750. **Mrs D.J. GUISE to the Minister for Energy:**
Will the minister please update the house on Western Power’s certified agreement negotiations?

**Mr A.J. CARPENTER replied:**
I thank the member for some notice of this question. I am pleased to report to the Parliament that last week Western Power successfully negotiated an agreement with the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union - CEPU - in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. I congratulate all those involved in the negotiation of that outcome. Linesmen will receive a 12.25 per cent pay rise over three years through annual increases of 4.25 per cent, four per cent and four per cent. There is also a 7.5 per cent catch-up payment for wages employees to bring them into line with the going rate for similar workers in other states. This is a unique situation for linesmen. I will get back to that in a minute. It had to be addressed and it does not necessarily apply to other workers. I thank the Australian Industrial Relations Commission for its very constructive role in bringing this matter to a successful conclusion.

It has also brought to light one of the most reckless and ridiculous displays that we have seen in recent times concerning industrial relations from the new Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. I think he fired off without giving any thought to what he was talking about when he urged the Western Australian government to introduce essential services type legislation to deal with the situation. The situation was being dealt with under the existing system and it was dealt with successfully. There was no need to roll out the tanks! There was no need to start attacking people as they went about their daily tasks. There was no need for a ridiculous confrontationist approach that would have only worsened the situation. If we had taken the member’s advice, right now we would be locked into an ugly industrial dispute and the power would have been out. To illuminate the member a little bit further, there is already such legislation in Western Australia: the Fuel, Energy and Power Resources Act 1972. Those with any length of memory about politics in Western Australia will remember that amendments to that legislation, which I think came into effect in 1974, provoked extreme debate in the Western Australian community. Look up the history - the legislation and the powers already exist. They are not used because they would provoke the situation; they would not resolve the situation. The situation was resolved. Real life is this: when the unions are asking for an increase in their pay, they make the best case they can.

Mr **T.R. Buswell** interjected.

**Mr A.J. CARPENTER:** What was that?

**Mr T.R. Buswell:** As soon as they look at AWAs, the Premier is on his feet like nobody’s business!

**Mr A.J. CARPENTER:** If it were up to the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, Western Australia would be in a constant industrial war. There is absolutely no need to take the crazy approach that the member advocated. It is sad to say that the member’s position - which is probably born of impetuosity, inexperience and a lack of wisdom - was reflected in an editorial in *The West Australian*. It was written by a person who shares many of those very same qualities. He is impetuous, lacks wisdom and does not know what he is talking about most of the time. In fact, as I recall, consistent with the usual depth of analysis that is applied, the editorial stated that the resolution came about because the Labor Party wanted to cosy up to its union mates - Bill Game and the CEPU. I can understand why *The West Australian* is sensitive to this sort of thing. I think it was the very same edition that pointed out that the chief executive officer of West Australian Newspapers Ltd earns a modest $1.9 million a year. Fair enough, the CEO does not write the editorials. The editor is responsible for the editorials and, whether he writes them or not, they are written under his direction. Ask the people at the newspaper office; they are written under his direction. The editor of *The West Australian*, Paul Armstrong, earns only $300 000 a year. That is fair enough. In fact, I think that is a modest payment for a person who holds that position. It is much more than the Premier earns!

I will test the depth of knowledge of the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party: what do the linesmen earn?

Several members interjected.

**Mr A.J. CARPENTER:** What does a linesman earn? Come on! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is the expert.

**Mr T.R. Buswell:** Ask the member for Kimberley.

**Mr A.J. CARPENTER:** He was telling the world that they should not be getting this pay rise and that they were being outrageous. What do they earn?

**Mr T.R. Buswell:** It’s called the big gun at the head, isn’t it?

**Mr A.J. CARPENTER:** Have a little guess. What do they earn?
Mr T.R. Buswell: I’m concerned about the process.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: This spokesman is out there telling us that they have just received an outrageous pay rise. What do they earn? I will tell the Deputy Leader of the Opposition what they earn. Before this certified agreement increase, the level 8 linesmen in Western Australia working for Western Power were on a weekly salary of $848. As a result of the first increase, the level 8 - that is, the senior level linesmen - will now be on $1,012.40 a week.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Does that include overtime?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: That is their base salary.

Mr T.R. Buswell: What is their actual salary?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The member should tell us. Here we go. This is what has happened. A person who knows nothing about the issue, nothing about the levels of pay that these people earn, has said that they have been outrageous in demanding an increase and has advocated a big stick approach to bash them back into their box, which would only have incited industrial conflagration in Western Australia and brought about the very result that he said he wanted to avoid; that is, lights out! That is what would have happened. Now that he is the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Vasse must research his stuff a bit better. All the members sitting on the other side of the chamber who voted for him are watching him from behind; they are all watching Troy “the Boy” and Matt “the Brat” sitting up the front, and every single one of them knows, or thinks, they could do a better job. The theme that is emerging today is that there is no leadership opposite. If the poor souls who loyally go along and vote for the Liberal Party think that there is an alternative leader sitting there waiting to take over, and described by the newspaper as by far the most outstanding of the new recruits, my God, what does that say about the rest of them?

Point of Order

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: By no stretch of the imagination can this be deemed to be in any way anything to do with the question. The standing order to do with relevance must surely prevail.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am sure the minister will be finishing his contribution in a very short space of time. I direct that he complete his answer quickly.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I take that guidance, Mr Speaker. This is the best tonic for jetlag I have ever come across. If that is the best the Deputy Leader of the Opposition can do, he is in trouble. He has to do his work now; the spotlight is on him. The spotlight shines very brightly. The further along he goes, as the member for Kalgoorlie is finding, the brighter the light will shine on him. It shines very brightly; it shows all the little faults; it shows all the little cracks - and there are a lot of cracks in you, brother! There is a big gap - knowledge, wisdom.

I congratulate Western Power, the union and the Australian Industrial Relations Commission for coming to this resolution.