility and the State Act became redundant.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: The Commonwealth law over-rode it.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: Part II, of the Act deals with the prices of commodities, and there may be found in Section 13 the following:—

(1) The Governor may from time to time, on the report and advice of the Commissioner under Section 11 of this Act by proclamation:—

(i) Fix and declare for any commodity—

(a) the maximum price;

(b) different maximum prices according to differences in quality or description or in the quantity sold, or in respect of different conditions, terms, or localities of trade, commerce or sale.

Later on it provides:—

(ii) In fixing and declaring any price, do so relatively to such standards of measurement, weight, capacity or otherwise howsoever as he thinks proper; or so that such price shall vary in accordance with a standard or time or other circumstances, or shall vary with profits, dividends, or wages.

Thus, there exists in the Profiteering Prevention Act everything that the Government needs to continue the control of prices now exercised under Commonwealth law. I suggest that the Government should scrutinise that Act, containing as it does provisions that have been applauded by some of its own members, and that it will realise that those provisions have not to be passed by Parliament and could not be destroyed in the attempt to promulgate regulations that could be disallowed.

The Government has the authority within the existing law and I repeat that only meagre regulations would be necessary to give the commissioner—I take it he will be Mr. Mathea who will be taken over by the State from the Commonwealth—the requisite powers. If those responsible for the framing of the Bill will look at the vital sections of the Profiteering Prevention Act, they will find that specific instructions already having the force of law may be given to the commissioner. My suggestion to the Attorney General is that he permits the debate to be adjourned so that he may examine these aspects with a view to making appropriate amendments to the existing law, which will be better suited to the conditions prevailing in this State.

MR NEEDHAM (Perth) [5.50]: During the recent referendum campaign, I advocated that the people of the Commonwealth should vote "Yes" so that we might have a continuance of control of rents and prices by the Commonwealth. I did this for several reasons, the principal one being that the Commonwealth Parliament and Government were better fitted to control prices and rents than were the States. Unfortunately, the result of the referendum was against the continuance of these controls by the Commonwealth. By a most emphatic vote, the people of the country decided that the request of a majority of the State Governments should be granted and that the control should be vested in the States.

Now we are face to face with the responsibility of the Government undertaking the control of prices. I am not enamoured of the manner in which the Government is proceeding to carry out that policy because control by regulation would be dangerous, in that it would give the Legislative Council a chance to disallow the regulations. That Chamber has already shown its insincerity in the matter of price controls by its action in amending the Bill for the control of rents, and I certainly would not afford that House an opportunity to deal with regulations designed to control the prices of commodities.

I cannot see the necessity for the undue haste with which the Government is proceeding to carry out its task. There certainly was a reason for the prompt passing of the measure to control rents, because of the fact that Commonwealth control

would cease within a matter of days but, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, there would be ample time before the Commonwealth hands over the control of commodity prices for the Government to bring down a different sort of measure. The Leader of the Opposition has indicated how existing legislation could be availed of, and I hope that the legal members of the Government will consider that aspect before asking us to proceed with the Bill now before us, because it does not give any information worth while to members as to the handling of this control. I am under the impression that the Government is really not ready to bring forward this legislation, as the Attorney General, who is in charge of the measure, is about to proceed to the Eastern States again to attend the Premiers' Conference which will deal with this very class of legislation for the taking over of control of the price of commodities. It would have been better to await the hon. gentleman's return before introducing this legislation. But here it is, and we have to do the best we can with it.

My main objection to this legislation is that pointed out by the Leader of the Opposition, that it is to be administered entirely by regulation. All the regulations in force just now are Commonwealth regulations and they are to become State law as soon as this measure is passed. I might be answered from the Government side of the Chamber that the Commonwealth legislation was practically carried out by regulation. Speaking for myself, I have every confidence in the Commonwealth Government's administration of the law by regulation, because in the Commonwealth Parliament a majority of members were sincere in their desire properly and effectively to control prices and prevent profiteering. I do not think that is the case here. The administration of this measure by regulation will give the Legislative Council ample opportunity to amend the regulations in the way it desires. If the example we had in connection with the Increase of Rent (War Restrictions) Act Amendment Bill is to be the standard of the Council's desire for control, then I say this legislation will not be carried out by regulation only, but by something more definite if the Council has the opportunity.

The Leader of the Opposition has referred to, and quoted extensively from the Profiteering Prevention Act of 1939 and suggested legislation something on the lines of that Act to control prices as being more effective than would be the control under this Bill. I have before me the Profiteering Prevention Act of 1939, Section 1, of which reads—

The Government may from time to time, on the report and advice of the Commissioner under Section eleven of this Act, by proclamation—

(i) Fix and declare for any commodity . . . The section then goes on to list the various prices, maximum and otherwise. It will be noted that the Governor may fix and declare the price of any commodity by proclamation. There is a vast difference between a proclamation and a regulation. If this legislation were on lines similar to the section I have quoted, then I would not be criticising it. But it is quite the opposite. At any time the fixed price can be attacked by challenging the legislation. From our experience of another place, however, I have grave doubts as to the effective working of the measure now before us. This Government has put up a record during its 18 or 20 months' occupancy of the Treasury bench for the appointment of Royal Commissions, boards, etc. I would support the Government on this occasion, however, if it proposed a board or committee to control the administration of price-fixing. I would prefer a board consisting of representatives of manufacturers, the Chambers of Commerce, trade unions and wholesalers and retailers, the board to be given definite power to fix prices. If that were done, I would like a public inquiry into this matter.

I referred to the subject of price-fixing in my speech on the Address-in-reply and mentioned then that applicants for increased prices that had been made in Australia from January, 1947, to about June of that year represented about £60,000,000. I said then, as I say now, that many of those applications were unjustified. They were made with the desire to increase the profit margin of the sellers of the goods. We have seen prices rising from day to day since the referendum. This State is now called upon to bear the responsibility for the control of prices and we should have something more definite than a Bill of this kind. Every

application for an increase in the price of goods should be thrashed out in public. Some members may object to that, because they will say that private business matters would be revealed. But under this measure provision is made for secrecy, and information could be given to the board at the public inquiry that could be treated confidentially.

I see no more valid objection to a public inquiry by a board of the kind I have suggested, dealing with the prices of commodities, than could be raised to the inquiries of the Tariff Board, which has been in existence for many years. People go before that board and give valuable and private information upon which it makes a determination. For many years it has been functioning and the business people have raised no objection. No business man, wholesaler, retailer or manufacturer should be afraid to go before a public inquiry and state what price he requires for his goods and the reason for asking such a price. I advocate that system because the very people whom price fixing most directly affects are those people who themselves must submit their case for increased wages before a public tribunal. Every trade union seeking an increase in wages for its members must go before the Arbitration Court and put on the table and before the public gaze the reasons why such increase is sought. Similarly the whole inquiry connected with the fixing of prices should be public.

I do not like the Bill in its present shape. I am a keen advocate of the control of prices which I feel will be necessary for some time to come in view of the unsettled condition of the world today. That being so, I am eager to see legislation put through this Parliament that will effectively protect the public from exorbitant charges. Again, I am anxious about the intention of the Government to remove control from certain articles, for that control is to be removed by regulation. No-one desires control to be continued if the removal of controls will not endanger the public's spending power. But we will have to be very cautious indeed before we lift the control of any commodity at present. For that reason I hope that before this Bill becomes law it will be very much altered and will leave this Chamber in such a fashion as will provide protection to people from exorbitant charges.

MR. HOAR (Nelson) [6.10]: While a great many of us may feel very sorry that the people of the Commonwealth a short time ago decided to vote back to the States the control of prices, nevertheless when they did so they did it in a very decisive manner. There can be no question in anybody's mind as to the opinion of the people of the Commonwealth in regard to this issue. Therefore we must accept that decision with as good a grace as possible and attempt to make the best of the situation. We are confronted with this Bill, and it does not need very much imagination on my part to see the kind of pressure which will be brought to bear on the Government in connection with matters affecting prices and controls. We have one instance—perhaps it is not direct pressure—in a circular letter which came in yesterday's mail from the distributors of tractors in this State.

The Minister for Railways: You will soon see how far that is going!

Mr. HOAR: I imagine other members as well as I have received a copy. The intention behind it is to endeavour to persuade the Government and individual members of Parliament that the agents of the distributors are in a far better position to understand the individual requirements of their buyers than is a Government officer. I am not prepared during this discussion to debate the pros and cons in regard to that particular circular.

Mr. SPEAKER: It is outside this Bill, really.

Mr. HOAR: Yes. I mention it briefly in passing to indicate what will happen generally under this Bill once it becomes an Act. I think that the Government, and all individual members for that matter, will receive quite a number of letters, circulars, telegrams and suchlike endeavouring to induce the Government to have certain articles released from the restraint that will be imposed on them by regulations that will be in force under the authority of this measure. So far as I can see, this Government, being of a Liberal complexion and therefore, generally speaking, sympathetically disposed to the very class of people who normally stand to gain the most either from the present divided control or the absence of control altogether, can expect both from the general public, and in particular from its own mem-

bers, an insidious sort of propaganda that will place a very great strain on its strength and sincerity if it really intends—as I believe it does—to legislate in a manner which is in the best interests of this State. We must remember that it would be fatal for any relaxation of controls to take place in regard to any item or commodity that is definitely known to be in short supply. That is a point with which I think every man must agree. We know quite well that shortages of commodities, generally speaking, upset the whole of the normal trade relations between individuals and States and enable certain unscrupulous people with their eye on the profit motive to sell those commodities to the highest bidder.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. HOAR: I was saying that one of the inevitable results of shortages of commodities is that certain people are able to exploit the market and so operate at a profit by selling to the highest bidder. In my opinion the Government, or the Minister and his department, controlling this vital piece of legislation must be very careful to see that all commodities and articles of national importance, that are known to be in short supply, are handled in the best interests of the State. This Government will shortly have the responsibility of controlling prices in Western Australia. That responsibility was not thrust on unwilling shoulders by any manner of means, because both the Liberal Party and the Country and Democratic League asked for it. During the prices referendum campaign they begged the people to return this power to the States. They told us they had everything ready to put into operation to control prices in Western Australia. They had gone through the usual procedure of scare propaganda to obtain a "No" vote from the Western Australian electors. They showed the Commonwealth Government as the big bad wolf, standing with dripping jaws waiting to swallow the States, and other such rot that we have come in recent years to associate with Liberal Party propaganda.

That party, in its campaign, was actually able to persuade the public that it would be in the best interests of this State to be subservient to and at the mercy of six separate controls rather than the one cen-

tral authority which has, up till now, given valuable service to the Commonwealth through a most difficult period in our history. The electors were told, during that campaign, that not only was the State Government all set to take over, but it could actually control prices in Western Australia. When that statement was made, the Government did not only limit it to the price of goods produced in Western Australia, but made it all-embracing to encourage the people to vote "No." That propaganda was most misleading and, in my opinion, had quite a large bearing on the vote in this State. We know quite well that this Government can control the price of any commodity produced in Western Australia, but by no stretch of the imagination can we expect it to control, by the proposed legislation or any other means, the price of a commodity produced in the Eastern States, that must ultimately be exported here.

The only part of the price of that commodity that this Government has any influence over at all is the margin of profit allowable to the retailers once it reaches Western Australia. That being so, neither this Bill nor the regulations that are to be associated with it can in any way protect the Western Australian consumers against the interests of exploiting Eastern States manufacturers. The Minister has told us there has already been one conference on this subject between the States, during which certain broad principles were agreed to. Those principles are outlined in this brief report in "The West Australian" of the 22nd June last, which states—

The main tenor of the agreement reached between the Premiers was that the States should co-operate in every way to obtain uniformity in the administration of controls and to ensure that no State should gain an advantage over another.

That is one of the main principles arrived at in the conference on this subject between the various Ministers of the States. I would like to tell the Government that the public will expect the Minister to obtain a far more specific understanding or agreement with the other States. He will be expected to reach a most firm agreement, in regard to commodities produced by one State that are of national importance and are known to be in short supply. Corrugated iron is one of a number of such items that comes

readily to mind, and to which this argument applies. Some definite agreement will have to be arrived at between this State and New South Wales, which is a producer of this particular commodity, to ensure that, with the relaxation of Commonwealth control, it will be equitably distributed between the States at a fair price. A similar understanding will have to be arrived at in connection with other commodities which are most urgently needed for home building and other purposes.

We must remember that we, as a State, are still industrially backward compared with some of the other States. We still have to depend on them, or oversea countries, for many articles which we cannot produce. Yet we know that Eastern States prices today are far higher, in almost every instance, than are those in Western Australia. We pride ourselves in this State that we have a wage system and a standard of living generally, which are at least comparable to what operates in any other State of the Commonwealth. But in spite of the fact that wages here, until recently at any rate, have been higher than those in the Eastern States, the general price level in the East has been far higher than here. This can only mean one thing, that there is a great variation in profits existing between the various States of the Commonwealth.

I venture to say that the Minister, with all the goodwill in the world, will be unable to attain any uniformity of thought or action in keeping prices standardised, particularly in the case of those items that are of the greatest importance and the need for which is nation-wide. That will be his hardest task when he attends the next conference in Canberra or Sydney. He will have to persuade the Ministers who are responsible for the industrial development in the various States that it is in the interests of the whole Commonwealth to arrive at an agreement that will make it possible to keep commodity prices even throughout the States. If the Minister fails in that task, I feel that the measure now before the House will be entirely useless. If the Minister cannot secure a standardised price for commodities such as galvanised iron, that failure will be disastrous to Western Australia. Such a commodity would then most certainly be attracted to the State or States

where the fixed price returned the greatest profit to the manufacturer. The tendency would be to encourage interstate competition of the worst possible kind, resulting in inequitable distribution of vitally needed products to Western Australia's disadvantage.

I hope that, when replying to the debate, the Minister will give consideration to that aspect of the question, for a solution must be found. It would not surprise me if the interstate price control framework, sponsored or approved by this Government, becomes in the not distant future quite ineffectual to do the work it is intended to do, purely as a result of the powerful influences that can be brought to bear on State Ministers at a conference such as that which is to take place in the near future—influences brought to bear by Eastern States industrial and commercial interests. Those are risks that all Governments have to take at the present time. We are up against the selfish side of human nature, where it is more important, from a manufacturer's point of view, to make a profit from an article than to see that all States are equitably served with that product at a reasonable price.

I regret the necessity for this measure at the present juncture, and would term it an enabling Bill, because if passed it will enable the Government to draw up regulations—which no-one else will ever see—to control prices in this State in the most bureaucratic manner. The Leader of the Opposition has referred to the measure as a skeleton Bill, which it is, as it has not a pound of meat on it anywhere. I regret that the Government has seen fit to bring the measure down without at the same time giving members copies of the regulations to which the Bill refers. It is a most undemocratic procedure. I would not give the Liberal Party anything, at any time, and would never give it a blank cheque, which is what it is now asking for. The Government has brought down the Bill, which contains nothing, and the very machinery that is to operate price control in this State is hidden away in the Minister's desk.

The Attorney General: I said we were taking over the Commonwealth controls.

Mr. HOAR: The conference that the Minister is about to attend will simply carry on the work started at a previous conference, at which the general principles were

drawn up. He and his colleagues will no doubt get down to tinctacks this time, and find out how the Commonwealth regulations can be amended so as to benefit price control as it affects Western Australia. That is the Minister's job at the coming conference. As it is, he asks the House to give him power over something about which members know nothing.

Hon. E. Nulsen: He does not know anything about it, either.

Mr. HOAR: It would have been more in the interests of this State had the Minister waited a while before bringing down this measure. There are still six weeks to go before Commonwealth control ceases. The Minister should have waited until he had returned from the conference armed with the information that he will obtain and strengthened by the co-operation he hopes to achieve. He could then have placed the information before the House, together with tentative arrangements that would cover the regulations for a given period. Members would then know what they were dealing with, whereas at present they know nothing of the kind. All sensible persons realise that prices must be controlled for the time being and I do not wish to be placed in a position where I am asked to deal with a measure the substance of which is outside my knowledge. I do not think the Minister has given the House a fair deal in this respect. It would have been far better for members to have been given an opportunity of intelligently understanding what the Minister has in mind, and to that end the Minister should have waited until he returned from the conference.

HON. A. R. G. HAWKE (Northam) [7.47]: Price control over goods and services is a vital question at this period in the history of Western Australia. Perhaps it is even more vital in these post-war years than during the time of actual hostilities. There is a great deal of loose thinking in connection with the reasons that have caused prices to increase over the years. We have all heard or read at times of comparisons being made between the prices of certain commodities in 1914 and corresponding prices at the present day. Those who make such comparisons put all kinds of interpretations on them. Most of those interpretations are drawn for party political purposes and most, in recent years, have

been drawn for the purpose of discrediting the present Commonwealth Labour Government. Any person or organisation making a comparison of that kind, and not telling the whole truth about it, is acting as dishonestly as it is possible to act. When one hears persons making these comparisons, or reads of the comparisons when they are printed, one could easily be led to believe that there is no justification at all for prices being so much higher today than they were in 1914.

I think it was the member for Murehison who told the House a week or so ago that taxation imposed on the people generally was for the most part recovered in prices charged for goods and services. That is true. It is because taxation has risen so substantially from 1914 until the present time that prices are so much higher today than they were in that year. But that is not the whole story. If we are honest and complete in our analysis of this situation we must try to find the major causes responsible for the very great increase in taxation today as compared with 1914. I consider that the major causes of high taxation today are to be found in the two world wars, in which Australia was engaged, and the world trade depression in which we were also involved.

If any member has taken the trouble to study how much the two world wars and the world trade depression cost the Commonwealth and State Governments of Australia, he or she will be staggered to find how much taxation has had to be recovered from the people of Australia because of these events taking place. Most of the cost to Australia of its participation in the two wars, and of its being involved in the depression, was met out of loans raised either by Commonwealth State Governments. Every one of these loans carried debts charges by way of interest and sinking fund payments. Those payments could be made by the Commonwealth and State Governments only after they had recovered from the people of Australia by taxation the necessary sum of money required for that purpose.

There are some members of this House who have a very complete and keen appreciation of how deeply a Government is involved when it raises money by way of loan to finance non-productive commitments or non-productive undertakings. You, Mr. Speaker, are one of those members, and the member for Murehison is another. There

are several others, but I doubt very much whether every member of the House is sufficiently alive to just how heavy this burden is, in the first place upon Governments, and through Governments upon the taxpayers and the people generally. For instance, the Commonwealth Government of Australia raised £373,000,000 by way of loan for the purpose of financing Australia's participation in the first World War. The sum paid in interest on that total capital indebtedness to the 30th June, 1945, was £389,000,000, or £16,000,000 more than the total amount of money borrowed. In other words, the taxpayers of Australia have been called upon to pay in taxation to meet interest on the first World War borrowings, £16,000,000 more than was actually borrowed.

Mr. Marshall: And they still owe the debt.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: And most of the original debt of £373,000,000 is still owing.

Mr. Marshall: They owe every penny of it.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I would suggest to those people in Australia, and especially public men, that they deal honestly and completely with the question of high taxation when they are talking about it or writing about it for the benefit of the public at large.

The Minister for Housing: A good deal of that £373,000,000 would have been extinguished through sinking fund.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I think the Minister for Housing will find that a great deal of the money raised by way of loan for the first World War is still owing. In any event, even if none of it is owing, the fact is that an amount of £16,000,000 more than was actually borrowed had to be paid in interest and raised by way of taxation upon the people.

We find that in the second World War the Commonwealth Government borrowed by way of loan £1,387,000,000. A sum of £1,387,000,000 to finance Australia's participation in that conflict. That figure is staggering to ordinary mortals such as most members of this Chamber are and even if that huge amount was borrowed at an average rate of 3 per cent.—and the average rate would be higher than that—the interest commitment upon our borrowings

in the last war would amount to more than £41,000,000 per annum. That amount of £41,000,000 needed to pay interest upon our last war borrowings can be obtained from only one source, and that is the source of taxation, which, of course, has to be imposed on people generally and most of which has to be recovered in the prices charged to the public for goods and services. That is the major reason why taxation has increased as severely as it has done during the last 10 years, why the prices of goods and services are as high as they are today and why they are much higher today than they were 10 years ago.

I should hope that the public will come to understand the truth, first of all, as to why taxation increases very greatly because of a war or a trade depression, and will also come to understand that practically the whole of the taxation raised by Governments has to be included in the prices paid by the people for goods and services. If those facts can be absorbed sufficiently by the public generally, there will be a clearer appreciation as to why prices are high today and the purchasing power of money much less than it was 10 years ago or, if we care to go back to 1914, 34 years ago.

The average man and woman are particularly interested in prices because that is something which touches them very closely and almost every day of the week. People know how prices affect their standard of living. If the pound today will purchase, say, 1 cwt. of mixed commodities and in six months' time will purchase only $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. of those same commodities, people generally will realise that there is something radically wrong with their standard of living, and so they will immediately agitate for higher wages and incomes all round to enable them to meet the new situation and re-establish their standard of living on a basis at least equal to that which prevailed previously.

It is now well understood by wage and salary earners that it is not the amount of wages and salary one receives that is the vital consideration. There was a time many years ago when higher wages and salaries constituted a religion with a large number of working people. In those days they considered that if they could obtain higher wages and salaries, their standard of living would automatically increase to the extent of the increase in income. Painful experience in more recent years has taught them

that this is a fallacy. It is not now the amount of wages and salary a person receives that really counts; it is the volume of goods and services that each pound of income will command that counts. In other words, the all-important consideration is the purchasing power of the pound.

On this account there is ever so much more interest now than there was during the war in the subject of price control. As everyone knows, during the war there was control over wages as well as prices. Wages and salaries were pegged, prices were controlled, and generally the economic system in Australia maintained during the war a remarkably even level, a far more even level, I think, than was achieved in any other country of the world. Since the termination of the war, wages have been unpegged, and organisations concerned with working men and women have properly made approaches to industrial tribunals for the purpose of having wages and salaries increased to a level that would bring them into line with the increased cost of living brought about by the imposition, for instance, of greatly increased taxation upon industry and upon the people as a whole.

The tendency in more recent times has been for the vicious circle of wages chasing prices to gather speed. This is very bad for everyone concerned, and all would desire, I imagine, that the economic system should be stabilised as soon as possible and to the greatest extent possible. I suggest that this can be done only to the extent that is possible within the framework of the capitalistic system by an adequate and severe control of the prices of goods and services. If that control is not operated and the prices of goods and services are permitted to go on increasing because of an ineffective system of price control or because of the absence of any such system, then inevitably the working man and woman will demand—and properly so—before legal 'tribunals that wages and salaries be increased to enable them to keep pace with the prior increases in the cost of living. Therefore it is essential that members, in considering the Bill now before us, should take every step possible to ensure that any legislation passed by this House shall be the most effective that can be designed. I propose to

have something more to say about that later on.

I want to refer briefly to the referendum in connection with prices. The referendum was taken for the purpose of asking the people of Australia whether they were willing to give to the Commonwealth Parliament the right to legislate for the control of rents and prices.

The Attorney General: Permanently.

Mr. Wild: On a permanent basis.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: We had two interjections from two members almost at the same time. Obviously, the question asked of the people was on a basis of permanency; but speaking for myself I see no reason why the Commonwealth Parliament should not have a permanent right to legislate for the control of rents and prices. I see no real objection to it. If it is right that a State Parliament should have the permanent power so to legislate, what is wrong in principle, or in any other aspect, with the Commonwealth Parliament having that power?

The Honorary Minister: Or Russia having it!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I emphasise that the referendum was held for the purpose of asking the people of Australia whether they were willing to allow to be written into the Commonwealth Constitution a provision which would clothe the Commonwealth Parliament with the right to legislate for the control of rents and prices at any particular period it might consider it wise and necessary so to act. I am convinced that if that clear-cut question could have been put to the people of Australia in that way, the majority of the people would have voted in favour of it. Unfortunately, very powerful financial interests in Australia, who want no control of prices at all, either by Commonwealth or States, were able to disseminate so much misleading propaganda as completely to cloud the true and real issues of that referendum. I think also that those same interests were anxious to defeat the referendum because such defeat would represent, in their opinion, another setback to the present Commonwealth Government and might be expected to have a snowballing effect on public opinion generally in preparation for the next Federal election. Without any shadow of doubt,

speaking for myself again, I would rather trust the Commonwealth Parliament—

The Honorary Minister: Than the State.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE:—where both Houses are elected by the people of Australia, than I would trust a State Parliament in connection with the control of rents and prices, where in such State Parliament one House—the Upper House—is elected by only one-third of the adult population of the State. Members who have read the long title of this Bill know that it aims at providing for the control of prices and rates of certain goods and services and for other purposes. That is an important part of the Bill to which I will make further reference later. Another part of the Bill provides that the Governor may make regulations to prevent undue increases in prices. That particular part of the Bill is so worded as to offer what appears to me to be a glorious harvest for the legal fraternity of the State if Western Australia should ever be so unfortunate as to have this legislation foisted upon it. This part of the Bill, as I said, gives the Governor power to make regulations with respect to the prevention of undue increases in prices and rates for goods and services, particularly in relation to food, clothing and housing.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: A bit of window dressing! That is all!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Let us take the view for a moment that it is not window dressing but is, in fact, a bona fide effort on the part of those responsible for the drafting of the Bill to make it possible for this measure to be operative in such a way as to control prices in this State. I think any Minister would find it difficult to interpret to those of us who are laymen what is actually meant by “undue increases.” And are increases, which are not considered to be undue, to be outside the control of this proposed legislation? That would appear to be the intention of the framers of the measure.

If that be so, it would appear that the person who will be charged with the administration of this legislation will be powerless, unless in his opinion there has been an undue increase in price, made by some business person, of the goods or services which that business person has sold

or is offering to the public. Why should these undue increases have relation only to certain commodities? What will be the court's interpretation of the word “particularly” in this setting? Are we to understand from the way in which this part of the Bill is framed that the commissioner in the first place, and the courts in the second, are to regard as not at all serious any offences relating to undue increases in the prices of goods and services not covered by the term, “food, clothing and housing”? I hope in the first place that the Bill does not become law at all; and I sincerely hope in the second place that, if it does become law, this particular part will be drastically altered. One or two members who have spoken previously have described the measure as a skeleton Bill. If I were not as thin as I am, I would say it is certainly a skeleton Bill, a thing of skin and bones only. But as I am as thin as I am, I will allow one of the other members who has more flesh on his skeleton to make that remark about the Bill.

The Attorney General: You will not deny you are pretty effective.

The Minister for Railways: Over 100 yards!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: This Bill is certainly only a skeleton arrangement. It is the Bill of a lazy Government, if I might, without giving offence, describe it that way; and I do not say it offensively, either. It is a very lazy way of attacking the State's most vital problem; because the control of prices and the prevention of profiteering together do constitute the most vital problem before the State at present. I would say it is a much more vital problem even than the difficult, urgent problem of housing. I say that because, if prices are not effectively controlled, the movement of inflation which has already got under way in Australia since 1939, will gather pace; and the purchasing power of money will depreciate to such an extent as to establish a set of conditions in Western Australia which will be extremely damaging to our industries and to very large numbers of our people, and especially to the poorer sections of the community.

We need much more than a skeleton Bill to deal with this problem, and the members of this House should insist that the Government give much more earnest con-

sideration to this problem than it has, if this Bill is the outcome of such consideration as has been given. I do not think it is fair to the members of this House—and I am concerned only with the members of this House—that a Bill of this kind should be brought before them to deal with this extremely important question. Surely members are entitled to have proposals put before them in complete form, setting out the method which the Government intends to operate to ensure the effective control of the prices of goods and services in Western Australia! I would like to know whether the Government, when it was considering bringing down this Bill, also gave consideration to the alternative of using the existing Profiteering Prevention Act.

Mr. Marshall: Ministers never thought of it.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: If the Government did give consideration to the question of using the Profiteering Prevention Act originally introduced in 1939 and still on the statute book, then I am puzzled beyond question to know why it chose to bring down this skeleton Bill, this ineffective piece of legislation, as against making whatever amendments might be appropriate to the existing Profiteering Prevention Act and operating that immediately. Here is an Act already upon the statute book, an Act that contains 35 sections and sets out clearly the powers of the commissioner, the methods he shall operate, the duties he shall discharge and the steps he shall take to prevent business people in this State from profiteering at the expense of the general public.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: A good Act.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: This Act is a very good Act.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: Passed by the Legislative Council, too.

Mr. Marshall: Under threat of war, though!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: It is an Act that was built on the experience of Great Britain during the first war and, to a lesser extent, on the experience of some of the other States in regard to control of prices between the conclusion of the 1914-18 war and the beginning of the 1939-45 war. This Act operated successfully in Western Aus-

tralia for at least two years after it was passed by this Parliament in 1939. It only ceased to operate because the Commonwealth Government brought down legislation or regulations to control prices right throughout the Commonwealth. By virtue of the powers given to the Commonwealth Government in wartime its system of control was supreme and our Act did not operate during the period the Commonwealth was in control.

The Attorney General: Do you think the Commonwealth system was a good one?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Now the Commonwealth is vacating the field because, by a decision of the referendum, it has no option.

The Attorney General: Do you think the Commonwealth system was a good one?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The Commonwealth system, within limits, was very effective.

The Attorney General: That is what this Bill is.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I know what this Bill is; and if the Attorney General wants me to tell him more about what it is, I would be quite prepared to do that. I say that this Bill which he and his Government have brought down is one which, with the passing of time, will become very largely ineffective. I know, for instance, that this Bill proposes to apply the existing Commonwealth regulations to this State almost in their entirety. I know also that the Attorney General, in the event of this Bill passing, will take early steps to convert the Commonwealth regulations into State regulations; and that when he does that, those regulations will have to be laid on the Table of this House and on the Table of the Legislative Council.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: What chance then?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: How many of the existing Commonwealth regulations for the control of prices and the prevention of profiteering does the Attorney General think he will have available to him for operation after that process has been followed?

The Attorney General: I will certainly have the whole of the Commonwealth regulations effective.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: If the Attorney General thinks that—

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Of course he won't!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: —he is completely out of touch with political realities in Western Australia.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: He is even more innocent than he looks.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Completely out of touch, and flying absolutely in the face of past experience in this State with the Legislative Council in regard to matters of this kind! I am amazed to find the Attorney General so innocent, and I suggest to the Premier and other Ministers of the Government that they take a very serious interest in this matter.

Mr. Leslie: You have been long enough here not to be amazed at anything.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: It seems to me that the Attorney General has accepted this method of attacking the problem because it is an easy method. It is something which the wise men of the East—whom most members on that side do not normally regard as wise—have prevailed upon him to accept. Why should we in this matter be dragged at the heels of Victoria and South Australia, for instance, any more than in connection with any other matter? The Attorney General cannot in any particular fault the existing Profiteering Prevention Act, and he knows it. It is a complete Act which sets out in clear black and white just how profiteering is to be prevented in Western Australia. Why does not the Government take up this statute, amend it where it requires to be amended and include in it, if it so desires, the best Commonwealth regulations, and operate a system in this State for the control of prices and the prevention of profiteering, under its provisions? That is the common-sense course to follow.

For the life of me I cannot understand why the Attorney General and the Government should have agreed to the introduction of a skeleton Bill like this when we already have on our statute book a complete Act which was proved to be absolutely effective during the two years in which it operated, namely, 1940 and 1941. It would be far more difficult for members of the Legislative Council, who were inclined to whittle down any legislation for

the prevention of profiteering, to oppose the provisions of an existing Act than to defeat the State regulations under this proposed legislation when the Attorney General brings those regulations before both Houses of Parliament. As a matter of fact, this Act would not require to go before the Legislative Council for further consideration, except in regard to its last section, and not even in regard to that because that section deals with the duration of the Act and states, in effect, that it shall operate in Western Australia until six months have elapsed after hostilities have ceased. Technically and officially, hostilities have not yet ceased.

Mr. Marshall: Unofficially, they are going to start again! That is what I think about it.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: It appears that technically and officially they will not cease for many months to come. But when they do cease, be it this year, next year or the year after, this Act for the prevention of profiteering will still legally continue in operation for another six months. That measure is adequately framed to prevent profiteering in Western Australia, yet we have the Government deserting it altogether and bringing down this thing of skin and bone, to which I have already referred.

Mr. Marshall: As State-righters, they go bald-headed for Commonwealth legislation!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: If this Bill declared that the Commonwealth regulations would become a part of the proposed legislation and would be unchallengeable—

The Attorney General: That is just what it does do.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Yes, I know it does—up to a point. I hope the Attorney General is not trying to mislead members. I say that this Bill, if it becomes law, will not make Commonwealth regulations for the control of prices a permanent part—

The Attorney General: A permanent part of the Act, until the end of the Act.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: It does not.

The Attorney General: Until amended by regulation.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: What sort of an Attorney General is this? I make a state-

ment that if this Bill did in fact declare that the Commonwealth regulations were to become a permanent part of the Act—

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: The Minister does not know his Bill.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE:—my opposition to it would not be nearly as strong as it is.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Have a look at Clause 14.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The Attorney General says, by interjection, that that is just what the Bill will do.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: It will not.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: He told us, in effect, that if the measure passes it will make the Commonwealth regulations for the control of prices a permanent part of the Act.

The Attorney General: Until altered by regulations.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Yes. The Attorney General said that after he was challenged about the reliability of his first statement. I say that if this Bill becomes law the Commonwealth regulations controlling prices might not operate in Western Australia for more than six or eight weeks. They would operate, I should think, for only so long as it would take the Attorney General to have new regulations drafted with such minor adaptations as would be required to make them State regulations. I should say the Government proposes to follow the same course in regard to these regulations, if this Bill becomes law, as it will in connection with the measure we passed the other night dealing with the control of rents in Western Australia. On that occasion, the Minister concerned told us quite frankly that the Commonwealth regulations for the control of rents would only operate as part of the State Act until such time as he could, with all possible speed, develop appropriate State regulations to take their place.

I suggest that the Government will follow the same course in regard to this legislation if Parliament—and particularly this House—is foolish enough to pass it. Even if the measure passes, I understand it is proposed to limit its operations to the period which will end on the 31st December, 1949. Is any Minister or member of this House foolish enough to think that this

problem of price control will have disappeared by the end of 1949? Surely it must be clear to everyone, especially after what I said earlier in regard to the cost of wars, trade depression and the resultant tremendous increase in taxation, that the control of prices, goods and services, is a problem which will have to be dealt with by Parliaments for several years to come, unless Governments and Parliaments are going to be so recreant to their trust as to permit the process of inflation to get out of hand and thereby allow the purchasing power of money very greatly to be depreciated.

I hope members will regard this matter with a due sense of responsibility. The Bill is inadequate from every point of view and is dangerous from the angles I have just emphasised inasmuch as the regulations that the Attorney General will promulgate—if the Bill becomes law—will be State regulations, and as such, liable to disallowance by either House of Parliament. One would not require a very fertile imagination to look six months ahead and realise that Western Australia will have little or nothing in the way of an effective system for the control of prices and the prevention of profiteering operating at that time. The most vital of the State regulations that the Attorney General would table in both this House and another place might easily be disallowed, and he would then be left with an ineffective system.

The Attorney General: The existing system.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I suggest to the Attorney General or, if he is not receptive, to all members of the House, that they take the greatest care in ensuring that the control of prices in this State shall be adequate and complete. That can only be done if steps are taken to see that the existing Profiteering Prevention Act is the vehicle used by the Government of the State to prevent profiteering in the prices charged to the public for the various goods and services made available by the business world. I have told the House—in effect at all events—that the Bill is a measure for the control of prices, while the Act that is already on the statute book is an Act for the prevention of profiteering. There is a vital difference between the Bill and the Act, and it is worthy of a great deal of consideration. I have considerable worry and entertain some

suspicion about the more powerful business interests that were largely responsible for the election to office of the present Government.

The Honorary Minister: That is not true.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: It is true.

The Honorary Minister: I was not elected by any business interests.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: It is true that I entertain considerable suspicion as to the intentions of the more powerful business interests in this State, that were largely responsible for the election to office of the present Government, as far as the attitude of those interests to profiteering prevention is concerned. I noticed in the Press the other day that Mr. Dimmitt, M.L.C., spoke during the Address-in-reply debate in another place on the subject of price-fixing, among other things. In addition to being a member of the Legislative Council, Mr. Dimmitt is a fairly big shot in the business world of the city of Perth. He urged that a brand new Minister be appointed to administer any system of price control in Western Australia.

Mr. Leslie: The present one has not gone out yet.

Several members interjected.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! One at a time, please.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I was interested, when mentioning what Mr. Dimmitt said about a brand new Minister, to notice how members immediately behind the ministerial bench brightened up, all except the member for Middle Swan.

Mr. Nimmo: We would not want the job.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I can quite believe that the member for Mt. Hawthorn would not want the job, and I cannot imagine any other private member wanting the job of controlling prices in this State.

The Minister for Lands: Did Mr. Dimmitt suggest in which House the new Minister be appointed?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The report that I read of Mr. Dimmitt's remarks did not give any particular reasons why he was so anxious to have a brand new Minister appointed, but I imagine he was speaking for the business world, and that the interests of that world desire to play a big part in

influencing the administration of any system of price control set up in Western Australia. With reference to that I have a further statement, taken from a Press report, that gives me even more cause for worry and suspicion about the influence that the business world might exercise with the present Government in the control of prices.

You, Mr. Speaker, may be aware that the State council of the Liberal Party met in July last. I do not know whether you were a delegate to that conference or whether, being Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, you are expected to be absolutely impartial and to keep yourself completely away from the taints of the party so that you may in this House—as of course you do—carry out your duties absolutely impartially and so that you might in addition, in your conduct and activities in the outside world, be absolutely apart from the machinations of the inner councils of the Liberal Party. I intend to quote from "The Daily News" of the 13th July, 1948. The present Premier, the Hon. Duncan Ross McLarty, M.L.A., was present at the conference held on that day, and I have an idea he was present by command—

The Premier: By invitation.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: —more especially in connection with transport, which I would say is a difficult question for the present Government, made up, as it is, of representatives of the big private transport interests, and representatives of farmers who, I think, have a solid appreciation of just how the big business men of the private transport world would butcher State transport systems if given opportunity so to do. I think the Premier went to this meeting of the State council of the Liberal Party mainly for the purpose of being grilled as to the Government's intention with regard to private transport, and the question of the control of prices came up for discussion. This is how "The Daily News" reported the proceedings—

When urged by a Party member to explain the Government's policy regarding price control, Mr. McLarty had a whispered conversation with Party President, Frank Downing.

The Minister for Housing: Probably asking him to provide a drink.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The Minister for Housing suggests that the Premier was asking Mr. Downing to buy him a drink

Would the Premier make that invitation to Mr. Downing because of the assurance previously given by the Premier that private transport interests had nothing to be scared about and would be looked after, protected given quite a big field in which to operate?

Hon. A. H. Panton: Perhaps he was asking for an aspro.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I suggest that that was not the purpose of the whispered conversation at all. As a matter of fact it was not the purpose of the conversation.

The Minister for Housing: I did not hear it.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The Minister for Housing did not hear the conversation. I thought the Minister for Housing would be well in with the inner council of the State Liberal Party and I am surprised that the Premier did not take the Minister for Housing along with him because I should say that with regard to ticklish problems like private transport—

The Minister for Housing: Or buying a drink.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: —and control of prices, some legal advice might be necessary. However, the terms of the conversation are not to remain mysterious for all time. The purpose of the conversation and the terms of it are available to the House because the newspaper report goes on to state—

Mr. Downing then asked the Press to withdraw before the Premier replied.

Mr. Styants: That is the stuff.

Mr. Marshall: They are going behind closed doors.

Mr. Styants: It is the iron curtain.

The Premier: I have known the Press to withdraw from other conferences, too.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I would say that the Premier might know about that because the invariable practice at Labour conferences is that the Press are not permitted to be present at any stage. This is at least consistent.

The Minister for Housing: But not very liberal.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Apparently the Liberal Party council admits the Press only

until such time as some member asks some awkward and embarrassing question about how the Liberal-Country Party Government is to operate a system for the control of prices and for the prevention of profiteering. We know just what would be the attitude of some of the delegates present at this council meeting for they would be representing big business interests. They would probably be members of the Perth Chamber of Commerce, which chamber wants all control of prices completely removed.

The Premier: I do not think that is so.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: It is so near to being right that it hardly matters. I am almost sure that I read a report in the newspaper not so very long ago that the Perth Chamber of Commerce had carried a resolution urging the abolition of price control. The Leader of the Opposition has just handed to me a report which I read some days ago and which appeared in the May, 1948, issue of "The West Australian Mining and Commercial Review." This monthly publication is issued by big business interests which politically are 100 per cent. on the side of the present Government. This is a report of the 44th conference of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Australia and is as follows:—

As businessmen we extended co-operation in the successful administration of price control during the war and in the transitional period, but for the past year we have seen the abolition of wage pegging, which is the logical counterpart of price control, and an ever-growing ideological and political bias in the field of price control. Despite numerous Government promises that price control would be gradually eliminated, the control has been tightened and gross profit margins compressed to a dangerous degree.

Mr. Reynolds: Now we have it.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The report continues—

Coupled with high taxation, price control is bringing businesses to the point where it is impossible to make those necessary reserves against bad times which prudence dictates. Members would almost think that the Premier himself had written this article.

Further, the lack of incentive and delay of bureaucratic control is a potent factor against initiative and enterprise which full production demands. The volume of profits today, compared with pre-war, is insufficient owing to the reduced value of the Australian pound.

The Premier: I have had businessmen impress upon me the need for a gradual relaxation in price control.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I can quite understand that, too, but the Premier, as a result of his experience, should know that in the business world there are some powerful individuals, who express not only their own opinion but influence the opinion of very many others. The declaration made by the Associated Chambers of Commerce at their conference in Perth in May is a clear indication of what they think. They declared in the article I have just quoted that the transitional period has passed and declared it in such a way as to indicate that normality—whatever that is—has been restored and that we are again living in more or less normal times. I regard their attitude with the gravest possible suspicion for I know their power and I suggest to the Premier that he would be extremely wise if, instead of fooling around with this thing of skin and bone, this skeleton Bill, he were to prevail upon the other members of his Cabinet to throw the Bill aside and adopt the Profiteering Prevention Act, with whatever amendments and alterations are necessary. That Act could operate in Western Australia for the control of prices and more important still, for the prevention of profiteering.

THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING (Hon. R. R. McDonald—West Perth) [8.58]: I have listened with interest to the analyses of price control and of this Bill which have been volunteered by speakers, particularly the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Northam. The member for Northam adopted a most extraordinary attitude. His idea in getting value is bulk and not quality and of all the criteria in getting value, bulk is, I think, about the last. In general, quality is the essential.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: What about the 30 pages of regulations?

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: They are super bulk.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The Commonwealth Government which took over the control of prices in 1940 had a Liberal Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies. This control of prices was initiated within four days of the declara-

tion of war because the Prime Minister was determined that prices should be maintained within a reasonable limit. An Act was passed which succeeding Labour Governments have most religiously maintained right up to the present day.

Mr. Graham: He did not have the Legislative Council to contend with.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Mr. Menzies had, I think, the views behind him of all responsible people, and that would include the Legislative Councils of the various States, which passed the profiteering prevention legislation. The Leader of the Opposition said that the Bill of 1939 enacted by this State was passed by the Legislative Council with practically no amendment. I do not want to hear any greater tribute to the Legislation Council of this State than that volunteered by the Leader of the Opposition tonight with respect to which some members have introduced an element of doubt about the attitude of that Chamber in this very matter, on this very subject, and in connection with this very legislation—seeing that the Leader of the Opposition says that when he presented a Bill at a time when such legislation was needed, the Legislative Council accepted it virtually without amendment.

Mr. Marshall: Under threat of war.

Mr. Graham: They had the jitters.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: As to whether it was under a threat of war, which is an emergency, or under postwar conditions, which is another emergency, I think that any responsible legislative body would act with due regard to the public interest. I have no doubt that that would be the position in this State.

Hon. A. H. Panton: But is the Legislative Council a responsible body? That is the point.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: We have the tribute paid by the Leader of the Opposition on that point, and I am prepared to accept what he said.

The Minister for Lands: The member for Leederville is himself an ex-member of the Legislative Council.

Hon. A. H. Panton: That does not make the Legislative Council any better.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Let me go back to the genesis of price-fixing

legislation in the Federal sphere. The member for Northam looks at value as a matter of bulk and not quality; he looks at the Bill from the point of view of the number of pages instead of from the standpoint of what is contained in it. That being so, he will be disappointed regarding the original Act under which price-fixing has operated since 1940.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: That of course is not true.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It is true.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: It is not true that I prefer bulk to quality.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The hon. member talked about skeleton Bills and from that I drew the conclusion that undoubtedly he condemned the measure under consideration because it is short. Possibly he does not appreciate the fact that some of the shortest Bills in the history of the British Parliament have been the most important in their effect upon the British way of life.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: This Bill, with all the regulations under it, will be much bigger than the Profiteering Prevention Act. Therefore, you favour bulk!

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: No. We know that from time to time legislative enactments—take the Traffic Act, for instance—are comparatively short, but the regulations under them are considerably longer than the measures themselves and contain very important features as well. For my part, I say: Do not let us pass adverse criticism on the Bill because it is short. I have been in this Chamber for a considerable period, during which on occasions I have heard very many complaints about long and involved clauses embodied in legislation, and the question has been asked as to who could interpret them. When we have a short Bill that says all it means, then, instead of condemning it, we should extend to the measure a word of praise. Let us turn to the genesis of this skeleton Bill, which is to be found in the National Security Act of 1940, passed by a Commonwealth Government led by the Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies and initiated within four days of the declaration of war, and we find that the reference in it to the fixation of prices is contained in three lines of that Act.

Apart from a few sections that apply to any subject involved, the National Security price-fixing structure of Australia for the past eight years has been based on those three lines in the Act passed by the Commonwealth Parliament in 1940. I do not know whether the hon. member would describe that as a skeleton provision. In fact, it is hardly the big toe of the legislation, if we may adopt a metaphor of that kind. Those three lines contain the only specific references to prices in the Act on which the Commonwealth has operated for eight years, and on them has been based the edifice of price-fixing throughout the Commonwealth. There is a consensus of opinion in Australia and elsewhere as well that, in relation to price-fixing and the prevention of any undue increase in prices, the Commonwealth, by successive Governments, both Liberal and Labour, has achieved no small measure of success.

Let us pass for a moment to the consideration of one or two other matters. This Government has approached—I speak as one who is not in charge of this Bill but as a member of Cabinet and of this Parliament—the subject of price-fixing with a full sense of responsibility.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: But your Government favours decontrol.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: We favour decontrol when it can be safely applied. In that respect I am pleased to adopt the words of the Leader of the Opposition tonight, which, I think, expressed the matter admirably. I would be prepared to add to it a word or two, not in contradiction of his sentiments but by way of endorsement and amplification. There is no quarrel between the Leader of the Opposition and myself with regard to the principle that can be adopted respecting price control.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: What about your junior counsel?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I think my junior counsel and I are pretty well in agreement—if I may apply that term to the gentleman who is now my senior at the bar of this State.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You expect to apply decontrol at the end of 1949, do you not?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: No.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Oh, yes you do! That is all the Bill provides for, and the Attorney General has stated that the Legislative Council would not agree to any longer period.

The Attorney General: I did not say any such thing.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You do not deny that, do you?

The Attorney General: Yes, I do.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You told that to a gathering of Commonwealth price-fixing officers.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: And we have a copy of that.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: If what the hon. member states is correct, it is not within my knowledge. In the matter of control, I would like to see applied the principle which has been very properly adopted by the member for North-East Fremantle's party on many occasions when emergency Bills have been brought forward—Parliament is given democratically the opportunity to pronounce on them session by session. That is the practice that during 14 years of occupancy of the Treasury bench by the political party of which the member for North-East Fremantle is so distinguished a member, was followed so often, and—I say it in all sincerity—the lesson has not been lost on me now that I, for the time being, have a seat on the Treasury bench.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I think the date does not mean anything, but the Minister's statement does mean something.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The date means that this important subject must necessarily—

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Be reviewed.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING:—independently of the party that may be in power, be brought before Parliament for its opinion and pronouncement year by year.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Presently we shall read to you what the Attorney General said to a gathering of officers.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I do not think there is any divergence between the opinions of the Attorney General and myself on this and other points.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: You will be surprised.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: So the Bill is framed to expire at the end of next year for the purpose of preserving the right, prerogative and privilege of Parliament of pronouncing on that legislation at its session next year. In my belief, when the time comes, Parliament will find it necessary and proper in the interests of the people to extend that legislation, because there will still be some subjects that will need a degree of control regarding the price structure in the interests of the people and the economy of the State. Now do not let us try to divide the people of this State into two classes—

Hon. A. H. Panton: It has been so divided for a long time.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING:—those who are responsible and those who are irresponsible, because that division cannot be justified. Let me say for the commercial community, who are concerned with the operation of prices from one point of view, just as the consuming community is concerned from the other point of view, that the expressions conveyed to me are that price control most definitely need to be continued. The commercial community is most vitally interested in suitable measures being taken to prevent inflation and a lowering of the purchasing power of money, because inflation or its effects are not confined to any one section of the community. The loss and the deprivation arising from inflation are common to practically every person in the country. The commercial community, the manufacturing community, are fully sensible of that fact and we believe on good grounds that, with this type of legislation, there will be the fullest understanding and co-operation from that side in order to achieve the objects of this legislation, namely, to keep the price level down to the fullest possible extent.

There has been expressed tonight an undue emphasis on regulations. Regulations are the machinery part.

Hon. A. H. Panton: You taught us a good deal about regulations while you were sitting on this side of the House.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: And rightly so. Regulations are the machinery part, and I agree with the member for Leederville that, wherever possible, we should limit the degree of authority that

is to be contained in regulations. But the original price-fixing structure was 999 points out of 1,000 regulations. In fact, it was all regulations, and that system has been carried on by successive Governments in the Federal sphere and is still being carried on at the present time. It has been carried on by a Government of the same political faith as that of members sitting on the other side of the House and has been accepted in that form. Although eight years have passed since the Act was passed, that system has been accepted by members of the Labour Party in power in the Commonwealth Parliament as a satisfactory means of dealing with the regulation of prices. The regulation of prices is a variable subject that has to serve conditions that arise from day to day, week to week and month to month. There is something to be said for the flexibility of regulations and the ability to change them from day to day and week to week to meet conditions which themselves have changed.

But if we regard that system of regulations under the Commonwealth in relation to prices as a measure resting on emergency, then we can adopt the same view towards regulations in this case because the Commonwealth Government, following the referendum, retired precipitately from the field of control it had previously exercised, and retired in such a way as to leave the States the minimum of time reasonable to undertake this responsibility or even less than the minimum time.

Mr. Graham: There would have been far less time had the field been vacated as a result of a High Court decision.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: That would have been rather different.

Mr. Graham: It would then have been vacated at a moment's notice.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: That would have been rather different because we had the Economic Stability Act on our statute-book to back up the position there. The State of Queensland was not able to deal even with its landlord and tenant regulations, but was compelled to apply for an extension of time to enable it to pass the requisite measures through Parliament. We must bear in mind that only two months have elapsed since the Commonwealth notified its intention of retiring from the field

of price control on the 20th of next month. During that time it has been necessary and imperative for the State Governments to undertake this responsibility and meet together to form some idea of the co-ordination of their plans and the best methods by which this responsibility can be assumed. That consultation has entailed the utilisation of certain time, and this measure has been brought forward after all possible consideration to ensure that there shall be a smooth transition from Commonwealth to State.

I attended the conference held in the first place in relation to price-fixing, and there was a degree of unanimity amongst the State Premiers that I had never witnessed before. Mr. McGirr, the Premier of New South Wales, was in the chair, and he said, "There is nothing party about this question of assuming responsibility for price control. This is a grave responsibility, and is a matter upon which the States must assist each other and work together practically as a band of brothers." The dominant principle of the Premiers was—

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: No Legislative Council was there, you know.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The obsession of the hon. gentleman regarding the Legislative Council should not keep him awake at night. I do not think that need worry us.

The Premier: It is the first time he has mentioned it this session.

Hon. A. H. Panton: I feel rather suspicious when I find you buttering up the hon. member like that.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: This was the fundamental principle on which the States approached the question, with the possible exception, to a slight degree, of South Australia, which was going into the matter in a rather different way, but with the same end in view. South Australia had prepared its legislation prior to the conference being held. The dominant principle of the Premiers was that the transition from Commonwealth to State control should be on a basis in the nature of walk-in-walk-out. In other words, the States should take over the existing machinery of price fixation under Commonwealth control as it would be on the 20th September, 1948, because by doing so the States would be taking over

the same machinery which the whole of the people of Australia had been operating, which the price-fixing branches had been working and which the commercial and other business people had understood; and, by simply taking over where the Commonwealth left off, there would be the minimum of dislocation and the maximum of smooth working. Then the States could proceed, according to their consultations with each other, to eliminate from price control such items as could properly be released.

Mr. Graham: Such as?

The Attorney General: Whales, for one thing!

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Well, that will no doubt be announced shortly; but, as I think the Attorney General explained when moving the second reading, by reason of the States' desire to work in co-ordination, they have been consulting each other as to what items could be safely decontrolled and whether such decontrol would have an adverse effect.

Mr. Graham: Legislation in different forms could be introduced by the States.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The legislation may be in different forms, but in general the opinion of the Premiers was that there should be a transition of the smoothest kind, under which the existing framework of price control on the 20th September should pass in the same form on that day to the control of the States.

I wish to refer to two or three points in connection with Section 92 of the Constitution. The subject was raised by the Leader of the Opposition and also by the member for Nelson. I think it most desirable that Section 92 should be understood. Why did the Commonwealth seek these powers over prices by referendum? Because the Commonwealth realised that the power which it had been relying upon was a defence power of the Commonwealth. It realised that the defence power would disappear shortly, or within a measurable time, if it had not already disappeared.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: And also, perhaps, clarification of the Commonwealth's authority under Section 51.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Not so materially. I think the defence power was the dominant motive which led the Com-

monwealth to seek power by this referendum. That was the dominant motive because the Commonwealth had been operating price-fixation under the defence power. When the Commonwealth operates under the defence power, members know as well as I do that it can do almost anything. It can fix the price of bread under the defence power. Under the defence power the Commonwealth could fix prices in relation to interstate trade, where a man in one State sold goods to a man in another State.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The Commonwealth could not go on doing that indefinitely, as recent judgments of the court show.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Doing what?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Using the defence power to fix the price of bread.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: No, it could not.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The most recent decisions indicate that the judges are becoming careful about that.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The defence power must come to an end; and the general opinion is that if it has not come to an end already, it may do so very shortly. When any determination by the court has been made, it has been made on that supposition. Once the defence power ends, the Commonwealth can operate prices legislation only by a reference to it from the States by Acts of the State Parliaments as regards those States, or by an amendment of the Constitution. To show the attitude of this Government to the matter and that we do not think there should be an abrupt cessation of Commonwealth power over prices, last year we introduced—and this House passed—an Act by which the power to fix prices as regards our State was conferred on the Commonwealth until the end of this year. But the Commonwealth sought to obtain the power of fixing prices permanently by referendum. If it had obtained that power by referendum, then it is pertinent to inquire the position under Section 92. If it obtained that power by referendum, it would no longer rely upon the defence power; it would rely upon the power given to it, under its Constitution, as a result of the referendum.

The important point to bear in mind is that Section 92 binds the Commonwealth as much as the States, and once the defence power is gone then there would be no more power in the Commonwealth regarding interstate transactions than there is in the States as they are now about to administer price-fixing legislation. That is the position, and it was so stated to the conference of Premiers by Dr. Evatt himself. He said the Commonwealth would have been in exactly the same position regarding Section 92 and interstate dealings as the States themselves will be. Therefore he said to the States, very properly, that regarding interstate transactions it is a matter for the individual States to help each other and co-ordinate their policies. The Leader of the Opposition, in the course of his interesting remarks on this topic, mentioned MacArthur's case and the milk case. I have not the full description of these cases before me, so shall refer to them in those colloquial terms. The MacArthur case is no longer law. It was freely mentioned during the referendum campaign, but it is no longer law as far as the effect of Section 92 is concerned.

The authority is, as the Leader of the Opposition rightly quoted, the milk case. If I may just state in one moment the law on the subject as I apprehend it and as it will be when the States take over price control and as it would have been if the Commonwealth had taken over price control by succeeding on the referendum—both the same—it is shortly this: The Commonwealth could have done no more regarding interstate trade than the States themselves could do. That is No. 1. No. 2 is that the generally accepted position constitutionally is that a State can fix prices, pretty extensively, of goods that are to be sold from one State to another, provided it does not use that price-fixing measure as a pretext for restricting the flow of goods from one State to another.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That was the decision in the milk case.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes. If I may endeavour to make myself clear, States can help each other in price-fixation in regard to interstate trade as long as it is confined genuinely to a desire and intention to keep down price levels. They only get into trouble under Section 92 when

they use price-fixing, or pooling, or any other measure, as a means to hinder or impede the free flow of goods from one State to another.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Do you think that an Eastern States manufacturer could evade the decisions of the Ministers and still sell to another State at increased prices compared with local prices?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Time may show, through decisions on this matter, just to what extent control can be exercised.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: You think there is a possibility of its being challenged?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I think there is always a possibility; I would not say there is a probability. But I think this: that there is, under the milk case decision, a very powerful degree of control in the individual States, which can be exercised in the interests of keeping down the cost structure in relation to interstate trade. Goods are now in some respects in short supply. Reference was made to galvanised iron and piping, undoubtedly in short supply, goods which come almost entirely from one firm or its associates. Before the war we never thought seriously of price control; we never thought seriously of interstate trade operating so that goods might be sold cheaply in their State of origin and dear in any other State; and my own view is that we can exaggerate any fears in that respect at present.

Commercial people and manufacturers are people who think in long terms. They know that a shortage may exist for two or three years, but it will cease at the end of that time. They know they will want to trade to other States and they want to preserve their goodwill in other States. The last thing they desire is a reputation that at a time of scarcity they penalised and blackmarketed the State of Western Australia as against the State in which they produced their goods. A firm like the Broken Hill Pty. Ltd. and its associates, which expect to trade for an unlimited time and sell their goods in all the States, are the last people to build up a reputation for unfair and unreasonable discrimination against one State as compared with others.

Mr. Hegney: Suppose they have a monopoly?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It has been said that they have a monopoly. It has been said that they always have had a monopoly; and yet in pre-war days they never used that monopoly to differentiate against Western Australia. I think I can say that as regards this State, from my own knowledge, the Broken Hill Coy. and its associates, bearing in mind our isolation, have extended to us, if anything, more than the quota or parity to which we would normally be entitled.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: You would approve the fixation of a quota system?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I would approve any measure that would assist in equitable distribution between the States.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That may be necessary under this price control structure.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The Commonwealth Government itself has been so assured that it can leave to the big firms equitable distribution between the States, that it has retired itself from the control of a number of commodities. Take tyres! They are not controlled at all.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Tractors!

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Tractors are, I think, still controlled by the Commonwealth. But take an example of which I can speak with knowledge. Tyres have not been controlled for a considerable time by the Commonwealth, which relinquished control to the manufacturers and distributors. I have been told that in that control—and I am not saying other commodities should be dealt with in the same way; I am simply dealing with a specific subject—

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: The ancient law of supply and demand obtains, does it not?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The control has been equitably and skilfully exercised, and this State has received its full share.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Is not supply equal to the demand?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: No, supply is not equal to the demand. Very far from it! I had a specific commission from the Premier recently when I was in Melbourne to go to the tyre manufacturers

there to see whether supplies could be raised.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Was that not for an especially large size?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: A large size, and truck tyres, etc. I found from figures and from evidence that was quite complete, that they were doing all they could and our State had received, if anything, more than its ratio, the ratios in general being based on pre-war consumption when supply was equal to demand, with some modification in favour of States whose conditions had been such that the demand was reasonably greater. So I return for a moment to the general principle that appealed to the Premiers—apart from the Premier of South Australia, which State had already introduced its Bill, or prepared its Bill, which was to be introduced into Parliament the following day—that all the States could best serve the people by taking over as it stood the framework in regulations and in price-fixations that the Commonwealth was operating on the 20th September; and this Bill is designed exactly to do that. I have been rather puzzled at some of the criticism of this Bill. What does this Bill do?

Hon. A. H. Panton: Nothing!

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It does almost exactly what the Commonwealth did and has been doing and is doing; and almost exactly, for the time being, what all the advocates of the "Yes" vote asked the people of Australia to do by continuing Commonwealth control.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: For how long will it do that?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: By this Bill, for one year longer than the Commonwealth's own measure.

Opposition members: No!

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Until you give effect to Clause 14.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: No. The Commonwealth was operating this latterly under the Defence (Transitional Powers) Act, the measure which succeeded the National Security Act which was due to expire at the end of this year. This Bill will give operation to the Commonwealth provisions up to the end of next year.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: Until you give effect to Clause 14.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: By this Bill we are therefore carrying on under State law the regulations that the "Yes" advocates of the referendum desired the Commonwealth to continue exercising. They wanted the same regulations carried on, the same price-fixations and the same machinery, but because the Commonwealth decided to walk out of the picture and we propose to do under State law what they wanted the Commonwealth to continue doing, there is criticism of this measure. That is why I say I am puzzled. I am puzzled that there should be such criticism when this Bill has been introduced in such a form that it might reasonably be expected to be acceptable to all concerned and especially acceptable to those who appealed for a "Yes" vote; because it is just what they advocated. If there are any critics of this Bill they should not be advocates of the "Yes" vote, but advocates of the "No" vote who could say, "You are doing under State law or taking over under State law just what the Commonwealth was doing." It is from the "No" voters that one would expect criticism.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Shows a bit of inconsistency, doesn't it?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Not at all.

Hon. A. H. Panton: You advocated, "No" in one place and "Yes" in another.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Not at all. I am speaking of the framework of the Bill. We are all agreed that price control shall continue and the discussion tonight is about the framework in which the control shall continue. I say it is that which the Commonwealth had, and the last people who should complain of that are those who thought the Commonwealth should carry on with that frame or framework of price control. I would not have taken up the time of the House if it had not been suggested that I might say a few words on Section 92.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I am glad you did.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I have endeavoured to do that to the best of my ability, because I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that it is a matter of importance and one on which all Governments and States will need to be

extremely vigilant so that they can use all the machinery and power at their disposal to prevent any discrimination between States by virtue of Section 92.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: You might have a number of James cases on your hands.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The James case did, in the end, just what we are pointing out now. It decided, contrary to the High Court's opinion, that Section 92 bound the Commonwealth just as it did the States. It is a land mark in Australian constitutional history, and is carried on at the present time. So we must bear in mind as fundamentals of this Bill, in the first place, that it is a transitional measure which, for smooth working, carries on the framework used by the Commonwealth for eight years, and secondly, it is a temporary Bill so that Parliament may, at the end of one year at the latest, have a chance of doing what it pleases in regard to price control in Western Australia.

I am not going to take up time on the referendum. I think the member for Nelson said very properly that a decision had been given by the people, and our duty is to implement it in the right way. But I do say this, that the people's decision was overwhelming and unmistakable. It was not a party decision; it went far beyond the alignments of parties. The decision does not necessarily mean, as the member for Northam pointed out, that there shall be control of prices all the time, but a power to control prices whenever it is desired. The people said, in unmistakable terms, and with a voice which has no precedent in any referendum in Australian history, "We are not going to centralise this permanent power at Canberra. Canberra may have the control for the time being under the defence powers, but when it comes to all-time control, that is to be in the hands of Parliaments and Parliamentary members who are living in our midst and are intimately acquainted with the conditions under which we live."

There is no justification or propriety in questioning the wisdom of the people on the declaration they made on the subject. There is no doubt, as the Commonwealth Government showed, about their intention and desire. Our duty is to implement the substantial responsibility which admit-

tedly passes back to the States. All State Governments are in the same position, irrespective of party. The Leader of the Opposition and the member for Northam referred, in a constructive and justifiable way, to the variations in the type of legislation, and there can be legitimate arguments in that respect, but they, after all, are matters of opinion. This Bill will do what is needed, and it is a simple one which brings into effect, not a new law—as one would almost think—but regulations and rules which have been governing Australia in this respect for the last eight years.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Would you agree to make the Commonwealth regulations a permanent part of the Act? You have been arguing that way.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I have not necessarily been arguing that way. We have been applying Commonwealth regulations to Western Australia, and I have been saying that in my opinion there is a degree of responsibility on this State Parliament, in both Houses, to ensure that nothing will be done against the interests of the people, and I believe that degree of responsibility exists in the people themselves and in the commercial and manufacturing interests of Western Australia.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Would you agree, in Committee, to make the Commonwealth regulations a permanent part of the Act?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The hon. member is asking his question of a Minister speaking on account of his interest in price control but not as Minister in charge of the Bill. On that point I would be pleased to discuss any matters with the Minister in charge. This is a transitional Bill, and it will do the job required without presenting any complications because it does not seek, for the time being, to take away from the people the law they know and under which they work. This will mean a smooth transition, and it will be done by a few words instead of a few hundred, which is a welcome change.

MR. HEGNEY (Pilbara) [9.48]: I propose to pass a few comments on the Bill, and in doing so I want to start by making my protest to the Minister in charge against his not having seen that every member of the House was provided with a copy of the

regulations referred to in the measure. I have on previous occasions objected to amendments being introduced to the House without every member being given an opportunity to peruse them. The attitude of the Attorney General—I say this in no personal sense—as the Minister in charge of the Bill, in not making these regulations available for the benefit of members, amounts more or less to an insult to members generally.

The Minister for Housing: I do not think so.

Mr. HEGNEY: I take it so. When we come to examine the position we find that we, as responsible members of Parliament, have before us a Bill introduced by the Attorney General. It contains three or four pages and refers to a series of regulations which have had the force of law under the defence powers of the Commonwealth for the last eight or nine years.

The Attorney General: They are available in the House.

Mr. HEGNEY: If they are available, why have not members had extended to them the courtesy of having a copy laid on the Table? The Bill has reference to certain regulations that have the force of law under the Commonwealth Parliament today. Does not the Minister think every member is entitled to a copy of the regulations, brought up to date, so that he might know what he is asked to debate? Members are placed at a disadvantage if they have not copies of those regulations. The Bill has for its object the substitution of a State law for a Commonwealth law in the fixation of prices. I will read an extract from the policy speech of the Premier, delivered last year. Among other things the Premier then said—

Subject to the maintenance of all necessary powers to control prices and to prevent exploitation, we intend to see that the people of Western Australia receive back those essential powers to direct their own affairs which they previously possessed. This State will never get justice or make progress unless it has a government which is something more than a puppet of the Commonwealth Government.

I read in the Press and heard over the radio speakers for the Liberal Party and for the "No" side in the referendum campaign, pointing out to the people in this State and throughout the Commonwealth that the

States could immediately grapple with price-fixation legislation if the Commonwealth would vacate that field. There were no qualifications attached to the statements of the "No" campaigners, many of them Liberal Party and Country and Democratic League members. It was said that all the Commonwealth had to do was to get out of the field of price control and that the States, and this State in particular, would take over immediately, on the following day. Although the Premier said last year that his Government would not be a puppet of the Commonwealth, we now find that two of the first pieces of legislation introduced during the present session provide for an absolute replica of regulations enunciated and drafted by the alleged Canberra bureaucrats.

This is a demonstration of a Government being a puppet after having told the people of the State that there would be no progress unless they had in power a Government that was not a puppet of the Commonwealth Government. The question of whether the Commonwealth is better able to legislate for and control and regulate prices than are the States, is a matter of the past. The point is that the States must now introduce and pass the necessary legislation and promulgate the necessary regulations for the protection of the people against profiteering and black marketeering. I disagree with the statement of the Minister for Housing that the people have unmistakably made their pronouncement. There were certain characteristics of the campaign that have not redounded to the credit of many of those who were opposed to the Commonwealth having power to fix prices. There was a great deal of misrepresentation, innuendo and propaganda, over the radio and in the Press, against the Commonwealth, and it was pointed out that the States would be able to control prices more effectively than could the Commonwealth.

I am one of those who believe that within the next two years the people will have found that the States are not able to control prices as effectively as did the Commonwealth. It is as well to look the facts in the face and not try to make ourselves believe that the reversion of price-fixation to the States will be an unqualified success. The Minister for Housing, who put up the case on behalf of the Attorney General,

stated that the Premiers were sincere in their desire to bring about uniformity and unanimity in price-fixing legislation. I pay all due respect to that statement, but the Premiers are not the final authorities on the introduction and implementation of such measures. What is more, there are six Premiers, with varying political views, in accordance with the decisions of the people in their respective States. Is it likely, therefore, that for any period there will be absolute agreement and unanimity with respect to the provisions of the various Acts and regulations passed in the different States?

If this Bill is passed and is duly transmitted to another place, it may pass that Chamber without amendment but, if it becomes law, as I read the Bill the Government may immediately alter all the regulations referred to in this measure and substitute for them other regulations, which must then be laid on the Table of the House and passed by the Legislative Council before they can have any effect whatever. Despite the statement of the Minister for Housing that members should have no doubt about the sincerity of another place with respect to the regulations, I have the gravest doubts and believe that whatever regulations are eventually passed by this House will never pass another place if the big commercial interests of this State consider that such a course is in their interests. Although I do not know who is its author, I propose to quote from an article in a paper called "The News Review," dated the 19th of July, 1948. There, under the heading of "The Liberal Party" it states—

In addition a close liaison between the party executives and Liberal members of Parliament is very necessary. The rank and file supporters of the Party, particularly the business section, expect a very close tie-up in this direction. Comments have been made in recent months that some of the Party's Parliamentary members have not shown the enthusiasm expected of them in this matter. One or two members of the Upper House in particular have been especially mentioned, as being somewhat reluctant to appreciate the need for this close co-operation. Many more people are actively interesting themselves in Liberal Party activities nowadays and consequently the affairs of Parliament are under more constant and closer scrutiny than heretofore.

This can sink into the minds of C. and D. League members, because the tie-up is between that League and the Liberal Party.

The Minister for Lands: What has this to do with the Bill?

Mr. HEGNEY: I will tell the Minister that later on. To continue—

Many more people are actively interested themselves in Liberal Party activities nowadays, and consequently the affairs of Parliament are under more constant and closer scrutiny than heretofore.

This is where I started before I was interrupted.

After all, it is very largely the policy and influence of the Party, plus its financial support, which is responsible in most instances for the return of its candidates, and members so elected owe a considerable degree of loyalty both in service and adherence to policy, to the Party.

The Minister for Lands: There is nothing wrong with that.

Mr. HEGNEY: I am not surprised that the Minister for Lands has made an interjection such as that, because he may not think as I do, but I believe that the force behind the Liberal Party section of this Government will be so strong that before many months have passed they will endeavour to make price-fixing regulations in this country innocuous.

The Minister for Lands: You consider it will get as strong as the force of trade unionism.

Mr. HEGNEY: The reference to the Liberal Party in this paper, which has not been contradicted, leads me to believe that this is the case and that before very long the Legislative Council will again demonstrate the power it has over the people of this country. In the final analysis it will be found that the Legislative Council of Tasmania, which had the power to send its Labour Government to the country and left itself in the legislative halls, and the Victorian Legislative Council which previously did the same thing, do not represent the consumers and the millions of wage-earners in the various States. The Legislative Council of South Australia, and the Legislative Councils in practically all the States, do not represent the majority of people of the respective States. Of that I am quite certain. They represent at the outside 30 to 40 per cent, but they wield the power and they alone are the force in this country. The second Chambers wield as much power as does Joe Stalin of Russia.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member is getting away from the Bill.

Mr. HEGNEY: If you, Mr. Speaker, had waited for about two minutes, I would have indicated just how my remarks are allied to the measure.

Mr. SPEAKER: I am still waiting.

Mr. HEGNEY: The Bill provides—and I am not going to quote any of the clauses—on page 5, the following:—

Subject to the provisions of this Act, the Governor may make regulations prescribing all matters and things, which by the provisions of this Act are required or permitted to be prescribed, or are convenient for carrying into operation or for facilitating the operation of the provisions and purposes of this Act, and in particular but without prejudice to the foregoing power, may make regulations with respect to—

(a) The prevention of undue increases in prices and rates for goods and services, particularly in relation to food, clothing and housing;

I would like the Minister in charge of the Bill, in his reply, to outline clearly, or as clearly as he possibly can, just what the words, "and services" mean. I visualise, and I may be entirely wrong, that the word "services" will include the fixation of wages and conditions of employment, or at least the rates of wages. We already have an Industrial Arbitration Court set up to deal with wages, the fixation of wages, and the price of labour power. I would like the Minister to indicate whether the word "services" is uniform as far as all the other States are concerned or whether the word has been placed in the Bill exclusively by this Government, and if so, just what is its meaning.

The Attorney General: It is uniform.

Mr. HEGNEY: In relation to food, clothing and housing, I think the provision in this part of the Bill will not preclude the Government or the Commissioner of Prices from fixing the prices of other commodities, but as far as I can see, the Profiteering Prevention Act of 1939, which I have perused carefully, would be preferable to introducing legislation of the character of the Bill now before the House. Paragraph (c) refers to—

The progressive removal of the control of prices and rates.

Here again it will be found that my interpretation of the progressive removal of the

control of prices and rates may differ from that of some members on the Government bench, but I have before me a copy—and I have a copy of John Henry Austral too—of "The West Australian" of the 10th August in which the President of the Perth Chamber of Commerce, Mr. H. V. Illidge, makes reference to current problems. The column is headed "Trade and Finance." The extract I wish to quote is "Fight or Perish" and the sub-heading, "Choice before Free Enterprise." The report reads—

Free enterprise must either fight or perish, Mr. H. V. Illidge, president of the Perth Chamber of Commerce told members of the 58th annual general meeting last night. World conditions, he said, constituted a challenge to free enterprise in this country. The fact must be acknowledged that had the many sections of free enterprise always presented a united front on matters embodying the fundamental principles of a free economy, Australia would not have gone as far as it had towards a socialised State.

In the months to come free enterprise would be called upon to combat, as a single, powerful unit, the attempts to foist on Australia a bureaucratic economy and a sterilised uniform way of life, and to organise to do what free enterprise alone could do efficiently—prepare for the difficulties and problems with which world conditions would inevitably bring us face to face.

That, in conjunction with this Bill, indicates that the Government will as quickly as possible amend the Bill and get rid of price control altogether. I want to say, and say quite definitely that the workers of this country have had their wages controlled for many years per medium of the Arbitration Court, they will see that he stated it was the that fixed by the Arbitration Court, workers are told that they are out of court, that they are disloyalists and a lot of agitators and that as they take advantage of the law they should abide by it. Wages are controlled by the Arbitration Court and if members will read the judgment delivered in February of 1947, by the President of the Arbitration Court they will see that he stated it was the first time in the history of the court and the history of wage fixation in Western Australia that there was a semblance of giving to the workers something which would be effective and which would not be taken away from them as prices were controlled.

Workers are harnessed to the fixation of wages and I can visualise the position that if price-fixing legislation in Western Australia

is terminated—we have an indication of it in the Bill, and I pay a certain amount of regard to what the Minister for Housing said—it will be found that there will be industrial unrest and that the workers will be fighting for higher wages and prices will be spiralling more than heretofore. Once it is found that the purchasing power is being reduced and that there is no alternative, the workers will have to make a stand for the preservation of the purchasing power of their wages. I can visualise clearly what will occur. It may happen in Victoria before very long because there is an anti-Labour Government there and I believe that the Legislative Council of that State, as will be the case with the Upper Houses of the other States, will do all it possibly can to hamstring and retard the effective operation of legislation of this character.

There is another matter I wish to bring to the attention of the Attorney General. I am open to correction on the point, but, as I view the position now, the Bill provides that any Minister or employee, or any person appointed by the commissioner may pass on information to the Commissioner of Taxation or the Deputy Commissioner of Taxation. Paragraph (d) of Clause 12 states—

Nothing in this section shall be deemed to prohibit—

(i) the Commissioner, whenever he considers it necessary or desirable to do so—

(1) From communicating to the Attorney General any information—

and in a later subparagraph the clause says—

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

The Attorney General: I think they already had that authority under the Commonwealth law.

Mr. HEGNEY: That is the point I want to refer to. Under the Commonwealth income tax law of 1936, the Commissioner of Taxation was empowered to transmit information to certain authorities, such as the Commissioner for Pensions, the Director-General of Health and so on. Under the Income Tax Assessment Act Amendment Act, No. 58 of 1941, which was passed by the Commonwealth Parliament, the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner was added to those

mentioned in Section 16 of the Income Tax Assessment Act of 1936. Paragraph (a) of Subsection (4) of Section 16 of that Act reads—

Nothing in this section shall be deemed to prohibit the Commissioner, second Commissioner, or a Deputy Commissioner, or any person thereto authorised by him from communicating any information to—

Then come references to various authorities, commissioners and so forth, and, of course, the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner does not appear in that category, because the price-fixing regulations had not been promulgated at that stage. The point I wish to make is that while the Bill provides for the State authority transmitting information to the Commissioner of Taxation, there is no power under the Commonwealth income tax law—since the passing of uniform taxation legislation, which was introduced in 1942, there is only one law dealing with the matter now—for the Commissioner of Taxation or the Deputy Commissioner of Taxation to transmit any necessary information to the Minister, or any prices commissioner appointed under the State law. I regard that as a very important phase of the legislation. It might be all right for the commissioner under the State law to transmit information of a relevant character to the Commissioner of Taxation, but for what purpose? The arrangement with the Commonwealth Government should be that the Federal law be amended to provide that the Deputy Commissioner of Taxation shall be empowered to pass on to the State authority information of a relevant character with regard to any taxpayer's income tax return and his net income over a period. That is what we want. If the Minister is to attend a further conference in Sydney on this matter, he should look into this question, which I regard as of vital importance to the implementing and carrying out of this legislation.

Hon. E. Nulsen: The power should be reciprocal.

Mr. HEGNEY: The authorities are endeavouring to secure uniformity and if there is anything in it with regard to the position of Western Australia—so far as I know it applies to the other States as well—the point I raise should be looked into. I shall not delay the House any longer with regard to the Bill itself, but I believe that when the various States have passed their

appropriate Acts and their regulations are in force—I hope my forecast will prove quite unfounded—a position may arise where Western Australia will find itself at a disadvantage compared with some of the Eastern States.

When the Minister for Housing was speaking, I interjected with reference to Broken Hill Proprietary Ltd., and I do not want the inference to be drawn that I consider the company has done anything to the detriment of this State. As a matter of fact, I did not mention that company, but it must be borne in mind that whereas there was competition between firms operating years ago in various parts of Australia, much of that competition has been eliminated by the setting up of combinations of various interests. In many instances, large firms have a monopoly of various commodities and goods. If Broken Hill Proprietary Ltd.—I will cite that concern, seeing that its name has been mentioned—were able to dispose of its commodities in the Eastern States at higher prices because Victoria had lifted its controls more quickly than this State, Western Australia would find itself at a great disadvantage. That would also apply to fittings for houses and a multiplicity of other lines that I need not mention. Then there is the question of a State like Victoria or South Australia repealing its legislation, and Western Australia still carrying on under its Act—if the Legislative Council should so desire.

While the Premier and the Minister in charge of price-fixing legislation in this State will do their utmost to bring about unanimity and uniformity as between the States, whichever way we look at it we must admit in the final analysis of the legislation and the degree of control exercised, the effectiveness or otherwise of the legislation will depend upon the attitude of minority Chambers in at least four of the States of the Commonwealth. Finally, I hope the Minister will see to it that every member receives a copy of the regulations. At any time when an amendment of the regulations is made, or the Minister places any information before the House, each member should be entitled to a copy of the amendment or information, which should be furnished not merely to the Leader of the Opposition, whoever he may be for the time being. That information should not be available to one or two members only but should be in the

hands of all members, so that they may be able to discuss matters brought before the Chamber.

I hope that the legislation that will be passed will prove of benefit to the people of Western Australia, but since we have had such legislation during the war period, I trust it will be many years before price control and profit control are lifted. If we are going to have continued industrial peace in this country, the workers will not be satisfied to have their wages fixed by Arbitration Courts while no restrictions are imposed upon the profits of the concerns that make them. To ensure industrial peace and avoid industrial warfare, the workers must be protected far more than they have been in the years gone by.

MR. LESLIE (Mt. Marshall) [10.21]: I greatly regret to find that members of the present Government are emulating the very bad example that I take it was set by their predecessors.

Mr. Graham: That is very gracious of you.

Mr. LESLIE: During the years I have been a member, it seems to have been the recognised practice for Ministers, when introducing a Bill, to make a speech and give, in the words of the member for Northam, a bare skeleton of what is necessary rather than full information as to what is proposed and what is desired. The idea was to make a brief speech in explanation of the Bill and then leave members to set up a row of ninepins which the Minister later nimbly knocked down. That happened with the previous Government, the only other Government of which I have had experience. I have heard Bills introduced by speeches that contained good information, but quite a lot was missing. I as a member of the then Opposition submitted a lot of questions, just as the Opposition has done tonight, seeking the why and the wherefore, and so did members on the Government side, and the Minister then gave us the information. Had the Minister in the first place given the fullest information that was requisite and necessary, much of the time of the House would have been saved.

Mr. Graham: The Minister on this occasion did not do that.

Mr. LESLIE: That practice is apparently being followed by Ministers of the present Government. That is what has happened in connection with this Bill. When I heard the Minister's speech and read the Bill, I felt concerned. At the recent Federal referendum, I voted "No."

Mr. Graham: And I voted "Yes."

Mr. LESLIE: I urged other people to vote "No" for a number of reasons. I do not propose to traverse those reasons at this stage, though later on I shall briefly refer to a couple of them. Now I find it is the intention of this Government to continue one of the things I voted against at the referendum, and no reason was offered for its continuance. I believe that is the reason why this debate has continued during the evening. I was not at all happy about the position. I feel most unhappy with the method of price-fixing—I will not say price control because there has been no control—and the way it is operating. That is one of the reasons why I voted against a continuance of Federal control. It has been a system of fixation of maximum prices and the granting of profit permits.

I wanted the State to undertake this responsibility in order that a different method might be adopted and that we might have price control and profiteering prevention. I consider that the provisions of the existing Act are far better than the proposals in the Bill, because the present statute would permit of more being done along the lines I have in mind. So it was with some concern that I read the Bill introduced by the Attorney General. As the debate progressed, we had the Minister for Housing explaining the reason why it was necessary to adopt a sort of transition measure because of existing circumstances. The Minister has been to the East and has met the Premiers of other States. He also met Dr. Evatt and heard the matter thoroughly discussed, and I now feel convinced that, unsatisfactory as this measure is to me, it is a matter of expediency to adopt it on account of what has happened. Therefore, having expressed my regret as I have done, I am content to accept the position.

At one stage I felt some concern about the States' undertaking price-fixing in view of Section 92 of the Commonwealth Consti-

tution. I do not profess to be a constitutional authority.

Mr. Graham: That is just modesty on your part.

Mr. LESLIE: No, it is a fact. Without having the information given to us by the Minister for Housing tonight, I viewed the position of the States somewhat along these lines: I believe that most of the States have regulations to control the quality of goods, whether intended for internal or external consumption. Therefore I say that if it be possible for a State to regulate the quality of such goods, it must be possible for a State to regulate the prices.

I see no difference between regulating price and quality when considering the effect of Section 92. We can exclude from entry into this State goods that do not conform, for instance, to our health standards. We can also forbid the export of goods, whether to other States or elsewhere, if they are not of a certain standard. It has never been suggested that any legislation or regulation made by a State to that end was ultra vires Section 92 of the Constitution. At any rate, such action has never been challenged, and I think the reason why this power has been exercised by the States over many years and has not been challenged is recognition of the fact that a challenge would not be successful. Therefore, in my lay mind, I have accepted the fact that we may constitutionally substitute "price" for "quality, standard or grade." In such a case, no court would sustain an argument that a price had been fixed in order to interfere with the free interchange of goods as between States. It would be a price fixed for the purpose of control, just as a grade or standard would be fixed for maintaining the quality of a particular line of goods. Having adopted that viewpoint, I have felt no further concern about the ability of States to operate price-fixing, having regard to Section 92 of the Constitution.

The Minister for Housing mentioned that at the conference held in the Eastern States, no less an authority than Dr. Evatt confessed that the States were in no better position than the Commonwealth, nor was the Commonwealth in a better position than the States, as regards price-fixing under Section 92. I suggest to the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues, who said they voted

in favour of the referendum that, when it comes to truth in advertising, they should analyse some of the statements made during the referendum campaign in connection with this very matter. Was it not said that the States could not control price-fixing, that Section 92 of the Constitution would not permit them to do so? Was it not said, although may be not in so many words—the innuendo was there—that the Commonwealth could do it? We are blamed for many mis-statements which we actually did not make.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The Commonwealth would have been able to control prices if the referendum campaign had been successful. What are you talking about? The Commonwealth wanted the power, and asked for it.

Mr. LESLIE: I am open to correction, but I understand Dr. Evatt said that the Commonwealth was doubtful about its power, and so were the States. In my opinion, the States could undertake price control, without the possibility of legal challenge, in the way I have indicated. I have not had an opportunity to peruse the regulations. The Leader of the Opposition had a copy in his hand which he flashed at us tonight. I do not know whether it would be of any benefit to me if I did see it.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: As I told you, this copy was given to me by the Minister.

Mr. LESLIE: We must meet circumstances as they are. We are faced with an expedient and, in the interests of the State, have to proceed along certain lines. Whether the regulations are part of the Bill or are something separate, I do not know. The Minister has not replied to the debate and he may tell us later where they figure in the scheme of things. I ask the Minister to give the House an assurance that, if the regulations are not part of the Bill and are adopted in toto and are not disallowable, he convert them as soon as he possibly can into State regulations under the State Bill, so that they may be laid on the Table at the earliest possible moment.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: And the Upper House could have a shot at them.

Mr. LESLIE: I am not worried about the Upper House. As I have said, I am not satisfied with the way in which price control has operated in the past. My desire is to have proper price control, not price-fixing.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: What is wrong with our own Act?

Mr. LESLIE: I am very happy about our own Act. I would prefer it to this measure. The position was explained far more lucidly than I can explain it by the Minister for Housing. He said the desire was to continue the present control for a temporary period. It has been operating smoothly throughout all the States and the desire is to obtain uniformity. Modifications can be made as they become necessary. I can imagine the chaotic conditions which might result from a sudden change-over. This is really a transitional Bill. It is for that reason that I am prepared to accept it. Unless it is accepted, I suggest there will be chaos. If Opposition members will look at it in that light, they cannot do other than support it. We will then have an opportunity to make necessary amendments in order to bring about proper administration of price control. I leave it at that, but I do make this appeal to Ministers: I ask them to explain in future, not necessarily at length, the most essential features of any proposed legislation.

On motion by Mr. Graham, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 10.37 p.m.

Legislative Council.

Wednesday, 18th August, 1948.

CONTENTS.

	Page
Bill : Prices Control, Standing Orders suspension	492
Address-in-reply, tenth day	493

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

BILL—PRICES CONTROL.

Standing Orders Suspension.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [4.33]: I move—

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the Bill to be passed through all its stages at the one sitting.

HON. SIR CHARLES LATHAM (East) [4.34]: I sincerely hope that the Chief Secretary will give us sufficient time to examine this Bill thoroughly. I understand that the Commonwealth Government will not cease to control prices until somewhere towards the end of September. Under those circumstances, I would like an assurance that we will have sufficient time properly to examine the legislation we shall be asked to pass.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban—in reply [4.35]: I can assure the hon. member that there will be ample time to study the Bill and I sincerely trust there will be no need to take advantage of this motion.

Question put and passed.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Tenth Day.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. E. M. HEENAN (North-East) [4.36]: I support the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply, but before proceeding with a few remarks in that connection, I would like to associate myself with the congratulations that have been tendered to you, Mr. President, and to the two members who have received honours from the King. I welcome to this Chamber the new members, all of whom have made a very creditable showing. I am sure that each will be a real asset to the proceedings of this House.

Certainly I cannot let the opportunity pass to refer to our friend Mr. C. B. Williams, whom I am sure we all miss a great deal. His departure was almost like the passing of a tradition, because he was in the category of the pioneers on the Goldfields, where he had a lot of influence and accomplished a great deal for the miners. On many occasions in this House, he made most valuable