

## Legislative Council

Thursday, 2 April 1987

**THE PRESIDENT** (Hon. Clive Griffiths) took the Chair at 11.00 am, and read prayers.

### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY: THIRD DAY

#### *Motion*

Debate resumed from 1 April.

**HON. H. W. GAYFER** (Central) [11.05 am]: At the commencement of my speech, I take the opportunity to congratulate Hon. Joseph Max Berinson on his appointment as Leader of the House. As such, in this place he is Leader of the Government and of his party. I say to Hon. Joe Berinson, as we all call him, "Well done!" He is the person most suited to the job, and certainly has the experience for it. He also has the guarded respect of his adversaries.

I also congratulate Hon. Kay Hallahan on her appointment as Deputy Leader of the Government in this place. She has had a meteoric rise to stardom, such as could be eclipsed only by Crocodile Dundee. She might even have the same tenacity.

Hon. A. A. Lewis: As long as she doesn't reach behind her and grab the knife.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: That is so. Mrs Hallahan would have to see the film to understand what is meant by that. Obviously, her pursuits do not allow her any time to view films.

Hon. Graham Edwards has been elevated to the front bench, to the Ministry, and we in the National Party congratulate him and wish him all success in the future. I understand that the position was hotly contested, and to those who were not successful I extend my commiserations. I hope that when the others fall off the perch, as it were, there will be room for them in the near future, or perhaps not the near future!

Hon. J. M. Berinson: Better!

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: I thank the Attorney.

While I am in this mood, which will not last for long, I congratulate the Premier and his Ministry, particularly Hon. Pam Beggs, for the stand taken with respect to the display of semi-nudity and what I consider to be the gross indecency that is creeping into the bars in Western Australia. I talk for myself in this matter.

Hon. E. J. Charlton: You can talk for me too.

Hon. J. N. Caldwell: You can talk for me too.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: I will do so then. I do not think that anybody wants to see this practice continue. There is nothing surer than that the situation was worsening day by day. It is true that people do not have to go to those bars, but why should such displays take place there? I believe that Pam Beggs has done the right thing. I quite agree with her that sexual exhibitions would have been next on the list, matters were going downhill that fast. Although I like my beer and the conversation that I have at the bar, I do not need gyrating mammary glands to make that beer taste any better. I do not need that and neither does anyone else. As that novelty wore off, something else would develop.

I know that the practice also exists in the north. Girls are flown up there and paid \$300 a day plus to entice people.

Hon. E. J. Charlton: Plus what?

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: I leave that open to Mr Charlton, as he made the interjection; but I will not elaborate.

I believe that Pam Beggs has done the right thing. A stand needed to be taken before matters got too far out of hand. I would like Hon. Joe Berinson personally to congratulate the Minister for me and my party in this place for her tenacity in sticking to her decision. I say to her, "Good girl!"

I was interested in the Governor's Speech. The Governor, of course, is well known for his studious nature, and his powers of oration are excellent. I wonder if he himself prepared his Speech. I know I have to compliment you, Mr President, on having it printed so quickly after he finished. In fact three minutes after he finished speaking the printed Speech was in front of us. This shows that he had no intention of altering the words which were written there. He might not have expressed himself as he did if he had prepared what he had to say.

He might have been advised. Perhaps this is the usual tradition. I have never been in the Ministry so I do not know whether this is right or not. Perhaps it is the usual custom of Governments to advise Governors what to say in their defence or otherwise and what they are planning on Opening Day. I rather suspect that may have happened before, and it is one of these Westminster traditions which has been handed down. It may happen again. We will leave that.

On the first page of his Speech the Governor talked about the electoral system, saying it would be a powerful, beneficial legacy in this Parliament and would be in accordance with the support for reform indicated by voters at the last two elections. I do not want to get into debate on the electoral reform Bill at this stage. Indeed it is not on the Notice Paper yet. I could raise the ire of many people here, but I do not believe that that desire for reform has been expressed by the voters at the last two elections. It has certainly not been expressed in my electorate or in many other country electorates. Perhaps it was expressed in some electorates, but that does not mean that it should be the rule for the whole country.

I note there is to be a cut in the national income made in such a way that the whole community will share the burden fairly and equitably. Restraint has to be exercised on all sides, including moderation in wage agreements and salary packages. All that I agree with. But there is nothing about interest rates and the problems they are causing and the fact that they must be lower.

I suppose the view will be expressed by somebody opposite that this is happening: today, interest rates have fallen from 16.5 to 15.75 per cent on the three-month market, and to about 15.5 per cent on the seven-day or short-term market. Perhaps we will see more of this happening, but I do not believe the Government has much control over that at all. If it can be maintained, we may possibly be heading for a better environment interest-wise than we have had up to date.

In the neck of the woods from which I come, and in the industry with which I am connected, the interest rates are killing us. Certainly the investor with money is enjoying 18, 20, 22 and even 30 per cent which some are able to get on the weekend market at times for large amounts—\$1 million loans and that sort of thing. Some are quite prepared to play the money market and enjoy the interest rates, but what is killing my industry is interest rates and nothing else.

This leads me to some other remarks the Governor made in his Speech. I refer to remarks to which I did not take exception, for I felt he inadequately expressed the situation in his Speech. I know the man and I know that he understands the plights of the country areas, but he wrote off the agricultural industry in two short sentences. I believe that possibly he ac-

cepted what somebody else might have wanted him to say. On page three of his Speech the Governor said—

In other areas of assistance to industry, the Government, through the Department of Agriculture, is playing a major role with an increased effort in extension work and in reviewing priorities for new agricultural pursuits.

The gross value of Western Australia's rural production is estimated to reach \$2 483 million this financial year compared with \$2 215 million in 1985-86. It is the second highest aggregate recorded.

That is the sum total of the Governor's remarks on the dilemma of the agricultural industry. I quite agree with what is said here—that the Government has increased its effort in extension work—but from the way that this is written, people who do not understand the plight of the industry would look for immediate success from an injection of increased effort in extension work and a review of the priorities for new agricultural pursuits.

Last year agricultural income was the second highest on record; that is the way the Speech reads. In other words it reads as though it is a goody-goody, and it is there as a result of the Government's planning and what-have-you. I do not think anybody would know unless he were told—and this should have been added—that the reason for that increase in income was purely and simply that the wheat harvest was one million tonnes up on the year before, and the price was maintained but not increased. Also, the same situation applied to lupins. The lupin price was maintained but the tonnage was up by many thousands of tonnes. The value of wool increased, but only slightly in proportion to all the costs over the previous 12 months.

These explanations should have been made. It should have been borne in mind that every farmer in Western Australia is facing a crisis. It is a crisis probably paralleled only by the great Depression. The average Western Australian farm debt is 71 per cent greater than the nation's average. The average Western Australian farmer who derives 50 per cent or more of his income from wheat has a debt 80 per cent greater than the national average for that industry. So the Western Australian grain grower is 80 per cent worse off than his fellow workers in industry in any other part of the country. The Primary Industry Association has estimated that the average interest rate for rural finance rose to 19.4 per cent in 1986. This

means that the average Western Australian wheat-belt farmer is paying over \$50 000 in interest alone at his current estimated debt level.

The average wheat-belt debt is \$250 000, and the average interest rate is, I repeat, 19.6 per cent. So every five years that debt is created again. Any number of people with large commitments such as this have, in four or five years, paid nothing off, nor have they been able to pay off any of their original capital outlay, purely and simply because of the interest burden.

A recent survey showed that the average farm indebtedness in Western Australia exceeds the average gross farm receipts. One would think it was talking about the Federal Government, but it is not—it refers to individuals trying to make a living. On conditional purchase farms with 66 per cent of the area cleared, the debts are an average of \$165 per hectare. They are only conditional purchase farmers—people whom we helped get there. With 88 per cent cleared, the figure increases to \$167 per hectare, owed by these struggling farmers who, not under the official means test but in terms of the living allowance granted to them under loan requirements and so on, are allowed \$12 000 per annum. That—for a family with two children—is what they are expected to live on.

The rural debt in Western Australia is \$1.75 billion. Of this, \$900 million is owed by grain growers in Western Australia. One-third of that \$900 million, or \$300 million, is on the slide to oblivion, and another third could be on that slide if something is not done fairly quickly to halt the situation.

While the Government has acted, we believe these figures are startling enough to show that the situation is not good. It is not as expressed in the Governor's Speech, where it looked as though things were fairly rosy. That is not the situation at all. The situation is that the collateral of these struggling farmers is going down the drain day after day. In fact, last year the fall in values of Western Australian wheat-sheep land values fell by 47 per cent—in one year alone! What do members think that has done to the farmers' security?

On Wednesday, 25 March, *The West Australian* said that a State Government task force, of which Mr Winston Crane was chairman, had just completed a survey of new land problems. This was not a Western Australian Farmers Federation task force, but a State

Government task force. It found that the provision of a \$1 million interest rate subsidy over five or six years would support borrowings of about \$7 million, which got to the crux of the matter straight away. However, it estimated that one-quarter of the State's new land farmers who took up land after 1976—only 10 years ago—were in serious financial trouble.

The articles continued with recommendations to the Government. Those recommendations must be exercised as quickly as possible because we are in a situation where time will wait for nobody. We have only to look at the country newspapers and see notices of clearing sales and auction sales to know that the problem is very real indeed.

When the finances were made available by this State and the Commonwealth Government, we were very gratified that this step was taken, and when it was announced earlier this year that it would continue to be made, and improved where possible, we were again gratified. But under the terms of the States' and Northern Territory's rural adjustment scheme, part of the general principles state—

The overriding objective is to assist rural industry structural adjustment and to ease adjustment pressures through the provision of adjustment assistance to individual farmers who are considered to have the capacity to achieve and maintain a commercially viable farm business enterprise.

The planks laid down for the distribution of the money are in those principles, and we have no quarrel with them. We do have a quarrel with the principles applied in this State by the corporation that controls them, which has its own assessment of what should or should not be. I will give members one example. I will not hash all this up because what I mean is well known by those in the industry who are following this day by day. I refer to the \$40 million assistance for interest as one example. It was an election promise made by this Government—and gratefully acknowledged by the industry—of assistance that was to average interest rates at 15 per cent over a two-year period, and to be renewed thereafter. It was a very good idea; but in two years does Mr Lewis know how much has gone out of that kitty towards that honourable pie-in-the-sky dream? Only \$3.8 million!

Hon. A. A. Lewis: Was it invested on the short-term money market?

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: They tell me not—they tell me that the balance is not invested on the short-term money market or involved in

WADC funding. They tell me that it is not there to be funded but is only there if it is wanted. The \$40 million is pegged, but the principles for the release of it are not good enough. If we want to float, year in and year out, at the present stage of our income on the farms, and our expenditure, taxes, and costing, we cannot afford an interest rate any higher than 12 per cent, and even that is too high for some. And 12 per cent is not 15 per cent; and 15 per cent is not much better than 19.5 per cent, which makes people reluctant to take advantage of this offer and to become locked in.

The National Party is absolutely insistent, as indeed is the industry itself and our electors. The people in country areas want some sanity to be reached in the equalisation of the interest rates. That is what is meant by the terms and the objectives I read out and by the principles that we thought were espoused in the allocation of the original \$40 million which the Government announced prior to the election. We on this side believe that something must be done.

I will not elaborate any more on this particular subject. My colleagues will have more to say about it in this place and in another place because this situation has gone on long enough and there must be a rewrite of the principles involved. While I am discussing this subject, I would add that there are two other continuing imposts which are being borne by farmers that could be and should be removed before the coming sowing season. They are the tariffs on farm chemicals and the new excises used to raise revenue for the Government from the carriage of grain from farm to port.

Something must be done about this. I wonder whether members know that of late there has been argument in country areas as to whether there should be a subsidy or not, similar to that experienced in the United States of America and other countries. I believe we cannot afford this type of subsidy, and I have stated that opinion here before. I believe it will not be a panacea to our problems, although an increase of \$50 a tonne would help. However it will not help interest rates because what we need is an injection of thinking into the whole structure, design, and direction of the agricultural industry by the people in Canberra, who are ruling its destiny.

By that I mean that these revenue raising methods such as tariffs and fuel excises, which apply to railway engines and to the tracks that they may use, and for which farmers pay part, could be alleviated overnight. Taxation relief

could be instituted in a few hours, which would give relief to the entire industry. The industry is going; it is sliding out of our hands and yet relief could be provided by Canberra and, to a lesser extent, by this State. Certainly it could be provided if the people in Canberra got off their butts and said, "Right, this is what we need to do. We can't afford a subsidy, but by jingo there are other avenues which can be used to help the industry immediately." This must happen if the industry is to survive this parlous period. Somebody must get up and take immediate issue.

Mr Kerin is calling a conference in Albury in June to discuss this very matter. There are people filling aeroplanes going back and forth to conferences over East day after day, week after week. I should have been at one myself this week in Melbourne, but such conferences are not the answer. Talking will not get us anywhere. Perhaps talking at the conference or the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade or some other international conference might bring some sanity to this area, but we are stuck with the problem. Having been stuck with the problem, we must get off our tails and do something about it. It is possibly a rehash of those prices and imposts that affect agricultural and rural industries at the moment, which, I repeat, have a debt load in this State of \$1.75 billion. It is horrendous.

I now wish to draw attention to the recent environmental report issued by the Health Department of Western Australia on the proposal for disposal by incineration of polychlorinated biphenyls—PCBs—in Western Australia. It is a healthy sized document of about 175 pages. The basic aim of this report is to set up an incinerator in order to get rid of PCBs, which had been widely used in electrical equipment since the 1930s, but which are now being phased out. Because of a perceived health risk and their potential to cause long-term environmental pollution, it is said that these PCBs must be destroyed. They have been stockpiled because there were replacements created throughout Western Australia. No satisfactory disposal method is available locally, or so it is said. Therefore the idea is to build an incinerator at Koolyanobbing, 460 kilometres east of Perth and 53 kilometres from Southern Cross.

It is estimated the proposal will cost \$1.5 million and it will make work, I understand, for only three families. However part of the desire to locate the plant near a town such as Koolyanobbing—which is no longer being used as a town—is that it was a BHP town and has

the facilities and housing necessary. Yet this incinerator, which is proposed to be built in a quarry seven kilometres from Koolyanobbing, will employ only three men and their families. We are told that the incinerator is to be very small and that its period of use will be minimal—a few short years, perhaps five years, while the PCBs in WA are collected and taken to Koolyanobbing for disposal.

The actual burn-down period of that incinerator is one year; it is envisaged that it will have a year's actual use. It is near a railway line. We find that the bulk of the PCBs in Western Australia are owned either by SECWA or by major iron ore companies—not goldmining companies—in the Pilbara which have their own electricity generation systems. The SECWA component totals an estimated 190 000 kg and consists of the contents of capacitors. About 36 per cent of those PCB-contaminated capacitors have been taken out of service and are in storage. The remaining 64 per cent are scheduled for replacement, and all are in use and located in Perth. The mining companies generally have removed their PCBs, and the component of the waste stream totals an estimated 530 000 kg which is largely located in various Pilbara towns.

In effect, what it means is that transporters will be bringing these loads from the Pilbara all the way to Perth to pick up more PCBs and then taking them to Koolyanobbing through various country towns. That will surely cause concern to people in those areas when that type of material is transported through their towns. The experts tell us it is not all that dangerous. The potential toxicity of PCBs to wildlife is indicated by tests on laboratory animals. The hazard presented to humans is a matter of debate—the experts are not sure.

Some researchers claim a low level of intake is acceptable while others claim any exposure presents a hazard. So it is a two bob each-way bet as to whether there is a hazard. That is what my readings indicate, but the Government and the Health Department assure us there is no real worry. They say it is a perfectly harmless exercise, and that is why they are building the incinerator at Koolyanobbing. If it is harmless why are they not burning these capacitors in Perth where they are located? Why do they not burn them in the Pilbara? Why not take them from Perth to the Pilbara and out to the Simpson Desert if there is any doubt? Why pick Koolyanobbing and try to convince people there is no hazard?

These capacitors will be transported through towns like Northam and Kellerberrin all the way to Koolyanobbing. The Government says, "There is no worry; they are only trucks transporting stuff which is no hazard." If it is not a hazard why take it through those towns? Get rid of it here. You can have it in your electorate, Mr President; I will gladly give it to you in South Perth.

I am not going to argue whether a problem exists with PCBs, but at Southern Cross in my electorate this proposal has brought the fear of the Almighty. The question people in the district are asking themselves is why the material is being transported all that way if there is no danger. Suspicion rests very deeply, especially with those people living close to the proposed site. One of them is a farmer, Mr Bernie Guerini, who is well known as the president of the agricultural show. The stone quarry is not on his property, but it is right on the edge of it, and the Government is trying to tell him there is nothing wrong with this proposal. That is why we want the incinerator put in the Pilbara or in Perth. It is proposed to put it in a stone quarry seven miles from town. The Government says there are no real worries, the site is close to a railway line, and the incinerator will be pulled down in five years. There is no thought that it will become the national disposal site for all PCBs in Australia! Nothing like that has entered the minds of those putting forward this proposal. The WADC officers would not think of this as another industry so that the town might grow and more than three families might be required. Nothing is further from their minds—so they say!

Hon. E. J. Charlton: There is a guarantee because they said the unions would not allow this stuff to be brought across.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: That is right—what a laugh! Yet it is being transported all over Western Australia to Koolyanobbing because they want a town to cater for three families.

So we are to have no suspicions whatever and we are expected to support the Government and go out among our electors and say, "There are no worries here, Bud." I cannot answer the questions that are coming in. A meeting was held the other day which was attended by 200 people—I am not sure whether Hon. Mark Nevill was there; he may have been—and I do not believe it did anything to calm the anxiety of people. I do not believe it did a thing to help. The fear in the district has become very emotive. People quote

Chernobyl and talk about fallout, but that is pooh-poohed by the Government which says there is no worry and no hazard, yet in the environmental report opinion is divided.

What do the poor farmers and miners and everyone around that area do? Which side do they take in relation to this Government project? If they assent to it, what happens to the views of all the townspeople between the Pilbara, Perth, and Kellerberrin through which this stuff will be transported in lead-lined containers on trucks? There are possible problems. What guarantee and security do they have that there is no hazard?

We have been told the incinerator is over-designed to prevent any problems. If there is no problem with this material, why over-design the incinerator?

Hon. Mark Nevill: To ensure it is incinerated.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: Hon. Mark Nevill can go and persuade our people that there is nothing wrong. There may be nothing wrong with this project, but the people who live there are worried and an emotive fear is growing in the same way as it would if the incinerator were put in South Perth. All hell would be let loose!

If a PCB incinerator were to be established in the area represented by Hon. Joe Berinson or by Hon. Mark Nevill, they would experience the same emotive fear from their constituents as I am experiencing from my constituents in Southern Cross. I do not know whether it is right or wrong, but there are too many ifs and buts. I do not know the full reason that the incinerator will be established at Koolyanobbing, next to a town where families want only a roof over their heads.

I have listened to Dr Richard Lugg from the Health Department and he has said that there are other sides to the coin and that, "The incinerator would be so safe that it is unbelievable." He used those exact words because I wrote them down when he used them. He could not say that there are no health problems associated with the incinerator and that the fear of contamination to food and the other problems to which I have referred are only red herrings.

The Leader of the House is both an accomplished Federal and State politician, and with his experience he must understand why these people are going butcher's hook about the problem. They will soon reach the end of their tether in respect of this matter. I am afraid that all the reports in the world about this matter

will not please them because there are too many ifs and buts. I am sure the Government will not be successful in erecting the incinerator. The Southern Cross farmers and the Marvel Lock miners are strong and powerful men and, to say the least, they express themselves forcefully. I am frightened when I think about what the situation will precipitate into, especially when I consider the fear and emotiveness that is apparent in the area.

Hon. Mark Nevill: They will tear you apart if you agree to it.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: If Hon. Mark Nevill believes I am doing nothing apart from being a representative of my area, I suggest that he puts himself in my shoes and considers what would be the reaction of his constituents if the incinerator were to be established in Esperance.

It was enough for the President to shudder when I suggested that the incinerator be established in South Perth. What would be wrong with a mobile incinerator? After all, it is only a process to burn PCBs. Why cannot we be futuristic and design a mobile incinerator? It could be towed to the Pilbara and PCBs would not have to be transported throughout this State.

Another alternative is a gas-operated incinerator which could be used in places like Karratha. I do not have the knowledge to answer the simplistic questions which have been put to me and which I have touched on today. The problem is a simple one. The people in Southern Cross are frightened that a situation like that which occurred at Chernobyl will occur in their town, and the crops in that prime wheat-growing area will be contaminated. It has been said that the risk of contamination would spread to towns 300 kilometres from the main centre if such a disaster were to occur. Perhaps it has been proposed to establish the incinerator at Koolyanobbing because if a disaster were to occur it would not affect the Perth metropolitan area.

I advise the Government that it has not yet heard anything about its suggestion to erect a PCB incinerator at Koolyanobbing.

I refer now to the water problems facing the towns of Narrogin, Wickepin, Kulin, and many other towns which are dependent on the Wellington Dam. I have on the Notice Paper a question to the Minister asking when it is proposed that the Harris Dam project will be proceeded with and whether the water will have a similar salt content to that of the water

in the Wellington Dam. There is no indication that it will have, but certainly there is a necessity for something to be done very smartly.

In January 1986 the water from the Wellington Dam had a soluble salt content of 923 milligrams per litre. The water from the dam was supplemented with water from Bottle Creek, which had a soluble salt content of 1 045 milligrams per litre. The water from both sources, on reaching Narrogin and other towns serviced by those sources, had a combined soluble salt content of 954 milligrams per litre. The residents in the towns concerned were unable to grow gardens and lawns because of the salt content of the water.

The people in the area have every right to complain because in 1954 the World Health Organisation recommended that the maximum soluble salt content of water should be 1 000 milligrams per litre. As I have already mentioned the soluble salt content of the water in Narrogin and surrounding towns in January 1986 was 954 milligrams per litre. Indeed, they had a reason to be angry. However, in 1987 we find that the soluble salt content of the water from the Wellington Dam is 961 milligrams per litre and from Bottle Creek it is 1 163 milligrams per litre. The combined soluble salt content of the water from those sources is 983 milligrams per litre. Certainly, it can be said that the water has not reached the record which occurred in 1981 when the soluble salt content was 1 139 milligrams per litre. The point is that the water is unfit for human consumption.

Hon. S. M. Piantadosi: What is the safety level?

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: I have already told the House.

Hon. S. M. Piantadosi: What is the accepted level?

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: It is about 1 500 milligrams per litre. I advise Mr Piantadosi that if this problem existed in the area he represents all hell would break loose.

I am trying to put forward the case that all the people in this State should be treated equally with regard to certain basic conditions, one of them being a supply of potable water.

Hon. S. M. Piantadosi: I wish to inform you that there have been instances in Perth, especially in the northern suburbs where a lot of groundwater is being used, when those high levels have been reached.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: I would appreciate it if the honourable member will supply me with those details so that I can circulate them in my area as an indication that there is no need to worry about the Wellington Dam; there are no problems associated with it; and, therefore, we do not need to continue with our quest to have the Harris River Dam built. I would be pleased to circulate such information, and I thank the member for his offer. That concludes my comment on this subject. The support has been overwhelming; I did not expect that sort of Government support.

Hon. S. M. Piantadosi: I know a little about water.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: I know, that is why I shall quote the honourable member as an authority when circulating this information in the newspaper. I feel sure that Hon. A. A. Lewis and Hon. W. N. Stretch will also take notice and use the information. Having so easily got that problem out of my system and having received the answer I wanted, I will pass to another subject.

A week or two ago, and it may happen again next week, petrol was on sale in the city for as low as 45c a litre. It was quite common to see the price of 48c a litre but some did reach the lower figure. I noticed that yesterday the price was back to 58.9c a litre.

Hon. V. J. Ferry: It was 56.1c a litre.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: If it went down to 56.1c a litre, perhaps the reduction in interest rates is already having an effect.

Hon. Garry Kelly: Ask the oil companies why it happens.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: I do not know about asking the oil companies, but from an article in the January 1987 edition of *The Road Patrol* I understand that the maximum petrol price is 58.3c a litre. The proprietors who sell petrol for more than 59c a litre may be breaking the law, but I have seen petrol for sale at that price.

The retail price of petrol, not including tax, is 26.4c a litre. I have not been told the price at which retailers buy it but there must be a fairly healthy profit because the price goes up and down like a fiddler's elbow through a range of prices differing by as much as 10c a litre. I am told that the accepted retail price of 26.4c a litre is 2.75 times more than it was in 1978. However, the tax has increased from 7.21c a litre in 1978 to 31.93c a litre in 1986, an increase of 121 per cent on the retail price and 450 per cent on the price overall. That is very hard to reconcile.

The 31.93c a litre tax imposed at October 1986 was made up as follows: State and Federal royalties, 1.40c; State franchise licence fees, 4.52c; Federal crude oil levy, 6.30c; Federal excise, 19.71c. In July this year the State Government increased the State franchise licence fee by 2c a litre, which increased the total revenue from that source by some \$40 million a year.

We farmers do not notice these price movements up and down because we are not affected by these price wars, or whatever one calls them, to entice people to buy petrol at different bowzers. In the country areas generally there is only one bowser in the town.

Hon. E. J. Charlton: We get the movements up.

Hon. H. W. GAYFER: As Hon. Eric Charlton said, we get the petrol price movements upwards and the freight rate movements upwards, but that is all.

If I were to drive my 20-tonne truck to Perth and load it with fuel, at a saving of 10c a litre I would make a killing. Of course, there are two problems: One does not have the finance to outlay on a load of that size in one year even though it would help the position later; and, secondly, it is impossible to get the trucks to Perth quickly enough before the price has changed again. The situation is becoming farcical; with the gyrations taking place, the motorist will suffer in the long term.

I do not know how garage proprietors explain to their customers that although the price was 45c a litre last week, this week they will charge 58c a litre. As Hon. Garry Kelly's interjection implied, they probably tell their customers not to blame them, it is the oil companies' fault. Perhaps that is the root of the problem or perhaps it is private enterprise and cut-throat trading to get a share of the market. However, it indicates that there is an awful lot of money being made in the fuel business.

If a lot of money is being made from fuel, we over the hills want some of it back because we are not receiving any benefit from these price wars—not one iota. As Hon. Eric Charlton said we get the price rises but not the price reductions. That is farcical when one considers what this country and the development of our farming and country areas are all about; that is, the price of fuel in those areas so that we can run the enterprises for which Australia is so renowned.

Finally, I want to dwell a little on the very interesting subject of regionalisation. We have to understand this fully and to know why the Government is doing it yet we cannot seem to get the message to the Public Service and others who are querulous. Hon. J. M. Brown knows how indignant the people of Merredin are about the movement of public servants from the town; Hon. A. A. Lewis and Hon. W. N. Stretch know how indignant the people of Narrogin are. Hon. E. J. Charlton also knows about the situation in Merredin and the strife in that town. We find it a little difficult to understand, for example, why the Water Authority will be based in future at Bunbury, Northam, Albany, Kalgoorlie, and Karratha. We find it a little difficult to explain to our constituents why it will be centred in these places.

Like Westrail, the Government may feel that with the rest of the regionalisation to larger towns, it will live it down.

It is certainly very worrying at the moment, and it is extremely worrying that the Main Roads Department said it would follow suit, particularly in the town of Narrogin. However, fortunately for the Main Roads Department—or the Minister directing the department—it has shifted its ploy in that it is now having an internal review, as they call it. That could mean anything, but at least it brings a temporary cessation to the hostilities that were threatened to the towns and communities a short time ago.

When we see that things in our towns are so tough and people are finding things so expensive that our own public servants are leaving, we start to think we are being cast adrift. Instead of being encouraged by this over-governmental system—which is not deploying people and allowing them to live in the various towns where in many cases they have been for years—many of our country towns feel the momentum of the ball of fear and lack of confidence in the district gathering pace. And it is being caused by decisions of this Government in the movement away from country towns of people and families.

I opened my speech with a few words on the plight of the agricultural areas and what could be done by the Federal Government to bring about certain relief now. I talked about the fact that a subsidy was not what we wanted, and of the many things that could be implemented immediately by the Federal Government. I have talked of all that but until now I have not mentioned that what we need above all is confi-



dence in what we are doing. I believe this movement of people away from our districts is not doing that.

I support the motion.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon. B. L. Jones.

# **ACTS AMENDMENT (ELECTORAL REFORM) BILL**

*Restoration to Notice Paper: Assembly's Message*

Debate resumed from 1 April.

**HON. G. E. MASTERS** (West—Leader of the Opposition) [12.14 pm]: The motion before the House is for the reinstatement of the Acts Amendment (Electoral Reform) Bill to the Notice Paper. I will not canvass at length, all over again, all of the arguments put forward opposing the reinstatement of Government legislation under certain arrangements.

We are opposed to the reinstatement of legislation unless it has previously been agreed to or some arrangements have been made. We would oppose that practice on principle because we believe it has got well out of hand in recent years, under this Government. At times pieces of legislation become extremely controversial. Most certainly in those circumstances, and where there has been a substantial break between the time of the introduction and this time, as is the case with this Bill, then those Bills ought to be reintroduced.

We have a system of government under which these matters have to be debated by both Houses of Parliament, and if there is a matter of public importance, as this Bill is, then most certainly great care must be taken. The fact is that the Government prorogued Parliament two years ago to gag the Opposition; the fact is that last year the Government made certain arrangements and carried legislation over to gag the Legislative Assembly. It now comes back with a smile and says, "We will carry on where we left off", which is quite wrong. It is the wrong way to go about these things; it is an abuse of the system and a complete negation of the two-House system as we know it.

I point out for the record that Parliament is not for the convenience of the Government, Parliament is not to be manipulated, and Parliament is not to gag the Opposition. I resent, and I feel other members should resent, the prospect that we are being manipulated in this House for the convenience of the Government of the day.

**Hon. J. M. Berinson:** It is no such thing.

**Hon. G. E. MASTERS:** That is my opinion, Mr Berinson.

This Bill is a most important one, and is probably the most contentious Bill to be introduced into this Parliament in all of the time I have been in the Parliament. That is only 13 years. I am sure there are other members here who have been in Parliament much longer than I, and I doubt whether they can recall Bills more contentious or more important than this one.

I am not saying the Bill should not be reintroduced, but that it should not be reinstated. I will give some good reasons for that. Changes to the electoral system are being proposed to the extent that the Government, among other things, will attempt to change the entire structure of both Houses of Parliament in Western Australia, to change the voting system—in fact, to sack half of the members of this House who have been elected for a term of six years, even though they are not up for election for some time to come—to reduce country representation, and so on.

The National Party, the Liberal Party, and the Labor Party have carried out negotiations in recent months—not weeks, but months. From reading statements by the Labor Party, and after discussions with the National Party—and I know our own position, of course—I understand that all parties have moved quite dramatically from their previous stances of some months ago and have proposed and talked about other changes. So the whole ball game starts again. There will be Liberal Party amendments, National Party amendments, and, I assume, Labor Party amendments.

The conferences and discussions are going on to this very day, and the Government ought to take account of that. We are simply saying that we are considering the reinstatement of a major piece of Government legislation at the stage at which it was left some five months ago. What is the rush? What is the reason for it? We will be sitting until June. It simply means that the Bill could and should be reintroduced into the Legislative Assembly. All of the results of the long discussions should be debated by the responsible spokesmen for the various parties in another place. Hon. Andrew Mensaros is our spokesman, Hon. Mal Bryce is the Labor Party spokesman, and I understand that Mr Matt Stephens is the major spokesman for the National Party, or maybe it is their leader. In any event, the discussions have been lengthy and careful.

If the Government has its way, the new proposals will be debated only in this place. I want to make one very important point. So far the Bill has passed through the Legislative Assembly. The only matters that can be debated in the Legislative Assembly if the Bill progresses through this House are amendments made in this House, nothing else. The Bill cannot be re-debated.

I further point out that the debate took place in this House on 11 and 12 November 1986, five months ago. There have been many consultations during that five months, but the point is that the debate occurred five months ago.

About five months ago in this House—around 11 November—10 members spoke in the second reading debate, which means those members will be precluded from speaking again.

Hon. J. M. Berinson: You know the real debate will take place during the Committee stage.

Hon. G. E. MASTERS: That is a poor excuse. The major speeches are made during the second reading debate when considerable changes are proposed. A large part of the debate will be during the Committee stage when there will be careful and more considered debate. The fact is that 10 people will now be precluded from speaking at a time when major changes are proposed. They will be unable to speak when this Bill is reinstated in this House. It is no good saying they will, because the arguments and discussions have changed everything. These 10 members will be sitting mute in their seats without being able to have a single voice. Certainly, in the Committee stage they can speak, but what is the point of that?

One can only wonder why the Government is rushing this legislation through. I say "rushing" because at the moment, with these new changes, it ought to be cautiously debating the Bill. From what I read in the newspapers, I can only gather that the Government has some sort of strategy for the by-elections. I think the Government, in its public statement, intended to have the Bill dealt with by 9 May.

Hon. H. W. Gayfer: What effect would it have on the by-elections?

Hon. G. E. MASTERS: They have absolutely nothing to hang their hats on in the by-elections. They are desperate for an issue. They have said, "Right, we will get something done by 9 May." Really and truly they are saying, "Let's defeat the Bill by 9 May."

Hon. J. M. Berinson: Rubbish! Wishful thinking!

Hon. G. E. MASTERS: We will test the Government. I am only going on what one senior Minister of the Labor Party said. I think it is worth quoting from a letter signed by Arthur Tonkin on 22 April 1986. No matter how much the Government screams and shouts, these were his words—

To hear my colleagues say, as they did in Geraldton on Sunday night, that we must make absolutely sure that the bill, which will contain the promises we had made to the people at the election, is defeated . . .

If the Government is genuine in making cautious progress and gains members opposite would say, "Let us take our time. We have new proposals and changes; let us put it back to the Ministers who are in charge, the spokesmen for the various changes." If they want the Bill defeated they can bring it back to this House and force the issue that way—in other words, take no real account of the consultation and changes. In the end, the Legislative Assembly will have no choice but to make a decision based on the amendments alone. I think it is a strategy that the Government has worked out to suit its purposes. It will not work. It is an insult that the Government could be saying, "We will put this legislation through the Houses of Parliament before 9 May." The people who make up their minds about how quickly a Bill will go through the Houses of Parliament are the members of Parliament themselves, not the Government of the day. It is not for it to say when this Bill is to go through, whether it be 1 May, 9 May, or 20 May. It is the members of this House who properly debate the issues and decide.

If there is a situation where the members of this House, when discussing these matters, want to adjourn the debate for further discussion, then by heaven, it is the right of members to adjourn any debate. Last night we saw the Minister lose his temper and have a tantrum on the first day into the session.

Hon. J. M. Berinson: You know that is not in my nature.

Hon. G. E. MASTERS: I am amazed that it is not in Hon. Joe Berinson's nature. He got into a tantrum and spat out his dummy. Let me tell members that my party will insist that the adjournment is necessary. That has always been the practice in this House, and it will continue to be so.

If the new leader is going to spit out his dummy every time that happens, he will have a whole wheelbarrow full of them. I appeal to members to oppose this reinstatement. I ask them to think sincerely about it for all the reasons I have given. When the vote is called, to sit firm we should say, "Let the proper processes of the Parliament be achieved."

**HON. H. W. GAYFER (Central)** [12.26 pm]: The almost convincing arguments of the Leader of the Opposition do not fall on deaf ears, but I am afraid they do not mobilise my feet in the direction which he would like. I will be perfectly frank why his arguments do not.

The proposition before us arises from Standing Order No. 416 in the Legislative Assembly, and is matched by similar words in the Legislative Council's Standing Order No. 437, which provides—

Any Bill which lapses by reason of a prorogation before it has reached its final stage may be proceeded with in the next ensuing session at the stage it has reached in the preceding session . . .

It further states—

(b) if the Bill be in the possession of the House in which it did not originate, it may be proceeded with by resolution of the House in which it is, restoring it to the Notice Paper . . .

Standing Order No. 418 states—

Should the motion for restoration to the Notice Paper be not agreed to by the House in which the Bill originated, the Bill may be introduced and proceeded with in the ordinary manner.

The message yesterday said—

The Legislative Assembly acquaints the Legislative Council that in accordance with the provisions of the Standing Orders relating to lapsed Bills, the Legislative Assembly requests the Legislative Council to resume consideration of the following Bill—

"Acts Amendment (Electoral Reform)  
Bill 1986"

In other words, the Legislative Assembly said it has finished with the legislation. It wants this House to consider it.

I admit that five months is a long time to have elapsed since these 10 members last spoke on this Bill; and great orators they were. If we believe, by returning this Bill to the Assembly,

there has been sufficient change to spark off more great oration, then that might justify siding with the Leader of the Opposition.

However, the destiny of this Bill and all that the Government hopes will be enshrined in it rests with this place. If this Bill is returned to the Legislative Assembly as the Leader of the Opposition desires it to be, I can well imagine what would happen to it down there. It would be the subject of a guillotine motion because the Assembly members know they have discussed the Bill; they know it is the self same Bill exactly. It would be dealt with as expeditiously as possible, perhaps in 24 hours, and then be back here. The decision on the fate of the Bill would still have to be made here.

I know what I want to do with the Bill, but I will not debate that now. We might as well have it here now on our Notice Paper where it will sit, we are told, until after Easter. I do not know whether that arrangement has anything to do with crucifixions. The Bill will be discussed after Easter and a vote taken—as Mr Masters rightly said—around election time so that it might be used as an election ploy by the Government. All that does not really concern me, because it will happen. Whether that is the Government's timing or just our comprehension of what might happen is beyond our control.

I agree with Mr Masters that if an adjournment is required, the Bill will be adjourned. On the other hand, if the Government wishes to put the Bill up for debate on this time schedule, I see no point at all in returning the Bill to the Legislative Assembly for it to go through an attempted discussion on it again, a discussion which would undoubtedly be gagged, when the Bill would then be sent back here to fit in with the timing outlined yesterday by the Leader of the House.

We have looked at this matter and we have some weight in the decision that will be made. I am not convinced that it will serve any purpose at all to send the Bill back to the Assembly. Accordingly, my colleagues and I are quite adamant that the reinstatement of the Bill should proceed.

**HON. MARGARET McALEER (Upper West)** [12.33 pm]: I oppose the reinstatement of the Bill and I go further than my leader because I do not think the same Bill should be presented to Parliament again in this session. I

base my contention on explanatory remarks made last night by the Leader of the House. Hon. Joe Berinson said that in the course of the second reading debate the Government took notice of the arguments put by a number of speakers on this side of the House. That all those matters in contention, and all those matters where there might have been room for negotiations, should not be argued out in this Chamber but should be discussed by the parties. He said that having taken note of those arguments the Government left the Bill and then entered into discussions with both the National Party and the Liberal Party.

In the Premier's political notes of a week or two ago he said that the Government had discussed the matter not only with the conservative parties which dominate the Legislative Council but also with other parties, so I expect there were far-reaching discussions with all sorts of people. The Government having had those discussions and taken note of the arguments that this was not a proper place to be messing about with the Bill, putting amendments here and there in an effort to get some sort of agreement and ending up with a hotchpotch of a Bill, and having said there were some grounds for agreement on certain points while on other points there was no agreement, it seems to me the proper course of action for the Government would be to produce a Bill which embodied those points of agreement.

I cannot see that the situation is improved by now re-presenting the same Bill. Mr Berinson has said that the Government is not planning to put forward amendments of its own but is expecting only to listen to and decide on amendments moved by the Opposition parties. It seems to me we are in exactly the same position we were in last year. The Government is failing in its duty in just trying to reinstate the Bill.

**HON. J. M. BERINSON** (North Central Metropolitan—Leader of the House) [12.36 pm]: I am getting almost embarrassed by the frequency with which I have recently been agreeing with Hon. Mick Gayfer. The fact is that I think we are indebted to him today for bringing the House back to reality and to a commonsense approach to a serious question.

As I understood Mr Gayfer to say, what we are really looking at here are practical considerations. So far as the procedure is concerned, Mr

Masters says we should let the proper processes be followed. However, Mr Gayfer provided him with a very persuasive explanation of how that is precisely what we are doing. The Standing Orders provide for our current processes, and that is what are being followed.

But the practicalities of the situation are that we are dealing with a Bill that has to be brought to a head one way or another. The Government has made its position clear. It regards the legislation as of the utmost priority and importance and believes that, one way or another, its fate has to be determined. Mr Gayfer was again absolutely right when he said that the place where the fate of this Bill is going to be determined is this place, not anywhere else.

I can understand arguments from the Opposition opposed to electoral reform. Those arguments are in the best tradition of a party which has opposed reform since the independence of this State. It is a party which really cannot bring itself to break away from its historical attitude in that respect. I can understand members opposite wanting to oppose electoral reform.

What I cannot understand is their attempt suddenly, for the first time in my experience, to hide from the debate and to treat it as involving an evil day that has to be put off at all costs. Nothing is to be achieved by that. If it is to be an evil day for the Opposition—I hope it is to be—by the achievement of some real electoral reform, it has to be faced up to. The sooner we do it, the better, and with the least number of these transparent, obstructive devices.

The long and short of it is this: The basic Bill remains the same. Discussions have taken place and amendments, we know, will emerge. They will not be Government amendments. The Government stands by the Bill as it is, and it would be delighted if the Opposition would care to join us in supporting it. The Bill is ours and we stand by its terms. Nevertheless it is well known that amendments will be moved. They cannot be placed on the Notice Paper and made available for consideration by all members until the Bill itself appears on the Notice Paper. The suggestion is that we expedite that procedure, by applying the provisions of the Standing Orders for reinstatement. I urge the House to meet this problem head on and to make sure that the Bill goes on to the Notice Paper so that we can proceed with further debate in an orderly way.

Question put and a division taken with the following result—

**Ayes 14**

Hon. J. M. Berinson	Hon. Kay Hallahan
Hon. J. M. Brown	Hon. B. L. Jones
Hon. T. G. Butler	Hon. Garry Kelly
Hon. J. N. Caldwell	Hon. Mark Nevill
Hon. E. J. Charlton	Hon. S. M. Piantadosi
Hon. H. W. Gayfer	Hon. Doug Wenn
Hon. John Halden	Hon. Fred McKenzie

(Teller)

**Noes 9**

Hon. C. J. Bell	Hon. P. G. Pandal
Hon. V. J. Ferry	Hon. W. N. Stretch
Hon. P. H. Lockyer	Hon. John Williams
Hon. G. E. Masters	Hon. Margaret McAleer
Hon. N. F. Moore	

(Teller)

**Pairs**

<b>Ayes</b>	<b>Noes</b>
Hon. D. K. Dans	Hon. D. J. Wordsworth
Hon. Graham Edwards	Hon. Max Evans
Hon. Robert Hetherington	Hon. Neil Oliver
Hon. Tom Stephens	Hon. A. A. Lewis
Hon. Tom Helm	Hon. Tom McNeil

Question thus passed.

**MAIN ROADS AMENDMENT BILL**

*Restoration to Notice Paper: Assembly's Message*

Debate resumed from 1 April.

**HON. G. E. MASTERS** (West—Leader of the Opposition) [12.42 pm]: The Opposition presents exactly the same arguments against the reinstatement of this Bill as it presented in the debate on the previous Bill. I do not see any reason to repeat those arguments. We oppose the reinstatement of the Bill as a matter of principle. We will always oppose the reinstatement of certain Bills under the conditions which I expressed in the previous debate.

Question put and passed.

**ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE**

**HON. J. M. BERINSON** (North Central Metropolitan—Leader of the House) [12.43 pm]: I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

*Chamber Etiquette*

**THE PRESIDENT** (Hon. Clive Griffiths): I want to raise two matters before the House adjourns. Firstly, I remind members that it is a requirement as well as a condition of etiquette in this place that members refer to each other as "honourable". I do not want to have to interrupt a member's speech to remind him of that but of late members are departing from that requirement.

*Hon. Robert Hetherington: Bereavement*

Secondly and much more sadly, it was brought to my attention, subsequent to the House sitting this morning, that Hon. Robert Hetherington has had a bereavement in his family with the passing of his father. I was not aware of it when the House first sat. I now bring the matter to the attention of members. No doubt the members of the House will make some appropriate comments in due course. On members' behalf I offer our condolences to Robert, in particular, and to his family.

*Parliament House: Congestion*

**HON. JOHN WILLIAMS** (Metropolitan) [12.45 pm]: Mr President, I draw your attention to the fact that a couple of us who were attempting to get to the Chamber this morning were seriously inconvenienced by congestion in the north top corridor. The congestion should not have occurred. While we welcome visitors to the House, it was quite impossible for me to get from my office to the Chamber through the crowd that had congregated on the other side of the screen on that floor. Perhaps something could be done about ensuring our passage to the Chamber at the beginning of the day's sitting.

The PRESIDENT: I will make a note of that.

Question put and passed.

*House adjourned at 12.46 pm*