

Should the matter be left there? I think any fairminded man must admit that if there is nothing to hide at the State Brick Works, an inquiry can do no harm to anybody there. On the contrary, it must do good. Furthermore, as this is an inquiry into bricks and cement, such inquiry might ascertain the cause of this blackmarketing and, after all, if that were found then we would be rendering a service to the State.

On motion by the Acting Premier, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 9.56 p.m.

Legislative Council

Thursday, 23rd August, 1951.

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

QUESTIONS.

PETROL PUMPS, ELECTRIC.

As to Regulations Governing Installation.

Hon. E. M. HEENAN (for Hon. W. R. Hall) asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) Is it a fact that there has been an organisation in this State all this year endeavouring to introduce electric petrol pumps?

(2) Is it a fact that the necessary regulations permitting use of electric petrol pumps by resellers in garages and service stations have not yet been framed?

(3) Is it a fact that sufficient information was available in the early part of the year to permit of the framing of these regulations?

(4) Is it a fact that several Ministers have been approached in an endeavour to hasten the approval of these regulations so that the public may have the benefits of electric petrol pumps?

(5) In view of the undoubted inaccuracy and probable illegality of the present manual pumps on service stations, is this delay in approving electric pumps necessary, and what is its cause?

(6) Is it known that stocks of electric petrol pumps are available in this State; and, if so, can any indication be given as to when approval will be granted for their use by service stations?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE replied:

(1) and (2) Mr. Walker, the manager of the Electric Pump Equipment Company, has been negotiating with the Weights and Measures Department for the use in Western Australia of certain petrol pumps that have been discarded in the Eastern States. The pumps submitted so far are not considered suitable for public use, and Mr. Walker has been informed of the necessary modifications required by the department.

(3) No.

(4) Mr. Walker has made approaches to the Minister for Police and has written to the Premier, and may have approached other Ministers.

(5) and (6) The existing manual pumps are both accurate and legal. Regulations dealing with electric pumps are now under consideration and are expected to be gazetted shortly.

STOCK DISEASES.

As to Material for Construction of Sheep Dips.

Hon. L. A. LOGAN (for Hon. A. L. Loton) asked the Minister for Agriculture:

In view of the amendment to Regulation 63 and the Third Schedule under the Stock Diseases Act, 1895, as published in the "Government Gazette" on the 6th July, 1951, will the Minister take action to have supplies of galvanised water piping and locally manufactured cement made available immediately to primary producers so that sheep dips can be constructed?

The MINISTER replied:

Action has already been taken to have essential materials made available to facilitate the dipping of sheep. These efforts will be continued.

OCEAN PASSENGER VESSELS.

As to Berthing and Bus Services.

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

(1) Is he aware that oversea passenger ships are berthed at "G" shed a considerable distance from the harbour entrance, thus being responsible for passengers disembarking at Fremantle entering the city through the industrial section?

(2) If so, because of the fact that Fremantle is the western gateway to Australia and the first impression of new arrivals is most important, will he take the question up with the port authorities with a view to oversea passenger ships being moored at either "C" or "D" sheds so that entrance may be gained through the city proper?

(3) Has the Transport Board granted permission to the Metro Bus Co., Ltd., to run special buses to Perth starting from Edward-street, Fremantle, on days when oversea ships arrive?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE replied:

(1) The berthing of mail passenger ships is usually confined to berths "E," "F" and "G" because of the suitability of those berths, both in regard to adequate depth and for the manoeuvring of large ships in berthing operations, and in unberthing during bad weather. On occasions, these vessels have been berthed at North Wharf. Immigrant ships are usually berthed at berths "A," "B," "C," "D," "E," "F" and "G," but they also have been berthed at North Wharf.

(2) As indicated in (1), the berthing of large mail passenger ships is mainly confined to berths "E," "F" and "G," but passengers are transported by special buses organised to convey them to the shopping centre of Fremantle.

(3) The operation of special buses for the convenience of mailboat passengers had been commenced by the Metro Bus Co. prior to the inauguration of the Transport Board in 1934, and no action has been taken by the board to cancel this convenience. When oversea ships were allotted to berth "G," the starting point was transferred to Edward-street.

GALVANISED WATER PIPING.

As to Priorities and Releases.

Hon. A. R. JONES asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) What priorities are given when permits are issued for galvanised water piping for the following purposes—

- (a) for the supply of water for domestic use;
- (b) for pumping stock water from bores or wells;
- (c) for reticulating stock water from source of supply to paddock tanks (point of consumption)?

(2) Is the Minister aware that a No. 1 priority does not necessarily secure the permit-holder an immediate release of the required articles?

(3) Will the Minister endeavour to have a release order issued with a No. 1 permit?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE replied:

- (1) (a) Priority No. 1.
- (b) Priority No. 3.
- (c) Priority No. 3.

(2) Yes. The waiting period of delivery is governed by shipping from the Eastern States and the sizes of piping supplied by the manufacturers.

(3) Releases for No. 1 priority are always issued with the permit.

PYRITES.

As to Financial Assistance by Commonwealth.

Hon. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Is it a fact that the Commonwealth Government is assisting financially in the erection of a special wharf to handle pyrites in Tasmania?

(2) Is it contemplated that financial assistance will be available from the Commonwealth in Western Australia for the handling of pyrites?

The MINISTER replied: :

(1) Investigations are being made into this matter.

(2) It is understood that Commonwealth assistance will be available for the supply of pyrites for the manufacture of superphosphate. If this is so, I expect Western Australia to receive some assistance from the Commonwealth.

RAILWAYS.

As to Attended Stations and Staff.

Hon. A. R. JONES asked the Minister for Transport: :

(1) What system is used by the Railway Department to determine when any station or siding should be attended by a station-master?

(2) Has the station staff position improved since last year?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE replied:

(1) The position is usually determined by the volume of business transacted, and train operation requirements, but housing facilities and availability of staff have also to be considered.

(2) No.

LANDS.

As to Availability of Esperance Sandplain.

Hon. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Will the Minister say whether all land shown on Litho. 423/80 (Esperance district) has been withdrawn from selection?

(2) What is the area involved?

(3) What is the reason for the withdrawal?

(4) Is this area likely to be thrown open for selection at a later date?

(5) How much new and abandoned land has been taken up for settlement on the Esperance sandplain in the past two years?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) Approximately 160,000 acres.

(3) This area was thrown open for selection before it had been planned, with the result that complications have arisen in connection with roads and block boundaries. It was decided to withdraw the land temporarily to enable the surveyors to prepare a design for subdivision of further locations, after conference with the road board regarding access roads.

(4) Yes, immediately the design for subdivision has been prepared and the additional locations surveyed.

(5) 8,920 acres new Crown land selected. 60,785 acres abandoned Crown land re-selected. 64,023 acres Crown land applied for, not yet approved. Total: 133,728 acres.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by Hon. H. K. Watson, leave of absence for six consecutive sittings granted to Hon. J. G. Hislop (Metropolitan Province) on the ground of public business.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Seventh Day.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. H. C. STRICKLAND (North) [4.41]: Before commenting on the speech of His Excellency the Administrator, I would like to take the opportunity of congratulating you, Sir, on the receipt of a very high honour from His Majesty the King. It was a mark of great distinction, and I trust that good health will enable you to enjoy it for many years. I also wish to extend a welcome to the new members and to congratulate the new Clerk of Parliaments, Mr. Sparks, and his assistant, the Usher of the Black Rod, Mr. Roberts, on their appointment to those positions.

I listened very attentively to His Excellency's Speech and was pleased to hear that important public works originated by the Labour Government are maturing. Already the South Fremantle power station is in operation and is enabling us to enjoy a little more warmth in this Chamber. It is also gratifying to know that such great public works as the comprehensive water supply scheme, the South-West power scheme, and the war service land settlement scheme are all

showing satisfactory results, and that Wundowie is producing sufficient pig-iron for local foundries. The success of these very important undertakings reflects credit upon Labour planning prior to the present Government's taking office.

I was pleased to hear His Excellency tell us that another passenger ship would be placed very shortly on the North-West coast. It is to be hoped that it will commence running before the "Koolinda" is dry-docked as, otherwise, when the "Koolinda" is removed from the service, heavy expense will have to be incurred by residents in the North who may wish to take a holiday in the South during the hottest months of the year, which are usually the slackest, especially in the Kimberleys. When there is no passenger ship, the expense of travelling often prevents families from coming South.

The only alternative means of transport is the aeroplane, and the difference in cost is considerable. The fare by plane for a three-unit family, consisting of a man, his wife, and a child of school age, is £79 to Perth and another £79 for the return journey. Concessions on a State ship would enable the same family to come to Fremantle for less than half that cost. Such travellers would have a week or more on the sea, which is beneficial to the health and adds to the enjoyment of a holiday. On the other hand, the plane journey from Wyndham to Perth occupies 12 hours and the cost is £79, therefore their savings disappear at the rate of £6 10s. an hour. By comparison they can live for £6 10s. each per week on the sea. As I have said, the high cost of journeying by aeroplane precludes many families from taking a much-needed spell from the tropics, and consequently it is pleasing to hear that a new ship is to be placed in commission.

It has been truly said by other speakers, in this House and in another place, that shipping on the North-West coast today is worse than it has ever been. On a recent journey I found that at every port along the coast people came down to the ship hoping to find goods on board, particularly building materials, and were very disappointed at their absence. It strikes me as rather peculiar that ships cannot stretch a point in these hard times and take cargo. It is not for want of space on the "Koolinda," on which vessel I travelled on the occasion to which I am referring. There was nothing on the deck, and between decks there were empty cattle pens. I think those pens are large enough to hold eight bullocks, so that there would have been ample space for the storage of cargo. For some reason or other, however, the State Shipping Service does not wish to handle builders' supplies.

Only today I was speaking to the manager of a firm which supplies pre-cut houses and which wanted to transport two buildings to Roebourne. The only space

that the State Shipping Service could offer was 100 cubic feet, and, in those circumstances, it would have required eight or nine boat trips to ship the material for the two houses. Builders cannot afford to have men sitting around waiting for materials to arrive. If that happens, tradesmen take other work, probably 200, 300, or 400 miles away in another town or on a mining show, and they do not return. We have had the spectacle of one house in Roebourne standing three-parts finished for over 12 months. Builders cannot be blamed if there is no co-operation between the State Housing Commission and the State Shipping Service in seeing that the goods are delivered. That position prevails in almost every port along the coast.

Hon. H. K. Watson: It also prevails on the trip down, does it not?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: From Port Sampson onwards, yes. For some reason—probably because of the tides or the exposed position of the jetty at Port Sampson—the captains of boats apparently desire to stay in that port for short periods only. They do not like being there for more than two or three hours at a time, and cargo is not accepted for ports such as that. One would imagine that where only two houses are involved a point could be stretched so that the material could be put on board.

In the days when there was only the old "Chungking" on that coast, she used to be loaded to the plimsoll, and sometimes even lower still during the war years. It has been said that once she got on the beam of the Rottneest light, she used to drop back a couple of knots, though I do not know whether that is so. That is just the tale they tell. Even then, shipping on the North-West coast was better than it is today, as no effort seems to be made now to get urgently needed supplies aboard. The position has recently been better at Witte-noom Gorge where I think already about 70-odd State rental homes are being occupied and another 44 are under construction. Those homes have been erected by the Commission's own tradesmen and the work has gone along fairly smoothly.

In all the ports together there have been only 42 homes allotted, and out of that number 15 have been completed, which is a very poor effort on the part of the Government. Only 15 homes have been completed along the North-West ports in a period of more than four years. At Carnarvon, 11 have been completed and the target for that centre was 24. More than half of them are prefabricated houses and the others are small timber-framed asbestos homes. At Onslow, a few timber-framed asbestos homes have been under construction for over 18 months, and the contractor there was waiting to see whether the material was on the boat. He was disappointed when he found that nothing had turned up, and he told me he would have to let his

tradesmen go. He had been paying them full wages and keeping them occupied on odd jobs, but could not keep it up forever.

Hon. G. Fraser: Do you know whether the State Shipping Service refused to take that cargo?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: On inquiring at the State Housing Commission, I was told they could not get space on the ships. When I inquired at the State Shipping Service, I was given a lot of reasons such as over-stowing; unsuitability of cargo; too much delay in ports, where delay cannot be afforded because cattle are on the road being driven to Derby and must be picked up on a certain day, and soon. Members will understand that if the ship misses a tide on that coast it may mean missing a day, which would involve a fair amount of expense, but I fail to understand why one ship, such as the "Kybra," which does not carry cattle, cannot be made available to pick up cargo of this sort.

At Port Hedland, two houses have been completed in 18 months. At Derby, two have been completed and five are under construction, but the design of the houses there is causing complaints by the local road board and is a source of ridicule by the people living in the district. The dwellings are constructed flat on the ground, inviting snakes and other vermin to enter; and, when heavy rain occurs, I surmise that the water will enter the dwellings also. I noticed a lot of waste attached to the building of the homes, as regards both labour and materials. I counted 75 shutters round those houses. Where one shutter would have done, four have been used, which involves a great amount of extra material such as hinges, screws and so on.

Hon. H. Hearn: Is the Government the builder of those houses?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: Yes. They are designed, I understand, by a Government architect. It is a pity people like that do not live in that country for a while and get to understand what is required. The present position is just another instance of remote control and of the attitude that "anything will do for the North-West."

Hon. N. E. Baxter: Do not those houses incorporate the Housing Commission's tropical design?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: If they were built up off the ground a bit so that the air could circulate and more sparing use was made of shutters, the dwellings would be better; but at present they are very disappointing. On top of all that, the rental is fixed at £3 4s. per week, which is far too high for a worker to pay in that area. I wrote to the Housing Commission and asked if it was not possible to have the capital value of those homes written down so that a rent more in keeping with the comfort and value received could be charged.

Hon. N. E. Baxter: What is the approximate capital value of those buildings?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: I endeavoured to ascertain the capital value and the figures are to be forwarded to me, but I have not yet received them. When the information becomes available, I will be only too happy to pass it on to members. The cost of materials, freight and administration for the building of those houses must be very high. Every month or so some official from the Housing Commission flies North, to have a look at the progress being made, or something of that nature. I do not, in fact, know what they look at, but it all adds to the cost of the houses. In addition, water rates, power charges, and so on are excessive in the North. I see no reason why the Government should not write the capital value down so as to allow a fair rent to be charged. I am sure the magistrate in a fair rents court would not fix £3 4s. a week as an equitable rent for those homes.

Hon. H. Hearn: No, they reserve that sort of thing for private owners.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: The rent for these places at Carnarvon is £2 14s. per week. Owing to the inability to obtain transport, either by sea or road, since the floods in that area, the contractors there told me that they have lost their gang of men through lack of materials, and the Housing Commission informed me that the delay and extra cost involved in the construction of those 10 houses will have the effect of further increasing the rent. At Carnarvon, too, the water rates are high.

One of the impositions, amounting almost to extortion, is the extra charge placed on materials by the Transport Board. When a man comes to Perth to purchase a new truck, he naturally has no inclination to drive it back empty, and to my knowledge there have been three cases recently of men coming from the North to pick up new vehicles and being asked to take goods back with them. On making application to the Transport Board for a permit, they were charged 15s. a ton for the material they carried north. Such extra charges all add to the cost of a rental home. Why the board should charge 15s. a ton I do not know.

I wrote to the Transport Board and asked for a reduction in the fee. The Government says it wants to help the North, but it is certainly not helping the worker employed there. It has a far different outlook towards residents in the towns from that which it displays towards the wealthy station-owners in the Kimberleys, for it recommends that a subsidy amounting to half the landed cost at North-West ports should be granted on all building materials that are used on cattle-raising properties.

What a different attitude the Government adopts towards some of these wealthy station-owners as compared to that

adopted, through the Transport Board, towards people who desire to cart materials to the North, or towards tenants who are paying high rents for a poor class of house in the North. To me, it seems to be quite without reason. After all is said and done, buildings that are erected on station properties, such as staff living quarters, are free of taxation. It is a total deduction. On the other hand, if a man desires to build a house for himself, extra transport charges are imposed on him, which increase the cost of his materials. In addition, those occupying rental homes will be burdened with the capital cost for the rest of their lives. The Transport Board or the Government should take a more lenient view towards those who apply for transport permits and grant them some consideration, in order to encourage people to live in the North.

The recent floods in Carnarvon caused tremendous damage to roads, and much damage was suffered by plantations, mostly bean crops. Fences and irrigation channels were also affected, but the banana plants and the crop itself did not suffer very much damage. Recently I asked a question in the House, and the reply gave an indication of the amount of private damage. I was told that only 11 applicants applied for compensation, amounting in all to a total of £11,000. There was, of course, a good deal of incidental loss of personal belongings, such as clothes and other possessions.

Hon. L. Craig: Did the people claim for that loss?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: No. The only persons that did submit claims were the battlers. I think the Government made available some free-of-interest loans, the average being £100. They were made to people who, being without income, needed that financial assistance for the purchase of food. Normally, in the first year of development on these plantations they do casual work outside; they work more or less part time to keep themselves in food. Because of the damage to their fences and irrigation channels, they, of course, could not work outside and that was the reason they had to apply for financial assistance. However, the loans are interest-free and that is something.

The damage to the roads was tremendous, and it will take a great deal of money to place the main road and the approaches to Carnarvon in trafficable order. In some sections, long stretches of road have been washed clean away to a depth of two or three feet and extending in width from fence to fence. They were built only of the natural soil, which is clay, and river sand. This had been built up for over 20 years until a reasonably good surface was developed; but, as a result of the extraordinary flood, the surface has been completely washed away. In some places 20 years' work has been totally lost and there is nothing left on which to

lay a foundation to rebuild the roads. There are watercourses where the road used to run, and the route is pitted with large holes. I hope the Government will provide the extremely expensive initial cost of building a proper road with a stone foundation and a sealed surface in that area. Not a great length is required. I should say from eight to 10 miles would be sufficient to enable traffic to pass in and out of Carnarvon at all times.

Hon. H. K. Watson: Do you think it would stand up to future floods?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: I should say it would stand up against all floods. There are about four miles of that road with a sealed surface. One mile of it has a stone foundation which was laid during the war. I think, by the Army or the Air Force. The water flooded that section to a depth of three or four feet at a fast-flowing rate, and when it had receded no damage had been done to the surface of the road. It had fretted the shoulders of the road a little, and some stone and rubble had to be replaced, but no damage whatsoever had been done to the bitumen. The problem, of course, is to get the stone. The only stone available would be approximately 40 miles from Carnarvon and I think the Government should carry it to Carnarvon and construct a bitumen-surfaced road around the plantations and approaches to the town. Such a road would, I think, stand up to anything and would last for a considerable number of years.

Undoubtedly, in places, the roads will have to be laid on different locations because there is nothing left of the old section on which to build. It would require many yards of earth to replace the old roads. For three weeks, children living along the river were unable to go to school because the bus could not get around to them; tradesmen could not get out; and planters could not get their fruit in. Some of them were successful in bringing their crops in, but all of the crops could not be transported, and some of the fruit ripened on the tree and thus could not be marketed. It was only a gully half a chain wide which held them up for three weeks. The flood-waters themselves obstructed the traffic for perhaps only one week. I sincerely hope that an all-weather road will be constructed to stand for all time.

For some reason or other, Carnarvon has less than four miles of sealed road. I do not want to compare one town against the other; but, as an illustration, Wyndham has seven or eight miles of first-class bitumen road, Derby would have no less, and Port Hedland has approximately the same. Even Roebourne can boast of a bitumen road down to Point Sampson and through the town, which I imagine would consist of more than 10 miles of bituminised surface. Wittenoom Gorge has 12 or 14 miles of sealed road. Those dis-

tricts, of course, are in the fortunate position of having plenty of metal alongside the road, whereas Carnarvon has a clay soil. But it will be cheaper in the long run to construct a road with a stone foundation, because it will stand up to any future flood.

Hon. H. K. Watson: Were the roads that you mentioned constructed by the Main Roads Department or by the local authorities?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: Principally by the Main Roads Department. Some may have been built by the local authority, but not very many. One could not expect the road board in that district—that is the Gascoyne-Minilya Road Board—to build that road. It already has over 1,000 miles of road to maintain, and the responsibility and expenditure is far beyond it. The rebuilding of the road is certainly a job for the Main Roads Department; and, in the long run, a solidly constructed sealed road would prove to be the cheapest. Floods have caused a lot of concern in Carnarvon, and conjecture as to where the next one will occur.

I can remember that there was considerable anxiety amongst the townspeople as to the safety of their homes following a flood in 1926 or 1927 in the town itself; and the Government of the day sent a surveyor to Carnarvon who, I think, was named Stanley, to survey the watercourse outlet to the sea. I have never seen the report; but I did speak to Mr. Stanley on many occasions during his stay in Carnarvon, and he gave me to understand that several islands which are in the centre of the river at the ocean end, and also further up the river in the main channel to the sea, were obstructing the free flow of the water. His opinion was that if the islands were cleared of the vegetation they carry, the water would then erode the soil and that the river would thus clear a channel for itself. In those days the cost of the work was far too great to contemplate, and nothing was done; but the department might well look into the details of Mr. Stanley's survey and possibly it would derive some valuable information as to how the town might be best protected in future. This flooding is a matter of great concern, as each flood encroaches more and more upon the town. This time the high-water level was five inches higher in the town than at any other flood period.

Another matter on which I wish to speak is that of encouraging people to settle in the North. If the Government is desirous of encouraging people to settle in the North, some opportunity to do so must be made available to them. There is very little opportunity to settle in the Kimberleys, where the most fertile areas are to be found. Following inquiries made at the Lands Department, I found that there is not one acre of land available for selection in Kimberley. Much of it is taken up by pastoral areas.

The Minister for Agriculture: Why is so much of the area not taken up?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: All Crown Land has been withdrawn from selection. What the reason was for adopting that course, I do not know. I hope that it may be simply pending survey and classification, and that, when this work has been done, it will be thrown open for selection.

The Minister for Agriculture: It has been available over the last 50 years.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: During the last 12 months, none of it has been available. Some of the pastoral companies hold over 3,000,000 acres, and this sort of thing has the effect of shutting out population, not encouraging it. People cannot go there to engage in agricultural pursuits because there is no land available for them.

Hon. H. K. Watson: Do the leases contain all agricultural land?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: In the vicinity of Fitzroy Crossing, I should say that the leases occupy all agricultural land. I have not travelled right through those leases, but many thousands of acres on the Fitzroy are contained in big leases.

The Minister for Agriculture: But the pastoral land may be taken if land is needed for agricultural purposes.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: Three persons have asked me to sponsor applications for a few acres comprised in pastoral leases. If the pastoralist is willing, it is all right, but if he is not willing, the obstacle is almost insurmountable. I understand that if the Government desired to resume some of this land, it must be done with the consent of Parliament.

I have been wondering why the Government has undertaken to provide watering points on pastoral leases and whether it has actually been forced into taking this action. Questions were asked in both Chambers last session, but it was very difficult to find out exactly what object lay behind the spending of all this money on some of the properties of absentee-lessees, such as Bovril Estates and Vesteys, who have done very little with their leases.

Naturally we should like to know why Government money is being spent to improve pastoral leases, seeing that such expenditure is allowed by the Taxation Department as a full deduction. If a pastoralist puts down a bore, irrespective of whether it proves to be good or bad, the whole of the cost may be claimed as a taxation deduction. In reply to a question asked last session, the Premier stated—

We have to preserve the State's asset, and I think the Government is acting in the right direction in placing watering-points on the various holdings.

I consider it is time the Act governing these leases was amended. If the Government has to step in to protect the State's asset, evidently it is being neglected or destroyed by the lessees through not improving or

handling their leases as they should. Under the Land Act, lessees may sit down until 1984—the year in which the leases will expire.

Hon. N. E. Baxter: What stock would the leases carry?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: I have no idea of the number these holdings will carry, but the improvements required under the Land Act are so meagre as to be ineffective. Under the stocking provision, the lessee, after 10 years, must have over 30 sheep or six head of large stock per 1,000 acres. He could have horses or anything else and that would count in the stocking. The improvements that a lessee is required to put on the leases are not stipulated. All that is required is the expenditure of an amount of £10 per 1,000 acres in the first 10 years. In these days, the homestead and buildings would absorb the amount that represents, and this would be sufficient to comply with the Act.

As far back as 1933, the then member for Gascoyne endeavoured to get the Act amended in its application to the Kimberley leases so that lessees would have to disperse their expenditure. Notwithstanding that he was a member of the Government of the day, he could not get the amendment passed. In the conditions prevailing today, it seems that, had that amendment been accepted, the Government would not be faced with the expenditure on watering-points, which is estimated to amount to half a million of money.

There can be no aim at stepping up production, because the expenditure is to be spread over 25 years. That is a long time to look forward in order to obtain greater production from the land. It is time the Act was amended so that these big and wealthy companies would be compelled and not induced to improve their land, because they could well afford to do it.

The Minister for Agriculture: You are actually advocating harsher conditions for the pastoralist.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: Yes; I think the Act should require the lessees to protect the asset of the State and that the taxpayers should not be called upon to pay for repairing the damage lessees have done to the leases. Doubtless there are good pastoralists in the North who do care for their leases. To mention one, Fossil Downs has a resident-owner who lives on his property most of the time, and there is not the slightest doubt as to what can be done on the leases.

I wish now to refer to another portion of the Kimberley area. Mention has been made of experiments in the growing of sugar-cane and various other crops, and on that aspect I have a copy of a report on the North Kimberley district, compiled

by Surveyor William R. Easton, who was in command of an expedition in 1921, the object of which was to find a port on the northern coast to open up the hinterland. In my opinion it is a very good report, though, at the time it was issued, I believe it was thought to be rather extravagant. In these days of modern machinery, however, and with the aid of aeroplanes, I consider that the time has arrived when the Government should take steps to develop this portion of the State. Mr. Easton commented on the potentialities of growing sub-tropical fruits, and I should like to read one passage—

That many species of commercial tropical and sub-tropical plants will grow has been proved beyond doubt by the gardens in existence at the Port George Mission, and the Drysdale River Mission.

At the Port George Mission, the average rainfall is about 50 inches, and at the Drysdale River Mission, I think it is a little less.

Dates, coconuts, rubber (suitable varieties), bananas, plantains, peanuts, sisal hemp, pineapples, tobacco, sunflowers, sorghum, paw-paws, sweet potatoes, beans, pumpkins, beets, cabbages, onions, tomatoes and melons grow to perfection. Cotton will grow almost wild. Upland rice grown on poor sandy soil without any fertilising agent, and harvested under the most primitive conditions (i.e., hand-sown, cut by sickle, the grain trodden out by bullocks, and winnowed by the wind), has yielded 33 to 44 bushels per acre for several years, while sugar cane, which generally requires a rich soil is growing to perfection at the Drysdale Mission, on the poorest sandy soil I have seen on the trip.

This soil, which only occurs in the vicinity of Napier Broome Bay, is very similar in appearance to the yellow sandy soil between Perth and Fremantle.

When such a report could be made back in 1921, it might be a good idea to have another look at that territory. If population is to be attracted to the North, that seems to be an area which could be used for closer settlement.

The Minister for Agriculture: What is to prevent people from going there?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: No land is available.

The Minister for Agriculture: Who has got it?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: The Crown. It is all withdrawn from selection.

The Minister for Agriculture: In the last 12 months?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: It is 12 months since I first inquired, and I asked again a few days ago so that I would not be saying something that was not correct.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: Was much land selected prior to 12 months ago?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: No land has been taken up there except by the missions.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: But it was available.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: I am not clear on that point. I would be surprised if, since aerial photos. have been taken of the North, it is not possible for the Surveyor General to do something about the area. However, I doubt whether it has ever been surveyed. I met a man in Wyndham early this year, and he had applied for an area on the Gulf, opposite Wyndham. He got the same reply that I have just given, namely, that all Crown lands were withdrawn from selection. He wondered why. A great part of it is an aboriginal reserve. That portion of the Kimberleys, according to this report, has rivers that flow all the year round. If that is correct, then it is the only part of the North that has such rivers, and I imagine it would be well worth investigation. I would like to say a little more about the rapidly depreciating pound. I think it is true that stockpiling for war is one of the causes of inflation.

Hon. H. Hearn: Would it not be better to say for defence than for war?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: The Press tells us it is for war.

The Minister for Agriculture: To prevent war.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: Among other things aggravating the position on our home front is the knowledge, which we all have, that the pound is fast losing its value. Sir Arthur Fadden's pound, which he assured us would regain value, has declined rapidly in the last 18 months. In some instances, especially in the case of earners of big incomes, I blame high taxation for accelerating the decline in the pound, because we all know that the quicker we can turn our money into goods of some kind the happier we feel. The present position has created a terrific demand for materials. In the North, many pastoralists, perhaps for the first time in their existence, have an opportunity of spending large amounts on improvements, but they are faced, of course, with the inability of being able to procure the necessary materials. The urge to spend on improvements has created quite a seller's market so that the price of a commodity is rarely asked; it is a matter of whether it can be supplied. I do not blame anyone for taking advantage of the circumstances, or attempting to put money into something solid, such as goods, stock, houses or furniture. The cure is the production of more goods. But I am of opinion that producers will not produce because taxation is too high.

Hon. N. E. Baxter: What about the wage-earners? Are they producing?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: Some of them may be hanging back, and that applies practically all round. I was told more than once, when the late Mr. Chifley was Treasurer, that the rams were not going to be used; it was only for old Ben, anyway. That was common throughout the North. The whole incidence of high taxation, in my opinion, is the cause of under-production and consequently of inflation.

A lot has been said about encouraging the development of the North, and I am pleased to see that some interest is being taken by the Federal Treasurer in the taxation proposals. There is not the slightest doubt that relief from taxation would encourage people to go to the North. In some fields, there is vast mineral wealth still to be exploited. In addition, fishing and the establishment of canneries for frozen fish might be encouraged. Also, of course, there are some isolated pockets this side of Kimberley—very small areas of land—which might be put to better cultivation uses; but I doubt it. The rainfall in the area between Northampton and Broome is not adequate for growing too much.

I think that many improvements will have to be brought about and a great deal more than simply taxation relief given before workers and people who supply services will be attracted there. After all, if a worker is only to be free of taxation, he will not gain such a great amount in the North. I was interested in Mr. Forrest's remarks on subsidies in the North. I believe that if a worker is given freedom from taxation and then subsidies are cut out, he will be worse off than he is today; because at present many concessions apply, so that a family living on a small income would not be sufficiently compensated simply by total relief from taxation. However, I do not know just how far the subsidy matter was discussed at Canberra.

Hon. N. E. Baxter: A family with a small income would not pay much taxation.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: No. In order to attract people to the North, more money than this Government can afford to spend will have to be made available. The Commonwealth Government will have to come to its aid. All public works in the North have been more or less repaired, and patched, until they have reached the stage where they need renewing. An enormous amount of money will be required to renew some of the jetties.

The Marble Bar railway is now beyond repair, according to the authorities, and it will soon be discontinued. The people who were served by the railway are disappointed; they feel they are being badly treated. They are the people living at Marble Bar, Nullagine and beyond. It makes no difference to the few pastoralists

who live along the track between Marble Bar and Port Hedland, as they have formed their own company to do their carting. In fact, they have carted their own goods and stores for many years. The railway has never received much revenue or support from them except when it was convenient, because a train happened to be running, to get something or other brought out.

I would like the Government to think again before it absolutely abandons the line. A trial could be made with a light diesel locomotive which would curtail some of the present expense. Under light loads, the track would stand up for many years. This line is serving a mineral area which still has unknown quantities of base metals; so I imagine it would be well worth while to retain it a little longer. Another hard blow has been dealt the people in Marble Bar by by-passing the town with the main road which is replacing the railway. They feel they are being absolutely let down in that respect.

Hon. N. E. Baxter: At what distance from the town does the road by-pass it?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: It is seven miles out. The road from Port Hedland will join the Nullagine road, which is the Great Northern-highway, coming through from Meekatharra. As yet, it is not completed. The Great Northern-highway will continue on to Broome. The old road runs near the railway from Port Hedland to the Bar. Then it is possible to go to Nullagine by two roads, either through Corunna Downs, or past the aerodrome. However, the Main Roads Department has decided that the road shall go to the aerodrome, and so by-pass Marble Bar by seven miles. The distance in bringing the road into and through Marble Bar, would be approximately the same. It is pretty hard for a small community such as that to be by-passed.

Hon. N. E. Baxter: What disabilities will they suffer by being by-passed?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: The disabilities suffered from by-passing are just as great as, or greater, than those experienced by any other town, such as, say, Northampton, along the Geraldton road, if one were travelling northwards. All communities, especially isolated ones, like to have traffic passing through their towns, and rightly so. The people in Marble Bar are approximately 110 miles from Port Hedland and 80 odd miles from Nullagine. The next town across, Meekatharra, is about 500 miles away.

Hon. G. Fraser: What extra distance would it take to go through the town?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: It would be approximately the same; certainly no greater distance.

The Minister for Agriculture: Then why did the Department do it? Was it because of rough country?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: For convenience. I understand the country over which the new road passes is a little more level, but when Mr. Drake-Brockman was Engineer for the North-West, he spent some thousands of pounds on the old road which went right into Marble Bar. I have not been over it; but from the information I have received, I do not think there would be much difference in constructing a road along the old route instead of making a deviation around the town.

Hon. N. E. Baxter: The department seems to be by-passing quite a number of towns. I could mention several in my area.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: Another question is the supply of meat in the north.

Hon. H. K. Watson: That is a question in the metropolitan area, too.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: Meat is a problem everywhere, but it appears to have climbed on the merry-go-round, because it is going round and round and increasing in price all the time. Nothing can be done about the supply of meat in the North, but it is rather incredible that although we have huge sheep and cattle stations up there, the small number of residents in the towns are frequently forced to eat canned meat because of their inability to purchase livestock. Nothing can be done about it. If the pastoralists do not want to sell their stock to the local community, nothing on earth can make them. In some cases drought is definitely a reason for communities being unable to buy livestock; but in other districts, such as Carnarvon, there is no excuse other than a better market elsewhere.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: You can seldom get fish at the seaside resorts.

Hon. L. Craig: Or apples in Bridgetown.

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: The livestock market is uncontrolled; but with the Prices Branch operating at Carnarvon, the local butcher cannot afford to pay the prices asked for livestock because his retail price is fixed.

Hon. H. K. Watson: Does the Prices Branch extend its tentacles that far?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: They all pursue them to the end. If more consideration could be given to the North in respect of building materials, cheaper houses, cheaper water and cheaper power, it would considerably improve conditions. To my mind, the North should be given priority in the acquisition of building materials, including local cement. After all, not a great number of people in the North require these materials. The stations will certainly take as much as they can get; but, as I said before, this is the first time for many years that stations have been in the happy position of being able to spend the necessary finance on their holdings.

Hon. H. K. Watson: Does not that statement contradict your objection to their not having improved their properties in the past?

Hon. H. C. STRICKLAND: I was dealing with the Kimberleys. There is a vast difference between the Kimberley cattle stations and those down as far as Northampton. The area from Broome down is all sheep country—except a few cattle stations such as Roy Hill and Marillana. I refer to the sheep stations when I say that the owners have reached a position where they are able to spend money on their properties, if they can get the necessary materials. But these people find it difficult to obtain the materials they require.

There is also an urgent need for doctors and dentists in the North. I understand a new regulation came into operation this month whereby alien doctors will be permitted to practise in the North. That is good news, and I hope a doctor can be made available for each town. I will give members an example of what dentists and doctors mean to residents in the North-West. I met a man in Derby who had come down to Perth for ear treatment. The local doctor could not treat him and ordered him to Perth. That man's return fare was £43. I also read in the "Northern Times" a few weeks ago of a young married woman who was apparently suffering from toothache so badly that it necessitated her flying to Perth, at a cost of £30, to have the tooth extracted.

We cannot expect people to be encouraged to go North when they have expenses such as that. They go there to save, but their savings just disappear through misfortunes such as I have recounted. However, I hope that some relief from taxation will be given, and that the Government will give more consideration to relief from irksome controls surrounding permits for transport and the procurement of materials—building materials in particular. I support the motion.

On motion by Hon. H. Hearn, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.53 p.m.