

Legislative Council

Thursday, 17 May 1984

The PRESIDENT (Hon. Clive Griffiths) took the Chair at 11.00 a.m., and read prayers.

QUESTIONS

Deferment

HON. D. K. DANS (South Metropolitan—Leader of the House) [11.06 a.m.]: I seek leave to have questions on notice and questions without notice deferred. I use the word “deferred”, because if the House is still sitting when answers become available, questions will be taken. If we should adjourn before that time, they will be taken on 29 May. If the question of any member needs an urgent response, I am quite prepared to give him or her a written answer.

Leave granted.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT BILL 1984

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 15 May.

HON. P. G. PENDAL (South Central Metropolitan) [11.08 a.m.]: The Bill before the House is one that could be described, in the proverbial way, as being a bit like the curate’s egg; it is good in parts.

Not many people in this House or in another place, or any elected member of Parliament, could lightly ignore the wishes of their constituents and, in particular, the constituents who represent what is often described as the third arm or tier of government. The Government is doing that in relation to the legislation now before the Parliament. I doubt if there are many areas upon which local authorities in Western Australia have been more united in the past generation than on the question of adult franchise being extended into local government. The argument has crossed all political boundaries, and members on this side and members on the other side of the House would acknowledge, I am sure, that local government councillors and administrators, not necessarily unanimously, but overwhelmingly, have asked that the part of the legislation dealing with adult franchise not be proceeded with. That includes, of course, even councillors in local authorities who are more inclined politically to support the present Government than to support the Liberal and National Country Parties in this Parliament.

I recall an instance in a suburb adjacent to my electorate—that is, the City of Belmont—where

the council made clear its views on this issue. Along with dozens, indeed scores of other local authorities, it requested that this part of the legislation be deleted.

I find it significant when areas which have predominantly returned Labor members of Parliament have local authorities which perhaps can be loosely termed Labor councils.

A member interjected: They are loose!

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: Not so loose in some cases; but nonetheless councils that can be loosely termed Labor councils have themselves asked that these provisions in the legislation be deleted.

I refer briefly to a report in the *South Suburban News* of 21 March 1984. This report illustrated the feeling amongst local authorities throughout the State about this Bill regardless of their political persuasions, or even where they had no political persuasions. These comments illustrate their feelings. The article is headed “Belmont no to Carr plan”. Before I quote from it I indicate that no-one in his wildest imagination could suggest that Belmont is a hotbed of conservative activity, and no-one can seriously suggest that the Belmont City Council is a strong Liberal council. Mr McKenzie would have to agree with me on that.

The story, which, in part, reports the attitudes of councillor Mick Coffey, says this—

DROP-OUTS living in small communities could have the numbers to decide local issues if full adult franchise were introduced in local government elections, according to a Belmont city councillor.

Cr. Mick Coffey opposed this provision of the legislative “package deal” proposed by the Minister for Local Government, Mr Carr, when it was discussed at the last council meeting.

Councillor Coffey is then quoted as saying—

For the first time, I will be saying “thank God for the Upper House” . . .

Several members interjected.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: Councillor Coffey is not on his own. We have had arguments in this House about who said that first. It was said by a former Labor Premier, Philip Collier, and this Government is learning that despite its attitude towards the upper House, it is at least an institution which one can bludgeon when some of one’s more reckless policies are thrown out to one’s relief.

Hon. Kay Hallahan: What utter nonsense!

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: Then it is possible for the Government to report back to Trades Hall and to the State Executive to the effect that at least it tried.

A member interjected: You delude yourself.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: I do not delude myself.

Several members interjected.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: It was a former Premier, Philip Collier, who first said those words.

The PRESIDENT: Order! This has nothing to do with this Bill, notwithstanding who said it.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: The words of Councillor Mick Coffey had everything to do with it.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I was referring to the statement that the honorable member was making and I was suggesting that that had nothing to do with the Bill.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: Councillor Mick Coffey of Belmont was reported in the newspaper as saying, "thank God for the Upper House", and, of course he is not the first person on the Labor side of politics who has said that.

Hon. Fred McKenzie: You know that he is not now a councillor of the Belmont City Council.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: Yes, but Mr McKenzie also knows that Councillor Coffey was a councillor, and a prominent one for many years. Therefore, one presumably does not change one's mind because one has been off the council for a quarter of an hour.

Hon. Fred McKenzie: It is a bit more than that.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: I am merely trying to say that his attitude would not have changed just because he has retired from the Council.

Hon. Kay Hallahan: He is an ex-councillor.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: I have already explained to the member, who obviously did not listen, that I was quoting from a report in a newspaper of 21 March last.

In case the member did not hear, I have just repeated that statement. I have made it clear that ex-councillor Coffey, in endorsing the comments made by a former Labor Premier of Western Australia, again used those words to indicate that, on occasions, legislation is brought to the Parliament with no real hope of being passed; the Government is then able to use the facility, before their Labor masters of this State, of saying, "Well, at least we tried".

Hon. Graham Edwards: We hope this legislation will be passed.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: The story then goes on to say—

The council resolved to advise the Local Government Association that it wished to retain the existing voting system.

However, the council favoured the differential rating system proposed in the package, and also the proposed autonomy.

Several members interjected.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: It is no good members opposite interjecting as they have been in the last couple of minutes saying, "All these people want the good bits, but none of the bad".

Hon. Tom Stephens: You speak like that, not us.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: It is the local government bodies themselves—

Hon. Garry Kelly: What about the voters.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: I shall turn to that interjection in a moment. Would the member like me to answer the interjection he made 10 seconds ago? If not, I suggest he be quiet. I use that example to illustrate the point that, an area not known to be strong in its support for conservative politics in this State—

Hon. Graham Edwards: What are the numbers on the council?

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: —does not support the Minister for Local Government in his bid to make radical changes to the voting system of local government in this State.

Hon. Tom Stephens: You mean to introduce democracy.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: If one cannot convince one's mates of the weight of one's arguments, then one can hardly expect one's political enemies to give their support.

I suggest the task before the Australian Labor Party is to spend as long as it takes to go out and convince people in local government, or at least half of the people in local government, to support the sorts of so-called reforms that are being proposed by the Government. Only then can these people rightly come back to the Parliament and say that this is a reform that local government desires; therefore, Parliament should give it every consideration.

Hon. Garry Kelly: You did not see the Court Government doing that.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: Until the Government does that, and attempts to convince local government that these reforms are proper and desirable for local government, the Labor Party and the Government have no right to use blackmail tactics such as those used by Mr Carr. That is, if local government and the Legislative Council will not give the Government its adult franchise reforms, local government cannot have the rating reforms.

That is hardly a fair and equitable way to run a State.

Hon. Garry Kelly: Councils have to be representative.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: It is a supreme irony that this Government speaks so much about extending the autonomy of local government yet is here ignoring the wishes of local government.

Hon. Tom Stephens: We want it to be more representative.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: The people in local government do not believe the Government. The councillors in local government, many of whom are Labor Party supporters, simply do not believe the Labor Government's proposals.

Hon. Tom Stephens: You are an antediluvian.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: In many parts of this State the most ridiculous and idiotic anomalies would be created by the extension of full adult franchise. I understand my colleague, the Hon. Philip Lockyer, will raise the situation pertaining to Shark Bay. When he does that for the information of members who have not heard of the position before, I would be most surprised if anyone could convince me that the proposal is anything other than idiotic in the way it will affect that local authority area. The Minister, the Premier, and the Government as a whole well know that in many parts of this State, the extension of the franchise would have the same idiotic, silly, and juvenile consequences.

If I recall correctly, one instance concerns the Muresk Agricultural College, and I guess any other tertiary or subtertiary institution, where the number of students over 18 years of age could well give them the capacity as residential students to outvote ratepayers who live in the district and will continue to live in the district long after those students have left the college and probably gone to the other end of the State to earn themselves a living.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Order! When I call for order it means that honourable members should cease their private discussions instantly.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: The Government has done nothing, not only to allay the fears of people in the situation I have just described, but also to allay the fears of the members of the local authorities concerned and certain members of this House and another place.

Until such time as the Government has put its mind more seriously to questions of that kind, it has no right to bring to the Parliament legislation which it knows to be—in these provisions anyway—only half-baked.

Hon. Kay Hallahan: What a ridiculous thing to say.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: To give an example closer to home and one that affects a local authority in a small portion of my own province, I turn to the Perth City Council. Government members who so far have spent the morning interjecting have done so on the basis that the councillors in these local authorities have a vested interest to protect, whether those councillors be Liberal, Labor, or any other sort of councillors. Members opposite have indicated that we ought not take too much notice of them because those councillors are protecting some sort of vested interests. However, I am sure my colleague, the Hon. John Williams, as well as other members who represent parts of the City of Perth, would be aware of a publication put out by the Perth City Ratepayers and Citizens Association. Now we are coming down not to the councillors but to the ratepayers themselves and their associations. It is therefore valid in this debate, in trying to determine what people want, to know what these people have said.

This association of ratepayers issued a circular dated 14 May, and it reads as follows—

The introduction of this Bill by the Government is a matter of fundamental concern to this organisation as we believe that two important aspects will seriously affect Perth as the capital of this State.

Firstly—Voting:

Currently, all ratepayers and residential occupiers of rateable property in each Ward have the right to be enrolled on the Rate Electoral Roll, which subject to the Bill being passed, without amendment by the Legislative Council will then provide.

All people on either the State or Federal Electoral Roll will have the right to vote plus owners of property (limited to one owner per property when more than one is the owner). However the owner only has the right to vote in one Ward, irrespective whether the party owns properties in more than one Ward.

This deletes in the City the majority of the ratepayers i.e. the tenant occupiers who mainly reside outside the Ward.

Comment

- (a) The bulk of the ratepayers will NOT be able to vote and this will mean to many taxation without representation.
- (b) Rates will be set by those who may reside in a Ward but contribute little by way of rates to the Council.

If the Council expands into Social Welfare activities the rates must increase.

I repeat: These are the views of the Perth City Ratepayers and Citizens Association; they are not the views of councillors, local government, or the Liberal Party. To continue—

Secondly—Change in Ward Boundaries:

In the Central Ward there are only a limited number of residents and property owners (based on one vote per property) and to balance out the electors on the Council Rolls it will be necessary to adjust the Ward Boundaries. The effect will be to reduce the number of Councillors representing the existing Central City Ward and adjacent West and East Ward areas. It must be borne in mind these three Wards currently produce sixty seven (67%) of the annual rates raised by the City of Perth and the new Bill, in effect provides for a reduction of representation from these areas.

If members opposite want to talk about democracy, as they have done in a number of their interjections this morning, they should listen to this. To continue—

The Act will disenfranchise these people and in these circumstances the rates then, in effect, become no more than a wealth or direct property tax on property owners.

That would probably have some appeal to sections of the Labor Party. To continue—

Currently at least they have some say in the level of rates and expenditure, however under the proposed system this would disappear and leave the way open for future Council charges to be increased and no doubt Councils of the Day will provide added welfare services using as a funded basis the new "wealth or property taxes" gathered under the classification of rates.

Therefore this Association strongly urges you to exercise your right to protect the Free Enterprise System by amending those sections of the Bill which will unfairly disenfranchise the property owners and occupiers and also have the effect of a reduction in the representation of those Wards where the majority of occupiers and owners reside elsewhere i.e. out of the Central City Area.

Hon. John Williams: A very responsible gentleman.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: This well-drafted circular is from Mr Bruce Campbell.

Again, I read it to emphasise the point that it is simply not true to say that local government councillors have a vested interest in preserving the status quo. The matter goes far deeper than that, and similar letters from ratepayer organisations

from many parts of Western Australia have requested that we take some action against that part of the Government's Bill to which I have referred.

I want to touch on only one other matter regarding adult franchise before I turn briefly to the second and worthwhile part of the Bill. Everyone knows that, at the best, local government elections attract an average of 15 to 20 per cent of those who are currently entitled to vote. I do not know whether an analysis has been undertaken of the standing in the community of those on the rolls or of the socio-economic group from which they come, but only approximately 15 to 20 per cent of people currently entitled to vote in local government elections exercise that right. Put another way, 80 to 85 per cent of people who are entitled to vote in local government elections consistently ignore that invitation year in, year out.

I am not sure that that proves a lot of things, but it might suggest that the Government is flogging a dead horse in wanting to extend the franchise which currently is not being used to its fullest extent.

Many people to whom I have spoken say that in many parts of the State we have "all but" full adult franchise for local government anyway, but it does suggest to me that if 80 to 85 per cent of the people who are currently entitled to vote do not vote and do not wish to exercise their right to play a part in that democratic process that the Hon. Kay Hallahan talked about earlier, I again suggest that the Government is flogging a dead horse in wanting at this stage to extend the franchise so that all people who are eligible to vote in State and Commonwealth elections also vote in local government elections. Therefore, for those reasons and others, and in particular because local government has asked for these provisions to be thrown out, I intend to oppose that section of the Bill.

Members are well aware of the other major portion of this Bill; therefore, I do not intend to spend any more than a few minutes on it. It deals with extending the rating options for local authorities and I commend the Government for bringing those provisions to the Parliament; indeed, I will vote in favour of them.

I counsel the Government that I do not believe the options will be workable. I spent some time in the last week discussing the suggested options with a number of local authority people, both administrative and elected personnel, and surprisingly, to my recollection, no-one actually thought the rating options would work. That is not to say that they do not want to try them, and it is not to say that they are being critical of the Burke Govern-

ment for bringing them in; indeed they have expressed appreciation that the Government has been prepared to bring them in but, almost to a man, these people have expressed grave doubts that the new rating options contained in the Bill will have any impact at all.

One example was given to me in regard to the riverfront properties at Riverton, Rossmoyne, and Shelley—properties with which you, Mr President, and I are most familiar. Ratepayers and property owners from such areas have been part of the reason that this Bill is now in the House. Those property owners, as well as those from Sorrento and other particular pockets of the metropolitan area, have been in, some would say, the happy position where their property values have risen so dramatically in the last decade as a result of inflation that in some cases they are paper millionaires; their properties are worth enormous sums of money, but of course they are now attracting enormous levels of rates. Some people would say, "Well, if they have got posh three-storied homes worth \$500 000, they can afford to pay that small amount in rates". I do not go along with that idea. Many other people who have lived in very modest homes in those areas for 30 years or more—as is the case around Riverton Bridge in my electorate—have been hit with large increases in their rates because of the revaluation of their properties.

I acknowledge that in this part of the Bill the Government aims to assist these people and I commend the Government for it, but it has been pointed out to me that it will really become an impossibility to find any optional way of rating those properties other than to insert a provision saying, "Posh homes and riverfronts, because of those peculiar inflationary situations, will be rated at a lower rate than would normally be the case". That example was actually used by a local government person in explaining the problem to me. He explained it in the sense that he supported the introduction of the options contained in the Bill, but with little hope that they would be a solution to the local authorities' problems, other than to have the ridiculous situation of rates based on the degree of poshness of a particular property.

I hope that the options do work, and if they work I will be among the first to acknowledge that the Government's legislation helped to bring that about. Equally, I hope that if the options are found to be unworkable or if they do not achieve their desired ends, the Government will be prepared to again look at the whole problem to try to find some relief for those people.

The Bill contains some reference to the pilot scheme that I think was initiated by the current

Government, although it may have been initiated at the end of the life of the previous Government.

Hon. J. M. Brown: The current Government.

Hon. P. G. PENDAL: I thank Mr Brown. It was the current Government. Some of the local authority people in my area were under the impression, however, that the legislation now before us would not be brought to the House until the results of that pilot study were known. I understand the results are being processed through the computer at the moment and that it is a highly complex matter. Those people suggested to me that the Bill itself or the rating options should have been held back until such time as the computer study results were known. They have been most concerned, and, in fact, they understood that it would be held back, so in a way we go into this legislation blindly, without knowing the computerised study results, results we would have had if the Bill had been delayed for a couple of months.

In summary, I repeat that I see the Bill as a bit like the curate's egg. I support those provisions that seek to widen the rating options that will be available to the local authorities, and oppose those that deal with adult franchise. With those comments, I reserve my right to act in the Committee stage accordingly.

HON. J. M. BROWN (South-East) [11.41 a.m.]: The remarks made by the previous speaker about the Local Government Amendment Bill immediately demand a question: Why have these amendments not been initiated before? What has been the Opposition's view on the progress of local government? It has been a dismal failure. Indeed, the Opposition's whole attitude to the concept of adult franchise has always been one of opposition.

As the history of this Bill will show, the Government has a difficult task in initiating its policies because of the considerations and determinations of this Chamber. The proposition of adult franchise for all people has not come before us just in 1983-84; that proposition has been in the hearts of people for the last 30 years or so.

I can remember well when it was suggested that people who did not own property should not be entitled to vote in local government elections. It was indicated to them that because they did not have a stake in the community they had no right whatsoever to vote. One finds that type of attitude difficult to reconcile, because those people being denied adult franchise have in the past offered their services to their country. It was good enough for a person to offer his life for his country, but it was not good enough for him to have a vote in local government elections. That type of attitude has continued for many years.

The political philosophy of the Labor Party has been that it believes in adult franchise. Those people who are being denied a vote are young men and women and the elderly citizens of our community: One group will contribute to the future of our State and the other group has made a tremendous contribution to this State.

If one were to take note of the comments made in the debate, one would believe that the Country Shire Councils Association has no attitude on the question of adult franchise. That is entirely wrong, because the Country Shire Councils Association has expressed some reservations about the matter and has been supported by the members of the Opposition in their denigration of the Minister for Local Government. They have been sponsored by members of the Opposition. It can be said that the Country Shire Councils Association does not advocate acceptance of the package put forward at present. That is not correct and I wish to demonstrate to members the reason that is not correct.

That association has a management committee which has expressed its opinion. I add to my comment on this matter the fact that Mr Ward at the great eastern ward conference of the Country Shire Councils Association on 26 April 1984 indicated there would be no special conference of local authorities to discuss the Bill—that was when the Bill had not passed through the other House. From what I can understand, the reason he made that remark was that the matter had been adequately canvassed by local authorities, and their opposition was not firm. I understand a meeting will be called tomorrow to discuss the proposition of adult franchise.

One wonders what the reason is for the sudden turnaround, particularly after the clearly enunciated statement of the management committee and the knowledge that local authorities are well aware of what is contained in the Bill. There is no doubt that the whole package will be of great service to local authorities in this State. I am not saying this because we are the only State which does not have adult franchise. The point I want to make is that every person in Western Australia is entitled to a vote because he is a person, not because of the contribution from the Commonwealth by way of grants or grants from the State to local authorities.

It is my view that people in country areas make a large contribution to the well-being, social welfare, and life in those areas, and they deserve some consideration for just being a member of the community and wishing to be involved.

I can remember the time when local authorities were licensing authorities as well. They collected licence fees for motorcycles, motor vehicles, vans,

trucks, and bicycles and no-one could make a greater contribution to the local authority than anyone who paid those licence fees.

I would like to go a step further and mention that local authorities also received grants from the Main Roads Department and that money came from petrol taxes. If one wishes to compare those fees with the rates paid by some property owners in the community, one would find that the fees would be higher, and one would understand that in country areas the involvement of the whole community is needed for the local authority to survive. These areas of contribution were the main support of the local authority. I acknowledge that the rate collections would have contributed much more money than would the allocations from licence fees or petrol taxes.

During the Whitlam Government years, direct grants to local authorities were instituted. In the two decades before that time those grants were refused. The grant came from the personal income tax component at a rate of two per cent, but it was not until 1975, and the Whitlam Government, that these additional grants were made to local authorities.

Members should surely understand that local authorities receive contributions from three avenues as well as from rates. The Australian Council of Local Government is making every endeavour to have the proportion of personal income tax increased from two per cent to four per cent, so that there is a greater sharing from taxes. I do not want anyone to be confused by the fact that licence fees are now collected by a central authority, or to think that that component has disappeared from the grants to local government, because it has not. It is tied to the Commonwealth grants to the State and at the State level, through the Main Roads Department to the local authorities. The same applies to petrol tax.

There is a growing awareness among parliamentarians in Australia that local government has a much more important role to play than it is playing at present. Members opposite may describe this package, with the exception of the adult franchise provisions, as being an advancement towards the good functioning of local authorities. I believe now, as I did 30 years ago when I was first elected to local government, that all people are entitled to vote. I would not like members opposite to believe that local authorities oppose this provision; I am talking about the councillors themselves.

Hon. Tom Knight: Only 99 per cent of them.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: When one lives in the country one realises that instead of having one-vote-one-value, country people have one vote and

no value. That is the assistance we have received in the country from the previous Administration. That is the sort of comment made in the countryside because that is how the previous Government treated country people. It behaved in cavalier fashion, and members opposite suggest some people are not entitled to vote. Perhaps Mr Knight has not studied the basis for the agreement put forward by the management committee in regard to this Bill.

The management committee has already indicated to the Minister that it will recommend adult franchise reforms to its members. The reforms will provide for two electoral rolls, one prepared by the Chief Electoral Officer, containing a list of all adults, and the other a ratepayers' roll prepared by the shire and providing an additional vote to resident ratepayers. That is the first proposal relating to adult franchise that has been approved by the management committee of the Country Shire Councils Association. The management committee's document goes on as follows—

In this context the Committee would accept as a 'ratepayer', those who at present hold eligibility to be registered on municipal rolls.

The Management Committee would agree to extending a vote to all resident adults, if:—

- (a) The existing franchise of owners and occupiers is retained.
- (b) The electors are entitled to cast a vote in every ward of a municipality in which they are qualified to be an elector.
- (c) The existing provisions relating to the closing of the municipal roll are retained.
- (d) The present franchise for loan polls is retained.
- (e) The present eligibility for election to Council is not extended.
- (f) An elector receives a vote if registered on the Chief Electoral Officer's Roll, and an additional vote if on the Ratepayers' Roll.

We can debate these matters for some considerable time, but one important point has come out of the management committee's report; that is, it agrees with adult franchise. The document goes on—

- (g) The Minister desists from adjusting ward boundaries to equalise the number of people in each ward. This may be appropriate to the Metropolitan area but it is not appropriate in some of the less populated country shires.

The committee is suggesting a compromise and some adjustment of ward boundaries in metropolitan areas, and further consideration of the matter in country shires. I endorse the proposition—not that there should be any alteration in the metropolitan area—that consultation should take place with country shires over the distribution of ward boundaries. I understand that ward boundaries have been made an issue on occasions in relation to this matter. I have consulted the Minister and his department and suggested that before any decision is made, each local authority should be consulted individually.

Hon. P. H. Lockyer: Like they did in Carnarvon.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: Then if the boundaries are to be adjusted, it will be with the agreement of the local authority.

Hon. P. H. Lockyer interjected.

Several members interjected.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: I am being sidetracked—

The PRESIDENT: Order! The member should ignore the interjections.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: Some local authorities have seen their way clear to distribute ward boundaries so that a more equitable ward system operates. Such a system would recognise the disadvantage of those who live in smaller centres or communities, but who have continuous representation within their local authority area.

Hon. P. H. Lockyer: Which ones?

Hon. J. M. BROWN: A person from the Shire of Kondinin told me the other day the shire had effectively carried out such a redistribution, as had the local authority in Merredin. I do not want to suggest that local authorities are not endeavouring to work towards a more equitable system. I am suggesting that consultation should take place before any changes are implemented and that there should be agreement with local authorities individually over the distribution of ward boundaries. I do not think anyone would want to refuse that request, but it is being used as a red herring in the deliberations about adult franchise, and it is entirely wrong.

Hon. Tom Knight: It is entirely correct. If you look at Lake Grace and Carnarvon you will find that is so.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: I wonder who else besides the young and old are disfranchised from local government. The country shires have suggested the following—

young men and women living with their parents or in groups,
elderly persons living with their families,

persons living in boarding houses, hotels or institutions.

That could be further extended to the police officer who lives in the police station, and the headmaster of the school.

Hon. P. H. Lockyer: The headmaster gets a vote because he is an occupier.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: Like the Hon. Norman Moore, he may have been eligible for election to Parliament for the area in which he taught, but he could not stand as a candidate for local government elections or vote in them.

It is clear that the Country Shire Councils Association agrees with the principle of adult franchise. I advise members that many local authorities agree with that principle and I have been given to understand that the Town of Narrogin has passed a resolution supporting it. I am not in a position to ask local authorities how they will vote.

Several members interjected.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: The Shire of Kondinin—

The PRESIDENT: Order! If the Hon. Phillip Lockyer and the Hon. Kay Hallahan wish to exchange information, I suggest they use the services of the postal department rather than call across this Chamber. The Hon. Jim Brown.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: The suggestion that adult franchise will have a harmful effect on local authorities has come from minority groups. The Country Shire Councils Association suggested that adult franchise could result in miners in remote areas taking over the control of local authorities. The Country Shire Councils Association's reason for its opposition is as follows—

That non-ratepayers could be elected to Council and levy rates on others.

This is contrary to the democratic proposition that there should be no representation without taxation.

I have demonstrated my views on that subject. All taxes are included—motor vehicle and petrol tax form a significant part of our overall taxation.

I am sure that members are not aware of the background in relation to the manner in which local authorities obtain their income. I know members are aware that without the direct grants from personal income tax, local authorities would not be able to function. Local authorities are aware of that also and that is why I sincerely support the Australian Council of Local Government in its endeavours to have the direct grants from personal income tax increased from two per cent to four per cent in order that the third arm of Govern-

ment—the grass roots of Government—can extend its services throughout the community.

The Country Shire Council Association's perspective states—

That non-ratepayers will be accorded equal status in municipal elections and loan polls as ratepayers.

If voters are not accountable in their choice of candidate through receipt of a rate assessment, there would be no curb in supporting candidates with the more extravagant promises.

Many mining districts, vast in area but sparsely populated, have large congregations of itinerant workers, in subsidised housing, and unaffected by rate levels.

While many of these are eligible to vote at the present time, they have not the inclination, but there needs to be some protection to long term residents in the distribution of ward boundaries.

Business people with shops in a municipality, and who pay rates either directly or indirectly . . . but reside in another district . . . will be disenfranchised.

Further on it reads—

Ratepayers with land in more than one ward will be limited to voting in one ward.

That outlines the association's opposition, but in general it applauds the proposition of adult franchise. I have not heard anything to the contrary from local authorities.

I do not want to pre-empt any decisions which may result from deliberations that will take place at tomorrow's conference—a conference which I will attend. However, I inform the House that I and other members believe that local councils should accept the provision regarding adult franchise.

Hon. P. H. Lockyer: Councils?

Hon. J. M. BROWN: Yes, there are councils which have expressed the view that there should be adult franchise. Mr Lockyer would know that, for several reasons, I would not pre-empt any decision at tomorrow's deliberations. If I were to mention in this House the names of those people who supported adult franchise, they would be marked men tomorrow.

I do not want to get away from the important issue of adult franchise because we are talking about people from all walks of life. The population in country areas is declining.

Hon. H. W. Gayfer: Do you know that the Bill was introduced in the Assembly on 2 May and the

pamphlet from which you are quoting was put out in April?

Hon. J. M. BROWN: Discussions between the Minister for Local Government and local authorities have been proceeding on this subject. Therefore, the local authorities understand what is taking place. The pamphlet which a member seems to think is out of date was sent to me on 12 April 1984. It is addressed to all executive members and town and shire clerks and reads—

Enclosed copies of a pamphlet which re-fines and clarifies the CSCA Management Committee's response to the Adult Franchise section of the Minister's package.

This pamphlet has been sent to all members of Parliament.

Would you please inform your Council accordingly.

Yours Sincerely
Ted

Ted, is Mr Ted Chown, who was the former Shire Clerk of the Shire of Esperance. He is now the Secretary of the Country Shire Councils Association which shares an office with the Local Government Association, the Secretary of which is Mr Dick Leggo. Mr Chown was a capable administrator of the Shire of Esperance and I am sure that he will do an excellent job as Secretary of the Country Shire Councils Association.

The pamphlet forwarded to members of the association by Mr Chown would have been sent under the direction of the association and that is the reason I quoted from it.

The other correspondence I received was a joint letter from the Country Shire Councils Association and the Local Government Association, under the signatures of Ted Chown and Dick Leggo, and it reads as follows—

SPECIAL CONFERENCE

to be held in the Golden Ballroom at the Sheraton-Perth Hotel at 10.30 a.m. on Friday, 18 May, 1984 to discuss the Local Government Amendment Bill 1984.

I received two other letters from local authorities within my electorate—the South-East Province—which covers the area from Kellerberrin to Kalgoorlie to Salmon Gums. The letters I received were from the Shire of Nungarin and the Shire of Kellerberrin. I telephoned the shires concerned, but, unfortunately, the Shire Clerk at Kellerberrin was not available. However, I spoke with Mr Harrower, the newly appointed Shire Clerk to the Shire of Nungarin, a gentleman who is undertaking his duties in an efficient manner. We spoke about what difference adult franchise would make to Nungarin. He advised that no more than 20

people would be affected and that there were about 250 electors in that shire.

I certainly endorse the continuation of local authorities in country areas, particularly in small country areas. I think that country members on both sides of the House understand the diminishing activities in the communities. The one bright spark in the Nungarin area is that at least the local authority, as the centre of operations, distributes its knowledge and benefits for social well-being within the community. I recently mentioned Tammin which, according to the latest census, has shown the most dramatic downturn in the number of residents in the area. We cannot afford to do without these small local authorities such as Dardanup or Westonia. It is essential to have them in the community and for the people in those communities to be involved. The greatest involvement we can allow those people, apart from their going on working bees for the social benefit of the community, is to give them a vote and a voice in deciding how the community shall be run.

It was a refreshing change to note that a young man of 23 years of age was recently elected to the council of the City of Fremantle. I am always pleased to see young people taking a keen and active interest in local government. We know that there are many young people with capabilities but they have neither the resources nor the time to spend in local government. I commend any person who is prepared to offer himself as a candidate, whether successful or not, for being prepared to make a contribution to the community.

Local authorities in small communities deserve the full backing of the people within their communities. That is why adult franchise is more essential in country areas than in other parts of the State. Adult franchise is not just a policy of the Labor Party; it has been considered by many people for a long time. It has been endorsed by the Country Shire Councils Association. If the association wants to deny that, it should advise its members to deny their support. If one considers the additional voters who would be involved in Kondinin, for example, no more than 50 people would be added to the roll.

The Minister for Local Government has shown a very positive attitude towards adult franchise. He has been prepared to consult with the authorities and has been quite firm in his support of the views I am now endorsing on adult franchise. That is one part of the package. There are four other parts in the Bill which are certainly worthy of consideration.

One of those deals with electoral provisions and another with the rating options. The Hon. Phil Pental referred to a pilot scheme for differential

rating. I know that that has been one of the bugbears of local authorities; they did not have differential rating. It begs the question: Why not have differential rating? I believe it has not been done because local government has never had the confidence of either the Government or the Local Government Department. In other words, local authorities were not trusted with differential rating. It was thought that it might be a means by which some people would be unfairly rated higher than others. That is the only view I can take as a result of the reports made over the last 10 or 12 years. Mr Pendal is correct in saying that perhaps the pilot scheme needs further revision; that is proposed in the Bill. It allows the Minister to give approval in the first instance on the proviso that 75 per cent of local authorities agree in the initial stages.

I would like to see both areas removed from the Bill, but that is a breakaway from the usual practice of not allowing differential rating. I think it is a step in the right direction and most councils would unanimously agree to differential rating. While there are politics involved in local government, and no-one would deny that, councillors generally take a bipartisan approach in their deliberations concerning the activities of the community. The rating options that have been referred to are a very important step within the framework of differential rating. Of course, the maximum rating figure has always been a matter of concern. A flexible allowance on maximum and minimum rating is contained in the Bill.

Several members interjected.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: I remind Mr Gayfer that we are talking about 1984; the Labor Party is in Government and the Minister for Local Government is improving the lot of local government, which is something the Opposition has never been prepared to do.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I remind those honourable members interjecting that it is quite obvious that the member addressing the Chair is conscious of the time and is endeavouring to conclude his speech. I suggest to members that they do not interfere with that.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: We both have messages to give, Mr President, and I appreciate your message. My message to the House is that the Opposition has never been prepared to give these concessions to local authorities; I do not think it trusted them although it has been in power for 21 of the last 25 years and has done nothing in this direction. The proposed measure will allow local authorities to operate more economically. Mr Gayfer would deprive the CBH workers of the

adult franchise package being offered because they may not qualify for a vote under the property franchise system.

Several members interjected.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: I have listened patiently over the past 15 months to members of the Opposition who do not appear to understand that they are in Opposition. I do not very often get an occasion to speak in the House and usually suffer the comments of Opposition members in the hope that we shall receive some co-operation with regard to legislation for which the people of Western Australia gave us a mandate when we were elected to Government.

Hon. P. H. Lockyer: It is your first speech since you were elected.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: I am really amazed; Mr Lockyer has decided that this is my first speech since the Government was elected. Mr Lockyer speaks *ad nauseum* whether he is sitting down or on his feet. He seems to think that because I am on my feet for the first time this year, I should not make a speech. Every member has the right to make his contribution to a debate in a manner that he thinks fit.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The honourable member knows he is getting no objection from me.

Hon. J. M. BROWN: There is an initiative to give councils currently rating on unimproved values the opportunity to change to gross rental values. This is worthy of lengthy debate. I would not like to see the system of gross rental values introduced into local authorities in the country areas because it has no application there in the majority of instances I know of. Some local authorities operate on gross rental values in the town areas, but in the rural areas unimproved capital values are used. Some local authorities use UCV right throughout the shire districts. This is one place where caution should be exercised. There should be no hurry to go into gross rental values as against unimproved capital values.

The fourth measure in the second package is that under gross rental values the rental value of residential property is based on five per cent of the site value under the Valuation of Land Act. That measure is to be reformed, and I think it has already been mentioned by the Hon. Phil Pendal when he talked about the situation of people in coastal towns and on river frontages. I will not enter into debate on that. That is another package which the Government has brought forward.

Urban farmlands are also to continue to be rated on that basis, whether owner-occupied or otherwise, provided the bulk of the owner's living is made from that land.

The final matter is greater autonomy for local government. Some of the options which have been put forward were discussed at council level, and in some instances it has been said it is not very much autonomy at all. But if it is a step towards greater autonomy in local government, it is the right step. Local government in Western Australia will be rewarded by the provisions of the Bill, but I will be listening to the discussions of the elected councillors. I do not believe the opposition to the Bill reflects the real opinion of the people of Western Australia, particularly those who have the right to vote and do nothing about it. It is a refreshing change to see such a progressive step to help the third arm of government, and it deserves the support of the full House.

Debate adjourned, on motion by the Hon. Margaret McAleer.

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE: SPECIAL

HON. D. K. DANS (South Metropolitan—Leader of the House) [12.23 p.m.]: I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 29 May.

Question put and passed.

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE: ORDINARY

HON. D. K. DANS (South Metropolitan—Leader of the House) [12.24 p.m.]: I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Community Welfare: Communicare Organisation

HON. KAY HALLAHAN (South-East Metropolitan) [12.25 p.m.]: I would like to bring to the attention of the House a disturbing incident which occurred in an agency which serves the people in my electorate. It is a very well known and well respected welfare agency called Communicare, which is supported by a number of community groups and churches. It was, in fact, the creation of a social worker named Norm Williams, who had a vision of a welfare agency which would not only provide for people with urgent needs, but also give people an opportunity to learn how they themselves could provide and understand systems so that they would not be so disadvantaged.

I am sure members would agree that, in the long term, it is by understanding the systems by which we live that people's rights within those systems are safeguarded.

A very disturbing thing happened on Monday afternoon this week. Norm Williams was sacked by the board of management for reasons which I regard as very disturbing. In welfare circles there is a great understanding that while it might be

necessary to give handouts to people to alleviate difficult situations, in the long term it is not the solution to an ongoing problem. For an agency to do something worthwhile, it must give people some skills by which to live. Apparently, in that agency the board of management has changed from that vision of lifting people's skills and abilities to care for themselves and their families to a management model, which is quite inappropriate for a welfare agency.

I bring this to the attention of the House because I think members should be aware of this sort of movement in their own electorates if they have a care for the people in disadvantaged circumstances.

Secondly, I want recorded in this House the very good work done by Norm Williams, not only through Communicare and the very fine network of support for disadvantaged people in the South-East Metropolitan Province and neighbouring provinces, but also in respect of the benefits of research. He has set up data collection systems. His agency has been one which has co-operated with the new initiatives from the Federal Government. That agency has been well-regarded by both the previous Government and the present Government, and it has been involved in the distribution of Government funds.

I know the Hon. Phil Pental shares my concern and my commendation of the work of Norm Williams.

Hon. Fred McKenzie: So do I.

Hon. KAY HALLAHAN: So does the Hon. Fred McKenzie, I know. So, too, would anybody who has had dealings with that agency. I record my very great concern for the future direction of that agency and its ability to serve the people in my electorate in the future. I leave the matter to rest there.

Police Union: Comments of Premier

HON. I. G. PRATT (Lower West) [12.28 p.m.]: I do not believe the House should adjourn until I make mention of three things which happened yesterday and which I think this House should consider and be aware of.

The first happened just after we started to sit yesterday morning, about 11.05 a.m. I left the Chamber to answer a telephone call from a Mr Bill Powell from Marvel Loch. In leaving the Chamber I wondered firstly who he was, and secondly, why he wanted to speak to me from Marvel Loch. In actual fact I found he comes from a part of Armadale within my province.

Secondly, I soon found out why he wanted to contact me as his local member of Parliament. He

asked me if I had read *The West Australian* of 15 May. I said I had. He said, "Did you see what the Premier had to say to the Police Union concerning coalminers from northern England?" I said that frankly I did not. He said, "He was speaking disparagingly of members of the Police Union, and in doing so he likened them to coal miners from northern England".

I undertook to obtain a copy of the paper and read the report in detail. The gentleman was extremely concerned about the matter. He has worked on mining projects in Australia since he came from England, and he considers that he has contributed considerably to his adopted country. He objects most strongly to the Premier using a reference to people of his type in a disparaging manner.

My constituent asked me what I thought he should do to express his concern about the matter. I said I thought he should write a letter to the Premier demanding an apology. Then he said, "Well, what are you going to do about it as my local member of Parliament?" I made the comment that there was very little I could do other than bring the matter to the notice of the Parliament during the adjournment debate.

I share the concern of my constituent that the Premier should single out people who happen to be coalminers from northern England. In fact, many people of that type have come to Australia and have contributed to our community. It is not right for the Premier to single them out as a disparaging example in reflecting on people with whom he does not agree.

I checked *The West Australian*, and the *Daily News* also carried a report which indicated that the Premier, in a rebuke to the secretary, said that some union members such as the secretary (Mr Jock Fraser) sounded as though they had come from the coalmines of northern England.

The second matter on the same theme happened during a debate in this House, and in an interjection, the Hon. Tom Stephens said, "Masters, go back to England".

Hon. G. E. Masters: I heard it. I was terribly upset.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. I. G. PRATT: The suggestion coming from two members of the Government is that there appears to be something wrong with people from England, and particularly that there is something wrong with a person's being a coalminer from northern England.

Hon. D. K. Dans: Maggie Thatcher has a few thoughts about that.

Hon. Kay Hallahan: Have you checked that with the Premier?

Hon. I. G. PRATT: No, I have not checked it with the Premier, but I have two separate reports from two journalists who covered the incident and they both reported in very similar words.

Hon. J. M. Brown: Have you got the radio report as well?

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. I. G. PRATT: The Hon. Sam Piantadosi should be terribly worried in case the Hon. Tom Stephens and the Premier start discriminating against Italian migrants in this country.

Several members interjected.

Hon. D. K. Dans: That is the very reason we are bringing in the discrimination Bill.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. I. G. PRATT: If the Hon. Tom Stephens and the Premier decide to treat Mr Piantadosi in that manner, I will support him as well.

Hon. S. M. Piantadosi: Mr Moore is included as well because of some of the remarks he made last week in Scarborough.

Hon. I. G. PRATT: The third event yesterday which shows the hypocrisy of the Government relates to an answer given to the Hon. Phillip Pandal on another matter. The Minister said that the Government does not support or encourage groups which practise or preach racial discrimination. That was at a time when the Premier referred in a disparaging way to coalminers from northern England and the Hon. Tom Stephens, from his seat behind the Leader of the House, told Mr Masters to go back to England.

Hon. G. E. Masters: What a terrible statement to make. Disgraceful, that is!

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. I. G. PRATT: I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this matter before the House and the people of Western Australia, because I believe we should judge this Government not by what it says in its flowery speeches, but by what it says and means in statements like the ones to which I have referred.

HON. TOM STEPHENS (North) [12.33 p.m.]: I was not going to rise in this debate until I was provoked by Mr Pratt's remarks. I want to make it quite clear that I have never in my life been linked with racist sentiments.

Hon. I. G. Pratt: Did you say it or not?

Hon. TOM STEPHENS: Certainly I would like to encourage the Hon. Gordon Masters to go back to England, not because he is English, but because he has been a troublemaker in the field of indus-

trial relations since he has been here. My sentiments have nothing to do with his English origin.

I am almost a full-blooded Irishman, and I have some difficulties with my heritage as an Irishman in relation to English people, but not in regard to race. However, I would be quite pleased to see the tail end of Mr Masters; we could hope for a better future.

In relation to the Premier's comments, we are seeing some things in the coalmines in northern England today that we would not want to see repeated in this country. Elements of the Police Force seem to have expressed points of view that are more in line with the industrial relations climate that has been engendered and endangered by the Thatcher Government in the United Kingdom—

Hon. I. G. Pratt: Now you are getting into the police, too.

Hon. TOM STEPHENS: —rather than anything to do with the situation in this State.

It ill-behoves the Opposition—the party which is the home of racism in this country and in this State; the source of the racial hatred that springs from the shadow spokesperson against Aboriginal people, and the source of hatred that emanates from Canberra with people like Mr Peacock who races around the country trying to stir up

racism—to suggest that there is any racism left on this side of the Chamber.

It is the Opposition from which racism fulminates and flows across the nation.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I remind honourable members that this is the adjournment debate.

HON. G. E. MASTERS (West) [12.35 p.m.]: I am forced to respond briefly to the remarks made by the Hon. Tom Stephens. What he said yesterday should not have been said in this House by any member of Parliament from either side of the House. The comments came from a man who seems to be bent on raising that sort of hysterical statement in debates. He referred to my being against the unions or being the cause of much of the industrial disputation. Let me say that neither Mr Tom Stephens nor any member of the Government will see me out of this country unless I wish to go. I will continue in my efforts to protect the people in the workforce, people whom the friends of Mr Stephens are oppressing.

HON. N. F. MOORE (Lower North) [12.36 p.m.]: I regret that the Hon. Tom Stephens made such outlandish remarks about me. If he would like to say them outside the House, I will take the appropriate action.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 12.37 p.m.