

# Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 23rd August, 1951.

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

## QUESTIONS.

### BASIC WAGE.

*As to Effect of Butter and Meat Price Increases.*

Mr. W. HEGNEY asked the Attorney General:

What increase in the State basic wage would follow—

- an increase of 1½d. per lb. in the price of butter;
- an increase of 6d. per lb. in the various kinds of meat which are included in the regimen from which the "C" series index is compiled,

assuming in each case all other relevant factors remain unchanged during any particular quarter?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL replied:

On the assumption that the State Court of Arbitration would adopt the same method of quarterly adjustment as in the past and vary the previous quarter's basic wage by the movement in the "C" series retail index, and that the price increases mentioned would have operated for the entire quarter under review, the answers for the metropolitan area are—

(a) 2s. 4d.

(b) 7s. 11d.

### SUPERPHOSPHATE.

*As to Authority for Requiring Statutory Declaration.*

Mr. CORNELL asked the Minister representing the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Under what statute or by what authority is the Department of Agriculture acting in requiring farmers to complete and furnish statutory declarations in respect of superphosphate used by them this year?

(2) What is the position of those farmers who do not furnish statutory declarations?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS replied:

(1) The information is being sought without authority or statute.

(2) Every effort will be made to deal equitably with these cases.

### HOUSING.

*(a) As to Homes for Railway Employees.*

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

(1) When will a commencement be made on building of houses at Greenmount or Midvale for use of railway employees?

(2) Is it intended to give preference in allocation to loco. and traffic employees working on shift work? or

(3) Will all sections of railway employees be invited to apply for new homes?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied:

(1) Building is contingent upon arrival of prefabricated and precut houses from oversea contractors. No definite date of shipment has yet been received.

(2) The bulk of the houses will be allocated to Midland Junction workshops employees.

(3) Applications from other employees will be considered in the allotment of the balance.

*(b) As to Outstanding Applications.*

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Minister for Housing:

What was the number of outstanding applications in the hands of the State Housing Commission at the 30th June last—

(a) in the metropolitan area;

(b) in the country?

The MINISTER replied:

If the hon. member will state what outstanding applications are referred to, the information will be supplied.

*(c) As to Approvals Granted.*

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Minister for Housing:

How many approvals for the erection of dwellings have been granted during the 12 months ended the 30th June last?

The MINISTER replied:

Nine thousand one hundred and seven.

*(d) As to Cost of Manning Estate Land.*

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

What was the purchase price of the Manning Estate land upon which the Housing Commission has had a number of houses erected?

The MINISTER replied:

The Manning Estate was resumed for housing under the provisions of the Public Works Act. The price to be paid by way of compensation has not yet been finalised.

*(e) As to Commission Costs and Spec. Builders' Charges.*

Mr. W. HEGNEY asked the Minister for Housing:

(1) What is the present approximate cost of building brick homes of—

(a) four rooms;

(b) five rooms,

by the State Housing Commission?

(2) What is the approximate sale price charged during the past six months by spec. builders for each of the above types of house?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The present base price for standard type brick homes built in the metropolitan area under the Commonwealth-State rental scheme are—

Type 7A (4 rooms)—£2,267;

Type 56B (5 rooms)—£2,548.

These figures represent contract prices only and excluded such extra costs as additional foundations, extra length sewerage line, imported materials and architectural fees.

(2) Separate figures are not available for 4- and 5-roomed houses. Prices (including cost of land) in cases investigated by

the Commission range from £2,125 to £4,100, but as costs of houses of similar type (let alone different types) are subject to variations by virtue of a number of factors, it is difficult to use average figures for comparative purposes.

**ELECTRICITY SUPPLIES.***(a) As to State-wide Flat Rate.*

Mr. GUTHRIE asked the Minister for Works:

(1) Has the Government definitely decided there is no possibility of a flat rate being charged for electricity for the whole of the State?

(2) If not, has the Government considered whether a flat rate charge would tend to increase the number of factories and works in the country areas, and so help the decentralisation of industry?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The Government is not prepared at the present time to provide for a flat rate for electricity for the whole of the State.

(2) The Government's policy is to decentralise industry wherever possible and practicable and, as proof of its intentions, is subsidising the South-West Power Scheme to the extent of £72,000 per annum.

*(b) As to Current Frequency for Fremantle.*

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN asked the Minister for Works:

(1) In answer to questions asked by me on Tuesday last, "If a main had been laid direct from the South Fremantle power house to Fremantle? If so, for what purpose was it laid?" he replied, "It would convey electricity." What I want him to tell the House is, in view of the fact that the South Fremantle power house will be generating on a 50 cycle frequency, would it be possible to convey 40 cycles direct from the South Fremantle power house to Fremantle?

(2) Was the line laid in order to transmit a 50 cycle frequency from South Fremantle to Fremantle?

(3) Will he say, for the information of industries wanting to order machinery, what frequency Fremantle is to be supplied with?

(4) Is the statement, made by Mr. Dumas and Mr. Edmondson at the inspection of the South Fremantle power house, that Fremantle was to be kept on 40 cycles, correct?

The MINISTER replied:

To answer the question satisfactorily I shall have to make a brief statement.

(1) No.

(2) Yes.

(3) The existing agreement with the Fremantle Electricity and Tramways Board specifically provides for supply at 40 cycles.

(4) Mr. Dumas and Mr. Edmondson at South Fremantle pointed out to Mr. Sleeman that the agreement specified supply at 40 cycles.

The conditions of supply of electricity to the Fremantle Electricity and Tramways Board are set out in an agreement made in 1916 and which does not expire until 1967.

Under that agreement the board is receiving electricity at a little over half the actual cost of generation today. As a result, the Electricity Commission is losing approximately £90,000 per annum, which has to be made up by other consumers within the metropolitan area. This loss may increase to £150,000 per annum in 1956 and to £240,000 per annum in 1961.

The Government does not consider this position to be equitable, or tenable.

Negotiations are proceeding between the Fremantle Electricity and Tramways Board and the State Electricity Commission with a view to an amendment of the conditions imposed by the agreement, and I am hopeful that a satisfactory solution may be found.

Failing this, the Government proposes to submit the agreement for review by Parliament, which is the only authority with the power to amend it.

There has never been any doubt, and I have said so before, but that Fremantle must change over to 50 cycles electricity, but, until finality has been reached regarding the agreement, it is not possible to state the conditions under which the new supply will be made.

*(c) As to Negotiations with Fremantle Board.*

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN (without notice) asked the Minister for Works:

Following on the Minister's reply, on what authority does he make the statement that—

Negotiations are proceeding between the Fremantle Electricity & Tramways Board and the State Electricity Commission with a view to an amendment of the conditions imposed by the agreement, and I am hopeful that a satisfactory solution may be found?

May I say that no negotiations are proceeding, or are likely to proceed until the Fremantle Electricity and Tramways Board has a guarantee that it will get 50 cycle electricity.

The MINISTER replied:

I am given to understand that negotiations are proceeding. Following on a deputation to me, when it was decided that certain negotiations would take place, I feel that, until I receive a report on the conference, I cannot say nothing that might prejudice a satisfactory solution.

*(d) As to Possibility of Negotiations.*

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN (without notice) asked the Minister for Works:

(1) Is the Minister not aware that the Fremantle Electricity and Tramways Board has decided that no negotiations shall take place until a guarantee is given that it will get the 50 cycle frequency?

(2) If he is not aware of what I have said, will he inquire and find out whether it is true, and if so, make a statement about the 50 cycle position so that there may be a possibility of negotiations being started?

The MINISTER replied: :

(1) and (2) I know nothing more than what I have said. I might say, now that I am on my feet, that if it is found necessary to introduce a Bill to make an adjustment regarding cost, the question of frequency will not arise.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: And then you blame Persia!

**WHEAT.**

*As to Prescribing Charges for Receiving, Handling and Shipping.*

Mr. ACKLAND asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Is it the policy of the Western Australian Government to prescribe the charges to be paid for the receiving, handling and shipping of wheat in Western Australia?

(2) Has the Parliament of Western Australia an incontestable right to fix the charges referred to in (1)?

(3) Has the Commonwealth Government any power to compel the Western Australian Government to vary the charges after fixation by the Western Australian Government?

(4) If the answer to (3) is in the affirmative, does he realise that the Commonwealth Government could fix the charges for the transport of wheat by rail, and also charges to be made by the Fremantle Harbour Trust and the appropriate bodies at Geraldton and Bunbury in respect to the loading of ships?

The MINISTER replied:

This question was asked of me in the absence of the Premier. The answers are:

(1) No. The Government proposes to agree to such charges in accordance with Section 28 of the Wheat Industry Stabilisation Act, 1948, of the Commonwealth.

(2) The State Parliament cannot override Section 28 of the abovementioned Commonwealth Act, but could probably fix additional charges if it so desired.

(3) Yes. Licensed receivers are agents for the Australian Wheat Board, which is a Commonwealth instrumentally. If a State law purported to fix remuneration payable by the Commonwealth to its agents, the Commonwealth could override such law.

(4) The abovementioned Commonwealth Act in Section 28 (2) and (3) deals only with the remuneration to licensed receivers and does not purport to fix the charges for the other matters mentioned in this question.

I should like to add that these answers are based on the opinion of the Solicitor General, and if the hon. member would care to peruse the opinion, it will be made available to him.

#### KINDERGARTEN UNION.

*As to Government Financial Assistance.*

Mr. NIMMO asked the Minister for Education:

Will he inform the House what financial assistance has been given to the Kindergarten Union for the years 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950 and 1951?

The MINISTER replied:

The grants paid to the Kindergarten Union by the Government for the years in question were—

Financial year 1944-45—	£1,549.
Financial year 1945-46—	£667.
Financial year 1946-47—	£904.
Financial year 1947-48—	£6,125.
Financial year 1948-49—	£5,373.
Financial year 1949-50—	£10,447.
Financial year 1950-51—	£12,706.

For 1951-52 it is proposed that the grant shall be £16,375.

In addition to this grant, a sum of up to £500 per year is available to encourage the opening of new country centres at a rate of £100 per centre.

#### COMMONWEALTH-STATE FINANCIAL RELATIONSHIP.

*As to Personnel of Investigating Committee and Fees.*

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Who are the members of the special committee appointed to investigate and report on the measures that might be recommended for the improvement of the Commonwealth-State financial relationship?

(2) When were they appointed?

(3) What fees, or other expenses, are paid?

The MINISTER replied:

This question also was asked in the absence of the Premier. The answers are:

(1) Sir Ross McDonald (Chairman), Mr. A. J. Reid (Under Treasurer), Mr. G. B. Lancaster (Economics Research Officer), and Mr. K. N. Birks (secretary).

(2) October, 1950, as notified in "The West Australian" of the 28th October, 1950.

(3) Nil, except for travelling expenses at the appropriate rates.

#### PENSIONERS.

*As to Dental Services, Eastern Goldfields.*

Mr. STYANTS asked the Minister for Health:

Will she lay on the Table of the House the file dealing with the negotiations between the Health Department and the Dental Association of Western Australia regarding the provision of dental services for pensioners on the Eastern Goldfields?

The MINISTER replied:

Yes. This file will be laid upon the Table of the House from Tuesday next until Thursday, the 30th August, 1951.

#### CAUSEWAY, NEW.

*As to Opening for Traffic.*

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

As it is understood that materials for the completion of the Causeway are on hand, will the Minister state when the Causeway will be ready for traffic?

The MINISTER replied:

All the materials required for the completion of the Causeway—that is the section which covers the two bridges—are on hand. As I have said in a Press statement, very approximately the Causeway will be ready for traffic in April of next year.

#### BUTTER.

*(a) As to Loading of Price Increase.*

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE (without notice) asked the Premier:

In connection with the proposed increase of approximately 1s. per lb. in the retail price of butter to consumers, does the Premier actually favour loading the whole of the proposed increase on to the retail price, or would he prefer, if it could be arranged, to have the increase made 50 per cent. in the retail price and 50 per cent. by way of additional Commonwealth subsidy?

The PREMIER replied:

When I was at the recent Premiers' Conference, I did, together with the other Premiers, ask the Prime Minister to grant some increase in the subsidy on butter, but the Prime Minister clearly indicated that the Commonwealth would not provide anything in addition to the £16,800,000 already provided.

*(b) As to Commonwealth Subsidy.*

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE (without notice) asked the Premier:

Does the Premier not think that if all the States had remained united in pressing the Commonwealth Government to increase its subsidy payment on butter by 6d. a lb., the Commonwealth Government would have been compelled by now to have agreed to the proposal?

The PREMIER replied:

The States were united in their appeal to the Prime Minister to provide additional subsidy, but the Prime Minister, as I have already stated, clearly indicated that no further increase on the £16,800,000 would be made.

#### GAS AND ELECTRICITY.

*As to Tabling Graph of Comparative Costs.*

Hon. E. NULSEN (without notice) asked the Minister for Works:

Will the Minister, on Tuesday next, table a graph showing the comparative cost of gas and electricity to ordinary householders in Perth and suburbs, and in capital city areas in other States?

The MINISTER replied:

I will be prepared to lay such information on the Table of the House when and if it is available.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

*Mr. Graham and Retort to Minister for Works.*

Mr. GRAHAM: Last night, during the course of my remarks in the Address-in-reply debate, I was, as you will recollect, Mr. Speaker, subjected to quite a number of interjections, some of which I regarded as being somewhat personal and rude. Owing to the fact that I did not clearly hear an interjection made by the Minister for Works—an interjection which I misunderstood and which I thought was something entirely different from what it was—I am afraid I retorted somewhat rudely in reply to him. I have since discussed the matter with the Minister and have read the "Hansard" notes, and I am satisfied that I made a mistake. I have, therefore, no hesitation whatsoever in expressing my regret for having used the terms I did.

#### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

*Eighth Day—Amendment—Defeated.*

Debate resumed from the previous day, on the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply, to which Mr. Graham had moved the following amendment:—

That the following words be added to the Address-in-reply:—"but as the production, control and distribution of bricks and cement are causing us serious concern we recommend Your Excellency to request the Government to appoint immediately a Royal Commission for the purpose of having these matters thoroughly inquired into with a view to ascertaining the nature and extent of existing abuses (if any) and how such may be corrected with advantage to our people."

THE DEPUTY PREMIER (Hon. A. F. Vatts-Stirling—on amendment) [4.50]: There is an old saying that history repeats itself, and I venture to say that it is ap-

plicable to the occasion now before us. I say this because I remember that it was in 1947 when the member for East Perth distinguished himself in this House by moving a motion which involved the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the activities of the State Housing Commission.

Mr. Graham: No. I did not move any motion.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: That is quite true, the hon. member did not move any motion, but he made a great number of allegations the result of which was that the Government—which had been in office then only three or four months—because most of the hon. member's allegations covered an earlier period, thought it desirable to accede to the hon. member's request for the appointment of that Royal Commission.

Subsequently, the member for East Perth again distinguished himself. In the course of his remarks at that time he said he could supply information which would satisfy the allegations he made against the Housing Commission, or unnamed members of the staff thereof. But, when he was requested by the Royal Commissioner to come forward and provide the necessary information, or what information was at his disposal, he preferred not to do so. In consequence, or partly in consequence I assume, the report of the Royal Commissioner was one of the most abortive documents that has ever been produced, because the Commissioner could find nothing wrong and could suggest little or no remedy for such minor matters as came under the notice of the Commissioner during the inquiry.

But the effect of that Royal Commission—if there was no other effect—was that considerable unhappiness was created amongst innocent persons on the Housing Commission's staff. I suggest that considerable diminution of successful effort on the part of the officers of the Housing Commission resulted, because they felt, for the time being, that they had what one hon. member once stated in this House—the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads. In the net result, the Royal Commission appointed because of the hon. member's allegations, contributed nothing to the improvement of conditions in the State of Western Australia. I venture to suggest that on this occasion the proposal that he makes in the amendment to the Address-in-reply, if carried into effect, would produce in the main precisely the same result.

Mr. Graham: If you have the same type of Royal Commissioner, yes.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: There was nothing wrong with the Royal Commissioner. He was as good a magistrate as this State has ever had—I refer to Mr. H. D. Moseley. I have no doubt whatever that he was as competent a magistrate and as honourable a man as has ever graced the magisterial benches of this State.

The Minister for Lands: Hear, hear!

Mr. Styants: He was, yes.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: And he was at the time he made his inquiry.

Mr. Graham: He refused to call people mixed up in the passing of money.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I took the opportunity of looking at Mr. Moseley's report last night, and if the hon. member would care to have me read what the Royal Commissioner said in regard to the refusal—I think no other word is applicable—of the hon. member to appear before him to testify, then I am prepared to have it found in the volume which is in front of me. I can read it to the hon. member, although I have no desire to do so because I have said enough on the subject already.

Mr. Graham: I refused to do so, but other people were willing, and he would not call them.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: So perhaps I might be excused for saying that history repeats itself, and it might have some application to the present case. But, of course, it may be quite possible to excuse, or even exonerate, the member for East Perth from desiring to repeat his historical episode because maybe he was merely providing an excellent opportunity, and well within the Standing Orders, for the member for Melville to make another speech on the same point.

The Minister for Lands: That is the point.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: If that was so, then I would minimise my criticism of the member for East Perth and agree that he is a good confederate and loyal colleague, and one who could be called upon, when circumstances demanded it, to make that effort. So it becomes necessary to deal, so far as the case of Harrison versus Bruce is concerned, mainly with the observations of the member for Melville; and, so far as the general issue is concerned, to endeavour to answer, having first endeavoured to appreciate the views put forward by the member for East Perth, in regard to the extremely wide and all-embracing inquiry which he desires to make—or rather which he desires this House, by way of amendment to the Address-in-reply, to convey to His Excellency the Administrator as being the considered views of this House.

Let me say at the outset that I have no doubt that the greater number of matters which have produced this motion—and here I want to make it plain to the member for Melville that for the time being I exclude the case of Harrison versus Bruce—are already well known to the Housing Commission. These matters have been the subject of definite and active consideration, as well as action, by that Commission, and in the majority of cases the matters have been so limited or controlled, or put a stop to, that they no longer represent trouble serious enough to warrant the consideration of a Royal Commission.

From time to time the Government have been advised of various difficulties that have cropped up in regard to some of these matters, and also of the action of the Housing Commission with respect to them. However, with the full approbation of my colleague, the Minister for Housing, I took an opportunity early today to spend some time with the chairman of the Commission, Mr. Brownlie. He has been responsible for the majority of inquiries and actions to which I have referred. If I were not satisfied before of the intense desire Mr. Brownlie has to do his absolute best in a difficult set of circumstances, and also of the definite action that he has taken in regard to matters which bore in any way a serious aspect, after the discussion I had with him this morning I could not be other than completely satisfied.

The issue in this matter seems to be mainly that there are some people who are issued with releases for the acquisition of bricks who do not obtain them in due order of issue; there is no doubt whatever that there are some such cases. I say, without fear of successful contradiction, with all the conditions existing there is no possibility or no practical way of ensuring that there are not some cases which are not dealt with in the order of priority in which they are issued. I will go further and say that no organisation could be set up which could effectively police every such case, even if an effort were made to set up that organisation; nor is there, as far as I can ascertain, anything in the law of the State to require, as a statutory matter, the carrying out of a scheme of priority of that nature. The situation might be that a large number of inspectors, or officers filling the same position, might be appointed to supervise the release of bricks and probably of other materials involved. I have no doubt that if they were appointed and exercised their fullest possible activities, it would still be found that there were some people who were getting them out of order, but I will give a few reasons for that in due course.

It must be a well-known fact that no matter how strong the police force in any thing may be, one cannot avoid the commission of certain offences. I think members will agree with me that probably one of the most efficient police forces known to the modern civilised world was the Gestapo in Hitlerite Germany and yet people continued to escape and, occasionally, they did throw bombs even under that most efficient organisation. Without fear of reasonable contradiction I say again that the Housing Commission has taken every practicable step to ensure that the administration of this particular branch and its activities is carried out as fairly as possible.

There are in Western Australia some thing like 900 registered builders. Of that number I am informed approximately 30 are not in active operation. Therefore there are 600 to be dealt with. That number in itself gives some indication of the

very considerable supervision that would have to be effected. If one were to have a complete grasp of all the individual operations, and be sure that every issue of bricks, or release for bricks, was dealt with or supplied in exactly the order in which it was issued.

I have no doubt whatever that the genesis of the difficulty that exists goes back to the time when bricks were recontrolled after they had been decontrolled. If I remember rightly, the recontrol was affected just over a year ago but the decontrol took place something like 18 months or two years before. There was a considerable period, therefore, when there was no control and when power shortages and other unavoidable matters produced, unavoidably, a diminution in the supply of bricks. At the same time, because bricks were being decontrolled and people were anxious to obtain them for their future or present needs, there was a tremendous demand, or rush, to obtain the bricks.

Contracts were made between brick-makers, builders and other individuals for the supply of bricks either in isolated lots or on long-term programmes. With the stepping up of the building programme and the decision by the Government to issue permits up to 12½ squares on an automatic basis, it became quite apparent to the Housing Commission over twelve months ago that a recontrol of bricks was desirable if there was to be any future order obtained from a very difficult situation. But it was impossible to turn back the clock in regard to those arrangements that had been made, and it was also impossible to augment the supply of bricks sufficiently to cope with the greatly increased demand. Whatever may be said against the present position or against the position which has existed during the past twelve months, to which I have just referred, there is no doubt that there has been a magnificent increase in the number of dwellings that have been erected in Western Australia. The figures, particularly in regard to self-help homes, given by the Minister for Housing last evening, would indicate that this alone has risen from 700 a year to 1,700 a year in the course of a short period of three years.

The overall position has been immensely improved from the point of view of the number of dwellings that have been erected. It did become apparent to the Housing Commission, however, at one stage that some of the builders—and I say some of them advisedly because the majority I am assured are most careful and co-operative to the utmost of their ability—were taking advantage of the situation and exerting no real effort to make available the bricks released for A on the property of A, but were inclined to utilise them on some other contract perhaps, as the Minister for Housing suggested, in favour of somebody for whom they were working or, alternatively, for some person who was able to

contribute something else towards the completion of the contract of dwellings—many of them groups of dwellings—which these people had.

When the chairman of the State Housing Commission became aware that this was becoming rather too common a practice, he immediately sent for and interviewed the representatives of the Building Industry Congress, the Master Builders' Guild and whatever organisation it is—whose name I forget at the moment—to which other master builder's belong. The chairman informed these organisations that this could not continue and received from them undertakings that so far as every person within their membership was concerned, action would be taken to ensure that the closest possible adherence to priority issues would be effected. I have been assured that that undertaking has been well kept in the opinion of the Housing Commission and its officers over the last few months. There were a few left, however, who were not associated with, or part and parcel of, these organisations. No less than two of these firms have been struck off the list altogether and have not been given any releases at all because they will not comply with these proposals. At the present time there is another case under consideration for similar treatment.

Then, of course, we come to the question of there being a certain amount, I may say a limited amount, of blackmarketing in the industry. If we are going to have a Royal Commission in Australia every time a little blackmarketing takes place in a commodity that is in short supply, then I think we shall have a Royal Commission at least every Monday morning, because, as everybody knows, whenever a commodity is in short supply, and in great demand, there will always be somebody who is prepared to pay extra for it and somebody who is prepared to take the risk of selling it to him. Like any other offence, it is merely a matter of being found out.

As a result of investigations conducted over recent weeks, there are pending a number of prosecutions concerning this very subject. It is an extremely lucky man, however, be he a police officer or anybody else, engaged in an investigation of that nature, who is able to produce sufficient evidence to bring a case to court with a prospect of success. Occasionally I read the Press of the Eastern States of this Commonwealth and there are references to blackmarketing there besides which the minor transactions that are being conducted in Western Australia fade into insignificance.

Once again I repeat that these activities, limited though they were, and mostly confined, I am informed, to the smaller brickmakers, have been taken in hand by the State Housing Commission as controllers of materials under the Building Materials Control Act. The result was

that one brickworks—whose name I will not mention as it will not be reasonable to do so at this stage—said “Oh, well, we will close down.” They have not closed down and I suggest to them that they do not close down, because that particular brickworks out of a total capital of £25,000 or £26,000, if I remember aright, has been the recipient of assistance to the value of £12,000 from the industrial Vote.

It would not take me very long if they did close down to recommend that a receiver be appointed and that they be taken over completely, and I believe the law would permit it to be done. I will not mention the name at this stage because I do not think it reasonable to do so. There is very considerable evidence, therefore, in that case that action was taken. It is not always done so obviously, however, as I believe it was in that instance, and while there are very many dependable carting contractors who have been carrying bricks in large quantities for a very long period in the metropolitan area, from the brickworks of that area to the customers, and have never thought of charging more than the legitimate carting fee, there have been cases where ways and means have been found for these carting contractors to receive the bricks from the brickworks; to charge a fee allegedly for carting, but which is outside all reasonable proportions for that; and to split the difference with the brick maker.

So even although it was known that those people existed in a very limited number, the Housing Commission decided that all releases to all carting contractors, however honest and full of probity they had been over a number years, should be discontinued, and discontinued they have been—long before this matter came before the House—with the result that no release today is issued except through the brickworks itself; and in some cases there is an officer of the Housing Commission either stationed there or a regular visitor there to ensure that this ukase is being carried into effect. So there again I suggest that nothing more could be done and that nobody could inform the Housing Commission any more than it has already been informed, and that nobody with any certainty of success or any greater certainty of success could take action other than, or better than, that which has already been taken.

Within the State Housing Commission itself in the last couple of years there have, unfortunately, been one or two cases in which employees have not lived fully up to their responsibilities to the community. Has any mercy been shown them? Not the slightest! Three of them were given their time within an hour in the last couple of years, because it is the determination of the Housing Commission, and particularly of the chair-

man, to ensure that, so far as is humanly practicable, efficiency and square dealing shall be the guiding stars of the Commission and its staff.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Was any action taken other than dismissal?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: In two cases the men were prosecuted. The third case I understand, was not one for prosecution; it was merely dereliction of duty. I remember the prosecution that took place in one instance; and, while I personally was not satisfied with the amount of the fine imposed on that occasion, it would have been regarded by most people as considerable. Knowing the circumstances a little better than the general public, I must confess to the hon. member that I thought the punishment was not adequate. However, that is a matter for the magistrates and is one over which the Housing Commission has no control. I mention it only to indicate that there has been no lack of control by the Commission and no lack of keeping in touch with the possibilities and the probabilities of wrongdoing and ensuring that wherever such offences are discovered they are dealt with and such holes as exist are closed up as rapidly and as effectively as possible.

No system of inquiry could do more than that. It would, however, undoubtedly impose upon the very large proportion—in fact, I might say all—of the staff of the Housing Commission the feeling that notwithstanding all this; notwithstanding the efforts they had made; notwithstanding the rigid control that was being exercised; notwithstanding all these things, they were still under suspicion of not doing enough. Is that the sort of treatment which, in these circumstances, this Legislature desires to impose upon them, and have, as I said earlier, history repeat itself? I sincerely hope it is not. The attitude of the Commission in this matter has been to ascertain what is wrong and to determine how best to deal with it. The complete acceptance of a system where there are no possibilities other than of completely rigid principles being adhered to, is not going to result in these times in increasing the number of houses; and that, of course, is the main aim and object not only of the Housing Commission, but of every member of this Chamber.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Do you think we have anything to learn from South Australia?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: The chairman of the Housing Commission discussed even that with me this morning, and he says he does not think so. In fact, I would very much have liked the hon. member to hear all that that gentleman said to me this morning.

The Minister for Lands: He might not have liked it!



The DEPUTY PREMIER: It is not that at all. I am sure he would have enjoyed it from an entirely informative point of view. I did know something of the operations of the Housing Commission; because, up to 12 to 15 months ago, I was closely in contact with it and learnt to appreciate the diligence which the chairman and his officers displayed in work for this community. I took whatever opportunity was offered to me in the short time I was associated with the Commission to encourage it in its method of approach to its problems. Mr. Brownlie told me that, after careful inquiry, which to a great degree he made personally, in his view the situation is being handled in Western Australia better than in any other State of the Commonwealth. I am not in a position to query that statement.

I do know that, so far as blackmarketing is concerned, one can find from time to time very interesting reports of what takes place in some other parts of the Commonwealth, although I have not read—I will be quite plain on this subject—any such reports in regard to South Australia. That may not mean that they do not exist; but they have not come to my notice. The chairman of the Housing Commission is also of the opinion, and has convinced me, that if any attempt were made to alter the present system of the automatic issue of permits or to do away with the system of group building which the Commission has adopted for a period of years with very great success for Commonwealth-State rental homes, the persons first and most likely to suffer would be those artisans who are engaged in the building and associated trades, particularly in regard to the group building system. He says that that is where occasionally there creeps in the failure, even now, to follow strict priority, but that it is very often done quite bona fide in order to maintain a team in a certain locality while some other arrangements are being made for them to move on; and he contends that, where it does take place, it can be, and has been, explained because he has, on receipt of complaints, brought up the builders in question and inquired of them the circumstances, and has either satisfied himself that the action being taken was reasonably legitimate or has ensured that it came to an end.

Last year there were approximately 60,000,000 bricks to be handled. That number would be sufficient for 2,500 houses. According to the chairman of the Commission, there was a demand for approximately 3,000 brick houses, which would have involved roughly 70,000,000 or 72,000,000 bricks. In consequence, there was a lag of something between 10,000,000 and 12,000,000 bricks, as far as I could appreciate the position in the time available to me. Obviously, therefore, with that lag of 10,000,000 or 12,000,000 bricks, there

must be a lag in supplying persons who have received release orders. When it is borne in mind also that the Public Works Department, for public purposes, has—and I think quite rightly so—from the State Brick Works itself a very substantial priority in regard to a considerable proportion of the bricks that that institution produces, it will readily be realised that in regard to the State Brick Works the difficulties may be even more apparent.

But let us remember that the State Brick Works contributes only about 25 per cent. of the total bricks and, as a consequence, the activities of the Commission are spread not over one or two of these brickmaking institutions, but over quite a considerable number of them. I could have continued taking note of instances where disciplinary action or conversation, as the case might require, has taken place with brickmakers in the metropolitan districts and, indeed, elsewhere in order to ensure that the best possible thing was being done in such circumstances as I have mentioned.

I was also interested to know from the chairman of the Commission that the State Advisory Panel, which was appointed some years ago to advise it in regard to building matters, and which includes representatives of country as well as of metropolitan builders, was of the opinion some two years ago that all controls as exercised by the Commission should be thrown overboard; whereas quite recently, at a meeting, the members of that panel came to the conclusion that, as the controls are being exercised by the Housing Commission and with the results that have been achieved, those controls should be retained. That may not seem a very important circumstance, until one thinks about it for a minute.

Everybody will recall what a demand there was a couple of years ago from persons such as some of those who are on the advisory panel for the relaxation or abandonment of any controls in regard to the building industry and the release of materials. On the one hand, it is quite clear that the relaxation of controls to the extent of the automatic permit, as it is now issued and as it has been issued for some time, has resulted in a great step-up in building activity. On the other hand, the advisory committee has reached the opinion that the relaxation of controls in regard to the release of materials would probably have a contrary effect.

And so I think it will be apparent that close examination is being given consistently and at all times by the Housing Commission to the problems which might be said to be involved in the motion moved by the member for East Perth for the amendment of the Address-in-reply. I think it will be clear to the majority of members of this House that every reasonable action has been taken to ensure that fair dealing in this regard is the order of the day, as far as is humanly practicable.

For some reason the motion now before the House, Mr. Speaker, refers to cement, and members are aware that there are two kinds of cement in use in Western Australia—that made locally and that which is imported. The difference in price between the two classes of cement is considerable and, although I have not the actual figures, I know what the approximate position is. Locally made cement costs somewhere between £8 and £9 per ton and the imported article costs as much as £24 per ton at the present time.

No control has been exercised over imported cement and those who care to pay the price for it have been able to obtain it, but complete control has been exercised over the local article, the quantity of which used far exceeds, of course, that of the imported variety. Due mainly to the very high price to which I have referred, public use of imported cement has been restricted in recent times, though that restriction has been determined also, to some extent, by shipping difficulties.

The circumstances relating to cement seem to me to be entirely different from those surrounding bricks. In the first place, there has not been any great complaint as to the control over cement, though there have been—and probably for some time will be—some complaints about the shortage. Secondly, there is only one source from which the production of local cement emanates, and it is therefore fairly easy to keep a close watch on transactions in that commodity and ensure that the difficulties occasioned by the great number of producers—both small and large—in the brick industry are not likely to arise in the case of cement. I therefore suppose that cement has been included in the motion simply for the sake of conformity because there does not seem to me, on the evidence before me, to be any need for inquiry into that subject. It should be apparent to members that the Government does not propose to agree to the general and wide inquiry suggested by the member for East Perth into the subject of bricks and cement.

Perhaps I had better turn now to the second part of this subject, to which I referred earlier as the case of Harrison v. Bruce. It occurs to me that the member for Melville may have intended to be completely fair in bringing this question before the House, but I submit that he did not entirely succeed in that intention. There must be many members of this House who would be lost in admiration of the hon. member were he a barrister-at-law. They would, I think, agree that the talents which he undoubtedly possesses would probably, if applied in that direction, have raised him to heights even greater than those to which he has already attained.

Mr. J. Hegney: You do him honour overmuch.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I do not know that I do. So far as I have gone, I believe I have expressed the opinion of quite

a number of members in this Chamber, but they might be able to criticise the member for Melville for his method of proving his case if he applied the same method to his activities at the bar. The member for Melville was very prone to accuse the Minister for Housing—for example—of not disclosing the whole of his case, of not reading reports in full and then to say that he, the member for Melville, proposed to do it.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: The Minister was rough on Bruce.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I am not suggesting that he was or was not rough on Bruce. I do not propose to deal with the Minister's speech at all, as I conceive it to be my duty only to deal, as efficiently as I can on rather short notice, with the observations of the member for Melville. In the course of remarks made last evening the member for Melville said—

The Minister said that when Capt. Bruce and his wife were at the works and there were two to one, why did not Capt. Bruce and his wife go ahead with the business?

He then went on to say—

As a matter of fact it was not two to one, and the Minister knows it, so why mislead the House? Why make the House believe that Capt. Bruce and his wife, being two to one, had nothing to fear, when the Minister knew full well that although Capt. Bruce had his wife with him, Mr. Harrison had his foreman with him?

The Minister for Housing: Was the foreman there all the time?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: He was there all the time, but during one period he might have been 10 feet away.

Mr. Graham: I hope the Minister is not reading from proceedings of this session.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I am reading from notes of the hon. member's speech—notes which I thought were extremely valuable to me and which I have a perfect right to read.

Mr. SPEAKER: It is quite in order if the Minister is not reading from "Hansard."

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: What you are reading from is an uncorrected proof.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I can remember the hon. member uttering these words.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I acknowledge having uttered them, but wish to point out that when I said "10 feet" I should have said "10 yards."

The DEPUTY PREMIER: We will even allow the hon. member that correction. To proceed—

Evidently the foreman was there whilst Harrison was discussing with Capt. Bruce and his wife this matter of bricks.

Later on the hon. member quoted from a report of the general manager of the State Brick Works, and in that he named the foreman who was supposed to be there. He did not actually name him, but referred to him as the second of the two persons named in the general manager's report, from which he read and which was part of the papers laid upon the Table of the House as the result of a point of order, and which I now have here. The two names mentioned in that report were Nail and Payne, and the second of them was Payne.

The member for Melville therefore indicated that a foreman named Payne was present during all the proceedings and during part of those proceedings was, allowing for his recent amendment, no more than 10 yards away. Having put those two facts together and not at that time in any way doubting the hon. member, this morning I rang up the State Brick Works and asked if I might see Mr. Payne, the foreman of the Byford brickworks, who was present in June when Capt. Bruce called to see Mr. Harrison. I was told that Mr. Payne was not foreman of the Byford brickworks at that time, that he did not see Mr. Harrison and that the man I wanted was named Harold Gordon Unwin.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Then I offer my apologies to Mr. Payne.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I then said to the office of the State Brick Works, "While I am not anxious to make it inconvenient for Mr. Unwin in the circumstances, as I realise he is some miles away, and so on, I would be glad to see him before lunch." They were good enough to send him in. He was accompanied by Mr. William Charles Wilkins, production and sales supervisor of the State Brick Works, who introduced him to me.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: What is Unwin's position?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: He is foreman of the State Brick Works at Byford and was appointed to the position in April last having previously, I believe, been on the burning staff. I think that is what he told me, though I did not make a note of it as I did in the case of his observations with a bearing on this case. After a preliminary request to him to tell me what eventuated on the morning when Capt. Bruce and his wife called to see Mr. Harrison, I took from him a note of the exact happenings. I subsequently read that note over to him and asked if it was correct. I can assure the House that he told me that all I had written down and read over to him was correct and I can also assure the House that what I read over to him was all that I had written down. It was as follows:—

During April I became foreman. Mr. Payne, who had been foreman, was still there at that time, pending his

removal to Armadale. Payne left for Armadale about a week before the visit of Capt. Bruce and his wife, when Payne's house was ready. On the Saturday morning I was in the office at the Byford works. I was just going out of the office when I saw a man and woman coming. The man asked me where Mr. Harrison was, as he had an appointment with him at 10 o'clock. I said, "It is only 20 to 10 now; you had better wait." A few minutes afterwards the man came to the office door and asked if I could get in touch with Harrison. I said he was at Elston's and they could go up. They did not like to do that. I suggested I could telephone and asked what name. He told me, "Bruce."

I was just going to ring up when I heard a motor coming and saw it was Harrison's motor van. Later I looked out and saw they were talking and went back into the office. They talked for five to 10 minutes outside and I did not hear one word of their conversation. At the end of the five or 10 minutes Harrison and Bruce came into the office. Mr. Bruce remained near the door and did not come right in. Mr. Harrison asked me to ring Cardup works for him. I could not raise them.

Harrison and Bruce remained talking but until I rejoined them after trying to phone I did not hear anything of what was said. When I did rejoin them I heard Bruce saying he had apparently come to the wrong place; that he had his permit in for bricks and could not get them. I said to him, "If you want bricks it is not what you know, it is who you know." When I said this I was not referring to the State Brick Works or to Cardup. I referred to the carters who carted bricks from all sorts of brickworks.

Bruce nor Harrison did not comment. They went outside again and talked again for a few minutes but again I was in the office and heard nothing of the conversation. Then I went outside to go round the works. The Bruces and Harrison were still talking but had moved away from the office. I had no talk with them and heard nothing. When I came back to the office the Bruces had gone and Harrison came into the office. He said, "They have come to the wrong place. Cardup is where they should have gone." Not at any time when they were within my hearing—

That is, of course, was when they were in the office.

—was mention made of Harrison doing anything for Bruce for money or anything like that.

I sent for the foreman—and I will inform the House the reason—because it appeared to me that if the member for Mel-

ville was correct in saying that this man was within hearing of all the conversation, it was extraordinary that no statement had been taken from him by the manager of the State Saw Mills. I fully expected, when I began my inquiries this morning for the purpose of finding out what, if any, substance there was in this matter, that I should find that this foreman—first of all Payne and, latterly, I think, Unwin—would have something to tell me of what conversation took place between Harrison and the Bruces.

But as will have been realised from the statement here, he knew nothing whatever about it except that very limited part when the pair called into the office and suggested he should ring Cardup for Harrison, which he tried to do. Therefore, I think it will be quite clear that the Minister for Housing was completely justified in saying what he did and the member for Melville quite unjustified in his criticism about it, namely, that at the time of the conversation they were two to one.

However, I should like to go a little further with the remarks of the hon. member. When he came to the question of the Minister for Housing having read only portion of a report from the general manager of the State Saw Mills and the State Brick Works, which is among the papers tabled, he corrected the Minister for not reading the lot and he said, "I will read the lot," but he did not. He read all the parts that were unfavourable to Mr. Harrison and left out the only statement which might have indicated that Mr. Harrison was trying to do a conscientious job for the State.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You know that is not true!

The DEPUTY PREMIER: It is true.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You prove it!

The DEPUTY PREMIER: There is entire proof.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: You prove it!

The DEPUTY PREMIER: It is here as clear as day. The statement reads—

For your information, since Mr. Harrison assumed control he has found labour sufficient to pick over the dump. In seven weeks to the 2nd August, 42,000—

That is, clinker bricks.

—were recovered at a cost of £80 2s. 2d. equal to £1 18s. 2d. per 1,000, selling price £7 17s. 6d.

Of the above, 38,250 have already been sold for £301 4s. 4d., as against £549 for 10s. loads to employees, £5 loads, and 8,000 clinkers recovered for the whole of last year.

That was the part the hon. member did not read.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: For the obvious reason that it was a mass of figures and I felt it was of no importance at the time.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: Some members may believe that, but I decline to do so. The hon. member left out the only part which might have indicated to the public and this House that Mr. Harrison was trying to do his best for the State Brick Works. He elected to supply the clinker bricks and turn them to the State's account. But no mention of that was made by the hon. member.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That is your warped mind, thinking that way! The explanation I have given you is the true one.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I will not express any opinions of mine. I am quite prepared to state the circumstances; they are the circumstances and I will leave the House to judge whether the hon. member did or did not.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Is the Deputy Premier going to read everything in those papers?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I shall certainly read more than the member for Melville did, as the hon. member will realise.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Is the Deputy Premier going to read the lot?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: What about getting from the file the letter that you wrote to the Minister for Housing on this matter?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I do not mind getting letters from the file if they have any bearing on the question.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: When you advised him that he should not see Capt. Bruce and Mrs. Bruce.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I think it was quite right. I do not think it was a proper thing for the Minister to see them at that stage. The Minister has told the House himself that he did not think it right for him to see them. If every matter in its embryo stage came to a Minister, then Heaven help the man in a Minister's position.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: This was taken to the Minister only after unsuccessful attempts through other channels had been tried.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: Had not been tried successfully.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That is the trouble; had not been tried successfully.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: The hon. member misinterprets me. I mean that the hon. member had not tried very successfully. The hon. member, in my opinion, deprived them of the opportunity of examining the position properly or,

if he did not, the person for whom he was acting did so by declining to make any concrete statement as to the alleged offence before the deputy manager of the State Brick Works. I cannot come to any other conclusion. The hon. member tried, if I remember aright, to indicate that because he knew something of a letter which he knew had been received from Messrs. Parker & Parker, he formed the opinion that the letter was sent to trap Capt. Bruce into making a statement so that a charge could be laid against him.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: 'So it was.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I think the contrary. I think it was sent to enable Capt. Bruce to be informed that there was a possibility of such action being taken and not to trap him or anybody else.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: They asked for a statement to be obtained.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: They would.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: They had no right to ask.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: After all, I do not see why they should not. An inquiry was being held by the State Brick Works and surely the employee thus maligned was entitled, through his advisers, to have a copy of the case, if any, presented against him.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: He was entitled to be there and ask Capt. Bruce to be present in person.

Mr. SPEAKER: This argument will now cease. The Minister will proceed with his speech.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we might have overstepped the mark in almost forgetting the House in the circumstances of this matter. There is room, of course, I admit, on this particular point, for differences of opinion. The hon. member has expressed his and I have expressed mine and, once again, it does not matter very much in the final judgment; what matters more is the things I have mentioned, but I will leave it to the House to determine.

Now we will come to this question of clinker bricks. The Minister for Housing was at some pains in an endeavour to inform the Chamber last evening that this concession to employees on all clinker bricks had grown up during the war or perhaps at an earlier period when there were more bricks than would meet the demand and therefore clinker bricks were not required; and the practice had persisted over a considerable period.

It so chances, as is borne out by the observation I read a moment ago from the general manager of the State Brick Works, that it was when Mr. Harrison assumed office in April of this year that a com-

mencement was made to put a stop to this practice which, in his opinion, was losing through the proper channels certain bricks that could be used for certain types of building work and, in addition, losing the State Brick Works a considerable amount of money which ought to be turned to account. So he discussed the matter with one W. C. Wilkins, production and sales supervisor of the State Brick Works. I had an opportunity of interviewing Mr. Wilkins this morning to ascertain two things. The first was: What is the procedure through the State Brick Works for the release of bricks and is it capable of being easily got round. The second was: What was the position in regard to these clinker bricks and when was the concession system altered? Mr. Wilkins told me this—

I was appointed to the above position (that is production and sales supervisor) on the 6th June. Prior to that I had been chief clerk for 12 months.

He told me also that the position of production and sales supervisor was a new one that had been created but that it involved a number of the duties he had been doing previously as chief clerk. Mr. Wilkins went on to say—

It has always been my job to visit the works regularly and I have been in charge of the distribution of bricks. All orders that are supported by releases are recorded and held at head office.

In the course of his remarks the member for Melville indicated that Mr. Harrison could have ascertained whether the order was with the State Brick Works or not in a few seconds, and therefore it was impossible for him not to know when he received that letter from Capt. Bruce that the order might not have been placed with the State Brick Works, but with the Cardup brickworks.

Mr. Graham: Did he not state in his letter that it was by this that the mistake had been made?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: No, he said, "it seems."

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: When Capt. Bruce came, he told him he knew.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: By what means does the hon. member prove that?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: By means of an inquiry to which I hope you will agree.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: The member for Melville has not proved it yet.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: You have proved nothing yet either.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I am not seeking to prove anything.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Neither was the member for Melville.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: What I am seeking to do is to disprove some of the statements made by the member for Melville which I will say were ill-considered; and I think I am entitled to do so. I am entitled to inform the public that there were a number of inaccuracies in the remarks of the member for Melville just as the hon. member stated that there were inaccuracies in the remarks of the Minister for Housing.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That does not prove anything.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: They were serious, and it is important to point them out. I do not wish to continue this dialogue across the floor of the House and with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will continue my speech.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The Minister never does when things get tough for him.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Think that one out.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I was thinking how childish it was for the Leader of the Opposition to make a statement like that.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: That is a very weak comment.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I know the situation clearly. What looked to be a perfectly good case on which to pillory the Government has turned out to be a damp squib. I will now get on with the job.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: We will see. It is not done with by a long way.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: The hon. member does not know what I am going to say in the rest of my speech. I might easily go on speaking after the tea suspension.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: There is nothing to prevent the Minister doing that.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I will now revert to Mr. Wilkins' statement concerning the distribution of bricks. He said—

All orders supported by releases are recorded and held at the head office. When an order becomes due to be supplied, a voucher is put up to the works (that is the brickworks). Later these would appear on the roster stating the day, approximate time, the carter and to whom the bricks were to be delivered. Invoices are made out by the works daily and forwarded to head office. These are marked against orders already sent to the works until each order for bricks is complete. A daily summary is sent with these invoices which are made up into a weekly summary and are the basis on which the drawer's pay is computed. There are no less than eight of these men employed at these works—four on No. 1 kiln and four on No. 2. They are pieceworkers and get different rates of pay for various types of bricks.

It can be imagined therefore how well they would know the number of barrows of bricks that have been drawn, and there are

50 bricks to a barrow. It is not likely therefore that the number of bricks produced from the works in any one day would not be well known to these men. They are carefully checked up in the summaries that are sent to head office daily, and from which a weekly summary is made.

With the exception that drawers are not paid for clinker bricks, these bricks are subject to the same record—

That is to say, that although the drawer is not paid for these clinker bricks, they are subject to the same system of record.—and the drawers go to the office every day with their tally.

Under this system, I have no hesitation in saying that no one can get away with bricks from the State works.

Now I turn to the question of Harrison and the clinker bricks—

Soon after Mr. Harrison arrived, I discussed the matter with him of the concessions allowed on clinker bricks. Mr. Harrison was eager to co-operate. Very few staff loads went out after his arrival, and he drew my attention to this and the loads were stopped very soon after. Early in June we had the whole thing organised. Since then all clinker bricks have been through the sorting process and sold at list prices and only on release orders.

It is now the 23rd August and this House met for the first time this year on the 2nd August, so we may take that as being the date of importance. Approximately two months before that, the whole of the procedure with regard to clinker bricks, which, as I have said, had grown up for very satisfactory reasons during the war, had been put an end to, with the result that the clinker bricks had been made subject to release. A total of 48,000—which is a substantial number, as only a small proportion of production are clinker bricks—were made subject to release orders.

Consequently, an impression, which seemingly it has been sought to create in this House, that there has been a great deal of juggling, shall I say, going on in recent times in regard to clinker bricks, is surely blown kite high. If the information that Mr. Wilkins gave me is not sufficient to indicate that this is so, surely the statement of the general manager in his report, particularly the part that the member for Melville did not read, should be conclusive. I think it is worth reading this part in order to ensure that every member understands it. Mr. Gomme said—

For your information, since Mr. Harrison assumed control, he has found labour sufficient to pick over the dump. In the seven weeks to the 2nd August, 42,000 were recovered at a cost of £80 2s. 2d., equal to £1 18s. 2d. per thousand, selling price of £7 17s. 6d. Of the above, 38,250 have already been sold for £301 4s. 4d. as against £549

for 10s. loads to employees, £5 loads, and 8,000 clinkers recovered for the whole of last year.

Thus, in seven weeks the recovery has been £301, or an average of approximately £45 per week, as against £549, equal to roughly £10 a week for the whole of the previous year. I stress this to indicate—and I think the House must agree—that in it we have evidence that Mr. Harrison did at least have the interests of his employers at heart and was not merely seeking to carry on his job any old how.

While the hon. member did make mention of the matter to which I am about to refer, I want the House fully to appreciate the possibility of the reason why Capt. Bruce wrote to Mr. Harrison, c/o Cardup brickworks, 101 St. George's-terrace, Perth. The hon. member mentioned that there had been a newspaper report, and on this it may be well to refresh the memories of members. This report appeared in "The West Australian" of the 12th June, 1951, and dealt with a periodical inspection by the Minister for Housing of the new State Brick Works being established a mile past Armadale. The report ends thus—

Mr. Wild expressed himself pleased with the progress of the construction work under Mr. G. Rapley, of the Works Department. He subsequently visited the Cardup works and conferred with Mr. R. Harrison, the new manager. Mr. Harrison, who is 34 years of age, has not been long out from England, where he had experience for 20 years in all phases of brick production with Messrs. J. and H. Jackson, of Manchester, the biggest brick-producing firm in northern England.

By what means that phraseology crept in does not matter; it is there. I direct attention to the passage—

He subsequently visited the Cardup works and conferred with Mr. R. Harrison the new manager.

Obviously, it was a reasonable assumption on the part of anyone who read that—and I take it Capt. Bruce was of the number who read it—that the Cardup brickworks were being managed by Mr. Harrison and, in view of his association with the Minister for Housing, according to the Press report, were probably one of the State Brick Works. That would have been a reasonable assumption, and I think Capt. Bruce did make it.

*Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.*

The DEPUTY PREMIER: Before tea, I made some reference to the fact that a newspaper article had doubtless led to the error which was made by Capt. Bruce in addressing the letter to Harrison of Cardup brickworks in lieu of the Byford brickworks. He had formed the opinion, of course, as had everyone else, that it was quite an understandable mistake. But I

do not think the situation justified the observations of the member for Melville in regard to the communication which Mr. Harrison subsequently addressed to Capt. Bruce, dated the 19th June. In the course of his remarks the hon. member said—

I submit that the Minister's answer does not ring true for this reason that he gave no satisfactory explanation as to why the manager of the works, who knew that Capt. Bruce's order had not been placed with his firm—

The Attorney General: Why would he have known that?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Because he said he found it out.

The Attorney General: Subsequently?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: No, before he wrote to Capt. Bruce.

The Attorney General: No.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I say, "Yes," and I will prove it. When Mr. Harrison wrote to Capt. Bruce he said in his letter that there was some mistake and then he said that he had found that the order was not placed with his firm.

I take it the intention of that is to show that the letter written by Mr. Harrison to Capt. Bruce indicated what the hon. member said, to wit, that he knew that Capt. Bruce's order had not been placed with his firm before he sent the letter. I would suggest to the member for Melville, and to the House, that that was a statement which was not founded on any premises which justified it. Let us look at the letter written on the 19th June by Harrison to Capt. Bruce. He says—

Dear Sir.

In answer to your letter received on the 17/6/51, there seems to be some mistake as it is the State Brick Works, Byford, of which I am the manager. If I can be of any assistance to you I will see you on Saturday morning, 23rd June, at 10.30 a.m., if this is convenient to you, at the above address. I remain,

Yours truly,

R. Harrison.

Surely it would have been just as fair and reasonable—in fact in my opinion rather more so—if the hon. member formed the opinion that the mistake he referred to was the mistake in the address. There is certainly no indication that at that time he knew where Capt. Bruce's order had been placed. The mistake in my view, and in the view of any reasonable person who takes a thoroughly detached attitude in the matter, would be that there was some mistake in the address as Mr. Harrison says, "It is the State Brick Works, Byford, of which I am the manager," and the letter is addressed to Cardup.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: When do you think he really did know?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I do not know, but I do submit it is not a justifiable assumption that at the time he wrote the letter he knew and that it was proved by the contents of the letter, as the hon. member indicated.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Did he know before Bruce arrived?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: I am not able to form a judgment on that subject. I can only deal with the position as it is and what the hon. member is reported to have said, and what to the best of my recollection, he did say.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: We know it was before Bruce arrived, because Harrison said so himself.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: That is another matter.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Surely it is proof.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: The proof the hon. member indicated was the proof contained in the letter, and I submit, and I believe the House will agree with me, that he was jumping to conclusions on that. Whatever knowledge he ultimately gained, I have not had.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Yes, you have. You have seen Harrison's statement.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: Yes, but only long weeks afterwards, and therefore, I am not able to form an opinion as to whether he knew an hour after he wrote the letter, four days later, or a week later. There is nothing in the letter to indicate that he knew at the time the letter was written, and that is the only point I am seeking to make. It would have been preferable if this matter had been introduced into the House on such facts as were proven, and not on such imputations as are made up in the way that last has been, that being the reason why I have seen fit to say something about it.

Among the papers that were tabled last night by the Minister for Housing was the summing up by Mr. Gomme, the general manager of the State Brick Works. Mr. Gomme has come in for a great deal of criticism in the House from speakers opposite for the way in which he was alleged to have conducted or failed to conduct, the inquiry which, by minute earlier, he was directed by the Minister for Housing to make. As his findings have not been to any degree submitted to the House, I think it only fair to Mr. Gomme to indicate that this—I will call it judgment—is not such an ill-balanced document as to some extent, at least, has been indicated in this Chamber. He says, under date, 17th July—

In consequence of information passed to me by Mr. R. Brownlie, Chairman Housing Commission, that Capt. J. Bruce, Commonwealth Marine Branch,

Fremantle, had lodged a complaint that R. Harrison, Assistant Manager, State Brick Works, had by innuendo indicated that he could supply bricks if the sum of £5 were to change hands—this was on Thursday, 28th June—I immediately endeavoured to contact Capt. Bruce and eventually he came to see me on Friday afternoon, the 29th, when he reported what he had told Mr. Brownlie.

I arranged for Mr. Harrison to be in this office on Monday, the 2nd instant, and plied him with questions so as to establish (a) whether he was fully aware of the system operating at the State Brick Works; (b) whether he wrote the letter to Capt. Bruce; and (c) on his admission why was it written on plain paper.

Mr. Harrison stated he was writing private letters from Ye Olde Narrogin Inn where he was staying and so replied to Capt. Bruce on the paper available at the hotel. Mr. Harrison's answers seemed to me quite straightforward. He is a newcomer to this country and perhaps not quite conversant with Government procedure and generally I then formed the conclusion that there must have been some misunderstanding of the intent of his remarks at the meeting at the brick-works on Saturday morning, particularly as Mr. Harrison is a little difficult to understand, speaking with a very broad Lancashire accent, and he seems to cut his sentences.

In view of the uncertainty still existing and as I was going to the mills on Tuesday morning, I requested Mr. Hall to endeavour to arrange an interview between Capt. Bruce and Mr. Harrison in a genuine endeavour to straighten matters out. My idea was that Capt. Bruce would make a definite accusation in front of Mr. Harrison which would enable him to refute it in the presence of each other. The result of the interview is shown hereunder.

The statement made by Capt. Bruce and confirmed by Mrs. Bruce relating to 48 brickies and £5 a time is definitely not the statement made to me and as related by Mr. Brownlie. Whether this statement was also made on the Saturday morning I am unable to verify, although Mr. Harrison's statement, attached, shows some relationship. Mr. Tonkin called on the 12th inst. after my letter of the 11th had been posted to Capt. Bruce and stated it was on his advice that Capt. and Mrs. Bruce did not repeat their original statement. It seems to me, therefore, that unless Capt. Bruce is willing to repeat his original statement in Mr. Harrison's presence, I cannot very well adjudicate in the matter nor make any decision.



A reply has been received from Capt. Bruce, dated the 13th inst., in which he advises he does not propose to say anything further, and I propose to advise Messrs. Parker & Parker accordingly.

In summing up and after giving the matter much thought, I have come to the following conclusions:—

- (a) Capt. Bruce sincerely thinks that something irregular is happening at the brickworks but in all probability misunderstood Harrison's remarks.
- (b) If, at the time, he thought Harrison was asking for a bribe why did he not tax him with it there and then (as he had a witness, namely, his wife), instead of waiting for a day or two before reporting it to Mr. Brownlie. In any case I should have been the first approach.
- (c) The words used by Capt. Bruce at the head of page 5 of his statement when interviewing Messrs. Brownlie and Hynam are denied by these gentlemen as not being strictly in accordance with the conversation that took place.
- (d) If Mr. Harrison, on the other hand, had any thoughts of irregularities, to which Mr. Elston referred when handing over to him, he certainly went a very crude way about his endeavour to find out.
- (e) As the letter was re-addressed to Harrison from the Cardup Brick Company, I do not place any importance on the fact that he opened the letter as it was marked "personal."
- (f) Whether money passed or not, the system of deliveries would prevent Harrison from carrying out any alleged promise of delivery.
- (g) As Mr. Harrison had only been in the country for a matter of four weeks he could hardly have been in a position to make any contacts to carry out improper practices and another matter in his favour is that he had already reported to Mr. Elston certain alleged irregularities in connection with staff privileges.
- (h) As Capt. Bruce will not face the accused person with his original statement, the only

course I can see to follow is to absolve Mr. Harrison of any complicity as he is innocent until proved guilty and I cannot find that way.

Intentionally or otherwise—I am prepared to admit for the purposes of this debate that it was otherwise—the member for Melville placed in my mind the impression that he was convinced that Mr. Gomme was unfair and improper in his review of this matter but Mr. Gomme's judgment, I submit, was not the judgment of a partisan. In the first place, as the member for Melville pointed out once or twice in the course of last night's debate, Mr. Gomme began by being at least perfectly fair to Capt. Bruce by saying he thought Capt. Bruce sincerely thought that something irregular was happening. He went on to indicate that Harrison, having been here only a very short time and during that time having endeavoured to show up some irregularities, was not likely to be one to contribute towards such practices. He then pointed out the conflict of views that there is between the parties and recited certain differences that had occurred and ended by saying, "He is innocent until proved guilty and I cannot find that way."

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Did he not say a bit more than that later on?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: He said—

Should there in fact be any irregularities with deliveries of bricks whether by State Brick Works or private companies this cannot be laid at the door of this concern. The Building Operations and Building Materials Control Act under which releases are granted is administered by the State Housing Commission and I cannot accept any responsibility for what happens to bricks once delivered into the hands of brick carters.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I meant the part about what he proposed to do.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: He said—

It is therefore recommended from a departmental point of view that no further action be taken.

As the judgment of a layman, I think that is a well-balanced document. He tries to point out what might be to the advantage of each party and as there is not sufficient evidence before him, he adopts what I think members will agree is the usual principle of British justice—that a defendant is entitled to the benefit of any doubt.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Did he interrogate Unwin?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: To the best of my knowledge, no.

Mr. Styants: How did Parker & Parker come into the business at that stage?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: They had written to the general manager of the State Brick Works saying they wanted to know if Capt. Bruce was repeating his statement, or words to that effect, and he said he proposed to advise them that Capt. Bruce was not doing so. I think he had to answer the letter and that was the only answer he could give them. No exception can be taken to that. And so I say that any suggestion that the general manager of the State Brick Works has been in any way partisan or unfair in this matter is not borne out by his report and it seems to me that up to the present there is nothing to warrant the general manager forming any conclusion other than that which he did form.

In my view the whole matter is a most unfortunate one—I am dealing now solely with the case of Bruce v. Harrison. Were I sitting in judgment on the facts, so far as they have been shown to me—and I have now spent considerable time on the matter—I would say, at the very worst, that the defendant Harrison was entitled to the benefit of the doubt. That is at the very worst. I would therefore say that, being entitled to that benefit, he could not be convicted on any charge, supposing a charge could be or was laid in respect of this matter. But, this matter has been given, in my opinion, a great deal more publicity than it has deserved.

Mr. McCulloch: More than the price of gold question?

The DEPUTY PREMIER: It has placed Mr. Harrison, and I dare say Capt. Bruce, too, in a rather invidious position. I do not know whether Capt. Bruce realises what the situation will be if, as suggested, an inquiry were made into this matter under the panoply of the law. I do not know whether he realises the unpleasantness that will be attendant on an inquiry of that nature; I hope he does for I can see nothing that he can gain and little that he can lose except time, comfort and so forth.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: He could lose his good name if he cooked up a story as was suggested by the Minister for Housing.

The DEPUTY PREMIER: Of course, the position is equally bad, or worse, for Harrison; a man who had been, at the time of this business, in the country for only four or five weeks and who, as I said, had begun steps to improve certain positions at the State Brick Works which had been the subject of careless handling for quite a time. By these improvements he enabled the State to collect a fair value on a certain type of brick. I feel, however, that the matter has really gone too far for us to ask Mr. Harrison to lie down and take it. Virtually every paper in the State has some reference to this matter; the implications are much wider from what has been said than; in my opinion, actually exists within the four walls of this case.

I do not think it has been fair that the suggestions should have been so wide. I will not say that mud has stuck to Mr. Harrison over this matter but I am firmly convinced that there are some splatterings of it, and I have reached the conclusion that it is about time they were cleared away. I am convinced that the result of any investigation into this matter, at which both parties, and all concerned, would be obliged to state in full and under oath what took place, could only reveal a state of affairs in which Mr. Harrison would be shown to be not guilty.

So I propose to inform the House that while the Government does not intend to agree, as I said earlier, to the general and wide inquiry suggested in the amendment to the Address-in-reply, I have an alternative to it. Obviously, quite apart from the substantial reasons I have given, a motion of the nature moved is not acceptable to any Government; but if the amendment is defeated—and in so far as the case of Harrison versus Bruce is concerned—the Government is prepared to arrange for a stipendiary magistrate to inquire into the allegations made. I therefore ask the House to reject the amendment and leave the Government, on that undertaking, to take action in the matter.

HON. A. R. G. HAWKE (Northam—on amendment) [7.54]: The Deputy Premier has covered a considerable amount of ground in discussing this matter. Most of his time was spent in defending the administration of the State Housing Commission. As far as I was aware, the State Housing Commission was in no way under fire in this debate; neither—

The Deputy Premier: It is responsible for the distribution of bricks.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: —was the amendment aimed in any way at the State Housing Commission.

The Deputy Premier: The State Housing Commission is responsible for the distribution of bricks, and that is part of the amendment.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The Deputy Premier tells the House that the State Housing Commission is responsible for the distribution of bricks. How far is it responsible? Where does its responsibility begin and where does it end in this connection? Is the Minister trying to lead the House to believe that whenever and wherever blackmarketing has developed in this State in the distribution of bricks, the State Housing Commission, or its officers, have fallen down on their job and are entitled to be held responsible for every such activity? Of course not. The contention of the Deputy Premier on that point is absurd.

It is true that the State Housing Commission, under the building materials control legislation, is the responsible public authority. However, as the Deputy Pre-

mier knows only too well, the release of bricks is automatic in many instances. Therefore, it seems to me that the State Housing Commission is not under fire at all; certainly not from this side of the House. As a matter of fact, the Deputy Premier admitted in his speech that black-marketing does take place, and has taken place, in the distribution of bricks; I think he would admit that it is still taking place.

What is the attitude of the Deputy Premier to the problem of blackmarketing in bricks? He tells us that blackmarketing activities in Western Australia, by comparison with at least some of the Eastern States, is not of any great significance. Is that the way to face up to the problem? Is it a sufficient answer to this House for the Deputy Premier to tell us that blackmarketing in bricks, and perhaps in other building materials, is five times worse in Sydney than it is in Perth! No wonder blackmarketing flourishes in Western Australia if that is the attitude of the Deputy Premier to the problem. I think it is the attitude of the Minister for Prices, to the same thing, in connection with prices control legislation in Western Australia.

Mr. Graham: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Premier: Surely you are being jocular.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I am not being jocular.

The Deputy Premier: Then you have every justification for being so.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I am being tremendously serious because I have been convinced, for a long time, that black-marketing has been treated far too lightly by the Government; unfortunately, too, it is treated far too lightly by the general public. Too many people in the community regard it as smart business on their part to indulge in blackmarketing.

The Premier: Do you think it is as bad as it was when we had war-time controls?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: In my opinion, much worse.

The Premier: No, there is no comparison.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Much worse.

Mr. Graham: Of course it is.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Especially is this so in connection with building materials.

Mr. Graham: The Premier was away in Britain for too long. He is out of touch.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: So it seems to me that the attitude of the Government towards blackmarketing in this State is an attitude far too lenient effectively to meet the situation. When the Deputy Premier says that blackmarketing in this State is light by comparison with what it is in the Eastern States he has to remember that the volume of commercial and business activity in this State is ever so much less than it is in New South Wales and Victoria. Therefore the percentage of

blackmarketing in Western Australia could be quite as great, even greater, by comparison with what it is in Victoria and New South Wales.

The Premier: Action is taken against these people for blackmarketing and breaking the law.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Is it?

The Premier: Yes.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: When?

The Premier: The hon. gentleman sees reports in the Press the same as I do.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I suppose I have seen in the newspapers an average of one prosecution a month.

The Attorney General: Well, you do not read the newspapers.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The difference between the Attorney General and myself is that I read and understand the newspaper and he only reads it.

The Attorney General: You cannot possibly make the statement that there is only one prosecution a month, considering the number of prosecutions there are.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I do not think the Attorney General is awake to the type of prosecution we are discussing. What type of prosecution does the Attorney General think we are discussing?

The Attorney General: You said something about prices a while ago.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I thought so! I thought the Attorney General was unconscious as usual and he has proved overwhelmingly that such is the case.

The Attorney General: Well, you make yourself clear.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I am happy in the fact that I have made myself clear to everyone in the House except the Attorney General.

The Attorney General: Do not pay yourself so many compliments.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The fact that I have not made myself clear to the Attorney General only proves that it is impossible for anyone to make himself clear to the Attorney General.

Mr. Nimmo: Don't throw too many bricks.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The Deputy Premier so flatters the Government as to say that no inquiry into blackmarketing of bricks in this State could achieve any more than the Government has already done. I know, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure you know, too, as do some of the supporters of the Government in this House, that black-marketing in bricks is going on on a fairly extensive scale.

The Attorney General: What do you mean by blackmarketing in bricks?

Mr. Graham: Go back to sleep!

The Attorney General: What do you mean by blackmarketing in bricks?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I think every member of the House knows what we mean when we talk about blackmarketing in bricks, but for the special benefit of the Attorney General I would say that it is a practice by which certain persons, either engaged in the production of bricks, or the handling or controlling of bricks between the point of production and the ultimate point of use, obtain more for them than the price which the Attorney General's price fixing department places upon them.

The Attorney General: So you do refer to prices prosecutions, do you, as far as bricks are concerned?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I do not.

The Attorney General: Oh! I thought you did.

The Minister for Lands: That settles that.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The Attorney General is wrong again. We have seen quite recently in the newspapers a report that a certain brickworks threatened to close down because the legitimate maximum price for bricks was not sufficient to enable the company's works to be carried on profitably. It has been said during this debate tonight that the brickworks in question have not, in fact, closed down; not yet, at any rate. I understand the Government, through the State Housing Commission, carried out exhaustive inquiries regarding this company's operations and obtained a lot of valuable information. It would be interesting to know what action, if any, it proposes to take on the information which was obtained for it by the Commission.

There is no doubt in my mind that an exhaustive investigation into the production and distribution of bricks in the metropolitan area particularly, would expose the fact that blackmarketing activities in connection with bricks have been fairly widespread and continue to be so. I do not suggest for a moment that it is easy to prove a case against blackmarketers. I know that those who regularly engage in this practice are very crafty. They doubtless go to no end of trouble to cover up their tracks. Therefore it could very easily be that a searching investigation by a judge would not only expose the extent of blackmarketing, but also would result in a recommendation being made to the Government to take more effective steps for the tracking down of those engaged in it and probably for reducing the possibility of blackmarketing being practiced in the future.

If the Government thinks it has all the answers to this problem then that is unfortunate, especially for those people in this State who are waiting for homes but are not able to obtain them in a period

which could be regarded as fair and reasonable. They are families which are forced to wait far longer than they should to obtain a home in which to live; families which are compelled to live under the most deplorable conditions. And when I mention families, I have in mind the women and the young children, tens of thousands of whom today in Western Australia, as I have said, are living under terrible conditions in so far as their accommodation is concerned.

Prior to the speech of the Minister for Housing during the Address-in-reply debate, the Capt. Bruce-Harrison episode was not to my mind by any means the most important phase of the production and distribution of bricks in Western Australia. I regarded that episode as being incidental to the whole problem; as being a comparatively minor part of it; as being only one example of the possibility that blackmarketing was, in fact, in operation. However, the speech of the Minister for Housing in connection with this episode was such as to cause it to become a thousand times more important than it was before he made his speech. Those who heard the member for Melville make his speech on the matter will remember that he stated what he believed to be the facts. He gave to the House the information which had been given to him by a reputable citizen. He gave us information also of his, the member for Melville's, unsuccessful attempts to try to get, first of all, the Minister for Housing, and later other Government officers, to have this episode thoroughly investigated.

As a matter of fact, the member for Melville showed great patience in his efforts to try to achieve success in that direction. He was anxious that this matter should not be ventilated in Parliament or in public at all because he was keen that any suggestion of questionable action against any person should not be made here unless a searching departmental inquiry had first proved that there was a reasonable basis upon which to make the whole matter public. Now, what was the reaction of the Minister for Housing to the approach made by the member for Melville? The Minister for Housing would have no association with the matter; he refused to accept any direct responsibility in connection with it. He said, "This is not a matter for me to investigate; it is not a matter for me to handle; it is not my responsibility."

Well, Mr. Speaker, I should say that a Minister would have a very comfortable time in office if he were able always to adopt that attitude to important matters, and to get away with it. The member for Melville then endeavoured to get a searching investigation made by Government officers who had some relationship with the department concerned. In those efforts apparently he was not

very successful because at no stage was there any real showdown as between Capt. Bruce on the one hand and the manager of the State Brick Works on the other. However, the Minister for Housing did have some kind of departmental inquiry made by the general manager of the State Saw Mills and the State Brick Works, Mr. Gomme.

Finally, the Minister comes to this House, as he did this week, and judges the whole matter, makes a clear-cut and vigorous judgment as between the statements of Capt. Bruce on the one side and the position of the manager of the State Brick Works on the other. The Minister for Housing did not hesitate at all to judge the situation. He not only judged it, but he relished the opportunity to judge it. He told us in effect that he had found there was no justification whatever for the suggestions made against the manager of the State Brick Works. If the Minister had left it at that he would have at least some justification for his attitude, and no very serious objection could have been taken to what he said. However, he went very much further, and judged Capt. Bruce and his actions and activities in connection with the whole matter. The Minister decided without any qualification, that Capt. Bruce had cooked up a story and perpetrated a conspiracy for the purpose of trying to obtain a few thousand bricks with which to have a house built.

The Attorney General: I think Mr. Brownlie is supposed to have cooked up a story, too, isn't he?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The fact that the Minister was so reckless in regard to Capt. Bruce makes the episode between Capt. Bruce and the manager of the State Brick Works a thousand times more important. We all remember that the Minister for Housing charged the member for Melville with having made a vitriolic and scurrilous attack upon the manager of the State Brick Works which, of course, the member for Melville did not do at all. On the other hand, the Minister certainly made a very vicious, a most unjustified and vitriolic attack upon Capt. Bruce. Not only must the Minister for Housing accept full responsibility for that, but the Premier and all the other Ministers must accept responsibility for it too. That is why there should now be a most exhaustive investigation into the matter—

The Premier: Are you not satisfied with the inquiry promised by the Deputy Premier?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: —and we on this side of the House say that the investigation should be made by a judge. We also say that the investigation should not be limited to this one possible phase of blackmarketing, but should be widened to cover every possible activity of black-

marketing in connection with the distribution of bricks. I do not pretend to judge the manager of the State Brick Works. As a matter of fact, I give him the benefit of any doubt there might be, if there is any doubt. What we do know is that there is blackmarketing in connection with the distribution of bricks generally.

What is the sense, therefore, of the Government's agreeing to investigate only one possible blackmarketing practice by one or two persons at the most, and refusing at the same time to allow the man carrying out the investigation to inquire into the whole field of blackmarketing in bricks so that he might uncover such activities, wherever they exist, in the production and distribution of bricks within the State?

Obviously the Government is doing a most foolish thing if it agrees to an investigation of only that one phase of the subject where nothing has been proved, where nothing might be proved, and where there might be no blackmarketing activity of any sort. I should hate to think that there has been, or is, or would be anything of the sort associated with a State-owned and State-operated utility. So I say to the Premier and his colleagues that they run away from the general problem if they refuse to accept the amendment as a whole and undertake to have an inquiry into the Capt. Bruce-Harrison episode only.

It is a remarkable fact that both the Minister for Housing and the Deputy Premier failed to interview Capt. Bruce at any time. I understand that the Minister for Housing actually refused to interview him. What a one-eyed attitude it was for the Minister to come to the House and judge the whole matter, and viciously to go further and make the dastardly charges he did against Capt. Bruce when he, the Minister, who set himself up as the judge of the matter, had refused to give Capt. Bruce an opportunity of discussing the matter with him!

This evening the Deputy Premier was nearly as bad though, I admit, not quite. He came here and stated a case based entirely on information made available to him by departmental officers, and then said in effect, that, although there was really no charge to be answered, nothing really serious to be investigated, the Government had decided, in view of all the newspaper publicity, to agree to an investigation by a magistrate. Why did not the Deputy Premier grant Capt. Bruce the privilege of an interview in order that he, the Deputy Premier, might get not only the departmental point of view but also the opposite point of view? Surely that would have been a fair and reasonable thing to do! Yet it was not done.

The Premier: The Deputy Premier is going to have a very busy life if he has to listen to complaints by everyone who has complaints or to any charges made.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: No one has suggested that.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Is the position in this State really so bad?

The Premier: I do not think so.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Then there is no point in your statement.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Surely the Premier does not suggest that, in view of the proportions reached by the episode and the publicity given to it, the Deputy Premier should not in this instance have interviewed Capt. Bruce! The Deputy Premier regarded the matter as so important as to come here this evening and speak about it for two hours. Therefore it seems to me that an acute obligation rested on the shoulders of the Deputy Premier to interview Capt. Bruce so that he, the Deputy Premier could have had both sides of the case and arrived at a more balanced judgment. If the Deputy Premier is not able to get away from his habit of stating only one side of a case, it is unfortunate—unfortunate for the Government and unfortunate for all of those involved in this matter.

I suggest very seriously that the Premier and his Government would be taking a false step by watering down any proposed inquiry to such an extent as to cause it to cover only one possible activity in the blackmarketing of bricks in this State. I am sure that if the Premier had a talk with some of his supporters in this House, he would learn sufficient to cause him to agree that the severest investigation should be made to expose these dishonest activities, to bring to book those indulging in them and to establish a setup that would reduce to a minimum blackmarketing activities in the future.

I want the Government to take a much more realistic view right through regarding blackmarketing activities, irrespective of whether they occur in connection with building materials or anything else because, unless a much more severe attitude is adopted, we shall experience a much greater undermining of honesty by people concerned in these affairs. We can imagine the thoughts and feelings of builders and contractors who trade honestly and find themselves failing to get, regularly at any rate, the supplies of building materials they need to enable them to carry on and keep their teams of workmen together, well knowing, as many of them do, that other builders and contractors, prepared to trade on the blackmarket, are able to get supplies of building materials regularly and, therefore, are able to keep together their teams of workmen, and even to go further and flch employees away from the first group of builders and contractors because they are not able to keep their workmen employed regularly.

The matter in my view is extremely serious, quite apart from the Capt. Bruce-Mr. Harrison episode, which becomes im-

portant only because of the attitude of the Minister in his speech the other night when he libelled Capt. Bruce, and did it deliberately. It is only the attitude of the Minister towards Capt. Bruce in his speech which has wrapped the matter around with so much more importance than it had up to that stage. Therefore it would be out of all reason for the Government to agree to investigate only that question and leave the general, fairly widespread problem of blackmarketing in bricks to go on as it has done for so long.

**THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING** (Hon. G. P. Wild—Dale—on amendment) [8.32]: I do not intend to add any more fuel to a flame that has been fanned here for the last two days, and one day last week.

Mr. Totterdell: It is getting us nowhere.

**The MINISTER FOR HOUSING:** That is so. It has not got Capt. Bruce his bricks and it is not clearing the name of Harrison.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That is not our fault.

**The MINISTER FOR HOUSING:** There are one or two observations I want to make. The Leader of the Opposition inferred that the blackmarket here was as bad as it is in the Eastern States. I am not going to deny, and no member of the Government will, that there is a degree of blackmarketing in Western Australia. It is inevitable that there should be some blackmarketing, particularly when we have an expanding programme such as we have today. We are endeavouring this year to build 6,000 houses, but we are still producing very nearly only the same quantity of bricks that we were when we were trying to build 2,000 houses less, last year. The result, as the Deputy Premier pointed out prior to the tea suspension, is that it is inevitable that some people will fail to resist the temptation to enter into the blackmarket. It is rather interesting to look at the "Sydney Morning Herald" of the 15th July, 1951—only a little over a month ago—and see in an article there that cement is shown up to £3 a bag in Sydney on the black; and the New South Wales prices branch figure is 8s. 8d. a bag.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Bricks in Western Australia are up to £20 a thousand on the black, and the fixed price is £7 10s. a thousand.

**The MINISTER FOR HOUSING:** I can assure members that nothing like that permeates the industry in Western Australia. We know it is there in a minor degree, but we are doing everything we can to stop it. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the brickworks referred to by the Deputy Premier, and wanted to know what we had done in regard to stopping the blackmarketing at those particular brickworks. The reason why those brickworks were to be closed down, or allegedly closed down, was because of action taken by the State

**Housing Commission.** This particular brickyard had been operating a system whereby it never saw the permits. It had a carter who was the go-between. He got the permit from the permit-holder and then went to the brickyard where he picked up the bricks. I understand that the company was getting somewhere in the vicinity of £15 a thousand for its bricks.

When this came to the ears of the State Housing Commission, the chairman immediately took action and said that the provisions of the Building Materials Control Act were to be carried out in their entirety, and the firm then was not to deliver any bricks unless it was given a release. The result was that it endeavoured to call the bluff of the Government and said, "Very well, we will close down." But, as the Deputy Premier said, that brickyard has not closed down, and I do not think there is much likelihood of its doing so, either.

I wish to make only one other observation, and that is that I want to apologise to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for having used a word last evening which I did not intend when I said that Capt. Bruce had cooked up a story. I see in the report of my speech that I said it, and I must admit to having said it, but I was endeavouring to infer—

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The Minister said it very deliberately.

**THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING:** I was endeavouring to infer that this gentleman, when he went to see Mr. Brownlie, was led away, as many of us are at times. I said last evening that Mr. Brownlie denied certain of the things that he was supposed to have said in the presence of Capt. Bruce and which actually were said. Finally, now that this subject has been ventilated to such a large extent, I think the course the Government is going to take to have a magisterial inquiry is definitely fair to both gentlemen.

We have listened for three days to the rights and wrongs of Mr. Harrison and the same applies to Capt. Bruce. Now Capt. Bruce will have the opportunity to do what it was hoped he would have done before the inquiry at the State works, and that is, be able to go before the magistrate and look Mr. Harrison in the eye and make certain allegations, and it will be for the magistrate then to determine on the evidence whether he is right or wrong.

Amendment put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	.....	16
Noes	.....	21
Majority against	.....	5

**Ayes.**

Mr. Brady  
Mr. Graham  
Mr. Guthrie  
Mr. Hawke  
Mr. J. Hegney  
Mr. W. Hegney  
Mr. Lawrence  
Mr. McCulloch

Mr. Needham  
Mr. Nulsen  
Mr. Panton  
Mr. Sewell  
Mr. Sleeman  
Mr. Styants  
Mr. Tonkin  
Mr. May

(Teller.)

**Noes.**

Mr. Abbott  
Mr. Ackland  
Mr. Brand  
Dame F. Cardell-Oliver  
Mr. Doney  
Mr. Griffith  
Mr. Hearman  
Mr. Hutchinson  
Mr. Mann  
Mr. Manning  
Mr. McLarty

Mr. Nalder  
Mr. Nimmo  
Mr. Oldfield  
Mr. Owen  
Mr. Read  
Mr. Thorn  
Mr. Totterdell  
Mr. Watts  
Mr. Wild  
Mr. Bovell

(Teller.)

**Pairs.**

**Ayes.**  
Mr. Kelly  
Mr. Hoar  
Mr. Coverley  
Mr. Marshall  
Mr. Rodoreda

**Noes.**  
Mr. Hill  
Mr. Perkins  
Mr. Cornell  
Mr. Grayden  
Mr. Yates

Amendment thus negatived.

On motion by Mr. Needham, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 8.43 p.m.

## Legislative Council

Tuesday, 28th August, 1951.

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

### QUESTIONS.

#### HOUSING.

(a) As to Commonwealth-State Rental Homes, Fremantle.

Hon. E. M. DAVIES asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) How many Commonwealth-State rental houses have been erected in Fremantle?

(2) How many of such houses, including small-unit dwellings, have been made available to State Electricity Commission employees?