

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 18th August, 1948.

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

QUESTIONS.

NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL.

As to Expenditure on Advertising, etc.

Mr. STYANTS asked the Minister representing the Minister for Police:

(1) What are the respective amounts expended by the W.A. Branch of the National Safety Council on advertising during the past 12 months—

- (a) Press publicity (the amounts paid to the respective newspapers);
- (b) radio;
- (c) posters;
- (d) printed matter;
- (e) other forms of publicity?

(2) What is the amount paid to W.A. from the grant of £100,000 made by the Commonwealth Government to this State for the above purposes?

(3) Could any of this money be used for placing more police traffic controls on the roads?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied:

There are reasons why it is desired not to make this information public, but I will give it to the hon. member privately.

GOLDMINING.

As to Portable Drills and Diamond Drilling.

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

(1) What is the total number of portable drills secured by the Department to aid prospectors?

(2) What number of such drills are now in occupation by prospectors?

(3) Has any free boring by diamond drilling been done by the Department in localities recommended by geologists during the last 12 months?

(4) If any such work has been executed, in what locality has the drilling been done?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING replied:

(1) Six portable drills were purchased by the Department, and another is on order.

(2) Three are in use at present moment by prospectors, and all but one have been in more or less continuous use.

(3) No. The department has no diamond drills. Areas likely to prove payable to prospectors are, however, announced as geological surveys proceed.

(4) See (3) above.

WATER SUPPLIES.

As to Reticulation at Kalamunda.

Mr. WILD asked the Minister for Works:

In view of the promise previously given that the system of reticulation at Kalamunda would be completed at the same time as the raising of the Mundaring wall was finished, would he please indicate as to when work on tanks, etc., would be undertaken?

The MINISTER replied:

Orders for reinforcing steel for the concrete service reservoir have been placed with the Controller of Stores, and it is anticipated that the design for the rising

main will be completed very shortly, when orders for the pipe will also be placed.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLIES.

As to Transmission Lines for Mundaring.

Mr. WILD asked the Minister for Works:

In view of his promise that the power transmission lines to Mundaring would be completed at the same time as the opening of the South Fremantle Power Station, would he now indicate when the work of erecting this line will be commenced?

The MINISTER replied:

It is intended to place an order shortly for the transmission line material for an extension to Mundaring.

HEALTH.

(a) *As to Increasing Allowance to T.B. Subjects.*

Mr. NEEDHAM asked the Premier:

(1) Is he aware that the next Premiers' Conference will consider the anti-T.B. campaign?

(2) Is he aware that many sufferers from tuberculosis are reluctant to undergo treatment because of the inadequate monetary allowance whilst absent from their employment?

(3) Will he bring before the conference the question of the urgent necessity of a considerable increase in this allowance, to encourage T.B. subjects to undergo treatment?

The PREMIER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) I am not aware of any instance, but it is quite possible.

(3) Yes.

(b) *As to Government Assistance to R.M.A. Conference.*

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Premier:

(1) In respect of what items have expenses been incurred and services rendered by the Government for the B.M.A. Conference now being held?

(2) What is the expenditure already involved, and the total likely to be involved by the time proceedings have concluded?

The PREMIER replied:

(1) (a) The Government has agreed to printing to a maximum cost of £350 being done at the Government Printing Office.

(b) A Cabinet luncheon was tendered to a restricted number of delegates. Total present, 66.

(2) (a) Cost of printing so far done is approximately £220. It is unlikely that further work of any magnitude will be required.

(b) Account not yet received in respect of Cabinet luncheon.

WYNDHAM TOWN GOODS SHED.

As to Proposed Meatworks Site.

Hon. A. A. M. COVERLEY asked the Minister for the North-West:

(1) Has approval been given to the Public Works Department to shift the Wyndham town goods shed to an area on the Wyndham Meat Works?

(2) Is he aware that the Wyndham Road Board disapproves of such action?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The matter is now under consideration.

(2) Yes.

TRAFFIC.

As to Definition of Term "No Parking."

Mr. STYANTS asked the Minister representing the Minister for Police:

(1) What is the definition of the term "No Parking" as used by the Police Department for the regulation of standing vehicles on public highways, streets, etc.?

(2) Will he have this definition placed in the Traffic Act?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING replied:

(1) The term "No Parking" means that vehicles are not to park in areas where, under the Traffic Regulations, parking is not permitted.

(2) The term "Parking" is defined under Traffic Regulation 4.

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

As to Students, Courses and Cost.

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Premier:

(1) What is the number of students attending the University of Western Australia?

(2) How many of them are other than Western Australians?

(2) What are the countries and States and the numbers in each instance from (a) other countries, (b) other States?

(4) What courses are being taken by these people?

(5) What is the estimated cost to the taxpayers of Western Australia of this free university education?

(6) How many Western Australian students are receiving university tuition outside the State?

(7) Do any of these Western Australian students enjoy the privilege of a free university education?

The PREMIER replied:

(1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6) and 7 This information is not in the hands of the Government but I have written to the University to ascertain if they can supply it.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Tenth Day.

Debate resumed from the 12th August.

THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING (Hon.

R. R. McDonald—West Perth) [4.40]: I am indebted to the member for Mt. Hawthorn for the opportunity of saying something on matters which relate particularly to housing, but in the course of my remarks I would like to touch on one or two other subjects that have been raised by members in their speeches on the Address-in-reply. I desired to take part in the debate so that I might have the opportunity, as far as possible, of giving members any information regarding points they have raised, particularly in relation to the problem of housing, which is so important to the State and to members in their individual constituencies.

The member for Forrest raised two questions to which I wish to refer. One related to the supply of fruit cases for the apple

and pear pack for 1949. I do not propose to go into this in any detail, except to assure the hon. member that the matter of an adequate supply of fruit cases for the 1949 apple and pear crop has been continuously engaging the attention of the Government, and has been the subject of conferences with all parties concerned in the industry, and governmental officers. Owing to the resumption of export overseas, which will probably take place next year, to something approaching the pre-war scale, the production of apple cases, which had fallen off during the period of the war when no export was possible, has presented a problem of some magnitude and will necessitate the importation of cases from overseas, particularly Sweden.

The importations may approximate 500,000 cases against total requirements of some 1,500,000 cases. In that connection negotiations have taken place with the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture which, on account of its association with the Apple and Pear Board, has a measure of responsibility—I would say the chief measure of responsibility—at this particular time. I think arrangements will be made to meet the demands on terms which will be the best that can be expected in the circumstances. I might add that Western Australia's problem in relation to case supplies is small, compared with that of the other great apple-producing State, Tasmania, which I am informed will probably require to import something like 2,000,000 cases. That State is also faced with the necessity to make provision for a resumed export overseas after a period when exports abroad were not possible and case production had, in consequence, shrunk to a comparatively small volume.

The other matter raised by the member for Forrest related to the re-use of fruit cases, on the lines of the Queensland legislation. That has previously been the subject of inquiry and consideration by our Department of Agriculture. There are problems associated with the spread of infection—particularly fruit fly—and also problems of cost that have caused the department to be not satisfied that the re-use of fruit cases can apply here in the same way as has been successfully practised in Queensland. I feel, however, that the hon. member's suggestion is valuable,

and merits consideration, and I am having it further examined.

I turn now to the question which has occupied the minds of members in this debate, in conjunction with other matters, and it is that of housing. I am indebted to members in general for their contributions in relation to a matter which is of so much importance to the State and to so many people. I desire to know what the difficulties of people are so that I may be better equipped to attempt to assist the Housing Commission in providing a remedy. Before I deal with housing on a broad scale, I would like to refer to one or two specific matters which were raised. The member for Victoria Park thought that some undue expectations had been raised in the minds of people by the publication of the Commission's intention to utilise, as part of its programme, what is called the expandable house. I have turned up the Press statement which referred to this new type of building, and I feel that no exception could be taken to the statement in which the announcement was made. The Housing Commission, and the Government, feel that in relation to new housing programmes, and even possibly in relation to expectations or objectives, the Housing Commission should inform the public concerning its intentions.

The member for Fremantle made one or two remarkable statements which only need to be mentioned because they carry their own complete refutation. He said—

The McLarty Government did not start a new house before September, 1947.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Who said that?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I am sorry; I should have said the member for South Fremantle. I can quite understand the wish of the member for Fremantle to disclaim a statement of that kind because it would imply that from the end of March to September the Housing Commission completely fell down on its job, and the statement is not merely untrue but it is really, with all due deference to the hon. member, a very silly statement to make. The figures of the Government Statistician show that in the quarter ended June, 1947, 614 houses were commenced, and in the quarter ended September, 1947, 751 houses were commenced. Those two figures are the highest quarterly figures for commencement of

houses since the housing programme was inaugurated in this State.

The member for East Perth referred to some instances in which he expressed criticism of the Housing Commission. In one case, he referred to a couple without children who might be described—with some diffidence by those who, like myself, are no longer young—as an elderly couple who were given a permit to build a small house, after their application had been in the hands of the Commission for a comparatively short time.

Mr. Graham: They are not an elderly couple.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I think they are between 50 and 60 years of age.

Hon. A. H. Panton: They are only youngsters.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I am indebted for the hon. member's implication that they could not be described as elderly, but when it comes to the allocation of houses, particularly in relation to permits to build, opinions can differ very considerably as to which should get preference over which. Merely because I happen to differ from the Housing Commission, or any hon. member, does not necessarily mean that the appreciation by the Housing Commission of the need for a permit is wrong. In this case, the facts before the Housing Commission were that this couple had a poultry farm which they were operating but, owing to severe war wounds received by the husband in World War I, and the wife having had an operation on her hip for osteoarthritis, they were compelled to sell the poultry farm in 1946. Since that time, they have been living with other families and have lately secured a room in a hotel.

A good deal has been said to the effect that elderly people whose children have grown up have been given little or no opportunity to acquire a home because the emphasis has been placed, and on the whole rightly so, upon those with large families, or those with families which are increasing. With some reason, it has been submitted to the Commission that recognition should be given to elderly people living in adverse circumstances who might also be granted the hope and expectation of getting a home of

their own. This is one of those cases—there are not many—where a wounded man from World War I, with a wife suffering from ill-health, who was compelled to relinquish his prior employment, was allowed possibly a privilege. I do not think it could be said that in the limited number of cases that have been granted permits, this is an unreasonable exercise of discretion by the Housing Commission.

Mr. Graham: They had made an application only three months before, and were suffering no hardship whatsoever.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: They were suffering the degree of hardship that for something like 2½ years, up to the present time, they had been going from pillar to post, living with various families and had at last ended up in one room at a hotel.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I know of a case where a single man in the Mt. Hawthorn electorate recently had a permit granted for a house costing £1,100.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I would be very glad to have particulars of it.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I gave them to the Housing Commission this week.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I have never heard of such a case as that, and investigations will be made.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: The name is Mat-tajan.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: No doubt, there are some circumstances which caused the application to be made, because I am sure the Leader of the Opposition will agree that the Commission is composed of reasonable men who are earnestly endeavouring to hold the scales fairly between so many contending applicants for houses.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I quite agree. They are doing a difficult job as well as it can possibly be done.

The Minister for Lands: I bet the applicant made some false statements.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The member for East Perth referred to a clergyman receiving a house in one of the areas in South Perth. The hon. member stated that this man was a newcomer and that there was only himself and a son 16 years

of age to be housed. That is an area of 600 acres where some 2,500 souls are housed. I am not able to find any fault with the decision of the Housing Commission that, in a community of 2,500 souls, a minister of religion might well be allowed an opportunity of residing in their midst. This has no application to any denomination. It simply means that I consider it completely defensible that, in a community of that size, provision should be made for a clergyman to be in residence among the people to whom he will minister in a religious sense.

Mr. Graham: Would it really matter where he lived or under what conditions he lived without special preference?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I do not think there is any special preference. I know of my own knowledge of other clergymen who have arrived to take up service with churches and have been refused houses, but there are cases where the communities are large and contain young people and there can be no reasonable exception to the Commission providing for a clergyman to reside amongst a community of 2,500 souls.

Mr. Fox: And one for each denomination?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I do not necessarily say that. If a community is of a certain size, it may then be quite reasonable. On the other hand, there might be one clergyman of one denomination for one community and another clergyman of another denomination for another community.

Mr. Graham: I do not think that would excuse the Commission when there are people suffering extreme hardship.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I say very strongly that I regard the allocation of a house to a minister of religion stationed in a community of a certain size as being entirely in the best interests of the people in the locality.

Mr. Graham: When there are other people becoming demented because they have been passed over?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I do not think there are many who would complain of that decision, not even those who have been disappointed on account of the time they have been waiting to get houses.

The member for East Perth spoke of two houses, one in Brisbane-street and another in Summer-street, East Perth, in which there was overcrowding. Unfortunately that sort of thing can sometimes happen. I agree with him that there were too many people in those houses. In one case, provision has been made for one family to leave and I believe that family will get a house in about two months' time. That will relieve the congestion there if the house does not fill up again.

Mr. Graham: Was that allocation made as a consequence of my representation?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It was.

Mr. Graham: It should not have been necessary.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It was a peculiar case. Until the member for East Perth became active in the matter, so far as I can learn no strong representations had been made to the Commission on behalf of those particular people. They were returned soldiers but they had not applied for a war service home, which is the easiest way for ex-Servicemen to get a home.

I pass now to the other house in which there has been overcrowding. The facts are that at the beginning of the year, to relieve the overcrowding, one family was given a house, but within a month or two another family, relatives, went in and took the place of the family that had left. The family that went in had come from the Eastern States, and the Commission felt that for the time being it was not easy to grant new arrivals a house over the heads of people who had been living here for years and whose applications had long been before the Commission.

Mr. Graham: I did not mention the Housing Commission in connection with that case.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The Commission has told me that that matter will receive further consideration. Speaking of housing generally, the main responsibility rests with the Commission, which under a statute of Parliament is charged with the responsibility and duty of building houses to meet the needs of our people, and the Commission continues its work, whatever the political complexion of the Government might be. I know that what-

ever might be the political complexion of the Government, the Commission will display the same energy and devotion to duty to build houses as rapidly as conditions permit. This has continued from the time of the preceding Government and during the term of the present Government.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Can you tell the House how Middle Swan got so many houses for two-unit families? Dozens of them!

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I have applied to the Housing Commission for information in reply to the question asked by the member for North-East Fremantle.

Mr. Marshall: We want it affirmed because it is a matter of public interest.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The information will be given as soon as it can be collated. The housing rate steadily increased during 1947, but at the end of that year, it became apparent to the Commission and the Government that the effect of a 40-hour week must inevitably be to slow down the building rate. For that reason the Government and the Commission consulted and evolved new techniques in the matter of housing design to continue as far as possible the same expansion as had been taking place previously, in spite of the fact that shorter hours were now being worked. The Commission evolved the duplex type of house of which 140 units are now authorised as part of the programme and are being constructed, while some of them are in occupation.

The Commission also evolved the expansible or small house which was brought forward for consideration by the housing authorities of the United States of America and it was from their journals that the matter came before the Government and the Commission in this State. This type of small house will enable the Commission to obtain, as part of the programme, more homes from the existing volume of labour and material than would have been possible had it continued to build entirely on the standard pattern hitherto adopted.

As regards houses of the expansible type being built by the Commission, when the building situation becomes easier, the Commission will inspect those houses and build them to the final design so that they will emerge as two or three-bedroomed houses.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Are local authorities lessening their requirements

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I am glad to say that some local authorities agreed immediately to the expansible type of house, but others were not altogether satisfied as to the design. However, after a visit by members of the Housing Commission, those local authorities are now, on the whole, co-operating extremely well with the Commission in regard to expansible houses.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I suppose the question of allocation has something to do with it.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes. The idea of building these small houses has met with a large measure of popular approval. An indication of this has been ascertained by means of a questionnaire which the Commission sent out and which produced a most encouraging and gratifying response. In addition the Commission decided to encourage the conversion of larger houses, which are too big for the existing occupants, into two or more flats. That is another way of getting accommodation made available more rapidly with a minimum of expense. The Commission has evolved a policy or a sort of self-help programme under which people, particularly those in the country and outer suburban areas, may contribute their own labour and get the assistance of their friends to build homes. These people are granted more favourable consideration in the matter of receiving permits to build.

Mr. Graham: Has that proposal commenced to operate?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It is in operation. They are what we call owner-built houses. The Government has also set up a building materials production division of the Department of Industrial Development under the Assistant Director, Mr. Temby, which is charged with encouraging the expansion of the production of building materials in our State to the fullest possible extent. In order to assist builders with regard to the many forms and formalities and time lost in connection with controls, a big progressive policy of decontrol is being observed, where materials can reasonably be decontrolled. Already cement and paint have been decontrolled in the last few

weeks, and I expect that other materials will be similarly dealt with in the near future.

Further, the permit system has been overhauled, and instead of requiring two separate permits—one a permit to build and the other for the release of materials—the permit to build now carries the release. That has been welcomed with applause by the building trade. The Government has the services of an advisory panel, acting in an honorary capacity, who meet every fortnight and comprise builders, an architect, and representatives of manufacturing and distributing industries, who are doing most admirable work and tendering advice to the Government which is of very great value. I cannot speak too highly of the honorary service of these gentlemen and the time and interest they are devoting to the solution of our housing problem. The State has been able to bring about an agreement, in which other States also share, by which tenants of rental homes will now be allowed to purchase those homes on easy terms over a long period of years.

The two and three-unit families have not been getting, or had not been getting a very large proportion—in fact they had been getting a very small proportion—of allocations of houses to rent and permits to build. I am not going to criticise that policy, because I think that in any housing programme to meet an emergency, the emphasis must be in the first place on the parents with large families; but the married couples with one or two children or without any children comprise a class that outnumbers families with two or three children.

Hon. A. H. Panton: That must grow, too.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes, and the Government has therefore increased the previous allocation, which was nominally five per cent. to 35 per cent., that 35 per cent. being broadly the proportion which should go to two and three-unit families.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Do you mean 35 per cent. of the total allocations?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes. That is a round figure. It cannot be used absolutely, but it is a guide. The Commission feels that something more has now been done for two and three-unit families, and that when they have been brought more

into the picture their proportion may be slightly reduced and a bit more added to the ratio of the larger families.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Are you sure that figure of 35 per cent. is right?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: That is the recent figure that has been arrived at:

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I find it difficult to believe in view of the number of allocations available.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I hope to get the figures because this new arrangement has been operating for a few months, since early this year. As soon as I can obtain the figures I will supply them to the hon. member and he will have some idea of how they work out.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: That means considerably over a quarter.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It is.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I very much doubt it.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I think the hon. member will find that the figures work out fairly close to that ratio from now on and from the early part of the year. I would like to give the House the latest figures that I have received and which are to a certain extent tentative, because absolutely final figures for the year ended the 30th June last have not been checked. The figures I have are these: For the year ended the 30th June last, 3,136 houses were commenced as against 2,448 in the previous year. The figures I am giving include what are called owner-built houses. For the year 1947-48 there were 2,767 houses completed as against 1,792 the previous year. For 1947-48 the building rate was 2,952 and for the preceding year 2,120.

Encouragement is being given more so than previously to the owner-builder. He can very often get materials—or a certain proportion of the materials—especially in the country, and by his own labour and that of his friends, plus the services of a carpenter or builder who may assist him with advice, build a house without drawing upon the volume of skilled professional labour which is utilised in the ordinary way for the construction of houses. In Queensland, 30 per cent. of the houses erected are built by owner-builders and we believe there is room for an increase in

the ratio of owner-built homes in our State.

Hon. A. H. Panton: You mean that an owner-builder is one who wants to live in the house himself.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes. He satisfies the Commission that his needs are reasonable. I welcome the criticism of members. I know it will come and in some cases it may be deserved. Where it is deserved, it relates to matters which ought to be rectified. However, I do not think that at any period of the State's building history there has been more interest, energy and initiative brought by any Government into the house-building programme than has been shown by the present Government. I say that, perhaps, who ought not to say it, but I say it because I believe it would be supported by builders and builders' organisations.

I now want to say a word or two about another matter. The Leader of the Opposition made some strictures about party propaganda and in the course of his remarks used words which I, with great restraint, will merely say were, in my opinion, in excess of the occasion. The Leader of the Opposition and I, and many members of this House, can cast our minds back a good many years and we know that party propaganda from time to time is something which is resented by the side against which it is directed. I remember the 1933 elections which were responsible for the appearance in this House of the Leader of the Opposition and myself and many other members who, like the Leader of the Opposition, have risen to high standing in the public life of our State. Prior to that election, a leader of another party—not my party—was alleged to have made a statement.

Hon. A. H. Panton: He made it, too!

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The statement was that in his opinion the State basic wage should be reduced to the lower level of the then Federal basic wage. That statement was disclaimed, but in any case it was not made by the leader of my party or any member of my party. In fact, it was made by the leader of another party whose party was fighting my own leader for the Parliamentary seat he held.

Hon. A. H. Panton: He was Leader of the Opposition at the time when he was supposed to have said that.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: He was fighting the election as leader of a different party. That statement, not made by the leader of my party or by any member of my party, and repudiated by us, was fastened on to us; and we heard it in our deafest ear, and my electorate was flooded with it, and so was every other electorate. We felt, especially those of us who were new at this political game, that those were very unjustifiable tactics. But to the party of my friend, the Leader of the Opposition, which had seized upon what they regarded as an election-winning slogan, that was great fun and we were expected to take it; and we did. We took it. Some words were said about misrepresentation of public men. I do not think that any man in the public life of Australia has been met with so much calumny and misrepresentation so undeserved as has Mr. R. G. Menzies. His political opponents have used expressions and propaganda against him which, if propaganda is to be analysed, will never be justified by any reasonable and unbiased judge.

Mr. Hegney: Have you read what Mr. Paton said about him?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: People may say things about other people which are unjustified, even when they may possibly be in the same party. I remember very well the 1945 Federal elections when there appeared in the paper in conjunction with the name of Mr. Chifley what purported to be a facsimile of "Speakers' Notes" issued by the Liberal Party of Western Australia. The document had been fabricated and appeared to be a phototype reproduction of the Liberal Party's "Speakers' Notes." This alleged facsimile contained expressions which were derogatory to the Liberal Party, its performances in the past and its ability in the future; and this fabricated document was published as an apparent reproduction of a genuine leaf from the "Speakers' Notes" of the Liberal Party.

The attention of Mr. Chifley was drawn to it in the Commonwealth Parliament; but after that it still appeared and it was meant to deceive the people of Australia. In plain words, it was a forgery and was denounced at the time from the

pulpit of one of the leading churches in Collins-street, Melbourne. I do not like party propaganda; but when we are going to speak about party propaganda, let us realise that what takes place is, I am afraid, much of the same quality from all parties.

The Leader of the Opposition rightly professed concern about finance, and so does every other responsible member of this Chamber. The Government is fully aware of the need to deal, in the most adequate manner possible, with the State's finance. The financial deficit that we have faced in the last year and must face again this year is inseparable from the post-war period of rising costs and inflationary tendencies. It will continue to involve stringency in State finances, particularly in a large and undeveloped State such as this, until there can be attained some equilibrium in the economic field. The Leader of the Opposition met the same position in his time. In 1945-46 the estimated deficit was £207,090, but the actual deficit for that year was £912,559, so the State went down the financial hill in that twelve months by £705,000.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: It would have, but it did not.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I am speaking, for the time being, of the anticipations of the Treasurer and the realisations. I appreciate that the Grants Commission in 1945-46 and in later years very properly acknowledged the inability of the State to control finance sufficiently to avoid deficits, and made available the money necessary to correct them. In 1946-47 the previous Government estimated the deficit at £186,000, but the actual deficit was £675,000. Again, the financial position deteriorated in that year by £488,744 more than was estimated by the Treasurer, and that sum was properly provided by the Grants Commission.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Not wholly.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Not wholly. In speaking at the Premiers' Conference in January, 1946, the present Leader of the Opposition made some pertinent and entirely justifiable remarks. He told the Prime Minister and the assembled Premiers of his expectation of a deterioration in the finances of the State during

his time and, of course, the time of any succeeding Government.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I did not mind criticising them, either. You will notice it.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I think the Leader of the Opposition made remarks that I would entirely endorse. I did like his realistic approach to the fact that financial stringency and recurring and increasing deficits will be inevitable under any Government until such time as financial conditions and the relationship between Commonwealth and States—as well as the economic position of Australia generally—are restored to something approaching balance.

Mr. Marshall: Your last utterance has some logic in it, but the earlier one had none.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I will endeavour to be logical. Speaking at the Premiers' Conference the Leader of the Opposition said—

Increases of expenditure must occur regardless of whether you try to fix the amount to apply today or in the distant future. One factor to be remembered is that development in some States commenced at a time when it was impossible to induce pioneers to undertake the work, and the costs of development in them were very high compared with those of neighbouring States which had the advantages of protected industries.

The Leader of the Opposition, then Premier, went on to ask, with regard to increased revenue, "Where is this flexibility to come from?" He then analysed the various sources of revenue of our State and showed conclusively the limitations which would be involved in increasing revenue from those sources.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I think that is one of the best speeches I ever made.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I am inclined to think so, because it is such a complete answer to anything that may be said about any deficit that has been incurred or that may reasonably be incurred by the existing Government. The Leader of the Opposition then said—

Rising costs and the pegging of prices prevent adjustments by the States. He then referred to railway fares and said—

Not only does Western Australia need all the money contributed by the State in uniform tax or any other tax but it also needs additional money for its resources to be developed.

It is of supreme importance to Western Australia to know how the Commonwealth is to arrange to finance our inevitable and heavy needs. The Commonwealth is silent on that point.

The hon. member knows, as do all members, that the difficulty of our State lies with our railways, which represented last year something over £1,200,000 of the gap between revenue and expenditure. I expect full understanding on that point from the gentlemen on the Opposition side of the House, because the railways are something that this Government inherited.

Hon. A. H. Panton: So did we.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The remarks of the Royal Commissioners, Messrs. Gibson and du Plessis, show that that inheritance is something that cannot be placed on a profit-earning basis in a short time, because the stage it has reached is one that has been arrived at over many years.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Do you think the railways will ever be placed on a profit-earning basis, in view of the interest that has to be paid?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I doubt it, but we will have to get them on a basis where they will show a better earning capacity than is the case today. At page 279 of their report, the Royal Commissioners say that the railways of Western Australia have been grossly neglected. At page 280 they say—

In the last 20 years a state of affairs has been allowed to develop which cumulatively must have the effect of destroying public confidence and undermining the morale of the staff.

They refer to the shortsighted policy pursued in the last 20 years. The railways, like other branches of the State service, have had to meet periods of depression and of war. I say emphatically that the railways will be a source of difficulty, in State finance, for which this Government cannot take responsibility at present—though it may in later years. In this matter the Government expects every recognition of the difficulties from members on the other side of the House. Steps are being taken by the Government to increase revenue receipts and other steps of adequate character will be taken in the near future. When it comes to additional expenditure or increased outlay by the Government on various services

I do not think there is one worthwhile item that can be challenged by any member. The Government has exercised constant prudence and care in its outlay.

If members look at the increasing burdens—in addition to the railways—that are responsible for our deficit, they will not complain that the public servants have had a much needed rise in income or that teachers have been awarded a rise to the extent of some £200,000 by the Teachers' Appeal Board. Who will complain that our police have had their incomes brought to parity with those of police in other States? Who will object to additional expenditure on important social services such as education? What Government can control the enormous additional expenditure involved in the 40-hour week or the increases in wages and margins awarded by the Arbitration Court, after full inquiry, to meet the added costs which the workers have to bear? Many speakers have been facetious in referring to the Royal Commissions and Select Committees appointed by the Government. I was interested to turn up the Policy speech of the Leader of the Opposition. I have been edified by the extent to which he endorsed what has been done by this Government. These points are taken from the report in "The West Australian."

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I will give you an actual copy, if you would like it.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I would like it, but I believe these reports are accurate and that they have not been questioned in any way. In the Policy speech of the Labour Party during the last elections the Leader of the Opposition said—

A complete overhaul of the legislation affecting vermin control was being made and a comprehensive Bill would be presented next session.

I listened to the member for North-East Fremantle, who seemed to suggest that the legislation had been so perfect that nothing could reasonably be done to alter it.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The action of your Government proved that. You have not done anything about it since then.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Whatever the situation was, the legislation was not much in need of alteration in the opinion of the hon. member and that of his party as expressed in the Policy speech.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: How does that prove the point that you set out to prove? Let us connect it up. The point was that our action endorsed yours.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The hon. member cannot have it both ways. If he says that the legislation is perfect and therefore the Opposition was unwise in saying it could be amended—

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I never said that the Opposition was unwise in saying that it should be amended, but that nothing has been done about it.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: The inevitable inference is that if no amendment is brought forward it is because the legislation meets all the needs. That was the inference to the hon. member, but in the Policy speech of the party it was said to be so unsatisfactory that it should be completely overhauled. The two cannot stand together. Let us proceed—

Soil analysis and research would be further developed to enable the better use of land. The Government had in mind the appointment of a committee to advise it on action required to bring into profitable production in the safe rainfall areas more idle land, irrespective of ownership.

Thus the hon. member's party advocated the appointment of a committee to consider and advise his Government respecting the land that was to be brought into production.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Do you disagree with that?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I am not disagreeing with it at all. On the contrary, I am very pleased to find this complete endorsement in the hon. member's speech, of the measures taken by this Government.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: And you do not disagree?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: We were to have a committee there which was to advise the Government on bringing land into production. Here is another statement by the hon. member—

To simplify many involved aspects of workers' compensation and to determine in which direction benefits should be increased, a general review was proposed, preferably by a parliamentary committee.

There we have the intention of the Leader of the Opposition and his party to appoint a committee or Royal Commission No. 2—no doubt the committee would have been converted into a Royal Commission. Now we find that he proposed something in connection with the co-ordination of transport services, for in his Policy speech he said—

Transport co-ordination and transport control would receive immediate attention. The Government proposed to establish forthwith a Royal Commission, including members representing all parties, to consider every aspect of the problem and to submit recommendations on which proposals could be placed before Parliament.

Hon. A. H. Panton: It looks as if you have pinched our policy.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: Why do you not give us your policy instead of taking ours?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: After holding office for some 14 years, Labour proposed in this Policy speech to proceed with the appointment of a Royal Commission to advise on transport matters. That is Royal Commission No. 3.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That is the legal interpretation, but not the correct one.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Now we have the policy as indicated by the Leader of the Opposition in his speech regarding trainee nurses for country hospitals. In the course of his speech he said—

A committee had been appointed to recommend action for the acceptance of trainees in country hospitals.

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

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Thus in the Policy speech of the Leader of the Opposition we have four committees or Royal Commissions proposed in his modest programme.

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

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I imagine that if the Labour Government had been returned to power at the last general elections—I have no doubt the hon. member would have carried out his promises in these matters—we, sitting on the other side of the House in such circumstances, would have, not unreasonably, said that the government of this State was by Royal Commissions and committees.

Mr. Hoar: That seems to be a most valuable document from which you are quoting, and appears to be the basis of your activities.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Far from it, but the document does make most amusing reading in the light of all the talk we have heard about Royal Commissions and committees during the progress of the current Address-in-reply debate. The present Government, in the short period it has been functioning, can look back on a record of achievement that, in my opinion, has met with the approbation of the vast majority of the people. On the subject of our railway system, information has been obtained from expert sources which has had a vital effect on the transport outlook in this State and has enabled us to determine that, inescapably and rightly, uniformity of gauge must be part and parcel of the general railway policy throughout Australia—a far-reaching decision of the utmost importance to transportation and its development in this State. That is only one of the matters on which this Government has been able to make a pronouncement as the result of that expert inquiry into transport matters.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Do you think that either you or I will live long enough to see it brought about?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I assure the hon. member that we shall both see it.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Then it will not be on the basis of the truth of the saying that only the good die young.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I can assure the hon. member that he will attend the celebrations in connection with the inauguration of the scheme. In this country we cannot stand still. It would be ridiculous if we did not envisage a steady increase in our population and the development of new areas required to meet the needs of the augmented population. For that reason the Government has taken the initial steps to add a new province to Western Australia in the lower Great Southern area of the State, one which, on account of its unique advantages with regard to rainfall, will vie with the South-West as one of the most magnificent areas in the whole of Australia.

There has been active and continuous work by this Government in a variety of other directions. In the realm of production, in amenities for coalminers, in the extension of educational facilities, in measures that have been, or will be, before Parliament—including one dealing with workers' compensation—in the extension of medical services throughout the northern portions of the State and in various improvements in operation in the different departments of State—in all these directions there has been an energetic and forward movement which, in the short period of the life of the present Government, represents a performance respecting which it can take some pride.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: There has not been much forward movement with regard to hospitals and nurses.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I am glad the hon. member mentioned that point because I propose to end my remarks on a light note.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Did you read what was said about the hospital at Albany?

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Or about the hospital at Lake Grace?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I shall end on a note that the member for North-East Fremantle has put into my mind.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I thought your remarks had been on a light note all the time.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: But this is to be lighter!

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Members opposite will enjoy this gem which, with great respect, I have culled from the Policy speech of the Labour Party. In the report of the Leader of the Opposition's speech, which appeared in "The West Australian" of the 26th February, 1947, there appears this statement—

The Government expects to open the Royal Perth Hospital next month.

On motion by Mr. Nimmo, debate adjourned.

BILL—PRICES CONTROL.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

MR. GRAHAM (East Perth) [5.40]: I regret the fact that the Minister in charge of the Bill is not in his place and, so far as I know, is not within the precincts of the Chamber.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: He would not be all there if he were.

MR. GRAHAM: My first expression of opinion on this matter is one of a certain amount of amazement because of the proceedings last night when we had the spectacle of the Minister for Housing endeavouring to save something from the wreck of the vessel that had been launched by what I may describe as his junior counsel.

The Minister for Housing: You misconstrue me.

MR. GRAHAM: It became necessary for a senior Minister, after the debate had proceeded for a little while on the second reading, to say something to bolster up the case. It is perfectly obvious that the Government is anything but happy with regard to this particular measure. Members will recall that only a few months ago, supporters of the Government—and, of course, Ministers themselves—campaigning vigorously and very often viciously against the Commonwealth Government's referendum proposals which, as we are all aware, were for the purpose of extending further powers to the Commonwealth Parliament. The people accepted their advice and made their decision, so now the States are in the position of having to assume the responsibilities involved.

During the course of that campaign, the people were assured that the State Government was prepared and, indeed, anxious, to take over these new responsibilities. They were told, in effect, that if they voted against the Commonwealth proposals the State Government was ready to exercise the necessary powers, and the people took notice of that statement. I interjected last night when there was a suggestion by the Minister for Housing that the Commonwealth had been precipitate with regard to this matter, that despite all the talk about the State Government having prepared its plans, it had not done so and therefore we had before us the type of Bills that, unfortunately, have been presented to the House. As I suggested then, it would have been possible, had a chal-

lenge been made to the High Court of Australia, for a situation to have developed by which the State Government would not have been given the three months' notice that the Prime Minister has extended to all State Governments.

On the other hand, State Governments would have had but a moment's notice if the High Court by its decision had declared the Commonwealth regulations to be invalid as being in excess of its defence powers. In those circumstances the States, whether they liked it or not, would have been immediately in charge of the situation. Therefore the Minister merely trots out an excuse for a very poor Bill when he advances such an argument. I remind the House that notwithstanding the statements that were made about the Government being prepared to assume these particular responsibilities, Ministers have completely reversed their outlook by charging the Commonwealth Government with acting in a fit of pique because the referendum went against its desires. As a result of that decision, the State Government found itself in a most unenviable position, notwithstanding the notice that has been given, for apparently no thought or consideration has been given to the matter. Now we find that the whole of the Commonwealth regulations have been adopted en bloc but, unfortunately, they have not been presented to this Parliament. Nevertheless it is the Government's intention that those regulations shall have the force of law as soon as this legislation is passed, if it be the will of Parliament that it shall be enacted. I sincerely hope that that is not the will of Parliament.

I recall that during the referendum campaign we were lectured time and again with the assertion that controls constituted a menace and an interference with the freedom of the subject and that ultimately what is known as the Australian way of life would be adversely affected. Those general charges levied against price control if valid then, must be equally valid at the present moment. Only a short period ago, something like three months, we recall that the statement was made that price control was a step towards socialisation. If any sincerity attached to that statement at the time, which was made by many of those who occupy seats on the

Government side of the House now, then, however peculiar it might seem to others, the Liberal-Country Party Coalition Government in this State is, in fact, leading Western Australia along the path towards socialisation. It strikes me as being rather remarkable that the word "services" occurs in several places in the Bill, which provides for control of prices and rates of certain goods and services.

Here it might be interesting to remind ourselves of some of the all-embracing terms that were used during the referendum. Members are aware of the references made to the term "charges." It was alleged by members of the Government that that term was so wide that it could include anything and everything, and as the member for Pilbara stated last night they even went so far as to point out that it could include the fixation of wages. I went to the trouble last evening of consulting a dictionary to find the meaning of the word "services." I found that the definition of the word "service," among other things, is "performance of labour for benefit of another." In other words, the definition exactly fits wage-earners. I am perfectly entitled, therefore, to say that under this Bill the Government would have power to fix wage levels in this State, to determine awards and to provide for the rewards that workers should receive for the performance of labour for the benefit of others in other words, the employers.

Members are familiar with a term which was applied to a dread complaint from which so many of our men suffered during the recently concluded war; such Servicemen were referred to as being "bomb happy." Our experience of the two Bills that have been submitted to us I consider entitles us to say that the Government is "regulation happy." I desire to make it perfectly plain that I am anything but happy about the form of this legislation. The Bill itself is more or less innocuous; it contains very little indeed. The real legislation is embodied in the Commonwealth regulations, which have not been distributed to members, which have not been seen by members, which to a very great extent are outside the scope of the Bill so far as debate is concerned and which in any case it is impossible for members to amend, alter or defeat. No matter how unsatisfactory any of those regulations

might be, members are utterly powerless to do anything with them. That is a total departure from the method of legislation to which we have become accustomed, except, of course, the Bill dealing with rent control.

It is ridiculous to ask members to consent to a Bill which, by and large, contains nothing, the real essence of the proposed legislation appearing in regulations which it is impossible for us to attack in any way at all. I emphasise that we cannot do anything about them, we cannot strike out one word or disagree with a single regulation. We know perfectly well that in the ordinary way regulations can be framed under legislation passed by Parliament; but members have the opportunity of passing judgment on them. Any member may move to disagree with one, two or all of them. In the present instance, however, I repeat that we have not seen the regulations and cannot deal with them in any manner at all. Members must bear in mind, too, that the regulations will become law immediately this Bill is assented to. Irrespective of the complexion of a Government introducing a Bill such as this, I would express myself unhesitatingly as being in opposition to such a proposal. The Government cannot plead urgency in this matter, as we have more than a month before the Commonwealth regulations expire. Even then, as in the case of Queensland, an extension of time could be sought from, and in all probability granted by the Commonwealth. Therefore, the Bill could be presented to Parliament in the ordinary way and debated. It ought to be possible to pass the Bill in a week. Regulations could then be brought down and tabled in the usual manner, thus giving members a chance to peruse them and, if oppressive, to move for their disallowance.

The Government would still have an opportunity to promulgate fresh regulations. Even if there were some excuse for the present procedure—there very definitely is none—the Government should give members an opportunity to peruse the regulations which, as I stated, are in effect to be the Act. Judging from Press reports, the position has not been sufficiently understood. The Bill provides that when new regulations are framed the Commonwealth regulations shall cease to have effect; in other words, when the Government frames the new regulations and publishes them in

the "Government Gazette," at that moment the Commonwealth regulations cease to exist. If there is any objection—and one can easily envisage objections being raised in the Legislative Council—then there will be no regulation governing the particular point in dispute. Consequently the very situation that the Government seeks to avoid, namely, of there being a period of no effective control, will, without a shadow of doubt, owing to the method being employed by the Government, come to pass.

Even the most conservative member on the Government side would not for a moment seriously suggest that, at the very first opportunity, members of the Legislative Council, in defence of their own particular interests by whom and for whom they were selected and then elected to Parliament, would not pay heed to their masters. One has only to recall some of the extravagant statements that are made, many unfortunately over the air and not written, to appreciate what some members of the Legislative Council might do. Now that this weakness has been pointed out, the Government, unless it relents, will deliberately be creating a situation whereby the State will assuredly for a period at least be left without effective price control.

I am amazed, following the views expressed by the Government and its supporters, that no new plans or ideas have been brought forward. One surely was entitled to assume that the Government would make some modification or alteration in the old scheme of things on account of the numerous criticisms directed at it. We should learn something from experience; we have had many years of experience of prices control. One of the points to which the Government could have given serious consideration is that of increasing the penalties for those guilty of breaches of the law.

The Attorney General: The penalties provided are fairly severe.

Mr. GRAHAM: If my reading of the proposals is correct, there has been, if anything, a watering down of the penalties already applicable under the Commonwealth provisions and a lessening of the penalties when compared with those in the Profiteering Prevention Act. The penalties that have been imposed in the past have had very little effect. There have been

many occasions—I shall not weary the House by giving examples—when a mere nominal fine has been imposed on a firm that has been detected committing breaches of the law by charging excessive prices, and it would be a fair bet that if a firm were discovered committing such a breach it would not be the first time, and that by and large such acts had proved most profitable. A firm might get away with it for a period of years; in other words, receive from the public unlawfully thousands of pounds more than it was entitled to get. Yet, when officers of the Prices Branch have detected the offence, the court has imposed merely a nominal fine. Surely provision should have been made for at least a minimum penalty, and the maximum should have been fixed very much higher than is proposed.

The Attorney General: A fine of £500 and forfeiture of the goods is a fairly stiff penalty.

Mr. GRAHAM: That applies only in certain cases. We have to bear in mind the nature of the penalties imposed by the court, and surely some stepping up of the penalties should have suggested itself to the Minister, even on a cursory study of the situation.

There has been considerable criticism, not only by traders but also by the general public of the administration of the Prices Branch. To a great extent that is inevitable where any form of control is involved. The trading community feels that many of the checks made by officials of the branch are irksome and that the preparation of the returns entails a considerable amount of work, whereas the public feels, as a result of the general rise in prices, that any application made to the Prices Branch is granted. I think, therefore, that some consideration might have been given to the adoption of a different form of organisation so that, instead of reposing tremendous responsibility in one man—without in any way reflecting upon the occupant of the position, we have to remember that it is only human to err—a board of commissioners should be appointed.

The trouble is that decisions to increase prices are not explained to the public, and people are apt to think that wrong action has been taken. There should be a board of three representatives consisting of the present controller of prices, a representa-

tive of the business community and a representative of the consumers. If such a board were appointed, the direct points of view of the interested parties could be expressed when an assessment was being made, and as those interests would be able to represent the points of view of the traders and the general community, people would feel more satisfied with the whole set-up.

The results of some of the inquiries and investigations made by the Prices Branch should be communicated to the public. I am not so irresponsible as to suggest that the private trading accounts or secret details of particular firms should be made public, but when there is an increase and especially a steep increase in prices, some explanation of the factors responsible should be published. All but the most intimate private trading records should be open to the Press and to the public. Because this or anything approaching it is not done, many wrong decisions are made. I shall quote two instances to illustrate my meaning. Shortly after the outbreak of war it was possible, as I know from personal experience, to purchase firewood in one foot lengths for 18s. per ton. I am referring now to the dry wood. A decision was made by the Prices Branch that the maximum price should be 36s. 6d. a ton. At that time there was a general shortage, and quantities of less than a ton were delivered; so, in fact, firewood merchants received £2 5s. to £2 10s. a ton, which is a tremendous increase on the figure I previously mentioned—a 300 per cent. rise in the price of firewood in my individual case.

It was obvious, from representations that I made on behalf of an organisation, that the matter had not been fully investigated and only one side of the story had been told. All sorts of fictitious figures and margins had been allowed to cover the various operations through which firewood passes. I am certain that if, instead of accepting the figures or arguments of certain interested parties, the public had been given an opportunity to express its point of view and evidence gathered from the firewood merchants supplying them, a figure different from that which was declared would have been established. Another illustration, perhaps relating more directly to this matter, is that in respect of hotel charges. This may, to some degree impinge on the police liquor inspection branch and perhaps the

Licensing Court as well; but, after all, it is the Prices Branch which is responsible for allowing any increase in the tariffs or charges that are made.

I know something of quite a number of hotels in the metropolitan area. In one case the beds were never made for those who were residing in the hotel. Notwithstanding that there was a menu card available for inspectors who called, there was never any menu in that hotel. Meals were served up to one hour and twenty minutes late. There was no change of linen, towels and that sort of thing for periods of three and four weeks. On certain days when it pleased the manager of that particular establishment he told the boarders, "No meals today! You will have to make your own arrangements." And of course there was no adjustment in the tariff.

Hardly any of the boarders in that hotel were, in fact, being supplied with meals. When an officer of the Prices Branch entered that hotel there would be merely a cursory examination of rooms; a menu card would be called for; a few general inquiries would be made and figures would be asked for in respect of the dining-room and the house account; and so a determination would be made. I want to mention incidentally, concerning this hotel—and it is not an isolated situation I am describing—that while a certain number of meals were served there, many were regularly served in the kitchen. That is to say, friends and relatives and members of the family enjoyed pork, cream, asparagus, and that sort of thing. All those items were debited against the house account. But there was no choice of dishes in the dining-room. Sometimes there was soup and a bit of hash and some sweets if the boarders happened to be lucky.

If there had been a proper approach in connection with this hotel—that is to say, if the consumers had had the opportunity to state their case—a proper picture would have been presented to the Prices Branch. I venture to say that what I have mentioned in connection with hotels applies equally in respect of very many other undertakings as well, and in all matters when a determination is to be made it is necessary to draw evidence from at least two sides in order to arrive at the true situation. For that reason an opportunity should be provided for the public to give evidence; and the position would be very materially assisted if there were a representative of the public gener-

ally, who could sit with the Prices Commissioner himself for the purpose of determining a fair and reasonable price.

As a matter of fact, a determination of the price factor may not be a matter for dispute so much as the evidence upon which the price is determined. Surely from experience of the Act, the Minister should have given some consideration to the matters I have indicated; and if he had, and if it were possible for some decision to be made arising out of this sort of thing—with which he must be familiar—there should have been a provision something along those lines, at any rate for the purpose of making the price-fixing machinery operate more smoothly and effectively. Unfortunately, we are not informed in the Bill of the procedure or method that will be utilised to determine prices. What factors are to be taken into account? Will it be a matter of regulating the profit that is allowed a particular firm or a particular industry? Or will a figure be arrived at as to what is considered to be a reasonable cost of production plus a margin of profit for the manufacturer and retailer? But if the manufacturer is able to produce at a lesser figure, will he be allowed to make that greater amount of profit?

Exactly on what basis will this scheme operate? There is no information in the Bill. We have not had a copy of the regulations. The Minister did not advise us on these points when introducing the Bill, so we are completely in the dark as to what is intended. I would also like to be informed, particularly in view of the statements made during the referendum campaign—and, I think repeated by the Minister when introducing this Bill—that it is the intention to decontrol certain commodities, and perhaps services. We want to be perfectly sure in just what direction we are going if that is to be the procedure, because it is difficult to draw a line of demarcation as to what really affects the cost of living or those all-important items of food, clothing and housing. Machinery parts and motor vehicle parts, for instance, affect the prices of food, clothing and housing and every other commodity.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. GRAHAM: I was emphasising the fact that there is hardly a commodity or item of general use that is not ultimately reflected

in the price level. Therefore I warn the Government not to let enthusiasm run away with it in seeking to get rid of controls which, I concede, are generally unpopular, even if the overall effect of them is for the benefit of the public. It would be quite easy to start a situation that would become practically impossible later of being controlled or rectified. If such a state of affairs is loosed on us, any stabilisation later can only be at the new and increased level. I therefore suggest that the Government proceed very cautiously indeed and be not influenced to any great extent by pressure groups which might seek relaxation in respect of certain items. Naturally enough, when I mention pressure groups, I speak of business interests because, by and large, they are the only ones that could hope to gain from any substantial increases in price.

Earlier I made reference to loop-holes that exist because of lack of adequate information before the prices control authorities. I was speaking then with particular reference to hotels. It will be remembered that I mentioned them only by way of illustration. It now occurs to me, in connection with a particular hotel I quoted, that, amongst other things, there was not a washbasin in the whole establishment. There was a bath heater, but it did not work. An inspector going into such premises would not be aware of the fact that there was no bath heater or appliance to heat water for the unfortunate people lodging there. Notwithstanding what I said before tea and since, when an application was made by the hotel to the Prices Branch—a matter of a few months ago—an increase of about 33½ per cent. was allowed on the tariff. I would say, from the description of the place and the check I have made, that full board and residence at that hotel is not worth more than 30s. a week.

The Minister for Lands: Of course, the Commonwealth Government is responsible for that.

Mr. GRAHAM: That is so. I am not now seeking to compare one Government with another, but to point out what has occurred to me to be certain weaknesses because of the set-up. I am expressing disappointment that no attempt has been made to rectify the position by the legislation before us. I am most disappointed with this Bill. Finally, I want to touch on the

aspect emphasised by the Leader of the Opposition when he asked the Government to reconsider the Bill even to the extent, if need be, of withdrawing it, because there is no immediate urgency. There is still more than a month to deal with the measure, even without any extension of time. The Government should give consideration to using the Profiteering Prevention Act of this Parliament, with suitable extensions and modifications to meet the situation as it is at the moment and by incorporating any constructive suggestions that might be made by members. So far as the Ministry is concerned, it should profit by the experience of the Commonwealth Act and make an endeavour to draft a measure that will be more satisfactory to the public and assure a smoother working of prices control machinery.

I repeat, the great bulk of what we are asked to pass is not in the Bill or before us. We are to agree to something that is not before Parliament. As far as I am aware, outside of the Attorney General himself, only one member of this Parliament has had the greater part of what will, in effect, become the Act, made available to him. From what I can see of the Bill, and after all that is the only thing I have before me, it differs in many respects from the Profiteering Prevention Act because that measure also deals with the question of profits, apart altogether from the matter of charging extortionate prices. This is a time when a certain amount of economic stability is required, and it is certainly desirable that there should be some control of that aspect. Under the old Act, which is still law, though not operating, it was an offence for a business concern or an individual to refuse to sell at a declared price.

Whether or not the regulations which we have not seen make any such provision, I do not know, but it is conceivable that if a trader were dissatisfied with the price that had been declared, particularly where there was anything in the nature of a monopoly, he could refuse to make the goods available to the public, hoping and trusting that in due course controls would be lifted and he could reap the benefit of a higher price. The Profiteering Prevention Act provides for the appointment of a commissioner, who would be equivalent to the Prices Commissioner under the present set-up, and for evidence to be taken in public as well as in private.

From my knowledge of the operation of the present regulations—I do not know what they provide—it is apparently not possible for evidence to be taken in public, and from my point of view that is another weakness in the Bill now before us. A most important provision in the Profiteering Prevention Act stipulates that the commissioner may publish as he thinks fit any information obtained in the exercise of his functions. If the Act passed nine years ago by this Parliament were in operation at present I daresay that information would be made available to the public. As I suggested earlier, anything except confidential details of accounts and shop secrets could be published.

It is a weakness of the present Bill that it contains no provision for discretion on the part of the commissioner in the releasing of information to give the public some idea of the reasons for advances in prices. Under the Profiteering Prevention Act there is provision that the commissioner controlling prices shall submit an annual report to Parliament. Such a report would probably contain a great deal of information enlightening not only to members, but to the public generally. Any process conducted in secret, and interfering in any way with the normal trading influences at work in the community, creates a feeling of suspicion in the minds of the public, even though that suspicion may be unwarranted. I may say that at times such decisions have been entirely beyond my comprehension. Steps should be taken to rectify that position, even though it might not result in a curtailment of the general upward trend of price levels.

I wish again to emphasise to the Minister and to the Government that the Minister should regard sympathetically the suggestion that the controlling authority should not be vested in one individual but that, in addition to the commissioner, there should be representatives of the rival interests, the trading community and the consuming public. I would stress also that the Minister should give serious thought to the suggestion—put forward by my leader and other speakers—that the Profiteering Prevention Act might be used as a basis. I maintain that it requires very few amendments. If that course were followed we would have a far better proposition than the small Bill

—important though it is—now before us. The worst feature of the Bill is that its real machinery is contained in a document that is not before the House. It is a document that members have not seen and it contains provisions that we are powerless to alter in any way.

Mr. MARSHALL: I move—

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion put and negatived.

MR. MARSHALL (Murchison) [7.46]: I assume that by now many of those at present behind or occupying the ministerial bench fully realise that, even though one sits in His Majesty's Opposition, there is an obligation upon one to be careful in the criticism levelled against those who for the time being are administering the affairs of State. Perhaps new members will not appreciate this fact, but members like you, Mr. Speaker, and I, who have had opportunity of being on both sides of the House—

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: And in the middle.

Mr. MARSHALL: —and in the centre, have been forced to realise that while the Opposition must be critical of the Government, it should criticise in such a way that it can stand up to what it had said when it eventually finds itself on the ministerial side of the House. Unfortunately there are some members who, when in opposition, would not accept good advice. They made all sorts of accusations—irresponsible in the extreme—against those then sitting on the ministerial side of the Chamber. It is therefore fair to ask those members who made statements in an attack on the then Government, to justify their attitude now that they are on the other side of the Chamber. There are some members who by their silence propose to condone the passing of the measure now before us and who, on every possible occasion, made bitter attacks on any legislation by a Labour Government, either Federal or State, and condemned wholeheartedly and without reservation much of that legislation.

May I, without being offensive, say that the present Government will go down in history as the most complete assembly of political acrobats that ever adorned the ministerial bench in this House. There is not one member of the Government who

has not criticised the piece of legislation which they now ask this Chamber to sanction. From time to time and on every possible opportunity afforded them, members of the Government attacked the Commonwealth Government and declared it to be irresponsible and indifferent to the welfare of the people. This measure is only one of many which the Government has adopted without a semblance of alteration when in days gone by its members would have criticised it severely and without reservation.

Every piece of legislation dealing with controls has been adopted by this Government without amendment of any effect being inserted. On three or four occasions legislation has been introduced in this Chamber and the Government has asked the Opposition to give it favourable consideration. Yet members of the Government, when in Opposition, bitterly attacked this form of legislation. I would like to hear from the Honorary Minister, who vacated her seat as I rose to speak.

The Minister for Lands: You cannot blame her for that.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: No, you cannot blame her for going out.

Mr. MARSHALL: I do not propose to offer any more criticism of the inconsistency of members on the Government side, but I would say in passing, having regard to the legislation that has been introduced, that this Government is consistent only in its inconsistency.

The Minister for Lands: I have heard that before, too.

Mr. MARSHALL: I say that unhesitatingly, for I well remember the criticism that was levelled against the Government when the control of building materials was introduced. The criticism of the State Housing Commission was bitter, as was the criticism levelled against the Minister in charge of it, and also against the Commonwealth Government for the economic stability measures. Yet this Government has done nothing more than introduce the same type of legislation, amending some of it in a direction more severe than ever the previous Government contemplated. So I repeat, the inconsistency of the present Government is remarkable.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Have you read the latest speech on the Milk Bill?

Mr. MARSHALL: Yes. I would have liked the Honorary Minister to be present.

Hon. A. H. Panton: She held up her hand when she wanted to leave.

Mr. MARSHALL: I am not a schoolmaster, but I would ask the member for North-East Fremantle what that signal indicates, because he, being an ex-school teacher, may be able to inform the House what it signifies. The Honorary Minister who is not only a supporter of the Government but a Minister of the Crown, now finds herself in the invidious position of supporting legislation which she has attacked so bitterly in the past. She opposed all forms of control without reservation, and I think, had we baited her even further, would have advocated the abolition of the Licensing Court, which, after all, is a form of control, and I feel, too, that she would have advocated the abolition of the police force which has supreme control over all factors within the State.

Mr. SPEAKER: That is a long way from the Bill.

Mr. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the Bill is one dealing with controls, practically unlimited control; price control in all its spheres.

The Minister for Lands: It fixes the price of the police force.

Mr. MARSHALL: Charges for services rendered; a most comprehensive statement. All forms of charges, even charges for the police, if it is so desired. Their wages can be reduced or increased under this measure, and the Honorary Minister is now supporting it. She has always been in opposition to this form of legislation and attacked it from all angles on every occasion when the opportunity presented itself. I now want to know what her attitude is going to be to this Bill.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Her chair is vacant.

Mr. MARSHALL: It is a fair request. The Honorary Minister must have sanctioned this legislation or it would not be here.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Of course she must have done so.

Mr. MARSHALL: As a member of Cabinet, she must have agreed to it.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Of course.

Mr. MARSHALL: I know she must have agreed to it because, when a previous measure of a similar character was before this House, and required a constitutional majority of 26, the Honorary Minister had no hesitation in remaining in the Chamber and voting accordingly.

The Minister for Works: In your experience in the Cabinet, did nothing pass through it without having your complete concurrence?

Mr. MARSHALL: Not to my knowledge, because we as a Government were never at sixes and sevens with legislation.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: If the Minister for Works is feeling guilty, he can go out, too.

Mr. MARSHALL: I do not know whether the Minister for Works is feeling guilty or not, but no doubt the Honorary Minister has found it convenient to leave the House at this opportune moment. All members would be well advised to note carefully what they say when in Opposition, for if they do, by some miracle or other, happen to cross over to the ministerial side of the Chamber, they will be able to sit back and face any criticism. Apparently the Honorary Minister cannot do that.

I would also like to know from the Acting Premier what is his attitude in regard to this measure. I have with me a copy of "The West Australian" of the 12th February, 1948, and I presume that the Acting Premier will back up the Premier in the statement I propose to read. If he does not do so, it will be a further indication of the lack of harmony in this Government. The article states—

"Statements are made by the chairman that purport to come from the board," Mr. Grant said. "I disagree with them."

Mr. McLarty: If a Minister is dissatisfied with a Cabinet decision, his course is to resign rather than to attack Cabinet while still a Minister. If Ministers attacked the majority decision of Cabinet, they would have to get out of Cabinet.

I suggest that this Bill is a majority decision, but that the Honorary Minister does not support it. I would like to know what the Acting Premier proposes to do about the matter. The fact that the Government is constantly introducing legislation of this description, which has been bitterly attacked by it in the past, indicates that it is lack-

ing in initiative and cannot construct a piece of legislation to get over the difficulty but must look to other States and to other Governments for a lead in a Bill of this character.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: It would be all right if the present Government looked to our Government for a lead.

Mr. MARSHALL: Yes. I complain, with other members, at the way this Bill has been introduced. I feel that every Minister and every supporter of the Government realises that legislation by regulation is very dangerous. I can quote no better authority on that than the Minister for Housing, who has made the point very clear on many occasions, and I think I can say the same for the Acting Premier. Here we have a piece of legislation designed to make lawful a set of regulations which we have never seen, and which we will have no opportunity to deal with as we could with other regulations. We are asked to endorse this measure and enact regulations that we have not seen and may never see.

You, Mr. Speaker, can imagine what the re-action would have been on the part of members now sitting on the Government side had they been in Opposition and we had introduced a Bill of this sort. Imagine the hostility that the Acting Premier would have displayed and the attitude he would have adopted! Yet the Bill has been practically tumbled in and we have been told in effect, "Here is the Bill; agree to it or disagree to it, as you like." We do not know what the contents of the measure will actually be because we do not know what the regulations are. I put it to the Acting Premier who is a lawyer—I shall not refer to the Attorney General—would it not have been possible to introduce the regulations as a schedule to the Bill?

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: The answer is "Yes."

Mr. MARSHALL: Of course it is. The inclusion of the regulations in a schedule to the Bill would have sufficed, but we have been denied even as much as that. I want members on the Government side to realise that, though they may have had no responsibility while sitting on the Opposition side, they have now to shoulder the responsibility and bear the criticism that we can offer of legislation of this sort.

I do not like controls; I feel that they are objectionable. I am not satisfied that all controls are absolutely necessary. I agree with those people who hold that the sooner controls are dispensed with, the better it will be for this sunny land of ours. However, in considering this point, I look for a lead to other countries where there are no controls and I find that, bad as the situation is in Australia, it is a great deal worse there, especially where there is very little if any interference by way of State enterprise. The United States of America have what is known as free enterprise—the competitive system. There are no controls of this sort; there are very few controls exercised by the Government. I repeat that, bad and all as is the situation in Australia, it is worse in the United States of America.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: The cost of an egg and a piece of toast there is 5s.

Mr. MARSHALL: And probably more. This comparison shows clearly that the argument advanced by some people that the best method of getting away from control is to increase production is also a fallacy. I suppose the United States of America can boast of being the most mechanised country in the world. Its power production is phenomenal yet, with no controls operating, the price of commodities is also phenomenal. In fact, a stage has been reached where the Government has felt obliged to step in because the economy of the country is being jeopardised. America is exporting five times as much wheat as is being consumed in the country. Quite obviously, therefore, its economy is being sustained by this large export of foodstuffs, which in turn means that America is lending to the importing countries dollar credit with which to buy. This, to a degree, is holding the economy of America together.

Furthermore, I suggest, the threat of war is causing America to spend large sums of money, which again is assisting to sustain the economy of the country. This goes to show that in a country with free enterprise or the competitive system, especially a highly mechanised country that works on power production, that system cannot sustain it for any length of time under the present monetary set-up. Power production does not distribute sufficient in the way

of wages, salaries and dividends to permit of the consumption of the goods it produces, and so America is suffering acutely from the situation in which it finds itself with no controls. Judging by the records of that country, I consider that some form of control must be exercised here, at least for a time.

Every member of the Government, I should say without exception, knows of a number of leakages and faults that have been detected in the regulations that this Bill proposes to give the force of law. Many of our people have suffered in consequence of the looseness of some of the regulations. It would have been far better had the Government introduced legislation to correct those anomalies and set off from a base that would have ensured much greater efficiency and satisfaction than can ever be hoped for from these regulations. I will mention one instance—a remarkable instance—that for the self-same reason is a major factor with people, especially single people who have to get their foodstuffs served up in cafes and other like establishments. Married people who are in business and who have to depend upon cafes and similar places for their daily meals, are in the same position. We find that if a given price was charged in 1942 for a meal that same price can be charged today.

In other words, whatever was charged in 1942, the regulations provide that the price shall not be increased notwithstanding that the cost of services and goods has increased materially. In consequence, those people who were exploiting the public in 1942 by making excessive charges can now sustain those charges because, although the price of the goods which they serve to the public has increased phenomenally, they had made such a margin of profit in 1942 that they can now carry on business at the 1942 price. But the unfortunate individual who was reasonable with the public in 1942 now finds that all the goods that he supplies to the public have increased in price to such an extent as to force him out of business.

Another aspect should be carefully provided for in this measure, unless small traders are to be driven out of business. Many people cater in a general way for the public and trade in one specific line. I refer particularly to the proprietors of

cafes and small grillrooms. How can such people be expected to compete with Boans, Foy & Gibson and the chain stores who treat as a sideline that from which the small people obtain a living and require no profit from it at all? They treat it as a sideline merely to attract customers to buy other goods from which they make a great profit. I can see the Government having some severe headaches unless it introduces legislation which will leave reasonable discretion to some particular person or body of persons. In essence, the position to which I have referred means that foreigners who were exploiting the people in 1942 will be able to remain in business, while British subjects, who carry on the same class of business, cannot make it pay at the prices charged by them in 1942. They are in a hopeless position when compared with those foreigners, the big emporiums and the chain stores. All these factors must be taken into consideration if we are to be fair and just to all, particularly British subjects.

There are also other anomalies which should be ironed out. The Government is intent on passing the Bill and I feel, without wishing to reflect on the Government, that it is foolish in doing so, as there is no real urgency about this legislation at all. As was pointed out most ably by the Leader of the Opposition, we have on our statute book an Act which could be amended and used, which would be more workable than the Bill before us and which would do justice to all. Why the Government should persist in forcing the Bill through is a mystery to me. I sincerely hope that even at this late hour the Government will reconsider its decision, so that rather than force the Bill upon us we may have an opportunity to understand what we are dealing with. I am confident of this, that the Commonwealth Government—a Labour Government—will be highly delighted and much flattered to know that, after all the criticism which was levelled against it over these regulations, and over price control generally, the present Government has seen fit to copy the regulations which it condemned.

The Commonwealth Government will no doubt be flattered to realise that the criticism levelled against it had no foundation, because the Government is now trying to force this piece of legislation through the House notwithstanding that it has two al-

ternatives staring it in the face, either of which would give better service to the public than this Bill is ever likely to do. What does the Honorary Minister propose to do? She has returned to her seat. What attitude will she adopt in view of her hostility to all forms of control? What will she tell the people of Subiaco in explanation of her present position?

The Honorary Minister: They put me in on a two to one majority. I am not depending on you.

Mr. MARSHALL: I am afraid the Honorary Minister will find herself in particularly deep water at the next election.

The Honorary Minister: That is all right. I am prepared.

Mr. Styants: The Honorary Minister will probably send them another Christmas card.

Mr. MARSHALL: A Christmas card will not get her out of this difficulty. We had an example of the Honorary Minister's attitude lately, when she incited a section of the community to go on strike and applauded them for doing so.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Had they been other persons she would have wanted them put in gaol.

Mr. MARSHALL: She invited them to stick out. She said, "Comrades, stand up and fight."

The Honorary Minister: Fight a man your own size.

Mr. MARSHALL: What will the people of Subiaco think when they get a digest of the actions of the Honorary Minister? They know that when she was in opposition she decried all forms of control, yet now she is supporting this Bill, as a Minister, notwithstanding that it embodies controls in a severe form. What are the Premier and the Acting Premier going to do with the Honorary Minister?

Mr. Reynolds: Sit down, and say nothing! Take it!

Mr. MARSHALL: They will take it and then tell the House that the Honorary Minister is doing an excellent job. You know, Mr. Speaker, and I know that when a Minister speaks at a function he speaks for the Government.

Mr. Reynolds: Of course he does.

Mr. MARSHALL: All the members of the Government evidently sanctioned the action of a section of the community which resisted the law. They fought strenuously to get that section of the community to stand up and defy the law.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member must get back to the Bill.

Mr. MARSHALL: I shall, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for your correction. I tell the Government quite frankly that I am not altogether infatuated with controls; but I find myself in the invidious position of having to be so for the time being until I can see the light of day and I sincerely hope it will not be long before I do so, although, as I pointed out, we can produce ten times as much as we are producing to-day. But I am afraid we will have the same experience as America is having unless there is a change in the fiscal policy of Australia. That is the only solution to these problems. I reluctantly support the measure. One reason is that I think there is no alternative. But as the Government is adamant and will insist upon forcing this legislation through, I do not feel disposed to oppose it.

MR. GRAYDEN (Middle Swan) [8.21.]: I have listened with a great deal of surprise to the remarks of the members opposite. I have been surprised, too, at the attitude of the members of the Opposition—

Mr. Reynolds: Anything would surprise you.

The Minister for Lands: There is the comic opera member again.

Mr. GRAYDEN: I have been surprised at the attitude of members of the Opposition towards this piece of legislation. Members opposite stand for control.

Mr. Hegney: What arrant hypocrisy!

Mr. GRAYDEN: The policy of their party is complete nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Mr. Graham: Do you think that is part of this Bill?

Mr. GRAYDEN: That is No. 1 plank in the Labour Party's policy. Members opposite take every opportunity to implement that policy.

Mr. Graham: Naturally.

Mr. GRAYDEN: We hear constantly how earnestly they believe in this nationalisation; how earnestly they believe in controls; and up till now, I do not think we have ever had any occasion to doubt their sincerity in this respect.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: You name five of the regulations you are supporting, if you can.

Mr. GRAYDEN: We have always been under the impression that members opposite are simple, misguided individuals, but although misguided are, in the bulk, reasonably sincere in their beliefs; but from the attitude that members of the Opposition are adopting on this question, it would appear that all they have told us in the past as to their sincerity with regard to their professed beliefs has been nothing but arrant humbug, because now—and there is no question of this—the members of the Opposition are of two minds whether to oppose this Bill or whether to support it. If they oppose it, it means throwing overboard all that they have stood for in the past.

Mr. Hoar: We have only one mind about you.

Mr. GRAYDEN: This Bill is a simple one, extending the present unfortunate but nevertheless, to a certain extent, necessary controls. It is an emergency measure, because the existing Commonwealth controls are going to expire. Unnecessary controls will be abolished progressively by this Government, because that is its policy and it is the wish of every member comprising that Government. During the recent referendum campaign, the Opposition would have had the people of this State believe that these controls were desirable indeed; yet now, in complete contradiction of their attitude on that occasion, they claim that these regulations, which have been in existence all these years and have been administered by their party, are both unworkable and undesirable.

Mr. Hegney: Have you a copy of the regulations?

Mr. GRAYDEN: Surely that is an astonishing change of front! Yet if members of the Opposition were sincere in their attitude; if they were politically honest, why did they not tell the people of the State of this attitude during the last referendum?

What did they say then regarding the Profiteering Prevention Act on which so many of them have spoken at length on this occasion?

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: You didn't even know it existed until somebody told you.

Mr. GRAYDEN: The hon. member may not have known it existed.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: An intelligent answer!

Mr. GRAYDEN: Let me tell the House what was the attitude of the member for Northam towards the Profiteering Prevention Act during the last referendum campaign. He said it was useless for the people of Western Australia to rely on this Profiteering Prevention Act because its life was limited and the Upper House would never agree to an extension.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: That is true.

Mr. GRAYDEN: It may be true; but the point is that if the member for Northam were consistent, he would not now advocate a Bill the life of which, in his opinion, would never be extended in another place.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: There is no alternative now.

Mr. GRAYDEN: Now we see the inconsistency of the member for Northam. It becomes increasingly clear that members of the Opposition on this measure are playing a game for political ends and are completely disregarding everything that is in the best interests of the people of Western Australia.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Unfortunately you do not know what you are talking about.

Mr. GRAYDEN: Members of the Opposition have gone to great lengths to attack this measure, to oppose controls which, although formulated by the Menzies Government were continued by the Labour Government. Indeed, the Labour Government has on every possible occasion endeavoured to give the impression that it was responsible for the initiation of these controls. How many times during the recent referendum did members opposite make the statement that the Legislative Council in this Parliament would not agree to controls? That at least was the attitude adopted by the Opposition. Now that the referendum has gone against them, we will see that their

prophecies in that direction were false. Indeed, I think that in years to come this Opposition will be known as the Opposition of false prophecies.

The people opposite make all sorts of dire prophecies, yet they never come to pass. According to them, the Legislative Council would never agree to the extension of controls. Now what do we find? Do we find the Legislative Council rejecting the proposals? We find instead that it is not the Legislative Council which is objecting to controls, but members opposite. Members of the Opposition, who placed such great stress during the referendum campaign on what the Upper House was going to do to these controls, are now of two minds whether to defeat the measure themselves. And if by some chance this measure is defeated by the Upper House, where could we lay the blame? We could lay it fairly and squarely at the door of members of the Opposition. We could lay it at the door of the member for Northam and his colleagues —

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: You are getting more barmy every minute!

Mr. GRAYDEN:—because they have provided the Upper House with reasons—not very good ones—why it should not be passed. They themselves will not support the Bill; or, if they support it, will support it very grudgingly indeed.

Mr. Hoar: Can you not depend on your own members up there?

Mr. GRAYDEN: Yet, if the Upper House did reject the measure, that Upper House would be subjected to a concerted wail from members opposite. They would say again that the Upper House was not democratic because it rejected this measure, but they themselves are in two minds about rejecting it.

Mr. Hegney: Do you think the Legislative Council is democratic?

Mr. GRAYDEN: I think it is much more democratic than the procedure adopted by the Labour Party.

Mr. Graham: You are a raving lunatic!

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. GRAYDEN: The member for East Perth ought to know all about raving lunatics.

Mr. Graham: I have spent 18 months with one.

Mr. GRAYDEN: The hon. member means he has been one for the last 18 months. The Commonwealth handed back controls, I think, with a great deal of haste, instead of waiting until they had expired and giving the States an opportunity to make detailed plans. When it handed back the controls in this fashion it was said, and I think quite rightly, that it was done out of pique. The Opposition is now striving to do two things—to embarrass the Government and to make political capital out of this issue.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: Tell us something about the Bill.

Mr. GRAYDEN: I am telling the House about it. This applies irrespective of anything the Opposition can say to the contrary. It appears that members opposite are far more interested in embarrassing the Government and in making capital out of this issue than in assisting in the smooth change-over of controls.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The member for Middle Swan embarrasses the Government much more than does the Opposition.

Mr. GRAYDEN: I do not think the Government needs much support. As far as embarrassment goes, some arguments put up by members opposite are sufficient condemnation of the Opposition.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: You are a permanent embarrassment to the Government.

Mr. GRAYDEN: In this week's issue of the "Worker" there is a paragraph which is, to some extent, relevant to the matter now before the House. It quotes an item from the Sydney "Daily Telegraph" as follows:—

Members of Caucus did not vote for the end of controls because they think controls are bad They hope that chaos will result and that the people will repent their vote at the recent referendum and turn back to the Government with open arms—before the next election.

The "Worker" took exception to this report from the "Daily Telegraph." One of the Western Australian Federal members, as well as the Prime Minister, took exception to it. The "Worker" denies that the Labour Party in Western Australia, or throughout Australia, wished to see chaos as a result of handing back controls to the State. We can only conclude that there is a big dif-

ference of opinion among members of the Labour Party because here we have one section of the party denying that it wants to see chaos as a result, while in Western Australia we have, as I have said before, Labour members of Parliament in two minds about the question. Their speeches in this House clearly indicate their attitude in this respect.

It is all very well for the Opposition to say, "We do not object to controls—it is to the form in which the controls are to be administered that we object," but the fact remains that a few months ago the Opposition was lauding these very controls that it is now seeking to decry. There are two reasons for this. As I have said, the Opposition simply wishes to embarrass the Government and to make political capital out of the issue. It would appear that it is doing everything possible to these ends. Nothing would suit it more than to see chaos result from the handing back of controls to the States. I have listened to the speeches of members opposite, and what stands out is that the case on which their arguments are based has let them down. I could not help but feel that it must have been extremely disconcerting for them to get up one after the other, as they did, all last evening, to emphasise their case—

Mr. Hegney: You did not expect us to get up all together, did you?

Mr. GRAYDEN: —and then to see all their efforts completely shattered and their arguments skittled by a simple, yet brief exposition by the Minister for Housing.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: You will get on.

Mr. GRAYDEN: The member for Northam will not get on if he persists in taking up the attitude which he and his party have adopted towards matters such as are now before the House. It is one of the reasons, perhaps, why his party is endeavouring simply to make political capital out of the issue instead of considering the interests of the people of the State. As I was saying, it must have been disconcerting for members opposite to deliver their speeches on the question, making the best of a poor job, and then see their arguments shattered by the brief exposition of the Minister for Housing. He took the arguments of the Opposition one by one and found them wanting. I intend to be brief, and I trust that this measure will receive

the support of the House. In supporting it, I sincerely trust that the day is not far distant when a return to normal conditions will make the abolition of all irksome and unnecessary controls possible. I know this, that when conditions do return to normal the present Government will be the first to abolish unnecessary controls.

Mr. Hegney: Do you not believe in profit control?

Mr. GRAYDEN: I believe in the abolition of all unnecessary and irksome controls. The present Government will be the first to abolish unnecessary controls because that is its policy, and the wish of its members.

HON. J. T. TONKIN (North-East Fremantle) [8.41]: The Attorney General, as Minister in charge of this Bill, informed the House that a conference of Premiers had been held at Canberra on the 23rd June, and that a number of important resolutions were carried there. In order that members may be fully seized of the importance of those resolutions, I will restate several of them. I will restate them also to emphasise that the legislation now under discussion will not do much towards putting into effect the spirit of the resolutions. Resolution No. 1 which, I take it, was the most important of them, was—

For the maintenance of economic stability in Australia it is vital that an effective system of price control be continued.

I emphasise the words "vital" and "effective." It was vital that there should be an effective system of price control. The second resolution was—

It was imperative that the general principle of price fixing should be as uniform as possible.

I emphasise the words "imperative"—which is a strong word—and "uniform." The next resolution was—

That there should be the closest collaboration between the States in the detailed implementation of the price-control policy.

I wish there to emphasise the words "detailed implementation." Because of the way in which this measure has been brought down, I think it will be impossible for the Government to be sure that it can give effect to those three resolutions. The Government intends that the Legislative Council should have the fullest opportunity of de-

ciding what the policy is to be, and it will have the opportunity of so altering the regulations as to make close collaboration between the States impossible and destroy absolutely any uniformity and possibly leave us with an ineffective system of price control. At a conference of Ministers held in New South Wales on the 8th and 9th July, an agreement was reached—the Attorney General said—for close co-ordination between all States. I would like to know how we are to get that co-ordination if the various Legislative Councils are to have the opportunity of destroying as many of the regulations as they wish. I am amazed that the Government has brought down the Bill in its present form, seeing that there is necessity for compliance with the resolutions I have enumerated, and in view of the statement made by the Attorney General on the 23rd March last. I will quote from "The West Australian" of that date. The heading is "Control of Prices," and the subheading is "State Legislation Effective." It states—

A review by the State Cabinet had disclosed that State legislation enacted some years ago before Commonwealth regulations operated was effective and covered all necessary aspects of the control of commodities, the Attorney General, Mr. Abbott, said yesterday.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Is that right? From what are you quoting?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: From "The West Australian" of the 23rd March last. It was after the State Cabinet had given consideration to the measures necessary that that statement was made by the Attorney General.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: That makes the member for Middle Swan gulp.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: It continues—

The review had been made to ascertain whether existing State legislation would be sufficient when Commonwealth price control powers expired, he said. The State legislation had operated most successfully in the earliest stage of World War II. State rent control legislation, which had continued to operate throughout the war, had recently been amended, and was now up to date.

The Attorney General: I must have been absolutely wrong.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: He said Cabinet had decided.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Yes. It shows that the Attorney General made a public state-

ment without a full appreciation of what it meant, or else some subsequent developments have caused him to eat his words.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: But, according to that, Cabinet decided it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Acting Premier also made a statement, not quite so definite, but along somewhat the same lines. He said—

Labour propagandists completely ignored the fact that State legislation had controlled rents throughout the war period up to the present and that price control legislation was on the statute-book and had operated, and could operate again.

Despite the fact that Cabinet was perfectly satisfied that existing legislation was effective and had been operated successfully, we have this new method—I submit, it is a dangerous method—that makes it extremely doubtful whether an effective system of price control can be set up in this State.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: The House of Possils must have had a word with them since then.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Substantial funds, running into thousands of pounds, are subscribed to the Liberal Party, the dominant party in the present Government. Those funds come from sources that expect, in due course, to get value for their investments, and their voice is loudest in the Legislative Council. I am afraid that when these regulations, which this Bill proposes the State should take over in toto, are placed on the Table of the Legislative Council, a large number of them will not be accepted. The Minister has declared that although this Bill will enable the State to take over in toto the existing regulations, it is the Government's intention immediately to table new regulations, some of which I assume will be identical with existing regulations and possibly there will be some new ones. That tabling is to be done to enable members of the Legislative Council to move for the disallowance of some of the regulations.

The Attorney General: I would not agree to that.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Read "Hansard" and see what the Chief Secretary has already told that House.

The Attorney General: I would not agree that they would disallow them.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Attorney General should read "Hansard" and see what the Chief Secretary has told the Legislative Council quite recently on that very matter.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: It was on the rents Bill. He told the members of the Legislative Council that they had only to accept the regulations for the time being. New regulations would be introduced which could be accepted or disallowed.

The Attorney General: I would not agree to that.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: You will not have to.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: What say will the Attorney General have?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The member for Northam quoted an extract from the "Mining and Commercial Review" which was a report of the presidential address to the conference in Perth of the Associated Chambers of Commerce. I propose to make a small quotation from the same source. The President after dealing with the International Trade Agreement and Australian trade production, went on to say—

Many lines are in full supply and should have been de-controlled months ago.

He was not sufficiently helpful to indicate what those lines were. I do not know of any lines where production has outstripped the demand, but the businessmen were informed that many lines are now in full supply and should have been decontrolled months ago.

The Acting Premier: I believe tomato sauce is one.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Would tractors be another?

The Acting Premier: Not on your life!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The member for Northam also quoted the section which showed that these businessmen were ripe for the lifting of controls. The President said—

Despite numerous Government promises that price control would be gradually eliminated, the control has been tightened and gross profit margins compressed to a dangerous degree. Coupled with high taxation price control is bringing businesses to the point where it is impossible to make those necessary reserves against bad times which prudence dictates.

So the businessmen want to take advantage of the big gap which now exists between production and demand, a gap which is causing very great pressure on prices and forcing them up. They want to take

advantage of that gap and so increase prices, which will enable them to take from the consumers a sum of money that can be set aside to enable them to pay dividends when production has overtaken demand and prices have commenced to fall.

The Minister for Lands: Would that not influence the basic wage?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The businessmen would not put that in the report, but that is what they intend to do.

Mr. Leslie: If they can get away with it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Their desire is that controls shall be lifted so that prices can go higher enabling them to take from the people more than they should above the existing high profits and put that money aside so that when deflation occurs, production has overtaken demand and prices have commenced to fall, they will be able to maintain their rate of dividend. These are the gentlemen who will bring pressure to bear upon the Government to lift the controls in order that they may establish the reserves that prudence dictates.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: They can ignore the Government and go somewhere else.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: And these businessmen can bring pressure to bear on the Legislative Council where they have some very direct representatives, and have these irksome regulations disallowed. Then where will this effective system of price control be that the Government has promised to have implemented? That is the weakness in the present attempt to control prices. Fortunately we have a very clear example of what can happen as soon as control is lifted. Towards the end of April of this year, after persistent clamour on the part of the wholesale butchers, the Commonwealth Government lifted the control on the price of dressed lamb. The ceiling price then was and had for a considerable time been 1s. 5d. per lb. Pressure was maintained on the Government till eventually it gave way and control on this particular commodity was lifted.

The Minister for Lands: Where did the pressure come from?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I will tell the Minister for Lands where it came from. It

came from the Honorary Minister for Agriculture. Would the Minister like me to read the statements of the Honorary Minister for Agriculture? He contacted the Commonwealth Minister for Commerce and supported the wholesale butchers in their demands. These demands were resisted by the previous Minister for Agriculture in this State.

The Minister for Lands: I thought the control was lifted before that.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: No, when the control was lifted the price of lamb jumped from 1s. 5d. per lb. to 1s. 10d. per lb.

The Honorary Minister: Only for a couple of weeks.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: No, the Honorary Minister knows nothing about it.

The Honorary Minister: I do. I eat lamb and I pay for it, and I know what I am talking about.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. Marshall: You only know about old mutton.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: If the Honorary Minister is aware of the facts perhaps she will tell me by way of interjection what is the present price of dressed lamb.

Mr. Leslie: Interjections are highly disorderly.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: If the Honorary Minister does not know, I will tell her. It is 1s. 9d. per lb. and has been so for the last four months.

Mr. Fox: It has been up to 2s. per lb. in some places.

Mr. Hegney: Lamb chops are 1s. 11d. per lb.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The price of dressed lamb has not been less than 1s. 8d. per lb. since the control was lifted, and has been so for the last four months. The ceiling price previously was 1s. 5d. per lb., but now the people have had to pay up to 1s. 10d. per lb. for dressed lamb, the result being that many people who like lamb occasionally, the old-age pensioners, for example, cannot afford to buy it.

The Honorary Minister: They can eat beef.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: On Saturday morning last I was standing in front of a butcher's shop in Fremantle, and I

noticed an old lady, whom I know very well, looking at the legs of lamb in the shop window. She told me that she usually did her shopping in South Fremantle and that occasionally she liked a little choice lamb, but on inquiring at the butcher's shop in South Fremantle that morning, she was told that it would cost her 7s. for a small leg. In view of this, she stated that she had come to Fremantle in the hope that it might be possible to purchase it a little cheaper. I told her I was afraid that she would not do any better in Fremantle than she could in South Fremantle, because the price was 1s. 9d. per lb.

The Honorary Minister: Go to Subiaco; it is cheaper there.

Mr. Marshall: Subiaco does not know the Honorary Minister as we do!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: If it is cheaper at Subiaco, it will not be for long. A statement put over the air tonight is very similar to one that appears in today's issue of "The Daily News" under the heading, "Meat May Cost More." It states—

West Australian butchers intend applying for increased price margins after the State Government takes over price control.

The president of the Meat and Allied Trades Federation, Mr. Pethick, said today this was necessary to offset increasing overhead costs.

Mr. Pethick considered increases in meat prices were inevitable if costs continued to rise. He pointed out that wages had increased sharply in recent years, and sausage casings had risen from 3s. a bundle prewar to 18s. Furthermore, wrapping paper was costing some butchers about 200 per cent. more than a year ago.

That must be a tremendous impost.

The Honorary Minister: That was due to the 40-hour week.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I want to show how much reliance can be placed on Mr. Pethick's statement and I propose to quote from a published statement of his at the time of the lifting of the control of the price of lamb when he prophesied that the decontrol would mean cheaper meat for the people. The following appeared in "The West Australian" of the 22nd April last:—

Since price control on dressed lamb was lifted on Monday, butchers of the metropolitan area were charging about 1s. 10d. per lb. for legs of lamb and best lamb chops and about 1s. 3d. per lb. for shoulders, the president of the W.A. Division of the Meat and Allied Trades

Federation (Mr. L. Pethick) said yesterday. The controlled prices for these lines had been 1s. 5d. and 11d., respectively.

Mr. Pethick said that although in a period of extreme shortage such as this prices for lamb would rise fairly steeply, the public would reap the benefit of lower prices in the flush season with price controls lifted. His federation had always maintained that without price-fixing the public would secure their meat requirements for a year at a cheaper aggregate than with price-fixing.

Prices for good quality trade lambs showed no alteration on last week's quotes at the fat stock market at Midland Junction yesterday, despite the lifting of controls. Medium quality lines were as much as 1s. a head cheaper.

The producer did not receive any more when control was lifted; the extra money went into the pockets of the wholesale butchers.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: That is something like the fish business.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: And the wholesale butchers now propose to bring pressure to bear upon this Government to grant an increased price for the other cuts of meat. I have a paper which I understand is heavily financed by the Liberal Party—I have no proof of that—called "The News Review."

The Honorary Minister: You are quite wrong.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Well, investigation might show that there is a fairly close tie-up between the two.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Have a Royal Commission to inquire.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: This article is headed, "Prices and Subsidies."

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: You do not subscribe to that paper, surely!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: No, this copy was sent to me. This article is very interesting as showing the point of view of some people who apparently have never been so circumstanced as to have to watch carefully the money they spend on commodities. The article says—

In other words, the purchasing power of the community will control prices. All the price control officials at Canberra and elsewhere will never be able to do it as effectively.

The price control on meat is lifted and it has in certain directions undoubtedly risen in price. But it still rests with the consumer whether he will pay any price the butcher likes to ask. The consumer can quickly discipline the cattle man or the butcher by buying less meat or taking cheaper cuts.

That is precisely what the Honorary Minister for Agriculture said when he sponsored the move made by the wholesale butchers. He said, "The people need not worry. If the price of meat goes up, all they need to do will be to buy less meat."

The Honorary Minister: Or cheaper cuts.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Of course, that would be a solution because, if prices continue to soar and consumers buy less and less, they will eventually die and not have to buy any meat at all. Thus the problem would be solved. That would be one way out of the mess, but I do not think it is the way that humane people would advocate. When the Attorney General was moving the second reading of the Bill, he deplored the fact that the Commonwealth Government proposed to cut out the subsidies. He prophesied that that would bring about some acute difficulty. The member for Middle Swan said that members on the Opposition side were opposing this legislation because they believed in socialisation and this would not bring socialisation about. Now let us see what the businessmen who attended the conference of the Associated Chambers of Commerce thought of subsidies and socialisation—

Many lines are in full supply and should have been decontrolled months ago. It would be undesirable to completely abolish price control immediately, but there is urgent need to give the system greater elasticity with greater freedom of enterprise to the trader. Government policy of increasing subsidies in an endless endeavour to minimise increased costs in the price to the consumer is doomed to failure and it would be preferable to abolish all subsidies and to allow prices to find their true economic level.

That is the point of view of the businessmen who support the Attorney General's party, namely, that it is preferable to abolish subsidies and allow prices to find their true economic level. The article continued—

But it is obvious that the Government's obsession for socialisation will ultimately perpetuate the dependence of free enterprise on the omniscient and omnipotent State, in which the "free" citizen will be the slave of the bureaucrat.

So these businessmen consider that subsidies ought to be abolished completely, but that they will not be abolished because the Government believes in socialisation. The Attorney General complains that the subsidies have been abolished and the member for

Middle Swan says that we believe in socialisation and that that is why we are not supporting the present set-up.

Mr. Grayden: I said nothing of the sort. I said you were opposing the Bill because you are opposed to the present Government.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Did not the hon. member say anything about socialisation?

Mr. Grayden: No.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Then it will appear in the hon. members' speech if he does not strike it out.

Mr. Grayden: I said that you believed in control.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: If the hon. member is in any doubt as to what he said, he had better read the report of his speech.

Mr. Graham: He is missing nothing, anyway.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am further concerned about this matter and the attitude of the Legislative Council, because the Government's policy is decontrol. The Attorney General made that announcement at a meeting of officers of the Commonwealth Prices Branch. He told them that the Government's policy was decontrol. When he was asked why it was not proposed to introduce legislation providing for this control beyond 1949, do you know what he told them, Mr. Speaker?

The Attorney General: Where did this take place?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: At the conference held with officers of the Commonwealth Prices Branch.

The Attorney General: A confidential conference that was held?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I do not know whether it was confidential or not. I read it in the newspaper.

The Attorney General: If you read it in the newspaper it would not be confidential.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am quoting from a newspaper now. It reads—

Mr. Abbott said that the Government's policy was definitely decontrol!

The Attorney General: That is correct.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Continuing with the quotation—

He also made the surprising statement that the price control legislation would only

operate for one year because they could obtain no guarantee from the Legislative Council (Upper House) . . .

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Wow, wow!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: —

. . . that such an Act would be passed by them unless it contained that condition.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Wow, wow!

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: Now!

The Attorney General: It is an absolute misquotation.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Why did you not deny it?

The Attorney General: I did not attend any departmental conference of administrative officers.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Attorney General did not?

The Attorney General: No.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I beg his pardon?

The Attorney General: No. There was a conference of Ministers and that is the only conference I attended.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: This was not a conference of Ministers. It was a different conference, or a meeting, which the Attorney General had with officers of the Commonwealth Prices Branch, because those officers Mr. Speaker, were concerned about their positions. They wanted to know whether they were going to have a job or not and the Attorney General told them to look after themselves.

The Attorney General: Quite right, but I did not say what is quoted there.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I will tell the Attorney General why he told the officers to look after themselves. It was because he did not know how long price control was to continue.

The Attorney General: I did not use the words there.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Attorney General did not know what the Legislative Council would do.

The Attorney General: I did not say what was reported there.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The Attorney General said a moment ago that he was not at any such conference.

The Attorney General: I was referring to the conference in Melbourne.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am not blaming the Attorney General for being honest with these men. I am merely telling the House what the position is and why I do not like this method of overcoming it. I think it will fail, as the Government knows very well that it cannot count on the Legislative Council's agreeing to all of the regulations. The Council is to be given the opportunity to disallow one or all of them.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That is the weakness.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: Those big furniture manufacturers in another place will stop it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: If the Council disallows the most important of these regulations, how on earth can the Government set up an effective system of price control which, in the opinion of the Premier and his Ministers, is so vital? And it is vital! How can the Government guarantee to implement it if the Council is to be given the opportunity to disallow one or all of these regulations? As sure as night follows day, the Council will take advantage of its opportunity and disallow several of the regulations, or I am very much mistaken. Time will tell whether or not that is the position. During the prices referendum campaign it was necessary to secure a vote in a certain direction, and the Liberal Party issued the pretty little brochure which I now hold. It is very clever and I give the party full marks for its ingenuity. On the front of the brochure appears the following:—

It really is over the fence, Mrs. Jones! Since this Chifley Government took over the temporary control of prices we have to pay more for everything than we've ever paid before.

So the Liberal Party thought these regulations, which are now in existence, were so ineffective that the people were obliged to pay more for goods than they did before. Yet this Government proposes that we shall pass legislation to bring into operation, as State regulations, those selfsame ineffective Commonwealth regulations. Is there any logic in what members opposite do?

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: No.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: To state at one time that under Commonwealth price control prices are higher than ever they were before, and then to come along to this House and say, "The most effective way of doing this is to take over the existing Commonwealth set-up, regulations and officers, lock, stock and barrel!"

Mr. Grayden: Are you frightened that some or all of the regulations will be rejected?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am frightened of nothing. That is the position. These ineffective Commonwealth officers, these ineffective Commonwealth regulations which allowed prices to rise, are to be taken over by this Government in preference to existing State legislation which the Attorney General said Cabinet decided was most effective and had proved itself so in operation.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: It is mysterious, all right.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: That brings me to the only conclusion I can reach. It is that pressure by Legislative Councillors has obliged the Government to give them a shot at the regulations.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: In order to ruin the Act.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: So the Government adopts this method. It would put the Legislative Council on the spot if the Government made it agree to the existing legislation; it would be much easier for the Council to have a shot at disallowing the existing Commonwealth regulations. That is the weakness in the existing legislation and that is why I am opposed to it.

The Attorney General: Is that your only reason?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: It is the most important one. I am not opposed to controls; I am a believer in controls, and this Parliament is a believer in controls. I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that last year Parliament passed a Bill to control the profits of the Fremantle Gas and Coke Company and therefore to control the price of gas, because it believed that in certain circumstances—not associated with any state of emergency, either—it was desirable to impose control and price-fixing. I am wholeheartedly for controls over exploitation and profiteering.

Mr. Leslie: For the same reason as the Legislative Council must be.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: No. It believes in profiteering.

Mr. Leslie: It believes in price control. It passed your Bill.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: Under threat of war.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: A number of Legislative Councillors are strong supporters of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Leslie: A number are not.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I did not read—

Mr. Leslie: A number of the members of the party might think they are.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I have not read where they got up and disclaimed responsibility for what was submitted by the President of the Chamber of Commerce. I assume that they agreed with the sentiments expressed, namely, that controls should be lifted to enable them to make more profits in order to set aside those reserves which prudence dictated. I daresay there has been no lack of prudence on the part of the business men in the Legislative Council. If prudence dictated that those reserves should be set aside, they knew that this was the time to put aside large reserves, when the law of supply and demand did not enable the people to keep prices down. But the law of supply and demand is forcing prices up.

The Attorney General: What about taxation?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Taxation is only a certain consideration, because it is included in the prices, anyhow. They have to make profits over and above that. If taxation were reduced, it is a pretty safe bet that prices would not come down commensurately, but that would afford these people the opportunity they are looking for to set aside these reserves which prudence dictates should be set aside. Is that not the only conclusion to which any one can come on a statement of this nature?

Mr. Leslie: No.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Here we have the business men themselves declaring that the existence of controls at present is preventing them from getting these reserves. In other words they say, "We should be permitted to charge higher prices, not because our profits at present are insufficient, but because we have got to make higher profits now to tide us over the time when profits will be lower." I submit that is the only

conclusion to which we can come on that statement. That being so, we can see how much pressure will be exerted on the Government once these controls are taken over. I say it is extremely dangerous for any Government desiring to set up an effective system of price control to leave the door wide open as it is doing in this instance, and make the continuance of an effective system entirely dependent upon what the Legislative Councillors will do with the regulations.

The Attorney General: If they are brought down.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Attorney General has promised to bring them down.

The Attorney General: No.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: You will not allow me, Mr. Speaker, to pick up "Hansard" and quote from it, but fortunately I wrote down what the Attorney General said. So that I will not do him any injustice, I ask him to pick up "Hansard" which is on his desk and find out for himself. Here are his words—

... On the day we take over subsequently State regulations will be laid on the Table of the House.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: What about that?

The Attorney General: What would you suggest I say?

Mr. Hegney: Every time he opens his mouth he puts both feet in.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Should there be any doubt about the Attorney General's intention, I ask him to read what the Chief Secretary said in the Legislative Council on another Bill.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: What did he say?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: He said there had been objections to bringing in legislation of this nature. He did not say where the objections had come from, but he said there were objections to doing this, and in order to overcome those objections it was intended to table regulations so that the Legislative Councillors could bring about their disallowance. That is in "Hansard."

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: What do you say to that?

Hon. A. H. Panton: "Hansard" never lies.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Is there any reason for us to believe that we can get an effective system of price control under the methods the Government proposes to adopt?

Mr. Grayden: We will see how effective it is.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We will see all right; but that is like shutting the stable door after the horse has gone. It will not do our people much good, those who have to pay the higher prices, if we say, "We waited to see what the Legislative Council would do and they did what we thought they would do." What good will that do us or our people?

Mr. Grayden: We will see what they do.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We do not want to wait and see, but we want to prevent its happening, and the way we can prevent that is for the Government to use the existing State legislation, well-known to the Acting Premier and the Attorney General and to Cabinet as being completely effective.

Mr. Grayden: The member for Northam said that the Upper House would throw that out.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am prepared to let us see what they will do with that.

Mr. Grayden: The member for Northam was not.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Is the hon. member?

Mr. Grayden: I am perfectly happy about the regulations.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Would the hon. member be happy to see what they would do with the Act?

Mr. Grayden: I am happy about the existing regulations.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! There are too many interjections.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The member for Middle Swan wants me to wait and see what the Legislative Council will do with the Government's proposal, but he is not prepared to see what the Legislative Council would do with the existing legislation, the legislation which the State Cabinet declared publicly to be completely effective.

Hon. A. R. G. Hawke: The member for Middle Swan is highly irrational.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: His declaration only confirms my conviction that the Government is obliged, because of pressure from the Legislative Council, to adopt this method, so that the Legislative Councillors can be given an opportunity, as the Chief

Secretary promised them, to have the regulations disallowed. I am not going to subscribe to that method, if I can possibly avoid it. Before I conclude, I would like to ask the Government what it thinks this effective system, which it promises, can do towards providing adequate supplies of galvanised iron and wire netting at a reasonable price. I think there is going to be extreme difficulty in this connection, because if the price to be charged is to be fixed in the State of origin and that price communicated to Ministers in the other States, and only transport costs allowed in addition, I cannot believe that firms will subject themselves to a lot of trouble and inconvenience in order to derive less profit. The profit motive is the most important thing in business, and, if a price is fixed, the man in business will sell his commodities where he can get the greatest profit. Under the system to be set up, I feel we will have fewer of these important commodities than we had before.

Hon. A. H. Panton: You have no faith in the Honorary Minister for Supply and Shipping.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: When the Minister told this conference of price officials that they had better look after themselves and find jobs because he could give no guarantee as to the length of their employment, I submit to the House that his statement was ominous and it would be as well if those officers did do their best to find congenial employment, because the Government expects the Legislative Council to knock this price control sideways before very long. The other night, when I interjected about the time fixed in this Bill not providing for any period beyond 1949, the Minister for Housing it was, I think, who said the reason for that was in order to give Parliament an opportunity to review the legislation from time to time. That is a pretty weak one in connection with price control legislation being taken over in the middle of 1948! It will be necessary to review the legislation, mind you, not the regulations, because they can be revoked at any time. It will be necessary to review this legislation in 1949. What nonsense!

If the Government does not wish the system to continue beyond 1949, all it needs to do is to get the Governor to revoke the regulations, and then there will be no provisions

to work under, because there is nothing in the Bill. We are told that the time was deliberately fixed at 1949 to give Parliament an opportunity to review the legislation. I am satisfied that the reason given by the Attorney General at the conference of officials, that if 1949 had not been included in the Bill the Government could have no assurance from the Legislative Council that it would pass the measure, is the correct one. What a wonderful state of affairs! In order to give the people of this State an effective system of price control, we have to agree beforehand, with the Legislative Council, that we shall limit it to 1949, however much it might be necessary to continue the control beyond that time. I suggest I have made out a case to answer as to why the Government has departed from existing legislation, stated by it to be quite effective, and adopted this method of bringing in a control system.

THE ACTING PREMIER (Hon. A. F. Watts—Katanning) [9.32]: I have listened with interest, not to say a certain measure of amazement, to some of the observations made by members opposite. Accepting for the moment the great bulk of the objections as being made in all sincerity, they seem to me to fall into two parts, one, that the legislation should have been brought before the House as an amendment of the Profiteering Prevention Act of 1939, and, two, that under the existing proposals it will be comparatively easy for the regulations, which may be promulgated, to be disallowed. I cannot accept—and I do not think the Government can—without a great number of qualifications, the views which have been expressed by members opposite concerning the Legislative Council in this matter. I can certainly give the House this assurance, that there have been no discussions between the Government and the Legislative Council such as have been the subject of the imagination of the member for North-East Fremantle and others.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Did not the Minister for Housing have a conference up here last week with the Legislative Councillors?

The ACTING PREMIER: I am referring to the Bill now before the House, and I have told the hon. member the facts in regard to it. The Government, without entering into these reflections upon the

Legislative Council because it regards them as not only unnecessary but improper at this juncture, is most anxious to ensure that there shall be no hiatus between the regulations which will, of course, exist under this Bill when it becomes law, and the State regulations which may be promulgated to take their place at some future time. It is possible for either House of Parliament to disallow these regulations if and when they are tabled. In consequence, it is possible, as a result of the activity of either House, that there might be a time when there would be no effective regulations in operation. Quite obviously, it is not the desire of the Government that that should be so. The risk of either House taking such action should not be permitted.

The Government, therefore, gives this assurance to the House, that it is considering the sort of amendment that should be inserted in the relevant clause of the Bill to ensure that a hiatus cannot exist—in other words, that there will be an effective set of regulations in operation at all times. That amendment will, I anticipate, be available when the House next meets to discuss the matter. I would also like to say that there are numbers of reasons why the Profiteering Prevention Act of 1939 was not used as the basis for this legislation. I held the view—and indeed I hold it now—that it was practicable to make use of that legislation. But we must not forget that a series of circumstances arose which apparently made it desirable that the Commonwealth regulations should be taken over. Members have expressed the view that they knew nothing of those regulations, and that what was to be the effect of the regulations, which the measure proposes to take over, was totally unknown to them. I suggest that they have had full experience of the regulations in question, as we all have, over a period of a number of years. In consequence, we are all fairly well able to judge what will be the effect of the existing Commonwealth regulations in regard to price control.

At one stage it was suggested that there should be no Commonwealth set-up taken over at all. But it was quite apparent that that could not take place, but that it would be necessary to take over not only a portion of the Commonwealth set-up but also a goodly proportion of its officials. When the situation arose, it became obvious that those people would in that way be able, far better,

to deal with the question of price control under the aegis of the State, than they would were we to bring them under some legislation which was entirely new to them. In addition, the necessity for uniformity to some degree seemed to me to override any last remaining objections I might have. For all these reasons, it was decided that the legislation should be brought down in the form in which it is now before the House. But I repeat the assurance I gave just now, and very categorically, that there is no intention on the part of this Government to allow any hiatus or gap in the regulations which might be caused by an act of disallowance by either House of this Parliament and that, therefore, measures will be taken over the week-end to bring before the Chamber an amendment suited to that purpose.

Mr. Smith: It might not be passed in the other House.

The ACTING PREMIER: At least we shall have control of the measure, and plenty of time to argue the point.

On motion by Mr. Wild, debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT—SPECIAL.

THE ACTING PREMIER (Hon. A. F. Watts—Katanning): I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn till Tuesday, the 24th August.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 9.39 p.m.

Legislative Council.

Thursday, 19th August, 1948.

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