

with the solicitor representing the Guildford Grammar School the amendments that Mr. Davies proposes to move, and both he and the Diocesan Trustees are in complete agreement with those amendments.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

# **BILL—ROMAN CATHOLIC VICARIATE OF THE KIMBERLEYS PROPERTY.**

## *Second Reading.*

**HON. W. F. WILLESEE** (North) [5.50] in moving the second reading said: This is one of the several Bills concerning ecclesiastical property that occasionally come before Parliament. The purpose of the measure is to vest in the Roman Catholic Vicar Apostolic of the Kimberleys all Roman Catholic Church property in the vicariate. Members will realise the vicariate is the Kimberleys diocese and the Vicar Apostolic is equivalent to the bishop of the diocese.

At present, the church property in the vicariate is held in trust by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Perth and Geraldton, and by the Pious Society of Missions of Broome. The two bishops and the society have indicated by letter they agree to the proposals in the Bill, which seeks to vest the property concerned in the Vicar Apostolic; to create the vicar a corporation sole with perpetual succession and a common seal; and to authorise him to sell, mortgage and lease any of the lands under the jurisdiction of the corporation.

Power is given in the Bill for the vicar to appoint one or more priests of the vicariate as his attorneys; and, on the death of a vicar, for a duly appointed provicar to exercise and perform all powers and duties until the appointment of a new vicar. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. C. H. Simpson, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 5.53 p.m.*

# **Legislative Assembly**

Thursday, 17th October, 1957.

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The Speaker took the Chair at 2.15 p.m. and read prayers.

## **QUESTIONS.**

### **FISHERIES.**

#### *Policing of Territorial Waters.*

Mr. NORTON asked the Minister for Fisheries:

(1) Has he read an article entitled "Indonesian Fishing Activities in Australian Seas" published in the "Australian Geographer," Volume 6, No. 1, 1952?

(2) If so, can he advise the House if the Indonesian fishing boats are still operating in our territorial waters?

(3) Do the islands referred to in the article mentioned in No. (1) come under State or Federal control?

(4) What action is taken to police fishing activities in territorial waters off the North-West coast.

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) Vague reports have from time to time reached me of Indonesian fishing and shelling activity in the rather inaccessible waters off the far North-West coast. As their operations were always well off the beaten track, no opportunity has offered, in the interval between the 1949 incidents written up by Dr. Serventy and the present week to board any such vessel to ascertain whether it has, in fact, been engaged in unlawful practices.

(3) Ashmore Reef and Carrier Island are Commonwealth territory. Browse Island is part of Western Australia.

(4) In the absence of a patrol vessel, little can be done to police this largely unknown area.

#### CROWN LANDS.

*Development of 100,000 Acres, Mingenew.*

Hon. D. BRAND asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) Is it a fact that negotiations have been opened with an English firm to develop 100,000 acres of Crown land west of the Midland railway, south of Mingenew?

(2) Is the basis of these negotiations similar to that reached with the Chase Syndicate on Esperance development?

(3) Will this area of 100,000 acres provide for early subdivision with a view to individual settlement?

(4) Will the emphasis be on the production of cereals, wool or meat?

(5) Will the State be involved in any financial obligations?

The MINISTER replied:

There have been no developments since I replied to the hon. member's question of the 24th September, 1957. An inquiry has been received but negotiations have not yet been opened.

#### NURSES.

*Trainees, Salaries and Conditions.*

Mr. MARSHALL asked the Minister for Health:

(1) Is the article which appeared in "The West Australian" on the 15th October, 1957, headed "Opportunities in Nursing" wherein it states the rates of pay for student nurses, at variance with the answer given to my question on the 14th August, 1957?

(2) What are the correct rates of pay for student nurses?

(3) How much is deducted for board and lodging?

(4) Is the statement also correct that girls will not be accepted for training under the age of 17½ years?

(5) If the article referred to is not correct, will Miss E. E. Harler publish a corrected statement?

The PREMIER (for the Minister for Health) replied:

(1) The answer given to the question on the 14th August, 1957, stated that some of the salary rates would be increased as the result of a new award expected to be approved by the Arbitration Court that day.

The increases are reflected in the figures quoted in the article which appeared in "The West Australian" on the 15th October, 1957, but the figure quoted for board and lodging was incorrect.

(2) The correct rates of pay for student nurses after deducting the charge for board and lodging are:—

First year—£4 13s. 1d.

Second year—£5 4s. 7d.

Third year—£5 17s.

Fourth year—£6 18s. 3d.

(3) £2 19s. 1d. per week.

(4) Yes.

(5) A corrected statement will be published.

#### CARNARVON WHALING STATION.

*Cost of Establishment, Profit and Sale Price.*

Mr. NORTON asked the Premier:

Can he ascertain—

(a) the total cost to the Commonwealth in establishing the whaling station on Babbage Island at Carnarvon;

(b) the total amount of profit derived by the Commonwealth from its operations of the Babbage Island whaling station;

(c) what price was it sold for?

The PREMIER replied:

(a) £1,375,000.

(b) Approximately £850,000.

(c) £880,000.

#### STATE ELECTRICITY COMMISSION.

*Loan and Source of Applications.*

Mr. COURT asked the Treasurer:

(1) What was the final public subscription figure for the last State Electricity Commission loan?

(2) What proportion (in value) of the applications came from Western Australia and from—

(a) State Government funds or the funds of State Government instrumentalities;

(b) general public and funds other than those referred to in (a)?

(3) If the loan was not fully subscribed without the underwriters having to make up any under-subscription, has the Government examined the reasons; and if so, what are the reasons?

The TREASURER replied:

(1) £481,000.

(2) £419,260, and from—

(a) £70,060.

(b) £349,200.

(3) The under-subscription reflects recent experience in the Eastern States where there has been a falling off in public subscriptions to loans. It is considered that high interest rates offered by some sections of private enterprise are a contributory cause.

### NATIVE WELFARE.

#### *Result of Blood Slides Taken from Well 40 Natives.*

Mr. GRAYDEN asked the Minister for Health:

(1) Were blood slides taken from the two natives who were evacuated recently by helicopter from the Well 40 area on the Canning stock route and who were later admitted to Derby native hospital?

(2) If the answer to No. (1) is "Yes," what mean haemoglobin and serum protein figures for the woman and child respectively, were revealed?

The PREMIER (for the Minister for Health) replied:

The information is not yet available. Inquiries are being made.

### NEWSPAPER COMPETITIONS.

#### *Effect on Sale of Lotteries Tickets.*

Mr. JAMIESON asked the Minister representing the Chief Secretary:

(1) In view of the recent large jack-potting of "Timeswords" and "Bestwords" competitions, conducted by the several Press mediums, has this now had any appreciable effect on the sale of Lotteries tickets?

(2) If so, is any action contemplated by the Government to restrict these competitions?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS replied:

(1) There has been some falling off in the sale of lotteries tickets.

(2) Not at this stage.

### COPPER ORE.

#### *Find in Yornup District.*

Mr. JAMIESON asked the Minister for Mines:

(1) In view of the publicity associated with the reported find of rich copper ore in the Yornup district earlier this year, has the Mines Department investigated this claim?

(2) If so, what was the result of the department's investigation?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) The occurrence is of mineralogical interest only, and has, in the opinion of departmental technical officers, no prospect of containing copper of economic value.

### CANNING STOCK ROUTE.

#### *Number of Wells, Inspections, etc.*

Mr. BOVELL asked the Minister for Works:

(1) What are the number of wells constructed by Government finance on the Canning stock route?

(2) What number are now in working order?

(3) When was an inspection of the wells last made?

(4) Is it the intention of the Government to put the wells in order and maintain them?

(5) What are the names of the cattle stations that use this route, and what number of cattle are brought over it each year?

(6) Are the wells used by natives along the route and are they the only source of supplies for natives?

(7) If the answer is in the affirmative, does not the Government consider it has an obligation to maintain these wells in working order?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Forty-eight.

(2) Forty-four to forty-six.

(3) August, 1957. Report by drover bringing Billiluna cattle.

(4) The Government is prepared to assist Billiluna with materials for repairs.

(5) "Billiluna"—the only station.

Cattle brought over in recent years:—

1954—400.

1955—490.

1956—800.

1957—900.

(6) Natives do use wells and are responsible for damage. The wells are not the only source of water for natives.

(7) Answered by No. (6).

### EDUCATION.

#### *Additions, Katanning High School.*

Mr. NALDER asked the Minister for Works:

(1) What progress is being made with the plan for the additional classrooms at Katanning High School?

(2) When does he anticipate that tenders will be called?

(3) Is it likely that the classrooms will be ready when schools reopen in 1958?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) and (2) The progress being made with the plan is sufficiently advanced to permit of tenders being called about the middle of November.

(3) No.

### NORTH-WEST CATTLE.

#### *Tick Fever Problem.*

Mr. COURT asked the Minister for Agriculture:

(1) Has there been any increase in tick fever in the East and West Kimberley districts during the past cattle shipping season?

(2) Can any estimate of financial losses be given. If so, what is the estimate?

(3) What action, if any, is being taken to combat tick fever, both on the stations and in transit?

(4) Has any advance been made by the C.S.I.R.O. to combat the disease and is work still proceeding?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No, there has been a decrease. During the past cattle shipping season 219 cases occurred, either en route or condemned at the metropolitan abattoirs, compared with 451 head during the 1956 season. At Wyndham Meat Works 77 head were condemned as compared with 230 head condemned during the 1956 season.

(2) Approximately £11,000.

(3) Until it is possible to eradicate the cattle tick completely from these areas, the problem will remain.

(4) Considerable work on the cattle tick problem is being carried out by the C.S.I.R.O., the Queensland Department of Agriculture and the New South Wales Tick Control Board. Most of this work is in relation to newer insecticides and the work is still proceeding.

### PARLIAMENT HOUSE.

#### *(a) Plans for Extensions.*

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

(1) Was he correctly reported in this morning's issue of "The West Australian" regarding the £400,000 extension to Parliament House?

(2) If so, does this mean a more extensive project than proposed in plans shown to members last session?

(3) Are plans complete for each phase?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) No.

(3) No.

#### *(b) Increased Expenditure on Building.*

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

Was not the project that was advised to the Legislative Assembly last session to be one approximately involving an expenditure of £100,000 over three years and not £400,000?

The MINISTER replied:

I cannot recall the instance when the figure of £100,000 was given; but even if it were, the plans now envisaged are of recent development. It is proposed to complete Parliament House over a period of six years on a scale not quite as elaborate as that envisaged many years ago but one which nevertheless will be considered as quite adequate for present requirements, and giving appropriate accommodation to members, to the staff of Parliament, and to visitors.

It is expected that it will be possible to appropriate annually sufficient funds to enable this complete plan to be finished within a period of six years and the anticipated expenditure for this financial year is £10,000. A commencement will be made about March or April next year on the early preliminary work in connection with the improvements. If the figure of £100,000 was given last session, I do not think it could have referred to the completion of the whole of the parliamentary buildings.

The Premier: That was for one year's work.

#### *(c) Earlier Plan Superseded.*

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

As there seems to be some misunderstanding about the matter and it was clearly in my mind that there was a project of £100,000 covered by the plans shown to Parliament, do I take it from his answers today that a new plan is being prepared either additional to, or in lieu of, the one that was shown to members last session?

The MINISTER replied:

It must be remembered that the Joint House Committee had a number of requests for additional accommodation and those requests were submitted to the Government. The Government, considering all requirements, felt that a complete plan was desirable. With that end in view a plan was drawn up, providing for certain work to be done in stages. That plan is the one which has now been adopted and approved by the Government. It is satisfactory to the Joint House Committee, and the Government is confident that funds can be made available to enable the work to proceed. Therefore any reference to the previous plan is of no value because that has been superseded by the plan which has now been adopted

and which, I repeat, appears to be satisfactory in all respects. It will provide for the completion of the building in a manner fitting to the existing structure and to the development and needs of the State.

It is considered that we cannot go on year after year hoping to be able to do something and not doing anything and leaving members of Parliament, the public and staff without adequate accommodation. For that reason we have at last got down to a complete plan which we feel can be accomplished within the period set out. An alternative was presented to the Government that the plans might be completed in four years instead of six, but it was felt that the financial commitment resulting from the adoption of the lesser period would be disadvantageous and difficult and for that reason the Government was able to approve of the complete plan being carried out in a period of six years.

### HOUSING.

#### (a) Position at Corrigin.

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

(1) Is it correct that there are a number of vacant houses at Corrigin?

(2) Is he aware that when a recent application was made for one of these houses, advice was given that they were for sale only, and not for rental?

(3) As the applicant referred to has been promised a position with the Corrigin Road Board, and is a married man, with two small children, will the Minister see that one of these houses is made available on a rental basis?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) I understand that there is one house vacant at Corrigin at present. This was erected under the provisions of the State Housing Act and is for sale. It is under offer at present, and the State Housing Commission is awaiting advice from the person to whom an offer has been made.

(2) Subject to my earlier remarks, yes.

(3) This applicant will be considered in conjunction with others having regard to need and the date of lodgement of application.

#### (b) Occupancy of Vacant House.

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

Further to my question, should the man who is now being considered as a purchaser of the one vacant house at Corrigin reject the offer, will the Minister advise what deposit would be required of the man I mentioned, who has been unemployed for some time, is a newly naturalised Australian with two small children and has been assured of this position? I have the

correspondence from the Corrigin Road Board stating that it will give him the job of loader-operator-driver providing he can get accommodation.

The MINISTER replied:

If the member for Dale will supply me with particulars, I will take immediate steps to have the case investigated. Naturally, I do not know the cost of the house but I assume it would be within the limits within which the Housing Commission disposes of homes under its own Act, in which case the deposit required would be £50, together with approximately £30 in fees.

### GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.

#### *Approximate Estimated Number, 1958.*

Mr. COURT (without notice) asked the Premier:

First, I wish to thank the Minister for Works for his patience in answering my earlier questions.

The SPEAKER: Order! What is the question?

Mr. COURT: Has the Premier had an opportunity to make that calculated guess regarding the estimated number of employees in the Western Australian Government service as at the 30th June, 1958?

The PREMIER replied:

The calculated guess is half completed and should be finalised by Tuesday next.

### RAILWAYS.

#### *Inspection of Sleepers at Mill.*

The MINISTER FOR FORESTS: Several weeks ago the member for Blackwood asked me a question, which he followed up yesterday; and I undertook to obtain the information for him. He sought information as to why sleepers could not be inspected at sawmills instead of at railway sidings. As far as the Forests Department is concerned, that course could be adopted but I am informed by the Railway Department that it has not made a final decision although the matter is being investigated at present.

That department points out that one of the main objections has relation to payment. At present the sleepers are brought to the siding, examined and passed. The Forests Department then brands the sleepers and gives a certificate stating that a certain number had been examined and passed. Payment is made on that certificate as the sleepers are then in the hands of the Railway Department and are easily checked.

The Railway Department feels that if the inspection were made at the mill, a lag in cartage would destroy the value of the Forests Department certificate as they would not be able to check the numbers received against the total quoted on the

certificate, because the mill people would not bring the sleepers in the same parcels as were certified by the Forests Department.

The result would be that in some cases the railways would be paying for goods not yet received. If the member for Blackwood makes representations to the Railway Department and can convince it as to the practicability of his idea, I can assure him of the full co-operation of the Forests Department.

The **SPEAKER**: Has the Minister the answer to Question No. 1?

The **MINISTER FOR FORESTS**: The information is available from Victoria but not yet from New South Wales to which another message has been despatched. I hope to supply particulars on Tuesday next.

#### **BILL—NOXIOUS WEEDS ACT AMENDMENT.**

Introduced by Mr. W. A. Manning and read a first time.

#### **BILL—INSPECTION OF MACHINERY ACT AMENDMENT.**

*In Committee.*

Resumed from the 15th October. Mr. Norton in the Chair; the Minister for Mines in charge of the Bill.

The **CHAIRMAN**: Progress was reported on Clause 2, after Mr. Wild had moved the following amendment:—

That the following be inserted to stand as paragraph (a):— by deleting all words after "shall" in line 1 of Subsection (2) down to and including the word "shall" in line 5 of that subsection.

Mr. **MOIR**: I oppose the amendment. It seeks to strike out of the Act the qualifications that have to be fulfilled by the applicant for a machinery certificate. In the Act the relevant section provides that every applicant for a certificate must be a British subject or an ex-serviceman who has served with the forces or in the merchant marine and he shall also satisfy the board that his knowledge of English is sufficient to enable him to perform his duties as a holder of a certificate.

If the amendment is agreed to it will have the effect of removing those requirements. It is wise to have this safeguard in the Act, particularly in regard to the mining industry because it could so happen that in the event of war and a man was not naturalised, dislocation of the industry could result. I agree with the provision sought in the Bill that a person shall seek naturalisation after a period of five years residence in this State, because I am also in favour of a person, no matter from what country he comes, being granted a certificate if he is able to pass

the examination and can speak English sufficiently well. Any person who has been granted a certificate but who fails to take out his naturalisation papers after the qualifying period, should have his certificate withdrawn.

The position could arise whereby a person from a foreign country could obtain a certificate and in the event of this country becoming involved in hostilities with the country of his birth, he would be interned. This happened during the last war and as a result many experienced miners who had resided in this State for 20 years, but who had neglected to take out naturalisation papers, were interned immediately on the outbreak of hostilities. That was a severe blow to the mining industry. Also, if a person has not become naturalised and he holds a certificate, there is a danger of his committing sabotage in the industry in the event of a war.

The **MINISTER FOR MINES**: I am not in favour of the amendment moved by the member for Daile, either. It would give power to the board of examiners to grant a certificate to any qualified person who had a sufficient knowledge of the English language, irrespective of his nationality. No matter from which country he came, any foreigner could have a certificate granted to him without his fulfilling any obligation in regard to citizenship. Migrants come to our State of their own free will and some of them enter at great expense to the Commonwealth Government. If we found ourselves at war with the country or countries from whence these people came, a difficult position could be created.

The Bill seeks to widen the conditions of employment and those migrants who held certificates and who had not become naturalised, would be interned and such an occurrence could disrupt the industry in which they were engaged. I cannot see any reason why a migrant, who has been in the country for a period of five years, should not become naturalised. The object of bringing migrants to this country is to increase our population and, to some extent, to relieve the overcrowded conditions in their own country.

I reiterate, however, that all migrants enter this country of their own free will and it is desirable that they should seek naturalisation after the qualifying period. Therefore I see no reason why we should extend the facilities that are being offered under this clause by agreeing to the amendment. The Federated Enginedrivers' Union was the first to realise that some easing of the conditions relating to conditions of employment was required and were quite happy to agree to an amendment such as that introduced from this side of the Chamber. In no circumstances would they be prepared to entertain an unnaturalised person being granted a certificate. I oppose the amendment.

Mr. WILD: I am disappointed to think that the Minister and the member for Boulder have taken the attitude of "no naturalisation, no job." Nobody has stronger views than I concerning new Australians becoming true Australians, and I take every opportunity to help them to become naturalised. But when they are brought to Australia from their various countries they are not told that unless they become naturalised, they will not be employed.

It should be left to the individual. While some become naturalised, others ask why they should become naturalised, and, of course, the answer they are given is that they have come to this country and are prepared to accept the benefits it offers, and accordingly they should become naturalised. Their reply to this approach is, "If you went to my country, would you become naturalised?" It is generally very difficult to answer that.

I agree that it is necessary for a man who is handling machinery to be able to speak English to the satisfaction of the board. He must also be competent, and that is why the board is there to see whether he knows how to handle machinery and what to do in an emergency. You and I, Mr. Chairman, must do the same to obtain a certificate. But these people are told that unless they become naturalised, they cannot obtain one; that they will be given a temporary certificate but they must become naturalised if they wish to hold it.

That is contrary to the principle adopted by the Commonwealth Government when these people were brought to this country and I would ask the Minister to reconsider the matter. Why should this be done with relation to only two or three unions? Why should it not be applied to the staff of Parliament House—to the stewards, for example? Why should they not be told that if they do not become naturalised after five years they must go? If it is good enough for one section, it is good enough for another. I ask the Committee to accept the amendment.

Mr. ROSS HUTCHINSON: I support the amendment, though I had no intention of speaking to it. I do so, however, to commend the logic of the member for Dale. We all agree that new Australians should become naturalised at the end of their term, but surely it is not necessary for legislation to be introduced to compel them to do so. It would be more desirable if they sought naturalisation. Compulsion of any kind is abhorrent to all of us. As the member for Dale has said, this could be applied to all phases of employment—to settling gangs, road gangs, and all labouring jobs. If we force people to become Australian citizens before they can retain their job, their worth as citizens will not be very great. They will bear a grudge against the country that forced them to become citizens. They would be more worthy citizens if they became such of

their own volition. The Minister should revise his attitude, because I do not think the country would gain one jot by compelling these people to become naturalised before they can hold their employment.

Mr. MOIR: Both the member for Dale and the member for Cottesloe have evaded the main objection. I would ask the member for Cottesloe what his attitude would be if we were at war with a country, a national of which was the engineer—a man qualified under this Act—in charge of the South Fremantle power station. Does he think that man should retain his job?

Mr. Mann: What difference does it make if you force him to naturalise. Would it have any effect on his outlook in the event of war.

Mr. MOIR: Having become naturalised, and taken the oath of loyalty to this country, a man would feel he had some loyalty to it. If he had not, the security people would immediately intern him and he would then be taken out of the position he occupies.

Mr. Hearman: From the security angle, it would be very much better if he were not naturalised.

Mr. MOIR: During the last war there were people who had been naturalised who fought for this country. We also had people who were quite loyal to this country, but were interned. This would not have been the case had they been naturalised. What I want to point out is the dislocation that would occur in an industry where these men are in important positions and because they have omitted to become naturalised in the event of war, they could be interned.

Mr. Roberts: You have to wait for the war, and none of us want a war.

Mr. MOIR: We have to look ahead and look at this from all angles. In the mining industry there are men who obtain certificates under this Act and who are in very responsible positions. I am satisfied that the board would not pass any person who had any difficulty with the language. It is for that reason I am supporting the measure because it is a very stringent condition under the Mines Regulation Act that the English language must be well spoken and readily understood. The reason is obvious because it is a dangerous industry and we cannot afford not to enforce this requirement. When these people fulfil the residential qualifications, they should become naturalised. If there were a sudden withdrawal, the whole industry would be dislocated. It has happened before in the mining industry. Those are my objections to the amendment moved by the member for Dale.

Mr. HEARMAN: We are using a wrong principle here in legislation which is really designed to determine the competency of people to handle certain types

of machinery. We are saying to a section of migrants that they must become naturalised, and this is a bad principle. Obviously the provision can apply only to those people who wish to acquire these certificates. We allow them to operate up to five years and if they are not naturalised at the end of that period, they are dismissed.

I agree that we should encourage these people to become naturalised but I do not think it is desirable to do it this way. The member for Boulder mentioned the security aspect and the fact that industry would be dislocated by a sudden withdrawal of these people after five years if they were not naturalised. Naturalisation may impose a personal hardship on certain people, because they may lose their pension rights if they change their nationality. There are certain ex-servicemen who have migrated to Australia who are in receipt of a pension and it would be lost to them if they became naturalised.

In the event of war coming again, these people would present a far lesser problem from the security angle if they were not naturalised. To force them to become naturalised increases the problems of the security forces in this country. Therefore, from the defence angle we should leave things as they are. A person of South European origin frequently comes to me and says that he wants to be naturalised in order to obtain a potato-growing licence. That is his only reason. If this amendment is agreed to by the Committee, it will prevent the member for Boulder from being approached in the same way. I hope that the Minister will reconsider this amendment.

Mr. RODOREDA: I move—

That progress be reported.

Motion put and negatived.

Mr. WILD: The member for Boulder said that I, in conjunction with the member for Cottesloe, missed the point he raised in regard to security. I would say that if we were unfortunate enough to be engaged in another war, certain un-naturalised people would be subject to national security regulations, but, on the other hand, if we force a man to become naturalised he may only do this because of his wife and family and in order to retain his job, while at heart he is still a national of the country from whence he came. He sinks his individuality and becomes naturalised so that he will not lose his job.

If war breaks out, what about the security risk then? If he is anti-British or anti-Australian, it will make no difference if he is naturalised or not. It seems to me that the member for Boulder does not always follow the same principles, and I will quote from Hansard of the 22nd October, 1953, page 1278, dealing with the

question of reciprocity in respect of dependants of new Australian workers working in Australia. The hon. member had this to say—

I oppose the amendment. I have stressed this matter every time it has been discussed. A great injustice is being done to the dependants of workers who come here from another country because they are excluded from the provisions of the Act, which provides that dependency has to be proved, not only outside but inside Australia.

To be consistent I am sure the hon. member must agree that the principle is the same in this case.

Mr. Moir: It has nothing to do with this.

Mr. WILD: Yes, it has. When we bring new Australians to this country, we should not put a gun at their head and tell them they will lose their job if they are not naturalised after five years. I hope the Minister will support the amendment.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: It is remarkable that what the amendment is desiring to do is now meeting with the controversial approach of the member for Dale, the member for Cottesloe and the member for Blackwood. The conditions in the Act at the present time are such that none of those people who are now asking to be admitted to the industry are able to get in. We desire to widen it a little. Those within the industry say that only a limited number are employed, so why should any more be admitted? Therefore, there is no very great demand from within the industry for these people to be admitted as there are not a lot of jobs going begging.

To meet the circumstances of those who are at the present moment not eligible to become certificate holders, in conjunction with the machinery branch, we looked around to see what we could do about it. We said to those concerned, "There are odd cases where we would like to be able to grant a certificate but because of the Act we are not able to grant these people the right to get a certificate. Would you be prepared to allow certain others to come in?" Then we enumerated them. They replied, "We are not very happy about it, but if they were naturalised, it would be a different matter." Had we not brought the matter up, the member for Dale would not have come forward with an amendment or anything else to improve conditions and these people would have remained in the background as they have done since 1945.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: That often happens.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: That does not strengthen the Opposition's case.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: It does not strengthen yours, either.



Mr. Roberts: What about some nationals who are receiving war pensions from their own country?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: When the hon. member wants to speak, he should get up on his feet in a proper manner.

Hon. L. Thorn: You want to do it yourself.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Members must maintain decorum.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I maintain that although facilities to become naturalised have been available to many thousands now in the State, a surprisingly low percentage of new Australians have become naturalised. Why is that? The matter has been voluntary and it is now contended that this is compulsion. It is not at all, but a condition of employment. If these people want to be in a position where they can get a certificate of competency, they must conform to this condition. If they pass the examination, they are admitted. This is only a condition, the same as conditions apply in many different kinds of employment. I can remember that not very long ago the B.M.A. would not admit any one of their kind from another country, no matter how well qualified an individual might have been. I have never heard a song by the Opposition against that attitude of the B.M.A.

Hon. D. Brand: Do you agree with the B.M.A?

The MINISTER FOR MINES: No. I do not know that I do. The position in that instance was slightly different. Although a man was highly skilled as a doctor in another country, the B.M.A. would not allow him to enter its ranks here.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: That is quite wrong.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: It is not wrong. The member for Dale or the member for Cottesloe brought forward an analogy regarding employment in Parliament House. The employment here is not skilled labour, and what I am asking members to agree to is something which covers skilled labour only, and in a limited sense. It is nothing more than a condition of employment within a particular industry.

The Minister for Transport: If you want to be a politician, you have to be naturalised.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: Could any member honestly say that the few who want to get into this industry are worthy of coverage if they are not prepared to become naturalised? Of course not! There must be a good reason if a man does not want to become naturalised after he has been in a sunny country such as Australia with all its conditions. I cannot see why this provision cannot be agreed to. My feeling in regard to new Australians is equally as high as that of

any member here, but I would not think any hardship was being imposed in asking that they be naturalised.

Mr. BOVELL: The matter has become a little involved and I find difficulty in following the pros and cons of the position. Doubts have arisen not only in the minds of members on this side of the Chamber but in the mind of at least one member supporting the Government. In view of the great importance of the amendment, the Minister should agree to report progress. At the moment, I am not in a position to cast an intelligent vote on the matter because my mind is confused by reason of the various arguments.

Mr. Moir: That is its natural state.

Mr. BOVELL: It is not like the member for Boulder to be insulting; therefore I take his interjection as a jest. This matter is of great importance to a wide section of the community and we do not want to hurry it. The best course would be to report progress and I sincerely ask the Minister to do that so that members, including myself, can have another look at the position.

Mr. ROSS HUTCHINSON: I, too, would like to say that the Minister might well have allowed progress to be reported. The hon. member who asked that progress be reported might not have wanted to speak against the Minister's desires at the moment, but to thrash out the question in the party room. Why deny that democratic way of operating?

The attitude of the Minister and the front bench in refusing to report progress is wrong. The Minister tried to make a distinction between conditions and compulsion with regard to new Australians being forced to become naturalised. Surely the condition that they will be turned away from their work if they do not become naturalised means compulsion! It is just another way of saying "compulsion", just as in English we have various words that mean the same thing—synonyms.

The point the member for Boulder made regarding security was touched upon by the member for Blackwood. If we have potential spies or saboteurs in our midst, they would most certainly seek naturalisation to cover up their future nefarious activities. We surely would not find a possible saboteur remaining unnaturalised because in the event of war he would immediately be picked up in a dragnet. On the saboteur question, I think there is no danger. Far more danger would exist from the trained spy and saboteur who would accept naturalisation. What would the oath of allegiance mean to such people? Nothing.

We are likely to suffer some small disadvantage by the withdrawal of some key men as outlined by the member for Boulder—I grant that this is possible under

certain circumstances—but despite that fact, no democratic country such as this is, can afford to force compulsion upon its citizens in order to achieve its ends with regard to certain employment conditions. I hope that even at this stage the Minister will agree to report progress and have another think about the matter. I do not see that the Government or the Minister can lose stature over such a course. The period of a quarter of an hour has elapsed since it was moved that progress be reported, and the Minister might report progress at this stage.

Mr. MOIR: The member for Dale referred to some remarks I made in 1953 on another Bill, but the principle enunciated there has nothing to do with the matter under discussion now.

Mr. Wild: Yes, it has; it is very similar.

Mr. MOIR: The hon. member was a member of this Parliament in 1947. Why did he not move to amend this section then, because his Government amended it at that time?

Mr. Wild: You like it in one case but not in another.

Mr. MOIR: The member for Dale is wriggling around like a fish on a hook.

Mr. Wild: Not half as much as you are.

Mr. MOIR: The Opposition is entirely overlooking the point that the amendment in this Bill introduced by the Minister for Mines confers on these people something they never had before. These restrictions have always been in the Act. Previously the restrictions applied to British subjects only. In 1947 the provision was widened to allow other categories to come in. The member for Dale has said that these people are brought here and are not told the things they cannot do. Of course there are many other things that they cannot qualify for unless they are naturalised. Does the member for Dale propose to amend all the other Acts? This provision has been here since 1947. It has taken him a long time to get around to it.

Mr. Wild: As they come up, we will give them consideration, but we will not twist around like you do.

Mr. MOIR: The hon. member is concerned about the issue that has arisen here, but it has existed all the time that he has been a member, including the period when he was a Minister, but he has not seen fit to do anything about it in that time. He is getting hot and bothered now.

Mr. Wild: You have raised the point.

Mr. MOIR: He thinks he can have a win in this case, and he must have a win sometime.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: There are many desirable things that should be done at a certain time; but they are not done until later years.

Mr. MOIR: There are a lot of desirable things that should be done at election time.

Hon. D. Brand: You are right!

Mr. MOIR: I think that the Bill confers benefits upon these people, and that the other provisions in that section of the Act should remain. If it is good enough for somebody to come to this country and obtain work and the benefits which are available to him, he should at least undertake some of the obligations that are imposed on those who are born here.

Mr. POTTER: I do not know what the Opposition is quibbling about. I think that this boils down to a residential qualification. After all, these people, if they do not know anything about the industry, cannot be issued with certificates. The clause in the Bill deals with the whole position and I think there should be some residential qualification, and also the newcomer should know the English language sufficiently to enable him to perform the duties required of a holder of a certificate.

Mr. ROBERTS: I move—

That progress be reported.

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

Ayes	....	....	....	....	15.
Noes	....	....	....	....	19.

Majority against .... 4

Ayes.

Mr. Andrew	Mr. W. Manning
Mr. Bovell	Sir Ross McLarty
Mr. Brand	Mr. Roberts
Mr. Court	Mr. Thorn
Mr. Crommelln	Mr. Watts
Mr. Hearman	Mr. Wild
Mr. Hutchinson	Mr. I. Manning
Mr. Jamieson	(Teller.)

Noes.

Mr. Brady	Mr. Lapham
Mr. Evans	Mr. Lawrence
Mr. Graham	Mr. Marshall
Mr. Hall	Mr. Moir
Mr. Hawke	Mr. Potter
Mr. Heal	Mr. Rhatigan
Mr. W. Hegney	Mr. Sewell
Mr. Hoar	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. Johnson	Mr. May
Mr. Kelly	(Teller.)

Pairs.

Ayes.	Noes.
Mr. Perkins	Mr. Nulsen
Mr. Ackland	Mr. Toms
Mr. Mann	Mr. O'Brien
Mr. Nalder	Mr. Gaffy
Mr. Owen	Mr. Tonkin

Motion thus negatived.

The MINISTER FOR MINES: I have given my reasons for objecting to this amendment, and I have nothing further to add. The debate does not warrant the amount of importance that has been attached to it by the Opposition, and there was a considerable play of words by the member for Cottesloe which did not get us very far. He certainly did not convince me that we should report progress.

A few day ago we reported progress and everybody has had ample opportunity to review the position. The member for Dale made some comment about being a juicy jewfish. I think the Opposition is endeavouring to draw a red herring across the trail. I do not think the matter warrants any further argument, and I object to the amendment for the reasons I previously gave.

**Mr. ROSS HUTCHINSON:** The Minister said that I used a lot of words that did not mean very much and that the issue was not a very important one. But I think a very vital principle is involved, so vital that it could hit world news. We are bringing migrants to this country and compelling them to become naturalised after a period of five years, or else they will lose their jobs.

The Minister for Mines: We do not compel them to go into industry.

**Mr. ROSS HUTCHINSON:** I thought I had made the point quite clear a few moments ago. The conditions imposed mean that if they do not become naturalised, they must leave their occupation.

**Mr. Moir:** They are not allowed to work at those occupations now.

**Mr. ROSS HUTCHINSON:** There is compulsion about it.

The Minister for Native Welfare: Your Government left it there.

**Mr. ROSS HUTCHINSON:** Ever since Parliaments began, members have attempted to right certain wrongs; but never to my knowledge have all wrongs been righted at any one particular time. If this matter is not important to the Government or the Minister, it is vitally important to new Australians. A number of members on the Government side feel that they would like to have another look at this matter—that is obvious. So why does not the Government report progress.

**Mr. Potter:** Of course, you would be an authority?

**Mr. ROSS HUTCHINSON:** I do not think the hon. member knows what he is talking about. I hope that even at this stage the Minister will change his mind.

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

Ayes	.....	16
Noes	.....	21

Majority against ..... 5

Ayes.

Mr. Ackland	Mr. W. Manning
Mr. Andrew	Sir Ross McLarty
Mr. Bovell	Mr. Roberts
Mr. Brand	Mr. Thorn
Mr. Court	Mr. Watts
Mr. Crommelin	Mr. Wild
Mr. Grayden	Mr. I. Manning
Mr. Hearman	
Mr. Hutchinson	

(Teller.)

Noes.

Mr. Brady	Mr. Lapham
Mr. Evans	Mr. Lawrence
Mr. Graham	Mr. Marshall
Mr. Hall	Mr. Moir
Mr. Hawke	Mr. Potter
Mr. Heal	Mr. Rhatigan
Mr. W. Hegney	Mr. Sewell
Mr. Hoar	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. Jamieson	Mr. Tonkin
Mr. Johnson	Mr. May
Mr. Kelly	

(Teller.)

Pairs.

Ayes.	Noes.
Mr. Perkins	Mr. Nulsen
Mr. Nalder	Mr. O'Brien
Mr. Owen	Mr. Gaffy
Mr. Mann	Mr. Toms

Amendment thus negatived.

*Sitting suspended from 3.47 to 4.5 p.m.*

Clause put and passed.

Mr. Ackland drew attention to the state of the Committee.

Bells rang and a quorum formed.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment and the report adopted.

#### **BILL—ASSOCIATIONS INCORPORATION ACT AMENDMENT.**

*Council's Message.*

Message from the Council received and read notifying that it had agreed to the amendments made by the Assembly.

#### **BILL—SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION ACT AMENDMENT.**

*In Committee.*

Mr. Moir in the Chair; the Minister for Labour in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Commencement:

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: On Tuesday the member for Roe indicated that there were some amendments to be moved. I examined them, and they are not considered to be contentious. I was not able to have them placed on the notice paper; but for the convenience of members, I have had about 22 copies typed for distribution. I move an amendment—

That after the word "proclamation" in line 5, page 2, the following words be added:— "but not before the first day of July, One thousand nine hundred and fifty-eight."

The wish of the Pastoralists' Association is that if this measure is passed within the next few weeks, its members should be given time to erect buildings or make necessary alterations.

**Mr. BOVELL:** The member for Roe and I foreshadowed certain amendments when this Bill was being discussed at the second reading stage, and the Pastoralists' Association addressed a communication to

the Minister for Labour in regard to the matter and suggested certain amendments. The one under consideration is designed to ensure that the amended Act shall not be proclaimed before the 1st July, 1958. As employers will be required to effect alterations to existing accommodation, some of which may well prove to be substantial, the additional time sought is considered reasonable.

I want to express appreciation of the Minister's action in this connection. This is an example of co-operation between employers and employees and the representatives of those two groups. The amendment is a fair one and I support it.

Amendment put and passed; the clause, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 3—Section 2 amended:

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I move an amendment—

That after the word "five" in line 8, page 2, the words "and by adding after the word 'nor' in line 7, the words 'to shearers who are accommodated in the residence of the employer on the holding on which the shearing shed is situate; nor'" be added.

The amendment will ensure that a shearer accommodated in the residence of the employer while shearing is in progress, will not be counted in the number and this is in accordance with the suggestion of the Pastoralists' Association.

Amendment put and passed; the clause, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 4—Section 6 amended:

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I move an amendment—

That after the word "but" in line 32, page 2, the words "where the erection of any building to accommodate cooks and their assistants is commenced" be inserted.

This will ensure that sleeping accommodation for cooks and assistants will be built separate from shearers' accommodation. The Pastoralists' Association feels this is necessary so that the provision shall not apply to shearers' quarters already in existence.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I am glad the Minister approves this amendment which I think is more important, relatively, than he indicated. As it stood, the Bill could mean that such accommodation would have to be provided after the passing of the Act and the amendment removes that risk so that the provision will apply only to new accommodation erected after the measure becomes law. The member for Roe drew attention to this and other matters, but, as he is not here, I wish, in

his name, to thank the Minister for having reached agreement on these matters on the lines that the hon. member and others desired.

Amendment put and passed.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I move an amendment—

That after the word "shall" in line 13, page 3, the words "when manufactured" be inserted.

I am advised that a mattress might shrink to below the required length but under this amendment if it is the required length on manufacture that will be sufficient.

Amendment put and passed.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I move an amendment—

That the words "and flock in equal quantities" in lines 18 and 19, page 3, be struck out and the words "flock, slumber wool, or a mixture of such materials, but any mattress purchased by the employer for the use of shearers before the coming into operation of the Shearers' Accommodation Act Amendment Act, 1957, shall be deemed to comply with the requirements of this subsection if it is properly filled with kapok, flock, slumber wool, or a mixture of such materials, unless an inspector declares to the contrary," inserted in lieu.

Amendment put and passed.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I move an amendment—

That the word "September" in line 23, page 6, be struck out and the word "October" inserted in lieu.

This has reference to the supply of refrigerators to shearing sheds, and I hope the Committee will agree to the amendment.

Amendment put and passed.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I move an amendment—

That the word "eight" in line 30, page 6, be struck out and the word "seven" inserted in lieu.

Amendment put and passed; the clause, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 5, Title—agreed to.

Bill reported with amendments.

## BILL—JETTIES ACT AMENDMENT.

### *Second Reading.*

THE MINISTER FOR MINES (Hon. L. F. Kelly—Merredin-Yilgarn) [4.28] in moving the second reading said: This Bill, which is already on the file, is submitted on behalf of the Minister for the North-West. Cabinet recently approved of the control of the wharf at Geraldton and the jetties at Busselton and Esperance being transferred from the Railway Department

to the Harbour and Light Department. When draft regulations for the control of the wharf and jetties concerned were submitted to the Crown Law Department for preparation, the Harbour and Light Department was advised that Section 5C of the principal Act precluded the making of the proposed regulations.

Section 5 (b) specifies that regulations made under the principal Act shall not apply to jetties forming part of any Government railways. Under Section 2 of the Railways Act, wharves and jetties, on which railway lines owned by the Crown are laid, form part of the railway. As a result, the regulations under which the Harbour and Light Department has for many years controlled the North-West jetties, are now invalid and could be upset at any time. Therefore, the Bill has a twofold purpose. It seeks to enable regulations to be made under the principal Act for jetties which form part of a Crown railway and to validate regulations that have been made in the past for this purpose. That is an explanation of the provisions in the Bill and I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Bovell, debate adjourned.

## **BILL—ELECTORAL ACT AMENDMENT (No. 2).**

### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 10th October.

**MR. BOVELL** (Vasse) [4.32]: This Bill, introduced by the Minister for Justice, seeks to delete the existing provisions in the Act which deal with the appointment of postal vote officers and, in lieu thereof, to insert provisions similar to those prescribed in the Commonwealth Act and in the Acts of other States within the Commonwealth. The provisions in legislation operating outside the State make it necessary for an elector entitled to vote by post to lodge a written application for a postal ballot paper. I am fully aware of the conditions applying to postal voting as set out in the Commonwealth legislation, but I am not very conversant with the legislation that operates in the other States.

The Bill will strike a serious blow at our democratic system by preventing electors who, through age, illness, infirmity or other unfortunate circumstances, are prevented from visiting the polling booth, from exercising the franchise. If passed, this Bill will virtually prevent many electors from voting and will wipe out almost entirely our adequate system of permitting electors to vote by post, when they are prevented, for reasons outside their control, from attending the polling booth on election day. I have already set out some of those reasons. In my opinion, Western Australia's existing system of permitting such

electors the right to exercise their franchise is one which should be embraced not only by the Commonwealth, but also by every other State in Australia.

The Minister stated that the present system under which postal vote officers are appointed and issued with postal ballot books has been in operation practically since the inception of the electoral laws of the State. Therefore, this system, I consider, has stood the test of time and it is most inopportune to attempt to alter the existing state of affairs. Although he said that complaints had been received by the Chief Electoral Officer, the Minister did not cite even one specific case to substantiate his claim. He said that there are at present 1,800 postal vote officers throughout the State. Of course, it is appreciated that a large number of those officers—who give their services gratuitously—perform their duties in a very satisfactory manner.

Those officers render a valuable service not only to the State but also to those electors who, because of many unfortunate circumstances, are prevented from attending the polling booth on election day. Not only did the Minister fail to substantiate his statement with any example of breaches of postal vote officers, but also he failed to mention that postal vote officers in this State are well-regarded citizens. Taking as an example one town that is known to me which has practically 1,500 electors on the roll, the postal vote officers there include the headmaster of the local school, the secretary of the local authority, a retired farmer who is also a justice of the peace, and a member of the State Public Service with a responsible position in the district. That is the type of person that holds the office of postal vote officer in various parts of the State.

The Minister gave no valid reason why Western Australia should forsake its present satisfactory system of postal voting in favour of the cumbersome method used by the Commonwealth Government. Under the Commonwealth postal vote system an elector, if he is ill or is a great distance from the polling booth, must first secure a form in order to apply for a postal vote and a postal vote ballot paper. To those people who are not well versed in clerical work, applying for and completing the necessary form represents a formidable task. This application form is then posted to the Chief Electoral Officer and, when sent from some of the outback places, it takes some time to reach its destination.

Having received the application, the Chief Electoral Officer forwards a postal ballot paper to the applicant. This is received by the person seeking a vote in due course and is then returned to the Chief Electoral Officer. That vote has to arrive at his office before the closing of the polls on election day. This is a most unsatisfactory procedure in country areas. In my

opinion. As a result of following that course, many hundreds of people lose their franchise, because they find that, as a result of circumstances beyond their control, they are prevented from attending a polling booth to record their votes, and they have not sufficient time to comply with the cumbersome procedure of, firstly, making application for a postal ballot paper, and then having to wait for it to arrive. Finally there is the delay occasioned in forwarding the vote to the Commonwealth Chief Electoral Officer, the cumulative result of which is that they are too late to record their votes.

No one knows when one is going to take ill and this often occurs to people immediately prior to election day, but under the cumbersome Commonwealth system those people lose their franchise. It is the responsibility of Parliament to ensure that a system is evolved—and such a system has been evolved in Western Australia—and followed to enable every elector to record his vote at election time. It is the right and privilege of every individual to cast a vote subject to the qualifications laid down by the laws of the country, and the exercising of this privilege and right should be encouraged in every way.

Our postal vote system has stood the test of time over many years and to allow it to be thrown overboard in favour of a system used by the Commonwealth Government would not be in the best interests of Western Australia, nor would it be in the best interests of the individual elector. In dealing with this matter, the Minister used several vague phrases. One of his utterances was as follows:—

A postal vote officer armed with a postal ballot book can attend indiscriminately at hospitals and institutions and the private homes of the sick and infirm for the purpose of obtaining postal votes, regardless of whether any prior request had been made by an elector or the relatives of an elector. This is one of the main weaknesses in our system and one which has brought discredit to the whole system.

That sounds all very well, but if the Minister is prepared to make such statements which, in my opinion, reflect on every postal vote officer who is performing an honorary service for the State and the electors in it, he should be prepared to back them up. It ill becomes the Minister to use such general and vague phrases. If he had supported his statements with figures and facts, he could have been excused for making them. He also said—

It is a reflection on the electoral laws of the State when postal vote officers are permitted to wait at the doors of institutions before the hour of nomination.

That is some more general phrasing and it does not do the Minister for Justice justice.

The Minister for Transport: I do not think you are doing yourself justice, because you and every other member are aware that that actually occurs.

Mr. BOVELL: I am not aware of it!

The Minister for Transport: Tommy-rot!

Mr. BOVELL: If it does occur, it was the obligation of the Minister to quote some instance where it has occurred and inform members accordingly.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr. BOVELL: It is all very well for the Minister for Transport to interject and to say that we know that this actually occurs. He may know and if he does, he can get up and quote specific instances after I resume my seat. To reflect on members of this side of the House, and on members on his own side of the House, and to say that we know where such cases have occurred is grossly unjust, and I take strong exception to it. If I have raised my voice in this debate as a result of the interjection made by the Minister for Transport, it was because I felt hostile at his insinuation that I knew where it had occurred. I cannot at the moment recall any instance in my experience of elections where any improper practice has been resorted to.

The Minister for Transport: Nobody suggested that that was improper; it is just something that is done.

Mr. BOVELL: The Minister said that we over here knew it was done. I am quite capable of speaking for myself, just as I know the Minister for Transport is capable of speaking for himself, and I repeat that when I have resumed my seat, I hope he will be able to quote some instances where this has happened, and give us the name of the person and the postal vote officers who were responsible for it.

The proposal to abolish the present system of postal voting, in my opinion, contains no merit whatever. The Minister did not submit any concrete reasons why there should be any change in the existing system at this juncture. So many amendments have come up from the Government side of the House in regard to elections, that it makes one wonder what the purpose of them is. The purposes are not clearly explained by the Minister or by some private members who have introduced such legislation.

If the electoral system of this State needs an overhaul, I would suggest the appointment of an all-party committee of this Parliament to look into this matter, and after it had made a thorough investigation into our electoral system, it could submit certain recommendations for

the consideration of Parliament. Generally speaking, however, I must say that I do not approve of the idea of piecemeal amendments being made to our electoral system. It would appear to me that there is no merit whatever in the measure before the House, and I strongly oppose the second reading.

**HON. A. F. WATTS (Stirling) [4.48]:** Like the member for Vasse I have no intention of supporting this measure. At this stage, I would like to express my appreciation to the member for Vasse for the very excellent contribution he has made on this particular matter, and for the very clear way in which he exposed certain of the results that would accrue if this measure became law. It is a fact well-known to those of us who represent country districts—especially those that are far flung and the settlements of which are considerably separated—that the Federal system of postal voting definitely makes it very difficult in a lot of cases, and quite impossible in a number, for persons who, under the existing State law, could get a postal vote, to record their postal vote at all.

The effect of this measure, if it is passed, will simply be to bring under the State law those people as they are today under the Federal law. In this Bill we find that an elector who has reason to believe that he will, throughout the hours of polling on polling day, be travelling under conditions which will preclude him from voting at the poll, or who is seriously ill or infirm, may, at any time after the 10th day prior to the issue of the writs and before six o'clock on the afternoon of the day immediately preceding polling day, make application to the Chief Electoral Officer or to a returning officer for a postal ballot paper.

One is taken ill without much notice, and we will imagine that there is a settler on the South Stirling war service land project who is taken ill two or three days before polling day. According to the proposition contained in the Bill, he can make application up to six o'clock of the night before. If he is very lucky to be taken ill on the Tuesday, his family will be able to post the letter in time to reach the Chief Electoral Officer or the returning officer for the Legislative Council the following day. If he is extremely lucky, the letter will be returned with the ballot paper in it on the Saturday morning, which is polling day, because that is the condition of the mail.

If, on the other hand, the man had taken ill on Wednesday, he could not get his ballot paper until the week after polling day, because there is no mail. Similar circumstances apply in a great many other places and possibly in far more than I would have any idea of. I have known that, as a result of the Federal system, people all over the place, such as

the settler I have referred to, have been deprived of their votes. Indeed, it could also happen in the townships, because the returning officers, especially for the Legislative Council elections, are few and far between. As I say, a man can be taken ill very shortly before polling day, or circumstances may arise in which he may have to be travelling so that it will be impossible for him to vote. In these days of rapid transport and sudden transition from one place to another, it is not unusual to be out of the State in 24 hours, although one may have had no intention of doing so the previous day.

This system again would preclude a great many people—as it has under the Federal scheme already precluded a great many people—from recording their votes. So far as I can see, there is absolutely nothing to balance that very strong and considerable objection—absolutely nothing at all. Personally, I can find no substantial fault with the postal voting system that has operated in Western Australia for the last half century or more. It has made it possible, through the appointment of postal vote officers in the out of the way places, as well as the more settled areas, for everybody to retain the right to exercise the franchise; because so long as the postal vote taken by that officer can be placed in a ballot box prior to the closing of the poll on polling day, then it is acceptable for counting.

The member for Vasse read an extract from the speech made by the Minister for Justice in which some comment was made on the fact that postal vote officers have been known to go to places where there are sick people without being actually requested to do so. Although that may not be contemplated under the existing law, for the life of me I can see nothing wrong with it. The fact that it may be considered improper seems to me to be a relic of the time when voting was not compulsory; and when to go to a man and say, "Look here! You ought to vote" might have been unwise or improper. But today when voting is compulsory, and when an elector can be fined £2 if he does not vote, it is a reasonable proposition to afford him all the facilities to do so. If he does not want to do so, he certainly cannot be compelled to vote; but if he does not do so, and he has no legitimate excuse for not doing so, he can be duly fined.

I see no reason why a person properly appointed by the department should not be allowed, indeed exhorted, to go to premises where these people and others might be so circumstanced that they could be disfranchised. But on the other hand, to require these same people to go through the paraphernalia contemplated by this legislation merely results, as I have said before—and as I will repeat—in disfranchising many people who otherwise would record their votes. In the main, as I see it, the greater percentage of the people

who would be thus affected would be those who are furthest from the centres of population; and they are the very people for whom the facilities should be made easier.

As I understand the position, that is just what has been decided under the existing postal vote legislation. In the years I have been in the Legislative Assembly, during which I have contested some five elections, I do not know of any instance where I have had to take the slightest exception to methods adopted by any other candidate or any postal vote officer. I do not think—in fact, I am sure of it—any other candidate has had to take exception to any of the methods practised by persons who might have assisted me.

Mr. Johnson: Have you not been opposed by a Liberal candidate?

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I do not think that has the slightest relevance to the subject matter.

Mr. Andrew: I have had to take exception to the action of postal vote officers in my electorate.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I would suggest there are a great many people probably to be found in all political parties who have known of the things to which the member for Victoria Park has just referred, and I would say, equally clearly and soundly, that there are a great many people in all political parties who have a great regard for propriety. Accordingly, I do not propose to make any invidious distinction as to the type of persons.

I happened to say that none of them at any time, as far as I could see, had given me any cause for concern, but I do know that in all those elections the postal vote system has enabled a great many people who otherwise could not have recorded their votes, to do so—whether they have voted for me or not does not matter in the slightest. They are entitled to their franchise, and they are not entitled to have imposed on them a system which will make it more difficult for them to exercise it—and there is no question that it will make it more difficult for them to obtain it. In my view, the Western Australian system has been more suitable for the purpose of ensuring that electors will obtain their votes than has the Federal system.

If anyone wants to talk about minor breaches or improper steps being taken under the postal vote laws, then might I refer members to the Federal system. The system set out in the Bill, if brought into operation, will leave itself just as wide open, if not wider open—I prefer the latter suggestion—than the present Western Australian system because people could be bothered more by postal vote officers regarding the filling in of the requisite forms.

Mr. Andrew: By any elector.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: Yes, not by a properly appointed officer of the Electoral Department. I have seen it done and whilst there may be nothing intrinsically wrong with it, it is not within the confines of Federal legislation.

Mr. Andrew: Corruption.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: It is not corruption so far as the postal vote officers are concerned. If corruption was so apparent as to warrant a change in this legislation, then why have we not had a great many more matters brought before the courts of this State in regard to it.

Mr. Andrew: You should know that.

Hon. A. F. WATTS: I know nothing of the kind. If we get the wrong people handling these things, as is possible from time to time, no doubt either system can be productive of what can be classed as wrong doing. But I feel satisfied there has been little of it under the Western Australian system and I am quite clear that the alteration proposed in the Bill will help to disfranchise a number of people and make it difficult for them to vote. I will not vote for the Bill, but will oppose the second reading.

MR. JOHNSON (Leederville) [5.3]: I support the Bill. Were it not obvious that there is a necessity for it, I think one of the aspects which would make it obvious that it should be supported is the weakness of the arguments put up by the two previous speakers.

The Minister for Transport: Hear, hear!

Mr. JOHNSON: Neither has produced any form of useful argument against this provision or any proposal that the Federal system should be altered or any statement that the Federal system was materially abused. I would point out that this legislation does embody some effective improvements on the Federal system and the most important one of these is that under the State system returning officers lie at the centre of each of our electorates, which in effect is the main town in each electorate, from which mails radiate.

Under the Federal system there is some real difficulty in relation to mail. Under the system as applied by the State, because of smaller electorates, that argument is almost completely invalid. There are some difficulties in the extreme north where there is a scattered population, but in the more settled areas there is very little difficulty about it. It is not impossible that the adoption of this system would disfranchise one or two persons, particularly those who fell sick on election day or the day before, and it is also highly probable that if they are sick to that extent they are not in a fit state to vote.



Therefore, if votes are taken from them under our current system, then it is quite possible that the vote is not a legitimate expression of opinion. It could be in a number of cases, because despite what the two previous speakers have said of the high standard of postal vote officers, with the exception of those who are appointed by virtue of their positions in the State Civil Service—and I include headmasters of every school, who are almost automatically postal vote officers—the people who act as postal vote officers are not impartial.

They agree to act in that capacity because they are interested in politics. People who barrack for football teams are known to be a little bit one-eyed and they go to watch football for the purpose of expressing themselves in one way, but people who play in the team for a club can be considered a little more than one-eyed. Therefore the folk who enter into the taking of postal votes under our present system are well and truly known to be postal vote officers for one side of the political argument or the other—they are barrackers. Whilst I know that the majority of them are honourable men and do try to keep within the spirit of our present law, I have not the foggiest doubt that it is impossible for them, on many occasions, not to let their own political preference show.

Mr. Court: Wouldn't that apply fairly evenly on either side?

The Minister for Transport: No.

Mr. Court: If it does apply at all.

Mr. JOHNSON: A man who is helping the Labour cause does it at his own expense, but the man helping the Liberals does it for payment.

Mr. Court: Don't be so absurd.

Several members interjected.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: How silly you can be!

Mr. JOHNSON: There is no need to shout. I can wait until the hon. member finishes shouting.

Mr. Court: Prove what you have said.

Mr. JOHNSON: There is not the slightest doubt that payment has occurred on many occasions and one postal vote officer, now deceased—he was well-known to me and working for the Liberals—he being an aged pensioner whom I knew for many years—told me he got 5s. for each vote. That was his statement to me.

Mr. Court: You should prove it. What action did you take about it as a citizen?

Mr. Jamieson: What action could he take?

Mr. JOHNSON: I could not take any action. I cannot prove it, but all I know is that it is true.

Mr. Court: How do you know it is true?

Mr. JOHNSON: There is nothing in the Act to show they cannot be paid.

Mr. Court: You say you cannot prove it but know it is true.

The Minister for Lands: I am thinking of something right now.

Mr. JOHNSON: A thing can be true but incapable of being legally proved.

Mr. Court: You have a responsibility to prove it.

Mr. JOHNSON: I know of a complaint that postal votes were taken in the Leederville electorate before noon on nomination day. I know they were taken against me. I am unable to prove who took them but I can say that the postal vote officer was a female—I think married—alleged to be wearing a ring and reputed to be of the age of about 40 years.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: What colour hair?

Mr. JOHNSON: Seeing the lady whose case I was dealing with was blind, or almost blind, I have some difficulty in proving it, but the complaint was made and can be examined on the files of the department. Once again it could not be proved. All I know regarding the vote of that particular lady who was almost blind, is that her name was listed and postal vote officers assisting me called almost directly after the close of nominations and were told that her vote had been taken that morning. What more can one do than that?

I will go a bit further and see what the member for Nedlands thinks about this one. The people who are sick, in any election, are normally a cross section of the community, and it would be abnormal if there was a large excess of sick Liberals over sick Labourites. I think that is a fair statement. We do not examine their mental state when we send the postal vote officer to them. Let us look at the sick votes taken at the last five, six or seven elections for this House and see how many occasions they parallel the vote of the well.

In connection with my own last election, it was the cleanest in which I have taken part and I would like to make it clear that I do not regard my opponent as the person responsible for what took place. The figures for that election indicate that the results were very close and one would expect that the sick votes would remain equally close. It is remarkable to notice what the absent votes were, but despite the fact that what margin there was in the votes resulted in my being here and my opponent not, he did get a fairly considerable proportionate majority of the sick votes. That same thing applied not only to that election but has applied on previous occasions.

The Minister for Transport: A regular pattern.

Mr. JOHNSON: Yes, a regular pattern. There is not the slightest doubt that our current system favours those with the money who can afford to pay someone full time to scrounge for votes.

Mr. Roberts: Prove that.

Mr. JOHNSON: I could not in court.

Mr. Bovell: This is the highest court in the land.

Mr. JOHNSON: I would suggest that the member for Bunbury, who is so loud in shouting down any unpleasant things he does not like, could examine the figures prepared by the electoral officers, which bears out the disproportion of sickness in Liberals. That is the outstanding point. The figures indicate there is a consistent disproportion between the vote of the electors and the vote of the sick.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Couldn't it indicate that Labour people do not canvass all sick votes?

The Minister for Transport: How do you know the political opinion of a sick person?

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Couldn't that happen?

Mr. JOHNSON: The member for Cottesloe has admitted by interjection that he realises sick votes are obtained by the people who get them, and not by party affiliation. That is the reason for the desired change. The member for Cottesloe has shown that he understands that sending a canvasser, sick vote officer or a barracker for his side is the way to get the votes.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Do not twist what I have said.

Mr. JOHNSON: The hon. member does not realise what he did say.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: I know what I said, but you are twisting it to form part of your argument, which is quite wrong.

Mr. JOHNSON: The hon. member cannot wriggle out that way. He may be a worm but he cannot slide out of it. From what the hon. member said he realises that sending a postal vote officer to a sick elector would assist in gaining a vote for the party he represents.

It will be remembered that just prior to the last election there was a Federal election, and realising that our election would follow, I took steps at the appropriate time, by the use of scrutineers and so on, to ensure that I recorded who voted as sick voters during the Federal election. This was only a few weeks before the State election. I listed them and called on those people, and with the aid of the canvassers was able to dissect those who were actively sick and those who voted as absentees.

That is not an easy thing to do under the Federal system. It had to be done by actually calling on the people. All those who, in fact, cast sick votes at the Federal

election were called on within 48 hours of the close of nominations. A sick vote officer went on my behalf to each of them, and from some a vote had already been taken, including the one I referred to earlier.

Yet, despite the fact that I had gone to this trouble—and it was a lot of trouble and the work had to be started well in advance of the election—the number of sick votes—not absentee votes—taken in my election was greater than both the sick and absentee votes taken for the same district at the compulsory Federal election held only a few weeks before.

This indicates that, under our system, pressure was put on people to record sick votes. There is not the slightest doubt about that. This I know, from my first election—a by-election—because I called on some people who, later, I got to know really well. In this instance, there were two people who were handicapped; they were not sick but handicapped, and I called to offer transport for them to vote. They were quite capable of travelling in a car. They said, "We have already voted; both of us. We are Labour supporters and we voted for a Labour man called Melville." That is what they told me, and I was surprised because my name is not Melville but I was the Labour candidate. Who misled them? And if members want to know something about the matter I will say that although these people live in the West Perth area, they barrack for South Fremantle. This indicates that I know them. That kind of thing goes on consistently.

I am not saying that every postal vote officer who barracks for the Labour side is an angel, but the opportunity is there and the current system is consistently abused by at least some of them, and it is time the system was changed. The Federal system makes abuse more difficult, because the handling of the documents lies in the hands of officials. When the application is made, it passes through the post office, and the postal people are too busy and too much concerned with retaining their jobs, to interfere for political purposes.

We can all agree that the post office is neutral. From the post office the application goes to the electoral officers, and again they are too busy and concerned with retaining their positions to interfere. They would probably be immediately sacked if they did anything of political unbalance. The electoral officers deal with matters in a perfectly neutral manner. I do not think anyone would doubt that our electoral officers are completely neutral and highly efficient.

The documents are then returned through the post to the individual voter who in nearly every case suffers no interference because the only interference that could take place would be by relatives if the vote was in the home. Whilst occasionally there are families in which

some political disagreement might take place, there are very few in which there is a big split. There could be family abuse of the system, but I think the extent of it is too small to be worth worrying about.

The only point at which abuse of the Federal system can occur to anything like a large extent is in the institutions. I consider it is quite proper that assistance be given in the form of providing applications for postal votes to the inmates and making out the applications. Under the Federal law I can see nothing wrong with that. However, it is possible for one party, by providing that assistance, to know when the various forms will be returned. There have been cases in which political barrackers have been waiting when the documents were returned, and they undoubtedly used influence. I say that because incidents of this nature have been found, and they are usually kept quiet for quite decent reasons. There does appear to be only that one method of abuse in the Federal system.

This particular legislation contains provisions to try to avoid that one. The whole intention of the legislation is to neutralise—that is probably the best word—the sick vote; to make it possible for the vote to be taken free from any influence other than the voter's own desires and perhaps the desires of the voter's family. It must be remembered that people who vote as sick voters can hardly be regarded, in the main, as being in the absolute prime of health and mental capacity. Many of them, of course, are in the best of health except perhaps for something like a broken leg, which is a real handicap. But, on the other hand, many are aged, really sick and infirm, and definitely are subject to influence.

I think I have made it clear that abuses do take place under our present system and that they are less likely to occur under the Federal system, and for this reason I greatly prefer the Federal system. The whole idea of the legislation is to keep the documents in the hands of those who are not political barrackers—the post office and the Electoral Department—and that is highly preferable to the present system.

Mr. Bovell: Has the post office agreed to adopt our State system and work for the State as it does for the Commonwealth?

Mr. JOHNSON: I do not think the post office has to be asked because the votes would be subject to ordinary postal charges.

Mr. Bovell: The Minister gave no indication that the post office would act as a distributor of application forms.

Mr. JOHNSON: It does not have to.

Mr. Bovell: Who is going to supply them? The Commonwealth has the post office, but the State has not. There is

no State office in such places as South Stirling, Borden, Gnowangerup, and others.

Mr. JOHNSON: There are many ways by which the forms could be made available in small towns and backblock places like Busselton. They could be made available in a number of State instrumentalities. There is a courthouse at Busselton at which there is a returning officer, is there not?

Mr. Bovell: You seem to know a terrible lot about it. The places I mentioned were South Stirling, Borden, Gnowangerup and so on, where the people are producing the wealth of the country and not doing what you are, wasting the money.

Mr. Jamieson: Have you a spare handkerchief over there?

The SPEAKER: The member for Leederville may now proceed.

Mr. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There should be no difficulty in making application forms available to those who want them. They do not have to be made available only through the post office. The post office, however, will be available for the transferring of these forms from the voter to the Electoral Department and back again, as postal matter. There is no need to make arrangements for that.

As for making arrangements for the actual applications, I have often wondered how people get on the roll. They are required to get on the roll and the forms are available in certain places; and if people do not take advantage of the availability of the forms, I would not be surprised if political barrackers did not do something to urge them to get on the roll. Similarly, people who will, under this legislation, be entitled to vote by this method will, perhaps, be urged to vote, but at least they will not be under the influence of a barracker at the time the mail is delivered—not in every case, because that would be impossible.

So the whole thing will be far more neutralised, far more preferable and far more incapable of abuse than it is now, and I think that before anyone suggests there is no abuse, he should analyse the returns of our own elections for this House for the past 10 or 15 years. If there is not an unbalance in relation to the various sick votes and the normal votes of the different electorates, I will go he. Furthermore, that unbalance does not in every case lean towards the Liberal Party, but it does in the vast majority. I think there is evidence in the figures alone that our system is abused; and it is capable of being organised in a manner that results in abuse. For that reason, and because it will improve our voting system and result in a cleaner vote, I support the legislation.

**MR. OLDFIELD** (Mt. Lawley) [5.31]: I agree with the principle of this measure, but I cannot altogether agree with the reasons put forward by the member for Leederville. I intend to support the Bill for reasons which I shall outline; but, first of all, let me deal with the statements of the member for Leederville regarding voting figures from previous elections. I think it is true that the anti-Labour parties enjoy a larger postal vote than does the Labour Party, but the reason for it is obvious if one cares to examine the figures.

The reason why the anti-Labour parties enjoy a larger postal vote than the Labour Party—and they enjoy it not only in the State sphere but also in the Federal sphere where there is the same system as is outlined in this measure—is that, apart from those who are ill, people who are travelling overseas or interstate record postal votes. I understand that far more postal votes are cast by such people than are cast by those who are ill. In addition, there are people away on holidays, and perhaps they are in an area in which there is no election.

Mr. Bovell drew attention to the state of the House.

The **SPEAKER**: I have counted the House and there is a quorum present.

Mr. **OLDFIELD**: Mr. Speaker, would you call the member for Vasse to order? I am trying to make a speech.

The Minister for Transport: There are only two Liberals in the House.

Mr. **OLDFIELD**: May I proceed, Mr. Speaker?

The **SPEAKER**: The hon. member may proceed.

Mr. **OLDFIELD**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker! I will endeavour to get through my speech as quickly as possible and, I hope, with as little interruption from the member for Vasse as possible. Now the hon. member is leaving the Chamber, and there will not be a quorum present.

Mr. Bovell: The hon. member always likes to stab somebody in the back.

Mr. **OLDFIELD**: To resume my speech—

Mr. Bovell: However—

The **SPEAKER**: Order! The hon. member will come back to his seat. I think he should accord due deference to the Chair and that he should behave himself. The hon. member went outside, then came back, and interjected several times. I would like him at least to accord due deference to the Speaker's Chair and allow other members to speak without trying to interrupt.

Mr. Bovell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The **SPEAKER**: The member for Mt. Lawley may proceed. There is no point of order.

Mr. **OLDFIELD**: I had reached the stage where I said that most of the postal votes cast at election times were cast by people who were travelling either overseas or interstate, or who were going away on holidays and who were visiting those parts of the State where no election was being held, and therefore there would be no polling booths available for them to cast absentee votes.

It is obvious to all members, and to the public at large, that the majority of those who are in a position to afford a trip overseas or interstate, or even to go away on holidays at that particular time, have Liberal leanings in their politics. That is the reason why the postal votes favour the anti-Labour parties. It is not because of the reason suggested by the member for Leederville—he suggested it was a result of malpractice. I will admit that malpractice has occurred, and I could quote one glaring instance of it where a certain Labour member of Parliament was found in a hospital with a postal vote book in his hands, taking votes himself, and with the ballot papers already initialled and the counterfoil signed by the postal vote officer who was at work at the time.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: He would not be the only one to have done that.

Mr. **OLDFIELD**: Maybe not, but that happened in the 1947 elections and the hon. member was subsequently defeated. As a result, it made little difference. But malpractice does occur, and will continue to occur from time to time through unscrupulous people, until such time as the Act has been tightened up. If the Act is open enough to allow such abuses, they will occur; and, in my opinion, all the loopholes should be stopped so that that is not possible.

I would say, in fairness to most members, that when abuses have occurred, they were not of the hon. member's own doing. Possibly they were the result of his zealous and ardent supporters, without the knowledge of the candidate concerned, and without any reference to him. However, every member, if he is honest with himself, will admit that he has known of malpractice at various times; if it has not been committed by him, at least it has been committed against him or in connection with an election in which he may have been interested either as a supporter or helper, such as in a Federal election or a by-election.

At present the Act is wide open, and it is a well-known fact in political circles that if in an institution or hospital the matron or the person in charge is favourably inclined towards one political party, that party is the one which has access to the institution or hospital concerned for the taking of sick votes. Of course, only the figures from the ballot box concerned could tell the story. The Federal system used to be similar to the one at present in

use in this State. But the present Liberal Party Government in Canberra saw fit to amend the Act six or seven years ago because of the malpractice and abuses which had occurred. This meant a tightening up all round and I do not think anybody could claim that there are any abuses under the present Federal system.

It is a fact that some people who are going overseas cannot cast their votes if they are leaving the State before nominations close. Also, if a person falls ill on the day in question he cannot cast a vote because there is no time to get the application form in and the ballot paper posted out and returned. But I feel that arrangements could be made by the Electoral Office, and certain officers could be made available so that in the event of a person falling ill on the day in question, and being unable to attend a polling booth, arrangements could be made for a member of the staff to attend the sick person, at the place where he was confined to bed, to take his vote.

People who are going into hospital for an operation, or women who are expecting to be confined, could make adequate arrangements in plenty of time so that application forms could be sent out and the ballot papers posted out and returned to the returning officer. I know that hardship will occur in certain outback areas, especially in the North-West in certain circumstances. It is only a question of the person not leaving it till the last minute. They could easily send in earlier and get the ballot papers out and have them returned in plenty of time. Under the present system the postal vote officers must have the ballot papers in the electoral office by 8 p.m. on the day of the poll, otherwise the votes are not admitted. That must be done also in the North-West and all other outback areas.

I do not feel there is much more that can be said on the subject because other speakers have dealt with it at great length. Most of us are aware of the differences in the two systems and we are aware of the circumstances surrounding them. Thus it is only a matter of deciding whether we favour the present system or the one in use in the Federal sphere. For the reasons I have outlined, and because I feel it will tighten up the Act—the Federal system does not allow for any abuses whereas our present system does—I have no alternative but to support the measure.

**MR. POTTER** (Subiaco) [5.43]: I support the Bill because I feel that its provisions are much more desirable than our present system. The Minister said that we had about 1,800 postal vote officers, and so I suggest to members that we are running our elections on the cheap. I agree with the Minister when he says that there is a small minority of the postal vote officers who are exceeding the bounds of propriety. Examples have been presented

by members—the member for Mt. Lawley cited one—and I suggest that most of us could do the same if we so desired.

Members opposite who are opposed to this measure envisage, I think, that the system will be something like the Commonwealth electoral postal vote system under which the returning officer is a vast distance from the area where people may want to record their votes. But in the State elections the electorates are smaller and the returning officer is much closer. Also there is a provision in the Bill for an elector enrolled for a province or district in the North-West, or any other remote area, who finds it difficult to attend a polling place, to register a postal vote.

There are special provisions for that in the Act, therefore I do not consider that members who are opposed to this Bill need have any fears in the direction they anticipate. I suggest that as this provision is already in operation in a number of States as well as the Commonwealth, members would be well advised to vote in favour of the measure so as to overcome some of the undesirable features that are now apparent.

In saying that I am not casting any aspersions on the vast majority of postal vote officers. I know how zealous they are in their work. But I do know of one instance where there was a campaign involving four candidates, and at 12 noon six to eight postal officers were waiting outside the door of one institution to crash in. That is neither desirable to the patients nor the candidates. In my opinion, the Bill will do justice to all candidates irrespective of party. I support the second reading.

**MR. JAMIESON** (Beeloo) [5.47]: I wish to make only a few comments on the proposed amendment to the Electoral Act. Action to improve the position which now prevails is long overdue. Despite his vocal condemnation against the ideas and claims of members on this side of the House, the member for Bunbury did not propose any other system that might prove to be better than the existing one. A system of postal voting, along the lines of the Federal system, prevails in all other States. Admittedly, there are variations in individual States, but in the main they have a system under which persons connected with a political party are enabled to take postal votes from sick people, so that other people, who are supposed to be, but never are, neutral, are not involved.

Mr. Court: I will not say it is fair comment to declare they are never neutral. Surely some of them are fair!

**MR. JAMIESON**: Can the hon. member name one who is neutral?

Mr. Court: Are you suggesting that the superintendent of the Sunset Home is not neutral? Officers like him take all the

votes in their respective institutions, and they do not allow any other persons in for that purpose.

The Minister for Education: Has the member for Nedlands tried to get in?

Mr. Court: I have not tried. If they are taking all the votes, I am prepared to leave the matter under their charge.

Mr. JAMIESON: The electorate of Nedlands is not a good example to take for assessing the situation. The electorate is so loaded politically that a fair indication cannot be obtained. One will be obtained only in an electorate where there is a hard contest. The Electoral Department is aware, despite the rebuttal of the charges by the member for Nedlands, that postal officers are paid on the basis of a certain amount per vote. They know that that takes place and it has been brought to notice. Under the legislation in this State there is no provision to prevent the payment of postal officers on that basis. They can be paid by the votes they collect, or by the day. The Electoral Department is only too well aware of that practice.

Mr. Court: That applies to both sides.

Mr. JAMIESON: I know, but it is not very fair in the case of an independent candidate.

Mr. Court: You are not suggesting that there are no paid organisers under the Federal system.

Mr. JAMIESON: I certainly am not. I am putting forward a system under which friends of a candidate or persons associated with his campaign will be able to do that work. No one would be so naive as to suggest that when an election is approaching all candidates do not look at the position in regard to the postal voting officers in their electorate.

Mr. Court: You are not suggesting that the candidates do not also organise sick and postal votes, as is done in Federal elections?

Mr. JAMIESON: I am not. I am asking why the collection of postal votes should not be open to all, so that persons on a campaign committee can do that work, rather than have the principals of institutions, who are supposed to be neutral, refusing such people access to hospitals because they contend they do not want the patients to be disturbed. Thus the principals of those hospitals can take the necessary action to secure the votes themselves. The method I have suggested is far better than persisting with the present system which has been loaded on one side.

For some reason or other, the people who are able to get the sick votes are more often supporters of the Liberal Party than of the Labour Party. However, that is not altogether true in every case, because in the electorate of Geraldton and in several others, the postal votes showed a majority for the Labour candidates. In the

main analysis of the statistics will show that the loading is far more to one side. The resources of the parties which are prepared to make payment on the basis of 5s. a vote, or a similar sum, should not be an important consideration when a fair contest is expected in an electorate.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I would say that it is a highly improper practice to make such payment.

Mr. JAMIESON: It may be a highly improper practice, but the member for Murray did very little to correct the position when he was Premier.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: I did not know it existed.

Mr. JAMIESON: It does take place and the Electoral Department knows all about it. If the hon. member doubts my word he can ask the electoral officers, and they will bear me out.

Mr. Roberts: Have you asked? Have they definite proof of that?

Mr. JAMIESON: Before flies are able to get in his mouth, the hon. member should shut it! Even if the electoral officers have proof of the practice, very little can be done because that practice is not an offence under the Act.

Mr. Roberts: Then the Act should be amended.

Mr. JAMIESON: I did not hear the hon. member suggesting any amendment to the Act, yet in his interjections he seemed to know all about this matter. He was telling the member for Leederville how wrong he was, when that member was saying what took place. The member for Bunbury said such a practice does not occur. I know it does occur. Four years ago the member for Bunbury knew very little about the ramifications of organisations in politics.

Mr. Roberts: I knew very little, but there is nothing wrong with that.

Mr. JAMIESON: He was then behind the counter, selling shirts, where he should be now.

Mr. Roberts: No doubt you would like to see me there rather than here.

Mr. JAMIESON: He was trying to correct members, who had some years of experience of organising in politics, when they ventured their opinion. I suggest that a person who is as completely gullible as the hon. member in this regard should keep very quite on the subject, otherwise people will become aware how little he knows about the subject.

Mr. Roberts: You know very little about any subject.

Mr. JAMIESON: I consider this to be a worth-while amendment to the Act and I support the measure.

**MR. COURT** (Nedlands) [5.55]: The whole argument advanced by the Government supporters is around the question as to whether the present system is abused more by the Liberal than by the Labour candidates. I can assure them, if any system is open to abuse, that, in practice, the Commonwealth system is. If it is desired to make a misuse of this type of votes, the opportunity is available under the Federal system. The very looseness of that system is the means by which a person can have a real "holiday" in respect of those votes. In theory the Federal system should be fool-proof, but in practice it is far from that. If the practice complained of by previous speakers is going on and is abused so much—

The Minister for Transport: What is your opinion?

**Mr. COURT**: I shall keep well out of that expression of opinion. As I explained by interjection, I refused to send postal officers into Sunset Home where there was a large number of votes to be taken because of the very nature of that institution. The superintendent and his deputy take the votes. I think that is fair and proper.

**Mr. Jamieson**: That is good, but what about other places when that does not happen?

**Mr. COURT**: There is no reason why it could not be organised in other places. I arranged that all other postal vote officers be kept out. If other than the superintendent and his deputy had been on the job, I would have soon taken other action.

The Minister for Transport: It can apply to any other system.

**Mr. COURT**: That is my point. The Federal system is not such a clean and wonderful system.

The Minister for Transport: The head of the institution would have the names and could do it under either system.

**Mr. COURT**: The matron or superintendent of any institution can say, "I am going to take charge of this matter," and he or she has the right to say who goes and comes and what the visiting hours shall be.

The Minister for Transport: Under the State system one inmate can help another.

**Mr. COURT**: Not as much as one would think. The officials can do it when it suits them. Where there is a heavy proportion of postal votes to be taken, they go through at a prearranged time with a great degree of speed.

The Minister for Transport: I know people who went with great speed through Glendilough and the Silver Chain Nursing Home, and the inmates who generally appeared to vote Labour voted Liberal. That is a statement of fact.

The Minister for Education: Was it a State or Federal election?

The Minister for Transport: State election.

**Mr. COURT**: What was done about it?

The Minister for Transport: What could be?

**Mr. COURT**: Plenty.

The Minister for Transport: It would only mean one word against another.

**Mr. Ross Hutchinson**: The Minister is drawing the long bow.

The Minister for Transport: No.

**Mr. COURT**: It has been inferred strongly—not inferred, but claimed—that the present system favours the Liberal candidates and it has been inferred that they abuse the system. If that is so, I would like to quote an experience in the Canning election. Presumably the reverse was the case there.

**Mr. Heal**: Good organisation.

**Mr. COURT**: On the theory advanced, if the Liberal candidate was organised as well as it is said he is organised in elections, he would have romped home. The ordinary votes showed: Gaffy, A.L.P., 4,424; Marris, L.C.L., 4,274. That is pretty close pegging.

The Minister for Education: A majority for Gaffy.

**Mr. COURT**: A small majority for Gaffy. The postal votes were: Gaffy 101, and Marris a mere 76.

**Mr. Ross Hutchinson**: There you are!

**Mr. Heal**: Bad organisation.

**Mr. COURT**: That is 25 per cent. down on a vote that was almost even Steven at the ordinary vote stage.

The Minister for Transport: I bet you had to turn over a lot of pages for that example.

**Mr. COURT**: The Minister drew a blank that time; it was quite coincidental and the first I lighted on when looking for another and better case. Absent votes were: Gaffy 296, Marris trailing 264; still a greater disparity than in the ordinary votes as a percentage. Of Section 122A votes, there were four for Gaffy and a mere one for Marris.

**Mr. Jamieson**: The exception proves the rule.

**Mr. COURT**: Nothing of the sort.

**Mr. Jamieson**: Give us the rest of them.

**Mr. COURT**: The total Section 122A votes is 5, but I am not worrying about them I am referring to postal votes.

The Minister for Education: After six years of a Liberal Government 76 postal votes was good.

Mr. COURT: I feel the Minister has his elections wrong, because there was a slight lapse. This election was held after three years of his Government. I am thoroughly satisfied that the present system does justice throughout the State so far as it is possible to do justice for this type of vote. No matter what system is used, there will be some injustices; it will either fall down hard on the side of making facilities available or else it will fall down on the other side and make them too easy. If it is too easy we will get abuse and if it is too hard we will deny people the right to vote, people who are genuinely entitled to vote and who genuinely desire to vote. I have seen the position on the North-West coast when a whole ship lost the right to vote under the Federal system because there was no organisation in that ship—it belonged to the State Shipping Service—before it left Fremantle.

I can assure the Minister that a lady, who used to be a member of this Chamber was on that particular ship and everyone knew about it from one end of the north coast to the other. She was interested in voting and interested that people she knew on that ship should support her cause, but under the Federal system the whole of the passengers—I am not sure about the crew; they may have made other arrangements—were disfranchised.

This is a consideration in a country such as Western Australia, where there are terrific distances and a low density of population in many areas. The present system gives reasonable justice to these people and allows them to have a vote with a certain amount of inconvenience, but not too much inconvenience, whereas under the Federal system, for many and varied reasons, the people are deprived of a vote. I oppose this measure.

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

Ayes	.....	23
Noes	.....	13
Majority for	.....	10

#### Ayes.

Mr. Andrew	Mr. Lapham
Mr. Brady	Mr. Lawrence
Mr. Evans	Mr. Marshall
Mr. Graham	Mr. Norton
Mr. Hall	Mr. Oldfield
Mr. Hawke	Mr. Potter
Mr. Heal	Mr. Rhatigan
Mr. W. Hegney	Mr. Rodoreda
Mr. Hoar	Mr. Sewell
Mr. Jamieson	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. Johnson	Mr. May
Mr. Kelly	

#### Noes.

Mr. Bovell	Sir Ross McLarty
Mr. Brand	Mr. Owen
Mr. Court	Mr. Roberts
Mr. Crommelin	Mr. Watts
Mr. Grayden	Mr. Wild
Mr. Hutchinson	Mr. I. Manning
Mr. W. Manning	

(Teller.)

(Teller.)

#### Pairs.

Ayes.	Noes.
Mr. Nulsen	Mr. Perkins
Mr. Toms	Mr. Ackland
Mr. O'Brien	Mr. Mann
Mr. Gaffy	Mr. Nalder
Mr. Tonkin	Mr. Thorn
Mr. Moir	Mr. Hearman

#### Point of Order.

Mr. Bovell: On a point of order, does this Bill require a constitutional majority?

The Speaker: No.

#### Debate Resumed.

Question thus passed.

Bill read a second time.

### BILL—COAL MINE WORKERS (PENSIONS) ACT AMENDMENT.

#### Message.

Message from the Lieut.-Governor received and read recommending appropriation for the purposes of the Bill.

#### Second Reading.

**THE MINISTER FOR MINES** (Hon. L. F. Kelly—Merredin-Yilgarn) [6.10] in moving the second reading said: The Bill, which contains a few simple amendments, has resulted from representations made by the combined unions at Collie, for amendments to existing pension legislation. Owing to the provision in the Act which renders a miner ineligible for retirement pension benefits, if he joins the industry after he attains the age of 35, some mine workers are in an awkward position if their services are dispensed with because of retrenchment at Collie.

It is possible for a worker to be employed in the mines from boyhood and, having attained the age of 35, be temporarily unemployed because of retrenchment. If he is re-employed within a period of 12 months, or a further period as is considered satisfactory by the pension tribunal, it is proposed that, subject to certain conditions outlined in the Bill, he shall retain his eligibility for retirement benefits. If he is not employed within 12 months, he becomes entitled to a refund of 75 per cent. of the contributions paid by him during his last period of employment.

Similarly, it would be extremely harsh to deny an elderly man his pension if he had worked and paid contributions for a period in excess of 25 years. The Bill proposes that in the case of such a person attaining the age of 57 years and who because of retrenchment, is not re-employed before attaining the compulsory retiring age of 60, he shall receive his pension on attaining the latter age.

It is also proposed to reduce the waiting period of two years provided in the Act in respect of refunds of contributions following resignation, to one year. This proposal



was originally designed to curb the possibility of a mine-worker deliberately changing his employment from one company to another to enable him to receive a refund. In view of the recession in hands employed and the new proposals in regard to retrenchments, the standard period of one year's waiting period is recommended.

Another item to be dealt with is in relation to the saving to the pensions fund by including provision for the payment of so much from a coalminer's pension as will not cause a reduction in a tuberculosis allowance. Present legislation provides for a deduction of any amount received by a pensioner under the Commonwealth Social Services Act, but does not cover the situation of a mine-worker who receives a benefit in the form of a tuberculosis allowance under a different Commonwealth Act. The total income of a pensioner will not be affected by the inclusion in the Act of this proposal, but will cause a considerable saving to the coalminers' pension fund. At present the practice is carried out by means of an agreement, signed by the pensioner concerned, but it is desired for administrative purposes to cover the deduction by legislation.

Another item in the Bill proposes to grant pension benefits to mine managers who are engaged at Collie when over the age of 35. In their case, despite a lifetime in the coal mining industry because they are over the age of 35, the existing provisions preclude them from enjoying pension benefits under the Act.

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

**THE MINISTER FOR MINES:** Before tea I was about to explain the position in which mine managers in the industry at Collie who were over the age of 35, find themselves. Because of that fact they are precluded from enjoying the pension benefits. The proposed amendment will allow those managers to pay arrears of mine-workers and owners' contributions to the pension fund from the date of introduction of the restricted clause governing persons who joined the industry when over the age of 35; that is, from the 8th January, 1949, to the date of commencing employment in the Western Australian industry.

In the event of a reciprocal arrangement being negotiated with Eastern States' funds, whereby financial adjustments will be made by the Eastern States funds concerned, provision is made in the Bill for a refund of amounts paid as arrears by the manager concerned. For quite some time there has been an endeavour to get a reciprocal arrangement with the coalmines in the Eastern States under which a man transferred from the industry in either New South Wales, Queensland or Victoria would be allowed to continue the benefits in this State without any break.

Up to the present the feeling in those States has been that for every one man who would transfer from this State to the Eastern States there would possibly be ten transferring in the other direction and the result has been that the Eastern States felt that a reciprocal arrangement of that kind would be very one sided. However, they are gradually coming round towards acceptance of the proposed reciprocity and, therefore, I think it is wise to include in the Act provision for reciprocity.

The remaining proposal in the Bill is designed to increase the allowance payable in respect of children. Prior to the recent alteration in the Commonwealth means test, any payment over 10s. per week in respect of a child or children would cause a corresponding reduction in the Commonwealth social service pension and the present provision in the Coal Mine Workers (Pensions) Act limits the benefit to 10s. per week, regardless of the number of children involved.

Now, however, any income received by the parent or guardian in respect of a child is not taken into consideration when assessing a Commonwealth pension, and it has been considered reasonable, in view of the relaxation of the means test, and because of the high cost of living, to grant an additional benefit for each child of a pensioner under this Act, at the rate of £1 per week. Those are the main provisions in the Bill. They have been thoroughly examined and the companies are quite in accordance with the bringing into force of legislation of this nature. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Wild, debate adjourned.

## **BILL—GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS ACT AMENDMENT.**

### *Message.*

Message from the Governor received and read recommending appropriation for the purposes of the Bill.

### *Second Reading.*

**THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT** (Hon. H. E. Graham—East Perth) [7.37] in moving the second reading said: Having regard to the importance of this measure, it is an exceedingly short Bill containing only about four and a half pages of operative clauses. It is a measure in connection with which I do not expect any great controversy.

One of its provisions is to validate actions taken since the 1st August of this year by the Commissioner or Commissioners of Railways, notwithstanding that the full complement was not on duty from that date until the commencement of this Act. From memory, the Premier intimated

to members, some weeks ago, when he was questioned regarding the existing position, that action would be taken to legalise and validate steps that had been taken in the ordinary course of business in the administration of the railways.

The second provision to which I shall refer is of importance but I feel, to a great extent, that it requires no—or hardly any—reasons. I think the necessity for the change is obvious. In other words, I hazard a guess that there is almost complete agreement on the point that the system of three-man control has been a failure. I think, too, that it is a failure because of its concept, and not necessarily mainly on account of a clash of personalities. However, whichever it might be, if the concept is wrong, which I believe it to be, or even if there were a clash of personalities there would always be a risk, irrespective of who was appointed, of there being a similar clash of interest and outlook, and accordingly very little effective being done.

As I indicated, I do not intend to argue the question because, from all accounts and from observations of members of both Houses, there appears to be almost unanimous agreement that the existing system has not been successful. So the Bill provides that there is to be a return to control by one commissioner instead of a commission of three. In order to save having to go through many scores of sections, and alter words to conform with this new set-up, a device has been employed in which the definitions of "commission" and "commissioner" will be altered. This will make the one-man idea operative and effective in all sections of the Act, save that in a few places sections are sought to be repealed because they will have no place under the new form.

It is proposed under the Bill that the appointment of a commissioner shall be for a seven-year term, and that he may be reappointed. The maximum retiring age of 65 years will still be retained. I might indicate to the House at this stage that whilst it does not appear in the Bill, an amendment may be moved to the effect that for reappointments there may be a lesser period than seven years where the occupant of the office is within seven years of the retiring age. To give an example, if the commissioner had been in office for seven or 14 years and had then reached the age of 59, obviously he could not be reappointed because in so doing he would breach the retiring age of 65 provision. In such case, where reappointment and not a new appointment is involved, it is likely that an amendment will be moved to allow of an appointment for a lesser period.

It is proposed that alterations shall be made in the existing law in relation to suspensions. I think most members are familiar with the machinery that must be employed at present. It states, first of all,

that within seven days of a commissioner being suspended a statement setting out the reasons shall be laid upon the Tables of both Houses of Parliament. There is a slight modification to that procedure set out in the Bill to make it six sitting days. As will be appreciated, there would be a little difficulty if the matter of a suspension took place round about the time of the Goldfields racing round when, for a period of more than seven days, the Legislative Council, as a rule, is not sitting; and the existing law makes no reference to sitting days. I think that is a modification which will be appreciated and accepted on all sides.

The Bill proposes also to reduce the period from the existing 40 days, during which action may be taken by Parliament to restore to office a commissioner—in future, of course, it will be "the commissioner"—if he has been suspended, to a period of 21 days. Here again I think it will be agreed that it is a more reasonable term, and if members of either House felt that an injustice had been done, there would be no impediment whatever, I suggest, on the part of any Government, in allowing the issue to be decided in each House if an effort was being made to restore to office any commissioner who had been suspended.

It is also proposed that in contradistinction to the present arrangement, the commissioner, if suspended, shall not automatically receive his salary. That will be a matter to be determined by the Governor and probably the necessity for it requires no stressing on my part. It seems ludicrous—and I am using a suppositions case—that if an officer has been suspended for a serious offence, or a gross dereliction of duty, he should be entitled for a certain period, whilst the Government is preparing papers to be laid on the Table of the House—and then the statutory period of 40 days must elapse—to draw his full pay.

Of course, if the commissioner were restored to office, any Government on the basis of fairness, justice and equity, would no doubt make a payment of either whole or portion of the salary. During the absence of the Commissioner of Railways, whether it be owing to incapacity or suspension, the Government will be permitted in the terms of this Bill to make a temporary appointment to the position for a period not exceeding six months following the vacancy. I add those three final words deliberately in order to answer an anticipated objection that, in order to escape certain responsibilities, a Government could conceivably make a temporary appointment for six months, and keep on repeating that procedure. I emphasise—there can be a temporary appointment for six months only from the date of the creation of the vacancy.

There is a further clause in the Bill known as a saving clause. I do not want to go into any detail in connection with it but it is to make certain that any charges which have been preferred, or any convictions that might be made, or punishment inflicted, will not be interfered with, or will not be in any way upset merely because of the passage of this legislation.

There is nothing new or novel in connection with such a provision. Indeed, there is a Bill before us at the present time which has a provision to that effect. I refer, of course, to the Land Agents Bill. That comprises the measure in its entirety as affecting the administration of the Railway Department. There is another clause which seeks to amend Section 42 of the Act. This section sets out certain offences against the railways, amongst which is one relating to the removal from Government premises of certain things which are listed, such as rollingstock—that would be a weighty job—tarpaulins, tools, appliances or property of any kind.

Legal interpretation is to the effect that these words, "property of any kind," relate to the property of the Railways Commission, not to others. Accordingly, parcels and goods belonging to patrons of the railways are not covered by that provision in the Government Railways Act. So it is intended to add those words to include all goods under the control or custody of the department.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Is it not an offence now to steal a parcel or any other goods covered by the railways?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: It is an offence to steal from the Railway Department itself, but I made certain that I used the words "an offence under the Government Railways Act" as opposed to common law. That comprises the sum and substance of the Bill.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: One major change.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: That is what it amounts to. As already indicated, circumstances over the past almost ten years have made it essential that there should be a change in the administrative set-up. I have seen certain railway papers from time to time and to me it appears ludicrous and certainly most uneconomic that there should be one, then two, and then three highly paid public servants dealing with the same matter, referring to enormous files in order to get the history and background of certain propositions and then, perhaps coming to different conclusions and, after a period of this sort of thing, their then developing a tendency for two members to gang up against the third.

Mr. Court: Are you not afraid of getting the same sort of thing in the Public Service Commission?

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I think we will confine our attention to this Government Railways Act Amendment Bill.

Mr. Court: Except that the principle is the same.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: I think the Deputy Leader of the Opposition had better have his argument with the Premier when the Bill is under discussion. I will be very pleased to receive the consent of members of this Chamber to the Bill we are discussing at present. I repeat, the facts and circumstances are so well known that there is nothing theoretical with regard to what has been submitted and there should be no need for a lengthy debate.

As a matter of fact, there has already been considerable debate, not only this session but during last session, and dating back to several years, and admissions have been made that some of those who sponsored and advocated a change in the top administration, have openly confessed and indeed recorded it in Hansard, that a mistake was made.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: It was an unfortunate clash of personalities.

The MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT: If that were all that was involved, it would be necessary only for there to be a change of personnel. But I am certain that even the member for Murray will agree upon reflection that there was something more than that. In recent times the position has certainly been a little more aggravated because of the personalities perhaps, but there were until comparatively recently not the same three commissioners that there were initially, and it still did not operate successfully at that time.

Perhaps it did not reach the surface to the same extent, and I venture to suggest that where there are men who are experts in their particular sections—more especially perhaps if they are professional men—these clashes are inevitable and the tragedy of it is that because of this warring at the top, there was a tendency for certain people to gather unto themselves others within the department and without, for the carrying of notes and messages; the tendency for people to interview other people whom they should not have interviewed, even to the point of certain officers apparently having almost a key to the Minister's office when everything should have gone through the head of the department. I am not speaking of the administration under the present Minister for Railways, nor am I being necessarily destructively critical of any Minister preceding him, but I do happen to know that that sort of thing was rife.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that gradually the heart and the spirit of railway officers and railway employees generally have been broken. Under conditions where the employees are unable to give

the respect to those in charge which they should be giving, the whole service eventually suffers. The psychological reaction upon them would be sufficient, and quite unconsciously perhaps these officers and workers generally would not be giving of their best even though they might be applying more exertion. So this whole tragic episode is, we hope, rapidly drawing to a close.

As members know, Magistrate Alan Smith is proceeding with his inquiries into the many aspects of railway administration and the conduct of its affairs. He is not on any heresy hunt but is endeavouring to ascertain and report to the Government the picture as he sees it, and to submit also suggestions of what might be done to improve the general standard in the railways to provide greater efficiency and a better service to the public and particularly of course to the users, whether they be passengers or whether they be people or concerns interested in the transport of goods and commodities generally.

I do not want anyone to misconstrue what I have stated as being a criticism of employees in the high positions, or in the more lowly ones. I say it is regrettable that the administration has been such that it was inevitable that some effect should have been felt right throughout. Accordingly, it is my hope, and also the hope of the Government, that this Bill will mark a turning point; that there will be a new hope and a new spark of life; that some of the unpleasant interludes and incidents which occurred in recent years will gradually be forgotten; that some confidence will be restored among the ranks all the way through; and that the administration will deserve, earn and receive the respect of the other units of the tremendous organisation.

Mr. Court: Can you indicate what the Government has in mind regarding the sole surviving commissioner?

**THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT:** I cannot at the present moment. All I can say, as an individual, is that I have felt a certain amount of personal satisfaction that Mr. Hall, whom I have met personally on a number of occasions, has been found to be, if not 100 per cent., then over 90 per cent. vindicated in connection with this whole unhappy affair.

Mr. Court: Is it intended that he will become the commissioner within the meaning of the new Act?

**THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT:** No decision has been made in that connection.

Mr. Court: Will it not be automatic?

**THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT:** Firstly, this legislation has to run the gauntlet of Parliament. I hazard a guess it will be passed in its present form, or in substantially the same form. I am not the Minister for Railways. To be perfectly frank, I have no idea of what he has in

mind, but I estimate that, whatever course he feels it is best to take, he will make a recommendation to Cabinet, and the Government will then investigate the matter and make its decision according to its very best judgment in the interests of the State.

I hope that what is to happen to somebody will not intrude itself into this debate. I consider that the whole question should be dealt with entirely impersonally. If and when something happens, or does not happen, or if members are in disagreement with what is taking place, they will have the right to express themselves as they wish. This is a matter of laying down a policy or course, not for a year or two in which the existing occupant holds office, but probably for very many years. I can say that in any event the Government will not be unfair to the remaining commissioner, but I cannot honestly give a direct reply as to whether he will be appointed as the proposed single commissioner, whether he will be offered some other position, or exactly what will happen. I would request again that we should forget about personalities on this measure and get down to the principles involved.

There is no need for me to say any more in submitting this Bill to the pleasure of this House. There will be an opportunity, after members have spoken and if there are particular matters exercising their minds, for me to reply at the conclusion of the debate. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Court, debate adjourned.

## ANNUAL ESTIMATES, 1957-58.

### *In Committee of Supply.*

Resumed from the 10th October, Mr. Sewell in the Chair.

*Vote—Public Works and Buildings, £1,169,080 (partly considered):*

**THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT:** I move—

That this Vote be postponed.

Mr. COURT: On a point of order, if it is postponed, will it automatically prevent members of the Committee from debating the Public Works and Buildings Vote?

The CHAIRMAN: No. It will be dealt with at the end of the Estimates.

Motion put and passed.

*Vote—State Housing Commission, £5:*

**THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING** (Hon. H. E. Graham—East Perth) [8.8]: On previous occasions I have made reference to the remarkable change in conditions. Only a few years ago the principal political question of the day was housing, whereas now it has receded very much into the background on account of the

substantially improved position generally, in respect of which it is recognised that Western Australia leads the rest of the Commonwealth.

In my view the activities of the State Housing Commission in Western Australia will recede still further. There is ample evidence to show that what in prewar years was regarded as normal house building activities is once again being restored and indeed being supplemented by other schemes. For instance, the State Housing Commission has the second mortgage scheme. Whilst it has an interest in the homes that are being built, the bulk of the finance is being found from orthodox private sources. Under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (No. 2) for the last two years 20 per cent. of the sum available to the State has been transferred to building societies.

In the three financial years commencing the 1st July next, 30 per cent. of the moneys which would have been available to the State will go to these building societies. What happens after that is, of course, in the hands of the Commonwealth. In other words, there appears to be a tapering off so far as the building activities of the State Housing Commission are concerned. In addition to that, as members are aware, there is on the notice paper a proposition to introduce a Bill which pertains to housing and which I hope to introduce on Tuesday next. That, too, will have the effect of making it possible for more people to attend to their own requirements from outside sources rather than through the Government.

Because of this trend the volume of houses produced by the State Housing Commission has been falling somewhat. I remember being exceedingly proud that in one year more than 4,000 homes were completed. The figure for the year 1956-57 is 1,762 under all headings. There is, however, an explanation due, because the fall is not entirely caused by a stoppage of the programme. There was considerable disputation between the Commonwealth and the States in connection with the No. 2 housing agreement. Indeed, I can say that so far as at least five of the six States were concerned, the agreement was forced on them and they did not want it.

Because of these disputations and uncertainties, it was late in the financial year before the State Housing Commission of Western Australia embarked on a building programme under that scheme. There are more houses under construction at the present time than was the position 12 months ago. In other words, there was some delayed action which was a little unfortunate owing to the fact that the building trade generally was suffering something in the nature of a recession

and that was aggravated by the delay in Commonwealth funds becoming available to us.

It is interesting to note that once again there are many people who are apparently finding no difficulty in locating alternative accommodation, because, for the financial year just concluded, no less than 1,357 tenants vacated their houses during that period.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: What period?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Twelve months. That is a tremendous turnover of tenants, indicating it is not nearly as difficult today as it was a few years ago to obtain alternative accommodation.

Mr. Heal: All types of housing?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: These are rental properties.

Mr. Heal: Only rental.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes. From memory, approximately 11,000 rental homes in the aggregate, which, of course, is quite a high percentage. In addition to the 1,357 persons who vacated, there were 934 families which rejected the offers made to them. Again, I speak with reference only to rental homes. That surely indicates that the stage has been reached where people can become choosy. If they do not like the particular design of a house or the exact locality of it, they are able to say, "No," and fend for themselves.

If there is a rejection without reasonable cause, the procedure at the State Housing Commission is that that person's application is put in cold storage for 12 months. Upon a second offer being made and again being rejected without good reason, then the person's application is cancelled. They are aware of that. It is pointed out to them, appears in writing and they sign as having received and understood that particular provision.

Perhaps I should mention that the Housing Commission in order to bring about these figures does not offer a person whose employment is, for example, in Fremantle, a home in Midland Junction. That, of course, would be silly in the first place, and the rejection would be quite reasonable in the second. Therefore the position in Western Australia is exceedingly satisfactory. It is not so that people are able to walk up to the counter and have handed to them the keys of a home immediately, although something very much akin to that will be taking place, it is anticipated, before the 30th June next.

In connection with war service homes, a larger allocation has been made available to Western Australia this year and there is not the bank up of applications that there was previously in this State, largely caused by the fact that we were required by the Commonwealth to adopt a go-slow policy to enable the other States of the Commonwealth to catch up with Western

Australia. Now, with the increased funds, it will be possible to give almost immediate attention to applicants who qualify for assistance under that scheme.

Mr. Heal: What is the approximate waiting time at the present moment?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: About 15 months in some cases and less in others, depending on the particular type of assistance they are seeking. Here are some figures which I feel would be interesting. Up to the 30th June last, the State Housing Commission had completed in this State 25,061 homes, made up of purchasers of war service homes 8,381; purchasers under the State Housing Act, 1970, purchasers under the Commonwealth-State agreement, 2,063, making a total of 13,214. The figure for rental homes is 11,847.

In addition, the State Housing Commission has rendered financial assistance to war service applicants which has enabled them to purchase 4,031 completed properties under the State Housing Act, and under second mortgage agreements, 380 cases have been assisted. In other words, 380 homes have been built as a consequence of that scheme; and the advances made to building societies have been responsible for the completion to date of 280 homes. That gives a grand total of 29,752 homes directly or indirectly built and purchased in Western Australia under various schemes administered by the State Housing Commission.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: Did you say, built and purchased?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Built and purchased by clients, yes. War service homes' applicants can purchase existing structures, but that is the only scheme under which that prevails. Of the total of 29,752, no less than 17,905 were home-ownership cases directly assisted by the State Housing Commission. In other words, more than 50 per cent. of the accommodation has been provided on that basis.

The building programme for this year will be slightly up in the matter of completions as against the previous year. The number of applications being received for homes is slightly less this financial year than in the previous year. Again, conforming with the trend, the majority of applicants are indicating that they prefer to purchase rather than rent homes under the various schemes operated by the commission.

The State Housing Commission, of course, is still the largest spending authority in State governmental activities, so far as capital moneys are concerned. It reached the stage of £10,000,000 to £12,000,000, and this financial year it will be within a few pounds of £8,000,000. This, of course, is terrific money. In postwar years the commission has spent the gigantic sum of £70,000,000 on housing in this State.

In this connection I make the observation that whilst housing was a top priority, and Governments gave it that order of priority, upon sober reflection now but without any regrets whatsoever because there is no doubt the people were in dire distress, I think we can say that perhaps too great a share of the moneys available to the State has been devoted to housing as against other requirements. But because of the burning social problem and the terrific impact upon the individual, especially the family man, it was necessary to attend to the matter.

The stage is now being reached, however—and I come back to my opening note—that we can rely more on the usual channels of finance and house construction and thereby relieve the Treasury of this burden, thus enabling it to proceed with schools, hospitals, water supplies, harbour development and such things which come, perhaps, more properly under government administration, particularly when funds are on the short side, which is the position at the moment.

Mr. Court: The question of emphasis on a particular item is a problem of government that is forever with you. You have to meet the situation as it arises. It could be housing one day, hospitals the next, and so on.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: That is so; but at the same time the school situation, for instance, was critical. It is still not 100 per cent. but it is immeasurably better than it was a few years ago; and a few more million pounds could have gone towards the erection of additional school buildings rather than on housing had the Government been so minded.

Hon. Sir Ross McLarty: And hospitals.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes, and indeed water supplies. I suppose country members would have liked the Government to press on more vigorously with the country water supplies scheme and the small independent ones. I am indicating that this was done because of the need, and there must, of necessity, be a tapering off.

At the peak, which was in 1955, more than 9,000 homes were completed in the calendar year in Western Australia. Yet the assessed demand on account of increasing population, and making due allowance for wastage—depreciation, demolitions, etc—was somewhere in the vicinity of 5,500. Obviously we cannot be building at a terrific pace to overtake the lag if the lag has been overtaken completely or substantially.

Another figure which might interest members is that concerning the amount of money flowing into the Housing Commission every week from those who are purchasing their homes and those who are

renting them—in other words, the regular instalments. About £70,000 a week, or just in excess of £3,500,000 a year is received from these sources.

It has been possible to do a little in connection with the McNess housing scheme, but unfortunately very little. The Treasurer has been making available a few thousand pounds which has made it possible for a few additional cottages to be erected for the indigent type of person for whom the scheme exists. Approaches have been made to the Commonwealth for the trust to be recognised as one of the bodies under which, for the aged homes scheme or whatever it is called, the Commonwealth now provides £2 for each £1 provided by the sponsor of the scheme.

Unfortunately the Commonwealth has said, "No." The McNess Housing Trust is out on some technicality or fine point in the Act. Requests have been made for the Act to be amended to allow a body such as the McNess Housing Trust to be admitted, but the answer is still in the negative. Therefore, far less is being done than would otherwise be the case.

Hon. A. F. Watts: About what is the rental paid now for a McNess home?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It is a maximum of 12s. 6d. a week. These little cottages or flats which are being erected, mostly for pensioner couples as tenants, are being built in the metropolitan area. The Lotteries Commission has evolved a scheme for the country districts under which, if there is a local committee, or the local authority, taking an interest in the matter, the commission will provide funds for the erection of cottages for pensioner couples and, indeed, for single pensioners in contradistinction to the policy in the metropolitan area where the Lotteries Commission gives no assistance whatsoever other than a small annual grant to the McNess Trust.

It is left to the local committee in the country to look after the premises, attend to the tenants as they go in and out, and so on. In this connection the State Housing Commission provides a free plan service, arranges for the calling of tenders, the acceptance and signing of contracts, the supervision of the building operations, and so on. This throws some responsibility on to the local people, and in quite a number of centres these little cottages have sprung up, and I think the scheme is working exceptionally well.

Mr. Court: Do I take it from what you said earlier that you cannot find ways of amending the McNess Trust so as to qualify for the Commonwealth homes for the aged subsidy?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: That is the position. Without having a copy of the Commonwealth statute before me I cannot quote its exact words, but they are to the effect that if the trustees or the

members of the authority seeking this financial aid from the Commonwealth are appointed by the Governor, whether via Commonwealth or State, they are excluded from consideration.

Mr. Court: Surely you could overcome that!

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It could be overcome by breaching the trust reposed in the Government of the day by the late Sir Charles McNess.

Mr. Court: There is no need to breach the trust, because you have Parliament to refer to.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: This is a Government responsibility; at all events we can go into the niceties of it on another occasion. It hardly makes commonsense that the Commonwealth would exclude an organisation such as the McNess Trust.

The only other question relates to building materials, as affecting housing. There are no shortages whatever of any of the components for the erection and completion to the finest detail of any home. There is no shortage of tradesmen in order to perform the necessary operations. It is true—it may be for only a short period—that there is some difficulty, for instance, with regard to plumbers.

The ups and downs that seem to affect the brickmaking industry—and this appears to be one of the ups—might also be mentioned. There is some difficulty in obtaining first-class bricks but there are still reasonably readily available other alternatives. There is no shortage of cement, but we need not proceed any further with that.

There are silica bricks which are a revived feature in this State, because there are buildings erected close to the heart of Perth 50 or more years ago and constructed of these sand-lime bricks. Those structures are as sound today as when they were built and one of them is to be seen—a two-storeyed structure—at the intersection of Queens Crescent and Beaufort-st., Mt. Lawley.

The building industry is a little healthier today than it was 12 months ago and I hope and trust there will be industrial activity, with new commercial buildings and a new structure for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and so on, in order to employ all the workers and restore some of the optimism that previously existed.

There is, however, this to be said; The—depression would be the wrong word—falling off in building activity has had its virtues, in that it has disposed of some building contractors who are better out of it and who probably should never have been building contractors, although anybody and everybody was used in the emergency. There were certain operatives, building tradesmen and unskilled workers

who were inferior, but it was a matter of all hands to the plough during the period of crisis, and when building activities slackened off, the weaker reeds, generally speaking, were the first to go. In addition, there was a pretty steep spiral, because of the pressure being placed on the building industry, in the matter of costs.

It is significant that, in the experience of the State Housing Commission, notwithstanding in some cases considerable increases in the cost of building materials—in other instances there have been falls—increases in the basic wage and in marginal adjustments, it is possible to erect a house cheaper today than was the case two or three years ago. I notice that joinery has risen by 10 per cent. as from last Monday, and I understand something has happened in connection with fibrous plasterboard; so it may be that there will be another upward trend. But as long as we have no unemployed, we can probably stand a little of that.

I am pleased that, generally speaking, I am able to address members in optimistic vein with regard to the housing situation; and housing, surely, is one of the prime requirements of any community. Anything ranging from broken homes to broken health, and even the introduction of undesirable "isms" can eventuate from unsatisfactory housing; and because of the general improvement, it is now possible to state that before Christmas of next year every single one of the several hundred emergency housing units that have been availed of by the Housing Commission over the past 10 years and more will be closed and, in the great majority of instances, demolished.

It is my hope and trust that there will never again be necessity for the expedients which, during the time they were there, were necessary; but which, nevertheless, have proved to be to the credit of no Government, irrespective of political colour.

Dealing now with forestry activities, I wish to inform members that during the past three years there has been an addition to our State forest area of more than 500,000 acres. That may indicate that there has been a forest-minded Minister in charge during that period, although perhaps I should put that in the question-mark category.

It is expected that within the next 12 months or so about one-third of a million acres more will be added to our forest estate. I do not think this is the time or the place to deliver an address regarding the value, both short and long-term, of our forestry and timber resources, as so much, directly or indirectly, can be affected by what we do with our land in the matter of clearing. Ultimately the population density of the State will be governed by the amount of fresh and potable water available.

Mr. Court: Are the areas that you have set aside and those you propose to set aside composed of land for the creation of forests or mainly existing forest?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Mainly existing forest, in the far South-West and to the extreme South-West of the existing forest area. A great deal of it is land entirely virgin, which has never been explored, although something is known of it through aerial photographs taken in recent years. Unfortunately a great deal of it has been devastated by uncontrolled fires.

Mr. Wild: Is it mostly karri?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: A great deal of it is karri, together with some lesser known and less popular timbers, but there is also a considerable volume of jarrah. It is remarkable just how much can be observed from aerial photographs. For those who are particularly interested, there is a handbook on forestry which was revised and recently issued—I think in the past couple of weeks—and in that there is an aerial picture. From that picture have been identified all sorts of things, including the natural features, the types of timber, the volume of timber, what has occurred to it—such as fires having passed through—where the area has been cleared and grown up again after many years, and so on. All that can be identified, delineated and assessed with an amazing degree of accuracy, without a human foot being set within the area.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition generally displays some interest in pine plantations. The programme for this year envisages the planting of about 2,600 acres of pines and the preparation of about 4,000 acres, some of which will be used and some of which will be made ready for the succeeding year. Land is being purchased for pine planting, in addition to land in the Forests Department's estates; and it is expected that somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 acres will be purchased during the current year. A great deal of it will be adjacent to existing pine plantations, or areas that were set aside for plantations in recent years; and it will be more or less filling in the gaps and generally consolidating areas.

I have mentioned before that it is amazing the number of highly successful business transactions that the Forests Department has arranged. It will take over some private property on which there is a greater value in the royalty of the timber than in the price paid for the land. In many cases a great deal of it is cleared land almost already prepared for the planting of pines, and the work is done free of charge so far as the department is concerned. But on the balance of the land there is more than sufficient, by way of royalty on the timber, to pay the full purchase price, quite apart from the



clearing and other expenditure involved. That is good business and without any question the State will reap tremendous rewards because of the department's foresight.

But as I have mentioned on other occasions, because we have such short lives as human beings, and shorter lives still as members of Parliament, we are more than inclined to concentrate on a crop that is reaped every year, and we are a little impatient about taking steps in connection with a crop that will be reaped, in the case of pines, in 30 or 40 years' time or, in the case of our native timbers, somewhere in the vicinity of 100 years, depending on the species and a number of other factors.

It is encouraging that recently feelers have been put out from a number of quarters regarding the establishment of industries of some magnitude, based upon our forest wealth. In this regard virtually all that would be used would be the waste from timber recovered in the ordinary way for commercial purposes, and native timbers for which there is virtually no sale at present.

In other words, it would make a more complete economic unit of our forestry activities if only we could clinch one or another of these deals with people who are interesting themselves in it. I might mention that the Conservator of Forests has been most active in this connection, ranging from Japan to India, Singapore, the Eastern States and so on. He seems quite optimistic that there is every prospect of something really worth while being attracted to Western Australia.

Mr. Court: Is that in the nature of hardboard or some synthetic industry?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It could even be in relation to paper, in one particular case. I think members opposite could perhaps give a helping hand in connection with the steel industry which would have a considerable effect upon the use to which our timber resources are put. That is all I wish to state at present, but no doubt there will be some debate as we proceed.

MR. WILD (Dale) [8.46]: I wish to make just a few observations on the activities of the State Housing Commission and also as regards the Forests Department. In perusing the Estimates, particularly after listening to the Minister's remarks about the decreased activity on the building side, I would like him, when he replies, to indicate why the number of works supervisors is reduced by only one for this year, and the temporary assistants have increased from 182 to 183; while the number of clerks—160—remains the same. I appreciate that the commission is still responsible for many hundreds of houses; but, as the Minister told us this evening, the commission has been quitting

a considerable number of them under the Workers' Homes Act. Therefore there must be a lesser number of houses for which it will be responsible this year; and there is also the decreased activity in regard to the building of houses.

I think the Minister said that last year only 1,760 houses were completed as against approximately 4,000 in the record year of two or three years ago. It would seem to me that there is not the necessity for the same number of supervisors and architects, draftsmen and other people as was required to cope with that particular effort two or three years ago. However, there may be some answer which the Minister will be able to give us.

While I was with the State Housing Commission I had many discussions with the chairman about the question of rent collection for Commonwealth-State rental homes. I understand that a fleet of men go out daily to the various suburbs to collect rents. I realise, of course, that there are some advantages in that system. When I asked about it I was always told that one of the big advantages was that when a rent collector went to a house he was able to confront the tenant and possibly have more chance of getting the rent. In addition, if anything was wrong with the maintenance, he would be on the spot and would be able to deal with any problems that might arise.

As regards the payment of rent for war service homes, the people have to come either to the State Housing Commission or, if they live in the country they have to send it by post. So I see no reason why the same condition should not apply to the tenants of Commonwealth-State rental homes. That would allow some reduction in staff; although I recognise that if that number of people had to pay their rent at the State Housing Commission, the commission would need extra counter staff to cope with them. I think it is something that could be looked into, and there would be a considerable saving.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: It could keep a skeleton staff.

Mr. WILD: Yes. Another point I would like the Minister to clear up is the question of money coming from the Commonwealth under the Commonwealth-State rental agreement No. 2 to which the Minister referred—money which is allocated to building societies. I understood that this money was only to be given to what we have all known as building societies—co-operative concerns such as the Perth Building Society. Yet I understand that during the past 12 months there have been at least two cases, of which I have knowledge, where outside private concerns have received money from this source; and they are people in the building game purely for a profit. I have no doubt that the Minister will be able to clear that point up.

One other observation I wish to make is in connection with the Austrian and Simscreek houses on which the Government is still paying a subsidy to the tune of about £20,000 a year. I know that this matter of the Austrian and Simscreek houses was bandied about this House at great length some years ago, but I do not think anyone would deny that they were bought in an endeavour to overcome the grave housing shortage at the time.

Nearly all other Governments in Australia—as did Western Australia—procured some of these houses. Our purchases ran into some 1,000 Austrian houses and 200 or 300 Simscreek houses. When these houses were brought here rents were higher than the rent of the average home that was being built in the State. But I think it is an unfair charge on the taxpayer for the Government to go on paying year after year and subsidising these houses to the tune of £20,000 a year.

I would now like to turn to the question of forests. I am particularly interested in the forestry situation in Western Australia and also in the matter of softwoods. My memory takes me back to South Australia where many years ago there was a very prominent member of Parliament who in the early twenties lost his seat in Parliament—if my memory serves me right—because of his advocacy of and the fact that he was more or less instrumental in bringing about the establishment of pine forests in the Mt. Gambier and Mt. Burr districts in the South-East. There was a considerable amount of controversy about it, and people condemned the project from one end of the State to the other. It is an amazing thing, however, to see at Mt. Gambier, Mt. Burr or at Narracorte the results of one man's vision; the mills there are in full production and, indeed, they are overproducing and cannot get rid of their pine timber.

I think that we have been a little insular in our outlook in relation to timber. We have been brought up to feel that the only good timber is jarrah. We all know that it is a good timber; that it is one of the best timbers in the world; and that many countries requiring hardwood would sooner have jarrah than any other timber. But we have a limited quantity; and during the years when the demand for housing and building of all types was at its highest—some four or five years ago—I well remember that we were cutting something like 900,000 loads in the round, which was considered to be excessive; and it was felt that we could not continue to denude our forests at that rate. Indeed, it is on record somewhere in this House that the then Conservator of Forests said that this would be fatal.

We are possibly not denuding our forests at that rate today due to the decrease in the building programme; but, on the other hand, we are an increasing population. At the moment there might be a slight re-

cession, as it were, in the bringing of migrants to Western Australia, but it is only a temporary phase and, without doubt, within 10 to 15 years we will have hundreds of thousands more people in Western Australia than there are at the present moment. All of them, of course, will require homes and some place to work, which means that there must be a gradual increase in the building activity in this State; and, as a result, a greater demand for our timber.

If we were to push on with our pine forest programme to the utmost limits of our finances, I feel certain that posterity would say, "Thank goodness we had some men of vision in the early 1950's who saw fit to provide for this eventuality, and recognised the necessity for planting as much pine as they could!" There are very few of us in Western Australia who realise that 1,000 acres of pine in a matter of 50 years will produce more timber than the largest mill in Western Australia could handle. That might sound a tall order; but I feel sure that the Minister for Forests will recognise that to be correct in view of this previous position for many years in the Forests Department.

As I have said, it might sound a tall order; but if one goes over to Mt. Gambier—and I have had the opportunity of going through their forests on two or three occasions—one soon sees the tremendous possibilities attendant on such a scheme. The Conservator of Forests there—Mr. Bednell—assured me that if farmers had planted 1,000 acres of pine instead of leaving vacant land to their sons, they would have left something for their families in perpetuity which would have produced more timber annually than any mill in Western Australia could handle.

As members know, the biggest mills we have here will turn out 50 loads in the square, and I think the Minister for Agriculture will agree that that is probably the maximum output that we could get. It is something to which we should devote our utmost energies; we should plant as much pine as we possibly can.

In addition to the planting of pine, as the Minister for Forests said, there is always the opportunity of being able to establish industries in that pine country. Here again I must refer to South Australia. From the pine forests in the south-east of South Australia there is not one square inch of the tree that is wasted—not as occurs in our mills in this State where unfortunately big fires have to be lit to burn the mill ends, and when the trees are lopped the branches lie on the ground to provide food for fires at some future date.

In the pine mills in South Australia they are able to use every square inch of the pine tree. Not only are the loppings used, but sub-contractors take away the small

timber year after year as the trees are pruned; and then it finally goes into the mill; and that which is not large enough goes into the pulping plant. After this process some of it finds its way to Western Australia and is used for totalisator tickets on the trotting courses and racecourses of this State. As a Parliament we should see that we plant as much pine as we possibly can for the future good of Western Australia.

I would like the Minister to examine this proposition. The people in this State should be educated to the use of timber other than hardwood, because there is a limited supply of the latter. The day will come when the supply will be very short, and it was only about four years ago when a great demand for timber existed in this State and the State Housing Commission permitted its contractors to use karri timber for the roof.

Yet seven or eight years ago, if anyone had suggested the use of karri for house building, he would have been ridiculed. At that time, due to the shortage of jarrah, the commission permitted its contractors to use karri in the roof. The same thing applied to flooring. It took some time and effort to convince the commission before it agreed to the use of pine as flooring.

If one were to make a tour of the South-West one would find many houses built of karri timber. These were built many years ago. As long as proper white ant prevention methods are undertaken, that timber will be just as serviceable as any other timber found in this State. Unfortunately there is a prejudice against the use of pine, quite often resulting from the poor quality available here.

Recently I visited the high school at Armadale and went into the wood-working section. I was shown a sample of the pine wood that is supplied to the students. It was very poor in quality. In order to educate the youth of this State to the suitability and the advantages of pine wood, and because in future they will have to use it for building purposes, good quality pine wood should be provided at the wood-working classes.

I do not know the arrangements made for the supply of pine wood to schools. I do not know whether the Education Department gets it gratis; but I do know that the pine used by the students is very poor in quality, so much so that they are likely to be put off pine for all time. Some of the children at these classes will become the wood tradesmen of tomorrow, and they should be given good quality pine which is easy to work so that the idea will be inculcated into them that pine is a suitable timber and can satisfactorily take its place side by side with the jarrah timber of this State.

Mr. Potter: Would you advocate the encouragement of pine planting round paddocks on farms?

Mr. WILD: I definitely do. As a result of my visit to South Australia and the many conversations I had with the officer concerned with pine planting, I am perfectly satisfied that one of the finest forms of investment on farming property is the planting of pines, although it will take about 40 to 50 years before any return can be expected. Even so, such an investment is very sound, and can be compared very favourably with the return from wool, which has been selling at astronomical prices.

I refer to one other point: the vacant land held by the Forests Department—land which is unsuitable for tree-planting purposes. During this session of Parliament I had occasion, during a deputation from the Kelmscott-Armadale Road Board to raise the question of the extraction of gravel from forestry reserves.

There is one such block between Armadale and Byford which, unless I am a very poor judge, will not grow anything at all. I do not know why that block was ever declared to be a forest reserve. It is between 15 and 20 acres in area, and on it will be found no more than 25 trees. When the local authority wanted to obtain a licence to take gravel from that block for road-making purposes, it was told that it was a forestry reserve and the policy is to preserve such land. It is a very short-sighted policy. I am sure that if the Minister were to examine this land he would agree that it was completely useless for tree-growing purposes, and that it would be more advantageous to hand it over to the local authority.

MR. HALL (Albany) [9.51]: I was very interested to hear the Minister comment that it would be possible for an industry to be established in forestry areas. I would like to draw attention to the fact that I recently visited the Eastern States with a view to interesting an industry to establish itself in the Albany region. I approached the Australian Paper Pulp Manufacturers. We all realise that paper pulp can be manufactured from the off-cuts of karri timber, and also from the secondary growth of karri, which is very prevalent in the South-West districts.

To substantiate what I put forward, that company sent an inspector to this State to look at the area I had in mind for the establishment of a paper pulp manufacturing plant. If that eventuates, the factory will work 24 hours a day, and roughly £7,000,000 in capital will be invested in this State. There is a ready market for any paper pulp we can manufacture. Everything that can be produced can be sold without trouble to Japan. One of the conditions appertaining to the manufacture of paper pulp is an abundance of labour and unlimited supplies of water.

If this proposition were examined very carefully, and if it bore fruit, the State would benefit to a great degree. With the

timber growth in our forests, such an industry could become very successful. I was pleased to hear the Minister intimating that such an idea had been in his mind.

Regarding the planting of pines in paddocks, referred to by the member for Subiaco, whilst it may be a good idea to prevent soil erosion and to supplement the revenue of farmers, perhaps the Forests Department could look around the sandhills of Albany and the surrounding districts with a view to pine planting. There is an abundance of good soil in that area for the growth of pine. Before urging the planting of pines on farms, which come under the field of agriculture, we should make use of some of the waste land in this State for that purpose.

I agree with the member for Dale that land is sometimes unnecessarily tied up by the Forests Department. Some land in agricultural districts is reserved for the purpose of supplying firewood. The royalty from firewood in these agricultural blocks will be nowhere near as great as the return to be derived from wool.

Mr. I. W. Manning drew attention to the state of the Committee.

Bells rung and a quorum formed.

Mr. HALL: I am glad, Mr. Chairman, you have been able to muster an audience. I was talking of land reserved in agricultural areas for such purpose as the provision of firewood. Although we need firewood, we have services such as electricity and gas, and there is firewood in abundance. Therefore, we should not restrict agricultural growth by trying to reserve this land for a few loads of firewood. I have no more to say, but would like the Minister to take action in that regard.

MR. HEAL (West Perth) [9.10]: I intend to be brief but desire to say a few words concerning housing. Like the Minister, I agree that the housing position, especially in the metropolitan area, has been improved over the last few years, and we have now reached a stage where the leeway has been overtaken.

In my short term as member for West Perth, my greatest problem in that area has been that of housing, due no doubt to West Perth becoming highly industrialised and also to the business area of the city extending to the west.

It is pleasing to see that people evicted from their homes in the metropolitan area were found temporary accommodation in every case. However, I do view with a certain amount of alarm the statement of the Minister that during the last 12 months 1,300 people have vacated State Housing Commission homes. I presume that they were mostly rental homes. I ask the Minister what will be the situation in a few years' time, when the housing position in

this State has been stabilised, if there are approximately 1,300 homes vacated on the rental side?

Will he find that the State Housing Commission has 1,000 or 2,000 homes without tenants; and will it have to advertise in the Press day by day and week by week, calling applications from people to take over these houses? No doubt the Minister and the officials of the State Housing Commission have this matter in hand. However, I impress upon them the need to look into it, because in a few years it could be a big problem. It is good to see the State Housing Commission is telling people that the best way to enter into an agreement is on a freehold basis and I sincerely hope that that policy will be maintained.

By interjection I asked the Minister what was the approximate lag at the present time for the allocation of a war service home or a war service loan. The Minister replied that it was approximately 15 months. Later on in his speech I think he said that during 1958 a person eligible for assistance under the war service scheme will be able to walk into the Commission's office, more or less, and be given assistance at a few weeks' notice. That will be a great thing for the ex-servicemen of Western Australia, and I will be most happy when that situation comes about.

During the last few years, mainly in 1953 and 1954, the housing position in Western Australia was a grave social problem; and I do commend the Government, through the Minister, for the action it has taken to overcome this. I think I would be right in saying that it is still a small social problem in the lives of some of our people, but I do not think it would be a good thing for the State if people could go to the Housing Commission, make application for a home and have it granted within two or three weeks. That would mean that the Housing Commission would have to have hundreds of vacated houses on its lists and it would be a drag on the expenses of the commission. Once again, I commend the commission for the efforts it has made in the past three or four years.

MR. OWEN (Darling Range) [9.16]: I wish to make a few observations mainly in connection with forestry, first of all touching on our natural forests, jarrah and karri. The Minister told us that these species, if planted now, would probably take 100 years to reach a stage where a great return could be expected. I agree it is a long-term project to plant either jarrah or karri.

I have been interested to see the activities of the Forests Department in my electorate and the neighbouring electorate. It seems to me that there must be some change in the outlook of the Forests Department in regard to reafforestation of our jarrah forests. I know that in the main forest areas it is the policy of the

department to cut only millable timber at periods when it is felt that it is economic to go through and fell the trees and clean up as far as possible by burning the debris in the off season; and the remaining trees form a canopy which encourages young saplings and regrowth.

That seems to have been the practice over the years; but during the last 12 months I have noticed in the immediate vicinity of the Great Eastern Highway, some 35 to 40 miles from Perth, there is a strip of land being almost denuded of natural timber. I thought that perhaps the Forests Department was intending to plant pine trees to give our tourists and visitors to that part of the State some idea of what pines can be grown there; but the Minister told me, in answer to questions, that it was to be used for reforestation purposes.

I was wondering whether it was just an experiment, or whether it has been shown that clear felling gives a quicker return from the sapling growth than under the old method of keeping a canopy of jarrah and red gum in the forest.

Over 50 years ago, in some of the areas immediately surrounding Mundaring Weir, huge areas were ringbarked to increase the run-off to the weir; but later on, it was left more or less to regenerate naturally. The regrowth there, I feel, must have been disappointing to the foresters, because in the main it was red gum or marri sapling regrowth; and where the jarrah saplings and jarrah regrowth predominated, the growth must be most disappointing.

There are still many areas where the trees or saplings are only 30ft. or 40ft. high and have not assumed worth-while proportions at all. I was wondering whether the Minister could give us any information as to the expectations of rapid regrowth in those areas on each side of the Great Eastern Highway.

Just recently I had the pleasure of visiting some of the older pine plantations near Mundaring Weir, in company with forestry officers and a delegation from the Victorian parliamentary party. We inspected these areas that are now almost in the last cut. The pine forests in the Graystone area were planted over 30 years ago; and they have given a good yield, many of the trees being 150ft. high, with a diameter approaching 2ft. The logs recovered from there are mainly for use as peeler logs, and they are very good. This shows what can be done on naturally rich soils which are suitable for pine planting.

I was also pleased to see that the Forests Department has undertaken the clearing of the natural bush along some of the richer gullies, presumably with the idea of planting the pines. Here again I was wondering what the economics would be, because the initial cost of clearing by bulldozing this heavily timbered country—the timber

consists mainly of blackbutt, red gum, swamp banksia and scrub, which are of no great economic importance—must be high. I was wondering what the economic return would be over the life of a pine plantation of 30 or 40 years. This is of particular interest, because I have been informed that there is no great demand for that pine timber.

Only recently I was told that orders for the pine which is cut on the Mundaring catchment area have fallen off considerably. At the moment there are huge stacks of pines being seasoned in baulk form. Perhaps the position has been aggravated by the necessity to cut over some of the metropolitan pine plantations which were severely damaged by fire last summer. Whether that is the case, or not, I would like the Minister to inform me whether it is a fact that there has been a falling off in the demand for the pine timber which has been cut, particularly in the Mundaring area.

I would like to touch on the by-products of our forests and to mention the possibility of encouraging some company or enterprise to undertake the development of our timber wastes. The Minister mentioned the recovery of timber waste for the purpose of paper and craftboard. The member for Albany also touched on the subject.

In the Eastern States there has been a lot of activity by the Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd. in manufacturing craftboard and making it up into cartons for the packaging of many of our food-stuffs. This company, particularly in the last year or two, has been trying to encourage fruit growers to use these cartons for the packaging of fruit, particularly apples and citrus, both for the local market and for export overseas.

Whilst in Western Australia most of our fruit-growing areas are in the heavily timbered country where the local product has been the jarrah fruit case, with the advent of the Geraldton tomato plantations and a certain amount of citrus in the Carnarvon district, there will be a need for fruit cases in those areas, and it would be economically possible, I feel, to use much more of the carton type of container in those districts than in the timber areas of the South-West.

Some six months ago while in Queensland I had the opportunity of visiting the Gayndah fruit-growing area some 250 miles north of Brisbane. It was shown to me there that the craftboard carton put up by the Australian Paper Manufacturers was an economic proposition. Although the initial cost on rail at the Gayndah siding was a little more than for the timber case, it was explained to me that the cost of making up the craftboard carton was much less, because it was only a matter of unfolding the carton, straightening it out,

putting it over a former, and then applying the glue to the carton and folding the bottom of it over. A small type of machine has been developed to hold the case while the glue is setting.

I was told that one good active worker could make up 100 of these cartons per hour; whereas with the usual timber case a worker was fortunate if he could make up 40 per hour. So the cost of making up the article was much less with the carton than with the timber case. Also the usual stencilling that has to be done on the timber case can be stamped on the cardboard carton at the factory where it is made. Indeed, the initial cost of the carton includes the cost of stamping on it the type and size of the fruit, the name of the grower, and the destination of the fruit. So the grower is relieved of more cost at that stage.

The nailing up or closing down was a cheaper process, too; but to my mind the biggest saving, particularly in the areas remote from a market—and the Gayndah fruit was making its way to the Sydney market—was on the freight because the freight cost was in the vicinity of 7s. 4d. per bushel case. This was worked out on the ton rate by rail. From memory the timber case filled with fruit went 37 to the ton whereas the cardboard carton went 43 or 44 to the ton, so that the saving in freight was something like 7d. or 8d. per bushel.

So to the grower, although he paid a higher price for the carton as against the case, the difference was more than made up by the time he got the full bushel of fruit in the carton to market, as it was cheaper to land on the Sydney market than was the timber case. The cardboard carton has great possibilities for use in places where fruit, tomatoes and so on are grown, remote from centres where timber cases are produced.

The manufacture of the cardboard requires mainly waste timber, and I think there would be a great opportunity there if the Minister or the Government could induce A.P.M. to start a factory here. It would put the fruit-case mills on their toes and the competition would result in good service. The manufacture of cartons in this State would be of great service to Geraldton and Carnarvon areas and it would mean the establishment of a valuable secondary industry here. I hope that A.P.M. can be induced to set up business in Western Australia.

**MR. ROBERTS (Bunbury)** [9.32]: I am disappointed that I was not here when the Minister introduced his Estimates; but having been called to the telephone, I missed the first portion of his speech. There is no question that since 1946 the State Housing Commission has done a remarkable job.

The Minister for Lands: Especially in the last four years.

Mr. Court: Be a bit generous.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Don't be so one-eyed.

Mr. ROBERTS: It has done a remarkable job in the last 10 years. I think the Minister indicated that there has been an easing in the housing shortage throughout the State in the last 12 months; but there is definitely an acute shortage of houses still in the Bunbury electorate. Granted that for many years under the Commonwealth-State Rental Homes Act, the State Housing Act and the War Service Homes Act, many homes have been built in Bunbury; but the position there remains as acute today as it was two or three years ago.

The Minister will recall that on the 25th July last I asked a question as to how many houses had been built within the boundaries of the municipality of Bunbury in the year ended the 30th June, 1957, under each of the various schemes, and how many applications for homes were outstanding at that time. In answer, the Minister intimated that the houses built there under the Commonwealth-State rental homes scheme for that period numbered 49 and the outstanding applications numbered 156. War service homes to be built were 13, and outstanding applications numbered 12.

Homes under the State Housing Act to be built numbered 32 and outstanding applications 56, making a total of 94 homes to be built for that year under each of the schemes, and in addition 59 homes were commenced prior to 1957 but not then completed. Outstanding applications, however, numbered 234; so I trust that the Minister will reconsider his decision and allocate a greater number of homes to Bunbury.

From further questions asked of the Minister, it appears that in 1956 under all those schemes there were 94 homes to be built in Bunbury; and in the financial year 1957-58, only 51. I am certain that the Minister appreciates the shortage of housing in Bunbury, but I think he should give consideration to a greater allocation to that centre.

The Minister for Lands: And give less to Manjimup or somewhere else?

Mr. ROBERTS: Not necessarily. The overall State figure, as the Minister knows, was well down last year in regard to the number of homes built. I am not trying to deprive any other centre of homes but to secure a greater allocation for my electorate. As the Minister knows, under the Commonwealth-State housing scheme at present they are only processing applications submitted in about May, 1955, as far as Bunbury is concerned.

The Minister for Lands: Wouldn't the Minister have to get more money from somewhere in order to build more homes?

Mr. ROBERTS: It is up to the Minister to state that, when replying. I have the greatest admiration for members of the State Housing Commission, because they have co-operated to the full. The Minister, 12 or 15 months ago, set up in Bunbury a section of the State Housing Commission; and I compliment him on his choice of officers for that centre, because they are extremely conscientious, as regards both the field and inside staff.

There are one or two points in reference to this State on which I would like some clarification. When examining the Auditor General's report for the financial year ended the 30th June, 1957, I noticed, on page 215, under the heading of "Employment of Funds" for evictee flats, an item of £116,072. For the year ended the 30th June, 1956, the depreciation on that figure was £66,333, and this year it is £108,334. I would like the Minister, when replying, to explain that to the Committee.

Under the heading "Current Assets" on the same page, for the year ended the 30th June, 1956, and under an item headed "Group Houses," the amount shown is £365,160; but this year there is no mention of that figure.

There is one other item I would like the Minister to clarify, if possible, and I refer to page 217 of the Auditor General's report. For the year ended the 30th June, 1956, the loss on the army huts scheme was £64,548, and for the last financial year the loss was £97,341.

Prior to the 1956-57 period the total loss on army huts and evictee flats was £300,635; and during the period 1956-57, the total loss on both army huts and evictee flats was £97,341. It seems to me that that is a very big increase; but no doubt the Minister has some information which will clarify the position. If it is too late this financial year I suggest to the Minister for Housing, in all sincerity, that during the next financial year he make available a greater allocation of homes for the Municipality of Bunbury.

MR. COURT (Nedlands) [9.42]: I have several queries of a specific nature in connection with some of the matters covered by the vote, but I think it would be easier to leave them until we deal with the items. As regards items of a general nature, I would like to hear the Minister comment, firstly, in regard to the general outlook on the administration of the State Housing Commission; secondly, on the condition of maintenance in respect to commission homes; and, thirdly, the location in general terms of the shortages and surpluses of commission homes.

Dealing with the question of administration, the Minister explained tonight that the back of the housing problem has

been broken. While there is still much to be done, and the turnover of the State Housing Commission is still very considerable, it appears to me that there should be some progressive reduction in the costs of the administration of the scheme. There may be some explanation, but the Estimates do not indicate that there is any suggestion of a reduction; on the contrary, there is the suggestion of an increase in the costs of administration and the general operation of the scheme for the ensuing year.

The maintenance of homes is in itself a major problem, and it will increase as commission homes get older. Many of them are of such a type of construction that after 10, 15 or 20 years of use maintenance costs will be extremely heavy, and unless the commission keeps on top of the problem it will get to unmanageable proportions, both in regard to cost and manpower. If the Minister can give us some indication of just how the maintenance situation stands in the overall problem of State Housing Commission homes, it will be of importance in this debate.

I raise the question of the location of surpluses and deficiencies not by way of criticism but because I want to make myself better informed. I can understand that at no point of time can the commission, no matter how good its administration may be, expect to have a complete balance in the location of its houses. Populations move because of changes in industry, work projects, and for other reasons. At certain places, at certain times, we will find temporary or permanent surpluses, according to circumstances; and in other places we find temporary shortages. For instance, we could have a shortage in the town of Albany and a surplus in Northam, Collie or some other place. It would be of interest to me, and I am sure it would be of interest to the Committee, if the Minister could indicate where the problems are, both as regards surpluses and deficiencies in housing.

On the forestry side the points on which I would like information at this stage are firstly, on the marketing problem of softwoods; and, secondly, on the ever-present conflict between the demands for agriculture and the demands for forestry. If I read the figures aright, the department is expecting to make a considerable surplus on the marketing of pines; and, in fact, on the marketing of hardwoods. The figures, as I interpret them from the estimates, are as follows:—Pine conversion costs are estimated to be £78,420, and the revenue from conversion £125,000, leaving a surplus of £46,580. On the hardwood side, the costs of conversion are shown as £74,100, and the revenue from conversion £93,500, or a surplus of £19,400.

It is impossible to interpret from those figures whether that is true profit from the conversion of pines and the conversion of hardwood, or whether it is only the gross

profit from which has to be deducted some of the very considerable expenses of the Forests Department.

The member for Darling Range also touched on the problems of marketing; and I would appreciate hearing from the Minister whether the department is able to dispose of all the timber that is available at present—I refer specifically to the thinnings, and timber from the more mature pine forests. If the department is having difficulty with marketing at the moment, it is important that the Government should give some attention to the long-term problem of marketing pine forests as they become mature, and as they become more prolific in available output.

From what the member for Darling Range said tonight there appears to be some surplus in one area, to which he referred; and that might be more apparent than real. It might be just a transitory stage, because it is realised that the department cannot vary the cut exactly to the demand of the buying public.

The Minister for Housing: I think he supplied the answer. In connection with the burning of the metropolitan plantations it was necessary to dispose of them rapidly and hence there is some interruption of the normal operations.

Mr. COURT: I am particularly interested in the greater problem, because there are ever-increasing acreages being planted; and in turn there will be ever-increasing acreages for cutting. One does not cut forests for fun, but for use and sale.

The last point I mentioned was the question of the ever-present conflict between the requirements of agriculture and those of forestry. This matter is a burning question in various parts of the State. On the one hand we have the factions that say, "Let the future take care of itself. We will rely on concrete and bricks and steel for construction." They are inclined to brush the history of timber aside. As the Minister well knows it is a history of ever-increasing demand of timber throughout the world. Predictions have been made that with the advent of steel and aluminium and other metals, timber will become unimportant; but we know that the reverse is the case, and that we will need timber and the other metals to keep up with our demands.

The Minister for Housing: It is increasing per capita.

Mr. COURT: It is happening on a world-wide basis, and we will have to look at the matter more from that angle.

The Minister for Housing: We will have to look at it on an interplanetary basis.

Mr. COURT: We will leave that to the next generation so far as timber supplies to the moon are concerned. The belief that excessive areas are being set aside

warrants examination. If, as the member for Dale suggested, some forestry areas have outlived their usefulness, it is only commonsense to release them as soon as possible. If, also, forestry reserves have no forestry potential, then they too should be released as quickly as possible particularly if they could be put to better use for agricultural purposes.

We know that in the South-West there is an ever-increasing population, and there will be an ever-increasing demand for agricultural land. That is where the great reserves have been made. This can be seen from figures that the Minister quoted tonight, when he said that the greater proportion of this 500,000 acres which has been set aside had come from the lower South-West. We are experiencing an ever-increasing pressure from some of these parts for, what they term, a more realistic attitude towards land which should be made available for agriculture, though that realism referred to could be wrongly based. When the Minister replies, I would like him to tell us whether his department works in close consultation with the Department of Agriculture, and whether this particular subject is kept constantly under review.

I cannot imagine that it is a static subject that can be decided upon today and ignored for all time, and I would appreciate some information as to whether there has been constant consultation, and whether there has been in operation, in say the last three or four years in the areas set aside—or proposed to be set aside—for forestry a plan for a rearrangement to meet the demand for agricultural land.

MR. I. W. MANNING (Harvey) [9.55]: I would like to make a few comments on forestry matters; and in particular I wish to touch on the ever-increasing demand for more land, particularly in the South-West adjacent to the closely-settled areas. There is a desire on the part of many people to push up the gullies into forestry land and many applications have been made to the Forests Department for land in these areas; and, of course, these have come to the notice of the members representing those particular areas.

I also believe that this is a question that needs a good deal of consideration, and very close watching. I wholeheartedly agree with the Minister, and the member for Dale, that there is a need for us to preserve our jarrah forests and also for us to increase the area planted with pines—particularly the area planted with pinus radiata, which will only grow in the better types of clay. In recent years the department has bought many acres of land suitable for growing pinus radiata, while it already holds many thousands of acres of country which is most suitable for growing this type of pine.



A large area of these forests is being affected by dieback; and this trouble is becoming more noticeable, and more extensive. I would suggest to the Forests Department that it give some consideration to either releasing this land for agriculture or to planting it with pines. Apparently the department believes that by reforestation it could get this dieback country to grow jarrah again, but that seems a very long and slow process to me.

I think the Forests Department would do well to give consideration to releasing some of this land for agricultural purposes; or, alternatively, that it should plant pines on that land rather than go out and buy more land for that purpose. Most of the poorer types of pines are grown in sandy country. For example, there is the *pinus pinaster* which is a slow grower, and a poorer type of tree.

The *pinus radiata*, on the other hand, grows best near Mundaring Weir and Harvey Weir, and most of our forestry country is suitable to the growing of this type of pine. If the Forests Department wishes to increase its acreages of the better type of pine and has to do it by purchasing land, then close attention should be given to that type of country which is not suitable for the growing of pine. I refer to the dam-gully land which is not suitable for jarrah, and will not grow pine, though in some cases it will grow blackbutt. It is, however generally swampy country and is suitable for agriculture.

The department seems to have the idea that it does not like settlers pushing into the forests because of the fire hazard difficulties, and the difficulties connected with their fire breaks. I cannot subscribe to that view; but I should think that with the clearing that settlers would do, and with the development that would take place, it would be more likely to provide a fire protection to the regions of the forest in their vicinity.

Accordingly I urge the Minister that, if it is desirable to purchase more land for forestry purposes, the department should look closely at the many hundreds of acres of land it is already holding, in order to see if it cannot put these to the best use possible; because at the moment I do not think this is being done. When there is such a pressing demand for land, particularly adjacent to closely-settled areas, it warrants the closest of attention by the Minister in charge of the department.

**THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING (Hon. H. E. Graham—East Perth—in reply)** [10.1]: Very many points have been raised in connection both with housing and with forests. I fear we would remain as a Committee a great deal longer than is the wish of the majority of members if I were to reply to each point in the manner that it deserves.

In regard to the question of administration referred to by the member for Dale and the member for Nedlands, the position is that at present more attention is given to individual requirements. Far more people are building houses on their own blocks in accordance with their own plans and designs. Homes are built of materials of the applicants' own choosing. Even during the progress of building activities, departures from plans can be made, by way of installations, etc. All this takes up more time in administration. It is good to see that trend. There is nothing to fear in regard to administration.

Over recent years the commission has been building almost as many houses as New South Wales. On the last occasion when I made inquiry, I found there was a staff in excess of 900 in that State; whereas in this State the job is being done with 350 employees. One scheme is operated in New South Wales; whereas in this State half-a-dozen schemes are in operation. Furthermore, we cater for individual applicants, which is not the case in other States.

In the matter of maintenance, last year the commission spent £310,000, and this year it is spending approximately £390,000. There is an amount of £450,000 on hand. One per cent. of the cost of every house is placed in a maintenance fund. The expenditure in this regard during last year and this year was particularly heavy, because we were making up the leeway. Earlier on the concentration was on new houses; but now the concentration is on maintenance work which, of course, is assisting the building industry through the expenditure of these not inconsiderable sums.

Mr. Court: Would you say that you are right on top as regards maintenance?

**THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING:** I would say that. In quite a number of districts in the metropolitan area—although I would point out that work is also going on in the country—the houses were looking exceedingly shabby. They had been erected between 1948 and 1951. They should have received periodical painting and maintenance, but that had not been attended to because of more important work on hand.

With regard to surpluses and deficiencies mentioned by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, by and large the position is well under control. In one or two places there is a surplus of homes—in Collie and Kwinana. In various country centres from time to time the disposal of one or two houses drags on. It may take weeks or months before anyone is found to either purchase or rent a house that is offering. I am not perturbed about that aspect. It is probably a good thing for the State. If there is to be an increase in the labour

force for a new development, and there are houses available in the district concerned, the people will go there to take on employment. They are hardly likely to go if there is nowhere in which to live.

In the metropolitan area, contrary to what the member for West Perth feared, I do not think there is any prospect of the State Housing Commission having homes on its hands, and unable to dispose of them, for the reason, which is generally acknowledged, that there is practically no building on private account for letting purposes, other than flats. Indeed, very many—I would estimate thousands—places which previously were available for rental have now been purchased and are being used as residences by the purchasers, or have been demolished to make way for industrial and commercial projects. In many places, even around Parliament House, the conversion of large apartment houses into commercial buildings has taken place. There is no prospect for a considerable time of people building homes for the purpose of letting.

Mr. Court: Referring to surpluses and deficiencies in the country, which are the worst points of deficiency—Albany, Bunbury or Geraldton?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Albany is pretty well catered for. In Collie, which was given attention on account of the necessity for greater coal production several years ago, no houses have been built for the past two years. Bunbury has had very favourable treatment; but for some unaccountable reason there is a strong growing demand for homes. I would point out for the edification of the member for Bunbury and others that the number of houses built on the group basis is falling tremendously.

It is up to the people of Bunbury to lodge their applications for homes under war service, or under State Housing Act conditions. In Bunbury, as in other towns, houses are built in date order. It is not a matter of the commission deciding to build 50 houses for Bunbury at a certain period. If 500 people apply under war service and they are approved for this year's programme, the commission will build 500 homes there.

As I said, group building by the State Housing Commission has reached vanishing point. It is not known with certainty whether, when the present agreement expires in 3½ years' time, the Commonwealth Government will be interested in a new scheme having application to homes for rental purposes.

Mr. Roberts: How did the scheme for removal of houses from Collie to Brunswick go?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: There still are some vacancies, but not to the extent that applied previously.

Mr. May: There is a waiting list in Collie.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Let me put that correctly. Without exception, on every single return that is placed before me—and I get them every week—there are vacant houses in Collie.

Mr. May: Waiting to be renovated.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Those among others. An experiment was undertaken in the transport of two houses to another country centre in order to ascertain the economics of the proposition. It is rather expensive, but cheaper than having houses standing idle, falling into disrepair, subject to vandalism and no income received from them. However, it has been decided in view of the somewhat uncertain position for the moment at Collie, to let the position stabilise, and we will see whether the township is able to face up to the number of houses or just what should be done.

It is my hope—and I think also that of the member for Collie—that we will be able once again to embark on a house-building programme in Collie. I would say to the member for Collie, as I said to the member for Bunbury, that any applications for a war service home—there must be quite a number of ex-servicemen in that town—will be dealt with in their turn.

Mr. May: They are still building there.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: They can make use of the State Housing Commission under that heading. With regard to rent collectors mentioned by the member for Dale, they play a most important part. I know that people can face their weekly or fortnightly commitment or call in the city somewhere and pay it; but they do not seem to do that. It is the habit of the creature in the main.

In addition, it is important with rental homes that there should be somebody at frequent intervals at the door able not only to take complaints lodged by the tenant, but also to see how the tenant is behaving himself—whether he is looking after the garden; or damaging the house; and general domestic standards and so on. There has been a definite tightening up with regard to that. Because of the easier housing position, we are not so reluctant to go to the extreme of evicting a family of some numbers where they fail to respond to approaches made to them and warnings given in respect of failure to pay rent, failure to observe reasonable standards of cleanliness or to take some care of the property which they are renting.

In connection with building societies, I venture to say—I mentioned the point in this Chamber before and during this session—that the intention of the Commonwealth is that none of this money should go to societies like the Perth Building Society; it should go to co-operative

building societies which are non-profit making. However, because there is so little in the way of co-operative activity in house building in Western Australia, quite considerable sums—indeed the bulk of the money—has gone to these established organisations. In some of the States it is confined entirely to co-operatives, and because of their number, only a certain number are selected and given any allocation.

The member for Narrogin had something to say about the unfairness in the metropolitan area as against the country in regard to building society money. However, I spoke to him privately and made a few suggestions to him and I understand that in association with his colleagues in Narrogin they intend to form a co-operative building society. Nobody will be more pleased than I to see a co-operative building society in that area or anywhere else in the country and, subject to the approval of the Commonwealth Minister, I will see that substantial allocations are made to any such societies. There is no question of a waiting period or anything else. Might I be pardoned for scrubbing forestry because it is somewhat a love of mine and if I start on it I am likely to keep going much longer than I should.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: You would get lost in the woods.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Never that.

Mr. Court: Would the Minister for Agriculture deal with the great conflict?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: What conflict?

Mr. Court: The great conflict between agriculture and land for forestry.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: I say first of all that there is no great conflict. Fortunately, there is a very close and cordial relationship between the Forests Department on the one hand and the Lands Department and the Department of Agriculture on the other.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: The Minister for Lands has gone out; we must have frightened him.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: There is a greater awareness now of the importance of timber for many good reasons, and as our knowledge extends there is a long-sighted view taken of the entire situation. I have seen evidence tonight of something to which I am now accustomed. It is asked, "Why does not the Forests Department relinquish land for farming and other purposes?" I would say that many millions of pounds worth of timber have been sacrificed to farmers. It is a fact that approximately 25 per cent. of the timber production of Western Australia—and I think my figures are reasonably correct—is still coming from private properties after those properties have been in private hands for a generation, and in some cases, two or three generations.

When the aerial photographs are completed, it is my intention to have superimposed the alienated land on some transparent material to show what a great deal of these farming properties are still, after a period of 50 to 100 years, virtually virgin forest and should, indeed, be dedicated as State forests. I repeat, many millions of pounds worth.

If people are anxious to obtain land, let them buy some instead of grabbing it from the Crown at bargain prices, or let them approach their members in their respective districts to see about legislation in the way of getting a little bit of development on properties made available at a virtual peppercorn rental.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Does the Crown sell these places at bargain prices?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Of course it does.

Mr. Ross Hutchinson: Now?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Of course they are sold at bargain prices now, with the difference that the marketable timber is reserved to the Crown. Accordingly, I say that there are avenues to be explored without seeking to impose on the estate of Her Majesty. Even in the matter of gravel, or materials of that nature, I am aware of what transpired a couple of years ago.

Local authorities were anxious to pounce on Her Majesty's estate, yet around their own territories and just as conveniently and cheaply they could have obtained gravel and other materials from private property, these private property holders being anxious to receive some royalty or return from what was to them virtually worthless land. The gravel will still be there in 50 or a 100 years' time; it is a handy reserve which we should have from which we can get these resources in days to come.

Mr. Court: These timbered lands left on private farm properties are still available to the State—when I say the State, I mean the people—through the normal market channels by way of timber. They are not lost to the country. They supplement the State forest resources.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Except that they are not being kept as forests. With a sawmilling permit in modern days, a forest has perpetual life because only the annual increment is harvested each year. This is in contradistinction to what took place close to Perth where there was clear felling. Because of that our sawmills are moving out and, indeed, are almost entirely placed in the South-West. Had there been a decent and well-based forests policy, there would be mills with permanent life within a few miles of the

metropolitan area. But now it is necessary to wait a couple of generations until the forests grow again.

On the farming properties with timber growing on them, the farmers, if they can make a few hundred or a few thousand pounds from royalties, are not much concerned about the timber position in 50 years' time; but our natural heritage has been sacrificed for them. Bit by bit it will disappear and that will be the end of it.

Mr. Court: But when they sell that timber they are relieving the State forests of something.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: That is so, but when it is gone it is gone for ever.

Mr. Court: But that is part of your forestry plan.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: No, the plan is for perpetual forests on a rotational basis.

Mr. Court: That is for your State forests, but as you cut these private lands, two things are achieved—one, you save the demand on the State forests; and two, these lands come into agricultural production.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes. We are making the best of a bad job; but it is criminal that the land was ever permitted to be used for other than forestry purposes because sooner or later it will be entirely lost to forestry; and there are other areas which are eminently suitable for the various forms of agriculture. It is obvious that so much farming land is being retained in its timbered condition that it is a better timber proposition than a farming proposition.

Mr. Court: Not necessarily. There are other reasons why a farmer keeps some of his land timbered.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes, a little for protection and for firewood, fencing and a few things like that, but that is not what I am discussing.

Mr. Court: He often has to bide his time for capital to develop the property.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Over a period of from 50 to 100 years?

Mr. Court: They are exceptional cases.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: No, they are not. Because of this discussion, I will approach the Forests Department to see whether we can get some fair samples in order to show the hon. member what I mean.

Mr. Roberts: When you mentioned about transposing privately owned areas, in the forest areas, from an aerial photograph you will not be able to tell the areas of bushland that have been developed for pasture purposes. A lot of undergrowth has been cleared from beneath the trees.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: It is obvious the member for Bunbury has never seen an aerial photograph. It is almost possible to count the number of leaves on a tree.

Mr. Roberts: You will not see the pasture land underneath the trees.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Yes, without any difficulty.

Mr. Wild: Will the Minister have a look at the proposition I put up to him about gravel in the Armadale district, because the remarks he made tonight, I am sure, do not apply to that district. There is other gravel there which is of a very low grade.

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: An undertaking was given by the Conservator of Forests, although it is not his job, to indicate many places where gravel could be obtained; and he has done that very thing for quite a number of local authorities.

Mr. Wild: If you get him to point out—

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING: Would the hon. member make his approaches other than during this debate?

Vote put and passed.

Vote—Forests, £347,409—agreed to.

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 10.26 p.m.

## Legislative Council

Tuesday, 22nd October, 1957.

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