

the metropolitan area to be erected under the Commonwealth Housing Scheme?

(2) If so, what are the prices for the erection of—(a) a four-roomed house; (b) a five-roomed house?

(3) If obtained, how do the prices compare with houses of approximately similar dimensions previously erected under the State Workers' Homes Board Housing Scheme?

The PREMIER replied: The hon. member supplied me with a copy of these questions and I have obtained the following information:—

(1) Yes.

(2) Tenders were called recently for the erection of 50 houses in the metropolitan area. The average prices submitted by the lowest tenderers for four and five-roomed houses were—(a) four rooms, £927 10s.; (b) five rooms, £991 10s.

(3) The houses built by the Workers' Homes Board in 1939 were slightly different from those intended to be built under the Commonwealth Housing Scheme, but on a comparable basis the prices in 1939 would have been—(a) four rooms, £700; (b) five rooms, £781.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Fifth Day.

Debate resumed from the 3rd August.

MR. LESLIE (Mt. Marshall) [4.35]: I desire to preface my remarks by extending to members of the House, both on this and on the other side, my very sincere thanks for the courtesies they have extended to me, and the great assistance rendered to me on my entering the House. In that I would include the Ministers, who have shown me every kindness that could possibly be expected, and have given me every assistance in any matter on which I have approached them. That atmosphere, while it did not actually surprise me, convinced me that the harmony that exists in our State Parliament is such that the people of Western Australia can be satisfied that any legislation submitted to the House can be safely entrusted to members. I commend the member for Nelson on the very fine speech he made in moving the Address-in-reply. I was rather surprised to find sentiments such as he uttered coming from that source, but it cannot be denied that when he remarked that the exist-

ing state of affairs in the rural areas of the State was a reflection on the nation, he was correct. To that I would add that it is also a reflection on the Governments of this State, and by that I do not mean only this Government but all Governments that have been in command in this State over many past years. I agree with him that agriculture is the broad basis on which rests the whole of our national life. I only hope that his mention of the fact from the part of the House with which he is associated is an indication that the recognition of this truth is slowly spreading among every section of the community.

I believe that we have to awaken in the minds of those who are not actually engaged in rural areas a sense of the interdependence between different sections of the community. The Minister for Lands is to be highly commended on the rural reconstruction report which I believe should be circulated freely amongst members of the public. I say that in all sincerity, because it is very evident that the Minister and his colleagues devoted considerable attention to the preparation of the report, which is educative and informative to the highest degree. Although there may be items in it with which we do not all agree, the report has touched on almost all the basic difficulties with which the economic life of the nation, and particularly of Western Australia as a primary producing State, is confronted. Mention is made in the report of the fact that 20.8 per cent. of the breadwinners throughout Australia are engaged in primary production other than mining, and that for a period of 10 years from 1930 to 1940 they were responsible for 82 per cent. of the total value of the exports from the Commonwealth.

Figures such as those serve to indicate the prevailing unbalanced system of economies that permits people, upon whose endeavours the economic life of the nation depends, to reap the smallest of returns as the result of their contributions. I am safe in saying that a considerable number of them have secured no return whatsoever. I therefore commend the report for perusal by everyone. One aspect I wish to mention affecting the economies not only of farming but of our national life, is that when reference is made to losses incurred in production the farming community is blamed wholly for inefficiency. Why only the producer or farmer should

be picked out for blame in that respect is difficult to imagine. It reminds me that my experience as a newspaper man has been that everyone knows how to run a newspaper far better than does the proprietor. People say that if they were running a newspaper they would put this in and leave that out: they would do this and would refrain from doing that.

The Minister for Mines: That does not apply only to newspaper men.

Mr. LESLIE: Perhaps not.

The Premier: It applies to football umpires.

Mr. LESLIE: I believe that it does. However, that has been my experience as a newspaper man and that sort of attitude applies particularly to the critics of the farming community. No other section of the community is similarly situated to the producer, who cannot make provision to meet rising costs. The manufacturer or distributor can increase his charges to meet added costs, and the industrial worker has the Arbitration Court which is designed to ensure that he is paid at least a basic wage commensurate with the prevailing cost of living. The farmer is left to pure chance. He has to contend with the vagaries of the season and with markets in which he is the prey for both consumers and distributors. Yet we find that when rising costs affect the economic stability of the country, the farmer is accused of inefficiency and costly methods. Much more than that is required in explanation than merely to lay the blame upon the farmer.

The primary producer will, I trust, secure fair consideration under the new order of which we hear so much. When it comes to endeavouring to define what the new order really is, I find that all the economic experts are as much in the dark as I am. If we are to enjoy the benefits of a new order, we shall obtain it only on the basis of one principle—it has to be based on social justice. In operation it will depend for success upon whether people, as a whole and individually, realise the responsibilities of the individual one to the other. That brings to mind our promised freedoms. How many people are anticipating that in the prospective freedom from want and freedom from worry there will be relief from all their responsibilities as individuals? I believe we are approaching the

question of the new order and its freedoms from an entirely wrong angle. Too many people think that they will be absolved from all the responsibilities that they as individuals owe not only to themselves but to their fellow-men. There is a danger that in seeking this freedom we may find it filched from us.

I suggest that we cannot find a better example of the needs of the new order than in the men who today are enabling Parliament to meet here in harmony and peace—the men of our Fighting Forces. I sincerely pray, and I hope all Governments and the people generally will pray, that our fighting men will bring back with them when they resume civil life the benefit of the lessons and experiences gained on the field of battle. If they do that, they will help towards success on behalf of the nation. If they do that, we will get somewhere with the new order. The first things the soldier acquires are self-reliance and self-responsibility. Next he is taught co-operation and mutual endeavour. Then he learns to practise self-sacrificing comradeship. That is what the new order should amount to. That is what should be our freedom. If men and women follow along those lines, we will have a real new order. I am satisfied about that, and I pray it will so develop. There is grave danger, however, that in looking to this freedom too many will endeavour to escape from their responsibilities and, in consequence, the people may reach a stage of complacency which will lend itself to exploitation by those individual sections prone to exploit others at every opportunity. If the individual is to realise the responsibilities he owes to himself and to his fellows, then he will realise that the new order for him will entail even greater responsibilities. I appeal to the people generally and to Parliament to awake to a realisation of this fact and to educate our youth to the knowledge that the new freedom we anticipate will mean greater responsibility than that which we ourselves faced in our youth.

While mentioning the Armed Forces it was a little disappointing to me to find no reference in His Excellency's Speech to the very fine record the men of Western Australia have established in every field in which they have been engaged. It is very pleasant to be told what the State has

done, how many of our men have enlisted and how much money has been subscribed by Western Australians towards the war loans; but, to use a colloquialism, a pat on the back for the men who are upholding Western Australian prestige is well merited. Those men deserve some commendation from the Government and from His Majesty's representative in this State. I do hope that the Government may see fit to send to the men a message to the effect that we as a Parliament, speaking on behalf of the people of Western Australia, do appreciate what they have done. The record of Western Australian military units stands high, and unchallengeable—something that we can all be proud of.

Turning now to His Excellency's Speech, may I say that it contains points which win commendation for the Government, but also some points which evoke criticism. I know it is easy enough to criticise; but criticism, to be useful, must be contributory and constructive. We must always bear in mind the fact that those whom we criticise here bear the burden and responsibility of government on their shoulders—no light task, as we all appreciate. I therefore suggest to Ministers that they bear in mind that whatever criticism may come from this side—and I speak now from knowledge of and personal association with members on these benches—is tempered by the knowledge that the Government has responsibilities and a burden in carrying on the affairs of the State. We keep that in mind; and therefore any criticism we may offer is offered not lightly, but only after due consideration of the facts so far as we are enabled to see them. If our criticism at times should appear to be unjustified and unwarranted, perhaps the responsibility for that may be laid at the door of members of the Government in respect of their failure to take us fully into their confidence as to their intentions concerning the future of the State. On that score I offer this first point of criticism.

I regretted the scantiness of the information contained in the Speech regarding the Government's programme for the future. Naturally, His Excellency refers to the surplus and credits the Government with having produced it. It is very fine for a Government to be able to report a surplus at the end of the financial year; but, as has already been mentioned, the activities of the Government may not be as commend-

able on that score as appearances suggest. It all depends on whether the Government is to be regarded as purely a business institution or, on the other hand, as an organisation created to improve the social welfare of the people. Success—and I suppose a financial surplus may be considered a success—is always only of a comparative nature, and our estimation of it must be based upon a standard of values according to the point of view. Personally, I should consider the success of a Government as being far greater if measured by monuments to which it is able to point in the establishment of improved social conditions; by, shall I say, a transition now from that parrot cry of a standard of living to a standard of comfort—a better standard of social amenities, to such things as make people love to live in a country instead of criticising its Government.

The Premier: Co-operation with the Commonwealth Government in order to escape deficits is also important.

Mr. LESLIE: If finance is to be the be-all and end-all of government, I suggest to Ministers to look in their consciences as to whether they have fulfilled those requirements for which a social and democratic Government such as this is established. Now I desire to make reference to particular items in the Speech. First of all I wish to deal with the outstanding industry of the area which I represent—the wheat industry. In all sincerity I commend the Government on the fact that His Excellency tells us that Ministers are going to seize every opportunity to protect the wheat industry from any further shrinkage and to plan efforts for its re-establishment. I know that this is a very sincere desire of the Minister for Agriculture, and I can assure the hon. gentleman that knowledge of that fact is appreciated, and that my people believe in his earnestness in that regard. When dealing with a question such as the agricultural industry we must endeavour to leave on one side all partisan feeling and to regard the subject from the broadest possible point of view. Whilst I commend the Minister for Agriculture and whilst I know that his ideas and endeavours and sympathies are directed into channels which we all approve, his particular methods are of course open to criticism, questioning and differences of opinion. It is from that angle that we may offer suggestions.

Wrapped up in the subject of the wheat industry are the remarks of His Excellency that steps for the revaluation of conditional purchase lands held in the outer areas are nearing completion. I contend that a complete analysis of the possibilities of country included in the marginal areas would reveal that the arbitrary division of our lands into marginal, buffer and good areas is economically unsound. In the marginal districts is to be found country equal to the best in the State in point of productive capacity, which has been proved beyond doubt. The quality of the soil and the climatic conditions are there to justify investigation into the possibilities of the land for more intense utilisation than that for grazing pursuits. I suggest that not only a re-valuation of land is called for, but also an actual re-classification of that country which is described as marginal. I can assure the Minister that outside the marginal areas there is land which, though considered to be good, is inferior to other country that is considered to be merely marginal. The Minister may reply that the classification of country as marginal is based on the rainfall; but I contend that some of the country described as marginal can be used for more productive utilisation than that of grazing, taking the rainfall into account.

The Minister for Lands: To follow your argument to its logical conclusion there must be at least three prices?

Mr. LESLIE: I do not think that the suitability of marginal areas, or portions of them, for production has been completely investigated.

The Minister for Lands: Do you inveigh against the prices now charged for land?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. LESLIE: Not at all. I am not complaining now against the prices charged for land. My complaint is against the policy. Now I desire to quote from an article dealing with marginal areas which was published in the "Wheatgrower" on the 9th March. It states—

Another sore point with marginal farmers is the fact that no definite statement will be made as to whether they are to be permitted to continue wheatgrowing. At the present time they are reduced to 150 acres, but the future is indefinite. Under the scheme put before the then Minister for Commerce in 1940, the marginal farmers were to be permitted to carry on wheatgrowing as a side line in conjunction with pastoral pursuits. It is on the continuance of wheatgrowing depends the success or otherwise

of pastoral pursuits in those areas. A minimum of 200 acres is the least which these farmers contend they can deal with.

Here we see the setting up of a definite policy in relation to those wheatgrowing areas, again an arbitrary policy which does not take into consideration the suitability of particular land for the purpose to which it is put. I am concerned, as are the settlers in these areas, at the fact that if this policy is continued those areas may be turned into merely grazing propositions. We view with concern the difficulties that may arise then on account of erosion and salt, the effect of which will be to render the country unsuitable even for grazing. We fear we shall eventually find that instead of one road board being able to report that of 275 settlers only 70 are left, the road board will have been closed up as well as others, and a portion of the State which has contributed considerably to the wealth of Western Australia—far greater in proportion to the amount which has been written off—will have been lost to us. I offer encouragement to the Minister to continue his efforts on behalf of the wheat industry, but I appeal to him to bring about an alteration in that arbitrary arrangement, the wrongful revaluation and classification of country in chunks, instead of completely investigating the land and reclassifying it.

It is pleasing to note the increase in stock numbers, although it is regrettable to find that while on the one hand Governments offer every inducement and encouragement to stock producers to increase their stock for the benefit of the nation as a whole, as soon as seasonal conditions are adverse the producers are blamed for having done something they were encouraged to do. The blame for overstocking has been laid at the door of the producer who has endeavoured to comply with the urgent requests for increase of stock made by the present and past Governments. I suggest that the men who have so complied with requests made to them by Governments in order to meet a national situation, and with a view to rehabilitating themselves, should be commended for what they have done and some effort should be made to assist them when seasonal conditions are unfavourable.

This point raises the question of railways. When the timetables were prepared for most of the branch lines of our outback areas, the

number of stock in those districts was very small and stock trucks were added to a service designed for passenger carrying. The increase in the number of stock and the consequent demand for railway facilities for transport to markets have changed the situation very considerably, so much so that the passenger service is now added to the stock train. As an example, we find that on the Bencubbin branch line the passenger service is nothing more or less than a stock train. People travel in little more comfort than do the sheep, at the same speed and with little convenience. I accordingly impress upon the Minister for Railways the need for a revision of these timetables and services. He should realise that stock railage has so increased as to warrant separate stock trains, independent of passenger services. I am sure that if the Minister is prepared to provide a better passenger service, one more attractive and offering better convenience to passengers, he will find that a passenger service can be maintained apart from stock trains. It is deplorable that passengers should have their carriages hooked on to a rake of trucks conveying sheep.

The question of water supplies is one that is rather a sore point at the present time. It was more so during last summer. I recently asked a question of the Minister as to water supplies for the coming season and the answer was not satisfactory. We must bear in mind that many country areas are now served both by the Goldfields Water Supply and the No. 1 or Barbalin Water Scheme. Many farmers regard that water service as an insurance scheme. It may not be generally known that farmers are compelled to pay water rates through a charge levied on the extent of their holdings, irrespective of whether they use the water or not; and, as I said, most of the primary producers in those districts look upon the charge as being in the nature of an insurance against adverse seasons or a shortage in their own water supply. They pay the charge as willingly as any person pays a charge inflicted by a Government, and consequently it is heartbreaking to them to find that just at the time when they most require the water for which they have paid over many years it is not available.

That occurred last year. I am not blaming the present Minister for it, but we

certainly can blame the Government that failed to provide adequate facilities in the past. Owing to manpower difficulties and scarcity of material for renewals and replacements, farmers were unable during the past serious dry season to obtain adequate water requirements. Many of them are at present viewing the coming season with misgivings. I would urge the Minister to investigate every possible avenue and make the most urgent representations to the proper authorities for the release of manpower and materials in order to ensure an adequate water supply for the coming season, otherwise many farmers will suffer a serious financial loss again.

Another matter I desire to touch upon briefly is health. His Excellency has advised us that legislation will be brought down to deal with nurses. I know the Minister for Health is as aware as I am of the most unsatisfactory conditions under which nurses have to train and work. An overhaul of the remuneration at present paid to nurses during their training period is definitely and urgently required. There is reason for anxious concern about this matter because unless the profession is made more attractive during its commencing stages and the later period, we shall not be able to maintain the numbers of nurses who will be required when some of the social schemes that are in contemplation are brought into being. The Minister might consider a revision of the conditions under which nurses are trained and of the remuneration to be paid to them during that period, as well as a revision of conditions and rates of pay when their training has been completed.

We have in the Minister for Education someone to whom the country is looking with great hope to bring about a change in the exceedingly unsatisfactory educational conditions now prevailing. That is acknowledged on both sides of the House. The present Minister is a practical man and we are looking forward, shall I say, to almost revolutionary changes in the educational facilities. No definite indication is given to us in the Speech as to the action the Minister proposes to take, and therefore we can but hope that he will bring down legislation and take such action as he, a practical man, knows is urgently required. From experience, I know he has dealt most sympathetically with the re-

quests that have been made to him, but of course the bogey of finance comes up. On that point my opinion is that the needs are of greater importance than the means and that we should adopt a standard of values which will comprehend that policy. I suggest to the Minister that one of his biggest stumbling blocks is the fact that he must go cap in hand to the Public Works Department for every little school requirement. It is high time the Education Department established a ways and works branch of its own. The Education Department is the best judge of the requirements of a school, not a man trained in engineering and whose main job is probably the construction of roads, bridges and buildings.

Mr. Mann: What about the Under-Treasurer? I think he is the worst man of all.

Mr. LESLIE: Yes, I believe there is something in what the hon. member says; it all depends on the point of view. If money is to be the guiding factor, let us aim at a huge surplus at the end of the year, irrespective of what might happen. But I repeat that the Education Department knows best the needs of a school, and it seems to me that it is the department which should prepare plans and estimates and have the necessary work carried out. Engineers and inspectors are concerned only with ways and means, not with the necessity for the work itself. If that difficulty is to be overcome the Education Department will require to set up a department of ways and works, in which it will be able to undertake what it considers to be necessary work in the interests of the children and of education. It will not be bound by finance from another department or have to meet the question of standards simply because some department in no way connected with education decides that it has a set standard which will apply whether suitable or not, and without any modification to suit different conditions.

Continuing with His Excellency's Speech, there is the question of soldier settlement. I do not intend to deal with that at any length for the simple reason that notice has already been given ensuring discussion in that connection in the House. But it is rather disappointing to find that no apparent action has been taken by the Government to deal with the question of attracting soldier settlers into our rural areas.

We know that before the war there was a definite drift to the cities, and that is likely to continue. If the presumed clamour for land is to come about and if we are to get these soldier settlers, we must make conditions in rural areas attractive to the people whom we want to induce to go out there. That is definitely the responsibility of this Government. We cannot expect men and women under modern conditions to go out and labour as did their fathers or the pioneers. I do not think I can do better than to refer in this connection to the report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission. The Commission has this to say in paragraph 93 of its report—

Some city dwellers take the view that farmers are a race apart, that their desires and wants are simpler than those of the more sophisticated city workers, and that the amenities which modern civilisation regards as normal are not desired by farming people. The Commission considers that such persons are builders of delusion, and that the average country man and woman have the same sort of aspirations to a comfortable home, modern conveniences and normal recreational facilities as those whose lives are spent in cities.

That is something which anyone who has any knowledge of rural conditions will whole-heartedly endorse. That particular passage should be considered by the Government and it should take action at an early date in order to formulate a plan to provide for these social amenities to be introduced the moment that a soldier settlement scheme is prepared. The Government must make conditions attractive in order to have the most suitable type of man coming into our rural areas.

I have left one point to be dealt with finally because, to my regret, no mention whatsoever of the subject is made in His Excellency's Speech. I refer to the vexed question of vermin. I am going to leave alone the question of rabbits, because it has been discussed so often in the House that I am sure all members are aware of what is happening in that regard. But I do want to utter a very serious warning concerning emus. We are facing a very definite menace from the invasion of emus in the north-eastern areas of the State. Very recently a deputation waited upon the Minister for Agriculture and informed him of the serious depredations made by emus and the losses being incurred by the farmers as a result. It fell to my lot to be able to go through

the northern part of my electorate at harvest time and actually see the damage the emus were doing. I can assure members that in no less than three cases I saw the farmer's wife driving a truck around the place while her husband was working as fast as his machinery would allow him, to get the crop in before the emus could smash it down.

The pest is serious. Whereas at the commencement of the last harvest season emus were more or less confined to an area roughly on a line north of Koorda and Bencubbin, today they are as far south as Dowerin and Nungarin. It is not a matter of a single bird here and there; they are there in flocks, and their invasion is slowly going southward.

Mr. J. Hegney: It is suggested that their meat would be good to eat.

Mr. LESLIE: I would not care to tackle it.

Mr. J. Hegney: How would it compare with mutton?

Mr. LESLIE: If any member would like to eat emu flesh, I extend to him a hearty invitation to come to my electorate, where he will get a surfeit of it.

Mr. J. Hegney: It was a man from up your way who made the proposal.

Mr. LESLIE: It did not come from my area, or perhaps it was a bait offered to the city folk to induce them to come out and help in the slaughtering of the emus in the absence of any governmental action.

Hon. N. Keenan: Do not people eat a portion of the emu?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. LESLIE: No portion of it! However, I want to say this, that when the deputation met the Minister, he expressed his sympathy, and in his reply outlined a rather visionary scheme or method to deal with the whole vermin question throughout the State. I am sure that we will receive his support on request for the appointment of a Select Committee to go into this question. But the emu pest is an immediate menace, and it is absolutely necessary that immediate action be taken by the Government to stop the spread of the birds and also to reduce their considerable numbers before the oncoming harvest. We are, I am happy to say, experiencing a rather satisfactory season in the district I represent. We will, of course, require the finishing rains, but it would certainly be a heartbreak to find that, after the anxiety of the opening of the

season and the promising outlook today, the whole of our efforts will be brought to nothing because of the failure to deal with a pest, the knowledge of the dangers of which has been brought home to those in a responsible position.

I cannot speak too strongly in urging the Minister to take some immediate action. I know that we have his sympathy, but sympathy is a very holey bag; it holds no water. I can only hope that he will awaken to the immediate danger of the position, and to the fact that not only in these areas will the country be denuded of crops but that the pest will establish itself further south and become more costly to eradicate. I suggest that the Minister make every possible effort to deal with the menace. I add my support to the appeals that have been made and are being made to him in connection with this pest in a desire, shall I say, to fan his rather ineffectual spark of sympathy into a blaze of activity so that he will get something accomplished before too late.

The Minister for Justice: There are thousands in my district.

Mr. Thorn: He is not trying to get any of yours.

Mr. LESLIE: I am not concerned with the emus in any one particular district; I am concerned with the fact that the emu question is becoming a national menace. At the present time it is most urgent. Not only are the standing crops likely to be ruined but next year's crops in areas as far south as the York electorate and westward, are likely to be affected. The birds are travelling and they are a definite menace.

MR. NORTH (Claremont): I would like to commence my few remarks by offering my congratulations to everyone present, including myself, for their safe return. I am taking the place of one who would have been a maiden speaker. I cannot claim to be making a maiden speech this time. I feel compelled to make a few remarks about the recent election to explain my position to the House and to the people of Claremont, because many things were said during the course of the election and I can no longer ignore them as in the past. There were in the district other strong forces of the same political colour as myself. They were trying to gain the seat. Before dealing with that