

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 29th June, 1949.

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PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

Mr. Fox and Building Operations and Building Materials Control Act Amendment (Continuance) Bill (No. 2).

MR. FOX (South Fremantle) [2.3]: When the Minister for Housing was speaking in reply last night on the Building Operations and Building Materials Control Act Amendment (Continuance) Bill (No. 2) he made certain remarks in reference to something I said when speaking on the second reading. My complaint was that a man who had a sick daughter and who lived in South-street, Beaconsfield, was unable to get 750 bricks owing to the removal of controls. The Minister sent for the file and I understand he read out a letter which was received from the lady concerned saying that she did not want a McNeess home because her father had built a flat.

I made no complaint against the Housing Commission at all, and in fact, when speaking, I said that the McNeess Housing Trust had offered the lady a home but that she was too ill to take it. That is a fact. She had been offered a home six or eight months previously but the Minister made no reference to my complaint about the man being unable to obtain bricks, and my complaint was solely in regard to the fact that a man could not get a supply of bricks because of the removal of controls.

Mr. Marshall: The Minister always does misrepresent the position anyhow.

THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING (Hon. R. R. McDonald—West Perth) [2.4]: I regret if I misunderstood the terms of the hon. member's remarks. He gave me a memorandum which I passed on to the Housing Commission and the file was sent up to me, drawing my attention to the letter which I quoted and which appeared to show that the lady had been satisfactorily placed.

Mr. Fox: My complaint was about the man not being able to get bricks. I knew all about the other part of the business.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I will make further inquiries on the aspect mentioned by the hon. member and will advise him.

The SPEAKER took the Chair at 2.0 p.m., and read prayers.

QUESTIONS.

TOBACCO.

As to Production Costs and Orderly Marketing.

Mr. HOAR asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) Does he remember that early in January this year a conference was held in Manjimup between the tobacco growers and the manufacturers and buyers of tobacco?

(2) That the object of the conference was to reach agreement on a basic price for all grades of leaf from which auctions could then commence?

(3) That the conference was a failure and no agreement was reached?

(4) That, as a result of this, I suggested to him by letter dated 20/1/49, that the State Government should institute an inquiry into the costs of production in this State, and that he replied that the matter was receiving attention?

(5) If so, what action has the Government taken to protect tobacco growers against exploitation?

(6) Does he know that as a result of the Government's apparent lack of interest in the plight of growers a large manufacturer and grower of tobacco is buying up tobacco on the farms at 2s. 9d. per lb.?

(7) That this practice, if persisted in, will destroy the competitive spirit between buyers and make future auctions, a farce, and that the growers will be the principal ones to suffer?

(8) If so, does the Government propose to take any action to promote orderly marketing that will give a fair price to all? If so, what?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The meeting mentioned took place at Manjimup on the 16th November, 1948, between the committee of the W.A. Tobacco Growers' Association and manufacturers' representatives, representing all leaf buying tobacco manufacturers in Australia.

(2) The object of the conference was to consider a marketing scheme originally put forward by Victorian tobacco growers for their State. The scheme was accepted by the Victorian growers and the Australian buyers. It was subsequently proposed by the buyers to all other Australian tobacco

growing areas. The basis of the scheme was that leaf be appraised by brokers' and growers' representatives at reserve values comprising the Australian Tobacco Board Table of Limits, plus 40 per cent. These values were to become the minimum prices and manufacturers were prepared to guarantee that they would not buy below those prices. The leaf was subsequently to be auctioned and the grower paid auction values. The scheme in effect gave the grower the advantage of competitive buying with a guaranteed minimum price. It was suggested that the scheme operate for three years, with the provision to vary the minimum price in accordance with changes in production costs.

(3) The conference was a failure and no agreement was reached because growers were entirely non co-operative. On comparative quality with the 1947-48 crop the guaranteed minimum price would have been just over 3s. per pound as compared with 3s. 4½d. actually received under Australian Tobacco Board appraisalment. On top of the basic price, competitive bidding could have been expected substantially to increase values. In fact, at the meeting, a catalogue of a Queensland auction sale was produced showing that the average value received at auction was 50 per cent. above the earlier appraisalment value. It appeared that the growers could look forward to increased values at auction and were offered a further protection of a guaranteed minimum price for a period of three years. The growers' attitude was that a guaranteed minimum price was not necessary if auction values followed the Queensland trend. This would no doubt be the case, as long as the Australian leaf market remains as it is at present. However, if economic conditions were to change so that dollar leaf became more readily available, or a cheap source of imported leaf was to be found, the minimum price guaranteed would be a very useful safeguard. The growers were prepared to negotiate only on the basis of a minimum price comprising Australian Tobacco Board Table of Limits plus 60 per cent. Manufacturers considered the basis too high and the conference broke down. The Government favoured the scheme, made a departmental officer available to assist negotiations, and was prepared to allow him to assist with the implementation of the scheme.

(4) To be of value, the cost of production survey would have to be on a Commonwealth-wide basis. This matter is being taken up with the Minister for Agriculture and Commerce.

(5) It is in the hands of the growers themselves to prevent exploitation by selling in the auction market.

(6) It is known that a large local manufacturer and grower has bought two tobacco crops on the farms at 2s. 9d. per pound. These growers were not forced to sell and there is every reason to believe that if they had submitted their crops to auction they would have received a considerably greater price. Advice has been received that in Victoria a manufacturer has been buying leaf on the farms, under similar conditions to the above cases, at an average price of 4s. per pound. A report of a tobacco leaf auction recently held in Queensland advises that the average price realised was 5s. 7d. per pound. There is no reason to believe that if leaf is submitted to auction in this State the price realised would not be at least in the vicinity of the Queensland average quoted.

(7) The Government is greatly perturbed at these sales on the farms. It is felt that if this practice continues and that the total offering of leaf for auction is substantially reduced, some of the smaller Eastern States buyers might not consider it worth travelling the great distance to the Western Australian auction, and competition may be greatly reduced with resultant lower prices. It is felt that it is in the growers' own interests to submit their leaf at auction, and that it is a matter for the growers themselves to handle rather than the Government.

(8) The matter of orderly marketing will be considered. In the meantime, growers should be advised to submit their leaf to auction.

COAL.

(a) *As to Collie Gasification.*

Mr. MARSHALL asked the Minister representing the Minister for Mines:

(1) What progress, if any, has been made with the experimental work of the gasification of Collie coal?

(2) Has any modification been made to the plant used by Mr. Fox?

(3) If so, what are the modifications, and what officer was responsible for the alterations?

(4) What officer, if any, is proceeding with the experiment of the gasification of Collie coal?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING replied:

(1) The experimental work designed to show that Collie coal is suitable for gasification with steam and oxygen under pressure by the Lurgi process was completed 12 months ago.

The Fuel Technologist and the Coal Panel have consulted with English and German authorities on the process, all of whom agree that Collie coal is suitable for this type of gasification. It was shown that Collie coal did not clinker and would not agglomerate into an impervious mass under the conditions of gasification.

This has been considered by the Coal Panel and the Department of Industrial Development is at present obtaining information on the cost of installation of the Lurgi plant and the likely time for delivery and erection.

It has also been shown that Collie coal is not suitable for gasification in ordinary retorts.

The Fuel Technologist is waiting until the State Electricity Commission can make a water gas plant available at East Perth so that quantitative efficiency tests can be carried out on the manufacture of blue water gas from Collie coal. Former experiments carried out on the manufacture of blue water gas from Collie coal by Mr. Fox were not of a quantitative nature. The Fuel Technologist is also studying the hydrogenation of Collie coal at high pressure.

(2) The plant used by Mr. Fox was adapted for low temperature coking experiments on Collie coal. It was not considered useful to modify it for gas making purposes as it is only a simple type of blue water gas plant of which there are three more efficient, elaborate and modern examples at East Perth Gas Works and one in course of construction at Fremantle, all capable of much larger outputs than the plant constructed by Mr. Fox.

(3) The only modification was the adaptation to the manufacture of low temperature coke from Collie coal. The Fuel Technologist, Mr. Donnelly, was responsible for the adaptation.

(4) The Fuel Technologist and his staff in consultation with Dr. Serge Uusna, who is at Wundowie. Dr. Uusna was under-manager of the large Lurgi gasification plant at Brux in Czechoslovakia during the war.

(b) As to Farms on Wilga Reservation.

Mr. MAY asked the Minister representing the Minister for Mines:

(1) Concerning the Wilga Coal Basin and his reply to a question dated the 23rd June, 1949, will he state why the surface of the land reserved in the Wilga Coal Basin cannot be utilised for farming purposes, the same as similar coal-bearing land is used in England and other countries?

(2) Does he consider that the reservation of this land is in the best interest of the State?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING replied:

(1) Recent experience shows necessity for coal-bearing land being retained by the Crown for coalmining purposes, owing to the provisions of the Mining Act.

(2) Yes.

(c) As to Stocks on Hand.

Hon. E. NULSEN asked the Minister for Works:

(1) How many tons of coal were on hand this morning at the Perth Power Station?

(2) How many tons of coal are on hand at the Gas Works?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) 11,732 tons at 8 a.m. on Wednesday morning, the 29th June, 1949, (650 tons received by rail ex Collie during 24 hours ended 8 a.m.).

(2) 3,200 tons at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, the 29th June, 1949.

HAY AND CHAFF.

As to Costs and Selling Price.

Mr. TRIAT asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) What is the price per ton for hay in stacks?

(2) What is the price per ton for cutting into chaff?

(3) What is the cost of chaff bags per ton of hay?

(4) What is the average cost of transport per ton to the metropolitan area?

(5) What is the selling price per ton of chaff f.a.q. Perth?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) This price fluctuates and under present conditions it is a question of what the grower asks.

(2) 30s. to 32s. 6d. a ton for cutting only.

(3) £2 14s. 6d. approximately a ton new bags.

(4) This figure has never been ascertained.

(5) Depends on No. 1. Average price today from a retailer to the user is about £16 a ton.

MOTORCARS.

As to Re-sales Trafficking.

Mr. NEEDHAM asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) Is he aware of the traffic in new motorears being re-sold at exorbitant prices shortly after purchase?

(2) Is he aware that new cars are being re-sold shortly after purchase at a profit of up to £200 per car?

(3) Will he take steps to put an end to this traffic, and thus save the public from being exploited?

The MINISTER replied:

Reports have been received that this trafficking is taking place and consideration is being given to ways and means of preventing it.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLIES.

As to Increased Charges.

Hon. E. NULSEN asked the Minister for Works:

Will he inform the House the average increase in charges for electricity over the whole scale of charges, and the increased rates for industrial power since the Government purchased the Perth City Electricity and Gas Department?

The MINISTER replied:

The average increase in charges for electricity over the whole scale of charges—31.61 per cent.

Increased rates for industrial power—38.53 per cent.

RAILWAYS.

(a) *As to Administrative Vacancies.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Railways:

(1) Is it the policy of the Government to appoint the majority of staff to fill vacancies in the administration section of the Government railways from recent arrivals in this State?

(2) Is any probationary period to be served before permanent appointment to recent and future vacancies?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No.

(2) Yes, where considered necessary.

(b) *As to Royal Commission's Recommendations.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Railways:

Is it the intention of the Government to implement the recommendations of the recent Royal Commission on Railways in respect to:

(1) Improving the relationship between staff and management;

(2) Provision of health inspector to attend to health and hygiene matters;

(3) Improving the method of controlling traffic?

The MINISTER replied:

The matter of giving effect to the recommendations of the Royal Commission is now receiving the attention of the Railway Commissioners.

BUS SERVICES.

(a) *As to Eden Hill and North Bassendean.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) Is he aware of the great inconvenience being caused the residents of Eden Hill and North Bassendean by the Federal Bus Co. not adhering to the schedule times for

bus services, also the non-running of schedule runs as instanced by the elimination of the 8.40 bus ex Bassendean on Monday the 20th inst. and the late running of the 8.30 bus on Tuesday the 21st instant?

(2) Will he call for a report from the Transport Board on this service?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No.

(2) Yes.

(b) *As to Eden Hill Fares.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) Is it a fact that the Federal Bus Service is charging 11d. for a single fare to Eden Hill as against 11d. for a return fare on the railways to Bassendean which also serves the same centre?

(2) If the answer is "Yes," will he institute inquiries to see if the bus fare is a just one?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) The Transport Board has already examined the whole position exhaustively prior to approving of the new schedule of fares on the Bassendean route.

(c) *As to Government Route, North Bassendean.*

Mr. BRADY asked the Minister for Transport:

In order to overcome the transport difficulties at Eden Hill and North Bassendean, will he arrange for the Government buses to travel to and from Perth via Government Road and North Road picking up and setting down passengers en route?

The MINISTER replied:

No. All available buses are required to operate a limited service over already established transport routes in the metropolitan area.

BUILDING SUPPLIES.

As to Preference to North-West Contractors.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE asked the Minister for Works:

In view of the serious position obtaining because of the inability of contractors to obtain materials, and also shipping space,

will be arranged for some preferential treatment in the supply of materials being given to contractors in the North-West part of the State who are severely prejudiced in their attempts to complete Government contracts?

The MINISTER replied:

Every assistance is given to builders and contractors on Governmental work to secure materials, but there is no evidence that they have been severely prejudiced in their attempts to complete Government contracts.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That is nonsense.

EDUCATION.

(a) *As to Visual Instruction Section.*

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

(1) On what date was the Visual Instruction Section commenced by the Education Department?

(2) What was the commencing salary of Mr. Uren?

(3) On what date were additional officers appointed to this branch of the Education Department, and what were the salaries of such officers upon taking up duties?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) September, 1945.

(2) £705 per annum.

(3) M. Richardson, 6th March, 1946, £197 p.a.; R. Campbell, 10th February, 1947, £438 p.a.; A. McPhee, 10th February, 1947, £474 p.a.; R. Clamp, 20th October, 1947, £400 p.a.; B. Williams, 16th February, 1948, £137 p.a.; B. Marshall, 16th February, 1948, £405 p.a.; J. Smith, 19th July, 1948, £590 p.a.; A. Connett, 23rd August, 1948, £420 p.a.; M. Andrew, 6th October, 1948, £245 p.a.; D. Bertenshaw, 1st November, 1948, £111 p.a.; R. Schenberg, 26th April, 1949, £215 p.a.

(b) *As to School Leaving Age.*

Mr. KELLY asked the Minister for Education:

When does the Government intend to raise the school leaving age to 15 years and thus give effect to legislation passed in 1933 and election promises made in February, 1947?

The MINISTER replied:

As soon as accommodation and staffing are reasonably adequate for the purpose.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: A very sensible answer.

SCHOOLS OF AGRICULTURE.

As to Committee of Inquiry.

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

(1) Who appointed the committee which is to inquire concerning the work being done by the instructors and students at Narrogin and Denmark Schools of Agriculture?

(2) Who comprise the committee?

(3) What is the object of the inquiry?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The Honorary Minister for Agriculture.

(2) Dr. Underwood, (Chairman); Mr. Edmondson, Mr. Worner, (Education Department); Mr. Russell, Mr. T. Wilson—nominated by the Honorary Minister for Agriculture; Mr. McKenzie Clark, (Agricultural Department); Mr. Nunn, (Secretary); (Agricultural Department).

I may add that the work of the committee is not confined to the question of the Narrogin and Denmark Schools of Agriculture.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Did the Minister for Education have any say?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: The matter was discussed with me and with the Acting Director of Education before the arrangements were made.

COAL STRIKE.

(a) *As to Power for Domestic Refrigerators.*

Mr. LESLIE (without notice) asked the Minister for Works:

Is he able to give the House a definite answer to the question I asked last night as to whether it will be possible to make power available for a short period each day for the use of householders who have refrigerators. The Minister promised to investigate the matter, and I would like to know whether he has done so.

The MINISTER replied:

It was necessary yesterday to inform the hon. member that I did not anticipate being able to give him a favourable reply. I have had the matter investigated, as promised, but cannot vary the answer given yesterday.

(b) *As to Leave in Lieu of Unemployment.*

Mr. BOVELL (without notice) asked the Premier:

In view of the threatened unemployment throughout the State of many thousands of men and women owing to the present coal position, will the Premier give consideration to the granting of annual leave to employees of all Government departments before action is taken to suspend their employment, thus deferring hardship on innocent men, women and children who are not in any way responsible for the present industrial crisis?

The PREMIER replied:

Provided the industrial unions will agree to such a proposal, favourable consideration will be given to the request of any Government employee who desires to take annual leave, or pro rata annual leave, due to him in such circumstances. In view of the abnormal conditions, however, it would be necessary for workers who desire to avail themselves of this concession to give the departments adequate notice in order to permit of the calculation and payment of the appropriate amounts.

(c) *As to Electricity Supplies and Coal Consumption.*

Hon. J. T. TONKIN (without notice) asked the Minister for Works:

(1) What was the total quantity of coal in stock or in transit for the Electricity Commission as at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, the 28th June?

(2) How much coal would be required to maintain the existing rate of supply of electricity to enable industry to carry on beyond 6 a.m. on Wednesday, the 29th June, until mid-day on Saturday?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The quantity of coal at 8 a.m. Monday, the 27th June, 1949, including coal then known to be in transit was—

	Tons
Bunkers	320
Reserve bunkers	350
On ground (approx. only)	10,500
On trucks, East Perth	797
In transit (known)	330
Total	12,297

Daily consumption had risen during the previous week to 950 tons. The actual quantity at 9 a.m. Tuesday was 11,946 tons, not including coal in transit, as it was not definitely known what that tonnage was.

(2) Approximately 3,250 tons to mid-day Saturday, and approximately 4,000 tons to midnight Saturday.

(d) *As to Discontinuance of Electricity Supplies.*

Hon. J. T. TONKIN (without notice) asked the Minister for Works:

(1) Is he aware that according to the figures he has supplied there is sufficient coal available to the State Electricity Commission to have enabled it to provide a full supply of electric power for the whole of this week and still have enough in reserve to maintain essential services for a further period of eight weeks?

(2) Does he not consider that the advantages to be gained by continuing a supply of power for the whole of this week are worth the risk that the present industrial trouble will not be overcome within eight weeks and that there would then be no coal for the generating of electric power for the maintenance of essential services?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) and (2) I do not like answering a question of this kind without notice. The joint talks of Cabinet and of everyone concerned in the matter of the rationing of electricity have been in keeping with the answers I have given to the several questions in regard to electricity—that is, that we could afford to carry on normally until today, as we have done, but that we could not carry the supply of electricity any further. I am inclined to think that, since the hon. member has made his calculations within the last five minutes, they are not of the same value as the decisions arrived at by Cabinet and the others concerned.

PETROL.

As to Rumour of Freezing Supplies.

Mr. SHEARN (without notice) asked the Premier:

(1) Is he aware that a widespread rumour has been circulated today that immediate freezing of petrol is to be introduced, in consequence of which many service stations have experienced an almost unprecedented rush for petrol supplies?

(2) Can he say whether there is any truth in such rumour?

(3) If not, will he make a statement to inform the public and thus assist in correcting what may otherwise seriously affect normal fuel supplies to the community?

The PREMIER replied:

(1) (2) and (3) I was not aware that there was such a rumour or that there had been a rush for petrol supplies today. So far as the State Government's intentions are concerned, they are not to take any action at present with regard to the freezing of petrol. I have not had any communication from the Prime Minister in this respect. My personal view is that there is no need for the public to panic and start hoarding petrol.

TIMBER INDUSTRY.

As to Amenities for Workers.

Mr. REYNOLDS (without notice) asked the Minister for Forests:

What progress, if any, is being made in providing amenities for timber workers?

The MINISTER replied:

The preliminary conference, to which I referred previously, was held recently under the chairmanship of the Conservator of Forests. At that conference were present representatives of the Timber Workers Union and the sawmillers. I have now received a written report from the Conservator setting out the result of the discussions. It is receiving my consideration with a view to further steps towards the provision of some scheme for amenities.

BILL—BUILDING OPERATIONS AND BUILDING MATERIALS CONTROL ACT AMENDMENT (CONTINUANCE) (No. 2).

Third Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING (Hon. R. R. McDonald—West Perth) I move:—

That the Bill be now read a third time.

HON. F. J. S. WISE (Gascoyne) [2.39]:

It is unfortunate that, in speaking for well over two hours in reply to the debate, the Minister made very little attempt to answer the many pertinent questions raised in relation to the Bill. The Minister, I fear, was handling his reply in the same manner as a legal man would handle the case of a guilty person. It is indeed unfortunate that the Minister, perhaps because of his undoubted ability and background, was able to dissociate himself entirely from the points of pertinent criticism and, in his reply, concentrate his efforts on those points that were less relevant and that suited his argument. The Minister made no attempt at all to get down to earth in connection with this very real problem. He reminded me of an aeroplane, in the air without any landing gear, unable to do other than flit around, make pretty passes and motions, which would certainly crash if it attempted to land. That is the position the Minister was in, as I will show the House.

It is obvious that in spite of the serious urgency of the position of building materials control, and the chaos that exists as regards their supply, the Minister is determined, because of other influences favourable to his view and Party, to continue to decontrol those commodities irrespective of the serious plight of those badly in need of them. It is not a bit of use the Minister pretending that decontrol has meant a satisfactory position. That is mere pretence and although the Minister, in the course of his speech, said that he continued to be in consultation with the Housing Commission on the question of decontrol, I am wondering just how much of its advice he takes. That is quite a different matter from being in consultation with it.

So much is the Minister out of touch with the seriousness of the materials supply position that I would invite him to ask into

conference with one member from his side, in addition to himself, and two members from this side, men of calibre, integrity and business capacity who are in association with these interests. I suggest the General Manager of Millars' Timber and Trading Company, the General Manager of the State Sawmills and the General Manager of Bunnings to see if there is any chance whatever of the Minister substantiating his statement as regards timber for home building.

Of course the information that he would get would show that there is indeed a chaotic condition existing with timber supplies and would indicate the impossibility of an ordinary person, or even the Government, obtaining the flow of materials essential to meet contracts in many parts of the State. So I repeat that the Minister is either ignoring the advice that he is receiving or being ill-advised. The Housing Commission, as such, must know, and I feel does know, the truth in the assertion made by members on this side of the House regarding the availability of timber, cement and bricks.

During the last week or two, since this debate commenced and publicity has been given in brief to the comments that have been made, I have received many letters from people advising me of their full support of my contentions and expressed views. I have received among those letters, comments from people who manage for the big distributors; people such as their district agencies and firms. I have one which expresses without any qualification the view that the leakage of essential home building materials since decontrol has meant rising costs due to materials being diverted to un-essential jobs and causing interruption to the continuous flow of materials to contractors in that district. So much so that these contractors will be forced to cease tendering or to ask for a very sharp increase in prices. That is typical of the comments being received and that particular comment comes from the manager of a large concern in a large South-western town of this State.

It is futile and foolish for the Minister to keep repeating that decontrol of timber, cement and bricks has meant an improvement in the position. It might assist him in believing it himself but it does not im-

press people who are trying to get the materials. One of the many cases I am handling is for the supply of timber for an ordinary house where a permit was approved. It was for a house in a country district and the application was lodged in 1947. The permit was issued on the 25th August and a complete order placed with a large firm in this State. However, in spite of continuous pressure on the firm by me—I repeat this is an order for a distant place—and even after shipping space had been procured in anticipation of the lodgment of cart notes, that order has not yet been completed for the ordinary sizes of timber used in home building.

I have other cases where, within recent months, a small quantity of 3 x 1½ in. and 3 x 2 in. has been ordered from a well-known co-operative firm—one of the largest in Perth as millers and merchants of timber—and we have been unable to get an assurance from them when they will be able to make delivery and eventually part of the order has had to be cancelled.

Regarding the foolish reply given by the Minister for Works today to my question that contractors are being assisted if they are in possession of Government contracts, I would say to him and his colleague the Minister for Education, that the only reason, at this stage why the school at Carnarvon is far from being in a position to be used, is because there has been no co-operation, and if any approach has been made then it has been impossible for the contractor to obtain the materials necessary. I would add that that contract is seven months overdue. The Minister for Housing will tell us that a contract has been approved for four homes to be erected at Carnarvon under the Commonwealth-State Rental Housing Scheme. The contract was approved months ago and yet he states that decontrol enables these people to get more materials and arrange their deliveries over many months. Of course the opposite is the fact and the result. The person who has the contract for Carnarvon received his first consignment on the last ship and it consisted of a wheelbarrow and six pieces of timber.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Good old control!

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: These men will suffer in exactly the same way as all country contractors are suffering for the very

reason that they can get neither locally nor in the metropolitan area a reasonably continuous flow of any sizes they so urgently need.

Mr. May: Quite right!

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: That is the position. The Government's desire to keep boosting not only its housing, but also its public works programme, must almost be causing a mental condition in the mind of the Director of Works because of the sheer inability of his staff and those under his direction to obtain the material necessary for those public works. There is no begging that question. It is either true or false. The Minister for Housing is not only out of touch with the materials supply position—he is not down to earth in that regard—but he is unaware of the seriousness of the circumstances under which the State contractors are unfortunately suffering. The costs which are involved in this waiting time are amounting to tens of thousands of pounds.

In some of these distant places, premiums have to be paid not only on the works but also to workers to attract them from where continuous employment might be offering. It also means that where delays occur, and where months elapse between shipments of essential materials, tremendously high retainers have to be paid which the contractors themselves must share with the Government as an added cost. And these added costs are incurred in districts not necessarily remote from the metropolitan area. That is, in spite of having ready access to all the timber yards and the cement works, they continue to suffer side by side with the community because of the Government's obvious desire to pretend to the public that decontrol has benefited the building programme.

The Minister airily threw aside the charges regarding the construction of fences. In fact, he said, "What matters it if a fence or two is constructed?" If the Minister will only seriously confer with those who advise him and who are supposed to know and do know, he will quickly alter his opinion on that point. Instead of that, he has made no attempt to understand the position of those seriously affected. Therefore, this Bill, so far as continuing control is concerned, is merely a pretence and a sham.

Yesterday the Minister made the statement that contractors have been assisted by the removal of controls. Tomorrow morning I could bring to him more contractors than his office would hold to show that that is not the position with people who have contracts with private owners for home building. When speaking on the second reading of the Bill I mentioned that it would not be possible to place an order in the city of Perth for 100 pieces of 3 x 2 for a two or three weeks' delivery. The Minister ignores all of those statements and selects points of little matter upon which to build his case and to boost the efforts of the Government regarding materials control and home building. I repeat that the contractors of the Public Works Department are at their wits' end to obtain material to continue the construction of public works. Let the Minister ask the Director of Works concerning that point and I am certain that my statement will be verified. But the Minister now prefers to blame all sorts of things, from the withdrawal of subsidies to the Commonwealth Government's policy of migration.

What is the use of looking for more red herrings? What is needed is a definite facing up to the real position. I think it showed much temerity on the part of the Minister to quote from an advertisement issued at the time of Mr. Willecock's 1943 election regarding his anticipation of home building. In 1943, when it was agreed by this House that hostilities were still close to us and the position still serious, Mr. Willecock decided that the Government should not seek an extension of time from Parliament but should face the electors. Whatever may have been in Mr. Willecock's mind as a possible first-year post-war housing programme, it was nothing compared with what the Minister for Housing and those associated with him confidently promised the people in their statements and Press advertisements two and a half years ago. I wonder whether that which I am about to read would be appropriately applicable to the present situation! I quote—

The Great Housing Muddle.

That certainly is appropriate.

For want of houses the people are living in garages or old Army camps.

Still appropriate!

Married couples, sometimes with families, are living in one room.

That is worse than ever.

Several families are living in one small house.

No alteration!

Are the people to blame? No! They have the money to build or pay rent. Are the builders to blame? No, they are ready to build immediately provided permits and materials are made available. The situation in the city is bad but in the country it is even worse. Vote Liberal.

Mr. May: Still appropriate!

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: That is the sort of advertisement for which the Minister for Housing is responsible and to which he is a party.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: And helped to write.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: Then he returns to the situation in the middle of the war years. Not after the war; not when he was condemning an amazing achievement by a Government from a standing start in 1945 and comparing that with what happened in 1947. But, of course, the Minister in his review of the circumstances during the whole of his speech conveniently forgot the war when he was making excuses for his Government and was using figures to illustrate the improved position. He even quoted the term of six years during the war upon which to base his statement of a comparison with the years since the war. His attention was called to that by interjection but he said, "Of course, there was a war on." However, the Minister did not desist in his attempt to mislead this House by quoting the figures for those six years of war which were comparable to the figures which, in his own words, would suggest a normal period.

It is quite idle and futile for such contentions to be raised and such misleading statements to be made when the two positions are not comparable. If the Minister were fair and were not still desirous of making of housing a political football, as his Party has done for several years, if he were satisfied to adopt a simple attitude, one could find not much basis for complaint. Will the Minister honestly cast his mind back to the days when there were no fires in the kilns, when it was extremely difficult to say just whether certain sawmills could continue to function or whether the cement works could

have an opportunity to add another kiln, where necessary, because there was no manpower available in the industry? Will the Minister be honest enough to say that, at that time, a stage of almost hopelessness had been reached, that no buildings were being undertaken, but that there was a prospect, as a result of the plans laid by his political opponents, of his achieving the things he now claims credit for?

If the Minister honestly wishes that picture to be presented, he will not only quote file extracts of what happened during the war, but will lay the file on the Table. That is what he should have done. Let us see not merely the page he quoted, but also the comments of those who assembled the information. If he quoted from official documents, it was his responsibility to place them on the Table, but he did not do so. I go further and say that the Minister yesterday not only used his figures in a subtle way, but also with deliberate intent misled the House.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: Oh, no!

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: The voice of Job! Let the Minister reply to what I am about to say. I have in my hand the table of figures the Minister quoted from. I asked him to place it on the Table and subsequently asked him for it. If my observations were correct when he was reading from the document, there was attached to it a statement that did not accompany it initially when I asked for the figures. The Minister obviously had examined the figures—that is shown by his pencil marks on the sheet—and obviously had read the comments of Mr. Gregson, dated the 18th June last. But my complaint is—and this in spite of the interjection by the member for Geraldton—that on this sheet, which the Minister used to compare the production of the six years of war with the production of the six subsequent years, is a footnote. It reads—

Figures to be used with care in interpretation in view of the inadequacy of recorded data. See attached notes.

On looking at the attached notes, this is what I found in paragraph (b). This is the schedule the Minister used for half an hour yesterday when giving figures to the House, and one would expect it to be without any question correct. Paragraph (b) states—

Limitations in the use of figures: These figures must be used to examine trend as no others were available, but the figures are subject to serious errors.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The Minister did not tell us that.

Hon E. H. H. Hall: There is quite an old saying to the effect that figures can prove anything.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: As the Minister obviously intended they should do, provided they were in support of his argument. It should not be necessary for me to make much comment on the way the Minister elaborately analysed the figures, but he did not give the House the information before him that the figures must be treated very carefully in view of the inadequacy of recorded data and that they were subject to serious errors.

The Minister for Housing: Will you let me have that document?

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I have further use for it. I had to request the Minister to allow me to get it into my possession. I do not propose to analyse the figures at this stage. I shall have an opportunity to do that later, because they refer to something more or less irrelevant now, something that can more appropriately be dealt with in discussing a motion on the notice paper. That is when I shall use them. I say that these figures must be used, as Mr. Gregson advised the Minister, very carefully in the matter of interpretation because they are subject to serious errors.

So it seems that figures can be made to prove anything, as the member for Geraldton remarked, particularly if they support a political case. That is the unfortunate situation. In conclusion, I repeat that the Minister would be well advised to inquire from the Public Works Department, from private contractors and from private home-builders what sort of a time they are having in obtaining timber, bricks and cement and, if he wants to meet such people in a detached way, I should like to bring them along to show that this is not merely an angle of complaint which is wholly justified, but that the community is suffering because of those in greatest need being still the most humiliated.

HON. J. T. TONKIN (North-East Fremantle) [3.7]: I think all will agree that before a problem can be successfully tackled, there must be a proper appreciation of its real nature. When speaking to the second reading of the Bill, I sought to present to the Minister something which is an actual fact and a real problem. The Minister, in his reply, attempted to show that what I had said was no problem at all and had very little bearing on the subject. That was most disquieting because, if the Minister will not realise that this is a problem which exists, then he certainly cannot be doing anything towards solving it.

I am not a builder and I am not so stupid as to come here and talk about difficulties in the building trade without being informed of them by men who are builders, and not only builders but engaged very substantially in the building trade, men engaged in building not one or ten homes but hundreds of them. These men have told me that their greatest difficulty is lack of materials, that they place their orders for timber with firms with whom they have been dealing for years and that, when the orders are delivered, they are short supplied. Essential sizes are missing and the position is just the same as if the order had not been delivered at all.

For example, no floor bearers are supplied, and so the joists cannot be put down and the frames cannot be put up and the brickwork cannot be proceeded with. I mentioned that, in one instance, no 8 x 1 timber had been supplied to a certain large firm for a period of nine months, and so there was no timber for hips or ridges. That, apparently, does not mean a thing to the Minister. He said that that sort of thing did not cause any delay in building or any increase in cost. I have been assured by a reputable builder that he keeps his team of men, who are excellent tradesmen, with him, even though for half a week they have no work to do. He pays their wages. He is not a philanthropist; he is in the house-building trade to make a profit and he does make a profit. It is obvious, therefore, that he includes in his price the amount of money which he pays his workmen when they are not working at all.

That is one of the main reasons for the increase in the cost of building today. The increase caused by the 40-hour week could

not be compared with that increase, because the difference between the 40-hour and the 44-hour week is slight compared with half or full-time. But the Minister will not face up to that. He says, "Oh, no, that has very little influence upon the position; it is not retarding building." I tell the Minister that the shortage of materials is retarding building, and the fact that essential parts of orders are not being supplied as they are required is also retarding building. I suggest to the Minister that he should immediately send out a questionnaire to all builders inquiring if this is not a fact. If he appreciates that it is a fact, he should take some steps to get co-ordination and to have timber cut in such a way that it will be supplied as it is required.

We all know that the cutting out of whole houses for assembly results in the erection of a far greater number of houses than any other method. The reason is obvious, as all the parts required are there in sequence and no time is lost waiting for essential parts of the order. Strangely enough, the Minister, in speaking to a Bill to continue controls, argues very forcibly that they ought to be lifted. This is a Bill to continue controls, not lift them, but the Minister was arguing upon the efficacy of lifting controls and so expediting building. He dealt with the position regarding cement and bricks and said that a few extra brick fences did not make any difference. Surely, the Minister knows that in a hundred and one ways essential material is being used for other purposes when it could be applied to essential uses.

I have seen more than once within the last few months existing asphalt footpaths being dug up and replaced with cement slabs. I saw it only yesterday in Lochstreet, Claremont, where a gang of men was engaged in taking up an asphalt footpath and putting down cement slabs in its place. If anyone can tell me that that is a perfectly justifiable use of essential materials today, then he could convince me of almost anything. People are today trying to get cement for essential purposes, but cannot procure it. We see it used in that way and the Minister says that not much is being so used. There should not be any of it used in that way. Practically the same thing happened in King's Park-road, where a footpath was renewed with cement

blocks, a work which could easily have waited for a more opportune time. The Minister, however, will not realise these things, so how can we expect any appreciable improvement in the situation? He used some figures to try to convince himself that, notwithstanding that we are slipping behind each month, we are yet gaining ground. A rather difficult hypothesis, but the Minister set out to prove it!

I was reminded of the argument used by one of our celebrated writers—I think Dickens, or it might have been Charles Reade—who said that there were persons who would use the average of the cold in the Crimea for a period of years as a reason for clothing soldiers in nankeen on a night when they would be frozen to death in furs. That is the type of argument the Minister used.

The Minister for Housing: It sounds very complicated.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: He said that if we took the average over the years, then the average number of houses required was much less than we were building now. So, because we are building more houses now, we are gaining ground on existing applications. On the Minister's own answers to the questions which I asked him, he showed very definitely that we were slipping behind each month. In other words, so far as rental houses are concerned, the number of applicants to whom priority is granted because hardship is admitted, exceeds the number of houses being erected. Is that a fact? For some months past—and we can expect it for some months in the future—the number of applications in which hardship is admitted by the department—if we take the total number of applications, the figure is greater still—exceeds the number of houses being erected. Yet the Minister wants to tell us, quite blandly, that we are actually gaining ground.

Mr. Marshall: You are overlooking the normal requirements. Can you explain that to the Minister?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I wish we were gaining ground. People come to see me regularly and also telephone me asking for help to get them out of their serious circumstances so far as accommodation is concerned. I have to tell them, almost without exception, that they must wait nine or twelve months until their turn is reached.

That is the type of answer we get from the Housing Commission. The Commission says, "We are now dealing with applications of such and such a month of 1947." Cold comfort to a person whose application was lodged in 1948! That is the position, so why delude ourselves into believing that we are gaining ground? We are not, because the number of priority cases is mounting even if we deduct from them the number of houses being made available. We cannot find solace in the fact that there are more persons looking today for rental homes who previously did not do so.

We have to deal with the situation as we find it. Altered circumstances are responsible for that fact, and we have to appreciate that that state of affairs will continue for some time. I hope the Minister will not attempt to explain away facts which actually exist, but that he will understand that these complaints are real, that he should have them investigated and that he should take some steps to apply a remedy. If that is done, we can say to our people that today prospects are brighter, because they can reasonably expect that the bottlenecks will be eliminated as far as possible and an increase in the house-building rate consequently achieved. I hope the Minister will have another look at this matter and make some inquiry on the lines I have suggested.

MR. HOAR (Nelson) [3.18]: I certainly did not expect to have anything further to say on this Bill, but must do so after having listened carefully to the Minister's reply to the second reading debate and noting the figures which he quoted in support of his argument. I came to the conclusion that the Government was either deliberately trying to mislead the people, or that the Forests Department's figures, which were taken from the department's records plus the Statistician's records, were entirely misleading. One or the other is misleading. Through the years we have received reports from the Forests Department setting out clearly, in detail, the results of our labours over the years in respect of the production and distribution of timber, itemising it in certain columns and eventually giving the grand total. I have not had an opportunity to study closely the figures given by the

Minister yesterday, but I have been looking at the 1948 report of the Forests Department.

In the past we have all been quite prepared to consider the figures of this department as honest in every way. But I can see such a tremendous difference between the official figures on this occasion and the figures given by the Minister that I can only conclude that a searching inquiry should be made by the Government into timber production and distribution, and particularly with regard to the itemising of the reports that are issued year by year under the name of the Forests Department.

If we look at certain columns in the annual reports we see various timbers referred to in cubic feet, others in loads, and others in super feet. Oils and tanning bark are mixed up with the production of timber, and I am very much afraid that the confusion which is in the minds of most of us in this House—and which will be in the minds of the public when they hear what has transpired, as a result of the Minister's action in using the figures he did—has been caused principally because there was never any clear understanding or interpretation given to the report in regard to production figures as they occur year by year. We can well understand how it is possible for the Minister on this occasion to be misled by a report of this kind.

Personally, I cannot understand, for the life of me, how these figures can possibly be obtained. In the very first stage, the report says that in regard to timber statistics the figures in the attached table relating to 1947-48 are derived as follows:—

Production: Recorded figures as published in the Western Australian report.

Exports, interstate: Figures published in the Forests Department's reports collected direct and supplied by the Western Australian Government Statistician.

Exports, overseas: Figures published in the Forests Department's report supplied by the Western Australian Government Statistician as supplied to him through the Commonwealth Statistician.

So, if the compiler of these figures has gone to the sources he named at the commencement of his report, I fail to see how he could have obtained any other figures than those that the Minister gave to me last week. In answer to a question of mine in

regard to the quantity of Western Australian-grown timber that had been exported over certain years, the Minister told the House that the following quantities had been exported:—

Year	Loads exported
1945-46	14,358
1946-47	21,531
1947-48	30,748
1948-49 (estimated) ..	25,000

On the strength of those figures, I feel justified in every way in offering some criticism of the Government for having permitted a doubling of exports of valuable hardwoods required by this country for great industrial improvements, as well as for the home building needs with which we are confronted. Yet, if this report is taken from the same source as that from which the Minister obtained his figures, somebody is deliberately misleading the public—either the Forests Department on the one hand, in the figures supplied to the Minister, which I very much doubt; or the present Government and the Minister, in seeking to cover up as much as possible the anxiety the Minister must be feeling today in having to call repeated conferences with the Sawmillers' Association in order to get a complete understanding of what is a fair amount of timber to export in these days.

The Minister himself said that these conferences had been taking place from time to time because the situation is not very happy, and I have no doubt, and am not a bit surprised to know, that the Liberal Government at any time would seek by any means in its power to improve its tattering structure. I am very sorry to know, however, that the present Minister for Forests, at any rate, has lent himself to such a practice as using figures of this nature which do not conform to the facts. The Minister referred yesterday to the fact that the Western Australian timber industry had been built up on an export basis under which mills were established to provide the type of timber required for export. He gave some percentage figures covering the five years prior to the war.

I agree with the Minister that the timber industry was established on an export market because, when this Colony was opened up many years ago, the only commodity it was possible to export was timber. From the coastline inland, wherever people went, they saw timber, and they thought the

forests of Western Australia were unlimited. Consequently, they exploited them to such an extent that the 1918 Forests Act had to be introduced to protect our great timber wealth. We know that in the early days of this Colony—and, in fact, up to the years before the recent war—we were justified in encouraging some sort of export market because we did not dream we were going to be projected out of the easy way of living we had enjoyed before the war. We did not know that those years of war were going to interfere with the economy of this country as much as they did. We did not know we were going to be compelled, whether we liked it or not, to undertake a tremendous immigration policy in order to safeguard our future so far as we could.

All these things have come as a result of the war, and have interfered with the economy of this country to such an extent that, so far as timber is concerned, at any rate, we most definitely have to forget all our pre-war ideas and look at the industry from the point of view of future requirements. I said yesterday, and I consider I was right, that the Minister and his Government in respect to this subject are living in the days before the war, and what we need is a Government that will live in the days of the future, and prepare for that future in such a way as to create the best possible conditions for everyone concerned. I am quite convinced that the Government has missed the bus in its assessment of the timber position.

I, and others, have made a statement that timber today is being misused. That can be seen in some of the outlying suburbs which are growing up like mushrooms overnight, and in which even good solid hardwood timber is being used for kerbs that will rot away in a very short time as a result of the action of termites and other natural agents attacking our timbers. We are wasting timber. It is being wrongly directed; and those most needing it find, in the main, it is harder to get than when it was under control. The Minister has not assessed the position correctly, and I think he is culpable to a considerable extent in seeking to use figures to win a cheap argument here which is definitely not aligned to the situation as we know it.

Another thing he mentioned was that inside the next six months, six new mills would be coming into production, and many of the 900 displaced persons who had arrived recently in Western Australia would go into the industry, so that by the end of the year the timber position would be substantially improved. I think that is doubtful, but even if it turns out to be true it only proves to be correct a statement I made last year, namely, that due to the entire neglect by the sawmillers generally of the conditions of the timber workers all through the years, under any sort of Government—I am not speaking politics now—there has arisen today a situation where nobody can persuade workers to go into the bush and bury themselves. As I said last year, we are in danger of handing over this important industry to foreign people; and on the Minister's own words last night there is the best part of 900 people to go into the industry, and 300 are in it now to my knowledge.

The Minister for Housing: There are 900 arriving.

Mr. HOAR: I understood the Minister to say that the biggest part of them would be placed in the timber industry in a labouring capacity. If the Minister thinks he is going to get these timber mills put into operation in the next six months, he is making a big mistake, and it is misleading to say so. The timber industry is not producing anything like what it did before the war. The output today is about 125,000,000 super feet per year as against some 150,000,000 pre-war. I believe those figures to be correct because they are given clearly in last year's report of the Forests Department.

The Minister can have this other report for all the good it is. I consider it to be of no value whatsoever to the people who expect to get some clarification of this issue. The figures clearly disclose to my way of thinking that we are unable to equal our pre-war production. That, coupled with the fact that we have a snowballing effect so far as homebuilding and industry are concerned—that is, there are arrears of bridge-building and other public works to be considered and embarked upon—convinces me that until we at least equal our pre-war production and exceed it, as we shall do with

the new mills that will eventually be producing, we should conserve this wealth of ours and not export it oversea.

I have nothing whatever against the Government's sending our surplus timber to the other States of the Commonwealth. It would be a great pity if the day ever arrived when we considered ourselves to be six separate States and not one nation. But it is wrong for anyone to encourage overseas people to believe that any lasting long-term agreement can be arrived at between them and us in respect of timber. As I concluded my remarks yesterday, so I do again today, by saying that I regret very much indeed that the Minister has not sized up the timber problem in the manner that we would expect a responsible Minister of this Government to do. I regret also that he has, in my opinion, lowered himself by using figures of this nature which are obviously incorrect.

MR. GRAHAM (East Perth) [3.34]: A further opportunity is presented to us to emphasise our dissatisfaction with the present position. I stated during the second reading debate, in my final words, that whilst we voted on this measure—and we voted unanimously in favour of an Act to continue controls of building materials—we did so at the same time as the Minister was releasing controls of those self-same building materials. In other words, the Minister, and through him the Government, is taking action which would appear to be diametrically opposed to the expressed wish of this House. It is easy to decide the reasons for the Government's course.

For political reasons, and in order to placate certain interests which have been most insistent in their demand upon it, the Government realises it sounds something in the nature of an achievement to be able to say that it has lifted controls on this, that and the other line of building materials. That is perfectly true, but at what cost? We on this side of the House have endeavoured to emphasise the magnitude of the problem confronting this country, and of the need to regard it as an extreme crisis in the hope that the Government would tackle the problem as it sees it; especially after having had recounted to it the situation as members of the Opposition view it. Yet,

notwithstanding what members have said, the Government apparently is prepared to drift along and continue operations as though this were a normal period in our history.

So apparent was that attitude on the part of the Minister that he made no attempt to, reply to the expressed viewpoints of members. He did, in several instances, reply to criticisms that had been made, but he ignored entirely any suggestions that were submitted. I have from my place in this House not once, but many times, endeavoured to impress on all concerned the seriousness of the housing position as it exists, yet the results have been practically nil. I should have thought we would have received, as we were certainly entitled to, some indication from the Minister as to the steps he intended to take, not in six months' time, but immediately, to overcome the terrible position where brick fences, cement paths, wood sheds, ornamental work in gardens, miles of kerbing on highways and other such unessential works are being indulged in so freely, as they are, in every suburb of the metropolitan area—and I daresay in other parts of the State—as a direct consequence of this Government's lifting the controls of building materials.

Apparently the Government intends to do nothing whatever about that situation, but to allow it to continue so that materials may be used and skilled men devote their energy and time to these useless operations. In other words, the Government is quite satisfied with the situation that exists at the moment. I say that the condition which I have roughly outlined—and it is indisputable because anybody with eyes can see what is going on—is something that should not happen under proper and effective controls. At present, as long as I have sufficient influence or good fortune to be able to secure building materials I can use them for any purpose whatever. It is true that I am limited to an expenditure of £50 for domestic building purposes in any financial year, but it will be agreed that when there are many thousands of people all helping themselves to these comparatively small supplies of material, in the aggregate that must have a very serious effect on our home building programme. Apparently the Government is quite content with what is going

on, as we have had no indication from the Minister that he intends to take any steps to rectify the position.

Other members have emphasised the seriousness of the situation in regard to timber and I was not impressed with the statements of the Minister as to the necessity to retain oversea markets for this product. From the return submitted to this House in answer to a question addressed by me to the Minister last week—and having in mind the many other important undertakings that require attention—I think it can be said that there is no need whatever, for the next 20 years, to worry about oversea markets for our timber. All our timber can be used in this State, for many years to come, for home and other building purposes. It is true that a certain quantity can be made available to the other States of the Commonwealth in return for materials that we, in this State, are unable to produce. I think the House is entitled to some comment by the Minister on the statement by Mr. Chifley, only a month ago, wherein he stated without qualification, under the heading of "Timber":—

The export of timber is permitted only when the State concerned has advised that the timber is surplus to essential requirements in that State and the transport position renders difficult its supply to other parts of the Commonwealth.

The Prime Minister, having made that statement to the House of Representatives on the 27th May last, is not likely to have put it into words if it were challengeable. Accordingly, I want to know from the Minister for Housing at what stage he advised the Commonwealth that the timber being exported from this State was surplus to the essential requirements of Western Australia. Not only the House but the public of Western Australia is entitled to a clear-cut statement from the Minister in regard to this matter. I ask him, also, has he or the Government advised the Commonwealth Government that there is a surplus of timber in this State—surplus to our essential building requirements? In order to convince the unsuspecting that the enormous number of outstanding applications for houses was not quite that revealed in the figures themselves, the Minister suggested that many people were switching from seeking permits to erect their own homes, in favour of rental homes, owing to the increasing costs of

building and the prospect of more than a lifetime being entailed in an endeavour to pay for houses erected on their own account.

Strangely enough the figures given to the House only last week revealed that this year, 1949, the number of outstanding applications for rental houses increased by 584, and the figure in respect of permits to build increased to the tune of 1325, to which must be added another 159 representing the increase in the number of unsatisfied and outstanding applications for war service homes. This means that the total increase in the number of persons seeking permits to build on their own account is 1484, whereas the number of outstanding applications for rental houses has increased by only 584. There is very little substance in that assertion by the Minister. He seemed to doubt statements made by several members to the effect that the lag in the supply of building materials is having an appreciable effect on the cost of dwellings and building generally.

Not very long ago I received a communication indicating that a contractor had informed the person for whom a house was to be built that, if an assurance could be received from the State Housing Commission, that there would be a free flow of materials as required—as was the case pre-war—he would be prepared immediately to reduce the contract figure by £100. With interest commitments £100 is a considerable sum in the view of the average applicant for a house. I am not impressed by the assertion that building contractors have appreciated the lifting of controls from building materials, because of the saving in time through not having to approach the Housing Commission for permits for materials, with which to erect buildings in respect of which the building permits have already been received, because in the great majority of cases it would be a clerk or some other officer that would make such approaches to the Commission. In any event, we have been told repeatedly that there is a reasonable balance maintained between the amount of material available and the number of permits to build issued, and that therefore if a permit is issued for a particular job it is because there is sufficient material available to complete that construction.

That was the position in the past, but it is certainly not so now. Because of the tremendous delay and the shortage of materials, workmen are unable to proceed with their duties and that is having an important effect upon the delay in the completion of homes, as well as increasing the cost of their construction. They do not have to wait a few hours in lining up in a queue at the Housing Commission, but the workmen spend days and weeks lolling and idling about, waiting for materials. Because of that fact there is an additional inducement for very many workmen to fill in their idle time and for contractors to use small amounts of materials on small jobs such as cement footpaths, brick fences and the rest of them. So we have one further reason or cause for the unessential work that is being undertaken.

I am given to understand that the State Housing Commission is endeavouring to make arrangements for the rise and fall clause in contracts to apply for a six months' period only, and not indefinitely as is the case at present. Where a contractor is operating in a big way, he naturally has an influence with the suppliers of building materials. He is a good, valuable customer and naturally the tendency is for him to receive some preferential treatment. Accordingly, it would probably be possible for the larger man—that is the big contractor—to be able to conform to what I am advised is the new arrangement which is to be put into operation. As a natural consequence it would be another case of the smaller man being gradually pushed out of business, which, I think all members will agree, is a most undesirable state of affairs.

My especial purpose in making these observations is to emphasise to the Minister that he must recognise the terrible mess into which the handling of building materials has fallen and of the extreme urgency of his acknowledging the mistake that he and his Government have made, and in the interests of suffering humanity—and it is nothing short of that—the Minister and his Government should be sufficiently courageous to acknowledge their error and reimpose controls. I say that not because anybody likes controls for the sake of controls, but on the grounds of equity and in order to make absolutely certain that building materials urgently required by so many

thousands of people will not be devoted to unessential requirements. There is abundant evidence in every suburb, and I dare say in every town throughout the length and breadth of this State, of this unessential work being carried on.

MR. FOX (South Fremantle) [3.55]: I am pleased to see that the Minister has brought down this Bill to continue controls, and I feel that we should pay some attention to the quantity of timber being exported from this State. Recently I asked a question about the visit of the Premier of South Australia to this State and about his anxiety to secure additional supplies of jarrah for South Australia. I do not know whether the supplies or the export of jarrah to South Australia have been increased since Mr. Playford's visit, but it will be interesting to see whether such is the case when the figures are made available.

In a State such as Western Australia it is absolutely essential to have as much jarrah as possible for building purposes owing to the prevalence of white ants. I consider that the other timbers of this State, such as karri, are more suitable to a State like Victoria where white ants do not wreak the havoc that they do here. It is impossible to use karri for home building in this State, and it is certainly impossible in goldfield areas, because the homes would be eaten out in a very short space of time. It has been the experience of builders with whom I have discussed the position, and my experience also, that if one stick of karri is put into a wooden building, or any building in the metropolitan area, it is not long before the white ants discover it.

In such cases the material then has to be replaced with jarrah. Therefore I say that if other States want our timber, or want a greater supply of timber, we should supply them with a timber that is not suitable for the building requirements of this State but which would be suitable for building purposes in the other States. We should export as much karri as possible and retain the jarrah in Western Australia for our own purposes. I know that we have to supply the other States with timber in return for materials that we want from them, and it is only reasonable, if the karri is just as suitable as jarrah in those States, that they should take karri in lieu of the jarrah.

The Housing Commission, in my opinion, should not issue permits unless the timber is available to meet the requirements of those permits. What is the use of issuing permits months and months ahead of the supply of timber necessary? Recently a man came to me—somebody had given him my name and told him to see me—and told me that he had a permit to build a small home. It was a small wooden dwelling and it did not require a great deal of timber. This man went around to nearly all the timber mills and quite a number of them said, "We are not concerned with supplying a small amount of timber. We are more concerned with supplying timber to the big contractors." I asked him if he would be prepared to give me a declaration in writing to that effect and he told me that he would. He said, "I will give you the declaration because that is what I have been told. I have been given your name as a person who may be able to help me." I knew a contractor and asked him if he would go to a certain timber yard in Fremantle and see if he could get the necessary supplies of timber. The manager told this contractor that he did not have a stick of timber in the yard. That timber yard was Millars' Timber & Trading Company in Fremantle. Yet the Minister said that timber is not in short supply and any amount of it is available.

The Minister for Housing: I did not say that.

MR. FOX: That builder is not on a very large scale but he has built quite a number of homes. He is the builder to whom I referred when I said that a contractor had built homes in 1937 at a cost of £540 and they were just as good as the houses being built now for £1,200 or £1,400. The Minister should look into the matter and not issue permits unless the timber is available to meet the requirements of those permits. If that were done, everybody would be on an equal footing, but at present the man with the most "pull" gets the material that is available and a man who has not any "pull" does not get any materials at all.

I know of one contractor who is heavily in debt with some merchants and yet they supply him with timber in order to get something off the account. I know that statement to be correct because I have been informed by a responsible man that the

big contractors get the most material that is available. If a man is to build a home of his own he should be in the same position as a man who is taking a big amount of timber from the suppliers, because timber is a necessity. The man with a small building to erect has a necessity as great as the larger builder, and he should be able to get his requirements immediately a permit is issued or at least within a reasonable time.

I hope the Minister will give some consideration to that aspect and not allow the issue of permits months and months ahead, because that is not achieving anything and, in fact, is retarding the building programme. I know a builder in a large way and he told me, "I am not tendering for any more contracts to build houses for the State. I can do much better by approaching those who have permits and working on wages for them. I have to wait months for materials and it is not worth my while building on contracts." I hope the Minister will encourage more control. It is time enough to drop controls altogether when there is ample building material available and when everybody can obtain all the supplies they need.

THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING

(Hon. R. R. McDonald—West Perth—in reply) [4.2]: I will deal with the remarks of the last speaker first. The exports of timber to South Australia are largely karri when they come from the main sawmilling firms. A certain amount of jarrah does go to that State from some smaller firms and mills, but that is something as to which control at present cannot be exercised because, as I have explained, under Section 92 of the Constitution trade and commerce are free between the States.

Mr. Fox: The State mills could look after that.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The State mills export practically no jarrah at all. Their exports are karri and that is what they do export. As to the issuing of permits, the practice has been to issue them somewhat in advance of available supplies and reasonably near to equation of anticipated supplies, but a little in advance. That practice was first recommended in a report by Mr. Wallwork in 1946 to the

Government on the housing programme and he considered that, if there was a pressure of permits on supplies, the result would be to increase supplies and thereby increase the total building ratio that could be obtained. The Housing Commission has felt that within very careful limits that is a practice which was soundly based and it was put into operation in 1946.

I have not been able to deal in any detail with all the matters raised by so many speakers in so prolonged a debate and I regret that. However, there are, perhaps, certain physical and mental limitations, which means that there may be some matters which I have overlooked or which I may have dealt with in rather a terse way. But I want to assure members that I do not live in a vacuum. The difficulties of housing that beat up against private members, beat up with much exaggerated force, as far as I am concerned, to improve the conditions in which people are inadequately accommodated. Every fortnight I meet two representatives, one each from the two main building organisations and I hear from them as to the building trade. In every way the Housing Commission and I endeavour to keep exceedingly close contact with the difficulties of the building trade with a view to taking any necessary action.

This Bill has been brought down because the State Housing Commission, with the full approval of the Government, is maintaining a larger measure of control over building and its requirements than any State in Australia. We stand alone in Australia by reason of the severity of control over building which is exercised in this State. It is somewhat amazing to me to hear some of the remarks made when one bears in mind that we are the most heavily controlled State in the whole of the Commonwealth in relation to building matters. In other States, which have Governments of a different complexion, Governments will not entertain for one minute the stringency on building which is exercised today by the State Housing Commission in this State.

When this Bill was brought in by the Government it was in spite of the unpopularity of so much control and the people who wrote to the Commission and said how severe the Minister for Housing was in still seeking controls. The everyday expression always refers to my obstinacy to retain

controls. In spite of that, with the Government's and my approval, the Housing Commission is pursuing a course which is designed to meet the particular circumstances of a State like Western Australia with far distant towns which, in the absence of control now exercised are going to fare badly, as compared with those in the metropolitan area, with building and timber supplies. So an endeavour is being made in all good conscience to supply that measure of control which suits our State's needs. I have told the House, and I repeat, that these controls were taken, in certain instances, from some materials not necessarily as a permanency but with a full knowledge that they would be reimposed if conditions justified it.

Mr. May: Do you think they have?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I think they were appropriately taken off at that time following a consultation with all the interests by the Housing Commission and myself. It would have my personal approbation if the Housing Commission recommended the reimposition of control of these items which members wish to see reimposed if the stringency that has become evident this year does not make for a greater flow of supplies. The member for East Perth has mentioned the matter of supplies that go oversea, but I do not propose to deal with that now because I believe there is something to be said on that question at a later stage. However, I do want to say that when the matter was considered by the Government and myself it did appear to me that with the expanding programme of housing and housing needs we would want to cut down the extent of timber that left our State.

Conferences were held between myself and sawmillers over quite a considerable period with that object in view which has, to a certain extent, obtained and it may obtain in future. However, one has to exercise a certain measure of responsibility regarding a big industry and the people employed in it, including both the employees as well as the employers and realise that one cannot, in justice, suddenly stop a policy that has been allowed and, in fact, encouraged by Governments over many decades. So, at all events, it can only be undertaken after very careful consideration and for very strong reasons indeed, when all the advantages

and disadvantages have been weighed. When it comes to the re-control of certain materials, the suggestion has been made that some influences have been at work. I do not know what they are. I do not think that, although some people would sooner see a free economy in operation, there would be any great objection on the part of various interests to the re-imposition of controls because in many ways that practice makes the situation easier for them. I can assure the House that no influences at all are being exerted on me or upon the Housing Commission in connection with any policy of re-imposition of controls where they should be re-imposed.

Reference has been made to some figures supplied to me by Mr. Gregson. I said to him that I would like some figures from him as he had a most complete knowledge, statistically, of the sawmilling industry and had been associated with the Housing Commission and the Forests Department in my time. I had a high opinion of his abilities and I knew that he took a great interest in the housing problem. He always had and still has that great interest. I asked him, therefore, to supply me with figures dealing with the quantity of timber retained in the State and that which was sent oversea over a period of years, so that I might have the particulars for the information of Parliament. He brought that information to me and made it available for the guidance of Parliament. He attached to it a memo. which, I must confess, did not occur to me as being relevant to the discussion before Parliament, because it was intended by him to indicate the trend, over a period of years, in the quantity of timber retained in the State compared with that which had been sent oversea, showing the expansion of the quantity kept in the State and the contraction of that which had been sent oversea. For such a purpose the figures are absolutely reliable.

In fact, Mr. Gregson has told me that the figures he compiled to enable me to deal with this subject before Parliament were taken from what he regarded as the best and most authentic statistics available to anyone. They certainly agree almost, if not exactly, in respect of one or two years, with the figures given by me in answer to a question in this House, which figures had been supplied by the Forests Department.

I mentioned that when I was speaking to the House last night, when I said I would quote Mr. Gregson's figures because he had valuable sources of information and a knowledge of the trade and industry, together with the industry's commitments with regard to oversea and interstate exports. Mr. Gregson told me that there was a possibility that the data, which he accepted as the best to be obtained, might affect percentages if they were taken for any particular year. At the same time, he has said to me that, in his opinion, it would be simply a matter of decimals. He stated that any possible inaccuracies in the data supplied by the department would relate to sleepers and not to any appreciable extent to sawn timber, with which we are concerned in the discussion in Parliament.

After 15 years in this House, I would be very sorry indeed if members thought I would be a party to any withholding from them of information I thought they should have. As the Leader of the Opposition asked me for the notes—I refer to the notes which, in the course of my long speech, I did not take the trouble to quote as I did not think them sufficiently important to deal with—I was glad to give them to him and to allow him to make any comments he thought fit.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: In the first instance, you detached the damaging contents.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I do not think so.

• The Premier: His pencilled notes are in the margin, and they were used.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I did not regard those figures as being material for the House; otherwise, I most certainly would have put them before members, because the chart from which I read had been prepared and given to me by a most reliable officer for the purpose of enabling me to deal with this matter when it came before the House.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: In fairness to Mr. Gregson, you should have read his comments.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: That may be so.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: It is so.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I shall not argue that point. It did not occur to me that I should, in my speech, quote one and a half pages of foolscap relating to the sources from which the information had been drawn on respecting the data upon which the figures were based. I can say there is admittedly a stringency in respect of the supply of materials that has been emphasised in recent months. With regard to timber in particular, my advice is that the position should be greatly eased in the comparatively near future, and certainly by the end of this year. My last word to the House on the question of supplies and controls is that the matter will be discussed once again, as it has been continuously discussed in the past, with the Housing Commission and, if the advice of the members of that body is that control should be re-imposed, that advice will receive the most careful and weighty consideration.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

BILLS (4)—FIRST READING.

- 1, Charitable Collections Act Amendment.
- 2, Marketing of Barley Act Amendment (Continuance).
- 3, Plant Diseases Act Amendment (No. 2).
- 4, Marketing of Potatoes Act Amendment.

Received from the Council.

BILL—MENTAL INSTITUTION BENEFITS (COMMONWEALTH AND STATE AGREEMENT).

Read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

MOTION—PRICES CONTROL.

As to Appointment of Commission.

HON. A. R. G. HAWKE (Northam)
[4.22]: I move—

That in the opinion of this House the Government should introduce legislation to establish a prices commission, and to give consumers and business interests direct representation thereon, with an independent chairman appointed by the Government.

This matter was debated very thoroughly in this House last year when the Bill to enable the State to control prices, following the defeat of the Commonwealth prices referendum, was before us for consideration. Those who sought to amend the Bill to enable consumers to have a direct representative upon what would have been a State prices commission argued that consumers were finally the most affected people in the community as regards the prices charged for commodities. It was also argued that prices would be likely to rise considerably under State control as compared with their control previously by the Commonwealth authority. Further, it was argued that the consumers, because they were the most vitally concerned and would find it difficult to stand up to the increasing cost of living, were more entitled than any other section to have a direct voice in the discussion and to decide on any increase in price that was to take place.

The Minister, on behalf of the Government, contended that one-man control through a single prices commissioner was preferable to control by two men or by a number greater than two. He also assured us that it was the intention of the Government, if the Bill became law, to set up an advisory committee upon which representation would be given to the different sections affected. When the vote was taken upon an amendment that aimed at giving the consumers a direct representative upon a prices commission, those who voted against the proposal were, according to "Hansard" of 1948, volume 1, page 580—

Mr. Abbott	Mr. Murray
Mr. Ackland	Mr. Nalder
Mr. Bovell	Mr. Nimmo
Mrs. Cardell-Oliver	Mr. North
Mr. Doney	Mr. Thorn
Mr. Grayden	Mr. Watts
Mr. Hall	Mr. Wild
Mr. Hill	Mr. Yates
Mr. Leslie	Mr. Brand
Mr. Mann	

Those members voted against the consumers having a direct representative upon the prices commission then envisaged.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member is not in order in quoting from "Hansard" of the current session.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I think you are quite right, Sir. I was forgetting for the moment that the Government had succeeded with its political trick of making

the sittings of this year a continuation of those of last year, thus keeping the sittings of this year in the same session as those of last year. However, I have read the list of members who voted against the consumers having a direct representative upon a proposed prices commission.

The attempt on that occasion to deny the consumers the right of having a direct representative was not successful, because all the members of the Opposition voted for a consumers' representative and were supported by the two Independents—the members for Victoria Park and Maylands. The Bill passed through this House with a provision for the setting up of a prices commission upon which there should be three members—one a direct representative of the consumers, one a direct representative of the business and trading interests and the third appointed by the Government to be chairman of the commission.

The Bill was then forwarded to another place and a majority of members of the Council, no doubt at the desire of the Government, altered the provision for a commission of three and restored the measure to the form it originally had when introduced into this Chamber. In other words, they altered the Bill to provide for one commissioner only, and thereby deprived the consumers of any representative upon a commission. When the Bill was returned to this House, the Minister naturally moved to accept the Council's amendments and, unfortunately from the point of view of the consumers, the two Independents, who had previously voted to give consumers direct representation, supported the Council's amendments and thereby helped to deprive the consumers of direct representation in prices control which they otherwise would have obtained.

So that Bill became law, with a provision in it for the control of prices by a single commissioner to be appointed by the Government. As is well known, the Government subsequently appointed as State Prices Commissioner, Mr. Mathea, who had for some time previously been Commonwealth Deputy Commissioner of Prices in Western Australia. Prices have undoubtedly increased in respect of many commodities during the last year and, for that matter, during the last two years.

The Premier: All over the world.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: There is no doubt on that score. Before dealing with that angle, however, I wish to quote to members a table of prices of commodities as at the 31st March, 1947, and the 31st December, 1948. This table is as follows:—

	Quarter ended 31st Mar. 1947	Quarter ended 31st Dec- ember, 1948
	pence	pence
Bread—2 lb	6	7.5
Flour (ordinary) 2 lb	5	6
Flour (S.R.) 2 lb	8	10.45
Jam—1½ lb (plum)	14.40	18
Golden syrup, 2 lb	8	9
Oats (dried), 1 lb	4.50	5.94
Italians (seeded), 1 lb	13	16
Currents, 1 lb	10.50	13.28
Apricots (dried), 1 lb	18	26.50
Peaches (canned), 30 oz	15.50	21
Pears (canned), 30 oz	16.50	22.50
Potatoes, 7 lb	8.43	14.50
Onions, 1 lb	2.90	3.50
Soap, 1 lb	7.33	10
Kerosene, quart	5.88	7.88
Butter, 1 lb	21.0	26.50
Cheese, 1 lb	17	19
Eggs, dozen	28	33

I realise that there are seasonal fluctuations in connection with eggs.

The Attorney General: Are those the figures I supplied in answer to a question?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: —

Bacon, 1 lb	20.50	30.45
Milk (condensed)	10	12.50
Milk (fresh), quart	8	9
Beef (sirloin), 1 lb	13	15
Beef (rib) 1 lb	11	12
Beef (rump steak), 1 lb	13	22
Beef (chuck steak), 1 lb	11	13
Beef (sausages), 1 lb	9.25	10.92
Beef (corned silverside), 1 lb	11	14
Beef (corned brisket) 1 lb	9	10
Mutton (leg), 1 lb	10.80	14
Mutton (loin), 1 lb	10.80	13.44
Mutton (chops, loin), 1 lb	11	14
Mutton (chops, leg), 1 lb	11	13
Pork (leg), 1 lb	15	23.20
Pork (loin), 1 lb	16	23.20
Pork (chops), 1 lb	17	23.20

The Attorney General: Where did you get the table?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: That table indicates very clearly the heavy increase in prices which has taken place in the period to which I have referred.

The Attorney General: Were those figures supplied by me? I should like you to answer questions occasionally, if you do not mind.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: In substantiation of the figures I have given, I now wish to quote from "The Daily News" of the 20th June, 1949.

Mr. Marshall: That is an authority on anything!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: After I have made that quotation I shall satisfy the Minister's deep curiosity as to where I have obtained the figures I have already quoted.

Mr. Bovell: Are you quoting from the "Opinion" column?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: This statement in "The Daily News" does not come from the "Opinion" column. It was written by a very clever investigator, one of the best staff men of "The Daily News," if not by the editor himself. It is headed "Ups and Downs of Prices." I do not propose to read the whole of the article but merely portions. It states:—

Prices have risen. Everyone knows that. But you may have a certain morbid curiosity to know exactly where you are being hit hardest and for how much.

Recently released statistics show just how much the average consumer of today is being pummelled by prices which continue to rise for almost any commodity you care to mention.

Food prices are particularly depressing. That is, of course, in their effect upon the consumers. The article proceeds to give some tables of figures by way of comparison. There is no need for me to quote them, as they are in line with the figures I have already given. The article continues—

The Western Australian man who wants to be fairly well dressed is particularly hard hit. The suit he buys today for £10 would have cost him £3 15s.—same quality and cut—in 1938.

The same type of overcoat he buys today for £6 would have cost him an economical £3 10s.

One other quotation I wish to make from this article is as follows:—

Some of the few commodities cheaper today than in 1928 are razor blades—down about 25 per cent.

So while the consumer is being driven almost to the point of suicide because of the exceedingly heavy increase in prices of commodities available to him today, he has a cheaper method of suiciding now than he had in 1928, or even just before the war. The figures which I gave previously, and about which the Attorney General was so curious, were taken from the Official Statistics of the Commonwealth of Australia, published, of course, by the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Canberra.

The Attorney General: What date?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I gave the Minister the dates in the table of comparisons for the quarter ended the 31st March, 1947, and the quarter ended the 31st December, 1948. The Minister will accordingly

have no trouble whatever in checking my table. Although he might think he can find some mistakes in my quotations from the publication in question, he will learn only too well that the figures I have given are absolutely accurate.

I admit quite readily that it was unavoidable that after the war there should have been a general increase in the price level. I have said in previous speeches in this House that we cannot have a war costing the country thousands of millions of pounds and necessitating the imposition of heavy taxation upon trade and industry and the people generally without recovering the cost of that war through such taxation by increases in the price level. I am not even going to argue this afternoon that prices have risen much more than they should have, though that is arguable. The only point with which I am now concerned is that, in all fairness to them, the consumers of Western Australia are entitled to have a watch-dog on a prices commission to watch and as far as possible to safeguard their undoubted interests in the fixation of the prices of commodities in this State.

We all know what has been happening in Western Australia during the last year, or the last two years, if the Minister prefers it that way. The outstanding thing which has been happening to the average person in Western Australia, and especially to people who have to rely only upon the basic wage is that prices have been rising, followed at some later date by an increase in the basic wage because of the additions made to that wage subsequent to an increase in prices. Following that again, we have had another increase in prices and subsequent to that another increase in the basic wage, and that has happened on several occasions.

I do not know what the opinion of the Minister is about the future. My frank fear is that prices will rise again, and again, and again, and that wages in turn will rise on several occasions. I do not know whether the Minister or all the Ministers in the Government have given any deep consideration to the terrible problem which this continuous increase in prices, followed by continual increases in wages, is going to establish in this State. I do not know whether they conveniently think that we in this State can go on facing up to that sort of

thing. I do not know whether they think the industries of Western Australia can go on standing up under the strain imposed upon them by these increasing prices and wages.

The Attorney General: You would not agree with the British system of pegging wages, would you?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I think that there is an urgent need for the very closest consideration to be given by all interests concerned to the making of some move to control the economic system in this State and, of course, in the other States of the Commonwealth. I said just after Parliament closed down last year that this would develop into the State's major problem and would occasion the greatest concern to all of those in control of industry as well as to the community generally. I am still of that opinion. In fact my opinion has been confirmed by the happenings of the last five or six months.

We can, of course, go on leaving tomorrow to take care of itself. We might even go on with the idea at the back of our minds, or even at the front of our minds, that this upward spiral of prices and wages will sooner or later bring about a collapse, because I think there is no doubt it will unless some solid attempt is made in the direction of trying to arrest that upward movement of prices and wages—which, of course, means an upward movement in the cost of production. However, in this motion we are not attempting to deal with that problem in the major sense.

I find, in moving amongst ordinary, average people, amongst families whose total income is the basic wage, or not very much above it, that they are extremely concerned at the existing situation. They have no faith at all in the prevailing system for the control of prices in Western Australia. I am not saying for the moment that their feeling in that regard is justified or well based. I am expressing the feeling they possess. They believe by and large that there is no effective system operating in this State for the control of prices. They believe that whatever control does exist is operated in the interests of the business community generally and therefore against the interests of the consumers generally.

I do not agree with their opinions in that regard. At least, I do not fully agree with

them, although I have an idea that the price control system in this State could be much more effective and much more severe than it is. For instance, when the States took over control of prices in Australia, they released very quickly from control some 3,000 items, if my memory serves me correctly. I think the State representatives argued at that time that the 3,000 items were not essential to the existence of the average person in Australia. I have no doubt the State authorities on that occasion wanted to simplify the price control system as much as possible. I have no doubt they wanted to make the State control of prices as easy as possible. Therefore it was a great move on the part of the State representatives to decide almost immediately, as they did, to release from price control those 3,000 items.

I have no doubt that that action has had a very damaging effect upon the Australian economy and upon the economic system of every State. One effect has doubtless been to enable the non-essential industries and the semi-essential industries to have a greater claim, a better claim, on the recruitment of labour than have essential industries in which price control has continued to be practised. If I am operating a non-essential industry and there is no price control over the articles I produce, I can offer much more in the way of special inducements to get labour from the altogether inadequate labour pool existing in Australia at present. On the other hand, if I have an essential industry, the products of which are subject to price control, I am not able, because my margin of profit is controlled, to offer as much by way of special inducements for the purpose of recruiting labour. That is another special problem associated with this subject.

I think it would be beneficial, from the point of view of prices control generally, if the Government of the State were to agree to give the consumers a direct representative. I am sure it would have a good moral effect immediately, because it would re-establish in the minds of the consumers a reasonable degree of faith in the price control system. The consumers would know that their point of view was being solidly put before the Prices Commission which would then exist, by one of their own people; one of their direct representatives;

a person in whose appointment they had to some extent a say although, perhaps, a very indirect say. I quite realise that the appointment of a consumers' direct representative upon a prices commission would have to be made by some existing organisation or organisations. We could not possibly give all the consumers a say, but we could allow some of the major organisations in Western Australia the right to nominate a person to represent the consumers directly upon a prices commission.

The motion also suggests that business and trading interests should have a direct representative upon such a commission. That is quite logical. I think we should have a prices commission operating in this State upon which the interests most vitally concerned are represented. Obviously the business and trading concerns are vitally interested, and the consumers generally are, too. Therefore, both sections should have a representative, and the Government in turn would have to appoint a third commissioner to be chairman, if for no other reason than to decide between the representative of the consumers and the representative of the business interests when they could not agree as to whether an increase in prices should take place or, occasionally, whether a decrease should be made. Speaking for myself, I believe in a permanent system for the control of prices. I think it is the logical corollary to our permanent system for the fixation of wages and salaries.

As is well known, we have a State Arbitration Court, the President of which is appointed by the Government. In addition, on that Arbitration Court bench there is a direct representative of the trade unions, or the workers, and a direct representative also of the employers. I think everyone who has studied the history of our State industrial arbitration system, since 1925 at any rate, will agree that it has worked remarkably well, not only in the direction of maintaining peace in industry, but also in the way of giving to industrial workers reasonable wages and working conditions. If, therefore, that system has worked successfully in relation to the fixation of wages, salaries and working conditions, why should not a system similarly based work successfully in regard to the fixation of prices?

The Attorney General: The Federal Arbitration Court has worked reasonably well, too.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I have some doubt about that. I would not for a minute say that the Federal Arbitration Court has, over the years, worked half as successfully as our State Arbitration Court.

Hon. A. H. Panton: It certainly has not. The Act would not allow it to, anyhow.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I much prefer our State system to the Federal system. The fact that the workers of this State have a direct representative on the State Arbitration Court bench gives to them great confidence and faith in that court. They know that a man they have nominated has been appointed to that bench, and that he is able to hear the witnesses, question them and take part in the *in camera* discussions and deliberations of the Arbitration Court as a whole. They know, too, that their representative has full access to all kinds of confidential and secret documents. Therefore the average worker in this State develops a very deep faith and confidence in the industrial arbitration system of Western Australia.

The Attorney General: When the workers' representative gives a decision different from that of the President, does not that affect his faith in the President's decision?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Generally speaking—almost invariably, in fact—the workers in this State accept the majority decision of the court irrespective of whether the workers' representative on the bench has agreed with that decision or not. There has been more than one instance where the workers' representative on the Arbitration Court bench has been in the minority in respect of a particular decision, but the workers have accepted the decision because of their faith in the system under which the court operates. I am sure they would not have 25 per cent. of that faith and confidence if the court consisted of only one man and they had no direct representative on it.

Not only have the workers in this State a great deal of faith in the State Arbitration Court system, but the employers by and large, have the same degree of faith and confidence in it because they, too, have the right to nominate a direct representative to the bench. Their representative has the same rights and privileges, as a member of the Arbitration Court bench, as has the workers' representative. Therefore they, as

employers, feel, as do the workers, that they are part and parcel of the Arbitration Court system; that they have a personal and aggregate interest in it, and consequently they do everything possible within their power to see that the State industrial arbitration system in Western Australia works successfully and with reasonable satisfaction to all concerned.

With that outstanding example before us, I feel we would be extremely unwise if we did not attempt to set up the same system of price control within the State. If the trading interests and the consumers generally were given direct representation on a prices commission, I am sure the majority of our working men and women would have greatly increased faith in it. They would feel that any increase in prices that did take place had been allowed only after a most complete investigation in which their own direct representative had participated closely. In order to get the best results from any system of control, we must develop, in the minds of the people generally, complete faith in it.

Every increase in prices granted by the Commissioner of Prices in this State during the last year may have been justified, although I do not think for a moment that that is so, and the great majority of the people of this State think that none of those increases has been justified. Consequently, they have no faith in our present system of price fixing. They feel that it is weighted against them. They know the cost of living has increased, and is continuing to increase, and feel that the true value of their money wages is being filched from them in this way. They are fearful as to where it is all to end. They speak sarcastically about controlling inflation and say that price control, far from arresting inflation, has rather speeded up the process and has hastened the approach of the day when a collapse will be inevitable. I would have expected the Minister and the Government to be anxious to establish in the minds of the people an opinion, with regard to the State system of control over prices, different from that which I have briefly described.

The Attorney General: I think the people have great confidence in the present Commissioner of Prices.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I am afraid the Minister is almost completely wrong in that point of view, though I grant his right to hold it. If he could move among the people on smaller incomes he would find that they are extremely distressed at the price increases that have taken place and the prospect of further increases in the near future.

The Attorney General: That does not say they have not great confidence in the Commissioner.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Yes; not so much in the Commissioner personally as in the system—or lack of it—for the control of prices in this State.

Mr. Styants: They have been shorn of a lot of their power by the State Government.

The Attorney General: That is incorrect.

Mr. Styants: You removed control from 3,000 articles, as a first step.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I am at a loss to understand why the Government and its supporters refuse to allow the public to have a direct say in the decisions arrived at in respect of prices.

The Attorney General: What you advocate is rather the Russian system. First of all you appoint a general and then a representative of the people to watch him.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I am not concerned as to whether it is a Russian, an Eskimo or any other kind of system.

The Attorney General: It is, is it not?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I do not know. Probably the Attorney General has available to him special sources of information about Russia that are not available to me, though I have never heard it suggested that he is a fellow traveller. It is not a question of whether the proposed arrangement is a Russian idea, an American idea or any other kind of idea in particular; the test is whether it is desirable, practicable and should be put into effect. I had hoped the Minister would approach the question from a commonsense angle.

The Attorney General: That is the correct point of view.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: If the consumers had a direct representative on the Prices Commission, much closer consideration would be given to their point of view.

There is urgent need for such consideration to be given to that point of view and to the general problem of rising prices that are followed by rising wages and salaries. A three-man commission of the type I have suggested could give detailed consideration to the problem as a whole. It would be representative of the consumers—who generally speaking are the workers and their families, although farmers and other groups are included among the consumers—and would also, by direct representation, be able to put forward the views of the business and trading interests. In that way we would get a much better statement of the case with regard to any suggested increase in price than is possible at present.

At the moment, business interests have the right to argue their cases before the commissioner, and can put up figures in support of applications for increases in prices, but I have never heard of a consumer, with any standing, being able to go before the commissioner and put forward arguments as to why some increase in price should not be granted. I maintain that the interests of the consumers in this or any other State are of sufficient importance to warrant that section of the community having direct representation on a prices commission, so that they might be safeguarded to the utmost possible limit. The Government gains nothing but loses a good deal by having a single commissioner. During the last eight or nine years, we have had considerable experience of price fixing in Australia. The Commonwealth operated the principle of a single commissioner, with State deputy commissioners, and since then—as far as I know—all the States have operated on the principle of the single commissioner, although I am not sure whether that is so in the State of Queensland. Whether it is so or not does not matter, because experience has shown that the consumers are not only entitled to direct representation but should have it, if only for the purpose of giving the consumer a better understanding of the prices fixation system and a greater confidence in it.

Unless consumers are given a direct say and direct representation in the fixation of prices in the future, I feel sure that the system in this State will fall more deeply into disrepute so far as the general public is concerned, and that would be a bad thing.

It is always a bad thing in any community if, a great number of the people in that community are without faith and confidence in a system of control under which they are forced to live. In such a situation we would find the seeds of situations which are in no way pleasant or desirable.

This motion is, therefore, one which I think should have the support of every member of the House. I would be gratified if the members of the Government would give it most serious consideration, and see their way clear to agree to the direct representation of the consumers on the one hand and the business and trading interests on the other hand. We would then have in this State the Arbitration Court system for the control of wages and salaries and a prices control system both based upon the same principles, both set up in the same way, and both giving direct representation to the same set of interests in the community. That I consider is most desirable and practicable and, if the Government would assist the House in that direction, we would find that we would have a better prices control system which would operate more effectively and thus safeguard the consumers. Secondly, it would, in some small way at least, assist in preventing prices from rising as high as they will rise if the present system of control is continued.

On motion by the Attorney General, debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

THE PREMIER (Hon. D. R. McLarty—Murray-Wellington): I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till 2 p.m. on Thursday.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 5.14 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Thursday, 30th June, 1949.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 2 p.m., and read prayers.

QUESTIONS.

HOUSING.

(a) *As to Permits and Materials.*

Mr. ACKLAND asked the Minister for Housing:

(1) Did the member for Murchison on Tuesday week strongly criticise the practice of issuing building permits for homes in advance of available materials?