

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: What is wrong with our own Act?

Mr. LESLIE: I am very happy about our own Act. I would prefer it to this measure. The position was explained far more lucidly than I can explain it by the Minister for Housing. He said the desire was to continue the present control for a temporary period. It has been operating smoothly throughout all the States and the desire is to obtain uniformity. Modifications can be made as they become necessary. I can imagine the chaotic conditions which might result from a sudden change-over. This is really a transitional Bill. It is for that reason that I am prepared to accept it. Unless it is accepted, I suggest there will be chaos. If Opposition members will look at it in that light, they cannot do other than support it. We will then have an opportunity to make necessary amendments in order to bring about proper administration of price control. I leave it at that, but I do make this appeal to Ministers: I ask them to explain in future, not necessarily at length, the most essential features of any proposed legislation.

On motion by Mr. Graham, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 10.37 p.m.

Legislative Council.

Wednesday, 18th August, 1948.

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

BILL—PRICES CONTROL.

Standing Orders Suspension.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [4.33]: I move—

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the Bill to be passed through all its stages at the one sitting.

HON. SIR CHARLES LATHAM (East) [4.34]: I sincerely hope that the Chief Secretary will give us sufficient time to examine this Bill thoroughly. I understand that the Commonwealth Government will not cease to control prices until somewhere towards the end of September. Under those circumstances, I would like an assurance that we will have sufficient time properly to examine the legislation we shall be asked to pass.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban—in reply [4.35]: I can assure the hon. member that there will be ample time to study the Bill and I sincerely trust there will be no need to take advantage of this motion.

Question put and passed.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Tenth Day.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. E. M. HEENAN (North-East) [4.36]: I support the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply, but before proceeding with a few remarks in that connection, I would like to associate myself with the congratulations that have been tendered to you, Mr. President, and to the two members who have received honours from the King. I welcome to this Chamber the new members, all of whom have made a very creditable showing. I am sure that each will be a real asset to the proceedings of this House.

Certainly I cannot let the opportunity pass to refer to our friend Mr. C. B. Williams, whom I am sure we all miss a great deal. His departure was almost like the passing of a tradition, because he was in the category of the pioneers on the Goldfields, where he had a lot of influence and accomplished a great deal for the miners. On many occasions in this House, he made most valuable

contributions to debates, and his specialised knowledge relating to mining and miners' affairs was something from which we all benefited. I trust that he will be able to settle into the new life he has adopted; that his health will improve; and that he will not suffer any adverse consequences from being defeated at the last election.

I am very sorry that Sir Hal Colebatch was defeated. With the greatest respect to his successor, and with no intention whatsoever of saying anything that would in any way convey the impression that Mr. Hearn is unwelcome, I cannot for the life of me understand the electors failing to return a man of the calibre of Sir Hal, who has accomplished so much for this State and who, in spite of his advancing years, was one of the most active and progressive thinkers and speakers in this House. I only hope that his activities and the progressive nature of some of the propositions which he put forward here did not contribute to his defeat.

Particularly am I interested in that portion of the Lieut.-Governor's Speech which deals with the mining industry. It reads—

Because of rising costs, shortage of labour and the static price of gold, the goldmining industry is experiencing a difficult period. Vigorous approaches to the Commonwealth Government for general financial assistance to the industry have so far been unsuccessful. Assistance, however, has been promised for marginal mines. The State Government is examining every angle by which the industry may be helped. Exploratory operations, geological field work, and experimental research are being maintained.

The PRESIDENT: Is the hon. member reading from "Hansard"?

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: I have a copy of His Excellency's Speech before me, Sir, but for convenience was reading from "Hansard." I am sorry to have transgressed, but have completed the quotation that I desired to read. It is only too true that this great industry is passing through difficult times. Last year it showed signs of reviving from the doldrums of the war years, but the improvement has not been maintained. Towns such as Wiluna, Menzies, Laverton and Agnew—to mention only a few—which until recent years were well known mining centres, supporting populations of thousands, have now almost ceased

to exist. It must be realised that in some cases that was inevitable, from a mining point of view, as the values in the mines concerned either cut out or dwindled to a point where goldmining was no longer an economic proposition. On the other hand, the decline in the industry is almost directly attributable to the rise in costs as against the unchanged price of gold.

It has been estimated that in 1937 the over-all cost of producing an ounce of gold was £6.923 as compared with £8.888 today, an increase of 28.3 per cent. At the same time, wages have gone up by 20 per cent. and stores and materials by 42½ per cent., while the price of gold has risen by only 2.7 per cent. In most other primary industries rising costs of production have been offset either by increased prices for the commodities or by bonuses. The mining industry appears to be the solitary exception. To my mind the situation is alarming, especially to Western Australia which, in the past, has been so dependent on the mining industry and for which that industry has done so much. Not only has gold to the value of £300,000,000 been produced in this State, but the industry has been directly responsible for the opening up of far distant areas and supporting therein prosperous communities that would not otherwise have existed.

On more than one occasion the industry has really been the salvation of this State. It has done more to overcome the problem of centralisation, which in Western Australia is still one of our greatest difficulties, than has any other industry. Its importance can hardly be overstated nor can the responsibility of both Commonwealth and State Governments to this industry during the period of its gravest difficulty. In the present troubled state of world affairs, when so many formerly accepted economic doctrines are being submitted to the acid test, it would be unwise to be too positive about the future of gold as a medium of world exchange. At the same time, the continued use of gold as a monetary basis and its restoration to a sphere of responsibility in world economic affairs, seem certain. The world has not yet reached a stage where managed currencies are the solution.

The weight of opinion seems to be that we should revert to the long-established tradition of gold as a backing for currency if

that view is correct—and my reading has convinced me that it is—we should do all in our power to increase gold production. However, we cannot increase or even maintain production of the metal, unless a higher price is obtained for it. That is the problem and I hope the Government will do all that lies in its power to assist in arriving at a solution. It is an easy way out just to blame the Commonwealth Government, but we must be honest and realise that Australia is a member of the International Monetary Fund, which controls the situation. The policy of that fund is directed mainly by America, the country which at present appears to stand forth as the saviour of the economic and social destiny of most countries in the world today.

It is easy to see that the matter of an increased price for gold does not lie with the Commonwealth Government, though I hope that Government will continue to use its influence to that end. It is largely a question of United States policy, but there are already signs of a change in that policy, and the forthcoming Presidential elections will, I hope, prove to be the turning point. I have mentioned these matters because of the erroneously accepted view that the Commonwealth Government is directly responsible for the parlous condition of the gold-mining industry. That is a view that has been sponsored, in some quarters, for political purposes.

I desire now to submit criticism of the State Government for what it has failed to do, in its own sphere of influence, for the goldmining industry. I intend to deal with that portion of the industry known as prospecting, one to assist which the State Government could do a great deal by active and liberal help. The prospector is an integral part of the mining industry. In spite of all the experts and geological surveys, he will remain one of the key men. Without him new finds will not be located and new tracks will not be blazed. Surely it is self-evident that the State Government should interest itself in some scheme to make prospecting more attractive. In the past this was a career followed by men of adventurous spirit, who have left their marks all over the goldfields of Western Australia. Unfortunately the number of men now engaged in that industry has reached a low level, and the State is the loser thereby. This is a condition of affairs that should

greatly concern the State Government, and the answer to the problem lies largely within its powers.

One of the suggestions I make is that the prospecting scheme introduced many years ago should be improved and expanded. I understand that in 1939 there were between 700 and 800 men working under the scheme, whereas at the present time there are only 43. Surely that is evidence that the scheme is out of date and no longer attractive. It provides for an allowance of 30s. per week at present and such a measure of assistance is hopelessly inadequate and quite useless in these times. The idea, surely, should be to attract good men by allowing them something adequate in the hope that they will make good and, generally speaking, to encourage the right class of man to engage in prospecting.

Hon. G. Bennetts: If a prospector or a soldier is receiving a pension, he is debarred from that privilege.

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: That is so. The policy adopted in the past has been that when a man was receiving assistance under the prospecting scheme and reached the age when he could apply for a pension, he was put off the scheme.

Hon. G. Fraser: They applied the means test to them, and yet they complain about that test so much.

Hon. G. Bennetts: And those affected were the real original prospectors.

The PRESIDENT: Order !

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: A proposition has been submitted by the W.A. Prospectors Association, which is a very representative body, but to no avail. I therefore charge the Government with being disinterested in the future of the prospecting industry and with being more concerned about passing the buck to the Commonwealth with regard to the price of gold. Another way by which the prospectors could be assisted would be the establishment of a treatment plant to deal with sulphide ores. That is another suggestion made by the prospectors' association, which has been repeated from time to time but still awaits fulfilment. In fairness to the Government, I must add that I understand surveys have been made and plans and specifications prepared, but time is going on and the prospectors are becoming very impatient.

Hon. G. Fraser: Did not the Minister for Mines make them a lot of promises?

Hon. G. Bennetts: Yes, but he did not carry them out.

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: The Minister certainly made promises, but, in fairness to him and his Government, I must admit there are difficulties associated with the problem.

Hon. G. Fraser: Let him make his excuses!

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: I understand something is under way, but a long time has elapsed and the matter is one of urgency. I suggest that something practical be done within the next 12 months. Whatever is done should be on a comprehensive scale that will attract men to the prospecting industry. I am sure it would be a step in the right direction and would pay handsome dividends. The question of increasing the price of gold or paying a bonus on its production is largely beyond the control of the State Government but assistance to, and encouragement of, prospectors is a sphere in which it can accomplish a lot—if it has the interest and courage to do so.

Mention has been made again by various speakers of the price of water on the Goldfields and through the country areas generally. I do not want the occasion to pass without voicing my support of the claims that have been made in favour of radical reduction in prices. One of the greatest problems of Australia today is centralisation and the reluctance of most people to live elsewhere than in the cities. The answer to it is to make life in the country districts and on the Goldfields more attractive and to extend to people every encouragement to live there. Water, especially on the Goldfields, constitutes one of the most vital needs and plays such a large part in the life and well-being of the people. Surely it is unfair, therefore, that its cost in the outer districts should be so excessive as compared with what is charged in the city.

This is a problem that should be solved not only in the interests of the people on the Goldfields and elsewhere but of the State generally. Too long there has been the general point of view that all good things and all the amenities that go to make life so pleasant, are centred in the cities. That attitude cannot be reconciled with our desire and the urgent need to populate the far distant portions of the State. In the

past the tendency, as it were, has almost amounted to telling people on the Goldfields that they were foolish to live there; that they should live in Perth where water supplies are so much cheaper and where it is so much easier and less costly to have gardens, beautiful parks, and so on. The prevailing attitude, I suggest, will have to be radically revised because, as I have already pointed out, centres like Wiluna, Agnew, Laverton and other such-like townships, have almost disappeared from the map. If the mining industry does not revive, the people living in such places will naturally come down to the city, and that will tend to accentuate a problem that has become one of the greatest in Australia.

I propose now to say a few words on a subject respecting which I hold strong views. I refer to the franchise of this House. I understand it is the policy of the Government to extend the franchise. That policy was enunciated at the last general elections, and last session the Government made a rather feeble effort to give effect to it. As a matter of fact, on that occasion we had the remarkable demonstration of pledged supporters of the Government—men whom one would imagine were pledged to support the policy enunciated at the general elections—voting against a Bill that their own Government submitted in this House with the object of extending the franchise. I understand a similar Bill will be submitted this year and I hope it will be passed this time.

In these days, it is hard to pick up a paper or engage in conversation in a train without the subject of Communism arising. We hear people and read papers declaiming against Communists and Communism; but it frequently occurs to me that some of us do little about it. According to books written by competent authorities, the world has many millions of years to go and our way of life must be changing all the time, as the world is given to change. There will be no progress without changes being made. If our democracy is to survive, we must review it from time to time and improve and modernise the instruments of democracy.

We know that we in this Chamber represent only about one-sixth of the adult electors. The franchise is restricted to one-third of the adult population, but only about 50 per cent. of that one-third vote. That is

an unsatisfactory state of affairs. The net result is that the public take little or no notice of the doings of this Chamber. It is rarely indeed that any person comes along to listen to the debates, and it is now becoming very rare indeed to read in the daily Press any reports of our doings. At times I have found it impossible to leave Kalgoorlie to attend sittings of the Chamber in Perth, and I look vainly in both "The West Australian" and the "Kalgoorlie Miner" for any report of our proceedings. I do not know whether the House is sitting, what items are being dealt with or whether the House has adjourned.

Hon. G. Fraser: Or collapsed!

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: It amounts to this, that we are largely ignored and that the people are not interested in whether we function or exist at all. We must get the people of Australia interested in our democratic institutions; we must make them feel that those institutions are a real part of themselves, and a move in that direction might well be the enlargement of the franchise for this Chamber so as to make it more representative of the people.

There is one other matter upon which I desire to touch. I urge the Government to consider some scheme whereby members of Parliament living in far distant parts of the State can be granted passes for air travel. We have to move with the times and the members to whom I refer are greatly inconvenienced and handicapped because of their inability to travel by air without incurring expense which they are not in a position to meet. As you, Sir, know, there will shortly be an important occasion at the Leonora-Gwalia centre and people will be flocking there from hundreds of miles distant. It is almost imperative that the members for that district should be present, because many matters will be brought to their notice and they will have the opportunity to come in contact with people whom otherwise it would be almost impossible for them to meet. It will be practically impossible for members to go to the centre and also attend the sittings of Parliament unless they incur the expense of air travel.

Again, next week we shall have the Kalgoorlie Cup. That racing carnival is a great occasion and people from all over the Goldfields attend it. Many conferences are

held in Kalgoorlie at that time and the people's representatives should be there. One can go to Kalgoorlie from Perth in two hours, and from Kalgoorlie to Leonora in one hour; but to go from Kalgoorlie to Leonora by train involves a whole day's travel, and to travel from Kalgoorlie to Perth by train involves travelling all night and half a day.

Hon. W. R. Hall: If you are lucky!

Hon. E. M. HEENAN: I hope the Minister will give consideration to this proposal. Later on, when the provinces are enlarged and the Murchison is added to the North-East Province, I think we shall have to ask for a special aeroplane. That concludes my remarks on the debate, but I desire once again to convey to you, Mr. President, my congratulations and the hope that during this session you will be blessed with better health than you enjoyed last year.

THE HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. G. B. Wood—East) [5.11]: I endorse all the congratulatory remarks made by other members. I heartily agree with all that they have said in this connection, but I desire to make special reference to Sir Hal Colebatch. I am fully in accord with all that Mr. Heenan has said about Sir Hal. I feel he will be a great loss to the Parliament of Western Australia. Although on many occasions I was in disagreement with him, I feel we had a friend in him so far as country matters are concerned. He had a thorough understanding of our big country problems and was vitally interested in our primary industries.

Since I have been a member of this Chamber—some 13 years—I do not think we have previously had so few references to agricultural matters as have been made by members this session. I do not think that indicates a lack of interest in agriculture on their part and so I must come to the conclusion that members are quite happy about what the Agricultural Department is doing at present. Mr. Gray did refer to the grading of wheat and I assure him that, although no progress has been made with that matter, it was discussed by the Agricultural Council on two occasions and will come up for consideration again. Personally, I shall not voice an opinion on it. I shall leave the matter to experts, but

I suggest to Mr. Gray and other gentlemen who listen to Dr. Kent-Jones that they should also consider the views of other authorities. There are conflicting opinions on the subject of the grading of wheat, and while I know that Dr. Kent-Jones is convincing, I personally am not altogether sure that he is quite right.

During the course of his remarks, Sir Charles Latham spoke about soil conservation. I assure him that the subject is receiving great attention. We have a Soil Conservation Committee which is representative of the farmers, road boards, pastoralists, Forests Department and others, and which advises the experts. I was happy to hear Sir Charles's remarks about the experts, as I cannot forget what he said last session about some of them who were out to do a good job. I appreciate his kindly references to our experts who are dealing with soil conservation. We have a thoroughly competent officer in Mr. Burvill, who has a terrific job to do. The number of calls made on his time by farmers who recognise his competency is surprising. He is called upon to advise them on soil conservation, salt encroachment—indeed, on everything connected with the soil. He is supported by an efficient committee, of which the chairman is Mr. Lundy.

Hon. R. M. Forrest: Is there any chance of getting his services in the North?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Yes, definitely. His services will be made available there in due course. Mr. Lundy, the chairman, recently went to four of the other States where he spent quite a lot of time looking into the matter of soil conservation. The only thing I am sorry about is that the Soil Conservation Committee was not set up 20 years ago. We have slipped tremendously in Western Australia in this regard, the same as the Eastern States have done. It is only in the last few years that the various State Governments have awakened to the fact that we have deteriorated so far regarding soil conservation. Mr. Davies mentioned the rationing or control of bran and pollard. This is an old question. I know it has caused a lot of dissatisfaction in various places. Many people think that with control more bran and pollard will be produced. There is quite a bit in the sug-

gestion made by Mr. Watson that by mixing bran and pollard with other things, in the preparation of various stock foods, the supply can be spread. But if we told that to the poultry farmers, our lives would not be worth living.

Hon. E. H. Gray: They can do all the mixing themselves.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Yes. They are generally of the opinion that too much bran and pollard goes to the manufacturers.

Hon. E. H. Gray: They have the machinery, and can mix it themselves.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: They have not all got the machinery. They are of the opinion that they are forced to buy these manufactured meshes. I believe there is a lot in that. The supply could be spread if bran and pollard were mixed with something else, such as crushed wheat. But it is not a matter I profess to be able to determine. We are all anxious to relinquish control. I want to thank Mr. Daffen for his remarks about wheat. The wheat position today is in a state of uncertainty. I do not suppose the marketing of wheat could be more uncertain than it is at present. The Commonwealth Government has submitted proposals for the States to accept—I shall refer to them as the Commonwealth plan. That plan gives to the Commonwealth Minister for Commerce and Agriculture the sole right to sell wheat oversea to anybody he likes at what price he thinks fit. There is not the slightest argument about that.

Hon. G. W. Miles: We should go to Russia if we are to adopt such schemes.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Yes. People might wonder why we have not accepted the Commonwealth plan. That is one of the reasons. Another is that the stockfeeders—pigmen, poultrymen and others who use wheat—can buy it at 6s. 3d. a bushel. While that might not be so bad if it applied only to Western Australian wheat and Western Australian producers, it could mean that at least 20,000,000 bushels of our wheat could go to the Eastern States and be sold at 6s. 3d. a bushel as against the present oversea price of about 17s.

Hon. L. A. Logan: It did in 1945, when they had a drought.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: That is so. I do not intend to go fully into the Commonwealth scheme, but those are two of the salient features that prompted me to advise the Government not to accept this plan. It is hard for me to understand the mentality of the many farmers who want it.

Hon. E. H. Gray: They know very well that the State cannot have a wheat plan at all.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I do not know anything of the sort. They are prepared to give to someone the privilege of determining what shall be done with their product. I thought it was in the best interests of everyone concerned to give the growers—the owners of the wheat—an opportunity of saying what they wanted. Having come to that decision, I found that the other States had followed suit and were also to give the wheatgrowers a chance to say whether they would accept the Commonwealth plan, or reject it. But I believe that in Western Australia we have done better than that, because we have offered an alternative proposal. We will ask them whether they would like a State scheme—a purely Western Australian scheme—under which to run their business. So, in the middle of September, they will have an opportunity of saying which scheme they want.

There are many desirable features in the Western Australian plan. The primary objective is to create a marketing organisation which will faithfully serve the Western Australian growers by marketing their wheat to the best advantage, without any ministerial interference, and establishing the principle of a grower-control marketing organisation. The State board will consist of four elected growers and one nominated by the Government. The whole business, therefore, will be in the hands of the owners of the wheat. I fail to see that there can be any objection to that. It will also preserve to growers the democratic right of ownership, and in this respect it overcomes the basic principle of the Commonwealth scheme. As I said before, the Commonwealth plan gives the Minister practically total ownership of the

wheat. Under the Commonwealth proposal there would be an Australian wheat board, which could be overruled by the Minister. If Mr. Gray can tell me that is right, I shall be surprised.

Hon. A. L. Loton: The board has been overruled by the Minister.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I know. Under the proposal to which I have got the Government to agree, the wheatgrowers of Western Australia will have an opportunity of saying what they want.

Hon. G. Fraser: Did you attend the Wheatgrowers' Federation meeting at Canberra in July?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: No. I attended a meeting of State and Federal Ministers for Agriculture.

Hon. E. H. Gray: Did not the Wheatgrowers' Federation support the Commonwealth scheme?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Yes, and I make no apology for opposing the Wheatgrowers' Federation. It supported the Commonwealth plan in the hope that, with a change of Government, it would achieve its policy. The present Commonwealth proposals do not embrace the policy of the Wheatgrowers' Federation which says, "If we accept this, we have a chance of getting a 100 per cent. perfect plan when there is a change of Government." It is remarkable to think that the federation has at last realised who its friends are—the Country and Democratic League. What I have said is a statement of fact. I have it in a letter from one of my "friends" in the country. What the federation has expressed may be a good hope, but it is based on dangerous ground.

Hon. G. Fraser: Was not this State represented at that conference?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: It was represented by two delegates with four votes, but they did not vote because they considered they were sent from Western Australia to represent the wheatgrowers of this State who had given them certain instructions. When they got there, they found the other members of the Wheatgrowers' Federation

were departing entirely from their own policy and—I do not want to go into the ramifications of the 15-point plan—I take off my hat to those two delegates for not voting for it.

Hon. G. Fraser: Would you say that all State Ministers agreed to recommend that plan to their Governments?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Definitely no. The Ministers for Agriculture did not undertake to recommend the proposals. They said they would submit them to their respective Governments.

Hon. G. Fraser: Then the assertions are not true.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Whose?

Hon. G. Fraser: Those of the wheat-growers.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I do not know where that came from, but it is definitely not true. At the council meeting we were given a statement of what the proposals were, and it said, "At the conclusion, the State Ministers agreed to recommend their proposals to their respective Governments." I said, "I do not agree with that, Mr. Pollard. I will submit them." I think another Minister backed me up. Just because it is written on a piece of paper that we said we would recommend the plan, does not say that we said we would. Nobody has recommended it, I think, except the Tasmanian Minister. From memory, he is the only one who said he would recommend it to the Government. Naturally he would, because all he was concerned with was cheap wheat at the expense of the growers of Australia. I do not know that I want to take up the time of the House in dealing with the merits of the State plan, but I want to say this, that when the poll is taken, every wheatgrower in Western Australia will have a copy of the case which has been prepared by me in favour of the Western Australian plan and a copy of the case prepared by someone—I do not know who—in favour of the Commonwealth plan. It is rather strange that although I have made efforts to get someone to prepare the case for the Commonwealth scheme, I have not been successful so far.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Have you asked the Federal Minister?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Yes. I asked him a week ago. I sent him a telegram and he has not replied. I asked Mr. Wise if he would do it, and he declined. I do not blame him, if he does not want to.

Hon. A. L. Loton: You had better ask the "Wheatgrower."

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: It is pretty rough to have to call on a paper like that—I suppose it can be called a paper—to do anything. I also asked the executive of the Farmers' Union to do it, but it would not.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: The members of that executive are probably all in favour of it.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I made this suggestion: "Pick three or four of your members who are known to be in favour of the Commonwealth scheme and get them to prepare the case." I have done everything possible to have the Commonwealth case prepared and sent to the wheatgrowers.

Hon. A. L. Loton: Will the "Wheatgrower" newspaper publish the case for the State scheme?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I do not know what it will do except abuse Mr. Jones, Mr. Teasdale and me. The farmers of Western Australia will be told, as truly as possible, the merits of the State plan and of the Commonwealth plan, and it will be for them to decide what they want. I think that is the right attitude. I want to make some mention of milk. The Government—and particularly myself—has been freely criticised in regard to the recent milk strike.

Hon. G. Fraser. And quite rightly too.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I was hoping that Mr. Fraser would have something to say about it in the House.

Hon. G. Fraser: I might, yet.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: The hon. member has not spoken so far. I have here a paper called the "News Review." I do not know the printer and I have no idea whose paper it is. It may be that of the Liberal Party. I know it has nothing to do

with the Country and Democratic League. It is not a bit particular as to what it says from the standpoint of the truth of its statements.

Hon. G. Fraser: All the Liberals are the same.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I am going to read this because it is very important. There has been a certain amount of criticism and misrepresentation in regard to the milk strike, and I intend to take this opportunity to read a column, which has been devoted to me. I feel honoured about that. It reads—

From a general public point of view it was most misleading for the Honorary Minister for Agriculture (Mr. Garnet Wood) to make a Press statement some days before the strike eventuated to the effect that the Government had adequate plans in train to handle the situation if a strike resulted and that immediate steps would be taken to implement the plans if a strike was held.

It was quite obvious when the strike did eventuate that the Government had no adequate plans at all. In fact this was clearly indicated by the Premier, Mr. Ross McLarty, who during the course of the strike, stated that it was not a matter for the Government at all, but one for the Milk Board to handle as the properly constituted authority.

This paper has definitely confused two different issues. I made a statement only in regard to the supply of milk, and the Premier made a statement that he would not interfere with a properly constituted board. I felt it my duty to see that the people, as far as possible, received their milk. This article continues—

Obviously the two statements were conflicting and showed a lack of co-operation and such a position should not have been allowed to occur, because by his statement the Minister brought unnecessary censure upon the Government.

Similarly, the statement by Mr. W. E. Stannard, Chairman of the Board, that milk would be available in retail shops for the general public on the day after the strike was declared also proved inaccurate. Mothers with families were deprived of milk for at least one or two days. The board is a responsible Government authority and its statements should be sound and correct, because they automatically reflect on the Government.

The strike was a further indication of the absolute need for the Government to adopt a firm and strong policy generally in regard to its handling of State affairs. Only by such a policy and by being prepared for eventualities

of this nature can it hope to go from strength to strength, and maintain its position for the future, as is desired by its keen supporters.

Plans were made, to ensure that the public received its milk, before I left for the Eastern States.

Hon. L. A. Logan: Someone accused you of running away.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I called two conferences—one with the Milk Board, and one with the Farmers' Union—and the union assured me that the farmers would milk the cows and the milk would be brought to the city. I also contacted one of the big firms which deals in wholesale milk and which controls 500 milk shops in the metropolitan area. I received an assurance from the producer-retailers that they would produce the milk and deliver it. There are 30 of them in the metropolitan area. Any person with any brains at all knows that it is not possible to hoard a quantity of milk in order to be ready for any eventuality. Milk can only be depended upon from day to day. I will admit that the scheme did partially fall down, but it was through no fault of mine. For anybody to say that no plans were made is misstating the truth, because plans were made.

Hon. G. Fraser: What is the use of making plans if you do not carry them out?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: That is the silliest remark I have ever heard the hon. member make. I had no idea of the "basher gang" methods that would be employed to stop the delivery of milk. One of my plans was to co-opt practically every milk shop in the metropolitan area and make them temporary milk depots, but when the chairman of the Milk Board, Mr. Stannard, told me that there were 1,000 milk shops in this State who were practically all under the control of one firm, I thought everything would be all right. I knew the depots were being coerced, but I did not know that physical force would be used to prevent them from delivering milk. Even my colleague, the Minister for Police, went out to one depot to see what was going on. I had the Police Department in readiness and had arranged for transport to have an open go and all

these preparations had been made before I left for the East.

While I was in the Eastern States I kept in touch with Mr. Stannard and when he told me that this large retail firm had "turned dog" on us, it was a great shock. But has there ever been such a short-lived strike before? I was away for two days and I took the night plane from Sydney to return to Perth. That was a big effort for me because I am such a bad traveller in the air. When Mr. Stannard met me at the airport and told me that milk was to be delivered the next morning at ½d. per pint more, I knew everything was over. The strike only lasted for two days, although on the first day milk was delivered to some people, and for any person to say that there were no preparations or no plans, does not make sense.

The Chief Secretary: They started deliveries on the first day of the strike.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Methods were used to prevent the delivery of milk by people who should have known better. A lot of the people who took part in these attacks, deserve the greatest censure. I went away with the full realisation that everything was in readiness for the delivery of milk, and when members recall that there are 1,000 milk shops in the city, I think there would be every reason for them to think as I did. I had made arrangements for adequate police protection, but I do not think anybody dreamt that things would turn out as they did.

Hon. G. Fraser: Organisers have to anticipate a lot of things.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: This statement was also made—

Recently we had a strike by milk retailers. There was to be some strong, serious and resolute action taken in that case.

That was up to me, I suppose. The statement continues:—

An assurance was given by the Honorary Minister for Agriculture that preparations had been made and everything was in readiness to institute an emergency supply of milk. There was the threat of strike, and the day before it occurred, or thereabouts, the Minister hopped on a plane and disappeared over East. So much for him.

Hon. A. L. Loton: Who made that statement?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: The member for East Perth made that statement and I consider it rotten of him to do so.

Hon. A. Thomson: What would you expect from him?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: It was a rotten statement and those are the strongest words I would be permitted to use in this Chamber. It was the greatest worry to me that I had to leave the State to attend a wheat conference in the Eastern States. Yet the member for East Perth comes out with that sort of statement! I do not want to weary the House, but I repeat that everything possible was done before I left. Milk cannot be hoarded like coal or wheat or commodities of that sort, and the strike must commence before machinery to combat it can be put into operation.

Hon. G. W. Miles: The board did a good job.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: In spite of everything, I think the people did not do too badly, because I know that the milkman turned up at the house where I was staying and asked me if I wanted any milk at 5d. per pint. I told him I would only pay 4½d. per pint and he agreed to deliver the milk at that figure. That is how the strike finally broke up. The Government took a strong stand and I believe that if the Government had agreed to grant an extra ½d. per pint when the strike began, it would have been over in two minutes. In that case the public would have been called upon to pay the increased cost and I think every political party should be behind the Government in the stand it took.

The price of milk in Perth is as high as in any of the other States of the Commonwealth, but in Sydney if a person takes a larger quantity of milk he gets it at a cheaper rate, and that is the only difference. Some retail firms are not making as much as they should because of bad management, and I do not care who hears me make that statement. I asked my secretary to ring up one street in Mt. Lawley—Storthes street. For the first nine people he rang in that short street, there were five different milk suppliers, and yet milk retailers want the general public to pay for that type of

service. In Sydney such a street would have only one or two milkmen because they have there a voluntary zoning system.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: You would have to standardise the milk and have it of good quality.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I know what would be said in Perth if such a system were introduced. People would say that it is different here because there is a certain standardisation, but I would like to tell the House that milk comes very often out of the same tanks and goes to different depots.

Hon. E. H. Gray: That is bad management.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I would have expected that the party of which Mr. Gray is a member, would have supported the Government wholeheartedly in such a project. During the strike the Government was out to protect the public. Milk generally, is standardised.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: No, it is not.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: There are about four or five milk depots in Perth and most of the milk for the metropolitan area is delivered to these depots and is thus more or less standardised. In Sydney it goes into two depots and is distributed out, but to a far greater extent than a commodity such as bread. I daresay one depot would have better milk than another, but it all comes from the country.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: No, it does not.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: A quantity of milk would come from the metropolitan area, but, generally speaking most of it is from the South-West. Two thousand gallons of milk comes from this area in one tanker alone and 1,500 in another tanker and so on, and thus it is more or less standardised.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Do you not think that some of the cream is taken out of it? Do you not think it is brought down to the standard set by the Department of Public Health?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I do not.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: I think it is.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Some of the milk is mixed up and it must be more or less similar. In Sydney I found, as I said, a zoning system for the delivery of milk and probably only one retailer is allowed in each block. People can complain to the Milk Board and in that case another milkman is allotted that area although I was informed that there were very few complaints. I consider that something like that will have to be done in Perth; whether it should be voluntary or compulsory I do not know. In Sydney it is voluntary but during the war it was compulsory and the milkmen found it to be such a good system that they have since carried it on voluntarily. As far as I am concerned I will never agree to a rise in the price of milk while I honestly believe that such overlapping of deliveries is taking place.

A number of agricultural Bills will be brought down in due course. I do not wish to deal with them at this stage beyond saying that they are designed for the betterment and improvement of the agricultural industry, and I trust they will receive the favourable consideration that I believe they deserve.

Hon. J. G. Hislop: Do you intend to introduce a milk Bill during this session for the purpose of altering the constitution of the board?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I hope so. I support the motion.

On motion by Hon. W. R. Hall, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.46 p.m.