

Hon. L. CRAIG: That is so; nor have they the money to buy it. We have reached an era of heavy transport that country roads are unable to stand up to, and I see no solution except the provision of large sums of money for their maintenance. I support the motion.

On motion by Hon. W. R. Hall, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.41 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 23rd August, 1950.

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

QUESTIONS.

ROYAL PERTH HOSPITAL.

As to Patient's Belongings.

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Minister for Health:

(1) Is she aware that on the 10th March last a patient named Mohr was admitted to Royal Perth Hospital, and that on the day of his discharge he reported to the C.I.B. that certain of his belongings were missing?

(2) Does she know that at the time of admission entries were made in the property book which were signed by the admitting orderly, the ward sister and the patient himself as being correct?

(3) Is she aware that on discharge the patient signed the book as having correctly had returned to him the articles mentioned in the property book?

(4) Is she aware, further, that following the patient's report to the C.I.B., inquiries were made of three orderlies, their persons and domiciles being subjected to a search without search warrants being produced, although with the consent of the three persons concerned?

(5) Does this not indicate that there is no proper protection for the staff against mistaken or malicious allegations?

(6) What does she intend to do about it?

The MINISTER replied:

(1), (2), (3) and (4) I have been so informed.

(5) No. The system has been carefully reviewed and found to be satisfactory. In this instance, the property alleged lost had never been in the possession of the hospital.

(6) No action is necessary. No-one can be prevented from lodging complaints with the police, and the orderlies have the same protection against wrongful accusations as every other member of the community.

ELECTORAL.

As to Boulder Postal Vote Officer.

Mr. McCULLOCH asked the Attorney General:

What was the reason for the removal of Mr. William Joseph Kenneally of 102 Forrest-street, Boulder (where he and his wife and family have resided for many years), from the list of postal vote officers?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL replied:

Control of appointments of postal vote officers is in the hands of the Chief Electoral Officer.

I am informed that with the introduction of absentee voting at the last election the same number of postal vote officers as previously in some districts was not required. Mr. Kenneally was a resident of the Boulder district where there was no contest. It was considered his services, amongst a number of other postal vote officers, were no longer required.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.*As to C.M.F. Camps and Pay.***Mr. YATES** asked the Premier:

(1) In view of the grave international situation, will he give an assurance that all Government employees who are members of the C.M.F. will be granted leave for the forthcoming militia camps to be held at Northam?

(2) Will the difference in pay be made good to those attending?

The PREMIER replied:

(1) As far as practicable—yes.

(2) Yes, in accordance with the policy adopted by the Government since the formation of the C.M.F. in this State.

COMMONWEALTH-STATE HOMES.*(a) As to Cost, Rent, etc.***Mr. GRAHAM** asked the Honorary Minister for Housing:

(1) What are the disturbing factors which are said to prevent the compilation of reliable figures to show the average cost of building Commonwealth-State rental homes under the day labour system, and which apparently do not affect private contractors?

(2) How is the economic rent of these houses computed if, as he says, the cost of building them cannot be reliably calculated?

(3) Similarly, how is it possible to arrive at a selling price of such houses?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) The previous question referred to average cost of building under day labour conditions and the disturbing factors make it difficult for a comparison to be made with costs of identical types by contract. They are—

(i) variations in foundation requirements, including materials as well as measurements;

(ii) use of material cheaper or dearer than specified owing to conditions of supply;

(iii) roofing materials used—terra cotta or concrete tiles, or fibrous material;

(iv) fencing requirements;

(v) basic and other wage adjustments and altered conditions of employment as may apply at the various stages of completion of individual houses;

(vi) cost of materials at the various stages when absorbed into or purchased for the dwelling;

(vii) plumbing and sewerage requirements;

(viii) the time spread or time factor, e.g., identical houses commenced at the same time, but at different stages of completion at given dates, and completed at different dates would be subject to variations as influenced by fluctuating costs. It follows that houses commenced at different times would be subject to variations if different costs applied at the different times of construction.

It is possible to quote the cost of a particular house by day labour, but the home would not be of recent construction because of time taken to finalise costs and the resultant figure would in any event be useless for comparative purposes.

(2) Economic rent is computed in first instance by estimate and adjusted when final costs known.

(3) Selling price is not fixed until final costs known.

*(b) As to Day Labour Construction.***Mr. GRAHAM** asked the Honorary Minister for Housing:

(1) What is the total number of completed houses constructed under the Commonwealth-State rental scheme by day labour?

(2) What is the total cost of such houses?

(3) What is the total area, in squares, of these houses?

(4) What are the numbers of each type of house so built—four-roomed, five-roomed, etc.?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) Seven hundred and fifty.

(2) Final costs of homes recently constructed not yet known.

(3) 950,810 square feet.

(4) Four-roomed type, 235; five-roomed type, 462; expansible and duplex, 53.

*(c) As to Building Rate.***Mr. GRAHAM** asked the Honorary Minister for Housing:

What is the explanation of 109 rental houses having been completed by 304 men under day labour during the six months ended December, 1947, according to figures supplied by him at the time, whilst the corresponding figures for the six months ended December, 1949, are 63 houses completed by 935 men, as he informed me last Thursday?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

The information given in reply to the question of the 17th instant was to the effect that 488 homes were constructed by 935 men. The 63 homes built under day labour are included in this figure.

(d) As to Report on Day Labour Cost.

Mr. GRAHAM (without notice) asked the Honorary Minister for Housing:

Will he lay on the Table of the House the report of the Audit Officer made in connection with the cost pertaining to the erection of homes under the day labour system?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

I am not prepared to lay the papers on the Table, but the hon. member is quite at liberty to come to my office and peruse them.

STATE HOUSING COMMISSION.

As to Care of Harris Children.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: Yesterday, the member for Fremantle alleged that the children of parents named Harris were to be the subject of application by the Child Welfare Department for committal to the care of the State.

The Child Welfare Department does not intend to take, and has not taken any such action. The Sergeant of Police at North Fremantle advised on the 16th August that the family had difficulty in obtaining accommodation on that night and, as a temporary expedient, accommodation at the Mt. Lawley reception home was offered but not accepted, as Mrs. Harris advised the matron it was not required.

RAILWAYS.

(a) As to Footbridge, Claisebrook-road.

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Minister representing the Minister for Railways:

When is it anticipated that reconstruction of the overhead footbridge and substitution of ramps for steps will be commenced at the railway crossing at Claisebrook-road, East Perth?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied:

Commencement of work is contingent upon delivery of material which is on order.

(b) As to Standard Gauge Proposal.

Mr. NEEDHAM asked the Minister representing the Minister for Railways:

(1) Will he inform the House of the present position of Western Australia as to the proposal for a uniform 4ft. 8½in. railway gauge?

(2) Have negotiations with the Commonwealth Government been completed?

(3) If so, will he give particulars?

(4) What is the attitude of this State Government on the question of a uniform railway gauge?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied:

(1) The matter is still the subject of negotiation with the Commonwealth Government.

(2) and (3) Answered by (1).

(4) The attitude of the State Government is dependent on the degree of standardisation involved, the time element and the apportionment of cost between the Commonwealth and State Governments.

(c) As to "Wildflower" Class Diesel Trains.

Mr. PERKINS asked the Minister representing the Minister for Railways:

(1) What has each "Wildflower" class diesel train cost?

(2) What is its carrying capacity—passengers and freight?

(3) What have been the average weekly earnings of each such train in recent weeks?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied:

(1) Approximately £54,000.

(2) One hundred and twenty-eight passengers, five tons luggage or freight.

(3) Approximately £225.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

As to Housing of Cultural Sections.

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Is it proposed to acquire premises in the city for the purpose of properly housing the cultural sections of the Education Department?

(2) If so, what stage has been reached?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) and (2) If the hon. member will advise me as to what sections of the Education Department he regards as cultural, I will do my best to answer his question.

LAKEWOOD FIREWOOD CO.

As to Government Assistance.

Mr. KELLY asked the Honorary Minister for Forests:

(1) Has the Government financially assisted the Lakewood Firewood Co., and if so, when, and to what extent?

(2) What royalty per ton of firewood is paid by the Lakewood Firewood Co?

(3) What royalty per ton is paid by other firewood contractors?

(4) What State insurance premium rate is paid by—

(a) Lakewood Firewood Co?

(b) other firewood contractors?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) The Government guaranteed the account of the Lakewood Firewood Co. with the Rural and Industries Bank up to an amount of £160,000, split up into—

£115,000 assets;

£20,000 finance to carry on;

£25,000 to provide for mechanisation.

The newly-formed company took over the assets of the old company on 1st July, 1948, and arrangement with bank and Government took effect as from 18th December, 1948.

The limit has now been reduced to £127,750.

(2) 3d. per ton up to 30/6/1950; 1s. per ton as from 1/7/1950.

(3) 1s. per ton minimum.

(4) (a) 150s. per cent.; (b) 250s. per cent.

STATE PRODUCTS.

As to Total Recorded Values.

Mr. KELLY asked the Premier:

What is the recorded total value to W.A. of the following:—

(a) Wheat;

(b) wool;

(c) gold;

(d) coal?

The PREMIER replied:

(a) wheat, £18,049,248;

(b) wool, £20,000,202;

(c) gold, £9,051,302;

(d) coal, £1,043,905.

MINING.

(a) *As to Production and Men Employed.*

Mr. KELLY asked the Honorary Minister for Mines:

(1) What was the total value of minerals produced in W.A. (other than gold and coal) during the years 1948, 1949, 1950 (to date)?

(2) How many men were employed in each year?

(3) What tonnage of gold-bearing ore was mined in 1948, 1949 and 1950 (to date)?

(4) How many men were employed in the gold-mining industry in 1948, 1949 and 1950 (to date)?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) 1948, £548,000; 1949, £694,247; 1950 (to 30th June), £273,858.

(2) 1948, 578; 1949, 615; 1950 (to 30th June), 560.

(3) 1948, 2,447,545 tons; 1949, 2,468,297 tons; 1950 (to 30th June), 1,230,212 tons.

(4) 1948, 7,178; 1949, 6,800; 1950 (to 30th June), 7,034.

(b) *As to Supplies of Explosives.*

Mr. OLIVER asked the Honorary Minister for Mines:

(1) What types of explosives are available to purchasers of explosives engaged in metalliferous mining in Western Australia?

(2) Are any types of explosives in short supply?

(3) Is the use of Semigal and Monobel necessary because other types of explosives are not available?

(4) Is the continued use of Semigal in underground blasting operations injurious to miners' health?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) Gelatinous, non-gelatinous and semi-gelatinous types.

(2) Overall, the gelatinous types are in short supply at this moment because of—

(a) shipping scarcity, and

(b) complete change-over of old plant to new at Nobel's factory, Melbourne.

(3) Yes.

(4) Semigal was analysed and tested prior to authorisation, and found non-injurious. It is also in use in all other States.

MILK ACT.

As to Compensation for Delicensed Dairymen.

Mr. NIMMO asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) Is he aware—

(a) that under the Metropolitan Whole Milk Act, 1932-1945, (repealed by the Milk Act, 1946), a compensation fund was established to be known as The Dairymen's Compensation Fund;

(b) that under Section 30 of the above Act, dairymen had the right to apply for compensation if a renewal of their license was refused;

(c) that no provision is made in the present Act for such a compensation fund;

(d) that dairymen are being forced into heavy expenditure in the removal of their herds from the metropolitan area to outer districts?

(2) Is it the intention of the Milk Board to compensate dairymen who have been forced to vacate their present premises?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) (a) Yes.

(b) yes;

(c) yes;

- (d) owing to increased population, dairying in certain parts of the metropolitan area has become restricted. Several dairymen have found it advantageous to transfer to outer districts where dairying can be conducted more efficiently and economically under natural conditions.

(2) Answered by (c) of (1).

FREMANTLE HARBOUR.

As to Review of Tydeman Scheme.

Mr. SHEARN asked the Minister for Works:

(1) In view of the considerable criticism concerning the Tydeman Fremantle Harbour extension scheme, the large capital expenditure involved, the conflicting claims regarding seaward expansion and up-river development, and to obtain if possible, more assurance that the Swan River as a source of health and recreation will not be detrimentally affected by harbour wastes and fertilisation of marine growth, will the Government appoint an independent qualified engineer from within Australia to inquire into, and report upon all aspects of the Tydeman scheme, and that submitted by Mr. John Higgins, with particular reference to the obligation to preserve the cleanliness of the river as a State heritage?

(2) If not, why not?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The matter will be given consideration.

(2) Answered by (1).

COMMONWEALTH HOSPITAL SCHEME.

As to Re-imposition of Means Test.

Hon. E. NULSEN asked the Minister for Health:

(1) Did she see in "The West Australian" of Friday, the 18th August, on page 6, column 3, a small paragraph headed "Opposition to Federal Hospital Scheme?"

(2) Does she agree with the Page Hospital Plan?

(3) Especially with the reimposition of the means test, for any person having to enter a Government hospital for medical or surgical treatment?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) I have no details other than those published in the newspaper, which are insufficient to permit a judgment.

(3) This is a matter of Government policy which has not yet been discussed.

TIMBER INDUSTRY.

As to Amenities for Workers.

Mr. HOAR asked the Honorary Minister for Forests:

Referring to questions and answers by him on the 3rd August in reference to a Timber Workers' Amenities Fund—

(1) Does he remember stating that the sawmillers have now requested a further conference with the Minister, and this is expected to take place next week?

(2) Was such conference held; if so, what progress was made towards the establishment of such a fund, and who attended the conference?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) Yes. The conference was held on the 10th August, and was attended by the Honorary Minister for Forests, Messrs. C. R. Bunning, F. Gregson and C. Craig. In view of the mills being scattered in many parts of the State and the great variation in the number of employees, it was decided that it would be impracticable to operate an amenities fund in the timber industry. In an endeavour to improve the amenities of the men engaged in the timber industry, the conference decided that better housing, lighting and facilities such as a licensed club, playing fields and other sporting and entertainment facilities, should be provided by the companies, whilst schools, improved roads and better transport should be provided by the Government. Other amenities such as the provision of first-aid facilities at some of the larger mills are now being investigated and officers have been detailed by Messrs. Bunning Bros. and the State Saw Mills to look into the general question of amenities throughout the industry.

PREMIERS' CONFERENCE.

As to Federal Aid Roads Agreement.

Mr. MAY asked the Premier:

(1) Does he intend to press for a greater proportion of Federal Aid Road Grant moneys for road works at the forthcoming Premiers' Conference?

(2) Will he advocate that local governing authorities be permitted to use petrol tax moneys on bitumen works, particularly on roads which are and may become school bus routes?

(3) What is the total amount of funds in hand held in respect of plant pools?

(4) What amount of money, if any, has been spent from this fund since its inception in 1947?

(5) Will he agree that this fund be allocated amongst local governing authorities to enable them to procure urgently required plant and equipment?

(6) Will he advocate a long-term policy in the Federal Aid Roads Agreement whilst attending the next Premier's Conference?

The PREMIER replied:

(1) It is intended to urge that a greater proportion of the petrol taxation should be made available for roads.

(2) No. This is entirely a State matter.

(3) £151,350. (Authorisations, £162,000; expenditure, £10,650; unexpended, £151,350, as advised in the Legislative Assembly by the Minister for Works on the 15th August.)

(4) £10,650.

(5) Unexpended funds are committed.

(6) Yes, provided the terms are satisfactory.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Eleventh Day—Amendment, Want of Confidence—Negatived.

Debate resumed from the previous day on the following amendment by Hon. A. R. G. Hawke:—

That the following words be added to the Address-in-reply, "We deplore the failure of the Government to control prices effectively; we consider it is deserving of censure, and because of the damaging effect of that failure upon the welfare of the State's people and upon the future of the State's economy, we consider the Government has lost the confidence of the Legislative Assembly."

THE PREMIER (Hon. D. R. McLarty—Murray—on amendment) [448]: I did hear remarks that some such amendment was likely to be moved. I thought it might come from the Leader of the Opposition himself, or that perhaps the active and rather inquisitive member for Melville might have done something of the sort, but it came last night from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I am somewhat surprised that a vote of censure should be moved by the member for Northam because I believe it is a most unusual course. Certainly it is unusual in this Parliament, but no doubt reasons will be put forward why the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was chosen. I was also somewhat surprised at not receiving any notification at all of intention to move the amendment.

I thought that the usual courtesy extended between Leaders in the past, when such an amendment was contemplated, would have been extended to me last evening. However, I know there is no obligation on the part of the hon. gentleman to inform me of his intentions, and I accept the amendment as set out. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition in a very lengthy speech covered several subjects other than prices. He started off early by making reference to communism. I know that you, Mr. Speaker, are not going to permit me to deal with questions other than those affecting prices, as outlined in the amendment of the Deputy Leader

of the Opposition, but it may be necessary, as I proceed with my speech, to say something about communism as I am of the opinion that it has had a decided effect in regard to the price structure, not only in Western Australia but in Australia generally.

Several members interjected.

The PREMIER: If I am to be allowed to proceed—and I am anticipating a good deal of interjection, which I do not mind—I would like to say at the outset that when the Deputy Leader of the Opposition puts forward a case he is generally very lucid and makes his points clearly. But I thought he floundered badly when he talked about communism. I am glad that all he had to say on that subject has been taken down. It may at some future date be used in evidence against him. I shall be quite content that the readers of "Hansard"—I am not sure of their numbers—shall pass judgment upon his utterances.

Mr. Styants: You might get Menzies to declare him under his Bill.

The PREMIER: Getting on to the amendment, or to those matters leading up to it and to which the hon. gentleman referred, it is freely admitted by everyone that there has been a tremendous increase in the national income. Today it exceeds by many millions that of previous incomes. I need not tell members just what these extra millions of money mean to the general economy of this State; or how freely people are prepared to spend in order to obtain what they want. We know—and I do not know how we are going to stop them—that many people are prepared to spend large sums of money—more than the value of certain articles; particularly luxury articles—in order to satisfy their needs. The economic conditions are such that they are able to do this.

I talk about this position in our own State, but it applies to the Commonwealth generally. In fact, the whole world is caught up in an inflationary spiral. I am not too sure what is happening in Russia, but in all those parts where we can get full information, and we know what is taking place, we are aware that there is an inflationary spiral which is causing concern to all Governments. Then again, at the present time we have the fear of war, and, of course, the preparation for war. Should it become necessary to take men out of industry for defence purposes, the whole problem will be even more acute than it is today. Here I hope that caution will be exercised.

I know that we have certain obligations, which we must stand up to, with respect to the United Nations, but I do believe, taking a look at the whole position, that

our greatest help to the United Nations and to those who have our sympathy is by way of increasing food production and endeavouring to meet their needs. So, in short, I would say that our troubles are caused by the large volume of purchasing power now in the hands of the people and, of course, the short supply of goods to meet those demands. I repeat, more money is being spent today than at any other time in our history.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: And buying less.

The PREMIER: I am not sure that it is buying less. The hon. member knows perfectly well that adjustments are being made to the basic wage; and I believe, in certain directions, more goods are being obtained today than previously.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Could you name one such direction?

The PREMIER: All members know that the high prices we are receiving for exports such as wheat, wool and meat, and in fact for everything that we export, are creating this tremendous spending power. Of course, there is only one effective answer to meet this volume of spending power, and that is increased production.

Mr. W. Hegney: Do you think the exchange should be wiped out?

The PREMIER: I do not know that it is of any use the hon. member asking my opinion about the exchange. I am not particularly anxious to see any alteration in the exchange at the present time. Again, it is a matter for the Commonwealth Parliament, and the Commonwealth Parliament alone. When speaking on the Budget, I made reference to Government spending, and said it was a contributing factor to the inflationary spiral in which we are caught today. I do not think there is any doubt about that. Suggestions have been made that Government spending should cease; that Government spending should be confined to what are termed reproductive works, and that a more careful use should be made of Government expenditure generally. We all know that many of the great works today, not only in our own State but in the Commonwealth, cannot be reproductive for a considerable time to come, but a tremendous amount of money is being distributed throughout the populace, and it is true that it is adding to the inflationary spiral.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition spent a considerable amount of time referring to blackmarkets. He told us what was occurring in this State. From what I can learn, wherever controls have been exercised—in any direction—a black-market has immediately come into operation. Let us go back to the war period when we were said to be under the strictest possible control, and see what

happened! Let us have a look at petrol, for instance. Mr. Speaker, you will recall, no doubt, the repeated requests from the then Prime Minister, the late John Curtin, to people to cease using petrol, and to conserve every possible gallon. He told us of the dire need of the nation with respect to petrol and what might happen if we used it when there was no need for its use. But almost immediately petrol rationing came in, under strict control, who will deny that a blackmarket sprang up; and it sprang up in every city in Australia? I think an attempt was made to control it effectively, but without success, because the blackmarket in Australia flourished for so long as there was control over petrol.

Mr. Fox: Not in petrol, but in petrol tickets, perhaps.

The PREMIER: The hon. member says, "Not in petrol but in petrol tickets." But the very fact that they were able to purchase those petrol tickets enabled them to get greater quantities of petrol.

Mr. Fox: That is quite a different thing.

The Minister for Works: They were able to get petrol, too.

The PREMIER: I think at the time the State Liquid Fuel Board came under the administration of the present Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: No, it did not.

The PREMIER: It came under State administration, and I think the hon. member was the Minister for Transport at the time.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: No, he was not.

Mr. Grayden: He was a member of the Cabinet.

The PREMIER: If it did not come under the administration of the present Deputy Leader of the Opposition, then it came under the direction of one of his colleagues and so was a Government responsibility.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The Premier's case has not been very well prepared on that point.

The PREMIER: What I said is accurate, I think.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: No, it is not.

The PREMIER: The blackmarket in petrol must have worried the Government during the dark days of war, yet effective control over it was not exercised.

Mr. W. Hegney: How about talking of the bright days of peace and the black-market that exists now?

Mr. Hoar: The Premier would be better employed talking about the price of petrol.

The PREMIER: And, talking about the dark days of war, I could say something about the blackmarket that existed in tyres as well, where control was exercised.

Therefore, it will be seen that the effective carrying out of controls and price-fixing presents difficulties which no Government has been wholly able to eliminate—not one. The principal charges made by the hon. member were in relation, mainly, to meat and housing. He thinks the Government is deserving of censure. Perhaps it would be best if I read his amendment. It is as follows:—

We deplore the failure of the Government to control prices effectively; we consider it is deserving of censure, and because of the damaging effect of that failure upon the welfare of the State's people and upon the future of the State's economy, we consider the Government has lost the confidence of the Legislative Assembly.

Members: Hear, hear!

The PREMIER: Perhaps at this stage I might interpolate and mention that it is only a brief few months since we went to the people, and many of the things said yesterday by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition were mentioned by him and his colleagues during the election campaign. But it did not seem to have any profound effect upon the people because we are back here with as many seats as when we left. We are still back here, with too many seats for the hon. member's liking.

Mr. Graham: That is a tribute to the redistribution.

Mr. Styants: After gerrymandering with the boundaries.

Mr. Fox: And you still have to depend on the two Independents.

The PREMIER: I might say something there, too, and this relates to price-fixing. Recently in a speech the Leader of the Opposition said that he neither desired nor expected any support from the Independents in this House. I did not hear any of his followers say, "Hear, hear" when I mentioned that today. Let us revert to one of the two important matters to which the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has made reference. I speak of the meat problem, and perhaps at this stage a quotation by Mr. Finnan, who is the chairman of the Prices Ministers' Conference—and the Labour Minister in the Labour Government of New South Wales—would be worth quoting. I draw members' attention to Mr. Finnan's statement, which appeared in "The West Australian" of today's date. It is as follows:—

He could not foresee any solution of the meat price control problem, Mr. Finnan said. It was an Australia-wide "headache."

That was what Mr. Finnan had to say in regard to meat.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Can you quote Mr. Pethick?

The Minister for Lands: Mr. Finnan is a man who knows what he is talking about.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: That is very different from the Minister for Lands.

The PREMIER: The statement continues—

It was the only commodity under price control which could not be controlled from production to the retail counter.

It does not matter whether it is meat control under State authorities or Commonwealth authorities. It is admitted that meat, of all commodities, is the most difficult to control. The Commonwealth people did not make any secret of that, and I do not think anyone in this House will argue that meat control under the Commonwealth set up was any better than it is today.

Mr. Nalder: A very strong reason for the de-control of meat prices.

The PREMIER: I will say something about that as I proceed. I do not want it to be thought that the Government has not made very serious efforts to cope with what is admitted to be a most difficult problem. We knew that we had to face a lean period through the winter months, and we have faced these lean periods for years. To overcome this problem, we imported into this country 35,000 carcasses of mutton and lamb. This action was taken months in advance of the shortage and at a time when well-informed opinion was that this quantity would be considerably in excess of our requirements. That is what we were told. We sought advice and it was said that 35,000 sheep would be well in excess of the requirements. In fact, after we had brought this quantity of meat into the country, I was told that we might have difficulty in disposing of it.

Hon. A. H. Panton: A lot of the mutton was done up as lamb.

The PREMIER: The hon. member knows that that has always been so and sometimes mutton is sold as lamb.

Mr. Styants: The producers at York disapproved of your buying it, too.

The PREMIER: Yes, I know that certain people had such ideas, but not many producers would offer an objection. We hear a good deal about avaricious landlords, or I have heard a good deal about them, and perhaps that position is in reverse today. But, to those people who complain about our importing meat in order that our people might obtain it, I would say they are making rods for their own backs. One of the gentlemen who was most vigorous in his criticism of the Government was among those receiving the highest prices for sheep in this State. However, as I said, this is a most complex problem and, it does not matter what we do, there will be objections from some quarters. We all know the effect that the long, dry summer had upon our meat pro-

duction. It did have a most serious effect and, apart from that, we have made every effort possible to obtain as much meat from the Broome Meat Works as could be supplied, and we are still obtaining meat from there.

To guard against a similar situation next year, the Government will make provision for the storage of meat, and I can assure members we will profit by our experience, or the experience we are having at present. Not only will we store mutton and lamb but we will also store beef. If we cannot obtain sufficient from Broome, we will bring it from Wyndham.

Mr. W. Hegney: Is not that a socialistic move?

Mr. Graham: No. There is no election on now.

The PREMIER: A socialistic move! I am thinking about the feeding of the people, and not socialism. I am trying to explain to the House the most effective means which the Government believes it can employ to reach that objective.

Mr. Hoar: At what price?

Mr. Styants: Do you not think that is the function of the master butchers?

The PREMIER: If the hon. member wishes to leave it to the master butchers, he might get into a more difficult position than he is in today. I think he will agree there. I will admit that the responsibility devolves upon the Government to take every precaution to see that this position is overcome, or at least to minimise it, should it arise next year.

Mr. Fox: That is interfering with private enterprise.

The PREMIER: I would tell the member for South Fremantle again that I am much more concerned about the feeding of our people than I am with interfering with private enterprise, or with anyone else.

Mr. Fox: The Premier had better come over to this side.

Mr. Styants: Yes, you should come over here.

The PREMIER: And I think I would be an acquisition over there.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The Premier would be an acquisition in the division that is coming off.

The PREMIER: The member for Kalgoorlie has said that objection was taken to our storing meat a few months ago. We are not going to store meat with the idea of depressing the price to the farmers. We know that they must have a reasonable price and we know, too, that to provide for the lean period they must have some encouragement.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Can you tell us the meaning of the word "reasonable"?

The PREMIER: I would go so far as to say that the Government would be prepared to discuss, with all sections of the meat industry, proposals which they may have for the future. I know the Farmers' Union is very interested in meat supply, and I am sure its members want to be helpful as well. The Government would be prepared to discuss proposals with their representatives in regard to the future policy concerning meat.

Mr. Kelly: It is a Government responsibility.

The PREMIER: But the hon. member has made no contribution nor has he supplied any solution of the meat problem. Any person with any practical knowledge of the meat trade knows what a difficult problem it is. The member for Merredin-Yilgarn said it is a Government responsibility, but I would tell him that his side of the House is censuring the Government for not doing something, and I certainly do not admit that we did not do anything. I did not hear any constructive criticism coming from the hon. member's side of the House or any comments that might be helpful in any way. Up to date we have not received any helpful criticism at all.

Mr. W. Hegney: You had some a while ago.

Mr. Kelly: It is very early yet.

Mr. Hoar: The hon. member supplied you with a very valuable suggestion, but apparently you did not hear it.

The PREMIER: What was it?

Mr. Hoar: It came from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition towards the end of his speech.

The PREMIER: I suppose the hon. member means the part about putting people into gaol. But I would remind the hon. member that these blackmailers are not so easy to catch as might be thought.

Mr. Hoar: Apparently you did not listen to the speech of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Marshall: The Premier ought to know who these people are.

The PREMIER: Efforts have been made to find out who they are and, if any person does know them, there is no reason why that person should not give the names to the Price Fixing Commissioner in order to assist him.

Mr. McCulloch: Gestapo!

The PREMIER: All I can tell the hon. member with regard to the references to the meat position is that prosecutions have been launched. Inspectors have been out, and this particular problem has caused more concern to the Prices Commissioner than any other. I repeat that the difficulties in this State are experienced in

other States as well. It will be agreed, I think, that it cannot be said the Government has not taken any action. We have sought the best possible advice we could get in Australia upon this matter.

Mr. Kelly: You knew what you were going to be told before he came here.

The PREMIER: I do not know how the hon. member can say that! We brought Mr. Kelly from South Australia on the recommendation of Sir Douglas Copland. Sir Douglas was in charge of price control during the war period, and he had had a great deal to do with Mr. Kelly. It was he who recommended that Mr. Kelly should come here and submit recommendations to advise us in the matter. We took his advice, because we were given the best possible advice. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition offered considerable criticism respecting the set-up of the Prices Commission, and it was here that the member for Victoria Park came under fire. It is true that we have a single commissioner in this State, but that was the set-up under the Commonwealth regime; and that applies everywhere else that I know of.

Mr. McCulloch: There is no branch at Kalgoorlie.

The PREMIER: If the commission has no branches, I know that inspectors are sent to Kalgoorlie occasionally. I know also that there have been more examinations made regarding prices since the State assumed control than ever the Commonwealth made. If members like to prosecute further inquiries in that regard, they will find that my statement is correct. Going back to the proposed set-up suggested by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I just cannot see what advantage is to be gained by having three commissioners. One would be the representative of the consumers, and one, I suppose, would represent business interests. The third, of course, would still be the chairman. If the members of the commission disagreed at any time, which is quite likely, the chairman would have the final say.

Mr. Needham: Disagreements occur on the Arbitration Court bench, where we have that system.

The PREMIER: That is so. What have we got? I know it has been subject to some criticism but I fail to see that that makes any difference to its value. We have a Prices Advisory Committee to which any member of the community can make representations. The personnel of that committee is one that I think commands the highest respect. I know of my own knowledge that frequent consultations have taken place between the Prices Commissioner and the chairman of the advisory committee. Thus what the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has advocated so strongly is already provided for.

It has been said that the member for Victoria Park stated he would support that proposition when it came back to this House from the Legislative Council, as mentioned by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and he agreed to support the Bill with provision for this advisory committee. I say the action of the member for Victoria Park has been justified, because the advisory committee is working efficiently. It is giving valuable service. It collates information which the Deputy Leader of the Opposition desires the Prices Commissioner should have in his possession in respect of suggestions made. I am informed that the Prices Advisory Committee and the Prices Commissioner have worked in complete harmony, and in all cases have found it possible to reach agreement. Next we come to the building position.

Mr. Graham: The less said about it the better.

*Mr. Hoar: Anyhow you have not made much of a job of meat.

The PREMIER: If the hon. member desires me to say anything more about meat, he might as well indicate to me in what direction he wants me to proceed. I can only tell him again that Western Australia's position and its great distances make it more difficult to control the meat situation and the transport of meat than is apparent in any other of the States. Our stock has to travel down over long distances under trying conditions. All States have found great difficulty in dealing with the meat position, and there is certainly some excuse for Western Australia in that regard.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Our per capita production would be very high, would it not?

The PREMIER: From production only?

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Yes.

The PREMIER: I think that is so. The position today in the pastoral areas is that we have suffered from certain dry conditions that are having a serious effect regarding meat supplies. Unfortunately, many of our pastoral areas are subject to drought conditions and the position obtaining at the present time has not made the meat situation easier. As I was remarking, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition also referred to the building position. He claimed that the cost of house construction in Western Australia was mounting and made unfavourable comparisons with the position obtaining in other States. The information I have been able to secure is that we still have in Western Australia the cheapest house construction in the Commonwealth.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That was so in 1947.

The PREMIER: And still is. Let us remember this: The Government cannot be blamed for the position regarding such

items as corrugated iron, guttering, down-pipes, baths and basins, sinks, nail-wire and nails, glass and house fittings generally, because they are imported either from the Eastern States or from overseas. That position does not apply in the Eastern States to the same extent that it does in Western Australia, because some of the articles are manufactured there and are close at hand for building operations. We have to import those lines and have to transport them for long distances by sea.

Mr. May: They have also been buying our timber.

The PREMIER: They are not buying nearly as much of it as they would like.

Mr. May: They are buying more than they should be allowed to.

The PREMIER: At any rate, they are buying less than they were formerly. Since control was lifted by the Commonwealth, the subsidy on interstate shipping has been abolished. That has meant that on all goods coming from the Eastern States the increase in prices here would be higher than those applying to the same commodities in the Eastern States. Goods imported from overseas would also be affected by the increased freights.

Another big factor in connection with goods imported from overseas is that, in order to prevent any hold-up in the building programme, it was necessary to import a number of items in large quantities. The landed cost of these was, in some instances, nearly 100 per cent. higher than the cost of the Australian product. Unfortunately, we have no control over that position. In the case of baths, the quantity imported from overseas represents at least 90 per cent. of those used in houses in this State at the present time. These are considerably higher in price than the Australian article. While other States may have been affected to some extent, being the manufacturing centres it was much easier for the Eastern States to obtain local supplies than was the case with builders and merchants in Western Australia. Timber and brick price increases generally have been no higher here than in the other States and, of course, we produce those lines ourselves. In any case, I am told, the cost of building in Western Australia is still lower than that obtaining in the Eastern States.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Does that apply to plaster?

The PREMIER: I understand the hon. member intends to have a lot to say about plaster a little later on, and I suggest we leave that subject for consideration till then. We are not lacking in supplies of plaster in this State.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Yes, we are!

Mr. Hoar: At any rate, we have a fair amount of political plaster!

The Minister for Lands: Coming from the Opposition side of the House.

The PREMIER: Obviously some increases have been inevitable in the building industry costs. There has never been before in the history of this State as much building activity as there is today.

Mr. Kelly: Never before have so many people arrived here as now.

The PREMIER: That is so.

Hon. A. H. Panton: It is not quite correct because in the early nineties a great many people came to Western Australia.

The PREMIER: That is so, but I think I am correct in saying that not so many arrived then as there are today.

Mr. Rodoreda: "I tell you we will keep prices down!"

The PREMIER: I am appreciative of the fact that so many members of the Opposition have copies of my portrait, upon which they seem to place great value. As I was remarking, at the present time a very large number of people are entering the State and I was commenting on the effect that is having on the general economy of Western Australia.

Hon. A. H. Panton: We lived in tents in the early days.

The PREMIER: Yes, but I still say that more people are entering the State today than ever before. It would not make the slightest difference whether the hon. member was in charge of the housing situation or whether it was the present Minister or even the present Government, he would still be faced with the problem involved in the tremendous demand for houses. It is a time, of course, when there is an inclination for people who have money to pay more than they should, but, in such circumstances, they are determined to procure building materials. The suggestion has been made by the mover of the amendment that we should peg prices. Months ago we gave consideration to that proposal. I remember discussing the matter at great length with the Deputy Premier to see if such a scheme was practicable. We came to the conclusion that it was not, and I am still of that opinion. We just could not peg prices in one State and succeed. I say this also: that price-fixing and wage-pegging would have to go together.

Mr. Graham: And profit control.

The PREMIER: I think that if we pegged prices we would peg profit control, or to a very large extent.

Mr. Graham: Not necessarily.

Mr. May: They would still get around it.

The PREMIER: The hon. member pointed out that we are large importers of essential requirements, and I would add

larger in proportion to our population than any other State. That in itself presents a most serious difficulty. We could, of course, peg prices when the goods came to Western Australia.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: That is what I said.

The PREMIER: The hon. member did. But we have no say with regard to prices before the goods come into Western Australia and if we as a State, the only State in the Commonwealth, decided to peg prices, including the prices of those commodities which we export, I think we would soon have a reaction from the other States that would not be favourable to us. But would it be possible to engage in price-pegging unless we also provided subsidies? I do not think it would. Again, we would be led into trouble because I am sure the State could not provide these subsidies. I think, too, that for one State to attempt to adopt pegging would be to destroy the whole basis of control in Australia.

Mr. W. Hegney: Would you like the Commonwealth to have control of prices again?

The PREMIER: I think the people of Australia generally are still anxious to get as far away from price control as they can, but I know that there are certain commodities from which control cannot be removed and from which I am not prepared to remove control at present. But, of course, unlike the hon. gentleman, I am not one of those who believes that control is the solution of all our difficulties. On many lines retailers' margins have already been reduced; and, if prices were pegged, those margins would soon disappear.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: What is the average margin?

The PREMIER: I am unable to quote all the margins.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: What is the average margin? You said some have been reduced. When some are reduced, others are pushed up.

The PREMIER: It may be necessary to push them up. That is a matter perhaps for the prices commissioner. But I know margins have been reduced, and there are many factors operating in this State to bring about a state of affairs which would reduce those margins pretty quickly, and this would lead to a chaotic condition.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: They are getting an average of 22½ per cent now where years ago 12½ per cent. was recognised as satisfactory.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Woolworth's profits, for instance!

The PREMIER: Someone is saying something about Woolworth's, and Elder Smith's and some other firms have been referred to. I suppose it could be argued that, with their increased profits, the purchasing power of their money is no different to that of the wages man or the salaried man. The increased income of those firms exporting overseas, such as Elder Smith's, which was referred to by the hon. member, has been brought about by the general prosperity in relation to the goods exported. There have been a number of factors which the Government has had to face since it took office, all having to do with this spiral in regard to prices. The hon. gentleman made reference to the 40-hour week and said he admitted it would make some difference in regard to costs. We have had to face much higher costs for imports over which we have not had any control, but which have been absolutely necessary in the general interests of this State.

Mr. Hoar: Have increased profits been necessary too?

The PREMIER: Then there has been the removal of subsidies, to the extent of something like £20,000,000, I think. That had a very decided effect upon living costs in Western Australia. There have been higher wages—and, of course, under the conditions that exist, those are to be expected. There has been a reduced output in a number of industries, and an influx of population, with greater competition for the same quantity of goods. But let us have a look at the position generally.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Things have never been worse.

The PREMIER: Yes, they have, and the hon. member knows they have.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: They have never been worse.

The PREMIER: They were infinitely worse before the hon. member came into Parliament.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Not in regard to prices.

The PREMIER: People did not have the money to buy what there was, then. It is no use the hon. member talking like that.

Mr. J. Hegney: That was a pretty rotten system.

The PREMIER: It was. It is a different story today.

Mr. J. Hegney: Not much.

The PREMIER: Oh!

Mr. J. Hegney: The rich are getting richer and the poor poorer.

The PREMIER: The hon. member has got richer lately.

Mr. J. Hegney: No richer than you are.

The PREMIER: All right. We will consider ourselves on a level in that regard.

Mr. Marshall: He would be a happy man if that were true.

Mr. May: I will have the balance.

The PREMIER: Do not let us forget there has been an increase in wages to meet the increased cost of living. There is more money in our savings bank today than there ever was previously.

Mr. Marshall: No, there is not.

The PREMIER: Yes, there is.

Mr. Marshall: No, there is not.

The PREMIER: The hon. member is getting on to his pet subject. I anticipate hearing something from him in that direction before the session ends.

Mr. Styants: Do not encourage him.

The PREMIER: I say emphatically that living costs in Western Australia do not compare unfavourably with those of the other States. The hon. member complains that we have been too lax. I have had many complaints in the opposite direction. I say again that there has been considerable activity in regard to the policing of prices, and I am told from a reliable source that greater activity has been displayed by the States than was carried out by the Commonwealth.

Mr. Graham: Don't you believe it!

Mr. Hoar: The position has got worse, anyway.

The PREMIER: This vote of censure! Summing up, I claim that the Government is not deserving of censure.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You surely do not think it should be applauded?

The PREMIER: I would not expect that from the hon. member.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: From anybody.

The PREMIER: I would not expect it from the hon. member; but I think the average person in Western Australia will agree that the Government has handled a very difficult situation in a fairly satisfactory manner.

Mr. Kelly: Your ear is not too low to the ground.

The PREMIER: It was to the ground a few months ago when members opposite were making continuous reference to the very subject under discussion today.

Mr. May: You promised at the election to deal with this question.

The PREMIER: As I have said once before, we were returned to office. The people must have believed we were doing a good job—and this is one of the most important matters with which we have to deal—or else they would not have returned us.

Mr. W. Hegney: You are in a minority.

The PREMIER: Let me remind members that there have been no suggestions from members opposite as to what they would do to alter the position if they came into power.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Yes, there have.

The PREMIER: If the hon. gentleman were a member of any other Parliament, not only in Australia, but in the British Commonwealth and he thought it expedient for him to do so, he could move a similar amendment to this one irrespective of the political colour of the Government concerned. We are pretty lucky to be living in Western Australia today, despite all the things that have been said in regard to this matter of prices. There is but one solution to our difficulties and we all know what it is.

Mr. Hoar: A change of Government.

The PREMIER: No, it is not a change of Government.

Hon. A. H. Panton: You surely expected that!

The PREMIER: Do not waste the time of people by making such a suggestion! The only solution is greater production in order to provide for the tremendous amount of spending power. I would be prepared to co-operate to the fullest extent with members opposite to see how we can bring about that increased production.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: This is a death-bed repentance.

The PREMIER: No, it is not.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Yes, it is.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: We have been showing you for months how you could do it in certain directions.

The PREMIER: I would be prepared to co-operate to the fullest extent to get increased production, not only in the interests of Western Australia, but in the interests of Australia, and, indeed, of the world generally. Until we get that greater production we will have this continuous trouble about prices and price control. I do not think the Government should be censured or that the House should agree to the amendment moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition because, taking all the facts into consideration, I do not know what else could be done to deal with such a difficult position.

MR. OLIVER (Boulder—on amendment) [5.44]: I support the amendment. I want to avail myself of the opportunity to congratulate the member for Nedlands on what I thought was a very fine, constructive maiden speech. Coming as it did from a very young man it showed particular promise, and I considered his remarks on the devaluation question particularly timely. I look on this talk of revaluing the Australian £1 as being full of menacing possibilities. I think it could

bring disastrous consequences, because I cannot see how it could improve the lot of the worker; but I can see how it could reduce the national income by reducing the income of our basic producers. What earthly good can it do a country like Australia to reduce the income of its basic producers? I believe that the movement of sterling from the dollar saved the gold-mining industry, in particular, from a very serious crisis.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member is not speaking quite to the amendment, which concerns prices. He may be coming to it.

Mr. OLIVER: I think the question of valuation has a bearing on the subject with which we are dealing, and that is why I want to refer briefly to it. Costs are continually increasing, and the benefits gained from the movement I referred to are gradually being lost as a result. If something is not done in the near future, the goldmining industry will probably again be appealing for some assistance. A lot has been said as to wages in this State. It has been urged that they have been not only the major cause but, in fact, the whole cause of increased costs. As an advocate in connection with this particular feature of our economy, the basic wage, I claim to know something about that.

I could not agree that the basic wage has had much to do with the upward trend of prices, because it is something that follows prices; and it follows prices always. The only time the worker could gain any real benefit would be if costs showed a downward trend and wages started to follow the downward trend. In my experience, I can remember only one such situation, and the powers at that time did not wait for any downward trend for the basic wage to follow, but took arbitrary action. They cut the basic wage. Everyone knows that. They introduced the Financial Emergency Act, and the basic wage was arbitrarily reduced. That is what happened, so that even on that occasion, when the worker might have benefited, he received no benefit.

Mr. Fox: A Liberal Government did that.

Mr. J. Hegney: They brought about quarterly adjustments to bring it down quicker.

Mr. OLIVER: The movement of sterling from the dollar was something that did affect the Australian £1, but the part we are concerned with is this, that the Australian £1 did not move away from sterling but retained its value with sterling—a value that was given to it as far back as 1932-33. There has been no alteration in the relationship of the Australian £1 and the £1 sterling since 1932. But if we look

at the basic wage, we find that we had a basic wage in 1929, in Perth, of £4 6s. a week, and in the outer areas of the State of £4 5s. Today, in Perth, it is £7 6s., and in the outer areas, £7 11s. 6d., the difference being, in Perth, 67 per cent., and in the outer areas, 75 per cent. Let us look at the prices of our basic commodities. Take the year 1928-29—that was not a depression year but was looked upon as a very prosperous period.

I remember that there was a land boom then and people were paying fabulous prices for land, which indicated that primary production was experiencing a boom. We find that wheat was then at an average price of 5s. a bushel, wool 1s. 4d. a lb., and gold was worth £4 5s. an ounce. In 1947-48, which is the only year for which I can get complete figures, wheat was 17s. 6d. a bushel and wool, 3s. 6d. a lb. Gold, in 1949, was £15 10s. an ounce. What is the difference in the case of those three major items of our State's production? In the case of wheat it is 12s. 6d. per bushel, in the case of wool, 2s. 2d. per lb., and in the case of gold £11 5s. per oz. Let us now take the difference in percentage increases. In the case of wheat it is 250 per cent., equal to 3½ times the previous value.

Mr. Ackland: The wheat export price was less than 9s. in that year.

Mr. OLIVER: My authority was "The West Australian Year Book." I repeat that the value of wheat in 1947-48 was 3½ times the value in 1928. In 1947-48 the value of wool was 160 per cent. higher, or nearly 2½ times the value in 1928. Gold increased in price by 250 per cent., again 3½ times its value in 1928. That has been the experience of the people producing those items and one can clearly see the comparison with the basic wage, where the highest increase has been 75 per cent. over that period. I do not complain about the producers of those commodities receiving high prices, and I hope they continue to do so, because I know that while they are receiving those returns there will be money to spend in this country; but I am concerned that the worker, who contributes a major portion of the effort necessary for that production, has received a so much lower percentage increase.

To devalue the £ would reduce our national income and would not benefit the worker one iota. I hope that whatever influence the Government has will be used against any movement in that direction. The Minister for Prices said, on several occasions yesterday, that rises in the basic wage preceded any rise in prices. I do not think the Minister for one moment really believed that, because everyone who has given the matter even brief thought knows that that is not so. Before the Arbitration Court, which is the only authority in this State that can vary the basic wage,

makes any move to increase or decrease the basic wage, it is supplied with figures from the State Statistician. The wage is then kept constant or varied up or down according to what those figures indicate.

In the reply to an hon. member, the Minister for Prices said that if the price of meat goes up by 5d. per lb. the basic wage will go up by 5s. 11d. per week. Surely that is an indication to the Minister for Prices that what I have said is true. If the price of meat goes up 5d. per lb. the basic wage follows with a rise of 5s. 11d. per week. Surely that is conclusive proof, coming from the Minister himself. Early as it is in this debate, much has been said about price fixation. I was one of those who believed, rightly or wrongly, that price fixation could succeed. I believed it was one way of securing to the worker a reasonable standard of living. But I never believed that several authorities could successfully administer price control.

I knew that if authority over the control of prices was taken away from the Commonwealth it would fail, and that has been the result. It is not my endeavour tonight to fasten the responsibility for that failure on anyone in particular, but those who advocated the defeat of the Federal referendum on the 29th May, 1948, must accept responsibility for what has happened. The people who advocated the defeat of the referendum and said they could control prices better than could the Commonwealth now know that they have failed abjectly. It has been a miserable attempt and, judged by present standards, an unqualified failure. On the 29th May, 1948, the day of the referendum, the basic wage in Perth was £5 15s. 9d. per week. Now, in August, 1950, it is £7 3s. 6d., an increase of £1 7s. 9d. per week. In the whole history of the State's economy there has never been such an increase; there has never been such a price movement as is indicated by the basic wage, and the basic wage is the best indicator of any price movement because it follows prices up. That is the only reason that the basic wage could have gone up—it followed prices.

If members look back on our experience of basic wage fixation they will see what I mean. The basic wage was first fixed in 1926 and, if we take the total increases from then until May, 1948, we find that the increase in all that period—something over 20 years—was just about equal to what has happened in a little over two years. There has been a greater devaluation in two years, or a little over two years, than there was in the previous 20 odd years. Surely that is something to give any responsible person plenty to think about.

We hear a lot of talk about the value of the £. Obviously the £ is useful to any person only for what it will purchase. As far as I am concerned, as

far as every member is concerned, the £ is only worth what it will purchase. It would not matter to me or anybody else, if we had chaff bags full of pound notes, if we could not purchase anything with them—they would be worthless. Therefore, whatever number of pound notes is put into the basic wage the worker is concerned only with what they will purchase. We know too, that the £ will not purchase very much today. We hear all sorts of pronouncements as to the value of the £, and in the last Commonwealth elections the present Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies, said that the £ was worth 10s. He went further and said that it may be worth less than 10s. I think that most workers would agree with what Mr. Menzies said but I have tried to get at the real value of the £.

Mr. Read: No-one can do that.

Mr. OLIVER: The member for Victoria Park says that no-one can do that. I am not suggesting that he is right because I think we can get some idea of the value of the £. I have discussed this question with the State Statistician and with several men who are in charge of banks. I have even corresponded with Mr. Rydge, who edits "Rydge's Journal," and they all inform me that the best guide to the value of the £ is the all-item "C" series. We all know that the all-item "C" series is the series upon which the basic wage is fixed. Therefore, it can be seen that it all comes back to the basic wage. These people all say that the best indication of the value of money is obtained at the date the basic wage is fixed. If we accept what these people say—and unless we have some authority who will give us something different we must accept it—the £ in Perth today, based on the "C" series is, worth about 12s.

I am a little kinder than Mr. Menzies. But, let us have a look at the "C" series. It provides for certain elements that are included in the basic wage and if the system is followed correctly and faithfully it is quite all right; but the Minister for Prices tells us that if meat rises in price by 5d. a lb. the basic wage must be increased by 5s. 11d. a week. I tell the Minister for Prices that meat has exceeded the fixed price in Kalgoorlie by 5d. a lb. for many months. I might say that that has been so for the last two or three years.

Mr. McCulloch: For years.

Mr. OLIVER: Obviously people in Kalgoorlie have been underpaid. Then, if we take the position of house rents, it does not need much calculation to realise that the element in the basic wage, relating to rent, is not correct. The element for rent, in the calculation of the basic wage, provides for £1 0s. 8d. a week for the rent of a house. We all know that is not correct. If we include Commonwealth-State rental homes in the average rental the

element for rent in the basic wage should be 31s. which is something like 10s. 3d. in excess of what is at present allowed. It is argued that the Commonwealth-State rental homes should not be included in the elements because anyone who resides in them has the option of purchase. Personally, I do not think—I am not very optimistic anyway—that any of those homes are being purchased.

Mr. J. Hegney: A very small percentage of them.

Mr. OLIVER: Yes, but if one excludes the Commonwealth-State rental homes from the elements, the rental being about 26s. 6d. per week, it still puts the basic wage earner something like 6s. below the basic wage. Therefore, if we take these fictitious prices of meat and rent into consideration the basic wage earner is still something like 16s. behind. So how can it be said that the basic wage is the cause of high prices? Obviously, the man on the basic wage today is underpaid and that will be proved on the first occasion the unions can enter the court to present the figures. There is no doubt the basic wage will have to rise again, and not by two or three shillings but by something approaching £1. That must be the result of a full inquiry.

I am not one of those people who holds responsible any group of individuals for what is happening. I know that once a country is caught up in an inflationary spiral it takes a lot of arresting, but to blame the worker for it is obviously stupid; he is the victim and always will be. He never benefits from any inflationary spiral. For example, take a worker who is affected by the meat situation, with which problem we have been concerned in recent months! I am prepared to listen to any story on that question, but one reads in the Press of the economic chaos in the industry. One reads in the "Daily News" leading article as to what should be done about the meat prices; how unfair it is to control them unless controlled from the source.

One tries to assess what is wrong with the meat industry. I know that no butcher will admit to saying that he sells meat at the fixed price. I have discussed it with butchers. They are quite open about it, and state that they could not do it and do not try. I listened to the Premier very attentively tonight and he suggested that the remedy was for the people concerned to report the blackmarketers. I believe that would be one way of overcoming the difficulty, but let members put themselves in the butchers' position. Just imagine them selling meat in Kalgoorlie! A butcher there wants two carcasses of meat and he sends to Perth expecting to get them at the ceiling price and finds he cannot. If he wants them at the ceiling price he does not get the meat. The man who sends the meat to him cannot charge above the

ceiling price—or appear to charge—so he practises a subterfuge. He sends two carcasses of meat but to the account he charges two carcasses of veal. Who is paying for that? Obviously, the consumer!

Mr. Nalder: A very strong case for de-control.

Mr. OLIVER: It may be, but let the hon. member listen to the whole story. If one reads the journal of the Allied Meat and Trades Federation, it will be noted that bullocks have stopped growing forequarters and have only hindquarters. All the steak that comes from a bullock these days is rump steak. We all know that no matter how elderly a sheep may be it is still only lamb. Who is paying for it? Obviously, the worker! Yet it has been constantly inferred that he is the cause of these rapidly increasing prices. I will repeat that I am not complaining about what the producer is getting for his product, but he must admit he is having a wonderful honeymoon.

Mr. Perkins: We want to hear the hon. member suggest a remedy.

Mr. OLIVER: What I suggest is that the hon. member should offer his stock to the saleyards at a cheaper price. Would it not be natural to think that the producers of this country owe a duty to it? Are they not always harping on the point that the workers owe a duty to the country to produce more? Surely, if the country needs meat it is the duty of the producers to provide it.

Mr. Perkins: Is that the remedy.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. OLIVER: I was speaking of what I considered to be the remedy to solve the problem of the meat supply. I do not profess to be able to give an answer to all our problems, but I suggest to the member for Roe that the answer to this problem would be to produce more meat. I venture to say that the hon. member is a believer in the law of supply and demand, and, carrying the matter to its logical conclusion, it means that the producer is not producing the goods. We have been told that the worker should increase his output in order to solve our economic problems, and I suggest that that is the remedy for the producers of meat to adopt.

Mr. Perkins: Do not you think they might be producing something else, for instance, wool?

Mr. OLIVER: I am aware that they are producing wool, but that merely shows the lines upon which the producers are thinking. They are not worrying about supplying the people with meat, but are prepared to produce the commodity that returns the more money. We need the meat more than the wool.

Mr. Perkins: Do you not think there is need for wool?

Mr. Ackland: Would you direct an artisan to an industry where he would receive less wages?

Mr. OLIVER: I am not suggesting to the member for Moore that he should not do what will return him the most money, but we hear a lot from these public-spirited people as to what ought to be done in the matter of production.

Mr. Perkins: It is very interesting to hear you say that we do not need the wool. I am afraid your leader would not agree with that.

Mr. OLIVER: We do not need all the wool that is being produced, but we do need more meat. Here we have an item in the "Daily News" headed, "Beef Famine Threat with Population Growing." There is no question of a threatened meat famine at Kalgoorlie; such a famine has existed for months. There is no beef at Kalgoorlie and has been none for months. If I want beef for my family I send it from Perth. This in itself is proof that the producers have failed to produce the goods.

Nobody can claim that there are not all the facilities available to produce the cattle to supply the beef. We have only to look at the Kimberleys to realise the potentialities there for producing all the meat required. Obviously, little is being done. I would say that so far from the Kimberleys having been developed over the last 50 or 60 years, they have been progressively destroyed as a beef producing territory. One may travel from Wyndham to Hall's Creek without finding a fence. Without having to bother to open a gate, one may drive right through that country. Nothing has been done to increase the beef production there. We have a wonderful plant at Wyndham to handle beef and, notwithstanding all that territory around Wyndham, only about 35,000 bullocks a year are handled at the works there. If the Kimberleys were properly worked, the beef requirements of the State could be met and the Wyndham Meat Works would probably operate for ten months in a year.

I wish to touch briefly on housing costs, which are closely allied to the matter of prices. Some 18 months or two years ago, a worker raised a loan to enable him to build a house. When the loan was arranged, a large building contractor in Perth quoted for building the house, £1,225. Some nine months elapsed while the place was being built and the worker obtained possession in January of this year. He has already paid over £1,700 and has still to pay probably another £50.

There we have an instance of how costs have gone up. This worker used his deferred pay from the Military and his small savings to build the house and, when the

cost was quoted as £1,225, he could have paid for it but I am very doubtful what the result will be. In fact, he is inclined to give it up. That has happened in the brief space of two years. So, what I said earlier is quite true, that no matter what the worker might do or no matter how he might try, he would be the victim all the time. I repeat my belief that if everyone had been honest about price control, it could have been made effective. I am satisfied that it, had passed the experimental stage and that it would have worked. The fact that it is not working satisfactorily is because people have not been honest, and those people must accept the responsibility for the present state of affairs.

MR. STYANTS (Kalgoorlie—on amendment) [7.40]: I do not propose to speak on this matter at any great length. I was very much impressed with the attitude taken up by the Premier in defence of the Government's action in connection with price-fixing. He is quite a different personality today from what he was two years ago when the people were considering the merits of the referendum concerning the handing over of control of price fixing by the Commonwealth to the State. I think he was pictured in pretty well every paper with that characteristic pose of his and declaring, "I say to you today," and he promised the people that the States would effectively control prices. Tonight, however, he tells us that the States cannot control prices.

The Premier: I never said that.

Mr. STYANTS: I understood the Premier to say that. But if he denies that he did, I would say that he quite definitely said that this State could not control prices. We do not expect this State by itself to control prices. We expect all the States of the Commonwealth to amalgamate, and the Premiers and their Ministers, with their machinery for price control, effectively to control prices in Australia. We are not suggesting that this State should adopt a price control system by itself. But the Premiers of those States which have anti-Labour Governments are particularly responsible for seeing that the assurance they gave in connection with the control of prices two years ago, when the referendum was being conducted, is given effect to. Of course, we know quite well that that promise has not been carried out and that very little has been done; and as I will show later, the Minister for Prices in this State—and in passing I would point out that most people in the street today refer to him as the Minister for inflation—has not done all in his power. As a matter of fact, I think he has raised his hands in the air and been quite prepared to let price-fixing slip. I

believe that price-fixing in this State is a sham. It has not been carried out, and very little attempt has been made to carry it out.

It will be remembered that after the people of Australia decided to take control from the Commonwealth Government and hand it to the States, the Ministers controlling prices on behalf of the various States at their first meeting de-controlled something like 3,000 articles; and every time they have met since then, they have agreed to release further articles from control. If the Minister is going to speak on this question tonight, I would like him to tell the House of any item which has been de-controlled of which the price has remained stationary or been reduced. My experience and my investigations have shown me that immediately an article is released from price control the cost sky-rockets. The Premier was very emphatic that increased production is the solution of this problem. The fallacy of that contention is borne out by considering the position in the greatest industrialised nation of the world today—the United States of America—where we are told from time to time that production has increased to such an extent that they are having to plough in hundreds of millions of dozens of eggs as fertiliser for the soil, and where they are destroying various other consumer goods because the production is in excess of the requirements of the people.

Mr. Grayden: That is better than being short.

Mr. STYANTS: It has not been a deterrent to rising prices in the United States. I have a close relative who has lived there for 32 years and has just returned to Australia. She tells me that the cost of living in America is much higher than in Australia. I think that would have been the case ten years ago—that the cost of living in America would have been much higher than in Australia. But according to all the figures we have had given to us from time to time, the increase in the cost of living since the cessation of hostilities in World War II has been greater in America than in Australia. If production is the panacea for high prices, why has the cost of living in America risen to such lofty heights?

Increased production is not the only solution of this question. You know, Mr. Speaker, as well as I do, that there are many articles today which are in plentiful supply, but their price has increased in like ratio to that of articles for which the demand is greater than the supply. There are scores of articles which are in plentiful supply in shops, factories and in the markets; but, although there is a sufficient supply to meet the demand, those articles have gone up in price the same as is the

case with other commodities. I seriously doubt, therefore, whether increased production is the remedy, the entire solution which the Premier would have us believe it is.

Let us take the shortage of meat which has concerned the people of this State over the last few months. Although famine prices are being paid and there is a shortage of meat everywhere in the State, except in the metropolitan area, from time to time we read where a ship left Wyndham with 3,000 or 4,000 tons of meat for overseas. We read that frequently; and I believe that if the production of meat increased 25 per cent. in the next 12 months, it would not provide any more meat for the people of Australia, because that meat would be shipped overseas where it brings good prices. I think it was Mr. McEwen, the Federal Minister for Commerce, who said that recently a shipment of spring lamb sent to Canada realised 4s. 4d. per lb. Of course, if he can get 4s. 4d. per lb. for spring lamb sent to Canada, the average producer will not be concerned whether we have a meat famine in Western Australia or not.

Mr. Perkins: How does that come into this amendment?

Mr. STYANTS: The Premier said that if we increased production that would be a remedy for the high prices. I am showing that, where the production of meat is increased, instead of that increased production reducing the price of meat in Australia the meat is sent overseas where double the price is obtained for it that can be secured in Australia.

Mr. Perkins: Would not the butchers have an opportunity to buy it?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: On the black market!

Mr. STYANTS: Of course they would have an opportunity to buy it, the same as they have an opportunity to buy wholesale in the markets now—at prices over and above those at which they can retail within the legalised ceiling price.

Mr. Perkins: That does not apply to lamb.

Mr. STYANTS: Lamb is one of the commodities that has not been controlled for a long time. Lamb, pig meats, rabbits and that kind of thing have not been controlled. Nevertheless, while producers can get higher prices overseas, I do not think increased production will be the solution of our troubles in regard to increased prices here. As a matter of fact, the Premier advanced about half a dozen reasons why prices are increased, some of which I believe have some weight, but I thought he left out the main one, and that is that the greatest inflationary element in Australia is the enormous volume of money coming into the country as a

result of the phenomenal famine prices being received overseas for our primary products. I think that is admitted by anyone who has given any thought to the question.

Mr. Grayden: What can the State Government do about it?

Mr. STYANTS: This State Government, by itself, could not do much, but I point out that two years ago the State Governments of Australia gave a guarantee to the people that they would control prices. They did not say that each individual State would control prices, but that it would be done collectively. I think it was the Deputy Premier who said, two years ago during the referendum campaign, that if Commonwealth control ceased the State was in a position to take over the next day. Therefore, this State and the others where Liberal Governments were in control—because it was the anti-Labour parties who were asking for the control to be transferred from the Commonwealth to the States—are in honour bound to control prices. I say that the result has turned out as we anticipated it would—there has been an almost total abandonment of control.

I want to turn briefly to the question of meat, and then to show that the Government itself, because of its increased charges, has been a contributing factor to the increased cost of living in this State. I wish to deal with this question of prices because it particularly concerns the area I have the honour to represent. There the people for the last three months have been getting only one-third of their ordinary meat requirements, and that at a price much in excess of the legalised ceiling price ruling for it. In my opinion the basic cause of the ridiculous meat position in Western Australia is that, whereas no price control or limit has been placed on stock on the hoof, immediately it is taken from the saleyard to the abattoirs, and slaughtered, a legal statutory limit obtains with respect to what can be charged for the carcase.

Some of the master butchers are prepared to pay in excess of the price at which they know quite well—and so does the Minister for Prices—the meat can be retailed within the fixed limit. Had the Government been desirous of stopping this practice, it had ample power to place a limit upon the price which could be paid for meat on the hoof.

Mr. Manning: Would that overcome the shortage?

Mr. STYANTS: I think so; and if not, I do not think it would have increased it. Members know of the threat that is always held over the consumers, particularly as far as mutton is concerned, that the producers grow it for the wool. The profitable life of a sheep consists of a

very limited number of years. We also know that if a regulation were brought in tomorrow to control the price of meat—sheep in particular—on the hoof, perhaps for a matter of 12 months the stockowners would be able to hold the additional amount of sheep, but they would very soon arrive at saturation point so that it would be in their own financial interests to have the older sheep culled and taken to the saleyards.

Mr. Perkins: Would you be happy about eating all the old ones?

Hon. A. H. Panton: We do now, marked as lamb!

Mr. STYANTS: I do not say I would be happy about it, but the position has been forced upon me and my constituents.

Mr. Perkins: Chifley never adopted the suggestion you are putting up.

Mr. STYANTS: Let us admit, which I do not, that the Chifley Government did not do these things, two wrongs do not make a right. It is of no use saying that because my political opponents, some years ago, did something wrong, we should continue in that vein. What we want is the Government of this State, and the other States, to honour their promise to the people of Australia to control effectively the price of commodities.

Mr. Perkins: Do not you think they might have seen some difficulties in the way that you do not see?

Mr. STYANTS: The Government could at any time have placed a limit upon the price that could be paid for stock on the hoof in the saleyards. I am inclined to lean to the opinion expressed by the master butchers at Kalgoorlie in a letter I read to this Assembly a few nights ago, where they expressed the view that there were too many producers of livestock in the Cabinet of this State to expect it to take such action.

The Minister for Lands: Why not name them? How many are there?

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. STYANTS: The butchers themselves admit that they are unable to buy at the ruling prices and sell within the fixed limits. They admit that they have been indulging in blackmarketing; and so does the commissioner, the gentleman brought from South Australia by the Government to inquire into this matter. The amount of blackmarketing in the meat trade is a feature of his report. He said it must be stamped out. I want the Minister to tell the House what he and his department have done to implement the recommendations of the man brought by the Government from South Australia to inquire into this matter. Has the Minister adopted the method suggested by Mr. Kelly?

As far as I can find out no action has been taken with respect to the blackmarketer. The wholesale butcher is prepared to pay £8 or £10 more for a beast on the hoof than he knows he can retail it at and keep within the legal prices, just as he was prior to Mr. Kelly's visit. I do not blame the retail butchers at all. I believe they have been the most hardly treated section of businessmen in this country. If they wanted to continue in business as retail butchers, they had to break the law. It is of no use the Minister saying that he, or the Prices Branch, does not know that they break the law. He knows quite well that the law is being broken, and that he and his department are taking no effective action to remedy the position.

Mr. W. Hegney: They are conniving at it.

Mr. STYANTS: What has the Prices Branch done to follow up the meat being bought by these master butchers who are blackmarketing by paying £8 or £10 more than the value of the beast? Have they followed up to see what becomes of that meat? Of course they have not! They have not attempted to trace it, but have allowed the blackmarketer—the master butcher—to distribute it to the retailers well knowing that the retailers had to adopt questionable tactics to sell it at a profit so that they could get a living, and the people could get the meat. That is why I blame the Minister and the Prices Branch. They made no attempt to see what happened to the meat being bought on the hoof by these master butchers who were selling it at a figure over and above that fixed for the wholesale price of meat in this State. In addition to that I believe that if the Government sincerely desired to keep prices within the limits fixed by the regulations it would issue a further regulation, providing that it should be incumbent upon a person selling meat in a retail butcher's shop to supply the customer with a docket setting out the weight, description and price of the meat purchased. That would be an effective means of control, but what happens today?

If anyone purchasing meat in a butcher's shop demanded a docket showing the price and weight of the meat bought, he would be told to take his custom somewhere else. Both the Minister and the Prices Branch know what is going on, and that there is no effective protection for the purchaser of meat in this State. It is my candid opinion that the price-fixing branch is winking its eye at the breaches that are taking place. Unless someone goes to the Prices Branch with a specific case—as perhaps not one person in 50,000 is prepared to do—no action is taken about the additional prices being charged. It is a most serious matter for the worker. The worker

on the Goldfields today has to get 50 per cent. of his meat sent to him in small parcels from other parts of the State. Assuming he is getting it from those places at the fixed ceiling price, he has still to pay from 4½d. to 6d. per lb. above that price by the time it reaches his home in Kalgoorlie, and he receives no recompense for that extra cost in the computation of the basic wage.

The Minister said that an additional 5d. per lb. being added to the price of meat would involve an increase of 5s. 11d. per week in the basic wage. If that is so, then the workers on the Goldfields are at present being deprived, in the position that I have outlined, of about 6s. per week to which they are justly entitled. No earnest attempt is being made to control the price of meat and I am certain that both the Minister and his department know that to be so. They know that a greater price is being paid by master butchers, for meat on the hoof in the saleyards, than it is possible for them to pay if the meat is to be retailed to the customers within the price limits fixed.

The action of the Government in increasing charges in many directions has been a further factor in the increased cost of a great number of commodities. I will deal first with the increased charges for electricity and gas. Everyone in the metropolitan area knows that for many years electricity and gas supplies in the metropolis of Perth had been provided by the Perth City Council until, some time ago, the State Government made overtures for the purchase of those undertakings. I do not think members of the Perth City Council were unanimous as to whether they should dispose of those undertakings to the Government, and I believe a certain amount of duress was brought to bear on the council, but eventually the State Government acquired those instrumentalities and immediately raised the charges for electricity and gas by something in the vicinity of 100 per cent.

Obviously when the cost of gas or electric current used extensively in industry is raised, that increases the cost of manufactured commodities. I understand that the consumers of between 200 and 5,000 units of electricity per month had to pay a percentage increase in the vicinity of 100 per cent. The smallest increase, levied on the larger consumers, using from 50,000 to 100,000 units per month, was in the vicinity of 70 per cent. By its action in increasing the cost of electricity and gas in the new socialistic undertaking that it took over, the Government contributed to the increased cost of commodities in Western Australia.

The Premier: What would happen if we received nothing to meet our increased costs?

Mr. STYANTS: I am not on the Government side of the House. I understand that the same position was created at

Collie when the Government took over the power house there. The company running that undertaking had been making a profit sufficient to warrant the court of appeal, to which it went, awarding double what the Government had originally offered for the undertaking.

The Minister for Works: Had the company been looking after maintenance?

Mr. STYANTS: It could not have neglected maintenance greatly, because the court of appeal awarded something like twice or two and a half times the amount that the Government had offered for the undertaking. The company must have been showing a fairly good profit, to be able to convince the court that its equity in the undertaking was worth so much. Despite all that, immediately the Government took over the power house it increased the charges for electric current at Collie. Although, in the first instance, the user of electric current must pay the increased price, it is the consumer of the goods produced who eventually pays for the increase.

When charges for power are increased the manufacturer of consumable goods immediately passes that increase on, probably together with an additional amount of profit for himself, to the public at large. In the final analysis it is the consumer of the goods who has to pay the increased charges. Railway freights and fares were also increased considerably early in the life of this Government. It is strange that a Government that preaches decentralisation should increase railway charges, knowing that nothing retards progress in the outer portions of the State more than does an increase in railway freights.

Mr. Ackland: Do you think they have not been increased sufficiently?

The Premier: Have you read what our deficit is to be this year?

Mr. STYANTS: The member for Moore is wrong if he suggests that I think freights generally have not been increased sufficiently, but I maintain that the farmers, who are having their super. carted at a cost that represents a loss of £490,000 to the taxpayers of the State over the last twelve months, and who are at present on the crest of a wave of financial prosperity, should pay the cost of that use of the railways. That is what I claim and the member for Moore knows that the cartage of super. over the last 12 months in this State has cost the taxpayers of this State, in actual loss, £490,000.

Mr. Yates: Early morning fares should be increased.

Mr. STYANTS: Actually, it is over £490,000. A sum of £179,000 has been paid as a subsidy on road transport of super. and a sum of £296,000 was actually lost by the railways on its cartage. There is not only the cost of railway transport but

sleepers charges, meal charges and everything of that nature have increased. There is also a question of considerable moment to property owners in the metropolitan area and that is the raising of the land tax.

The Government did not raise the rate of the land tax but by an indirect means of raising valuations it achieved its end of getting additional revenue into the coffers of the State. And, that is what took place. Of course, that increases the cost of living too. Actually, I think it would be safe to say that all Government charges have been raised including fees to the Titles Office, probate duty and water charges. I think that water charges in the metropolitan area have been increased by approximately 40 per cent.

The Premier: Do you think those charges could have been avoided?

Mr. STYANTS: I am not in a position to say whether they could have been avoided or not, but the action of the Government in making those increases has had an influence in the increases in the basic wage and increases in the cost of living.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Water for irrigation purposes is still at the old rate.

Mr. STYANTS: I did hear the other evening—I think it was the Leader of the Opposition—one member suggest to the Premier that the water rate charges in the irrigation areas should be increased, but those areas are either in the Premier's electorate or adjacent to it.

The Premier: I have not any irrigation areas in my electorate.

Mr. STYANTS: Then those areas were recently in the electoral district of the Premier. In any case the areas to which I refer are Harvey, Roelands, Waterloo, and Burekup. I do not know whether the rate for water for irrigation purposes has been raised but apparently, from the interjection of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, they have not been increased. That is one of the rare instances where Government charges have not been raised.

It is generally known by members that as far as the water rate of the metropolitan area is concerned a person who is a property owner can get 1,000 gallons of water for every 1s. 6d. contained in the general water rate, but there is no concession in the sewerage and storm water rate. In some instances the department controlling water supply has increased the valuations of properties but it has not increased the general rate. That still remains the same but the department has considerably increased the sewerage and storm water rate. Therefore the department still gets additional revenue without giving an additional amount of water at the rate of 1s. 6d. a thousand gallons on the general rate.

I think, too, that wharfage charges have been raised considerably. All these additional charges are contributing to the increased cost of living. Rents, too, have to a great extent been by-passed because of legislation passed in this Parliament in 1948. It was the intention, and it was fairly rigidly carried out for a number of years, that rents which prevailed on the 31st August, 1939, the day before the declaration of war, should be regarded as the standard rents and except under exceptional circumstances no deviation from those rents was permitted.

What do we find today? People are purchasing big apartment houses at tremendously enhanced figures and then immediately appealing to the court for the purpose of increasing the rents of their tenants. In most cases they are receiving those increases. Therefore, even so far as rents are concerned the Government has, by its measure passed in 1948, permitted owners of property to obtain substantial increases in rents from their tenants. All these factors contribute towards the cost of commodities.

There is one aspect to which I would particularly draw the attention of the Minister for Prices Control, and that is the withdrawing of two price control officers or officials from the Goldfields areas shortly after the State took over control from the Commonwealth. While the two price control officers were stationed and operating on the Goldfields we had a means by which the public could feel assured that it was not being charged in excess of the prices permitted. Immediately this Government took over the control of prices it withdrew the two inspectors and some of the unscrupulous traders on the Goldfields increased their prices. This is the attitude taken by the Minister.

I approached the head of the department to see whether we could have the two price-fixing inspectors again stationed on the Goldfields. He put up the remarkable theory that it was better to send an inspector up there from time to time in order to catch people who were overcharging and take out prosecutions against them. He said that that was better than having two price-fixing inspectors stationed there and preventing the increases occurring. We did not want prosecutions against people on the Goldfields or any other area.

People do not want businessmen to be prosecuted. Why should the community be overcharged for five or six months and then wait for the Prices Branch to send up an inspector to take out prosecutions against the business people? Nobody wants that sort of thing. What people want is proper supervision and I hope the Minister will be able to tell us why these two price-fixing officials were removed from the goldfields areas. The system of permitting business people to overcharge—those who are unscrupulous

to do it—for months on end and then sending an inspector up to take out prosecutions against them is all wrong.

We very often find that figures are published to show that the basic wage has received a percentage increase in excess of the increased price of commodities. In my opinion a lot of those figures are doctored. It would be difficult to convince the average housewife that the cost of living for the "C" index series of articles has gone up by only 60-odd per cent. The average housewife is the best judge, and not the fellow who sits in the statistician's office and expects the businessmen to send in returns every month as to the prices of their commodities.

I will guarantee there is not one housewife in a dozen who would not claim that the increases in commodities under the "C" index figures—which are those taken for the purpose of computing the basic wage—are at least 100 per cent. For instance, here are the official figures to show what is allowed for rent in the computation of the basic wage. Any hon. member here, if he does not already know, will be astonished to learn that, for the compilation of the basic wage the rent assessed for a four- or five-roomed house in the metropolitan area is £1 0s. 2d. per week. Where would one get a house in the metropolitan area for that figure?

Mr. Fox: It would be more like £2.

Mr. STYANTS: Yes, that is nearer the figure. In the Bunbury area the rent for a house is assessed at £1 1s. 4d., and at Collie, 14s. 8d. I do not know what the member for Collie would say to that. I do not know how many four- or five-roomed houses he could tell us are available in Collie for 14s. 8d. a week. At Geraldton the rent is £1 2s. 11d., and at Northam, £1 0s. 2d. Those are the ridiculous figures taken into account for the computation of the basic wage in this State today. Is it any wonder that people suspect the figures and the source from which they are obtained? What is more, they do not take any notice of them and I believe that, if the real increases of the cost of commodities in the "C" series index were ascertained, it would be found that they are considerably in excess of those which are used in computing the basic wage.

Of course, the Minister contends that the rising cost of commodities is caused by an increase in wages, but that contention is so specious as to be hardly worthy of consideration. It has been stated, particularly by the member for Northam last night and the member for Boulder this evening, that everyone except the Minister realises it is the increase in the prices of commodities which raises the basic wage, not the increase in the basic wage which creates a rise in the prices of commodities. If the cost of commodities could be

stabilised for three months under our system of wage fixation there would be no increase in the basic wage.

I noticed in last night's "Daily News" quite an interesting report apropos of this discussion, and that was to the effect that people in Australia—I think members will agree that it is not the man on the basic wage—buy more Rolls Royce cars than do people in England where such vehicles are manufactured. This particular make of car costs £5,000 in Australia.

Mr. Fox: Has the hon. member ever seen one?

Mr. STYANTS: I have seen only one and undoubtedly it is a wonderful car, but that is the cost. It is an indication of the prosperity that is being enjoyed by the owners of industries in Australia when they are able to purchase a greater number of these cars—per head of population—than the people in England, which is the country of their origin.

Mr. Bovell: How many are in Western Australia?

Mr. STYANTS: If the hon. member for Vasse desires that information he would, no doubt, be able to get it if he makes his inquiries at the Police Traffic Office.

Mr. Bovell: We are discussing prices.

Mr. STYANTS: I am not quoting from my own authority, but from authorities regarded by the members on the other side of the House as their Bibles, and those are "The West Australian" and the "Daily News."

Mr. Bovell: The hon. member quotes Australian and Western Australian figures when it suits him.

Mr. STYANTS: For the last 12 or 18 months there has been a Commonwealth inquiry in progress hearing a claim by the Australian Council of Trade Unions for a £10 per week basic wage. Whilst it was regarded as a fantasy 18 months ago, if we keep on the way we are now and if the people are credited with the excess prices for meat, and obtain a correct figure for rents, it will not be a fantasy at all but a fait accompli. We have reached a basic wage of £7 3s. 6d. now and I believe, if the correct figures were allowed on those two items, that we would be receiving a basic wage of over £8 per week. Therefore, there will not be need to wait 18 months for a decision on the £10 per week basic wage claim, for already we should be receiving in the vicinity of that amount.

MR. FOX (South Fremantle—on amendment) [8.27]: No doubt quite a number of people in Western Australia are awaiting the outcome of the vote to be taken in this Chamber tonight which will decide the fate of the Government, but if one

cares to read tonight's issue of the "Daily News" it will be found that the Premier is under no illusion whatsoever. It is a nice state of affairs when it appears that the people outside Parliament already know that a vote adverse to the amendment will be made in the House tonight, knowing full well that there are two Independents in this Chamber and another member who has been at loggerheads with the Government for some time, insofar as he left the Government side of the House to come over to this side. In tonight's "Daily News" the Premier has stated that he is confident he will win and that the Government is counting on the available votes of the two Independents. What right has the Premier to say that?

The Premier: I did not say it.

Mr. FOX: It is in the Press.

The Premier: I did not say it. I am relying on good sound commonsense.

Mr. FOX: What a reflection on the two Independents! At what are members laughing?

The Minister for Lands: We cannot help it.

Mr. FOX: The people outside have heard the indictment of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, but they have not yet heard the Premier's reply, so how do they know how the vote will go? Did the Premier bring some pressure to bear on them—

The Premier: No.

Mr. FOX:—so that the Government could be assured of the votes of the two Independents? That is a gross reflection on those two members. It does not matter what our own Deputy Leader has said, we expect the members who term themselves Independents to give a just vote on the case presented to them by members from either side.

The Minister for Lands: You will find they will, too.

Mr. FOX: The Premier says he is confident that he will win.

The Premier: I did not say that.

Mr. Bovell: Where did you get the idea that the Premier said that? It is only a newspaper report.

Mr. FOX: It is a paper that supports the hon. member's party, which has never said a good word for the party on this side of the House. That is where I got the idea. The member for Vasse had better take to task the person who inserted the report.

Mr. Bovell: It does not say that the Premier said that.

Mr. FOX: They could at least have heard the Premier's reply tonight before deciding which way the vote would be cast.

Mr. Manning: They know what the Government has done.

Mr. FOX: So do I. Before I sit down, I think I might be able to show that it had an opportunity to do something, but has done nothing. There has been talk about the obligation resting upon the producers to provide meat for the people. I think they are under that obligation, irrespective of whether they can get better prices for their wool.

Mr. Mann: That is communistic.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: You ought to know.

Mr. FOX: The people residing in the metropolitan area and outside districts such as, for instance, Collie, make contributions towards the production of meat in the rural areas.

Mr. Mann: Oh no!

Mr. FOX: Where would the hon. member be were it not for the workers in the metropolitan area, the seamen and the waterside workers?

Mr. Mann: I thought we would hear something about the waterside workers.

Mr. FOX: Where would the hon. member be were it not for the men who take his produce away in ships or handle it on the wharf? Is there not an obligation to feed them and also the men who manufacture the super. that the farmers require?

Mr. Marshall: And those who produce the coal.

Mr. FOX: Is there not an obligation to feed the Collie miners who, by their work, produce the power that is essential for the manufacturing of everything used in the production of wheat, meat and wool? The farmers are under an obligation to feed all these people, and they should not keep their sheep for wool merely because they can sell their clips at higher prices. It seems as though the Government does not give a damn for the other people.

Mr. Manning: We appreciate our obligation, but the trouble is that so many from the country are coming into the city to work the 40-hour week.

Mr. FOX: The farmers worked the men from daylight till dark until we formed industrial unions for them.

Mr. Bovell: The farmers themselves work from daylight to dark.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: How do you know?

Mr. FOX: I thought my remarks would draw interjections. Members opposite do not like the truth.

The Minister for Works: I have heard you say that before.

Mr. FOX: Something was said during the debate about fish. The Minister for Prices should tell us something about the increased price of that commodity. He was asked a question about a statement

that appeared in the "Daily News" concerning a large catch of fish that was to be sent to the Eastern States if the fishermen did not get the increased price they sought for their catch. I asked the Minister how he was dealing with the matter. He did not answer, and made no attempt to do so; in fact, he could not reply to it.

The Minister for Health: It was too fishy!

Mr. FOX: During the election campaign, it was said that the State could control the prices of commodities. If the Minister for Prices were honest and answered the question I put to him, he would say that if the people who owned the fish liked to send their catch to some other State where better prices were obtainable, he could not do anything about it. As it was, he side-stepped the issue. He told the people at the referendum that the State Government could control prices just as well as the Commonwealth Government could. Here we have a glaring instance of how the State Government cannot control prices. If people send their meat to the Eastern States, he can do nothing to prevent it because of Section 92 of the Constitution which prohibits any such action being taken. Obviously the State Government has not lived up to its election promises regarding price-fixing.

Blackmarketing of meat is rampant and that commodity is one of the principal foodstuffs required by the people. That being so, it is most essential that meat should be procurable at a reasonable price, especially by pensioners and those in receipt of fixed incomes who do not benefit by allowances to meet increases in the cost of living. Such people suffer great hardship. The meat position in Western Australia is scandalous, but the Minister for Prices is not worrying about it, and he has made no attempt to cope with it. It is time we put someone a little more active than he is into his position, and had someone who would keep down prices.

Mr. May: The Government will not even let their supporters speak.

Mr. FOX: Not many of them seem too anxious to put up a case for the Government, obviously because they have no such case. The Minister for Prices has no case at all.

Mr. May: He should have.

Mr. FOX: Between May and August there is always a seasonal shortage of meat. One reason is that it is just about the shearing period and until after that time they are not over fat. Of course, if any of the stock is hand fed, the producer would want more for such meat.

Mr. Hearman: Are you suggesting that they shear cattle?

Mr. FOX: Do not be silly!

Mr. Hearman: That is what you said.

Mr. FOX: No. I said that the producers wait till the sheep come off shears. At that time some cattle are not fat unless they have been hand fed, in which case they would very naturally demand higher prices for them. This trouble started shortly after the present Government took office. When the Labour Government was in power, an attempt was made by the wholesale butchers to hold up the distribution of meat unless they received higher prices. At that time, the Minister for Agriculture told them that if they did not purchase meat in the markets, the Government would purchase it and distribute the meat itself. That brought the wholesalers to their senses. The present Government could have done that, and thus kept down the price of meat.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That would be socialism.

Mr. FOX: I do not blame the retailers for the present position. The wholesaler goes to the market and he is prepared to pay anything, even 6d. a lb. over the correct price. He knows he can pass the added cost on to the retailers who have to take the meat, and they in turn pass on as much as they can to the consumers.

The Minister for Lands: Is he the man that is doing the blackmarketing?

Mr. FOX: Does the Minister mean the wholesaler?

The Minister for Lands: Yes.

Mr. FOX: The Government is allowing the blackmarket to continue.

Mr. Nalder: The same position exists in N.S.W. where there is a Labour Government.

Mr. FOX: It does not matter what happens there! We are dealing with the position in this State, and the hon. member is making merely a bald statement.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Very bald.

Mr. FOX: According to a statement in "The West Australian" of the 9th August, the fixed price for beef wholesale was 83s. 4d. per 100lb., yet beef was sold on the market at 120s. per 100lb. Why could not the Minister for Prices take action on that statement, which was published in the newspaper?

Mr. Perkins: That was the wholesale price?

Mr. FOX: Yes; I said I was quoting the wholesale price.

Mr. Perkins: That is not an offence.

Mr. FOX: Of course it is. How could the retailer sell at the fixed price in those circumstances? He would have no chance in the world.

Mr. Perkins: It is necessary to have evidence of an offence being committed before there can be a prosecution.

Mr. FOX: What, someone must tell the Minister that an offence is being committed! Do we want a nation of pimps? We have officials who are there to police the price-fixing regulations, and they should do their job. If they did so, we would have much cheaper meat than is available today. Of course, we know that the Minister for Health said that people should go in for cheaper cuts, and the Honorary Minister for Agriculture made the statement that if meat was too dear, people should eat less.

Mr. Perkins: The member for Kalgoorlie gave evidence of a preference for old ewes.

Mr. Styants: I said that was all we could get.

Mr. FOX: Under the existing system, the wholesalers go to the market and buy sheep and pass them on to the retailers, with a charge of 1½ per cent. as buying commission. That means 1½ per cent. on top of the blackmarket price, and there is no wonder that people are having to pay such a high price for meat at present. If the Minister were really active, he could put a stop to this practice and enable the community to get meat at a fair price. Why could not he go along and have an examination made of the books of some of the wholesalers to see what they are doing? Is it too much trouble for him to do so?

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: It would be for the Minister.

The Minister for Lands: You would find that their books were all right.

Mr. FOX: The Minister cannot say that because he has not seen the books. One remedy, in my opinion, would be for the Government to market all the meat, though that might be rather too socialistic for these Ministers. Let the Government market the meat and then pass it on to the retail butchers. That is one way by which blackmarketing might be dealt with. It is what the Labour Government did, and blackmarketing did not exist when we were in office. It was nipped in the bud, and the present Government could have done the same if we had had an efficient Minister for Prices. However, the Government does nothing at all.

The Premier: Did you read what the New South Wales Minister for Prices, Mr. Finnan, said in today's newspaper?

Mr. FOX: No.

The Premier: You should have read it.

Mr. FOX: The Premier stated that he intended to have quite a lot of meat brought down from Wyndham next year in order to make up the shortage. That would be the correct thing to do. If quite a lot were brought down from Wyndham and stored, it would have the effect of checking blackmarketing to some extent. Many people have had their attention directed to the enormous increase in the

price of every commodity. Since the war there has been a tendency for prices to rise, and they have spiralled rapidly in the case of housing.

It is almost impossible for a young couple to get a home at present. The cost of a home of 12½ squares in wood and asbestos runs into £1,750 to £1,800, while the cost of a brick house would be at least £2,400. That is beyond the means of any working person to pay, because he would have no possible hope of repaying the principal. I have pleasure in supporting the amendment and hope later on to hear an expression of opinion from the two Independents, as well as from the member for Avon Valley.

MR. NEEDHAM (North Perth—on amendment) [8.45]: I was hoping that some members from the Government benches would follow the Premier and deal with the allegations made from this side of the House by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition when moving the amendment, but so far silence has prevailed on those benches. What I have to say in speaking to the amendment will occupy little time of the House, because the question of prices—the subject-matter of this debate—has been very well dealt with in the Address-in-reply and also on the Supply Bill.

I find it necessary to make one or two references to the Premier's speech. I understood the Premier to say that it was unusual for an amendment of this nature to be moved by the Deputy Leader and not by the Leader of the Opposition. I cannot see anything unusual in that, but I do see something very unusual in the fact that the responsible Minister has not vouchsafed a reply to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. In my experience, both in the Commonwealth Parliament and in this House, the responsible Minister for the department concerned has been the first man to rise in his place and reply.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Not so this Minister.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: That applies only to a responsible Minister.

Mr. NEEDHAM: Certainly the responsible Minister should have replied. However, I shall be still more surprised if he takes any part at all in the debate. The Premier stated that the whole world was caught up in the inflationary spiral. There is no denying that fact, but that is not an effective reply to the charges levelled by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition against the administration of the Prices Branch. I remind the Premier that there was every evidence of an inflationary spiral in May, 1948, when, during the referendum campaign, he was so busy telling the people that the State Government could control prices much more effectively than could the Commonwealth Government. Now the Premier attributes the present state of affairs to the inflationary spiral.

As a matter of fact, the price-fixing system instituted by the Commonwealth Government of that day was, as far as was humanly possible, capable of checking the inflationary spiral. I point out that one thing we look for in members of Parliament and public men generally is consistency, but if a comparison be made between the speeches of the Premier during the referendum campaign on prices and his statement here tonight, I must say quite candidly and with all the respect I have for him as a man that he has failed in consistency. He also endeavoured to reply to the charges levelled against the Prices Department in connection with blackmarketing in meat, but I think his defence was very weak. He said that while petrol was rationed there was blackmarketing in petrol. We are all well aware of that. But he forgot to tell the House that the Commonwealth Government made every effort to check the blackmarketing in petrol and in many instances people were prosecuted and fined for being guilty of the offence; and he failed to point out to this House any instance where any man was prosecuted for blackmarketing in meat. Not one single instance did he give. Not only did he fail in that respect, but he gave no instance of any effort that was made at all by the Prices Branch, controlled by the member for Mt. Lawley, to check blackmarketing in meat.

The Premier had the opportunity to give a reply to the statement made by Mr. Pethick, representing the wholesale butchers, that his organisation was sick and tired of approaching the Minister for Prices in connection with blackmarketing in meat.

The Minister for Lands: He wants us to decontrol. Are you in favour of that?

Mr. NEEDHAM: He wanted to check blackmarketing and he wanted the Minister to make every effort to try to check it. I admit it is difficult to prevent blackmarketing, but I also realise the obligation on the Minister responsible for the department controlling prices to make some effort to check it and to bring to book those people guilty of practising it. If my remarks on this phase of the question displease the Minister, let him get up in his place and tell us what he did to stop blackmarketing in meat. If he can produce any evidence of having done so I will be the first to apologise to him. I am under the impression he cannot produce any evidence of any effort on his part to stop blackmarketing.

Another statement by the Premier in the course of his speech tonight was that Western Australia's geographical position makes price control more difficult. Here again I consider the Premier was inconsistent, comparing his attitude towards price-fixing today with that of a year or two ago. We all realise the distances between the centres of population in Western Australia as against those obtaining

in the eastern portion of the continent; and the very statement that the hon. gentleman made was used by members on this side, during the referendum campaign, in justification of the retention by the Commonwealth of the control of prices. It was one of the difficulties we pointed out would beset the State Government in endeavouring effectively to control prices. But the Premier did not agree with that then. He took quite the opposite view and did not admit anything of that nature. To-night he has the weak defence in reply to the charges made, that Western Australia's geographical position makes it more difficult to control prices.

I want to refer to a statement made by the President of the Employers' Federation a night or two ago. It appeared in "The West Australian" yesterday morning. The report is as follows:—

"Loose thinking" on prices and wages was condemned by the president of the W.A. Employers' Federation (Mr. F. A. Johnston) at the annual meeting of the Perth Chamber of Commerce last night.

He said that figures from competent sources had been submitted to the Federal Arbitration Court at the recent basic wage hearing emphasising that wages did not lag behind prices. Over comparative periods wages had risen by 78 per cent. while retail prices had risen only 56 per cent. The lag between wages and rises in prices was from four to six months.

It was interesting to note that the advocate for the Australian Council of Trades Unions had abandoned the claim for a £10 a week basic wage and had suggested that the Court should give an interim increase of £1 a week and review the situation in three to four months' time.

The Minister for Prices in reply to a question put to him yesterday by the member for Mt. Hawthorn as to what would be the effect on the basic wage of an increase of 5d. a lb. in the price of meat, said that it would result in an increase of 5s. 11d. in the State basic wage. That does not back up the statement by Mr. Johnston that wages increase ahead of prices. Having quoted the statement by Mr. Johnston, let me quote the reply given by the general secretary of the Australian Labour Party in this State, Mr. F. E. Chamberlain. The newspaper report states—

Mr. Chamberlain was commenting on a statement made by the president of the West Australian Employers' Federation (Mr. F. A. Johnston) and published in "The West Australian" to the effect that the £10-a-week basic wage claim had been abandoned and that the A.C.T.U. advocate had suggested that the Court should give an

interim increase of £1 a week and review the situation in three to four months.

Mr. Chamberlain said that confirmation of Mr. Johnston's statement had been sought from the A.C.T.U. A reply had been received from the secretary by telegram that the A.C.T.U. advocates had not abandoned the £10 claim and that the statement was a "complete misrepresentation."

Mr. Johnston may have convinced the Perth Chamber of Commerce that wages do not lag behind prices but he is most unlikely to convince the wage earner," said Mr. Chamberlain. What is more important, of course, is the fact that the reasoning of Mr. Johnston has been accepted by the Government Statistician of the Arbitration Court.

Mr. Johnston used the words "for comparative periods" but did not mention what those periods were. Mr. Chamberlain gives a statement based on the remarks of the Government Statistician—

For instance, on July 30 this year, the State basic wage was £7. On the following day, the State Arbitration Court sat for the purpose of reviewing the basic wage in the light of the cost of living figures supplied by the Government Statistician.

The Statistician's figures related to the items in the basic wage regimen indicated that the index number for food in the metropolitan area had increased from 1,514 at the end of the March quarter to 1,559 at the end of the June quarter. Similar increases were also shown for clothing and miscellaneous items. As a result of the information before it, the court adjusted the basic wage from £7 to £7 3s. 6d.

The worker got an increase of 3s. 6d. per week but he had been paying the increased prices for three months. Still the Minister for Prices contends, agreeing with Mr. Johnston, that wages are increased before prices. Mr. Chamberlain continues—

The important thing to note, which completely explodes Mr. Johnston's assertions, is that the new wage of £7 3s. 6d. is related to the cost of living for the three month period which ended on June 30 last. I have no doubt that the information now being collected by the Statistician's Department will show further increases in the cost of living, but again the workers will wait three months before their wages are increased proportionately.

For instance, if the price of meat increased by 5d. a lb., according to the question put by the member for Mt. Hawthorn, then the worker would be paying that in-

crease for weeks and weeks before the court recognised it and paid him an additional wage; and that extra wage would date only from the time the court made the declaration, not retrospectively. Mr. Chamberlain goes on—

Perhaps Mr. Johnston would care to comment upon some of the writings of the financial editor of "The West Australian." In Monday's issue, for instance, one could read the following: "For example, an investor who bought 100 shares in Woolworths Ltd. (Aust.) for 50s. in 1930 would now hold 9,075 shares as the result of bonus issues and rights to new issues which would have cost him £2,265. Their market value today is £12,364. In addition, he would have received £3,066 in dividends."

I agree with Mr. Johnston that there is a lot of loose thinking—but where?

Those figures, quoted from the financial column of the newspaper, indicate who is getting the best deal as far as prices and wages are concerned; especially when we look at the extraordinary profit made by that one company. I have no intention of delaying the House for long. As far as I can see there are two ways of more effectively controlling prices and checking the inflationary spiral, apart altogether from more production. One is the reversion to Commonwealth control, and the other is the establishment of a tribunal, such as I advocated in the last Parliament, on similar grounds and with similar duties to that of the State Arbitration Court.

HON. J. T. TONKIN (Melville—on amendment) [9.7]: In order to get the subject-matter of this amendment into its proper perspective, one has to consider what the members of the Government parties said on it at the election before last when they obtained control of the Treasury Bench by distinct misrepresentation. They held out to the people that if they were returned as the Government of this country, they would be able to take all sorts of steps in various directions to correct the ills from which the people were suffering at that time. The Premier in his policy speech had this to say—

We are not going to spend our time in following political theories or trying to secure party advantages, but in seeing that . . . the householder and the housewife can go into a shop or warehouse and get what they want, and that our money in the Savings Bank or in our pay envelopes can be converted promptly and at a reasonable price to meet our requirements for a satisfactory and expanding standard of living.

There was an offer by the Leader of the Liberal Party to the electors to return, as the Government of this State, his party, and if they did so he would undertake to put that into operation.

The Minister for Lands: When did he say that?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: In 1947.

The Minister for Lands: And they returned him again.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I will deal with that a little later. The Premier went on to say that the Liberal Party stood for improving the value and purchasing power of wages and savings by more goods and fewer shortages. His colleague in this Government, who was then the Leader of the Opposition and of the Country and Democratic League, said that every effort would be made to reduce living costs and taxation. That was the combined policy upon which they were in complete agreement and which secured for the members of the present Government the support of the people. And, make no mistake, they were not content to rely upon that offer to the electors, but adopted the slogan, "Prices Rise with Wise" which was plastered everywhere!

That, combined with their offer to check the rising prices, played a very important part in their gaining the support of the people, which I say they gained by fraud, because they had no more capacity to carry out their undertaking than had the then existing Government—and, in my view, considerably less. The reason why we are in this trouble in Western Australia today is because the Attorney General, who is Minister for Prices, has directed the Prices Controller to put prices up.

The Minister for Lands: That is entirely wrong.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I will quote from the Western Australian "Grocers and Storekeepers' Journal" for February, 1950. Under the heading of "Glad Tidings for Retail Grocers," appears the following:—

From their reading of this journal members will be well aware that their association has maintained an incessant effort to have the position rectified. They will recollect the last case which it submitted to the Minister controlling prices at the end of September last and which was printed in our October issue. Following the submission of this case, your association continued to press strongly for a prompt review of the trade's position and the Minister instructed that this be carried out.

Now what does the Minister say?

The Attorney General: No directions have ever been given by me.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I will prove that this direction was given. Does the Minister know what the retail trade margin is today?

The Attorney General: I know what some of the margins are.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Never mind about that. Does the Minister know what the average over-all retail trade margin is, as agreed upon by the Prices Commissioner?

The Attorney General: There is no such trade margin agreed upon. It varies according to the trade.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: No, it does not. I will inform the Minister and will quote again from this journal. These people had been pressing for months for the restoration of a 22 per cent. retail margin. That is what the margin is—22 per cent. On some lines it is as high as 40 per cent. and on others it is less than 22 per cent., but there is an agreement between the Prices Branch and the retailers that they shall get 22 per cent. profit on the landed cost into store. That is the percentage, and the Minister directed that that be done.

The Attorney General: Not at all. I did not.

Mr. Marshall: What rot!

The Attorney General: What do you know about it?

Mr. Marshall: If I did not know more than you do, I would keep quiet. You are only making an ass of yourself.

The Attorney General: And you are nothing but a disturbing element.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We will place this on record, because I cannot imagine that the people who print this journal would deliberately misquote the Minister.

The Attorney General: There is nothing there to say that I agreed to anything.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We will see. It states—

Members, from sad experience—

That means members of the retail grocery trade—

—are all only too well aware of the urgent necessity for an upward revision in the over-all retail margin on groceries. Over the last three years their trading margins have been rigidly controlled and in many instances reduced, whilst their overhead expenses have steadily increased. The position has progressively become so acute that retailers generally have been seriously concerned as to the future of the trade and their personal solvency, many becoming so disheartened at the meagre returns earned, which were out of all proportion to the long hours of work and worry entailed in conducting a business under present-day conditions,

that they disposed of their businesses. It is noteworthy that in the year ended 30th September, 1949, a record number of businesses changed hands and it is a fact that over 400 retail grocers on the register of this association sold out during that period. The common explanation was that they were no longer prepared to bear the strain of the excessive hours necessary to maintain their businesses when they could relieve themselves of the worry and earn more by taking a job. From their reading of this journal members will be well aware that their association has maintained an incessant effort to have the position rectified. They will recollect the last case which it submitted to the Minister controlling prices at the end of September—

Does the Minister deny that they submitted such a case?

The Attorney General: No.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The statement goes on—

and which was printed in our October issue. Following the submission of this case your association continued to press strongly for a prompt review of the trade position, and the Minister instructed that this be carried out. The prices office undertook an extensive check of a number of representative businesses.

I now ask the Minister did the prices office carry out that check?

The Attorney General: I asked the prices officers to make their usual investigation.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: This was not a usual investigation. I will tell the Minister that they were engaged on the investigation for months, and it covered not only the amount of gross profit being made on certain items but also the volume of the trade involved in dealing in certain items in order that finally a decision could be arrived at so that, if the trade were permitted an increase on certain controlled items, they would themselves decide upon increases on uncontrolled items and the total result would be, to them, an over-all profit of 22 per cent. on their turnover.

The Attorney General: The whole matter was left to the Prices Commissioner.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The article proceeds—

This investigation took some weeks to complete. A number of conferences were also held between representatives of your association and prices officials who discussed the best method of granting relief to the trade.

Not the best method of granting relief to the consumers, and that is what this Government was supposed to have gone into office for!

The Attorney General: I suppose you will agree that the storekeepers should be allowed to live?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We will see about this living business, with a 22 per cent. margin on the landed cost into store. If the worker gets an increase in wages in the Arbitration Court, not only is that included in the price of goods, but also the retailer is entitled to his profit on that increase as well as on the previous cost. That is what is causing the inflationary spiral.

Mr. Totterdell: What about his rent and wages bill? They have increased.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We will see what these people have to say about it. The article continues—

It will be recollected that in its case the association submitted figures showing that the over-all gross profit on cost had been reduced to 17.7 per cent. and that overhead expenses amounted to 16.6 per cent., leaving a net profit of 1.1 per cent. In our conference with the prices office we strongly urged that the over-all gross profit of 22 per cent. on cost which had been established by the Commonwealth prices office as the essential minimum should be immediately restored. The prices officials claimed that their investigations indicated that the trade was obtaining 20.9 per cent. over-all on cost, but the Commissioner agreed that the over-all margin should be restored to 22 per cent.

That was because he was directed to do so by Government policy.

The Attorney General: Why do you keep on misrepresenting things?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: It is the truth.

The Attorney General: You know it is not the truth.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Why did not the Minister contradict this article when it was published? It has been out for months.

The Attorney General: I did not have to contradict it. It was a determination by the Prices Commissioner as to what was a fair thing.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Somebody must have told these people that the Minister directed the prices office to carry out this investigation and do what was done, or they would not have said so.

The Attorney General: They did not say so.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Then the Minister should proceed against them for libel.

The Attorney General: You would be proceeded against for libel if you made your statements outside this House.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: What a puerile statement!

The Attorney General: What a puerile speech you are making!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am reading to the Minister what this reputable journal printed about the matter.

The Minister for Lands: And you are putting your own wrong construction on it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am not. If the Minister for Lands cannot understand plain English, I cannot help him.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: As I have already read out, this journal deliberately says that the Minister instructed that this action be carried out.

The Attorney General: An investigation.

The Minister for Education: What is wrong about that?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Investigation, no.

The Attorney General: Yes.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: That the position be rectified.

The Attorney General: That the investigation be carried out.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Attorney General can have his argument with the people who printed this article. So it was agreed that the 22 per cent. margin was to be restored and, if the Attorney General did not direct that it had to be done, then he certainly did not object to it. Therefore he cannot dodge it because, if he did not direct that it should be done when he knew it was being done, he did not prevent it.

Mr. Marshall: He acquiesced in it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: This article continues—

It was agreed that the additional trading profit should be spread proportionately over controlled and de-controlled lines.

Incidentally, it may interest members to know that 69.47 per cent. of their turnover is still price-controlled and 30.53 per cent. de-controlled.

The Prices Commissioner confirmed this arrangement by letter dated 2nd February, and indicated that he was increasing the retail margins on biscuits, margarine, kerosene in tins, packet cheese, household soaps, candles, coffee, coffee and chicory, coffee essences, starch, barley and vine fruits.

In regard to de-controlled lines, your association decided to increase the margins on adhesive pastes, baked beans, dried beans, cakes, cleansers, cocoanut, cordials, curry powder, digestive meal, canned fish, health salines, lemon butter, macaroni, canned meats, mincemeats, oatmeals, peel, boot polishes, spaghetti and vermacelli and several smaller lines.

The various adjustments of percentages on controlled and de-controlled lines to give the prescribed 22

per cent. gross profit were worked out by the Prices Office and your secretary respectively.

So that they went into conference and, in accordance with Government policy, worked out how they could increase certain controlled lines and certain de-controlled lines to give them an average overall profit of 22 per cent.

Mr. W. Hegney: Streamlined arbitration!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: It goes on—

Then began the onerous task of completely revising the retail prices of the hundreds of lines listed under the categories mentioned above. This kept the staffs of the Prices Office and your association working at high pressure to enable the amended prices to be published in this month's price list.

We feel that this is a happy culmination to the long and sustained effort by the association to obtain for retailers their just dues, and members will undoubtedly appreciate the fact that it is only by their having maintained a strong and active organisation, that can and does represent and fight for them, that it is possible to achieve such a result.

This very necessary adjustment of margins will undoubtedly put fresh heart into the trade which has long felt that it was being unjustly penalised by a too rigid and severe control of prices and should enable and inspire it to maintain its customary efficient service to the public.

When this method of adjusting prices was agreed to, some astonishing results occurred. Take the product of margarine! That was subject to a quota and it was generally agreed that the price of it should be practically uniform throughout the Commonwealth. For a long time there has been a margin to the retailer of only 2d. a lb. on margarine, and that was regarded as adequate. When butter rationing was in force and it was not possible for the housewife to obtain as much butter as she wanted for cooking, she obtained margarine up to the amount of the quota which firms were permitted to manufacture. But, before butter rationing was lifted, under this very nice arrangement the price of margarine in Western Australia was increased by a further 2d., giving retailers in Western Australia a margin of 4d. a lb. as against 2d. in every other State.

Butter could not be obtained because it was still rationed so, if the housewife in Western Australia wanted to use margarine for cakes, she had to pay a further 2d. a lb. for it and give the retailer 4d. a lb. profit when it was not the position anywhere else in Australia. This was so simply because of this arrangement to give 22 per cent. profit overall. I took this matter up with the Prices Branch because it

was operating unfairly upon the margarine manufacturers in Western Australia. Recently butter rationing was abolished and, because of the price of margarine in Western Australia, with 4d. a lb. retail margin, housewives would not buy margarine but preferred to purchase butter. Of course they could not be blamed for that. Therefore, the sales of margarine in Western Australia fell off because of the unfair price which had been allowed to retailers in this commodity.

When I pointed this out to the Prices Branch, I was given the explanation. I was told that it had been agreed that the retailers were to receive a 22 per cent. average profit on landed cost into store and, as they were reduced on some items, they perforce had to get more than the normal profit on others. But the Prices Commissioner agreed that, with regard to margarine, it was a very unfair proposition and he said that the retail margin would be reduced from 4d. to 2d. a lb. But, to make it up, he increased the price of honey. If members will examine the items in the "C" series which are used for the computation of the basic wage, they will find that honey plays no part, yet golden syrup does. Golden syrup is listed in the "C" series but honey is not. Why did not the Prices Branch put the increased margin on golden syrup and not on honey? If the department had done that, it would have affected the basic wage and enabled the worker to buy golden syrup at the increased cost. However, instead of that, the department put the margin it had taken from margarine on to honey, which is not included in the regimen. I venture to say that honey is used far more extensively than golden syrup.

Mr. Graham: Absolutely!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Therefore it resulted in a very fine confidence trick on the working people. The Prices Branch agrees to increases in prices of commodities which are not included in the regimen, but the department knows that people will have to buy those commodities if they want a satisfactory standard of living. The Government carries on a subterfuge by controlling prices which are listed in the regimen. That is the sort of return this Government has given the people for the support they accorded it when the Government made its promises to keep prices down.

I have made a close study of the price lists in this grocers' and storekeepers' publication which sets out for the use of storekeepers the prices of the various commodities. I have checked through a number of items to ascertain what retail margin is allowed and I find that on some extremely small ones as much as 4d. and 4½d. on the shilling is permitted. All the way through this grocers' journal various

items such as jams, custard powders and others which are in daily use, have been selected for this extra large margin to compensate the retailer against the goods which carry only a small margin. So we reach the result that they obtain their 22 per cent. margin, and those percentage figures are the cause of all the trouble.

The Attorney General: It is a gross and not a net profit.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Of course it is, but let us see how it works if we stick to percentages. If I am a city merchant and it costs me £100 to land goods into store I am allowed to sell those goods for £122 and my profit is £22. However, if I am in the country I have to pay £5 freight on that £100 worth of goods of the same quantity and quality and if I am allowed to make £22 profit the same as the city merchant then, on a percentage basis, my profit is only 20.9 per cent. and I immediately claim that I am entitled to 22 per cent. That is what is going on. They claim that they must be allowed a higher price on these articles than that at which they are permitted to sell because they are entitled to 22 per cent. profit on cost. Where is the commonsense or reason for that?

If it is the same quantity of goods to be sold in the same way why should one man want a bigger monetary return than another simply because, on a percentage basis, he is entitled to it on figures alone. So if that procedure is carried on and if one takes the same £100 worth of goods in a remote part of the State, and it costs £10 to have them delivered, that will make the cost of the goods £110 and one will then immediately say, "I want my 22 per cent. profit and therefore I demand an increased price." That is how the spiral is going on; it is the increase on the landed cost. Every time anything occurs to increase the cost of goods that means an increased profit to those handling them.

All this hooey about high wages being responsible for high prices is absolutely wrong; it is the other way round. These high prices are forced up because of a demand for a certain percentage of profit and the worker, in order to live, has to obtain an increased wage to enable him to purchase some of these items. But he never gets anywhere near the appropriate figure because of the way the regimen is drawn up. If one were to examine this price list carefully it would be found that those items which do not enter into the "C" series index have been subjected to considerable increases, whereas a number of items in that series have been safeguarded. That does not mean that the worker's wages will permit him to buy the things he requires because in these days no worker can have a satisfactory standard of living if he sticks wholly and solely to the items mentioned in the regimen.

Take meat for example! Lamb is not mentioned in the regimen and that is why it was de-controlled. Is not the worker entitled to have a leg of lamb some time or other? But if he buys it at the ruling price look at the effect it will have on his purchasing power because lamb does not appear in the "C" series index! The Government did not hesitate to lift the control on lamb but it retained control on mutton and beef because those items appear there. We now come to Mr. Kelly's report. It is found that instead of the control being real it is only apparent because he says blackmarketing is rife and we know it is. The wholesale butchers have been pointing out that fact for years. They told the Premier three years ago that if he wished to do anything to handle the situation he would have to make a drive against black markets.

When the Premier said recently that he accepted Mr. Kelly's recommendations that meant he was prepared to institute a drive against black markets. Mr. Pethick, on behalf of the wholesale meat traders, said they were sickened by the promises of the Minister for Prices to take steps against the blackmarketers. According to the statement made in the Press the Premier passed this matter on to the Attorney General for attention after he had accepted Mr. Kelly's findings in order that the Minister could take the necessary steps to kill this black market.

Although Mr. Pethick has stated that the Minister has sickened him with his promises to take such steps, the remarkable part about it is that, when the Premier was speaking to this amendment earlier, he endeavoured to show that it was impossible to deal with black markets. He tried to point out how they had existed in wartime and therefore it was not expected that they could be put down now. He cannot have it both ways. His statement to the Press about accepting Mr. Kelly's recommendation and being prepared to take the necessary steps amounts to nothing.

The Premier: I said that it was not possible wholly and effectively to deal with them.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Is it possible to deal with them at all?

The Premier: I think it is.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Then why did not the Premier deal with them years ago?

The Minister for Lands: Because we were not in office.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Government was in office three years ago. When this matter was brought to the attention of the Minister for Lands and his fellow Ministers and they were told how the trade was being carried on, and when the wholesalers were complaining that their legitimate trade was being made difficult because of the blackmarketing which the

Government had allowed to grow to such an extent, Mr. Pethick said it was impossible to deal with it effectively because of the proportion to which the blackmarketing had grown; and he is probably right.

So the aspect from which we have to consider this matter is whether the Government took any adequate steps or any steps at all to make good the promises it made during the elections when it complained about "prices rising with Wise"; when it had all sorts of pictures in the Press to illustrate the high prices and the increases in the cost of living and when it capitalised on that to the fullest extent by promising to deal with the problem. However, what has it done since it has been in office? To the retailers themselves it has restored, at this time of stress, a margin for which they have been clamouring for some time; 22 per cent. overall increase on everything. I want to know whether the other States have restored a 22 per cent. margin to retailers. If they have not, what becomes of the claims of the members of this Government during the referendum on prices, when it was stated that the States could more effectively control prices than could the Commonwealth? Let me quote the Premier. In "The West Australian" of the 18th February, 1948, the following appeared—

Opposition to Extension of Commonwealth Powers.

The State had control over rents and prices and if necessary would effectively deal with both matters.

Apparently the Premier does not consider it necessary because he has not effectively dealt with those matters.

A Western Australian would certainly gain more with prices and rents being controlled in Perth than in Canberra.

Let us see. If this is the only State that has restored the 22 per cent. profit margin—and I believe it is—how could a Western Australian gain more by having State control over prices rather than Federal control? We have certainly lost more.

The Premier: That is easy to say, is it not?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Yes, because it is true. Surely the Premier will agree that this is the only State that has restored to retailers a margin they did not even ask for.

The Attorney General: The same principles apply throughout the Commonwealth and you know it. That is what annoys me.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Then he has done something by making you annoyed, seeing that you are now awake!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Let us consider the position regarding margarine. The Minister for Prices says that the same principle is adopted throughout the Commonwealth.

The Attorney General: I said the same principles were.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am dealing with a principle. The principle throughout the Commonwealth as applied to those who control a commodity that is in production—margarine is a competitor against butter—is that the price throughout Australia should be practically uniform. Despite that, the Government here was the only one that decided upon the 22 per cent. overall profit. That was brought in without the retailers asking for an increase in the price of this particular article sold to the people. So in that case there is here a profit of 4d. as against one of 2d. in the other States. Does that bear out the Minister's statement that the same principle applies throughout the Commonwealth?

The Attorney General: I said the same principles and the same margin of profit.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: They do not apply.

The Attorney General: They do.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am telling the Minister definitely—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member will address the Chair.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The margin on margarine, I tell the Minister, has been 4d. in this State and only 2d. in the other States. I challenge the Minister to disprove that statement. The reason for that difference was because the Prices Branch here agreed that in future, in order to put into operation this particular 22 per cent. gross profit all round, there should be some increases on items, irrespective of what the prices of those items were in this State. That was done without reference to those concerned. When it was pointed out how unfairly that acted upon Western Australian producers and upon the State's economy—one would have thought that the Prices Branch would have taken the matter into consideration without the necessity for its being pointed out to them—what did the officials do? So that the retailers should not be deprived of this extra profit, they put up the price of honey. Will the Minister say the price of honey was correspondingly increased in the other States or that the price was increased here only after consideration had been given to the situation in other parts of Australia? Who would believe that?

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: The Minister would.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Prices Branch looked for items in respect of which the extra profit was to be allowed and one they selected was honey. They did not choose golden syrup because that would

have affected the basic wage. The inflationary trend about which we complain will never be checked if the Minister is to yield to the importunities of those who are vitally interested in having prices increased. It is to be expected that people in the trade will endeavour to make as much profit as they can, and it is the Government's business to keep them down to reasonable profits.

The time of stress and inflationary movement is when the Government must have strength and hold back the forces that are threatening to engulf us. It should afford protection to the people and not yield to requests that mean steep rises in prices. The retailers have had a 22 per cent. restoration. In this respect there has been full restoration and full acceptance of the demand in connection with the price of that commodity. But who is it that pays these increased prices? Will the workers receive an increase in the basic wage to cope with the situation? Of course not! The increases that have been granted are in respect of articles that are not taken into consideration in fixing the basic wage. That is the wicked part of it.

Mr. Marshall: It is cruel.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: When increased prices on those commodities are operative, there will be no question of increasing wages to cope with the situation. We will possibly hear the Minister say that increases in wages are responsible for the augmented prices. Members can appreciate how hollow such a statement would be. On the other hand, the buying capacity of the workers is being reduced and their standard of living lowered, while those who seek larger profits are having their demands acceded to. That is a matter of policy on the part of the Government. A few years ago I read in a leading article in "The West Australian" the statement that the only criterion of the value of the £ was what it would buy. There is no gainsaying the truth of that assertion.

Mr. Bovell: Then "The West Australian" does make some factual statements?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Of course.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That was a most profound interjection!

Mr. Bovell: From the comments of Opposition members, I thought "The West Australian" was always wrong.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: You are always wrong.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We do not complain that "The West Australian" does not make factual statements; our complaint is that it does not make enough of them. We make plenty of factual statements in this House, but they are never reported. For example, the one about the Minister directing the Prices Branch to make these increases was a factual statement.

Mr. Marshall: That would not be reported.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: It is a matter of Government policy that there was to be a 22 per cent. overall margin of profit.

The Attorney General: Why do you mislead the House?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Is it not a matter of Government policy?

The Attorney General: No.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Then why does it allow that position to continue, if it is not?

The Attorney General: The Government's policy is that a fair thing shall be allowed to each party.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: And is a 22 per cent. overall increase a fair profit?

The Attorney General: I do not know whether it is or not.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Minister should not shillyshally and dodge the issue.

The Attorney General: I am not.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: If the Minister would get up and talk—

The Premier: What about sitting down and giving him a chance?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: If I had not risen, the Minister would not have got on his feet to deal with the matter—and the Premier knows it.

Mr. W. Hegney: The Premier does not want the Minister to speak.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Of course not.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Minister for Prices can attempt to camouflage this issue as much as he likes, but the Act gives him power of control and direction and, if it is not Government policy to restore the 22 per cent. overall profit margin in this State, what has the Government been doing to allow it to operate all this time?

Mr. Yates: Do you think it is too large a profit?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Yes.

Mr. Yates: Have you been in business?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: No.

Mr. Yates: I have.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: At a time when wages are lagging so far behind prices and it is difficult for the bulk of the people to make ends meet, it is no time to give to those who are in a better position all they ask for.

The Attorney General: You would not ask for an increase or vote for an increase?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: These people were given all they asked for at a time when the worker's wage is lagging so far behind

the cost of living that he is finding it difficult to manage. Surely the members of the Government must appreciate that situation! That is the position of the working man today. Just work out what it would cost to provide a decent week-end meal at the price of meat and vegetables today! That is the only way to approach this problem—what it costs a person to live. When prices are so high and still rising, it is no time to do something that will make them rise still higher, and the only effect of this will be to make the situation of the great mass of the people much worse than it was before.

I will agree at any time that a man, whether a wage-earner, business man or professional man, is entitled to a fair return for the labour involved, but I will not agree to this percentage calculation. Suppose we have one man in a certain position doing exactly the same service as a man in another position; because it costs slightly more to get the goods to render the service in one place than another, should the man in the one place be entitled to a greater amount of profit than the man in the other instance? He is not entitled to a greater amount of profit and should be prepared to accept a lesser percentage. Does the Minister mean to tell me that if it costs a man £10 to get, say, £100 worth of goods railed to him, he is entitled to add that £10 to the £100 and look for 22 per cent. profit on that? There is no more work involved in selling those goods—

The Attorney General: Does he get it?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: —and there is no more risk involved.

The Attorney General: Does he get it?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: No, but he is after it.

The Attorney General: It is the same old deception. He is after it, but does not get it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: That remains to be seen because these people have done very well so far.

The Attorney General: I say they have not got it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Minister does not know what they have got.

The Attorney General: I know they did not get that.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Minister does not know because he said so earlier. I asked him what the margins were and he said he did not know. Consequently, it is of no use his saying now that he does know. I think the Minister ought to read this statement from "The West Australian" under the heading "Trade and Finance"—

Inflationary trends unabated. Inflationary trends continued unabated and would continue to do so until the

ever-increasing cost of industry was counteracted by a higher rate of production.

That is the same old story.

Mr. Howard said that if Australia were to extricate herself from the obvious dilemma in which she was already deeply involved, perhaps more than any country in the world, it would be necessary to call a halt to the ceaseless demand for shorter hours and higher wages—

Is it any wonder that there is a ceaseless demand for higher wages when the Minister, because of Government policy, will agree to this increase of prices that has taken place?

—and to realise that only by hard work—

There is the hard work story again—

—and perseverance in producing greater value for the existing financial investment could Australia avoid the inevitable collapse which will be brought about by the inability of this country to compete in overseas markets.

I am amazed that anyone should have the effrontery to advance that argument—"perseverance in producing greater value for the existing financial investment." As if financial investment is not getting enough value already! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the member for Perth quoted the example of the investment in Woolworths, where £100 invested in 1930 would by this year have returned 6,000 per cent. That is what it works out at—£100 invested in this retail establishment in 1930 would, in 20 years, have returned 6,000 per cent. Yet we have people talking about working harder and perseverance in producing greater value to make financial investment a success. Well, anyone who had £100 invested in Woolworths in 1930 would surely regard 6,000 per cent. as something like a success.

No-one would be foolish enough to argue that this tremendous increase in value was typical of business generally, but I do say that the business people generally are the prosperous section of the community. The 400 businesses that were supposed to have been sold during recent years, in my view, were not sold because the people were not making sufficient profit. It would be interesting to know what sale prices were obtained for those businesses. We would do well to remember how difficult it is to get a house if one sells out, and one would think that a man in business who was not doing particularly well would be very careful about disposing of it because of the difficulty of finding accommodation, but that, apparently, was not any great deterrent because these businesses changed hands, I am satisfied, at very substantial profits.

But there are no profits for the great mass of the people under this Government's policy, so how can it claim to have the confidence of this Assembly or of anyone but those whom it serves? Complete disregard for the general interest! Completely recreant to its trust to carry out the obligations so solemnly entered into when it sought the support of the people! Completely regardless of all that, it allows prices in Western Australia to go up as a result of policy, not because of some circumstances beyond its control, but because it is the policy of the Government to restore these margins so earnestly desired. So I repeat that if the Minister is going to make a statement to the House, he ought to tell us whether the other States have agreed to the 22 per cent. or a greater margin. An overall profit of 22 per cent. on all lines would mean that on many lines the profit would be ever so much greater.

It would do the Minister good if he would read some of these price lists and get an idea from them just what are the ruling prices of the various commodities. I made it my business to ascertain some of the wholesale figures and compare them with the retail figures in order to work out just what the rates of profit were, and I was amazed that any Government which was desirous of keeping prices down would agree to such large profits being made for such small services being rendered. But there it is, and the Government is apparently content with that situation because it could not withstand the pressure, I suppose, from those to whom it looks for very strong support.

If the Minister has not seen one of these journals, I would be glad to let him have a loan of my copy because it would open his eyes. A profit of 4d. and 4½d. on articles costing 1s. 1d. and 1s. 2d.! The wholesaler does not get anything like that margin. When the price of margarine was increased to give a margin of 4d. there was no increase to the man who manufactured the product. He was kept to the same margin he had before. The new margin was just a special one to the retailers so that they would be able to get, over all their business, this 22 per cent. on turnover.

Years ago when things were very different from what they are now, the recognised profit in the grocery trade was 12½ per cent., and many men in business in those days did very well for themselves. I lived next door to one such storekeeper, who commenced business by trundling his wares about in a wheelbarrow and finished up worth many thousands of pounds. He made his money out of retailing groceries at a profit of 12½ per cent.

Mr. Grayden: Gross or net?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: A gross profit margin. Now they want and have got a 22 per cent. margin, and apparently the Minister thinks the time has arrived when they should be given that margin, all that they have asked for. I repeat that I want to know whether the other State Ministers for Prices have thought the same thing with regard to their States, or whether the decision in Western Australia has thrown the whole thing completely out of balance. The Minister has had quite a lot to say whilst I have been on my feet. Now is his opportunity.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. A. V. R. Abbott—Mt. Lawley—on amendment) [10.3]: First of all, may I congratulate the member for Melville on making a very excellent political speech, to which I listened with considerable interest. Some of the facts were very distorted.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: How can facts be distorted?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Because the hon. member made statements he had to admit were incorrect. He made a statement that margins on freight were allowed. He knew very well they were not. But that is only by the way. When he was caught out he said, "Well, they are asking for them, but have not got them." Let me assure the hon. member that margins are the result of decisions made at joint conferences of all the commissioners; have been investigated most thoroughly and finally confirmed by the Ministers; and are exactly the same in each State.

As to the speech of the member for Northam, he has for a considerable time been very interested in the financial difficulties of the world. I believe he has made a very sincere study of them. I do not consider that any thinking man can regard the inflationary tendencies of the world without being worried, particularly when he has a responsible position, as the member for Northam has and as every member of the Government also has. I can assure members that this problem has been given very deep consideration by the prices Ministers at their conferences.

I agree that inflation is a very evil thing and it certainly hits those hardest who are very often the most defenceless. As the hon. member said, it hits the man on a small pension and the man who has saved for years by means of taking out life insurance. Because of inflationary tendencies, the value such men will get on their investment ultimately has been greatly decreased. Various great international economists have studied this problem and different nations have tackled it by different methods. America has dealt with it by competitive commerce. Great Britain has tackled it by means of fixed controls and subsidies. But I venture to suggest that it is sterling which is

today in trouble in the world's markets, and not dollars. Dollars are supreme today. Every country wants dollars. It cannot be disputed that every country is starving for dollars, so it is futile to say that the energy and efficiency of the United States have not at least made their currency the soundest in the world. As I pointed out, the price system operating in Australia is under a joint and integrated administration.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Do you think the State can control prices?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: That administration must necessarily be of a non-political kind.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Do you think the State can control prices?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: That administration must necessarily be of a non-political kind because on it are three members representing the party followed by the Opposition and three who are followers of the parties that are represented by this side of the House. At the conference of prices Ministers, which are conducted on a Cabinet basis, the idea of party politics is never raised. If it had been, the conferences could not have continued in the way they have and for the long time that they have, conferences which I say, and each one of those Ministers will say, have done a very effective job, having in view all the difficulties that have had to be faced.

Mr. Hutchinson: Hear, hear!

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Who said, "Hear, hear"?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The work that the prices Ministers have to do is not popular, and I venture to suggest that not one of them who attends the conferences would be unwilling to surrender his portfolio, because the job is one that returns no thanks. Every one of them has been faced with the kind of criticism which has been levelled at me tonight. I have been accused of being the Minister for inflation. Mr. Finnan has been accused of being the Minister for high prices. And so it goes on. Each one of us in turn has been subjected to this attack by the Opposition.

The able speech of the member for Northam would have been very useful to the Opposition in New South Wales to attack the Minister administering prices there. Of course, it would have been utilised by an Opposition of a different political faith from that of the hon. member here; but it would have been just as effective and applicable.

Now we come to the vexed question of meat. I take the trouble to read the Eastern States newspapers, and I sympathise with my colleagues there with respect to the difficult questions of price-fixing and the control of meat. On the

very first occasion that we met, there was in attendance a Mr. McCarthy who had been for a number of years the senior prices officer of the Commonwealth. He warned us then that the most difficult task we would have to face, and one the Commonwealth had not faced with satisfaction, in his opinion, was the control of meat. We had to decide whether we would accept a task which we knew would be objectionable and most difficult to administer.

We were warned by an able man of long experience what we had to face. We had to make a decision as to whether we would meet this difficulty and do the best we could, or whether we would shelve it by de-controlling it at, as we thought, the expense of the public. So we accepted the responsibility, as Mr. Chifley did in his day, of attempting to effect control of a commodity that cannot be controlled at its source, because every animal is of a different value. No-one knows the value of an animal until it is dead. Sheep have different qualities and amounts of wool, and their weights vary. Whether the judgment or gambling of the buyers as to value is, or is not, correct, can only be determined later.

I do not say that prices control of meat here is 100 per cent. effective—it is not—but I do say that it has had a material effect on the position in this State. There were suggestions that the Government should acquire meat. Well, that was thought of by the Queensland Government, which passed an Act enabling it to acquire meat—and that was done some considerable time ago. I venture to suggest, however, that it never acquired a beast; yet it finds it necessary to put on the agenda for the Premiers' Conference the question of pooling overseas and local meat prices for the purpose of ensuring adequate supplies of meat for home consumption.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Has Western Australia put anything on the agenda at all?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Yes.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: What?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: That is the Premier's business. It must be realised that this problem is one that all prices Ministers are facing to the best of their ability. The administration is being carried out under great difficulty, by painstaking officers, such as we have in the prices Commissioner of this State. I can assure members that this is an unenviable task.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Do you say it is the Premier's business as to what Western Australia shall put on the agenda for the prices Ministers' conference?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: No, we were talking about the Premiers' Conference.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: What right have you to disclose what the Queensland Government has put on the agenda for the Premiers' Conference?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I have been given that privilege.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: By whom?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I shall tell the hon. member later, if he wishes to know. The prices Commissioner has made a strong attempt to ensure, as far as possible, that proper prices are charged in this State. One member asked if the Prices Branch ever followed up any of the buyers at Midland Junction. I can assure him that has been done. The prices officers found out what a man bought, and followed his van to the shop. But it is a very difficult thing, as members know, to prove this kind of offence.

Mr. Kelly: Have they made any prosecutions?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Yes, they have. On the staff there are 20 to 25 persons fully engaged on checking and investigations.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: You would not think so.

Mr. Yates: How would you know?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: In the year ended the 30th June, 1950, there were 1,126 checks, as a result of which prosecutions were launched in respect of 912 breaches. So, extensive investigations are carried out, and prosecutions are continually being made.

Mr. Needham: Have there been any prosecutions in regard to the blackmarketing of meat?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Since the States have taken over, margins have been reduced from time to time. An overall reduction of $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on woollen goods was made in one fell swoop; and another of 5 per cent. on furniture. In many other instances, margins have been reduced. That has applied to the margins in the oil business.

Mr. Styants: You still allow 42 per cent. on furniture.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Yes, I think that is so.

Mr. Styants: It is quite a nice margin.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I am not competent to judge that. I want to say a few words about index figures, which have been quoted right and left. I want to show that Western Australia's index figures are quite reasonable when compared with the Australian average. Since we took over, in September, 1948, in the "C" series for six capital cities, the miscellaneous group has increased by 11.17 per cent. The figure for Western Australia is 9.67 per cent. With respect to

clothing, for the same period the increase is 27.17 per cent. for the six capital cities, and 26.4 per cent. for Western Australia.

I want to be perfectly open about the position—I do not want any half-truths—so I shall quote the figures with respect to groceries. Taking the same period, the increase for the six capital cities has been 19.31 per cent., and for Western Australia, 23.34 per cent. Of course, we are at this disadvantage compared with the Eastern States that, as many of our groceries come from there, we have to pay additional freight on them. Freight, as members know, increased considerably when subsidies were withdrawn. We have heard a great deal about the basic wage, but it must be remembered that prices are also affected by margins for skill. I will quote a few of the percentage increases since 1947, as they affected Government undertakings. In the engineering trade the increase in the margin for skill since 1947 has been 53 $\frac{1}{3}$ rd per cent. In the building trade it has been 61.4 per cent; in the furniture trade—for cabinet makers—38 per cent.; for carters and truck drivers, 60 per cent.; in the timber industry, 80 to 100 per cent., and in the printing office, from 76 to 90 per cent.

Mr. W. Hegney: The Arbitration Court awarded those increases.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Yes. I do not say that those who received them were not worth it. All I am saying is that these increases are something that prices Ministers are obliged to deal with.

Mr. Hoar: Prices must have been high to justify those increases.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I will now deal with the basic wage percentage increases from September, 1948, to the 30th of June, 1950, the period during which the State has had control over prices. The percentage basic wage increase during that time has been 19.2 per cent., and the percentage increase for prices during that period only 18.3 per cent.

Mr. Graham: We will not believe it.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I did not compile these figures, but that is the percentage shown in the official figures from the Government Statistician. The increase during that period, accomplished under State price-fixing, has been only 18.3 per cent., but the basic wage has increased in the same period by 19.2 per cent.

Mr. Styants: Do you think £1 0s. 2d., as allowed for rent, is sufficient?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: That is a matter for the experts.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Will the Minister explain how it is possible for the basic wage to rise higher than the cost of living?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I am quoting the figures given by the Government Statistician. The amendment was fully dealt with by the Premier—

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: When?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: —and I am merely supplementing his remarks. Even today the cost of living in Western Australia is lower than in any other State of the Commonwealth. For the quarter ended the 30th of June last the index number of the "C" series in Perth was 1517. That is the Western Australian "C" series number, and the Eastern States capital cities' average was 1534. Our index figure is still less than in any other State, or rather, less than the average for the other capitals.

Mr. Styant: How does it compare with Queensland?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I have not that figure with me. I do not think it is necessary for me to say what I am about to say, as I feel that the Opposition appreciate, as I do, the very good service that the Prices Commissioner and his officers in this State have given. He is a most conscientious officer, who was especially selected for his first position in relation to prices, by the member for Northam. Since that date he has consistently served the State well in his position. I would not like the public to think that the Opposition were criticising the Prices Branch. I appreciate that it is the responsibility of the Minister and I accept it as such. I wish to make it quite clear to the public that there is no criticism of the Prices Commissioner and his staff from either side of the House.

MR. W. HEGNEY (Mount Hawthorn—on amendment) [10.25]: At the outset I wish to indicate to members of the Government, and the Premier and the Minister for Prices in particular, that I have never been under any illusion as to the attitude of the Government in connection with price-fixing since the Liberal-Country Party Government took control over prices in this State in 1948. I am one of those who believe that when the referendum was being conducted the Liberal and Country Parties in the various States of Australia did their utmost to wrench control over prices from the Commonwealth Government, because they thought they would be able to delude the people into the belief that if they gained control of the price-fixing legislation prices would be reduced, if not entirely controlled.

I have always believed and still believe that this Government, in common with other Liberal Governments, would at the earliest opportunity remove all controls over prices. It is only because this Government has not a clear majority in this Assembly that it has not the courage to relinquish altogether control over prices. I see no reason to depart from that attitude. I believe that if the Hollway Government in Victoria had been able to

cajole the Country Party of that State to coalesce with it, the whole of the prices legislation in Australia would by now have been wiped out, because one of the first acts of such a coalition Government would have been to abolish price control legislation in Victoria. Once one State had removed its price control legislation all the other States would be rendered innocuous and ineffective in their attempts to control prices.

I do not propose at this stage to go into detail as to what happened in Victoria. Suffice it to say that after a lot of negotiations between the Liberal Party and the Country Party in that State, and between the Country Party and Labour members, there emerged in Victoria a Government of Country Party members, and the Labour Party there supported the Country Party rather than the Liberal Party because, in the final analysis, the Country Party agreed that price control should continue. I have heard a number of references to what happened or will happen in Victoria and I know that the prices legislation will continue, for a time at all events, in other parts of Australia also. In "The West Australian" of the 13th July, 1950, there appears the following:—

Price Control Extension.

State Cabinet yesterday approved legislation to extend price control in Victoria until the end of 1951. The Bill would be brought before Parliament early in the new session, which would begin on August 8th, the Premier, Mr. McDonald, said after the Cabinet meeting.

That means to say that, as a result of the Labour Party supporting for the time being the Country Party members, price control legislation will continue in Victoria. But, I am firmly convinced that had there been a coalition government of the Liberal Party and Country Party in Victoria one of the first acts performed would have been to abolish price control altogether. I repeat that this State Government has a majority in the Legislative Council, and if it had a clear and complete majority in this House then it would not introduce the Price Control Continuance Bill this year.

Now let us have a look at the apologies made by the Premier and the Minister for Prices, the Attorney General, in connection with the proposition before the Chair. We all know that when the referendum campaign was being conducted in 1948 no qualification was given as regards the assurances of those opposed to the continuation of Commonwealth control of prices. I do not propose to quote extensively from the advertisements that appeared in the daily papers of that time. Suffice it to say that included in those advertisements were warnings to the people that husbands' wages would be at stake if the

Commonwealth Government retained control over prices. I have with me an advertisement which appeared in the "Australian Women's Weekly" of the time. Among other things it says—

A No vote does not mean that control over prices and rents will disappear. It simply means that if the Commonwealth does not extend the present legislation, your State Government will keep rents and prices down.

There is no qualification whatever in that assurance and, as a consequence, a majority of the people of Australia decided that the States should control prices. I submit that it is puerile and of no avail for this Government to advance such arguments as an inflationary spiral in other parts of the world or the fact that difficulties are occurring in Britain and America, and that those difficulties are justification for the difficulties and problems that are existing in Western Australia at present.

The people of Western Australia were told, in no uncertain language, that if the Commonwealth Government's proposal at the referendum was defeated this State Government, together with others, would rigorously control prices and, indeed, keep them down. But what has been the result? Previous speakers have dealt closely with the index figures used in the compilation of the basic wage. Suffice it to say that from May, 1948, when the Commonwealth Government's proposal was defeated at the referendum, the basic wage was £5 15s. 9d. but since then there has been a continual upsurge until today, in the metropolitan area, the basic wage is £7 3s. 6d.

I challenged the Premier and the Attorney General last year and the previous year. I told them that prices in Western Australia would continue to rise as the prices legislation, and the administration were ineffective because the Government wanted it that way. I still hold that opinion. I now propose to deal with a few matters that have already been mentioned tonight to prove that the Attorney General in his statements was absolutely incorrect. I hope he was unintentionally or unconsciously so but nevertheless he was absolutely incorrect. His performances have been most ineffective so far as the protection of the consumers of Western Australia are concerned. He has shown absolute apathy and indifference, if not inability, to protect the people of Western Australia against rising prices. At this stage I will briefly refer to a statement that appeared in "The West Australian" of the 1st August, 1949.

A good deal has been said about black-marketing and I propose to deal with that aspect, because I believe that this Government, in a large measure, has been responsible for the increased black-marketing over the past 18 months or two years. Under the heading of "No Meat to Sell. Goldfields Butchers' Difficulties," the following appears—

Black Market or Insolvency.

Advice that none of the Kalgoorlie butchers would open for business today had been conveyed to him by telephone, the President of the W.A. Division of the Meat and Allied Trades Federation (Mr. L. Pethick) said last night.

Kalgoorlie butchers, in common with metropolitan butchers, had been forced to buy livestock at a price which, when the animal was slaughtered, was far in excess of the legitimate wholesale ceiling price, Mr. Pethick said. For years the Prices Branch has advocated that once the ceiling price was exceeded butchers should cease to bid. This was actually what the Kalgoorlie butchers had done and the result was that the people of the goldfields were deprived of an essential commodity.

For many months, said Mr. Pethick, country and metropolitan retailers had been losing heavily through the excessive price of livestock. If this continued they had two alternatives—the black market for meat, or insolvency.

As I proceed I propose to show that the working people of this State have for a long time been robbed of increases in the basic wage. I will prove conclusively that the basic wage in Western Australia, declared under the provisions of the Industrial Arbitration Act, is much lower than it would be if this Government had sincerely and conscientiously done its job and ensured that the right figures were produced to the Statistician. That is a bold statement to make but I propose to prove it before resuming my seat. I will refer to a large advertisement which must have cost £50 or £100 and appeared in "The West Australian" of Friday, the 9th September, 1949. Nobody, unless his eyesight is impaired, could miss this advertisement. It is published under the jurisdiction of the Liberal Party and is headed, "The Cost of Living must be Reduced." There is no qualification in this advertisement but under the subject heading it says—

Socialist government is costly government—costly to the taxpayer and to the wage earner.

Socialist government appeases extremists, allows them to dominate the unions and so contributes to strikes and stoppages which help to increase prices.

The Liberal Party will reduce living costs and increase real wages by—

Encouraging and rewarding increased production.

Outlawing the Communists.

Introducing the secret ballot for union elections and decisions.

If the Attorney General, or any other member of the Government, can demonstrate successfully what the price of meat has to do with a socialist government appeasing extremists, or a socialist government being a costly government, I am prepared to withdraw all I propose to say. But, the actual position is that meat, being one of the commodities taken into account in the regimen of the basic wage, is charged to the consumer today at a price far above that fixed. Why do we stress the question of meat so much?

Meat is only one of the many commodities which the average household requires. But do not forget that in the actual aggregate expenditure in the "C" series index to which the Attorney General referred, and in accordance with the methods adopted by the statistician in compiling his index figures—on which I do not propose to elaborate—on beef, mutton, lamb and other cuts making up the meat regimen, 13 per cent. is absorbed and it is because meat is a most essential commodity in every household that I propose to stress the question of meat prices. At this stage I intend to read a series of questions which I submitted to the Attorney General both last year and this, together with his answers. I am prepared to apologise and withdraw everything I say if the Attorney General or the Premier can refute one word of my charge. On the 27th July, 1949, I asked this question—

How many inspectors are employed by the Prices Control Department in the enforcement of the provisions of the Act and regulations?

His answer was, "71." Less than 10 minutes ago members heard the Attorney General say that there were 20 to 25 inspectors policing the price-fixing regulations. I want to know where the other 50 went to.

The Minister for Education: He was dealing solely with the meat problem.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: I asked how many inspectors were in the department and not how many employees, and the Attorney General replied that there were 20 to 25 employed, checking on prices. I asked a further question as to this, and the Attorney General replied that when the Commonwealth was in control there were 111 inspectors but shortly after the State assumed control that number dropped by 40. My next question was:—

Does he consider the number sufficient to protect the interests of the public and honest traders?

His answer was, "Yes." I asked another question on the same date as follows:—

Is he aware of the fact that meat is being sold to consumers at prices far in excess of those fixed by the Prices Commissioner?

The Attorney General's answer was, "No." Despite the statement I have just read as to blackmarketing on the Goldfields and that officially the Attorney General is the Minister for Prices and knows all about it his answer 12 months ago was still, "No." The second question I posed was:—

Will he take immediate action to ensure that retail butchers prominently display notices in their shops indicating the fixed prices for meat?

The Minister's answer was:—

Under the Regulations notices showing the approved maximum prices for meat must be displayed. A continuous check is made by prices officers to see that this is carried out. Where it is found that it is not carried out, appropriate action is taken.

I now quote another question I asked on the 18th August, 1949, which appears on page 1263 of "Hansard" for that year. It is as follows:—

Is he yet aware that some consumers are being charged in excess of the fixed price for meat?

My second question was—

If not, will he make immediate inquiries into the matter?

The Minister's answer to those questions was—

Inspectors of the Prices Branch have reported that some charges have been made in excess of the fixed prices of meat, and prosecutions are being launched in those cases.

My third question was—

Is he aware that representatives of the Government Statistician periodically obtain from retailers a list of the retail prices of meat?

The Minister replied, "Yes." My fourth question was, "Is he aware that retailers quote the fixed prices?" and the answer was, "Yes." My fifth question was—

Does he realise that the figures thus supplied have a direct bearing on retail index figures supplied to the Arbitration Court by the Government Statistician and consequently on the basic wage?

The answer was, "Yes." The sixth question was—

Are the circumstances surrounding these index figures such that the basic wage is lower than it should be?

The Minister's reply was, "No." That was on the 18th August, 1949, when he definitely stated from his seat, and the record appears in "Hansard," that the statisticians under the Census and Statisticians Act can, by law, demand that the retailers supply certain information which they require, but the Minister states that the fixed price is supplied by the retail butchers to the statisticians. On the 28th September, 1949, I asked the Attorney General this question—

To whom can the retail butchers appeal against fixation of meat prices by the Prices Commissioner?

His answer was—

To the Prices Advisory Committee through the Minister.

My second question was—

Is he aware that a number of retail butchers assert they cannot continue to carry on business if forced to sell to consumers at the fixed price?

Despite all the publicity about black-marketing and complaints by the retail butchers, the Minister's answer was, "No." My third question was—

Is any maximum price fixed in connection with the sale of livestock by producers or agents at the Midland Junction abattoirs?

My fourth question was—

If not, why not?

The Minister's answer to my third and fourth questions was—

The system of disposing of livestock is the same in all States, namely, disposal by public auction. The buyers, however, know that when stock is purchased for slaughtering they will only be entitled to receive a fixed price therefore when slaughtered.

My fifth question was—

In view of the facts—(a) that meat is being sold to consumers by retailers at prices in excess of the fixed price; (b) that the basic wage is consequently lower than it should be; (c) that retailers consider the margin of profit allowed them to be insufficient, will he take immediate steps to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate the supply and price of meat to the public?

That was asked 12 months ago and the reply of the Attorney General was as follows:—

It is not considered that the basic wage is lower than it should be, as the price charged for meat by retailers, taken by and large, is the fixed price. It is considered that the retailers' fixed margin of profit over that of the wholesaler is reasonable, and that no good purpose would be served by a Royal Commission.

I happen to be one of those good husbands who obtains the meat for his wife, and I know absolutely and conclusively that meat is being sold at over the fixed price because an attempt was made to charge me 5d. a lb. extra. When I objected I was given the meat at the fixed price and I still receive it at that price today. I know that it is almost universal in the metropolitan area at present for meat to be charged at 4d. to 8d. a lb. over the fixed price and I defy contradiction on this by any member of the Government. Yet the Attorney General says quite blandly that he knows nothing about it and that by and large the fixed price is being charged. Members know, if they care to speak the truth, that my statements are correct. I challenged the Premier and the Attorney General previously and I challenge the Deputy Premier or any Cabinet Minister tonight to refute these statements. I go further now. Coming to the present year—mark you, Mr. Speaker, in his answer to my previous questions the Attorney General was distinct and clear in his claim that representatives of the Government Statistician were supplied with the fixed price by the retailers—I asked a series of questions on the 3rd August last and my first was—

Is he yet aware that the consumers have been for a considerable period paying up to 6d. a lb. over the fixed price for meat?

The Attorney General's answer to that was "No." My second question was—

Does he know that the computation of the basic wage has relation to the fixed price of meat and in consequence such wage is lower than it would otherwise be, and working people are suffering a grave injustice?

On this occasion the Attorney General's reply was—

No. I understand the prices used in the computation of the basic wage are those ascertained by the Government Statistician as being the prices charged to, and paid by, the consumers.

There is a complete reversal in the replies given by the Minister. What I want to get from the Minister, who is absent from the Chamber for the time being, is this: When was the policy changed or when did he decide on the policy? Either he was wrong 12 months ago and he is right now, or he was right 12 months ago and he is wrong now. I have no doubt that the retail butchers supplied the statisticians with the legal price. They would be a lot of mugs if they had not done so. I give them credit for more commonsense, when asked for information by the Government Statistician, than to give replies that would incriminate themselves under the law. Of course, they gave the officials

the fixed prices. I propose now to prove my point that the basic wage is lower than it should be. On the 22nd August last I asked the Attorney General the following question—

What amount of increase in the basic wage under the provisions of the Industrial Arbitration Act would follow an increase of 5d. per lb. in the price of the various cuts of beef and mutton as taken into account by the Government Statistician in compiling index figures relating to prices of commodities in any quarter over the previous quarter, assuming that all other factors taken into account by the statistician remain unchanged?

The Minister's answer to that question was—

An increase of 5d. per lb. in the price of the various cuts of beef and mutton would result in an increase of 5s. 11d. in the State basic wage for the metropolitan area under the present quarterly adjustment procedure.

There are the facts. I challenge contradiction of them. I challenge the Deputy Premier or the Attorney General or any member of the Country Party who is engaged in primary production, to refute my charge that the Attorney General, as Minister for Prices, is to be held responsible for thousands of people who are subject to industrial awards and agreements receiving 6s. per week less than they should be entitled to under the arbitration law of the State. Despite this, we have seen this sort of advertisement, the contents of which I propose to refute now, because they are most misleading. In the issue of "The West Australian" of the 24th March, 1950, there appeared a full page advertisement issued by the Liberal Party of Western Australia. I shall not quote all of it but it contained the following:—

Cost of living is higher in States where there is a Labour Government.

The Commonwealth Statistician's latest figures reveal that £6 11s. buys the same basket of goods in Perth that would cost £6 15s. in Sydney.

The worker in Perth on a Federal basic wage gets £6 11s. per week but under the State award gets £6 18s. 1d.

In view of my remarks, it will be seen that the advertisement, which was published just on the eve of the election, was most misleading. It was dishonest, to say the least of it. It was a fraud on the public because, as I have just indicated—and I defy contradiction in that respect—if the Government Statistician were to declare, through the Arbitration Court, the true basic wage, it would have been more in the vicinity of £7 for this State.

I do not propose to go into a number of other items, but one that is included in the regimen is potatoes, to which I shall

refer. Some time ago they were supplied to the public at a figure in excess of the fixed price because the retailers considered that on the margin allowed they could not make a profit. It should not be forgotten that potatoes, which represent one of the items taken into the calculation of the index figure, constitute an item in the regimen and, if the actual price were supplied to the statistician, it would be reflected in the basic wage, which would be in consequence higher. In view of the fact that members of the present Government, both Liberal and Country Party Ministers, assured the people of Western Australia that they would reduce living costs and control prices, it is interesting to read the latest references by the Government Statistician regarding prices applying in this State. In "The West Australian" of the 17th August last there appeared the following report—

Figures supplied by the Government Statistician (Mr. R. J. Little) reveal that the cost of living index in this State is still rising. The "C" index series, which relates to the retail prices of food and groceries, to house rents, clothing, household utensils and drapery, fuel, light and other miscellaneous items of household expenditure, revealed a noticeable rise in the June quarter compared with the previous period, said Mr. Little. The greatest increases were recorded in the clothing and food and groceries aggregates. Men's overcoats, pullovers, hats and socks and women's costumes and skirts were dearer and were mainly responsible for the rise in the clothing aggregate. The higher prices of fresh milk, bacon, pork and potatoes accounted for most of the rise in the food and groceries aggregate. Firewood was 5s. a ton dearer in Geraldton.

Compared with the June quarter of 1949, the clothing index rose by about 11½ per cent. but, compared with the September quarter of 1939, the index was about 165 per cent. higher.

It will be remembered that the present Government has been in office for the three years of the post-war period. The report continued—

The index for the "C" series for the metropolitan area and five selected towns was, on the average, 65 per cent. higher than in the September quarter of 1939.

Where is the argument? The present Government assured the people without any qualification whatever that it would reduce the cost of living. There is the proof of what has happened. I think it will be agreed that the Government has not lived up to its promises and it has been, to use plain words, dishonest in its representations to the public. On the 3rd August I addressed the following questions to the Premier:—

When did he first decide that some form of inquiry into meat prices was necessary?

The Premier's answer was—

The invitation to Sir Douglas Copland was forwarded on the 21st July, 1950.

My second question was—

Why did not the Prices Advisory Committee or the Prices Commissioner carry out such inquiry?

The Premier's reply to that was—

These authorities are constantly investigating the price of meat. Because of the acute shortage, the Government felt that further advice was desirable.

The fourth question was—

Is it a fact that he or another Cabinet Minister urged Mr. Kelly, who was appointed an investigator, to recommend that all controls on meat prices be abolished?

The Premier's reply to that was in the negative. To put the position quite plainly, the Premier woke up on the 21st July last. He knew, or should have known—apparently his Minister did not know—and the great mass of the people of Western Australia knew that, over a considerable period, they were being exploited in the matter of meat prices. Twelve months ago I asked a question and suggested to the Attorney General that a Royal Commission be appointed to inquire into the ramifications of the meat and cattle industries, but he said it was considered that an inquiry was not necessary.

What has altered the situation to warrant an inquiry just in recent weeks? The position 12 months ago was the same as it is today; it was just as acute then as it is now, but the force of public opinion has grown and the Government found that it had to try to put the soft pedal on somewhere; it had to find some way out, so it hit on the idea of getting Professor Copland from Canberra to bring down a report, and, when he could not come, Mr. Kelly, of South Australia, made the inquiry. Yet, right through the war period and since, the Prices Commissioner was the authority who fixed the price of meat.

I do not propose to read the references to blackmarketing that have appeared in "The West Australian" during the last few weeks, but I can bovrilise them by saying that Mr. Kelly, in his report, very strongly condemned the practice of blackmarketing in the meat industry. Mr. Pethick, the President of the traders' organisation, condemned the blackmarketing being carried on in the industry and had been complaining for a considerable time about it. Even the Premier, in his remarks on Mr. Kelly's report, was satisfied that blackmarketing was going on,

and suggested to Mr. Pethick that he should try to subdue it instead of criticising the Government.

The Labour Party has been out of office for three years; the Chifley Labour Government has been out of office for close on 12 months, but there is a type of propaganda that I object to, and I now throw it back into the laps of the Country and Liberal members who comprise the Government. This is an extract from "The West Australian" of the 28th March, 1948, issued under the authority of the Liberal Party of Western Australia. It reads—

The Yes-Men. Leading the "yes" vote in the Prices Referendum will be the communists, the blackmarketers and Chifley's Canberra power-chasers.

The communists will vote "yes" because they favour dictatorship.

The Chifley socialists will vote "yes" because they favour centralised control, which is a form of dictatorship.

The blackmarketers will vote "yes" because they were born under Canberra control and thrive under it. They fear State control because it is more directly under the control of the people.

These are the unholy trinity of yes-men who will combine to fasten the fetters of dictatorial control on the people of Australia.

Those are not my words; they are the words of the party of which you, Mr. Speaker, have the honour to be a member. This is the sort of propaganda that has been issued by the Liberal Party for the purpose of trying to gain the votes of the people for the time being. I will read again the reference to blackmarketers, because it is worth reiterating. I have no hesitation in saying that, if any member of the Liberal Party or any member of the Country Party subscribed to this part of the propaganda, he should hang his head in shame. The section in question reads—

The blackmarketers will vote "yes" because they were born under Commonwealth control and thrive under it. They fear State control because it is more directly under the control of the people.

In view of the statements of Mr. Kelly, who inquired into the price of meat, in view of the Premier's statement, and in view of the statements of Mr. Pethick and others who have proved conclusively that blackmarketing is going on, what has the Liberal Party section of the Government to say? The reason why I am so vehement in my remarks on price control is not so much because prices in Western Australia have actually risen and not so much because there is an upward trend in prices. It is because what has been generally recognised and what was recognised during the war period, namely, that the Commonwealth Government, which

had complete control over the economy of Australia, was able to peg prices and wages and, by the payment of subsidies, to control inflation, but members of the Country Party and Liberal Party throughout Australia, when the Commonwealth Government, after the war period, endeavoured to secure control of prices legislation, sent forth a cry throughout the length and breadth of the land that the people had had enough of Commonwealth control. I venture to say that, if a prices referendum were held tomorrow, a majority of the people, not only in Western Australia but also in all the States, would vote in favour of reversion to Commonwealth control, and I think that amongst the affirmative votes would be that of the Attorney General of Western Australia.

I realise that it is difficult absolutely to peg prices, including wages, and to check any upward trend, but the point I am making is that members of the Country Party and Liberal Party in Australia assured the people, without any tags, terms or conditions, that if the States were given control of prices legislation, they would control prices and, indeed, reduce them.

Mr. Styants: And they knew they could not do it.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: Of course they knew. I reiterate that this is dishonest propaganda, and I hope that I shall never, for the sake of retaining a seat in Parliament, or of trying to capture the Government benches for three years or six years, be guilty of so misleading and defrauding the electors. That is what has happened. The Government has shown itself to be ineffective in the matter of controlling prices. I believe that it does not want to control prices, but is looking forward to the time when it can relinquish control altogether.

When we charge the Government with being dishonest, we are only expressing the sentiments of a large number of people in this State. Unquestionably, if there were a contested election tomorrow, the Liberal Party of Australia would find some other means of putting out devious propaganda for the purpose of trying to warp the minds of the people against the Labour Party and Labour movement.

I do not propose to enter into great detail as regards prices. Suffice it to say, to advance my argument regarding prices being increased I asked a question of the Attorney General as to the component parts of the basic wage and how it was made up in the aggregate. The total was £7 3s. 6d. I am quoting now only the figures given to me in relation to the metropolitan area. For that area a sum of £2 14s. 3d. is allowed for food—that is for a man, his wife and two children. For clothing £2 1s. per week is allowed. For miscellaneous items £1 1s. 4d. is the allowance. That includes payment for "The West Australian" and other newspapers.

Incidentally, during the last session of Parliament I predicted that shortly after Parliament rose "The West Australian" newspaper company would make formal representations for an increase in the price of the newspaper. The company did so and got it. A 50 per cent. increase from 2d. to 3d. was permitted, and that is included in the miscellaneous items of the regimen for the basic wage. It would be interesting to know what inquiries or investigations were made into the ramifications of "The West Australian" newspaper company before the increase was granted. I suggest that it was granted without very great difficulty.

For rent £1 0s. 3d. was allowed as compared with £1 0s. 1d. in August, 1949. I know that the Statistician has to take certain figures into account; that he has a certain method to follow. I asked the Minister for Housing the other day certain questions relating to rentals and he was good enough to supply the details. This information is an indication of how the workers, through their organisations, have to battle to get a wage from the Arbitration Court which will be somewhere near the mark to meet present-day conditions. I am not going to read the whole of the answers given to me. My questions were—

(1) What is the present economic weekly rent for the following types of houses built under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement in each of the years 1945 to 1950, both inclusive—

- (a) four-roomed wood, or wood and asbestos;
- (b) five-roomed wood, or wood and asbestos;
- (c) four-roomed brick;
- (d) five-roomed brick?

(2) How many Commonwealth-State rental homes were occupied by tenants on the 30th June, 1950?

I will quote the extreme figures given in reply. The average rentals were 25s. in 1945 for a four-roomed wooden house, and 35s. in 1950. For a five-roomed brick house the rental in 1945 was 27s. 6d., and in 1950 it was 41s. There were 3,566 Commonwealth-State rental homes occupied by tenants at June, 1950. These are not my figures. I am not romancing. They are authentic figures. The figures allowed by the Government Statistician in the computation of the basic wage are for a man, his wife and two children. The amount allowed per week for rent is £1 0s. 3d. Yet here we have the best part of 4,000 people living in Commonwealth-State rental homes and paying up to £2 1s. per week. That is not the whole of the story but it will be immediately appreciated that there are thousands of people—and I know quite a few—who are living in flats, or rooms, or in parts of houses with the use of a kitchen and paying up to £3 and

£3 10s. per week. Yet they are allowed only £1 0s. 3d. in the calculation of the regimen of the basic wage.

I heard the Premier say that everybody seemed to have plenty of money; that people were never so well off; and there was more money in the savings bank than ever before. If the Premier were to knock around a bit and mix with some of the rank and file he would discover there was another side of the story. I know numbers of people who are trying to rear families, but with the rents they have to pay they are not able to make ends meet. They are not men who dissipate their earnings on the races or in the hotels, but they have a love of home and are trying to rear families. However, because of the continuously decreasing purchasing power of the £ and the rents they are obliged to pay, they cannot remain solvent. The consequence is that in many instances the wives have to go out to work to supplement the income of their husbands. Those are not isolated cases. So when the Premier says there is more money about than ever, I would assure him that things are not as good as he would lead people to believe.

The Attorney General made his excuses or apologies for the increased cost of living in Western Australia. He gave as one of the reasons, the inflationary tendencies. He said that various nations had tried to tackle the problem of rising costs; that Great Britain had to resort to fixed controls; and that every country wanted dollars. What have dollars to do with the price of meat in Perth? He cannot mislead me. He cannot mislead members on this side of the House. And I do not think he will be able to mislead many people in Western Australia when he puts those puerile and ineffective arguments forward to try to justify the continuous increase in the cost of living, especially when his Party defrauded the public a few years ago by telling them that if the State Liberal Party and Country Party combined were put in office, or if the Commonwealth were not given control over prices, those prices in Western Australia would be reduced. They cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Perkins: The member for Kalgoorlie made reference to the exact thing that you are denying now.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: A further statement made by the Minister for Prices was that the administration with regard to price-fixing should be of a non-political kind. Here again I am under no misapprehension as to what will obtain. The Minister for Prices—I am not speaking in a personal but in a political sense—when he says that the administration is of a non-political kind he is adopting that attitude only because he has to. If there was a

clear majority on the Government's side of the House without its having to rely on two Independents—

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: How many?

Mr. W. HEGNEY: Well, two and a half. If the Government had a clear majority it would adopt a different attitude altogether. If it had a clear majority it would take early steps to relinquish control of all prices and repeal the price-fixing legislation. It is only because the Government is hanging on by the skin of its teeth that it is adopting the attitude it has decided upon for the time being. The Minister for Prices has said repeatedly in reply to my questions that he is not aware that the fixed price of meat is being exceeded. But over 12 months ago he caused a very conspicuous statement to be placed in "The West Australian" by his Prices Commissioner to this effect—

Warning against Meat Profiteering. Saying that his department had received several complaints recently alleging that retail butchers were over-charging customers, the Prices Commissioner (Mr. Mathea) yesterday issued a warning against meat profiteering.

The statement then went on to say how that profiteering was being carried on. Yet this Minister told me in reply to my question 12 months ago, and reiterated it a few days ago, that he had no knowledge of any increase in excess of the fixed price being charged for meat. The Minister is either entirely apathetic, or indifferent to the administration of his department, or he has given me and the House misleading information.

I want to sound another note in regard to the Premier's statement that things are all right and there was never so much money about as there is now. The people on fixed incomes—I refer to old age pensioners, those women receiving the widow's pension and retired Government employees—find the prices of essential commodities—not luxuries—are continually rising, so we can appreciate how serious is their plight. Yet the Premier can say there is so much money in the savings bank, and so much money is earned. If he made inquiries from the pensioners' organisations and of the types of citizens I have mentioned, he would find the position was a little different from what he would lead the House to believe. I support the amendment submitted by the member for Northam, and I hope it is carried because I honestly and sincerely believe that the Government has failed to do its utmost to protect the great mass of the people of Western Australia. Not only do I believe it has not faced up to the job, but that it is trying to get out of doing so, and is pandering, and will continue to pander, to those who in recent years provided the finance for it to fight the Labour movement of Australia.

Much has been said tonight about the control of profits if wages were pegged. Mr. Speaker, you know that a worker has to throw all his cards on the table. Before he can get an increase in wages he has to produce the goods by showing conclusively that he is entitled to some increase. The Arbitration Court is there for the purpose of hearing arguments by the representatives of employers' organisations, and by the workers' representatives. As a result of their arguments, and the evidence adduced, the workers' wage is set down. It comprises so much for meat, rent, and other essential commodities. While that system operates, those who receive their income in the form of profits should have to go through the same procedure.

I have no doubt that today with the present system of accounting, big companies have many ways of hiding their profits and creating secret reserves. They can provide an abnormal amount for bad debts or depreciation, they can charge capital items to revenue, or make provision for fictitious liabilities, and thereby hoodwink almost any auditor if he wants to be hoodwinked, and even if he does not. Yet, when the workers ask for some form of control and protection, we find that this Government, anyway, led by the Minister for Prices, does not see its way clear to give the great mass of the people that protection. I hope the amendment will be carried because, as I said before, I believe this Government has fallen down on the job, that it was dishonest with the people at the elections of 1947 and 1950, and that it issued dishonest propaganda at the Federal referendum in 1948.

The Premier: You told the people that at the last election, but they did not believe you.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: Yes, and I am telling the people the same thing again through Parliament tonight.

The Premier: They will not believe you this time, either.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: When the Premier interjects that the people will not believe me, he does not want to get the idea that he represents the majority of the electors of Western Australia.

The Minister for Lands: He does, all the same.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: He does not.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: The Premier belongs to the Liberal and Country League of Western Australia, which has 15 followers.

The Premier: Not enough.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: I will not say they are all doubtful.

Mr. Marshall: It is the most he will ever get.

The Premier: I have heard your prophecies before.

Mr. W. HEGNEY: The Country and Democratic League has nine members, and between them they do not constitute a majority. So the Premier does not want to get the idea, although he is democratic in certain ways, that he represents the great majority of our people. If the Country and Democratic League tonight or tomorrow decided it could no longer see its way clear to follow him, or even if by some mischance the two Independents were not prepared to follow him any longer, he would not be able to carry on.

Although the Premier had a redistribution of seats and was successful in chiselling out a few Labour seats, we came back with the same number of members that we had in the previous Parliament. Since the Premier interjected, these remarks are cogent to my speech. The Country and Democratic League came back with two less, although the member for Moore tried to prove that they were returned with the same number. They had 11 in the previous Parliament and have nine now. How they came back with the same number I do not know. I am leading up to the point that the people of Western Australia, in the majority, have not endorsed this Government's attitude towards prices control. I leave it at that. At the same time, I hope this amendment will be carried because I believe the Government has fallen down on its job; and it will take an early opportunity, if it sees its way clear, to relinquish price control altogether.

MR. GRAYDEN (Nedlands—on amendment) [11.27]: One cause of the present high prices is lack of production; and shortage of manpower is quite evidently an inducement to lack of production. We learned recently that the Commonwealth Government was embarking upon a great defence programme for Australia to ensure the security of this country. In order to build up our defence forces, and re-equip and rearm our fighting units, we must drain some of our available manpower from production, and we must take materials that could otherwise be used for civil needs. Therefore, the Commonwealth defence preparations will tend to cause higher prices, even in the absence of any other factors. As a result, the question of Commonwealth defence is vitally linked with this debate on prices. The cause of the Commonwealth preparing its defences is the communist threat to the civilised world. The member for Northam last night made some reference to the Korean situation, and to the Communist Party within Australia. The Labour Party does not seem very anxious to deal with the problem of communism.

Mr. Graham: Get on to prices; that is a big enough problem.

MR. GRAYDEN: I think I have linked up the statements fairly well.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: You seem to be fairly friendly with them in Fremantle. You gave them your vote.

Mr. GRAYDEN: I did?

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: On your ticket you put the communist 3 and me 4.

Mr. GRAYDEN: I can only say that good judgment was shown in that case.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: It was your party that helped to keep them going.

Mr. GRAYDEN: The people of this State can judge the intelligence of a person making a statement such as that. I will deal now with the rather surprising statements of the member for Northam, with regard to the Korean situation and communism in Australia. He said he thought the South Koreans did not care who won the war in which they are involved. I think his expression was that the majority of the South Koreans "did not give a damn who won the war."

Hon. A. H. Panton: A high American officer was reported in the Press, a few days ago, as having said that.

Mr. GRAYDEN: I have here a cutting from the "Daily News" of Monday, the 21st August, 1950. The heading is "North Korean Invaders Lose 50,000, U.S. Army Claims." Under that heading appears the following:—

It was estimated that the North Koreans so far had lost 50,000 men in the invasion of South Korea, an army spokesman said today. South Korean losses to three weeks ago were about 37,000 and American casualties to two weeks ago were 2,616.

If the South Korean casualties are 15 times as great as those of the American Forces it would seem to indicate that a lot of the South Koreans do care.

Point of Order.

Mr. J. Hegney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, the matter that the hon. member is discussing has no relevance to the amendment now before the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: That is so. The hon. member must return to the subject-matter of the amendment.

Debate Resumed.

Mr. GRAYDEN: In Australia we must produce a greater quantity of goods if we are to bring down prices. We must keep up our volume of production to match the spending power of the public, and if anything disrupts our production programme it has a detrimental effect on prices, because it means lowered production while the same volume of spending power is available. That tends to create higher prices. The Communist Party in Australia is admittedly a disruptive factor in industry and has, in that way, an important bearing on prices. In spite of

that we have the attitude of members opposite, who have repeatedly stated that they are not worried about the political philosophy of the communists.

Hon. A. H. Panton: You are on the wrong track. Your brother tried that out and failed badly.

Mr. GRAYDEN: Mr. Holloway said that he could prove that communism was based on the same principles as Christianity. Unless we take firm action against the communists, as is contemplated in the Anti-Communist Bill before the Commonwealth Parliament, they will continue to disrupt our industries and so continue to create the higher prices about which members opposite are so deeply disturbed.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Are you not disturbed about them?

Mr. GRAYDEN: Yes, and about this cause of them.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Then we are in the same boat.

Mr. GRAYDEN: Yes, except that I support a measure that is designed to help lower prices, while the hon. member is apparently opposed to it.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Are you referring to me?

Mr. GRAYDEN: Yes.

Hon. A. H. Panton: It is a pity you are so young and childish.

Mr. GRAYDEN: I know the views of the hon. member's party.

Hon. A. H. Panton: My party made it possible for you to sneak, as an opportunist, into this House.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member must address the Chair and ignore interjections.

Mr. GRAYDEN: We, on this side of the House, do not wish to ban the communists merely because of their political philosophy, but because they are a traitorous organisation. Members opposite, who look on the communists purely in political terms, without realising the tremendous advantage Russia gains from this fifth column in Australia, are closing their eyes to a very real danger to this State and the Commonwealth. The member for Kalgoorlie said that his side of the House did not suggest that prices could be controlled by Western Australia in isolation.

If I remember rightly, the member for Northam said that we should peg prices in this State. He said, in dramatic tones, that we should not worry about other States or other countries of the British Empire, or about the rest of the world. In effect, he said, "If they can find no solution to the problem of high prices, surely we should not sit down and say there is no answer, but should adopt our own measures." I presume he meant that we should peg prices regardless of the rest of the States, but that is entirely

impracticable. Too many goods have to be imported here from the Eastern States for us ever to be able to peg prices in isolation. It could not be done. That statement by the mover of this amendment typifies the whole tone of the debate from the other side of the House. Members opposite put forward some impractical proposals to begin with, and followed them up with things that are in part admitted but which offer no solution whatever to the problem with which we are dealing.

Mr. Graham: The solution is to get rid of this Government.

Mr. GRAYDEN: That is the solution the hon. member would like, but not that which the people of the State would adopt.

Hon. A. H. Panton: They did it in the case of Nedlands.

Member: Why did you twist?

Mr. GRAYDEN: I do not think I twisted.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. GRAYDEN: I have not the strange mind of some members. Until we increase our output per man hour we will not be able to lower prices, because if we raise production and at the same time raise spending power in equal or greater proportion we will not be able to overcome the problem. What is wanted is greater output at the same cost, and the only way in which that can be achieved is through greater output per man hour. Three things that enter into the question are efficient management, efficient use of mechanical devices and efficient work on the part of the workmen. The fault is equally shared between those three factors. I do not think many of our industries are taking sufficient advantage of modern mechanisation or that our managements are as efficient as they should be, and I do not think our workmen are sufficiently concerned with trying to improve the methods by which they work.

Mr. May: You would not know.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: For how long did you work?

Mr. GRAYDEN: The solution of this problem rests largely on the question of production, but the arguments put forward by members opposite about production in the United States, and so on, are irrelevant. What we require is increased production in Australia; increased production per man hour.

MR. BRADY (Guildford-Midland—on amendment) [11.40]: At this late hour I would not weary the House at all but I believe the matter to be one of national import and one of considerable importance to this State. I intend to make my contribution because this question has particular reference to my own electorate, in

its attack on the basic wage workers, and because of the present cost of living. Last night, when the member for Northam was speaking, he read extracts from "The West Australian" and gave details of the profits made by certain companies.

A few days ago Pundit Nehru, speaking in India, passed a remark something like this, "The Indian people, because of their conditions, have very little fear of communism and it matters little to them whether they have communism." I am fearful of the fact that some of our people may adopt communistic ideas because of the present high cost of living, and I desire to ventilate my views in an endeavour to set out the facts as I see them. The member for Nedlands, a few moments ago, spoke about communism. If we do not desire communism in Australia we must improve the standard of living of our people. President Truman said that the best way to get rid of communism is to provide the people with a decent standard of living and decent amenities. I am afraid in this country we are not receiving that decent standard of living and the position of the basic wage worker particularly is becoming worse instead of better.

While the member for Nedlands was speaking I could not help thinking about housing costs. In 1939 the basic wage was about £4 2s. 2d. and in that year it was possible to buy a four-roomed house for £800. In 1949 a four-roomed house cost between £1,700 and £1,800 and the basic wage had risen by less than 90 per cent. In other words housing costs had trebled, but the basic wage had not even doubled itself. If anybody can tell me that the position of the working man, and those receiving a margin for skill, in this country is improving, then that person has another think coming. Whether we like it or not, we must realise that we are entering into a new phase of our social structure. We pride ourselves on our Christianity but I am afraid that Christianity is falling far short of what it should do for the rank and file of workers. Also, I am afraid that many of our Governments are falling short when they make promises, knowing in their hearts that they cannot be fulfilled. Such people are practising political dishonesty and that in turn encourages the people generally to practice the same kind of dishonesty.

I am most concerned about the position, and I cannot agree with the member for Nedlands that loss of production is the cause of our present difficulties. Later on I will quote from the decision given in the 40-hour week case. This decision was given by four Federal judges after considering the question for two years. I have often heard it said, by members on the Government side of the House, that the 40-hour week is to blame for a lot of our

troubles. When we actually hear a determination made by four Federal court judges, we realise that that statement is just a lot of "hoovey" and does not carry any weight at all.

In last Monday's issue of "The West Australian" the financial editor gave reports on four companies. One of these companies was Woolworth's Ltd. The report stated that a person who purchased 100 shares in Woolworth's Ltd. for 50s. each, in 1930, would now have an investment worth £12,000. On the same page, as the member for Northam has already pointed out, it was shown that Elder Smith's had a record profit which had jumped from £380,000 to £641,000. Noyes Bros., an Eastern States firm, had a profit of £100,000, while the South-West Dairy Farmers' Co-operative received a profit of £13,000. Even the Swan Building Society, in my own electorate, made a profit. Therefore, it looks as though we had, and still have, an open season for profits in Western Australia. On the bottom of the page we see where a company known as Freighters Ltd., which was floated only 12 months ago, has shares which have increased from £1 to 54s. in 12 months, and the prospects are looking so bright in Western Australia that they have purchased property in Albany-road, Victoria Park, so as to increase those profits.

So much for the Government's promise that it will control prices and do even better than the Commonwealth Government. Those remarks were made by supporters of the Government on the hustings. They said, "Leave price control in our hands. You can see that we have kept down building costs and we will do better than the Commonwealth Government." However, the people are being robbed at a greater rate than ever before in the history of this State.

Anybody who tries to prove that companies are not making profits has only to read the Commonwealth Bank report as set out in "The West Australian" of the 18th July. Capital investments have increased from 1939 to 1949 by £100,000,000. That would indicate that people who are investing capital in enterprises are not doing so to lose money. They know that the profits are there for the taking and they are going for their lives. I do not want to weary the House by making a long speech, but I think the remarks contained in this report are most significant and I intend to read a few extracts from it dealing with profit returns. It states—

The 23 companies included in the mining and primary production group showed the greatest increase in profits, which leapt from 6 per cent. to 20.9 per cent. in the 10 years, with no material change in aggregate capital.

So for the same amount of capital their profits increased from 6 per cent. to 20 per cent. It goes on—

Textile, paper, chemical, rubber, flour and sugar companies gained 1 per cent. in the decade, aggregate profit in 1949 being 8 per cent.

Finally in the last paragraph it says—

The 113 companies engaged in wholesale and retail distribution enlarged their profits from 7.1 per cent. to 10 per cent. over the period. Those firms engaged in the retail sale of cars, furniture, and musical instruments, reflecting the present prosperous conditions, saw their group profit rise from 6.6 per cent. to 14.6 per cent. in the last 10 years.

That bears out the contention of the member for Northam that labour which should be available for work in the basic industries is going to luxury lines and the basic industries are being neglected. This is so simply because the Government has not been controlling the position as it should.

Mr. Ackland: Would you direct labour?

Mr. BRADY: No, I would not direct labour, but I would increase wages and improve amenities in the basic industries in order to entice workers into those industries rather than to permit the manufacturers of luxury goods to take labour by paying high wages. I think the Government could do something in that respect. In Monday's "Daily News" Dr. Evatt said—

Evatt sees danger in rising prices. Financial and economic collapse might occur in Australia unless the rapid rise in prices is arrested, according to Deputy Federal Opposition Leader, Dr. Evatt.

"In the past six months the cost of living has risen so rapidly that those with fixed incomes are being placed in an almost desperate position," he said last night in a broadcast. "There is excessive profiteering and undoubted exploitation of the people."

Dr. Evatt said that since the Menzies Government came to power there had been a rapid deterioration in the standard of living. Throughout the country the rising tide of discontent was being forcibly expressed by the Press, which was giving full details to prove the rapidly diminishing value of the pound.

National Development Minister Casey recently pointed out his anxiety at the morale of the civilian population, Dr. Evatt said. Part of this was due to the drift towards war and the international situation but it was also undoubtedly due in part to the day-by-day struggle for survival.

The position of those dependent mainly on pensions was even more desperate. The quarterly increases in the basic wage were lagging behind the sharp increases in the cost of food and other commodities.

Everyone knew that increased production would help the situation, but this would be impossible unless the physical standards of wage and salary earners were protected from further reduction by the continuous inflation of prices, which went on from day to day and almost from hour to hour.

Here is another important newspaper extract of the remarks made by the president of the Women's Service Guild, Mrs. D. Bulford—

Cost of Living Claims Charity Workers.

Many Perth organisations now were noticing a lack of voluntary helpers because the high cost of living was forcing many housewives to go to work to "make ends meet," Women's Service Guild's president, Mrs. D. Bulford, said today.

Mrs. D. Bulford was commenting on a report that many Sydney housewives—including expectant mothers—had to go to work to supplement their husbands' wages.

It was likely that many Perth housewives had to work but this was not necessarily a threat to home life, she said.

"It depends on the woman," she said. "Some can run both a home and a career very successfully, while others spend all their time in the home and have very little to show for it.

"However, it is not right that the cost of living should compel housewives to go to work—that is different from working for a career."

She was strongly opposed to children leaving school at 14 to go to work, but realised that the present economic position left some parents with no other course, Mrs. Bulford said.

"Fruit and vegetables are the most vital food items and at present they are the most expensive. I am in favour of the old open markets throughout the city where customers can buy direct from the grower."

It can be seen from that that people in responsible positions are beginning to notice the falling off of women helpers in voluntary organisations. Those women are going out to work to make a few extra pounds so that they can balance the household budget. Children are leaving school at 14 years of age to enter industry in order to assist with the family budget also. These lads are even neglecting to

take up apprenticeships by becoming employed as junior labourers, and in other occupations, because the money is higher. That in itself is a serious matter because we should be encouraging all the juniors possible to enter trades where ultimately they will be of some economic use to the State; but, instead of that, they are taking up these dead-end jobs because of the higher wages offering.

I was in a shop the other day and a lad of about 17 years of age entered it, and the manager said to me, "There is a bright sort of lad. We were paying him about £3 a week to work here but he left to take a job for £7 a week as a labourer." They are prepared to go into jobs with higher wages rather than follow a vocation which promises them a trade at the end of the apprenticeship. I am particularly concerned with apprentices because they have formed themselves into an organisation in order to improve their conditions and to obtain higher wages. The position is so serious that even the trade unions are now pressing for protection to be given to apprentices. It is a most inequitable and iniquitous system which is operating for apprentices because their wages are based on the basic wage.

For the information of those members who are present tonight, the following are the percentages of the basic wage granted to them. In his first six months, an apprentice gets £1 8s. 9d., 20 per cent. of the basic wage. After his first year, he receives £1 18s. 9d. and, on completion of his second year, £2 10s. He receives the latter amount when he is about 17 or 18 years of age, but if he goes outside for employment he obtains £6, £7 or even £8 a week. The rate of £2 10s. is 35 per cent. of the basic wage. In fact, some of these apprentices must be assisted financially by their parents in order that they can pay for their lodging and laundry. I am concerned about the basic wage and the cost of living because in the first place the basic wage today does not truly reflect the cost of living. Because of that, it is not only imposing a burden and hardship on the working man, but is also creating hardship for those whose wages are based on the basic rate. The majority of workers nowadays receive the basic wage, plus a margin for skill, and the wages of an apprentice are computed on a percentage of the basic rate. I am afraid there is a certain amount of tinkering with the basic wage going on. If that is so and it is exposed, we are going to have on our hands the most serious problem that has ever confronted this State.

The member for Melville has pointed out that when margins were released from the price of margarine, they were re-imposed on the price of honey, not on golden syrup. It would appear that that was done deliberately so that the basic wage would not rise. Recently I read that the Price Fixing Commissioner said that

onions could not be increased in price because that would tend to an increase in the basic wage. If he is going to consider the basic wage from that angle and allow other commodities to increase in such a way that they will not reflect on the basic wage, then I think it is a great sin and crime to inflict on the workers in this State.

I read where quite a considerable number of goods are not considered when computing the basic wage, and if that is so it constitutes a first-class swindle of the worker, and the sooner he wakes up to it, the sooner he will receive justice. I did intend to quote at length from a report by the Price Fixing Commissioner which he prepared for the Government in booklet form, called "Development Work and Other Activities of the Government of Western Australia." This manual was issued by the Government about December last. I think it was intended that it should be published in time for the State elections, but apparently something went wrong with the printing and we did not receive the booklet until later this year. I noticed in it that the Price Fixing Commissioner, when discussing price-fixing, made reference to the basic wage. Amongst other things, he mentioned this—

There are a number of items under the headings of foodstuffs and groceries and miscellaneous which are either decontrolled, or controlled by some authority other than the Prices Administration. These are foodstuffs and groceries.—Oats (flaked), decontrolled; eggs, wholesale prices controlled by the West Australian Egg Marketing Board; bacon, decontrolled; milk (fresh), controlled by the Milk Board of Western Australia. Miscellaneous.—Gas, decontrolled; electric light and power, controlled by the State Electricity Commission; fares, controlled by the Railway and Tramway Departments and the W.A. Transport Board.

All items mentioned have increased in price since price control passed to the States. Some items have shown a considerable increase. This is mentioned to show that the cost of living index can be materially affected through factors outside the control of the prices administration.

I want to stress some points as to that. In the first place, I looked up the Price Fixing Commissioner's report to ascertain whether there had been any direction from the Government to him to try to make some exacting effort to keep the prices of goods down in order that the basic wage would not increase, but there was nothing to indicate that. On the other hand, the Price Fixing Commissioner's report shows that a number of boards which could have been requested by the Government to keep prices down allowed prices to rise and, in addition, a

number of departments over which the Government has control also allowed prices to increase. We see, therefore, how the Government, instead of carrying out its promise to keep prices down, has allowed them to increase. Before I leave the matter of production I would like to repeat a reference by the member for Northam to that phase. During the debate it has been said that production has not increased. Professor Copland, who was the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner from 1939 to 1945 and is now the Chancellor of the Australian National University at Canberra, when delivering an address before the Economic Society of that institution, made the statement—

The real production of Australia had increased by 12 per cent. since the war.

So it would appear that, despite the statement that production has not increased, Professor Copland, who should be in a position to know, says that it has increased. Then again an indication that the Government has failed to control prices and has allowed them to get out of hand, is to be seen in relation to the expansion of private industrial enterprises and luxury firms. They have been allowed to erect buildings and make record profits that they would not have been able to register if the Government had desired to stop those enterprises from making such headway.

In "The West Australian" of the 20th July, a statement appears showing that Mortlock Bros. disclosed on their operations a record profit of £95,957 after paying £68,000 in taxation. The ordinary dividend paid was 25 per cent. plus a bonus of 6d. on 10s. shares. Last year I had occasion to refer in this House to the fact that the Government was allowing Mortlock Bros. to erect huge premises within a quarter of a mile of Parliament House. Those premises have now been erected and they cover about 500 squares. Today half of that area is used for spraying and ducoing a few motorcars. Those enterprises have forged ahead at the expense of basic industries that could well have done with extra manpower and materials. In that instance, I fail to see what justification there was for the Government allowing the State Housing Commission to grant the necessary permits for such a building.

Then again, Woolworths has made great headway and Edments showed a record profit as well. According to a report appearing on the 5th June, Edments made a profit of £65,000, or £19,000 more than during the previous year. In fact, nearly every type of firm has made huge profits, despite the fact that price-fixing is supposed to be in operation. With regard to bricks, Dr. Roland Wilson stated in "The West Australian" of the 21st July that in the last 10 years brick and tile production had been stepped up from an output of

£335 to £556 per man. With regard to cement and cement goods, the production had increased from £607 to £739 per man. So I could go on quoting other production figures, which show the real position despite the statements made in this House from time to time that production has not increased.

The Minister for Education: You are quoting the value of production per man, not the production itself.

Mr. BRADY: In some cases, the figures relate to production as well as the values. I challenge the Deputy Premier or the Premier to refute the statement that production has gone up. It is true that it lagged behind for a period in recent times, but production has picked up and has exceeded previous records in many respects. The same applies throughout the cement industry. Let the Minister go to the plaster sheet industry for facts as well.

To give members some idea of what is going on in industry, "The West Australian," in its issue of the 7th August, contained a report dealing with Prestige Limited and its subsidiaries. At the 28th annual meeting it was disclosed that previously hidden reserves amounting to a total of £363,814 were to be brought into account. That is the standard of morality we have in business enterprises today! Here we find Prestige Limited and its subsidiaries are now prepared to divulge the fact that they had £363,814 as a secret reserve. I venture the opinion that more than 50 per cent. of the firms in operation here have hidden reserves.

Mr. W. Hegney: Of course they have.

Mr. BRADY: The public are not aware of that fact. Firms write down their stock and premises well below actual values and get away with it. Subsequently, they bring the correct figures into account. That is one of the practices enabling them to show a small margin of profit on large capital investments. That is one of the tricks of the trade, and it is about time such practices were exposed. I could speak for a couple of hours on this subject.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Give it to them!

Mr. BRADY: I will not continue much longer out of respect for some of the older members.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Are you referring to me? I will be here when a lot of you younger fellows are finished.

Mr. BRADY: Next I want to nail the deliberate lie that has been uttered here from time to time that the 40-hour week is the cause of high prices. I propose to quote from "The Industrial Information Bulletin" of August, 1947. The pamphlet gives the full text of the Federal Arbitration Court's decision on the 40-hour case, which was brought to an end in 1947. The case was dealt with by four judges of the Federal Arbitration Court and it occupied their attention for nearly two years. In

fact, the industrial unions were getting upset because of the long time the case was under consideration. The court took 8,875 pages of transcript, heard 225 witnesses and was tendered almost 500 exhibits. It eventually arrived at its decision and gave reasons for the findings, covering 27 pages of the pamphlet. Without going into details, I shall just refer to one or two passages because that will enable me to nail the lie regarding the effect of a 40-hour week.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. members should not use the word "lie," but "untruth."

Mr. BRADY: I stand corrected. The Federal judges in their decision said this—

There will always be shortages in the relative sense if we maintain full employment which of necessary implication postulates demands still unsatisfied, and so shortages. Whatever the figures seem to show, we in Australia are well fed, well clothed and enjoying a relatively high standard of living, higher from the worker's point of view because there are no unemployed, and his fears of employment are less than ever before. In some branches production is considerably in excess of its immediate pre-war stage, and overall it certainly is so. The large number of notes in the hands of the public suggests that the whole story has not found its way into official records or been told to us.

Later on the judges said—

Other shortages, many of them part of the housing shortage, are being caught up; some have already been eliminated and in many cases pre-war production has already been exceeded

It is a matter of some significance that responsible governments covering most of Australia do not regard the shortages, even housing, as a reason for either refusing or postponing this claim . . .

Under the heading "Effect on Production," they said—

In estimating the loss of production which might be expected to follow from reduced hours, we should not lose sight of the fact that our decision will not affect production in many industries; will not affect, e.g., imported articles, coal, steel, pig iron, electric power, rural industry and many industries already enjoying 40 hours by agreement of the parties, by awards of tribunals and by State law . . .

So this argument that the 40-hour week is responsible for the rise in prices is beginning to look a bit weak. Under the heading, "Statistical Evidence of Effects on Production," the Judges said—

Mr. Nimmo worked out with elaborate care the area of the field that would be affected by such an hours reduction as is claimed. Mr. Brown attempted a mathematical measurement of it in terms of a percentage loss of production overall. His figure assuming no reduction in rural industry was not more than 5 per cent.; Mr. Sleeman's and Mr. Tyrer's were higher (6 per cent. and between 5½ per cent. and 6 per cent., respectively). He then attempted by many assumptions, estimates and calculations, not generally or fully concurred in by Mr. Tyrer, to trace the effects of that lost production through the community by way of cost price structure, concluding that the overall price rise should not exceed 4 per cent.

So this terrible 40-hour week, which is supposed to be ruining everyone and is alleged to have made prices jump up 50 and even 100 per cent., was calculated to cause an overall price rise not exceeding 4 per cent. Later on in the report, it is shown that that percentage dropped and would be overtaken in the first twelve months.

Mr. Perkins: That was two years ago.

Mr. BRADY: Yes. The judges, after considering the statistical evidence, agreed that 4 per cent. was the maximum effect in the overall picture. To relieve the mind of the member for Roe, I shall read a little further—

We believe the resiliency of industry to be very great. Nothing, not even reduced working hours has for long interfered with the steady upward trend in productivity over the long period, measured, we are told, at about 2 per cent. per annum, but varying somewhat from time to time and in different countries.

So the production lag has been caught up to the extent of 2 per cent. and in another two years the remainder will be picked up.

We see in the net gains made by Australian industry, not only in mechanisation, equipment, building and resources, but also in technical knowledge and skill, a potential which must, with the will to use them, make possible great advances.

The age of science is hardly begun and what was possible in the past will surely be bettered in the future. Every department of science is coming to the aid of production; biology and the amazing promises it makes in the plant and animal world; chemistry, particularly as applied to metals and plastics; physics, in its wider realm providing the bases of new unheard of resources of which the atom bomb is only one example. These things must in time work through our industry rendering the need for man-hours less and less . . .

So the Federal Arbitration Court judges envisaged the time when the man hours would be less and less as a result of the various improvements that would be introduced into industry.

I should like to quote at length the basic wage figures and the regimen on which the wage is fixed. It would be an eye-opener to members to learn the sparsity of food and grocery items that are taken into account in making up the basic wage for the worker. The basic wage is fixed on the needs of a man, his wife and two children, so that for every child a basic wage or marginal worker has in excess of two, his family is penalised. One would not mind so much if all commodities were included in the computation, but there is no provision for taking into account the cost of fresh fish, fresh vegetables and fresh fruit. As the member for Melville pointed out earlier in the evening, honey also is not included.

I feel greatly concerned about the price-fixing position, particularly as it affects the basic wage, because I cannot help thinking, in the face of statistics and the comments of the member for Melville, that the basic wage has been doctored. I admit that that is a strong term to use, but the swing has certainly gone against the worker and it is a very serious matter. I emphasise with all the power of which I am capable that the Government should do something to control prices.

There are two courses open to the Government. First of all, the Government can admit that it is unable to control prices and can ask the Commonwealth to resume control. Had it done that three years ago, instead of telling the people that it could control prices, Federal Labour would have been in power today and granting substantial subsidies to this State. It would have been subsidising many industries that are not now being subsidised. The Government pretends to be concerned about the welfare of the State, but, as a result of the abolition of Commonwealth subsidies, we have lost thousands of pounds that would have come to us had the Labour Party continued in office in the Federal sphere.

The Premier should go to the Premiers' Conference, admit that price-fixing in this State has failed and appeal to the Commonwealth to take it over. If the Government does not wish to do that, it could say, "During the financial emergency in 1932, we reduced wages by 22½ per cent. To compensate the workers for that, we are now prepared, owing to the buoyant condition of the revenue and the industries of the State, to increase the basic wage by 22½ per cent." Then the Government would be showing that it was earnest in its profession of interest in the workers. I am satisfied that the workers are not getting a fair and just share of

the national dividend, and hope the Government will adopt one of the two alternatives I have suggested. I support the amendment.

MR. READ (Victoria Park—on amendment) [12.19]: I have been waiting for the reappearance of the member for South Fremantle because he was rather incensed over a statement in the "Daily News" this evening to the effect that the two Independents intended to vote with the Government. I should like to tell him that the "Daily News" had no authority whatever for making that statement and so, if he feels hurt, I would apologise to him. I would remind him, however, that the newspaper had only two possible guesses and it guessed rightly.

Hon. A. H. Panton: It was not much of a guess, either.

MR. READ: This amendment in effect means that if the Opposition were in charge of price control administration prices would be lower. I cannot think that that would be so, firstly because the things we require are in short supply; and secondly because the spending power of the people has been greatly enhanced by our national income. Too great a proportion of our people are producing non-essential articles. They are in employment in which they should not be engaged in the interests of the national economy.

I have in mind, for instance, hundreds of able-bodied men who are employed in racing and trotting and kindred activities such as the building of vehicles and the manufacture of harness. Those men could be better engaged in primary industry. Then there are thousands and thousands of young people in Australia working for about 20 firms who are producing cosmetics. They could be very well employed in other factories on goods that are more urgently required.

Mr. W. Hegney: You cannot tell that to the young women around Victoria Park.

MR. READ: They could be better employed in cheese factories and butter factories and jam factories.

Hon. A. H. Panton: What about lipstick?

MR. READ: As a matter of fact I have some figures relating to the prices of lipstick and the great volume of goods of that sort which is produced and the amount of money spent on face-powders, lipsticks and face-creams. There are hundreds of lipsticks and face-powders which can be purchased for 1s. 3d., which in quality are equal to, if not better than, similar articles for which people are paying 5s. 6d., 7s. 6d. and 8s. 6d., because the expensive goods are advertised throughout Australia at a cost of thousands of pounds.

Mr. W. Hegney: That is Liberal Party propaganda. They are getting the money back now.

MR. READ: It does not matter whose propaganda it is. It is one of the national industries. Another line I have in mind is breakfast food. Some of this is sold in 8 oz. packets for 1s. 11d. and people are thereby paying at the rate of 1s. a lb. for wheat. The food does not contain any nourishment, but no action is taken to reduce the price or to see that the manufacturers give people value for their money.

Mr. Hoar: I take it that you are satisfied with the Government's handling of prices.

MR. READ: It is not a matter of being satisfied with this Government's or any other Government's handling of prices. Governments have no control over prices so far as I know, in any part of the world. In this country we feel it is ridiculous for men to go to the Arbitration Court and ask for a basic wage of £10 per week, but I think the time is not far distant when they will get that and more. In America at present the workers are receiving much more than that—up to £14 and £15 per week. I have a friend who married one of our Victoria Park girls and I get letters from them. During the war that man was stationed here as an engineer for three years and was getting the equal of £6 a week in Australian money on a submarine. He wrote to me recently and said that his wage was £15 a week in America today; that the price he paid for his flat of two rooms and appurtenances was £4 10s. a week; and that he was paying double the price that he had paid previously for meat.

He finished up with the statement that the standard of living in Australia is equal to the standard of living in America and that he lived equally well in Australia on his £6 per week. I believe that the standard of living of our people has not been reduced and that our people are living today as well as ever they did, except those who are on superannuation or on pensions. I think that the income of these latter should be subject to the same increments as are made in the basic wage awarded to the ordinary worker, because the prices of commodities continue to increase as the basic wage increases, but the basic wage increases are not applicable to people on fixed incomes. A question was asked by the member for Mt. Hawthorn to which the Attorney General replied that—

An increase of 5d. per lb. in the price of the various cuts of beef and mutton would result in an increase of 5s. 11d. in the State basic wage for the metropolitan area under the present quarterly adjustment procedure.

I think that indicates that while it is a little time off, the 5s. 11d. will be given to these workers in order that they can pay the advanced price for meat.

Mr. W. Hegney: They are paying the extra price but their wage is based on the fixed price.

Mr. READ: I cannot see how we are going to get cheap meat at present. If the price of a sheep or a bullock oversea or anywhere else is fixed very high, we cannot compel, in a free country, the producer of beef or mutton to sell it any cheaper than at present. To get meat to the people at a cheaper rate it has to be subsidised, otherwise they have to pay the price. At the present price of wool, the amount on a sheep is worth 30s. to £2, and the hide is worth 25s. That means that on the hoof the animal is worth 10d. a lb. If it is sold at 10d. a lb. by the producer, we shall have to add to that the costs of slaughtering, dressing, and the retailers' wages and profit. How can the meat be sold for 10d. a lb.? On the other hand, how can we avoid the meat being sold at a high price when the butcher can get it? In a free country it cannot be done.

Mr. Brady: That does not apply to fishermen.

Mr. READ: A fisherman can do what he likes with his product. He can sell it how he likes.

Mr. Brady: No, not in Western Australia.

Mr. READ: The producer can get double the local price for meat oversea. Legislation is needed to curtail his operations there, but I do not think it can be done. If I thought a change of Government would reduce the high cost of living, and at the same time allow the worker to retain his present wages, I would be all for it, but it is impossible.

Mr. J. Hegney: Are you in favour of advancing prices?

Mr. READ: I am not, but nothing can stop it. Nothing has been thought of at the present time to stop that. As a matter of fact, it will be a dreadful thing when the oversea prices for our commodities fall. When people who are on a lower standard of living produce those articles, it will give a headache to someone here because of its effect on our basic wage and cost of living. But why worry about it at the moment when there is no answer to the question and the standard of living is not impaired? This is, I suppose, the finest country in the world at the present time because of the freedom the people enjoy and the quality and quantity of food they get. Yet here we are growling up to 12 o'clock at night as to who should be in charge of price-fixing. I do not care who is in charge of it; it cannot be altered.

Mr. Hoar: What a hopeless outlook that is!

Mr. READ: No, it is not.

Mr. Hoar: Yes, it is.

Mr. READ: It is an outlook we have to face, but members will not do so. The profit of 22½ per cent. allowed on groceries was mentioned. Well, I think it is not too much. The grocer has to pay the basic wage, which is high, and he has to meet his rent and other overheads in the way of electricity, etc. Those costs all have to come out of the 22½ per cent. profit, so there is very little left, proportionately, for the trader. It is easy to imagine that such a percentage means a lot of money, but when all the expenses of running a business are taken out of it, it does not amount to much. I would say that no good purpose could be served at the present time by altering this Government and plunging the country into a general election, with all its attendant expenses, for practically nothing.

Mr. W. Hegney: You have the wind up.

Mr. READ: No, I am too old for that. If we are here in 12 months' time, talking on the same subject, not only will prices be like they are at present, but very much advanced.

MR. PERKINS (Roe—on amendment) [12.35]: I have no doubt that this no-confidence amendment to the Address-in-reply has given members of the Opposition a wonderful opportunity to tell the Government just where the deficiencies lie in prices control. The energies of Opposition members have been pent up for a long time, and as a member sitting behind the Government I would be the last to deny them the right of criticism. That is what they are for, and whoever occupies the Government benches must be prepared to have fair criticism levelled at them. But it is quite another matter to justify an amendment such as this. The members of the Opposition will have to show either that the Government has done something in prices control that it should not have done, or that it has lacked vision to do other things which the Opposition is now bringing to its notice.

I have listened with a great deal of interest to the debate, and have noted certain points that Opposition members have raised, but I cannot by any stretch of imagination bring myself to believe that they have justified the amendment they have put before the House. The member for Northam moved the amendment, and he devoted quite a bit of time to castigating the Government for not having prices control on luxury goods. He was at some pains to say that because of the lack of vision of the Government in that regard, labour and materials had been drawn from essential industries, and production affected. Then other members of the Opposition told us that production had nothing whatsoever to do with it. They quoted America where production is very

high and spoke of the increase in prices. The member for Northam, and his henchman cannot both be right. One argument contradicts the other. I suggest to Opposition members that they iron out these difficulties before they come into this Chamber because this sort of thing cannot possibly impress the public with the solidity of their case.

Mr. Graham: What do you think of the Minister for Prices?

Mr. PERKINS: No doubt the member for East Perth would like to divert me from the question I am discussing at the moment. We can discuss his point later. I was surprised to hear the member for Northam mention the point as to the control of prices of luxury goods. I am not going to suggest that it does not have the effect of drawing essential labour and materials away from industry. I believe it does, and that it has an effect on production and tends to aggravate the rising price spiral, but perhaps there are reasons why it is impossible for price control to deal with this particular question. During the long period for which the Commonwealth Labour Government was in power and in charge of price control, it made little attempt to police the prices of luxury lines.

Hon. A. H. Panton: There was a war on.

Mr. PERKINS: That is so, but there were plenty of luxury goods available. Anyone who examines the position must realise that the difficulties of effective price control over luxury lines are infinitely greater than in the case of more essential commodities.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Your argument about luxury lines must be wrong, because during the war there was no labour available for the manufacture of such lines.

Mr. PERKINS: Luxury lines were being produced during that time and were not controlled, as to prices, by the Curtin and Chifley Governments.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The manpower regulations did not allow the production of luxury goods.

Mr. PERKINS: Certain luxury goods were available throughout the war, as the member for Melville knows. So much for price control over luxury goods, on which there has been a serious division of opinion among members opposite! A suggestion was made by the member for Northam—it was vigorously put forward by the member for Melville and echoed by other speakers from the Opposition benches—regarding the claim for the reduction of percentage margins.

I was struck by the way in which some speakers attempted to justify that argument. They named certain firms, of which I think I have a full list. Those

firms were Prestige, Elder Smith & Co., Noyes Bros., Woolworth's, Edments, and South-West Dairy Farmers. The member for Guildford-Midland mentioned most of the firms in that list and stated what their annual profits were and, without making any investigation into what special circumstances might have affected those firms, concluded that nearly all firms are making big profits. That was an interesting line of reasoning. I only wish it were possible to prove one's case by arguing on such flimsy evidence as that. The question of percentage margins is one of which I have some knowledge as I take an active part in the co-operative movement and see the trading figures of many companies.

I believe the member for Guildford-Midland also sees the trading figures of one concern in his electorate, and I challenge him to say that the percentage margin allowed to that organisation is unreasonably high. I know it is not, and that the chief problem affecting co-operative companies—about which I know most—is that with the ceiling price on top and rising costs below, they are continually being squeezed between those two factors. It is a serious worry to the managements of such concerns to keep them on a proper financial basis. I am surprised that responsible members of the Opposition should make statements of that kind without attempting to get concrete evidence from businesses such as I have mentioned, with regard to the actual position as it exists at present.

Do members opposite view with equanimity the putting of hundreds of small traders out of existence? There is no reason to believe that the ordinary small trader is in any better position than is the co-operative company. Does the member for Guildford-Midland desire to see the concern in which he is interested put into serious financial difficulties? I suggest that before such statements are made, members opposite should do a great deal more investigating into the true position.

Mr. Brady: Co-operatives do not make profits.

Mr. PERKINS: I do not know what the hon. member is getting at now. The method of operating a co-operative is that all ordinary trading practices are pursued and if profits are made, at the end of the financial year a limit of 5 per cent. is placed on the dividend which can be returned to the shareholders, and any surplus over that can either go into reserve or be returned to the shareholders trading with the co-operative, in proportion to the amount of trading they have done with it.

Mr. Brady: What do you know about it?

Mr. PERKINS: I do not know what the hon. member is getting at tonight. Very little attention seems to have been paid to the question of the cost structure as a whole and, from my point of view, that is the really interesting factor in price control. For a long time I have had a suspicion that, on a long-range point of view, any system of price control can only be a means of legalising increases in prices that would eventually come about anyhow. We know that in price control, under the administration of both Commonwealth and State Governments, the wholesale costs are examined and, when they have been properly tabulated, the percentage is allowed, and so any increased cost in industry is worked up through the price structure and, while price control does have an effect on costs, I have no doubt that eventually the costs are passed on.

The member for Guildford-Midland made an extraordinary statement—I think it was echoed by other members opposite—wherein he suggests that the 40-hour week had no effect, or very little effect on raising the costs of industry. He quoted from what the judges said three years ago. That was only an estimate by the judges at that time and, in any case, judges or anybody else can be wrong in their supposition. Members opposite should talk to some of the people engaged in industry. After such discussion, I imagine that any of them who hold the view that the 40-hour week has had no effect on the costs of industry will have a rude awakening. I am surprised at responsible members of the Opposition trying to put forward that contention.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: It would do you good to read the book "Six-hour Day" by Lord Leverhulme.

Mr. PERKINS: I have not read it.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: It would do you good if you did.

Mr. PERKINS: If the member for Melville will tell me where I can obtain the book I will be very interested to read it. But, if it seeks to prove something that we have found by experience to be wrong then the value of such a book, in my eyes, will be very seriously reduced.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: He was able to increase production by a reduction of hours.

Mr. PERKINS: I will assure the member for Melville that he will not find many industrialists who will support that point of view, and I can introduce him to many who will tell him that the reduction of hours from 44 to 40 has reduced production by far more than one-eleventh.

Mr. Ackland: Did the member for Melville read what Victor Courtney had to say last Sunday about the 40-hour week? Originally he was a great supporter of the Labour Party and may still be.

Mr. PERKINS: A number of members on the Opposition side have paid a lot of attention to the question of meat prices. They look at some of us on this side of the House, whom they know are interested in farming, with baleful eyes and one can imagine that they think we are personally responsible—those of us who are interested in farming—for the high prices that people are paying for their meat at present. They will have difficulty in proving that this Government has been responsible for many of the difficulties that are affecting the meat industry at the moment.

Basically the difficulty with the supply of meat is that meat prices are out of line with the prices for other primary products produced in that same run of agricultural country. The main commodity out of line with meat is wool; wool and meat being more or less interchangeable in production. The high prices which have been offering for wool for such a long period have gradually had a serious effect. Many of us have been able to foresee this for some time and I forecast, quite frankly, that the position will become worse unless there is some lifting in meat prices.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: If there is a bad season and the rains disappear it will be a different story.

Mr. PERKINS: Members can hardly expect producers to be philanthropists. It is much easier to produce wool than it is to produce meat, although many producers have been reluctant to change from the production of meat to wool. However, economic forces have been inexorable and you cannot expect men to stand by year by year and see their neighbours, who are on wool production, reaping greater returns than they have been obtaining from meat production with much less worry and work. We cannot expect producers, under those conditions, to carry on indefinitely. I think we have come to the crisis, and the people of this country have to face up to paying more for their meat than they have been paying in recent years.

Mr. Graham: They are.

Mr. PERKINS: If there is not an increase in the legal prices of meat it will mean that the recurring shortages of meat will gradually become worse and worse. As the member for Melville interjected, in the next few months, probably until Christmas or the end of January, there is not likely to be much problem about the supply of meat and I have no doubt that mutton prices will come down to the ceiling of 9d. a lb.

But, with the expectation on the part of producers that the policy of price-fixing on meat will be continued, what inducement is there for anyone with fat stock to carry them beyond this easy marketing period into a period when, if the stock are to be kept in a fat condition, it is

necessary to employ special feeding methods, use a lot of food and quite a lot of extra handling? The public must make up its mind whether it prefers to have a plentiful supply of meat for the next few months at what are looked upon by the Price Fixing Commissioner as reasonable prices. At present the legal price is 9d. a lb. for mutton, but for a long time after this plentiful period—and I warn members it could be seven months of the year—producers will not bother to carry prime stock for marketing. That is the difficult portion of the year.

Although there are always some culled stock coming on to the market the balance of the meat will have to be made up of what is killed at this time of the year and then put into freezers. However, if the public wants to live on frozen mutton good luck to it, but I have grave doubts whether, if it were given a choice, it would not prefer to pay a penny or twopence a lb. more on a legal market and have good, fresh mutton through every portion of the year as against paying high prices for what, in effect, are culled animals supplemented by other frozen mutton which has been stored in the flush season. The member for Kalgoorlie seems to see some virtue in using culled stock as meat for the people.

Mr. Styants: The producer sees a lot in it too. That is what we have been getting.

Mr. PERKINS: Producers have been content to take comparatively low values for culled stock, but if any Government has a policy which aims at feeding the people on culled stock alone then I believe that that Government is not doing its duty, because in this country we produce the prime quality meat and the public should be given the opportunity to eat the best that we can give it. I state quite definitely, notwithstanding what the member for Kalgoorlie says, that if the price inducement is there some producers will be prepared to meet that market. There seems to be an idea that the higher wool prices have somehow been inspired by this Government, and that the effect of high wool prices is drawing mutton away from the livestock markets.

Hon. A. H. Panton: I do not think anyone was silly enough to make that statement.

Mr. PERKINS: Just in case anyone did make the statement I would point out that all arrangements regarding wool marketing were made by the Curtin and Chifley Governments.

Hon. A. H. Panton: And the farmers should be very pleased about it, too.

Mr. PERKINS: I thought it just as well to put that on record in case someone makes the suggestion that those who support this Government have been responsible, in some way, for the set-up whereby

wool prices have increased so much in Australia. The member for Boulder made an astounding statement. It was that Australia does not need wool. I interjected and told him that I did not think his Leader would agree with him. The more I think of it the more convinced I am that his Leader would violently disagree with him on that particular point. No-one realises better than the Leader of the Opposition just how much Australia owes to the Merino sheep, not only in years gone by but in recent years, in assisting to pay off Australia's external debt, and also obtaining the vital dollars, in America, which Australia needs at present.

Evidently, wool is more important than any of our other industries except perhaps gold because it obtains for us necessary dollars from America. Therefore, I do not think we ought to do anything unduly to dislocate the wool industry. But, I believe, if it is possible we ought to maintain a reasonable balance between meat and wool, but I am quite definite that it cannot be done with meat at 9d. per lb. It must be realised that meat at that price shows a lesser increase compared with prices pre-war than with practically any other commodity.

Mr. Styants: That is the wholesale price.

Mr. PERKINS: The wholesale price is what I am quoting; 9d. per lb. pre-war. It was not an impossible price. We did obtain it at certain times of the year but now, of course, it is suggested that any increase over 9d. would be utterly disastrous. There are differences between the States. There are differences in the quality of meat exported; differences in the number of surplus carcasses marketed in the various States. However, we are dealing with Western Australian conditions, and I suggest to the member for Kalgoorlie that he investigate the conditions that we are working under here and not those in some other State. I think we need to pay some attention to where price control will eventually lead us if we place undue reliance on it. I notice that the communists have unlimited faith in price control. Periodically we see stickers all round the city and elsewhere urging the Government to peg prices. That request is rather touching.

Mr. W. Hegney: Should wages be controlled?

Mr. PERKINS: It shows quite clearly that those indulging in that type of propaganda have not investigated very closely as to where it is likely to lead.

Mr. W. Hegney: Do you think that wages should be controlled?

Mr. PERKINS: I think that the socialist philosophy which the Labour Party preaches and of which price-fixing seems to be one of the by-products—if I may use that term—can easily lead to some

sort of regimentation of the people as communism has led people in other countries. I have never accused members on the other side of the House of being communistic; I do not think they are. However, in following some of these policies they can finish up in the same boat. They are practising a doctrine and they do not realise where it will eventually lead them. The point I am making is that whatever policy of price control we follow, it should be one that will eventually lead us back to a free economy and not to a regimented one.

If we pursue any policies as to our price control which are to discourage producers from building up a plentiful supply of goods, then I suggest that we are doing the very thing which we on this side of the House want to avoid and which, I think, the members on the other side of the House wish to avoid but which I fear they will not avoid if they continue to pursue the policy they are at present advocating.

HON. J. B. SLEEMAN (Fremantle—on amendment) [1.5]: At this early hour in the morning I do not wish to speak at length, but there are one or two observations I wish to make. I agree wholeheartedly with the member for Guildford-Midland when he said that when the present Government asked the people to vote for it and stated that it would control prices, it was a fraudulent statement. It has now had ample chance of controlling prices but it has failed miserably. It has allowed prices to soar and thereby has increased the cost of living. Let me mention one or two instances of the indirect charges it has permitted. Firstly, I refer to the handling of cargo on the Fremantle wharves, that mostly includes those goods the prices of which are reflected in the cost of living. The figures are as follows:—

General Cargo (per ton).

January, 1939—Shed, 3s.; direct, 1s. 8d.
January, 1940—Shed, 3s. 6d.; direct, 2s.
January, 1944—Shed, 4s. 9.7d.; direct, 2s. 8.4d.
January, 1948—Shed, 8s. 6d.; direct, 2s. 8d.
Present time, 1950—Shed, 10s. plus 15 per cent.; direct, 3s. plus 15 per cent.

It can be seen from those figures that from 3s. in the shed in 1939 and 1s. 8d. direct they rise to 10s. plus 15 per cent. in the shed and to 3s. plus 15 per cent. direct in 1950. There is also 5s. 6d. per ton harbour dues which is now subject to a further 20 per cent. increase. We then get on to the charges for hay and straw per ton, which will prove interesting to our farmer friends. These charges are—

Chaff, Hay and Straw (per ton).

January, 1939—Shed, 3s. 4d.; direct, 2s. 2d.
January, 1940—Shed, 4s.; direct, 2s. 6d.
January, 1944—Shed, 5s. 4.8d. direct, 3s. 4.5d.
January, 1948—Shed, 12s. 6d.; direct, 4s. 8d.
January, 1950—Shed, 14s. 6d. plus 15 per cent.; direct, 5s. 4d. plus 15 per cent.

Harbour dues also increased by 5s. 6d. per ton. Then we come to bagged coke per ton and the figures are as follows:—

Baked Coke (per ton).

January, 1939—Shed, 3s. 4d.; direct, 2s. 2d.
January, 1940—Shed, 4s.; direct, 2s. 6d.
January, 1944—Shed, 5s. 4.8d.; direct, 3s. 4.5d.
January, 1948—Shed, 12s. 6d.; direct, 4s. 8d.
January, 1950—Shed, 14s. 6d. plus 15 per cent.; direct 5s. 4d. plus 15 per cent.

Harbour dues amount to 2s. 6d. per ton, subject now to a further 20 per cent. increase.

The Minister for Lands: Now tell us how the lumpers' wages have gone up.

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: If the Minister wants me to tell him how the price of potatoes has gone up I would first explain that if he had carried out the recommendations of the Select Committee, which were that Potato Distributors (W.A.) Ltd. should be disbanded and that Mr. Murray should be an official of the department and not be permitted to make a charge for the potatoes he handles in this country, we would have been better off. However, the Minister knows that when we presented our report to the House we were beaten by a majority of one and the report was discarded. It is a disgrace to the country how the price of potatoes has risen.

First of all, the potatoes are sent through the country agent, through Potato Distributors (W.A.) Ltd., then through Mr. Murray, then to the board, from the board to the wholesalers, then from the wholesalers to the retailers and from the retailers they eventually reach the customers. I apologise for being forced to refer to potatoes, Mr. Speaker, but it was merely to oblige the Minister for Lands, and to point out to him that he should have implemented the recommendations of the Select Committee to disband Potato Distributors (W.A.) Ltd. and place Mr. Murray as an official in the department instead of his making a charge for the potatoes he handles.

The Minister for Lands: Now tell us what has been the increase in the lumpers' pay?

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: The Minister would be interested in what I want to say, if he would hold his tongue for a few minutes.

The Minister for Lands: I am interested.

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: The Minister is interested in manures.

The Minister for Lands: No, in fertilisers.

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: The particulars regarding the rise in prices per ton respecting manures in bags include the following—

1939—Shed, 3s.; direct, 1s. 8d.

1940—Shed, 3s. 6d.; direct, 2s.

1944—Shed, 4s. 8d.; direct, 2s. 8d.

1948—Shed, 8s. 6d.; direct 2s. 8d.

1950—Shed, 10s., plus 15 per cent.; direct, 3s., plus 15 per cent.

The harbour dues on this item are 2s. 2d. per ton, subject now to a 20 per cent. increase. Thus the Government has imposed upon our farmer friends increased charges from 3s. in 1939 to 10s. this year plus 15 per cent. and harbour dues amounting to 2s. 2d. per ton, subject also to a 20 per cent. increase. It will be seen, therefore, that the Government has contributed appreciably to the increase in the cost of living through the charges imposed by the Fremantle Harbour Trust. That institution is a real money-spinner. The Government is out to get cash and does not care where or how it gets it. It reminds me of Taffy who said to his son, "If you can make money honestly, do so, but in any case make it."

Members will be interested to know that the payments from the Harbour Trust to Consolidated Revenue amounted to £100,000 last year, but this year the contribution has increased to £195,880, or over £90,000 more than for the previous 12 months. The Government may attribute that to the increase in wages; it has the proper technique all right. The more the lumpers' wages go up, the greater is the contribution to Consolidated Revenue from the Harbour Trust. It is quite true that wages went up this year and so the Harbour Trust's contribution to Consolidated Revenue has gone from £100,000 to £195,000.

I hope the Government will endeavour to reduce the cost of living so far as it is affected by Harbour Trust charges. I know it will fail miserably in dealing with other phases of the cost of living, but it has some say in this particular aspect because it can direct the Harbour Trust Commissioners what they should do. We know that that is so because although the Harbour Trust decided to employ one man, the Government said, "You cannot do that. You must employ someone else and give him a few hundred pounds extra." Obviously the Government could do something to ease the situation by lowering Harbour Trust charges.

I was pleased to be in the Chamber when the member for Victoria Park spoke a few minutes ago. He is responsible for some of the charges that have been levied during the past two years. It will be remembered that in 1948 when the Prices Control Bill was being dealt with in Committee, I moved an amendment for the appointment of three commissioners instead of one. Although I was not satisfied that three commissioners would be all that was required, I thought that arrangement would be better than having one commissioner. On that occasion the member for Victoria Park said—

This amendment is worthy of acceptance. The essence of the Bill is the control of prices, which is most vital to the well-being of every family in the State and to the countering of inflation. If three men are appointed they will have sufficient knowledge and experience to give fair and impartial judgment, which cannot be done by one man.

I want members to note that on that occasion the member for Victoria Park said it could not be done by one man. By the 14th September he had changed his mind. I do not know what happened, but obviously something did. On that occasion when the Bill was again before the Committee, he said—

I feel that I can accept this amendment because through it we now have some protection for consumers.

Although he formerly said the job could not be done by one man, he was prepared to accept that position. Tonight we heard him say that neither the present Government nor any other Government could control prices. He knows very well that the Government told the people that it could control prices when it recommended the electors to vote "No" at the referendum. That is one reason why the member for Victoria Park should support the amendment to the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply. I would not dream of supporting a Government that made a fraudulent statement like that. He says the Government cannot control prices. Why not agree to our going to the Commonwealth Government and saying that the State Government had failed miserably and it was impossible for it to control prices? Let him support us in asking the Commonwealth Government to take the necessary steps to assume Federal control of price fixation. That is the only way out of the difficulty, and I trust that our friends, the two Independents, will be quite satisfied that a Government that made such a fraudulent statement to the people cannot, in fact, control prices and will help us to put it where it belongs—on the Opposition side of the House.

A lot has been said this evening about meat. I have been of the opinion for some time that the matter of meat prices should be dealt with. We have the spectacle of bullocks from the North being landed at Robb's Jetty and fetching £35 per head. We know that some members of the Government are interested in bullocks and it is quite right that that should be so if they want to be. Anyhow, they are getting £35 per head for their bullocks that are being landed now. A few years ago they averaged about £10 per head.

I understand that the Wyndham Meat Works pay about £10 per head, and it is fortunate for that concern that there are not sufficient boats to convey the bullocks to Fremantle, because otherwise the works would be called upon to handle still fewer head. In view of the price paid now at Robb's Jetty, everything possible should be done to reduce the cost. The wholesalers who pay £35 per head for bullocks must get their profits and so they pass that cost on to the retailers who in turn pass the added cost on to the consumers. If the animals were sold on the weight and grade basis, I understand the position could be controlled properly, with the result that beef would be much cheaper than it is at present.

There has been a lot of talk about lamb. The wool and meat sides of the question are interwoven and that is why the price for lamb is so high. We know that members of this House have made the public statement that they were very pleased with their returns, and that for 12-weeks old lambs they had been collecting £3 10s. per head. How can we expect to get mutton at reasonable prices when members of Parliament are content to collect that amount for a 12-weeks old lamb?

Mr. Perkins: They were not mine.

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: I know, but that applies to someone sitting very close to the hon. member. Surely we can do something about that. Because the lamb has its wool at the time is no reason why an exorbitant price should be paid for the animal. The member for Kimberley could arrange some way of arriving at a fair price.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: Something like when they sold stock from Udialla to their friends for 15s. a head.

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: I suppose that would be in connection with some of the lambs from the stud flock that it was said were not worth running on the property. I shall await with interest what some of the big guns on the Government side of the House will say. I trust the amendment will be carried. Notwithstanding what the member for Victoria Park said tonight, I know he has twisted before. Let him twist again, and this time twist our way.

MR. McCULLOCH (Hannans — on amendment) [1.20]: I do not intend to cast a silent vote on this amendment. I am one of the people who object to being exploited. Twelve months ago the question of meat was brought before the Minister for rising prices with the object of getting something done to bring down the prices at Kalgoorlie. A deputation of master butchers—not workers—approached the Minister, presented their case and produced audited reports of the cost of meat at Kalgoorlie showing that they were operating at a loss. The Minister told the deputation that he was sympathetic and would bring before the next conference of Prices Ministers a proposition to fix the price of meat on the hoof. I do not think he ever put any such proposition before the conference. If he did, there was no report in the Press about it.

A similar position has arisen again this year, and the people on the Eastern Goldfields have had no fresh meat for some considerable time. The nearest approach they have had to fresh meat has been horse meat. I have no hesitation in being one of the party to censure the Government on its prices administration. This Government advocated State control of prices in 1948 and what has it done about controlling them? Nothing. The position has deteriorated from bad to worse, and the longer the people tolerate the existing state of affairs, the worse off they will become.

We have been told that if production is increased, prices will come down. Has not the production of wool increased in the last three years and has the price come down? To say that increased production is necessary before prices can be reduced is just a hoax. I have just picked up a newspaper which indicates what has been happening throughout the Commonwealth and particularly in this State. This is what it says—

Federal Treasurer Fadden is warning ex-Servicemen against "sharks" in waiting next year for their gratuity. But what about the "sharks" who've been having a glorious time in the last five years extorting the boys' deferred pay and most of their wages in exorbitant rents for wretched rooms and built-in verandah "flats" (no children please)? These and other "patriots" who couldn't do enough for servicemen in "lip" service during the war began robbing them as soon as peace was restored. I doubt if next year's "sharks" could teach these people anything.

That is the present position. Servicemen who went away to fight and save this country are today being exploited. Ex-Servicemen's Associations are asking for an increase in the gratuity promised the

men at the termination of hostilities in 1945. Some of those lads were entitled to a gratuity of £150, but what is it worth today? Somewhere about £75, if as much as that. These men fought and bled to keep us safe, and now they are being robbed of money to which they are justly entitled.

Everybody knows that the worker on the basic wage is now worse off than he was 20 years ago. The basic wage on the Eastern Goldfields today is £7 11s. 6d. and in 1931 it was £3 17s. The Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies, in reply to a question put to him in the last session of the Commonwealth Parliament, admitted that the value of the pound in the capital cities was about 10s. If the pound is worth only half today what it was in 1931, the basic wage is today equivalent to £3 15s. 9d. at that time. There is no blinking these facts. The figures may be found in Federal "Hansard." Mr. Menzies stated that the pound was now worth only 10s. in the capital cities, but that away from the capital cities it might be worth less. I am sure it is worth less.

We have heard many references to the building of homes and their cost. Last Thursday the Honorary Minister for Housing was asked by the member for East Perth, the average cost of building four- and five-roomed brick and wooden houses (a) by contract and (b) by day labour. The Honorary Minister, in his reply, stated that a two-bedroomed brick house averaged £136 10s. per square which, for 12½ squares, would bring the cost to £1,706 5s. There is not a two-bedroomed brick house in the metropolitan area that could be purchased for £2,500. If I can be shown where I can get such homes for £1,706, I will take two of them tomorrow and make a profit on them.

In answer to an interjection, the Premier told the member for Melville that plaster was in plentiful supply. I should like the member for Maylands to take particular notice of this. In his electorate at 90 and 92 Kelvin-street, Maylands, there are two homes, the brick walls of which have been up for the last four weeks and it has been impossible to get plaster for the walls. I will pledge my full honour on that. Two houses in Kelvin-street, Nos. 90 and 92, have stood for four weeks. They are of brick and tile and it has not been possible to get the plaster to cover the walls. They are not being sold or bought for £1,706 5s. The hon. member can have a look at them tomorrow. They are in his electorate and they have stood for four weeks at that address. I saw them myself today.

On several occasions I have read in the paper that this State expects in the very near future to export much more meat than hitherto. How does that come about? If we cannot feed the people

already in the State, how can we export meat? Surely our own people are entitled to get a bit of meat before it is sent overseas! We have 975,000 square miles in Western Australia and the Premier in his speech said that he expected to import meat. It is a sad state of affairs that a country with 975,000 square miles has to import meat to keep about 500,000 people. We have 100,000 square miles in the South-West Land Division which an expert from Britain told us not long ago was one of the richest places in the world for dairy produce and the raising of cattle. Yet the Premier tells us that meat will have to be imported.

I have no doubt that the prices question is a big one. I am certain that Mr. Mathea, the present Commissioner, has more letters from me on his file than from any other private member. The question has troubled the Goldfields for a considerable time, and more especially since the Government abolished the office in Kalgoorlie where two men and a girl were employed trying to police the matter of prices. The meat question was not quite so acute at that time. I consider that that office was an acquisition, so far as price control is concerned. The traders were informed of any breaches and were given a chance. We never looked for prosecutions; we did not want them. It was a bad move on the part of this Government to close that office at Kalgoorlie.

I hope the amendment will be carried. The Attorney General had an opportunity to avoid it when the mover, just prior to moving it, asked him whether he would recommend to the Government that prices and wages be pegged for six months as a trial. Why not try anything? If the plan were unsuccessful in six months, I do not think we would be any worse off than we are today. It would have been quite easy for the Government to give the matter a trial. If the Minister had promised that he would recommend to his colleagues a six months' trial of pegged wages and prices, we would not have been here till this time of the morning. The scheme might have worked, and if it had not we would have been no worse off. Notwithstanding that we have all these different parties on the Government side of the House—the Country Party, the C.D.L., the Liberals, the L.C.L., the Independents and the half-Independents—I hope that they will consider whether they have not been exploited as I have. It is no good the Premier's telling us that his policy has the approval of the people. The people of Nedlands did not vote for the policy of the L.C.L.

Member: They put its candidate out.

Mr. McCULLOCH: Yes. That cry is not much good. I think that every member should look this matter squarely in the face and try to arrest the drift or improve the situation. It is a well known

saying that prices go up in the lift and wages go up the stairs. There is no doubt about that; and so long as the spiral goes on the workers will be worse off. They are in a worse position today, so far as the value of the basic wage is concerned, than they were in 1931. Some people might think that the basic wage inquiry is held to ascertain costs. Nothing of the kind! The basic wage inquiry is held to discover what it costs the average man with a wife and two children to live in reasonable comfort. When the basic wage was first introduced in 1926, it was £4 5s. for males throughout the whole State. That was fixed as a result of an inquiry by Mr. Justice Piddington. It was an inquiry into the cost of living and not what it would take to keep a man, his wife and two children at a reasonable standard of living.

I say to members, not only those on the Government side but also the Independent members, that they should ask themselves whether they are really satisfied with the way things are going. It is no good saying we can do nothing about it. The Government said it could do something. In 1948 the Deputy Premier spoke over the air, and I listened to him very attentively. He said that that side of the House would not only control prices better than the Commonwealth Government was doing but would reduce prices in some instances. Members opposite said they could do that then. They have had two years' experience since that time, and it should have led them somewhere. We should now be enjoying a lower cost of living than was the case before price control was handed over to the States by the Commonwealth.

MR. SHEARN (Maylands—on amendment) (1.39): It would be an understatement to say that this subject has been dealt with in extenso last night and this morning. I want to commence by saying that the domestic matter to which the member for Hannans has drawn my attention will be referred promptly to the Minister for Housing tomorrow because I am assuming it is his job, not mine, to see that something is done in connection with it. I am supposing that these houses are Commonwealth-State houses.

Mr. McCulloch: They are war service homes.

Mr. SHEARN: Very well; it is still the obligation of the Minister. So far as the amendment is concerned, I say quite sincerely and frankly that up to a point the House is indebted to the member for Northam for introducing this topic. I am confident that there is no question in Australia—indeed throughout the world—which is exercising the minds of Parliamentarians, economists and others more than that of the cost of living. I am not, any more than is the member for Northam, content with the present situation

in Western Australia and that which has existed for some years, but in my position, not being allied to a political party, and having taken no part in the referendum to which reference was made earlier, I can approach the matter from an unbiased and entirely dispassionate point of view.

I say quite frankly it is most unfortunate that during the referendum so much extraneous matter was allowed to be introduced by the respective political parties that the public, by and large, was more or less confused. Today we find that the member for Northam has put forward no constructive suggestions to deal with this matter. He merely charges the Government with not having effectively dealt with the control of prices. Of course, one immediately asks oneself what is happening in the rest of Australia. I have the index figures here for the other States, and whilst Western Australia is not the lowest in the "C" series for the last quarter that I have—the March quarter—it has the lowest average of the six States and, remarkably enough, the most unsatisfactory of the States happens to be one—New South Wales—in which a Labour Government is in power.

I would not be justified in suggesting, nor do I intend to do so, that that Government is responsible for the situation. I think the question of the price structure is related to the national economy of Australia, and no one State Government can effectively deal with all the factors involved.

Mr. May: This Government claimed it could.

Mr. SHEARN: I am attempting to deal with the situation as I see it, shorn of all party political considerations. I repeat that I think the Prices Branch in this State is, in a most difficult set of circumstances, trying to deal with factors over some of which it has no control. The prices Ministers meet in conference at regular periods, and they again deal with factors over which they, as Ministers, can have no control. Whilst all that is bad enough, the wage earners, and everyone else in the community, are feeling the increasing burden of the situation. Whilst I have here notes which would enable me to speak for a considerable time on various aspects of the subject, as they have already been thrashed out tonight I would, if I dealt with them, merely be reiterating what has already been amply portrayed.

To deal with this matter effectively, it is the primary responsibility of the State Parliaments and the Commonwealth Parliament to approach it at the earliest possible moment, shorn of all party political considerations, in the interests of the community. As some members interjected very wisely and truthfully, they should

take an independent view of the situation. I suggest it is the duty of this Government to take the earliest possible opportunity, in common with all other State Governments to seek a conference with the Commonwealth Government to endeavour to evolve a process by which all factors related to our national economy could be considered, and the various problems over which individual State Ministers cannot have any control could be synchronised. I feel that by that means alone will we be able to get any semblance of order out of the chaotic state that exists, and is typical of every State in Australia today. The member for Northam says in his amendment—

We deplore the failure of the Government to control prices effectively; we consider it is deserving of censure, and because of the damaging effect of that failure upon the welfare of the State's people and upon the future of the State's economy, we consider the Government has lost the confidence of the Legislative Assembly.

I have to try to decide, amongst other things, just what the public is thinking about this. Every member is familiar with the fact that the circumstances, to which attention has been particularly drawn to-night, were the subject of continual discussion during the recent elections. So, what right have I to presume, at this early stage, to say that I shall, on the representations of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, be a party to unseating any Government? I do say, however, that in relation to the problems concerning meat, vegetables and a number of other items, there is a direct responsibility on this Government, having had the experience of the last nine months or so, to set about immediately to deal with the situation more effectively.

May I say in that connection to the member for Northam that his amendment is somewhat premature, because, I understand, it largely depends on these matters. Had it been introduced next session, and the Government had done nothing about it, when it had promised to do so, it would have been introduced at a more opportune time. But at this stage I suggest it is entirely premature and unfair. I am completely satisfied to take my responsibility in voting against the amendment tonight because it cannot successfully be shown, under the existing circumstances, that any State Government in Australia can have 100 per cent. effective control with respect to prices because there are so many factors, to which one can refer, that are outside the control of any State Government. Those factors, however, are concerned with the national economy and, therefore, can be resolved successfully only by the intervention of the national Government.

Mr. Hoar: Why did you take the power away from it?

Mr. SHEARN: I thought I made it clear that when the referendum was on I expressed my opinion merely by voting—and it is my own business how I voted. I was not called upon to advise the public how to vote in accordance with what was put forward by some of the parties. That is where an inestimable amount of damage was done. Without the active co-operation of the National Government with the State Governments there can be no successful solution of this problem. It is the responsibility of the State Governments to take the earliest possible opportunity of obtaining the co-operation of the Commonwealth Government in order that the factors associated with this important and urgent problem may be dealt with effectively. For those reasons I am unable to concede to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that he has put forward a case that would justify me in voting, as has been suggested tonight, to unseat the Government, which is no worse a position in regard to the fixation of prices than is any other of the Governments of Australia, some of which are Labour Governments.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I move—

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion put and negatived.

HON. F. J. S. WISE (Gascoyne—on amendment) [1.51 a.m.]: I do not wish to cast any reflections on the Chair, Mr. Speaker, but would observe that it is remarkable how many irrelevancies can creep into a discussion on a specific motion. The amendment is perfectly clear. It states concisely the failure of the Government to shoulder the responsibilities which it acknowledged and accepted. Unfortunately neither the Premier nor the Minister in charge of what is said to be price control attempted, in reply, to pay any attention to the statements that had been made, and that showed how clearly they had failed in their duty and had been recreant to the trust that the public reposed in them. I doubt if this Chamber has ever heard the Premier so weak in defence, or to such bad effect. He attempted first of all to comment on the fact that the Deputy Leader of this Party introduced the amendment, though he knew, of course, that that would not bear any examination from the point of view from which he was endeavouring to discredit it.

I would remind the Premier that when the Liberal Party, or what was left of it in 1933—I think seven members—were on this side of the House, and he sat in the centre seat now occupied by the member for Murchison, the Deputy Leader of that Party moved an amendment to the Address-in-reply, which was taken as a motion of no confidence. I can give other instances, to show how puerile was the first attempt to belittle what had been stated as a case, and how in his synthetic

rage and pretence he feigned surprise that this amendment should have emanated from whence it did. He said he had been given no notice of it. His statements fell so flat immediately that he attempted to adopt another attitude but, like most of the case he put forward, that approach was weak and irrelevant.

What were the Premier's excuses in reply to the case that was made out? They were that we were caught up in an inflationary spiral, that it was generally a postwar influence and that there was too much purchasing power in the hands of the people. Those were his words. On the subject to which he addressed himself at length, that of meat, he said that commodity was most difficult to control; that it was a most complex problem. Of course it is but, as with all other problems—simple or complex—that the Government has failed to tackle and has referred to someone else to solve, it ran true to form. The Minister, with his administrative ineptitude from this angle, was anxious that someone else should examine the position and recommend. As with most recommendations made to him, he let the matter rest there.

With regard to the much vaunted advisory committee to which he referred, I submit that it has no authority or power and that he takes no notice of it. The Minister in charge of prices is vested, under this statute, with as much authority as any Minister can have under an Act of Parliament. He is the one who directs and controls, or should direct and control what happens and what is intended to happen in this direction. The Premier, in his terse statement in relation to housing, told a pretty side of the story. What he did not say was that in 1947 housing costs in this State were the lowest in Australia. That was the start that this Government enjoyed in the matter of housing. In March, 1947, houses were being built in this State, by private enterprise and by the Housing Commission, at a cost of £87 per square. That was the official figure.

In spite of the misleading—you will not allow me to say lying, Mr. Speaker—statements in connection with housing, in spite of the advertisements that said how "prices rise with Wise"; in spite of advertisements deliberately misrepresenting what took place in an examination in the courts of this State, the price per square for building has risen from £87 in 1947 to something approaching £187 for contracts being accepted by the Housing Commission today. That is the position that we have reached with a Government that not only promised to control prices, as the member for Hannans clearly stated a few moments ago, but has also denied its responsibility and has not lived up to its promises or attempted to give effect to price control in this direction. If the Deputy Premier questions the figures I have given—I heard him discussing them with the Honorary Minister—I can prove what has taken place in the last fortnight, in connection with inquiries

made regarding house-building in my own district. It is no use trying to cover up the position.

The facts in regard to housing costs show how false were the representations made by the Government, how unfair was the criticism and how improperly it was based. The Premier said that in his view we were still enjoying the lowest house construction costs in Australia, but I say that is not so. It cannot be denied that the percentage increase in Western Australia is, in this regard, higher than that of any other State in the Commonwealth. Therefore, it is well to keep right on the spot in discussing this amendment and it is well to deal with the facts when giving consideration to it. The Premier concluded his vague and very weak statement by saying, "I do not know what else we could have done." What else the Government could have done were all the things that it promised to do and which it has not attempted to do under any circumstances—things that were outlined by the member for Melville and many others who have spoken to this amendment.

In his attempt to justify what he has not done, the Attorney General, in reply to what was stated from this side of the House, said that all discussions and decisions at joint conferences were such that they ensured an attitude, in each State, which did not vary in regard to giving effect ministerially to the decisions of those conferences. That is quite wrong. I can imagine the Attorney General at a conference; I can imagine him at the conference this week and when a decision rests between an increase in price being approved by the prices Ministers, or the Minister himself, being asked to make a decision or recommend one to his Government. I know which course he will follow. He will not take any responsibility himself but he will make sure that the majority agrees that there shall be a release of this or that commodity and an increase in its price. That is where our Minister stands.

What contribution has our prices Minister made at these conferences, which are held in rotation in every capital city of the Commonwealth? What contribution has he made to arrest the spiralling costs? I say he has made absolutely no contribution of a nature that would give to the people in this State any relief from the serious condition in which they find themselves because of uncontrolled prices. Although the Minister danced very diplomatically round the subject, when we see in cold print the contribution he has made we will see how ineffective was his attempt to reply to this amendment.

Let us look at the cover of the legislation in different States. The legislation in the different States is not uniform and it does not provide for uniformity of action. Its term is different in all States

and there is only one State that has a continuing Bill. Is that not so? I refer to the State of New South Wales. In the State of Tasmania it has two months to go and in Victoria they still do not know what to do about it. In Queensland it carries on for another six months and in this State it finishes on the 31st December. That is the position and, with Upper House domination in several States, goodness knows what might happen. This Government danced to the tune of the Upper House two years ago when I attempted to have the legislation continued until December, 1951. What happened? The Government, after accepting my amendment in this Chamber, was only too glad to agree with the Legislative Council's decision that it should not continue after the 31st December, 1950.

Therefore, the whole structure within the States, with the individual State Ministers making decisions to leave it to the decision of the Minister within the State, has meant that there is no uniformity and no effective price control within each State. Now we get back to the starting point and see what the Government is blamed for in this amendment. The Government is blamed for its ineffective control of the handling of the price-fixing legislation. It all comes back to the Government's promises—the things it is obliged to do if it is to keep faith with the electors.

Three years ago, and during this year, this Government claimed, firstly in 1947, that Labour robbed the housewives by allowing prices to rise and so put up the basic wage. That was a classic sentence put out in all Government advertising in 1947. What has the Government done about that? The housewife is certainly in a much more serious position today than she was before the Government made those promises; promises which it had no intention of honouring. The Liberal Party also said that it would keep down costs and prices, and would increase the purchasing power of money. As the member for Melville said—and he read an exact wording of it from the Premier's policy speech—the Liberal Party promised that if persons and housewives went into shops they would have an opportunity to buy not only what they wanted but they would also be able to buy at cheaper rates than they had enjoyed under the Labour regime.

What is the use of either the Premier or the Attorney General attempting to dance around the subject, giving no satisfaction at all in explanation of their guilt, of their administrative ineptitude and carelessness, of their lack of desire—I charge them with that—to face up to the situation. The Minister looks at the whole subject in a lackadaisical way and displays complete indifference. What is the answer? There is no answer which can

be any more than an excuse put forward by the Government on this most serious problem.

I will not flatter the Premier by saying that I have kept a copy of his photograph in the advertisements during the referendum campaign. He has his finger raised looking very much like a Shylock saying, "I tell you now the State Government has always controlled rents and will continue to control prices when the Canberra control ceases." On the question of price control, if it were left to the question of argument, the question of effectiveness or the question of honouring the Government's promises, then the Government has no answer and the result of this debate would not be in doubt. But, since it has decided, as the member for Maylands admitted—he will decide it from political considerations—then there is no other answer than that this amendment will be defeated. But, that does not exonerate the Government or give to the Government an opportunity to say that the people have endorsed its action at a recent election, which is questionable; nor does it give the Government the right to say that since it is the Government it will continue to do nothing about this question.

I hope that there will be a realisation by the Government that we on this side of the House are not carpingly critical of things all the time. Two years ago an offer was made to the Government from members on this side of the House to collaborate and co-operate on this very vital question. But nothing was done. Does the Premier remember that "The West Australian" wrote a leading article on the subject informing the Government that some attention should be given to the offer we made? Let us have a look at it, if we are honest about this question, from a non-Party angle, or else continue to pretend.

That is what the Government is doing in the matter; continuing to pretend, firstly, by evading the responsibility for what it said and, secondly, to pretend that the people are better off today in spite of the "C" index figures or those which the Minister used entirely disproving his whole contention. To give the facts, I will quote from the Quarterly Summary Bulletin. In 1947-48 the increase is 197 and up to the 30th September, 1949, in the six capital cities the average was 360 points, but it showed Perth to be 405. It is no use arguing against what is printed in the statistical register and the Minister, willfully or not, misquoted the figures in the "C" series index of that year because it clearly shows that the five towns average of Western Australia in the September quarter was 1,443, but the average for all other capitals was 1,428. No matter whether we take the food or grocery prices or any other index figures in the Statistical

Register, we will find that they are increasing by a far greater proportion than in any other State in Australia.

We knew what the fate of this amendment would be when it was launched, but we also knew that we had a great responsibility to the public of Western Australia who have been misled, a responsibility to the people who are suffering damaging effects because of the failure of the Government. From this side we say to the Government that with all our criticism on this subject, if the Government wants to let things drift then let it blame the international situation, let it blame anything except its ineptitude, and if it does then we cannot help it. However, if the Government will listen to what was suggested to it in the interests of this great country, and of its people who have no alternative but to suffer bitterly their limitations in spending power, if the Government will allow us to meet them in conference or in consultation on this subject, we may yet achieve something. I think that obstinacy on the part of the Premier and his Ministers will achieve nothing.

The Premier: Not obstinacy; I offered to do as you have suggested when I was speaking.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: Then why did the Premier not do it when we suggested it two years ago? Do not let it be mere words; let it be the practising of thought and policy from both sides of the House, and thus achieve much in the interests of all our people. I do not agree at all with the Minister that all legislation arising out of a crisis has to be regarded as temporary. Those are his own words that he used when the Bill was before the House. I suggest to him that something in the nature of permanency of the 1939 Profiteering Prevention Act is what he should again look at and accept individual responsibility for, and not thrust it aside because that offers the easy way out. To sum up, I would say that if the Government will look honestly at the wording of the amendment it will see in it a responsibility it must accept, but in its acceptance has fallen very far short of the requirements which are due to the public and of its duty to them.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION (Hon. A. F. Watts—Stirling—on amendment) [2.15]: If there was one thing which was hammered by the member for Northam at the sitting before this one—I had better not say yesterday—it was the question of the advisory committee and the necessity for having three prices commissioners and one of them being a representative of the consumer. If the hon. gentlemen mentioned those last words once, I think they will be found about six or eight times at least in the course of his speech. Therefore, as he seemed to attach considerable importance to his views

on the question of three commissioners as opposed to the advisory committee, and as he saw fit to offer some criticism of one member of this House who had not acceded to his proposition when he made it in 1948, I propose now to clear the matter up.

I would remind the hon. gentleman that in 1939 he introduced to this Assembly the first measure which was brought into the Western Australian Parliament, as far as I can ascertain, dealing with the control of prices. That Act, if I remember rightly, was called the Profiteering Prevention Act. I have examined all the remarks made by the hon. member on that occasion and the measure which was passed by the House, and in neither instance do I find any suggestion for or reference to the appointment of more than one commissioner. Nor do I find any suggestion for the appointment even of an advisory committee.

So I ask myself, early though the hour may be, why does the hon. member now suggest that the solution of this problem is to be found in something as to which he, in contemplation of the war which had then broken out, and obviously in contemplation of the state of affairs relating to prices, made no reference in the measure and so neglected it in his speeches. So I cannot resist saying that the hon. gentleman has only hammered this question of the appointment of three commissioners in order that he might find at least some intention for the criticism which he felt inclined to level at the Government on this matter.

At this stage, too, I have had great reason to realise the considerable service that has been rendered not only to the Government, but also to the State, by the members of the advisory committee and particularly by the chairman. As is well known to most members of this House, there have been occasions when, in the absence of the Attorney General, I have acted in his place, and on those occasions I have had opportunity to discuss many matters concerning prices, not only with the Prices Commissioner, but also with the chairman of the advisory committee.

I have no hesitation whatever in saying that the member of that committee who sits as the representative of the consumers, in the course of the 15 meetings which took place between October, 1948, and June, 1949, was fully competent in all the matters—and they were varied—which came before the committee, to put forward, and he did put forward, the case of the consumer where he considered it necessary. The chairman has spent many long hours in investigations in his anxiety and sincerity to ensure that no increases in prices are passed on as a result of any advice which might be tendered by his committee to the people of this State.

Perhaps it might be as well for me to offer some testimony from a person who, perhaps, can be regarded as a great deal more unbiased than I, and that is the Public Service Commissioner. When the question arose as to what remuneration, if any, should be paid to the chairman of this committee and to individual members of it, the matter was referred to the Public Service Commissioner. Everyone knows that the Public Service Commissioner is absolutely untrammelled by the Government. He is responsible to Parliament. His recommendations cannot lightly be turned aside. He accepts no control as to what his recommendations shall be. In his minute, which I have perused, he described in the highest possible terms the services that had been rendered by Mr. C. W. Court, the chairman of the advisory committee, and he went to great length in referring to the very considerable services he had rendered in the interests of price control in Western Australia.

For people to come here and speak in this House, members who are supposed to be men of responsibility, and to suggest that those on the committee had done nothing, that they had indicated no authority or activity and had made no contribution whatever to an effort to agree to the barest rises in prices that are essential and which have to be passed on to the consumers, is to talk absolute nonsense. All those three gentlemen, in their several capacities, and particularly the chairman, because of the considerable amount of investigational work he has had to do in respect of between 25 and 30 different types of industries, earn for them, in my opinion, not censure, not criticism, but the gratitude of the people of this State.

One would imagine that Western Australia was the only place where there had been any increase in prices—if we were to accept at their face value the observations of some members opposite. Of course, everybody knows that that is not so. Possibly sufficient has been said on that subject to indicate that rises in other States in the main as great or, in some instances, even greater, have taken place. One would be inclined to believe, hearing some members opposite, that during the regime of the Commonwealth in respect of price control there were no increases in prices in this State or in the Commonwealth itself.

I am a bit tired of percentages, and I have been trying to secure some figures regarding the difference in prices since the beginning of the war in 1939 to the end of June, 1948, which was just before the close of Commonwealth control, and to get those figures in terms of £ s. d. that we can all understand. I can assure members that the figures I am about to give are from an authentic source. These show the comparative prices as follows:—

Butter (lb.)—1939, 1s. 7d.; 1948, 1s. 11½d.

The price of butter was kept to that figure only by the payment of a subsidy of 5d. per lb.

Plum jam (tin)—1939, 7½d.; 1948, 1s. 1½d.

Sago (lb.)—1939, 3d.; 1948, 1s. 6d.

I admit that that is a difficult item.

Canned peaches (tin)—1939, 10½d.; 1948, 1s. 5d.

Salmon (tin)—1939, 1s. 1½d.; 1948, 1s. 10½d.

Mince-meat (lb.)—1939, 4d.; 1948, 10½d.

Sausages (lb.)—1939, 6d.; 1948, 10d.

Rump steak (lb.)—1939, 11d.; 1948, 1s. 11½d.

Milk (quart)—1939, 6d.; 1948, 7½d.

Lettuce—1939, 4d. to 7d.; 1948, 1s. to 1s. 6d.

Cauliflower—1939, 6d.; 1948, 2s. 6d.

Home furniture—

Kitchen suite, comparable kind—1939, £15 10s.; 1948, £26.

Lounge suite—1939, £32 10s.; 1948, £52 10s.

Bedroom suite—1939, £26 10s.; 1948, £47 10s.

Lady's overcoat—1939, £8 8s.; 1948, £14 14s.

Man's suit—1939, £5 10s.; 1948, £9.

Mr. J. Hegney: When was that?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: These comparative figures are for 1939 and 1948, and I said that they applied to comparable lines.

Sports coat—1939, £2 5s.; 1948, £3 10s.

Shirts—1939, 12s. 6d.; 1948, £1 7s. 6d.

Shoes—1939, 18s.; 1948, £1 16s.

House frocks—1939, 10s. 6d.; 1948, £1 15s.

Thus we find that in that period during which there was a measure of control in this State—first under the legislation introduced by the member for Northam and known as the Profiteering Prevention Act, and subsequently for a larger part of the time controlled by Commonwealth legislation—the figures show that very considerable increases in prices of these types of commodities, as well as in respect of many others, did take place. And that, let it be remembered, was at a period when the Commonwealth was in a position to, and did, peg wages and prices, which, of course, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any State legislature or Government to undertake. Notwithstanding its ability to pay subsidies, which were subsequently cancelled, to the extent of £25,000,000 or more, as soon as the State Governments took over control, and notwithstanding its ability to peg wages and prices, there were still, over a period of years, price rises which, in some instances, were as much as 100 per cent. Therefore, let it not be thought by anyone that rises in prices have been occasioned only since, by the verdict of the people, the States took over the responsibility for price control.

I have made use of the expression "by verdict of the people." I do not refer in that respect to the people of Western Australia alone. It has been suggested in this House quite a number of times by various members, as I understood them, that, because people who were in charge of the government of the State in 1948 took the opportunity of expressing their opinions in opposition to the permanent—and I repeat that word "permanent"—transfer of powers to the Commonwealth in connection with price control, we are apparently responsible for the imposition, or rather what members opposite regard as the imposition, upon the people of Australia, of State control of prices. It was nothing of the kind.

There are six States in the Commonwealth and in 1948 three of them had Labour Governments and three had not. I have no doubt whatever, in fact I know, that the members of the Labour Party in the States of Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania exhorted their people to vote, "Yes." Did the people of those States vote "Yes"? If there was a dumping of the Commonwealth proposal in any State, it was in Queensland where a Labour Government had been in office for a decade or more, and where there was no Legislative Council. In that State 138,681 persons voted "Yes" and 289,728 persons voted "No," a majority for "No" of 151,047 or, if I may so express it, a majority of 110 per cent.

In New South Wales, where there was a Labour Government also exhorting the people of that community to vote "Yes" and allow the Commonwealth to retain permanent power of control over prices, the voting was 623,299 "Yes" and 825,482 "No," a majority for "No" of 203,183. In Tasmania, where the governmental conditions were similar, the figures were 43,629 "Yes" and 81,179 "No," or almost double the "Yes" figure. In South Australia where, on the contrary, there had been a Government not of the Labour Party, I think for more than a decade, 149,655 voted "Yes" and 196,146 voted "No," a majority of only 46,491 for "No." In Victoria where there was also a Government of the same type, the voting was 504,477 "Yes" and 609,701 "No." Thus both actually and by percentages the "No" voting in Victoria and South Australia was considerably less than in the States which had Labour Governments.

I think I heard the member for Warren a moment ago observe something about what the Liberal and Country Parties might have done in New South Wales. Might I suggest that they were in a similar position to the Labour Party here, and I have yet to learn that the Labour Party in Western Australia was muzzled. Its members were as able and competent to express their point of view to the electors as were their confreres in New South Wales and Queensland. The whole result

showed the very reasonable commonsense of the Australian people, who were not prepared to pass over to the Commonwealth for all time the right to administer this particular matter.

I have no hesitation in saying that, had the Commonwealth put forward a proposal for a reasonable limited period, my own opinion would have been open to reconsideration and the verdict of the Australian people might have been different. This does not mean to say that I submit or admit that control since that time has been in any way deficient as compared with the circumstances existing before that time when, as I have already said, the Commonwealth had the right to peg wages and prices and did peg them, and when it had the money to pay subsidies and did pay them. Later, for reasons best known to the Commonwealth, it took the opportunity to withdraw the subsidies, which inflicted a very considerable number of control difficulties upon the State Governments immediately.

I have no doubt whatever that the control which has been exercised by the six prices Ministers of different political complexions—as the Attorney General said, without party politics entering into their deliberations—has reflected credit upon them and upon the Commissioners who have served them. I say quite frankly that we in Western Australia have a commissioner who was one of the most capable if not the most capable of the Commonwealth Deputy Commissioners. He has assured me in the course of conversation that the methods adopted by him in this State, which have never been contravened by any Minister of the Government, are precisely the same and are precisely as effective as the methods that were employed under the Commonwealth setup.

The member for Mt. Hawthorn this evening took some exception to the fact that he was told there were 71 inspectors and that the Minister, in his speech, had said there were about 25. I interjected that the Minister was referring to the inspectors engaged on meat inquiries, and that happens to be the position. Over 20 persons, according to the Prices Commissioner, have been engaged in attempting to detect offences against the meat price regulations, with the result that a very considerable number of prosecutions have been launched, but the very great difficulties attending that form of detection are best realised by those who have had some experience of it, and not by those people who stand off at a reasonable distance and try to make us believe it is an easy job to detect offences of this sort.

Does the hon. gentleman, who made some reference to the ineffectiveness of these officers of the department, realise that, just as with other forms of offence, the ingenuity of the offender may be as

great as the ingenuity of those who are out to track him down? I am saying this, not because I suggest that the operations of these officers have been wholly successful—that would be ridiculous—but because I suggest that it is not true and not reasonable to say that no attempt has been made, as has been stated in half a dozen places in this House, to track them down. I know perfectly well that many and genuine attempts have been made and, if they have not been wholly successful, it is not through lack of effort.

I should like to deal for a moment with the observations of the member for Melville about groceries. He referred to the margin of 22 per cent. Since he spoke, I have made a point of discussing the matter with the Prices Commissioner, because I was not informed of the facts before and I wished to inform myself on the subject as authentically as possible. I mentioned a few moments ago that Mr. Mathea was Deputy Commissioner of the Commonwealth for a number of years before State control, and consequently is well aware of what took place under the Commonwealth system.

Under Commonwealth control the grocers' margins were always worked on 22 per cent. and it is not considered by him that any lesser margin under modern conditions would enable business to be effectively carried on, particularly by small business men. This, he said, was considered to be fair and was Australia-wide. Prices which made up this overall margin of 22 per cent. were reviewed from time to time to preserve the margin. When it was agreed last year to make this review, the grocers claimed that the overall margin had fallen far below the figure of 22 per cent. and asked for an investigation. It was the common practice, even under the Commonwealth system; and, in the opinion of the Prices Commissioner, the only fair thing to do when a statement of that nature was made was to have such an investigation. Accordingly he readily agreed that it should be done.

The investigation included an examination of the books of about 50 shops and a close dissection of the profits derived from groceries as separate from other lines such as liquor, tobacco, etc. that might be sold in those shops. Approximately 50 per cent. of the items could not be altered because, under the arrangement of the Prices Ministers, they were all-Australia prices. So an adjustment had to be made on those items other than the Australia-wide lines. In the result, it was found that the overall deficiency was approximately two per cent. and an adjustment was made accordingly. No direction of any kind, he assures me, was given him on the subject. It is hardly necessary at this stage for me to say that, in view of the observations of the Attorney General himself. But as it might be claimed at some future time that

when I have been acting in the Attorney General's place I have given some such direction, let me say that Mr. Mathea has made it quite plain that no such directions have been given to him in matters of this kind at any time.

The margarine question was submitted to him by the member for Melville. As Mr. Mathea understood the position, the submission was made on behalf of the manufacturers of margarine, who had discovered that, as a result of the adjustment upward of margarine and the non-rationing of butter, their business was liable to be detrimentally affected. In consequence, Mr. Mathea informs me, the matter was given consideration, and he formed the opinion that the increases allowed upon margarine in the case of this investigation in regard to the 22 per cent. were made in error and should be rectified. Accordingly he had it rectified, but in order to keep the schedule of 22 per cent. going, he was obliged to replace it by some other item; and, after careful consideration and without regard to the fact that it was or was not included in the regimen for the fixing of the basic wage, he utilised honey as a suitable item to square up the account.

So what appeared from the speech of the member for Melville to be some enormous transgression of the decencies, shall we say, in this matter; what appeared to be a deliberate forcing of the Prices Commissioner to confer a benefit upon some trading section of the community, small though it be, turned out upon inquiry to be the normal thing which has been done by the Prices Commissioner under a system which he operated over a period of years and which he tells me is still the best than can be applied in Australia. That is what a great deal of the assertions made in this House amount to. They are founded largely upon supposition. They have little or no substance in them.

I say, as representing the Government, that there is no suggestion of our initiating any proposal for the abolition of price control. But to hear the member for Mt. Hawthorn, one would believe that we had decided long ago upon such a course. That is absolutely sheer nonsense. It is true that the legislation will have to be re-enacted, and I trust it will be. I believe it will be, because I feel perfectly satisfied that under the present administration in the department, under the present Prices Commissioner and the staff which he has, renewed and continued efforts will be made to do the best that can be done in this extremely complex problem.

I turn for a moment to the question of housing costs. I certainly cannot understand the references by the Leader of the Opposition to the increases in the prices per square from 1947 to 1950 from £87 to

£187. Answers to questions that are given in this House are, as everybody knows, generally prepared by responsible departmental officers. In consequence, they are given by Ministers of the Crown in full faith and confidence as to their correctness. On the 17th August, the member for East Perth asked the Minister in charge of Housing the following questions:—

What is the average cost of building four and five-roomed brick and wooden houses by—

(a) contract;

The Minister replied:

(a) The cost per square as at January, 1950, of contract built houses is as follows:—

Base Type 7A, two bedroom, brick, £136 10s. per square; timber, £135 2s. per square.

Base Type 56B, three bedroom, brick, £128 10s. per square; timber, £126 7s. 6d. per square.

The increase in price since that date is approximately 6 per cent.

I have worked out the 6 per cent. and it makes the £136 10s., £144 and the £128 10s., £136. While it may be true that in isolated cases such as the Gascoyne district, which like other parts of the North-West is noticeable for the difficulties involved in erecting any building there at all and the increased costs; while it may be perfectly true that the figure there is as suggested by the hon. gentleman—and I am not denying it, not having the facts—the truth is that the price per square in the metropolitan area for the usual types of dwelling being erected, both two and three-bedroom types, does not exceed £144.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Pre-cut or pre-fabricated?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: Neither.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I have a son-in-law building a house under private contract at £190 per square and he could not get it for any lower.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: We will have to go into the individual case to solve this problem.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Yes.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: But certainly, working on the Housing Commission's transactions, which is the only authentic information the Government can supply, the figures are those I have given and I do not propose to endeavour to remodel them in any way to suit anybody.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: No, you evade the point.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: No, I do not. I do not doubt that the figure of £87 used by the Leader of the Opposition was that of the Housing Commission, and it is fair to compare other figures of the Housing Commission with it. I do not suppose it was impossible, when houses were being built at £87 per square, for me to have found someone who paid £100 per square, but I thought comparable figures should be taken in comparable circumstances, and that it was proper to take Housing Commission v. Housing Commission. Nothing else would be a fair guide as to what has taken place in the interim.

I feel a great deal can be said on this question of the price per square of houses when one realises the substantial increase in population in this State in the last two or three years. I submit that in 1947 nobody suspected that the population of Western Australia would increase at the rate it has, or that the demand for this kind of service would be as great as it is. Obviously it would have been impossible to step up the house-building rate to the position it is in today had it not been for the extensive importation of housing materials. They have been imported publicly, to some degree, and privately to a large extent, at greatly increased costs.

I venture to say that the cost of imported galvanised iron is 100 per cent. above the normal Australian price. To say it was undesirable that such action should be taken, to me seems extremely foolish because it is within my memory—in the last 15 months or so—that I received a letter from the well-known firm of Lysaghts stating that it was extremely unlikely, in view of industrial troubles and other difficulties, that any considerable quantities of galvanised corrugated iron could be supplied to Western Australia, or anywhere else, for some months. That is the type of difficulty that one has to face up to all the time.

Mr. Chifley, himself, during the course of the last coal strike in New South Wales authorised advertisements, filling a whole page in every newspaper in the Commonwealth, pointing out the dire results of these things on production and the country's economy. But we have to face up to the proposition of either increasing costs or having less houses. Now, what would you have done, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. W. Hegney: But you were going to keep prices down.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: That is very clever of the member for Mt. Hawthorn.

Mr. W. Hegney: It is true.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: It is extremely clever. I commenced by saying that nobody in 1947 expected a state of affairs such as subsequently existed due, mainly, to the substantial increase in population.

Mr. W. Hegney: Some people in 1947 would not admit there had been a war to affect such things.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: If one comes to a conclusion upon a certain set of circumstances, and those circumstances subsequently change completely, then I claim that one is entitled to form fresh conclusions, and that is what I am suggesting in this case. To resume my theme, Mr. Speaker, I said that only one of two alternatives could be taken, namely, that we should considerably reduce the number of homes, or run the risk of increasing the cost by importing materials. I do not say that has covered the whole of the increased cost, but it has made a substantial contribution towards it. The balance has been made up by items which would have been no more under the control of the hon. gentleman opposite than any other man; and the position generally would be no more under his control than it is in New South Wales where, I believe, the cost per house is approximately £210 to £220 per square.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: I do not think you are reasonable in posing these questions to Mr. Speaker when he has no right to reply.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: One has to address the Chair, as the hon. member knows and I am sure Mr. Speaker is well-used to this sort of address; indeed it would be extraordinary if he were not because the member for Northam frequently uses it himself. I do not propose to dwell on this subject any longer. I am quite satisfied that the Government's efforts in this matter have been genuine.

I have no qualms of conscience, as a member of the Government, for any lack of thought in this matter, because, as the Premier said, we did give consideration, and spent a long time on it, to the possibility and the desirability of attempting to peg prices, but we found, in view of the considerable export and import trade of this Australia of ours, and particularly of Western Australia, that it was almost impossible and would get almost immediately out of hand. That would result from the fact that so many of our commodities come from outside the State. There is no question that the prices of our primary products are governed by overseas markets. I am very glad that the farmers of Australia have at last, after many lean years, had a year or two when they could say they had paid tax on a few hundred pounds. But I do admit that this must have some effect on our general economy by substantially increasing the purchasing power of our people.

I repeat that I have no regrets as to the action of the Government. There has been no ineffectiveness or inability in this matter any more than in any other. I consider that just as good service has been done in Western Australia as in any

other State, and what has been done by the State Governments in all the circumstances is as much as could have been done or was done by the Commonwealth Labour Government.

MR. GRAHAM (East Perth—on amendment) [2.57]: It requires no apology for one to address oneself to this question even at this hour of the morning. I say that deliberately because of the importance of the issue and because, to a great extent, of the self-satisfied attitude on the part of those on the other side of the House who have spoken. It is all very well for people who have considerable incomes, or supplementary incomes, to treat with disdain and without apparent concern, the repeated sharp rises in the prices of essential commodities, but we, on this side of the House, depending entirely upon a single income, and always associating with those in the lower economic strata, have some idea of the significance and importance of this issue. It is my intention to address some remarks to the member for Roe shortly.

The most remarkable part of this debate, which to my mind bears out precisely the contention of the Opposition, is that both the Premier and the Minister for Education have shown a more detailed and intimate knowledge of the work and activities of the Prices Branch than has the Minister who is in charge of it. That, surely, is apparent to everyone in this Chamber, and I suggest it exemplifies the criticism of members of the Opposition, that the Minister in charge has displayed no interest in the work of his department. He has made no sincere endeavour to see that there is an effective form of prices control.

There seemed to be a tinge of remorse in the words of the Minister for Education. He realises now that what we said with regard to prices 2½ years ago was perfectly true. He endeavours now to ease his conscience by suggesting that, in the referendum of 1948, when the people of this country were so woefully and deliberately misled by the Liberal and Country Parties, for the purpose of securing a mean political advantage without any thought for the welfare of the people, had the then Federal Labour Government sought to control prices for a limited period only, the Liberal and Country parties would have given support to such a proposal. We know perfectly well that no State Government in the Commonwealth, irrespective of political complexion, is capable of controlling prices properly. That is generally acknowledged and was stated from every political platform in Australia by Labour speakers. Facing members on this side of the House are others, part of an organisation which misled the people into believing that State Governments

could effectively control prices. We therefore make the charge that they have been responsible for and are the root cause of all the ills that beset us at present.

We have heard a lot of the reasons for or causes of increased prices, and we can agree with them, but I am more concerned with the lackadaisical, half-hearted and insincere attempts of the Minister in control of prices to control prices and prevent exploitation. I will give examples to demonstrate that point. The Minister for Education chided the member for Northam because, when he introduced the Bill for the Profiteering Prevention Act in 1939, he included in it no provision for three prices commissioners. That is perfectly true, but I now ask the Minister for Education: Have we learnt nothing from the experience of 10 years of price control? Surely it is possible to detect weaknesses and supply additional provisions to safeguard the rights and livelihood of the people of the country.

Our complaint, in view of the experience of the years, is that the consumers have no say whatever when applications are made for an increase of price of either goods or services. It is the very interests who seek the increases that make the representations, and they only. The consumers are never invited to submit their point of view and so we have in fact a tribunal—the Prices Branch—where all the evidence is submitted from one side. That is grossly unfair. I do not intend to traverse ground covered by me in earlier speeches, demonstrating without a shadow of doubt that false figures and alleged facts that were submitted bore no relationship whatever to the true position. Yet the Prices Branch, to my mind one of the most inefficient Government departments that this State has ever had—notwithstanding the remarks of several Ministers—without hesitation granted increases that surprised even those who made the applications.

Mr. W. Hegney: Prompted by the Government.

Mr. GRAHAM: That is the position. Commercial interests are represented because only they tender evidence. The attitude of the Minister is based on false premises, and that remark is not confined to him alone. There seems to be a feeling abroad that if goods become available in considerable quantities—in other words, if the period of short supply is overcome—there is then no longer any need for price control. Only the veriest tyro would accept such a proposition. One of the greatest factors contributing to overcharging is the shortage of business premises. Since the outbreak of war the population of Western Australia has increased by something between 80,000 and 100,000 souls and there are, practically speaking, only the same number of business premises available now as there were in 1939.

In bygone times if there was any exploitation it was a simple matter for some opposition to open a business a little further down the street or round the corner, but nowadays premises are not available for renting and it is practically impossible to secure a permit to erect new premises. The same number of business establishments have now to meet the needs of 80,000 additional customers and, with that increased demand, the natural tendency must be for the price of goods to go upwards, irrespective of the quantity of goods available. There is no real competition at the present time.

The Minister, in his wisdom, a few months ago removed hairdressing charges from price control. Speaking of the prices applying to men only, haircuts were increased from 2s. to 2s. 3d. That represented a total increase of approximately 50 per cent. over a period of about two years, because the price of a haircut was only 1s. 6d. up to two years ago. That increase was decided upon at a meeting of the Master Hairdressers, by the simple process of passing a resolution. The figure arrived at could easily have been 2s. 6d. or 3s. and no-one could have done anything about it other than pay. As I have said, there are no more premises available now than there were years ago and therefore anyone who sought to open a new hairdressing establishment could not do so.

In addition to that, in 1946, this Parliament passed legislation granting protection to hairdressers so as to make it impossible, as was the case previously, for anybody to open establishments and commence cutting hair. Therefore, those people had the protection of this Parliament—that is the law of the land—and they had the protection of a virtual monopoly in the same way as have hotels at present, granted not by a licensing court but by the shortage of accommodation. Yet the Minister for Prices removes control from their charges and the population of this State is left to their tender mercies. So it will be seen that there is no proper approach to or appreciation of the problem which confronts us.

I know that the Minister himself, and I dare say his colleagues, are not in the least disturbed because of the example I have just given. It could be repeated many times, but to those who draw the slender wages and have the smaller incomes, all these significant increases are of tremendous moment and importance. As has already been pointed out, the basic wage does not take into account the great majority of everyday incidental and inescapable commitments of the average citizen. Therefore, the Minister for Prices is an accessory to this type of thing that is going on. I know what he and his department usually throw back. They say that in the other States of the Commonwealth prices are even higher than they are here.

That may be so, but surely that attitude presupposes that because they are higher in another State prices control here means nothing but a device to enable us to chase those higher prices that exist elsewhere. In other words, it is something of an auction sale, or a race between the various States, to see who can reach the highest peak.

I have stated that no serious attempt is being made to control prices. I have in my hand, which I can pass to the Minister for Prices, a docket given to a person in a country town. Incidentally, during the time the present Minister has been in charge, I do not think one single inspection has been made in this country town by officers of his department. Locally-grown onions had a maximum price of 4½d. per lb. and in this country town the maximum price was 5½d. per lb. This is merely an example and is typical of what is going on everywhere, but no check is made by the Minister or his department. Here, quite coolly, for all the world to see, is written, "1 lb. of onions, 1s." That is more than twice as much as the maximum permitted. No attempt whatever was made to hide that breach of the law.

Judging by his demeanour at the moment, the Minister is not in any way interested or concerned, and that has been his attitude throughout the whole period he has supposedly been controlling prices. There are other items appearing on this docket, including half a pound of tomatoes for 1s. 4d. The date of that docket is the 8th July of this year. That is common to many commodities in many towns in Western Australia, and yet nothing whatever is being done about it.

Members have probably read, or listened to, advertisements about a brand of soap that is supposed to make film stars extra beautiful—two large bath-size cakes for 1s. 3d. is the ordinary price. I presume, in view of the extensive advertising programme engaged in by this firm, that it is still making plenty in addition to paying for that advertising. Yet we find that within the last couple of weeks the firm has advertised that a pocket comb, which can be bought for 6d. in town, is given away free in a special pack with two cakes of this brand of soap. For a firm to be able to give what is 1s. 9d. worth of goods for the ordinary retail price of 1s. 3d.—and there has been no diminution in the volume of ordinary advertising done by this concern—demonstrates surely that the price of soap and/or the price of combs is excessive in the extreme.

Mr. Nimmo: Not necessarily.

Mr. GRAHAM: Once again, the Minister is not in any way interested or impressed.

Hon. A. H. Panton: He has been trying the soap; look how beautiful he is.

Mr. Hoar: The Minister has had it.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: And we have had him.

Mr. GRAHAM: The Minister for Education seemed to get a little worked up about building costs. To oblige him I will use his own figures, but perhaps the conclusions to be drawn will not be in accordance with his desires. Early last year, the Leader of the Opposition asked questions of the then Minister for Housing which revealed that the prices, in 1947, for a 4-roomed house and a 5-roomed house, constructed of brick, were respectively £88 19s. 3d. per square, and £83 2s. 9d. a square. From the figures given to me the other day by the present Minister for Housing, those costs have risen to £144 14s. and £136 4s. Those are the figures supplied in this Chamber in answer to questions, and they reveal that since January, 1947, there has been an increase of 63 per cent. in the cost of a square for the erection of a 4-roomed house, and 64 per cent. in the case of a 5-roomed house. If that is a pointer, or indicates the efficacy of our price control system, then there is something wrong. One should never refrain from repeating that it was this Government, both on the hustings and during the referendum campaign, which made the extravagant statements that prices would be kept down; or, alternatively, that the State could perform a far better service than the Commonwealth, because it was close at hand and had a more comprehensive and detailed knowledge of local affairs.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Easy to get at.

Mr. GRAHAM: Easier to be got at was probably what was intended. The Minister for Education quoted certain figures showing the increases between the years 1939 and 1948. Those were the years when the Commonwealth Government was in control of prices, and under its control prices in Australia were kept in check far more satisfactorily than in any other country in the world, but no such proud boast can be made now. In fact, throughout the whole of the war period when there was purchasing power aplenty—lots of it in dollars—and when there was a shortage of practically every conceivable commodity which made the ratio of spending money available as compared with the supply of goods much greater than it is at present, prices were kept under quite efficient control. Also, during the period that the Commonwealth Government controlled prices there was an increase of 22 per cent. only in the basic wage.

I daresay the basic wage can generally be accepted as being an approximate index of the general trend upwards or downwards of the price level. The period of less than two years, since the Common-

wealth Government has relinquished control of prices, has brought about increases in the general price level as is demonstrated by the basic wage increase of slightly over 22 per cent. compared with the 1948 figures. Therefore, throughout the difficult years of the war with money unlimited and goods of every description in short supply, the prices in Australia rose by a lesser amount than they have in a period of just under two years. And this by a State Government which said that it could so effectively control prices!

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Do you think the Minister for Education knew that when he quoted his figures?

Mr. GRAHAM: He probably did not, but he is being informed now. It is possible that he did know because he quoted the figures from 1939 to 1948, but for some reason he omitted to bring his figures up to date by dealing with the figures from 1948 up to the present.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Would you not say that he did that deliberately?

Mr. GRAHAM: My answer would be in the affirmative.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: The answer is "Yes."

Mr. GRAHAM: As I stated earlier I was interested in the remarks of the member for Roe. I do not intend to traverse the argument that he adduced, but he made a statement to which all members on this side of the House could rightly take exception, particularly in view of two utterances which he made. Firstly, he said that communists are strongly in favour of price control and the pegging of prices. He immediately followed up by saying that price control is an offshoot of socialism which is the policy of the Labour Party. I thought that was a rather subtle way of suggesting that there is some affinity between the Communist Party and the Labour Party when he knows—and he should be honest enough to admit it—that there is nothing of the kind.

In season and out of season Labour has always fought against communism whilst the Liberal Party has always made a mock fight only to win elections. He is criticising hon. members on this side of the House because we believe in price control, not merely for the sake of keeping on controls but to protect the poorer sections of the community who are least able to protect themselves. These we do not want to expose to the hungry business people generally who seek to exploit the people. If we go to the other extreme and say that the Liberal Party and, it would appear the Country Party also, is in favour of a policy of laissez faire and can find nothing wrong in preying upon and exploiting the weak, then we find in it the type of outlook and the state of mind that has, throughout the ages, supported the despotic forms of "Govern-

ment"—if I might misuse that word—that have operated in many parts of the world even up to recent times.

At the present moment when there is a definite trend towards monopolies and combines, towards trusts and cartels, there is every need for permanent legislation, to use whenever it is necessary for the protection and the welfare of the people whom we are supposed to represent and whom the Ministers are sworn to defend and protect. It is all very well for those who occupy seats in this Parliament, who have wool cheques of many thousands of pounds to supplement their Parliamentary incomes and those who have investments and other forms of income, to treat with disdain this question of the increase in prices. What difference does it make to them if the price of a shirt rises by a couple of shillings, that the price of a haircut rises by 6d., or if any other commodity increases in price? However, it affects the very sustenance and livelihood of the people from whom we on this side of the House are drawn, and we would be recreant to our trust if we did not expose to the public gaze as far as is possible, bearing in mind the strictures of the Press, the attitude and the apathy of the Minister for Prices, aided and abetted by his colleagues, because the Premier must know perfectly well that the Attorney General is in no way interested in this matter and if he is doing his job as Premier—

The Premier: He knows nothing of the sort.

Mr. GRAHAM: —he would have long ago taken steps to see that a Minister who had his heart and soul in the work was appointed to take over this important portfolio. We have, on many occasions from this side of the House, drawn the attention of the Minister to breaches of this so-called price control but nothing has come of it. I know that certain members on the other side of the House are not as fortunately placed as some of their colleagues, and I am particularly referring to the new and younger members. They must realise full well by now, or if not they will very shortly, that they are very small fry. There are big boys of the Liberal Party's organisation, the chief of whom are not members of this Parliament. When certain decisions are arrived at and instructions are given, they must be obeyed implicitly.

The Minister for Works: Have you not some big boys in your own party?

Mr. GRAHAM: Those young men who are sitting behind the Government will realise on very many occasions that, in order to serve their masters who act behind the scenes, it will be necessary for them to betray the trust placed in them by ordinary people who, shall I say, so misguidedly voted for them. The effect is that it entails a most difficult task on our

part to enlighten the people, particularly because of the attitude of the daily Press. As regards the report that appeared in this morning's "West Australian" of the remarks delivered by the member for Northam in moving this well-warranted amendment, it was a disgrace to any journal to publish what appeared as purporting to be a fair representation of a very able speech.

The Premier: They gave him the headlines! What have you to complain about?

Hon. A. H. Panton: That is about all.

Mr. GRAHAM: It will not be possible for a long time, at any rate, for members of the Liberal Party, particularly the younger ones, to carry out in the interests of the people some of their obligations to those they represent. The issue is before us. The Government falsely and deliberately informed the people of Western Australia by every possible means at its command that it could effectively control prices. Yet we are aware, because of the indisputable facts and figures that we have submitted to the Chamber, of the hopeless mess it has made, in common with State Governments elsewhere throughout the Commonwealth, on account of the apparent inability of those Governments to deal with the problem. We have demonstrated, as the Minister himself has revealed, his lack of interest and knowledge of the department and its activities.

If we for a moment consider the interests and welfare of the people and in the interests of Parliament itself, there is one course only open to conscientious members, and that is to show their deep concern for the people and their appreciation of the evidence that has been adduced, by voting in favour of the amendment that has been so ably moved by the member for Northam whose speech, unfortunately, was almost completely ignored and certainly was misreported in "The West Australian" this morning. I close on this note that the members on the Government side of the House who sit smugly and content, safe in the knowledge—irrespective of what facts are produced by Opposition members, irrespective of the strength of their arguments—that they can depend upon the blue pencil of the official organ of the Liberal Party, which is thrown over the fences of practically every home each morning, to water down what is said or what is brought forward in the course of indisputable facts that have been related, and to ignore altogether those things that are regarded as likely to carry some weight with the people.

Surely we are not going to offer ourselves at a price, controlled or uncontrolled. Surely there are times when important issues are before the people, times such as this when we are in a hell of a mess—if I may use the term—and there is no indication whatever that the Minister in charge or the Government as a whole

feels there is anything wrong, irrespective of the abundance of evidence to the contrary, such men should rally and give some thought to the interests of the people and record their votes at the division that is to be taken shortly, in support of the amendment which is before us.

Amendment put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	....	....	....	....	23
Noes	....	....	....	....	26
Majority against					3

Ayes.

Mr. Brady	Mr. Needham
Mr. Coverley	Mr. Nulsen
Mr. Fox	Mr. Oliver
Mr. Graham	Mr. Panton
Mr. Guthrie	Mr. Rodoreda
Mr. Hawke	Mr. Sewell
Mr. J. Hegney	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. W. Hegney	Mr. Styants
Mr. Hoar	Mr. Tonkin
Mr. Marshall	Mr. Wise
Mr. May	Mr. Kelly
Mr. McCulloch	

(Teller.)

Noes.

Mr. Abbott	Mr. McLarty
Mr. Ackland	Mr. Nalder
Mr. Brand	Mr. Nimmo
Mrs. Cardell-Oliver	Mr. Owen
Mr. Cornell	Mr. Perkins
Mr. Doney	Mr. Read
Mr. Grayden	Mr. Shearn
Mr. Griffith	Mr. Thorn
Mr. Hearman	Mr. Totterdell
Mr. Hill	Mr. Watts
Mr. Hutchinson	Mr. Wild
Mr. Mann	Mr. Yates
Mr. Manning	Mr. Bovell

(Teller.)

Amendment thus negatived.

On motion by Mr. Yates, debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

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

That the House at its rising adjourn till 4.30 p.m. on Tuesday, the 29th August.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 3.41 a.m. (Thursday).