

**BILL—RAILWAY (BROWN HILL LOOP
KALGOORLIE-GNUMBALLA LAKE)
DISCONTINUANCE.**

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS
(Hon. H. S. Seward—Pingelly) [9.0] in moving the second reading said: This is a Bill the necessity for which is occasioned by the march of time. The railway concerned was put down in Kalgoorlie many years ago and for some time has been of no further use. Consequently, the Bill is introduced to permit of the discontinuance of its existence. The line was constructed in 1902 and its length was four miles 43 chains, the construction being of 60-lb. rails. In 1930, it was found that the railway was no longer needed and, in order to replenish the small available supply of 60-lb. rails, a section was taken up in 1935 comprising 76 chains.

In 1917, a further two miles 20 chains were taken up, leaving only a small section remaining. Its length is about one mile 34 chains, and that section is leased to Gold Mines of Kalgoorlie Ltd. and is still utilised by that concern. It is proposed that the section will be allowed to remain for such time as the company continues to require it, but that will not affect the passage of the Bill. The object of the legislation is to enable the line to be written off so that it will not remain as a liability against the Commissioner of Railways, and in order to avoid an earlier experience under somewhat similar circumstances when the introduction of a second discontinuance Bill was necessary. This is a small matter, but it is essential that this course be adopted so that the cost of the line may be written off the railway accounts. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Smith, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 9.3 p.m.

Legislative Council.

Wednesday, 8th September, 1948.

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

QUESTIONS.

AVON RIVER.

As to Future Use and Standard Gauge Railway Route.

Hon. A. THOMSON asked the Honorary Minister for Agriculture:

As negotiations are now being considered between the Commonwealth and State Governments on the subject of the standard gauge from Kalgoorlie to Fremantle, and as the route suggested by the Clapp report envisages utilising the Avon River Gorge—

(1) Has the Public Works Department been consulted as to whether this will seriously interfere with the suggested scheme to preserve the Avon River waters for future supplies to the metropolitan area?

(2) Has the Government considered plans for conserving these waters by means of three dams for the purpose of possible irrigation and, with the fall of 486 feet from Northam to Midland, the practicability

of generating hydro-electric power (as mentioned in evidence before the Select Committee on the standard railway gauge)?

(3) Will the Government investigate the practicability of cutting off the salt lakes which are apparently the cause of these waters becoming brackish?

(4) Will the Government give an assurance that a report will be made to Parliament showing that the future water supplies from the Avon Gorge will not be endangered by the Railway Department without a thorough investigation being made before a final decision is arrived at?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) The Railway Department has been requested to locate the route at a level which will enable dams to be constructed on the Avon River.

(3) Yes.

(4) Answered by (2).

STATE ELECTRICITY COMMISSION.

(a) *As to Personnel of Boards.*

Hon. A. L. LOTON (without notice) asked the Honorary Minister for Agriculture:

(1) What are the names of the members of the Electrical Workers Board?

(2) What are the names of the members of the Cinematograph Board?

(3) What are the names of the members of the Radio Workers Board?

(4) What are the names of the members of the Electrical Contractors Licensing Board.

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

(1) Electrical Workers Board—Messrs. W. Orr, chairman; H. Doonan, employers' representative; K. Gammon, supply authorities' representative; C. Bruchle, employees' representative.

(2) Cinematograph Board—Messrs. W. Orr, chairman; R. Starr, operators' representative; R. Yelland, employers' representative.

(3) Radio Workers Board—Messrs. W. Orr, chairman; F. Beames, employers' representative; D. A. Farquahar, employees' representative.

(4) Electrical Contractors' Licensing Board—Messrs. W. Orr, chairman; H. Doonan, Contractors' Association representative; K. Gammon, supply authorities' representative; W. McNicol, employees' representative.

(b) *As to Loss on Current to Municipalities and Railways.*

Hon. A. THOMSON (without notice) asked the Honorary Minister for Agriculture:

When is it expected that the information, mentioned by the Honorary Minister in reply to a question of mine on the 1st September, dealing with the electricity supplied by the Government at Perth and Fremantle, will be available, giving full details of losses during the years specified?

The HONORARY MINISTER replied:

I will try to have the report of the Auditor General available by tomorrow.

BILL—PRICES CONTROL.

Third Reading.

THE HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. G. B. Wood—East) [4.40] in moving the third reading said: Yesterday while the Bill was being considered in Committee, I was asked certain questions with regard to one or two matters and I promised to secure the desired information. I take this opportunity of making it available. Mr. Fraser is concerned about the employees who will be in the service of the State Government instead of in that of the Commonwealth Government. I have received an assurance from the Minister in charge of price-fixing matters that most of the employees will not suffer at all. A few may be at a slight disadvantage, the greatest of which is that one will lose £20 a year. On the other hand, I believe some of them will gain by transfer from the Commonwealth to the State. One man may lose a week's leave but, generally speaking, there will be little difficulty in that respect. The Attorney General said that every effort would be made to find employment later on for any officer who might have to leave the department.

Hon. G. Fraser: I hope your information proves to be correct.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Another matter concerned the question of prosecutions having to go before the Attorney General. I think Mr. Gray raised that point but I am informed by the Attorney General that that procedure is customary now. Such matters do not necessarily go to him but are always referred to the Crown Law Department when there is any question of an alteration in the procedure.

Then again, Sir Charles Latham referred to the fact that the profiteering Prevention Act is on the statute book and he was fearful that when this measure was passed there might be some conflict between the two Acts with regard to prosecutions. I have received an assurance—I think I mentioned it yesterday—that the 1939 Act could not operate unless a commissioner were appointed under its provisions and, further, no goods would be proclaimed under that Act. In other words, it would not operate, and although the Profiteering Prevention Act would remain on the statute book, there would be no duplication whatever. I hope that that information will satisfy those who raised these queries. I move—

That the Bill be now read a third time.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and returned to the Assembly with amendments.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Fourteenth Day—Conclusion.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [4.44]: I desire to endorse the many congratulatory remarks regarding the two members who received honours from His Majesty the King during the past year, and join in the welcome that has been tendered to the new members who have taken their seats in this Chamber for the first time. My welcome would probably be more enthusiastic if they were men of my own political faith. I realise that while we who belong to the Labour Party are so outnumbered in this Chamber, the legislation that is passed will not be of the best. I believe there will be an improvement in our numbers and I can see, in view of the redistribution that is to take place, a distinct change in that respect within a few years. I am sure that our

numbers will increase. I believe we are at bedrock now and that with each succeeding election our position will improve. I visualise the time, even within my parliamentary career, when we shall have a first class debate on the question of—

Hon. G. W. Miles: The abolition of this Chamber.

Hon. G. FRASER: That is so.

Hon. L. Craig: Do you really think you will live to be a hundred?

Hon. G. FRASER: No, but I do not anticipate I shall have to wait that long. If members will consider the trend of constitutional history, they will see that what I suggest is really likely to happen.

Hon. E. M. Heenan: Can you anticipate what the voting will be?

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes, if the constitution of the House at that time proves to be what I anticipate.

Hon. L. Craig: The result will be the same.

Hon. G. FRASER: I certainly trust our numbers will increase, as I believe they will. Should that prove to be so, we shall have better debates in this Chamber and we shall pass better legislation than we have hitherto. I was very pleased that my old friend, Mr. Watson, recollected the fact that many years ago we were workers together. Since those days we have trodden different roads, but I am not surprised, because I remember that in those early days I was the union representative and I certainly had a job in keeping Mr. Watson up to the mark. Since then he has taken the open road.

Hon. H. Hearn: He saw the light.

Hon. G. FRASER: I kept to the straight and narrow path, with the result that I arrived here 20 years ahead of Mr. Watson. Today I find myself in a rather unusual role. Instead of moving the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-reply, which I did for many years, I am the last speaker to offer a contribution to the current debate. That task is usually left to the Minister in charge of the House.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: Good wine is always kept till the last.

Hon. G. FRASER: I did think of taking upon myself that responsibility, but when I contemplated the performances of the Gov-

ernment I found it impossible to do so. The performances of the present Administration have been so bad that I would not endeavour for one moment to apologise for it.

The Honorary Minister: To which Government are you referring?

Hon. G. FRASER: When the term of the present Government is ended, I think we shall find that its performances were as bad as, if not worse than, those of the previous coalition Government. I could speak for a long time on promises and performances on the part of the Government, but I shall not do so at this stage. However, there are a few matters respecting which Ministers should hear something. Very often I have known members to say that this is a House of review. I do not subscribe to that idea at all. On the other hand I think that members of this Chamber should consider the promises made by any Government on the hustings and if it does not stand up to those promises, we should tell Ministers about it. I propose to tell the Government that it has fallen down on its job. It is not my intention to touch upon the financial position because everyone is well aware of the drift. Many years ago we had the slogan, "Gone a million Jack," but I am sure that very shortly we shall have an amended slogan: "Gone two millions Mac."

The Honorary Minister: You know that the 40-hour week has something to do with it.

Hon. G. FRASER: The drift had commenced long before that.

The Honorary Minister: Yes, before the present Government took office.

Hon. G. FRASER: One has but to note the drift in connection with the railways since the present Government took charge to realise what is happening. It is customary to say that Labour was responsible for the position of the railways but I can go further back and say that the drift started when the previous coalition Government was in office. We had the spectacle at that period of rake after rake of trucks being shunted on to a side line at the Naval Base because they were not getting the attention which the Government should have given them. Speaking from memory, during those years no apprentices were taken on at the Midland Junction Workshops, or else they were discharged after they had finished their term.

The result was that the tradesmen necessary to effect repairs to rollingstock were not available.

When the Collier Government assumed office in 1934, the State railways were in such a condition that in one year £1,000,000 had to be provided for deferred maintenance. The drift therefore commenced not with the Labour Administration, but with the coalition Government of 1930-33. However, I do not intend to stress that point, but I do intend to dwell on the promises and performances of the present Government so far as housing is concerned. It has been said that Labour did not do the job, but what do we find? This Government has not done much to improve the position, which is worse today than ever it was. Last year, on the completion of the Labour Government's programme, that Government had brought the number of houses being built up to about 2,800 odd per year.

The figures for the year ended the 30th June last—the latest available—show that under the present Government this total has slipped back to 2,500. That is in spite of the fact that the Labour Government started from scratch at the close of the war, and yet was able to reach the figure of 2,800 houses per annum. The present Government, after assuming office with all the groundwork done, has not yet been able to reach that total. In spite of its promises, the Government has not improved the position; in fact, the position has deteriorated. Mr. Thomson may laugh, but he cannot get away from the figures I have quoted. They are not mine, but the statistician's. He will find them correct if he checks them.

We have also heard much about the cost of building. We were told that the cost would be kept down so that persons would be enabled to build and own their own homes. What do we find in this connection? The last contracts signed by the Wise Government for two-roomed weatherboard houses fixed the price at £925. The figure this year in contracts for the same class of house is £1,245, merely an increase of £320 on £925!

The Honorary Minister: You know perfectly well that the costs of all things have gone up.

Hon. G. FRASER: Admittedly costs have risen, but not to the extent of 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ per cent.

The Honorary Minister: Do you know what the costs in the Eastern States have gone up to?

Hon. G. FRASER: I am not concerned about the Eastern States, but about this State. I am also concerned about the promise made by the present Government that the cost would be kept down to an amount low enough to enable people to purchase their own homes.

The Honorary Minister: So they can.

Hon. G. FRASER: That is not the only phase. Not only has the number of houses being built decreased, but the cost has greatly increased. Again, we find that a person, even after running the gauntlet of proving his case for a home, must wait, for a timber-framed house, for a period of anything up to 12 months on the priority list; and for a brick house, anything up to 15 months. Compare that with the period when the Labour Government was in office. There was then no priority list for a timber-framed house, and applicants had to wait only five months for a brick house.

The Honorary Minister: I suppose there are more applicants now.

Hon. G. Bennetts: How do you think young married couples are getting on now?

Hon. G. FRASER: That is another point with which I propose to deal. A promise was made by Government members on the hustings—and we have read much about it in the Press—that homes would be provided for two- and three-unit families. So far as my district is concerned, we have seen nothing of those houses. According to reports by the Minister, I believe some have been built in the State, but I repeat that, so far as I know, none has yet been erected in my district. One thing which the Government members did not tell the people when on the hustings was that, while houses would be provided for two- and three-unit families who could prove hardship, they would have to win an art union in order to secure a permit.

That is what is happening today. In order to secure a permit, a two or three-unit family must win a ballot. In the case of two-unit families, after the ballot has been conducted, the Commission examines

their needs. That is the method now being adopted. As a matter of fact, only one ballot has yet been held and we have no information as to when the next ballot will take place. In addition to running the gauntlet of the ballot, these people are subjected to inspection by the Government before they are permitted to build half a house—not a house. That is the best way I can explain the expansible house. Some local authorities will not allow such houses to be built in their areas, although others will. I therefore contend that the promise made by Government members to two- and three-unit families has very little foundation.

Hon. G. Bennetts: And then they are wondering why we cannot populate the country.

Hon. G. FRASER: In addition, we find that the larger families are being retained on the priority list longer than they should be. During recent days, I was rather startled to learn that persons with larger families than three units have not had permits issued to them for nearly three months. So much for the Government's promises and performances regarding the housing situation. We have read a great deal in the Press recently on the subject of day labour. I presume the Government started on its programme of putting off the men on day labour because of the pressure brought to bear upon it by outside interests.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: That was a promise.

Hon. G. FRASER: I quite admit it is the only promise that I know the Government has kept. I assume it is because of the outside pressure that was brought to bear upon the Government. There is good reason why such pressure was brought to bear, because under the day labour system the workers proved that homes could be built cheaper than under the contract system.

Hon. G. Bennetts: We have proof of that in Kalgoorlie.

Hon. G. FRASER: There is no need for us to go to Kalgoorlie, as we have the proof in the metropolitan area. I defy any member to disprove that statement. The method of arriving at the cost of dwellings is for a representative of the Master Builders' Association to confer with the Housing Com-

mission and arrive at a basic price. It may astound members to know that the only group of houses completed to date under the day labour system is a group of 64 at South Perth; and the final costs show that these dwellings were erected at less than contract prices. The basic price for this particular group of dwellings was £75,000, but, after completion, it was found that the cost was £2,500 below the estimate.

Members cannot say that private builders are doing the same, because under similar conditions they would have taken the £75,000. But, in addition to the saving of £2,500, the Public Works Department gave the men holiday pay and long service leave, the latter being over and above what would have been allowed by private builders. So, we find that day labour is acting as such a brake on rising costs that the outside interests have to get busy about it. The Government can show the public that places can be built by day labour cheaper than under the contract price system. That is what happened, and so pressure has been brought to bear on the Government to cease that system of building as much as possible.

Whilst I admit it was an election promise of the Government to do away with day labour, I think that when it was clearly demonstrated that the costs were less, it should not only have retained the men employed under that system, but have increased their number. We would welcome the idea in the Fremantle area. As a matter of fact, we asked for it only 12 months ago, when the Government had fallen down on the job there.

The Honorary Minister: That was after we had been in power for four months.

Hon. G. FRASER: The Government had not signed a contract then. The reason was that all of the tenders submitted by private enterprise were too high. There was a 36 per cent. increase on the price paid previously. We asked that, if Fremantle was to get homes, the day labour system be instituted there, but the Government would not go on with it. The first tenders called by this Government showed a 36 per cent. increase on the last Wise contracts. The Government would not go on with them. It was going to leave Fremantle high and dry. We asked, "What are you going to do about it?" The reply was, "What can we do? The

builders will not tender a reasonable price." If it had not been for the pressure brought to bear by the Fremantle members, the people there would not have got any homes.

It has been established that homes can be built cheaper by day labour, yet the Government is now doing away with that system. That will mean that prices can go practically unchecked. If we take the cost of a two-bedroomed house built either on the basic price principle, by a private contractor, or by the Government under the day labour scheme, and compare it with the cost of building outside, we find there is a vast difference. I was shown a quote only yesterday for a two-bedroomed place, tendered for privately, that ran into £1,698. When we realise these costs we naturally bump up against the question as to how the people are ever going to own their homes. We want an increase of the day labour system so that more rental homes can be built. Although a person may set out with the idea of owning his own home, the price has now increased to such an extent that he will never be able to do so. When we see a contract signed for an ordinary two-bedroomed house, to cover a period of 45, 40 or 33 years for repayment, we wonder how these people ever expect to own a home.

They might have a little equity in it, which would improve gradually with the passing of the years, but unless something radical is done, they will never be more than tenants with, probably, the added protection that they cannot be evicted. We would like the Government not to decrease the number of buildings being constructed by day labour for the rental scheme, but to increase them. Heaven knows, there are enough applicants! I think today the number of applicants runs into over 12,000. Admittedly, a couple of thousand may have been satisfied, but those waiting for homes under that scheme would be about 10,000 in round figures. It is necessary for the Government to do something along these lines because for the last 20 odd years private enterprise has not done anything in the way of building rental homes.

Hon. L. Craig: Your Government made it impossible for them, under rent control.

Hon. G. FRASER: We will not go into that now. What the hon. member says may be right or it may be wrong. I am en-

deavouring to point out to the Government the necessity of increasing the number of rental homes that are being built. For over 20 years—long before the depression—private enterprise has not built for rental purposes. Many people, due to various causes, can never hope to own their own homes, so places must be built which they can rent. Something on these lines has to be done or the 10,000 applicants now waiting for rental homes will never receive them.

This Chamber—Mr. Miles is mainly responsible—must share the burden for the blame attaching to the scarcity of rental homes because, I remind the hon. member, he was the one who, in 1937, moved that the item of £10,000 in the Loan Bill, put up by the Willecock Government, for home building for rental purposes, be deleted. So, the hon. member must bear the blame.

Hon. G. W. Miles: I will take the responsibility for my action.

Hon. G. FRASER: The hon. member ought to be ashamed of it!

Hon. G. W. Miles: I am not.

Hon. G. FRASER: It is because of his action that there are some thousands of homes less in the metropolitan area than if that item had remained. The sum of £10,000 was set aside for the purpose of building rental homes. It would have provided from 20 to 25 houses. I feel sure that the scheme would have been so successful that in the following years there would have been much larger amounts provided for the same purpose, with the result that some hundreds of houses would have been built by the Government for rental purposes when the war broke out.

The Honorary Minister: We did amend the Act to provide for rental houses.

Hon. G. FRASER: I am talking of 1937. Had that £10,000 not been deleted at that time, the houses would have been constructed and today would be worth twice what they originally cost. Quite apart from the financial point of view, they would have given considerable relief in the provision of homes. So, instead of the Government putting off day labour men, it should be increasing their number to make up the leeway in regard to rental homes. On checking the tenancy applications, I find that the number of people waiting for homes

under the rental scheme is in the vicinity of 10,000.

The building programme has not got back to the normal prewar rate. The experts say that the prewar rate was 2,000 per year, but I have made a check and find that over 3,000 building permits were issued by the local authorities. Even allowing for industrial concerns, the prewar figure would be about 2,700 or 2,800 homes a year. If the rate required now was only the same as prewar, we would still find that we were not up to the stage of meeting those requirements. But the normal requirements today are larger than prewar because prior to the war many people had difficulty in finding, out of their wages, the necessary deposit in order to become home builders.

Today, because many of our young lads have been in the Forces and have received their discharge with deferred pay, etc., they have become potential home builders. So, a larger number are now potential home builders than prewar. If we take the prewar rate as the normal rate, and we realise that for five years there were no buildings constructed at all, we can understand that there will be a deficit of between 12,000 and 15,000 houses. As I say, at the moment, we are not building even at the normal rate. Until we get up to the 4,000 mark we will not catch up any leeway.

The Honorary Minister: Do you think the 40-hour week will help?

Hon. G. FRASER: It will not make any more difference than a number of other things. The problem is not the 40-hour week but the high cost of building about which this Government has not done very much. So, I say it will take anything from 12 to 15 years before the leeway is overtaken. Yet we find the Government, which was doing a job in a particular section that private enterprise had not touched, is putting men off with no guarantee that they will stay in the building trade. Among those men are many trainees who would be valuable artisans to the Government. Yet those men, too, will have to find other employment.

Even at this late hour the Government ought to reconsider its decision, and, instead of dismissing tradesmen, put them on to the day labour system, and increase their number. We will welcome the Government's

action if it does in Fremantle what it has done in South Perth and some other parts of the metropolitan area; that is, build houses under the rental scheme by day labour. We will prove in the Fremantle area, as has been done in other districts, that houses can be built cheaper by day labour than under the contract system.

The Honorary Minister: Can they be built quicker too?

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes. That has been proved. Houses have been turned out quicker that way than by private contract. If any member likes to check that statement by taking a house at South Perth and one constructed under private contract at Graylands, he will find it is correct. It defies contradiction. The day labour system is better in respect of both costs and time. The Government should not throw that scheme overboard but should expand it. If it does not, we will find at election time that the housing position is in just as big a mess as it has been ever since the war. I believe that housing is one of the greatest problems of the people today. I hope that the Government will do something not only to increase the rate of building, but to decrease the cost. If it cannot lessen costs, it ought to give consideration to the payment of a bonus by some means or other, to allow of people becoming potential home builders.

Greater consideration should be given to the people who endeavour to purchase their own homes, as against the people who are merely rent payers, although many of these people do not have the opportunity to become home owners and are compelled to pay rent all their lives. However, the Government has fallen down on the housing question, and has fallen down on the job badly, both from the cost point of view and from that of the volume of building that has taken place. Whilst I may have criticised the Government, it is not the only criticism I wish to make. I wish to say a word or two about "The West Australian."

Hon. R. M. Forrest: Say something nice.

Hon. G. FRASER: I am always doing that. I have read many times in "The West Australian" about all the different "isms." They have quoted communism, socialism, liberalism and all other sorts of "isms," but one thing which I have never seen in "The West Australian" is the word "sup-

pressionism." There is no doubt "The West Australian" is a past-master at that.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: Is that word in the dictionary?

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes, and there is no doubt that this paper is a past-master at it. I will quote one or two examples.

Hon. H. Tuckey: It has always given your party a fair go.

Hon. G. FRASER: It has occurred on a number of occasions, once when Mr. Wise gave the paper some information and the blue pencil was applied to his statement. Later on the paper was forced to apologise and print the portions of the statement that had been struck out. The same thing applied to statements made by Mr. Hawke and by Mr. Graham.

The Honorary Minister: That would be a pity.

Hon. G. FRASER: I have had the same experience myself.

The Honorary Minister: That is terrible.

Hon. A. L. Loton: Does "The Worker" do the same thing?

Hon. G. FRASER: During the last election campaign in my province I submitted, in company with other candidates, my policy speech, and in the course of that utterance I criticised the Government for falling down on its job as regards the housing position.

Hon. G. W. Miles: That is the previous Government.

Hon. G. FRASER: No, the present Government. I made two statements regarding housing and I said that the Government had not signed one contract in the Fremantle electorate during the first six months it had been in office. The second statement I made was that even at that stage—that is, when the campaign was in progress—the Government had not completed one building in the Fremantle area. That was for a period of twelve months since the Government had been in office. My policy speech was published in "The West Australian" on the Friday week before the election. The Minister did not attempt to reply to me, but imagine my surprise when on election day I opened the paper and there was a statement from the Minister in reply to my accusations. I read the reply carefully but the Minister

had skated round the two accusations I had made and did not attempt to answer them.

On the 10th May I visited the office of "The West Australian," and the editor was profuse in his attempts to tell me that his paper was fair to my party. I told him that the fairness to me was most peculiar but that I had visited the office to reply to the statements made by the Minister. In my reply I confined myself to a comment on the despicable action of the Minister in replying to me on election day in an attempt to influence electors of the West Province. I also issued a challenge to the Minister to produce one house in Fremantle that had been completed up to that time by the Government since it had been in office. A reporter was made available to me to take my statement which was very concise. I made my statement on the 10th May and today is the 8th September. As yet that statement has not appeared in "The West Australian." The reason for its suppression is that the Minister could not produce the house. That is the deal the Labour Party receives from what is supposed to be a reputable daily newspaper.

The Honorary Minister: Never mind, "The Sunday Times" said nice things about you.

Hon. G. FRASER: Never mind what "The Sunday Times" had to say. I am dealing with "The West Australian," and I label that paper with the name "suppressionist." That paper has truly lived up to the name so far as I and other members of my party are concerned. I do not mind the paper being favourably disposed towards the Government as long as it is fair, but I have never known the occasion where that paper has ever displayed an atom of fairness when dealing with the Labour Party.

Hon. A. Thomson: We are rather doubtful as to whether you are now being fair to the Government.

Hon. G. FRASER: I have not said anything in my speech that the Government could not contradict if it had achieved results. My statements this afternoon are based on absolute facts that can be verified, and I defy the hon. member to show that what I have said is incorrect. I have quoted figures given by the Government

Statistician, and not figures taken out by any member on this side of the House. I know the Government Statistician is fair, irrespective of what party happens to be in power, and so I repeat, that I defy Mr. Thomson or any other hon. member to prove that the figures I have given as regards the cost of houses, or the number of houses that have been built, are wrong. I do not intend to weary the House any longer —

Hon. G. W. Miles: Hear hear!

Hon. G. FRASER: —because whilst I have criticised the Government, I have not criticised the hon. member who said "Hear, hear." He made an excellent speech on the Address-in-reply up to a certain point, but he went beyond himself and spoilt his speech when he spoke, in the latter portion of it, about the Commonwealth Government's taxation proposals.

Hon. G. W. Miles: It adopted my policy.

Hon. G. FRASER: In the course of attacking the Government, the hon. member called them "brigands." If it had not been for the men whom the hon. member referred to as "brigands," he would not have been here complaining about taxation that is being imposed, because the parties that he supports walked out and left Australia to fend for itself in the early stages of the war.

Hon. G. W. Miles: What rot!

Hon. G. FRASER: There is no rot about it! It was because of the petty jealousies of those parties that they could not carry on even when Australia was at war, and the men whom the hon. member refers to as "brigands," had to come to the rescue and take over the reins of government. They brought our armies back from the Middle East, appealed to America for assistance and, by their actions, saved Australia from an enemy that was at our gates. Yet—

Hon. G. W. Miles: What about Mr. Essington Lewis who made all our ammunition and the like?

Hon. G. FRASER: —because they did that—

Hon. G. W. Miles: Just bushrangers!

Hon. G. FRASER: —and because they imposed taxation to pay for the many requirements for our war effort, the hon. member calls them "brigands."

The Honorary Minister: But the war is over now.

Hon. G. FRASER: All those things have to be paid for. Further, many of the men who went to the war must receive certain payments for injuries they suffered and because of the services they gave to protect men like the hon. member. Yet, because a little bit of taxation is imposed—

The Honorary Minister: Little bit is right!

Hon. G. FRASER: —the hon. member objects! Before I conclude, I wish to suggest something which I consider will be an improvement. I want to help the Government wherever possible and I consider it could improve the service it is giving to the country—

Hon. E. M. Heenan: By resigning!

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes, that would be better, but if not, the next best thing is to reorganise Cabinet. I say that quite sincerely because I think some Cabinet Ministers are handling portfolios that could be amalgamated with those of other Ministers.

Hon. H. L. Roche: What do you want? A Minister for Fremantle?

Hon. G. FRASER: I consider the housing position is so serious that it requires a full-time Minister in charge of the department. The Department of Supply and Shipping is one that could be amalgamated. Many statements have appeared in the Press, but when members get down to facts and figures they find that everything is not so good as far as that department is concerned, in that claims made in the Press cannot be substantiated. These statements are the laughingstock of the waterfront and the shipping people or anybody who is in the game.

If we examine the figures, we find that they are not so good as the Press would have us believe. As a comparison, during the last six months of the Wise Government, when there was no Minister dealing with the question, we find that there were 203,000 tons of cargo brought into Fremantle from the Eastern States. Now that we have a Minister in charge, we find that for the six months ended the 30th June, 1948, cargo representing only 180,000 tons has been received. This is 26,000 tons less than for a corresponding period when no Minister was in charge of the department.

Hon. A. Thomson: That has happened just because we have had a change of Government?

Hon. G. FRASER: I am not saying that at all, but I consider the department could be amalgamated with some other department so that a full-time Minister could be provided to deal with the housing position. I say that in all seriousness, and I am not condemning the Minister in charge of the department. But the figures show that the Department of Supply and Shipping has not been doing as well with a Minister as it did previously, and that could be the department to be amalgamated; this would release a Minister to be in charge of housing. We have liaison officers in the Eastern States to arrange for the shipping of supplies, and this should enable us to do without the services of the Minister.

Hon. A. Thomson: Did they fall down on their job when the Government changed?

Hon. G. FRASER: No, they are still carrying on with the job.

Hon. A. Thomson: It is a reflection on the men concerned.

Hon. G. FRASER: It is not a reflection on the men concerned, but now that there is a full-time Minister in charge of the department, I am afraid that there may have been some ministerial interference with the men, which may be responsible for the falling off of our imports. However, if these officers are left to do the job, they will carry it out just as thoroughly for this Government as they did for the previous one. I urge the Honorary Minister to endeavour to have my suggestion adopted in regard to a full-time Minister in charge of housing, and it will improve the Government's position so far as the public is concerned. I support the motion.

Question put and passed; the Address adopted.

On motion by the Honorary Minister for Agriculture, resolved:

That the Address be presented to His Excellency the Governor by the President and such members as may desire to accompany him.

PAPERS—FREMANTLE ROAD BOARD.

As to Removal of Member.

HON. E. H. GRAY (West) [5.34]: I move—

That all papers relating to the removal from the Fremantle Road Board of Mr. George Wells be laid on the Table of the House.

I greatly regret the necessity of moving this motion because, in all my parliamentary experience, I cannot recall having previously been requested to do such a thing, and I took all sorts of pains to endeavour to get the matter settled before bringing it to this Chamber. Unfortunately, I was unsuccessful, and so, as a matter of common justice, I am placing it before the House.

The motion relates to trouble that occurred between one of the staff of the Fremantle Road Board and a member of the board, Mr. George Wells. It began with a dispute between the local poundkeeper and a ratepayer of the district when Mr. Wells was present. I understand that the argument led to happenings that resulted in a charge of assault and the outcome was that the ratepayer pleaded guilty and was fined. Later on, at a board meeting, Mr. Wells reported that, in his presence, the poundkeeper had made some lying statements to the police. This caused an uproar. He was requested to put the matter in writing. He did so, and later received a letter from a solicitor demanding a withdrawal or an apology to be published on his terms; otherwise, proceedings would be taken. Mr. Wells did nothing. That was some months ago and no action has been taken up to date.

I impressed upon Mr. Wells the seriousness of making such statements, and he said he was so sure they were correct that he was prepared to go into any court and justify what he had said. That was in March last. A few weeks later, the poundkeeper and Mr. Wells had an argument on the main road near the store at Hamilton Hill, and the outcome was that Mr. Wells was charged with assault and was ordered by the magistrate to pay £10 and costs. He had to pay; he has his own ideas about this.

I wish to state that I am making no attempt to justify the action of any road board member in interfering with one of the staff. If there is anything wrong, it is the duty of the member to report to the secretary or the chairman and later to the board, but a member is distinctly out of order and is acting contrary to his duty when he interferes with one of the staff. That is a bald statement of the facts.

At this juncture, Mr. Wells approached me following a meeting of the road board

at which a member had moved that the Minister be written to requesting the removal of Mr. Wells from the board because of his conduct to the poundkeeper. The motion was not seconded, and it therefore lapsed. I assured Mr. Wells that whatever happened, the Minister would notify him and would probably also notify one of the parliamentary representatives of the district, and that he would have ample opportunity to put his case if the board pressed for his removal. Mr. Wells was satisfied with my assurance, and went away. Up to that time no communication had been received by him from the Minister or the department. Much to my surprise, a notice appeared in the "Government Gazette" of the 7th July, a copy of which was forwarded to Mr. Wells, together with a letter that read—

I have to advise you that under the provisions of Section 122 of the Road Districts Act, (1919-1947, His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor in Executive Council has thought fit to remove you from membership of the Fremantle Road Board, and I have further to inform you that under Subsection (3) of the said section you are disqualified for 12 months for re-election as a member of the said road board.

I enclose herewith an extract from the "Government Gazette" publishing the notice of your removal.

Yours faithfully,

W. C. WILLIAMS,

Under Secretary for Works.

Mr. Wells completed his term of office in April and another election was being held. A candidate was found to oppose him. An old gentleman was persuaded to nominate; he was a very sick man and, I am informed, was 84 years of age. The object was to give the ratepayers an opportunity of expressing their opinion regarding Mr. Wells. The gentleman accepted nomination, but died before nomination day, and Mr. Wells was elected unopposed. Particulars of the assault case had been published in the newspapers, and the ratepayers had ample opportunity to express their disapproval of his action. However, no other nomination was received, and Mr. Wells was returned unopposed.

I consider that the Minister made a very bad mistake. I have never known of such action being taken in similar circumstances. I think I shall be in order in saying that I approached the Minister and he informed

me that he had sent for the magistrate's notes, had read them and taken action accordingly. Evidently he was satisfied from the magistrate's notes that Mr. Wells should not continue to be a member of the board. This occurred some two months after Mr. Wells had been re-elected. I am sorry that the Minister took the action he did. It is rather pitiful when we think what a solicitor will do; he believed everything the magistrate said. I do not wish to imply that the magistrate would make an untrue statement, but he was circumscribed by the evidence placed before him. Had the Minister examined the files and read the history of this road board, he would not have taken action of this sort.

A large number of people in the Hamilton Hill district, which is a very prosperous district, have pressed me to bring the matter before the House so that we may see what is in the file. Then everybody will have an opportunity to learn exactly what occurred with regard to this man's removal. Had the Minister examined the file, he would have discovered a big story behind these happenings, which started two years ago. Mr. Wells has been a prominent and popular figure in the district and, assisted by others, has been trying to persuade the board and the ratepayers to establish a true valuation of the land in the district. The desire was that sufficient funds might be raised to make an impression upon the big programme of work that many ratepayers desire to see undertaken in the district, which has been undervalued for many years. It is the first time in my life that I have been approached by a prominent man complaining of the ridiculous valuation and the ridiculous amount of rates he was asked to pay. He maintained that they were 60 per cent. too low.

Hon. H. Tuckey: You know that for years road boards could not increase either their valuations or their rates.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: The former chairman and Mr. Wells persuaded the board to have a proper valuation made. This was done, after which the present chairman came into the picture. He is the owner of a large property. Thus there are two sections in the district, and Mr. Wells was with those who were anxious to do everything possible to push the interests of the district and who were prepared to pay their proportion of the cost. There is a main road constructed and maintained by the Main Roads Board pass-

ing through the district, that is of tremendous advantage to the market gardeners whose properties abut on it. These very prosperous settlers on the main road do not want footpaths or anything else. They have a splendid road on which to drive to market and are hostile to anybody who suggests that rates should be raised.

A valuation was undertaken, as I mentioned previously, and was forwarded to the department and investigated. I was Minister for Local Government at the time. The valuation was submitted to the experts and the road board was commended on the action taken. The present chairman led a deputation to me requesting that the department or the Minister intervene to cancel the valuation. Under a certain section of the Act the Minister, if he disapproves, can cancel a valuation and have a fresh one made, with the result that a different rate can be imposed. I was fortified with an intimate knowledge of the history of these matters, and I advised the present chairman of the board—who was not then on the board—that I could not do what he asked.

I said that the board should be supported and not denounced for taking this progressive action; that the district was very prosperous and the residents largely comprise market gardeners who had made a lot of money during the war. I further said that if they understood the business they would be behind the road board in striking a proper rate to increase the amenities for the people of the district. I told the gentleman who is the present chairman of the board that I would not interfere, and that I considered the position was sound. He was very wrathful; and before he left he said, "I am going to the local court. I have 60 to 70 ratepayers backing me and we are going to apply to the Local Court to have the valuation upset." I replied, "Do not do that, because you are handling other people's money and you are bound to lose every one of the cases," which he did. A fairly considerable sum of money in legal expenses was expended as a result.

Most of the ratepayers concerned are known to me personally and I meet them very often. I came across two or three of them on this occasion and asked them what rates they were paying. I told them the rates were ridiculous. They had to pay in legal costs twice as much as was represented in the increased rates imposed. Mr. Wells,

with others, has been crucified because of his action in trying to advance the interests of the district. That is the cause of the vendetta being waged against him; there is no question about that. The people are incensed that this man is being crucified because he is a progressive worker for the district.

Let us look at the record of Mr. Wells. He has been on the road board for 10 years. During that period he has served 12 months as chairman, three years as vice-chairman, three years as chairman of the works committee and three years as chairman of the finance committee. I would point out that under the Act—and Mr. Tuckey will know this—in the event of a vacancy on a board, the seat must be filled within two months. This seat was declared vacant on the 7th July. It is now September, and I understand that an election will not take place until the 31st October, which means that during a vital period of the year when the allocation of money takes place, this particular ward will have been without sufficient representation. It has been one man short.

Anyone knowing the history of this case will realise that it has been a big disaster for the local authority concerned. Not only has Mr. Wells been punished and humiliated by being thrown off the board, but the rate-payers of the ward have been deprived of representation. That is a bad mistake.

The Honorary Minister: Who is going to contest the vacancy in October?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: I have not the slightest idea; but I think that as a matter of fair play, if it is possible, the disqualification of 12 months should be lifted from Mr. Wells. Under Section 122 of the Road Districts Act—I have never known of this section having been used for this purpose before—it is provided—

(1) Whenever a board shall not observe the provisions of this Act, or in any other case when the Governor shall think fit, the Governor may supersede the board, either wholly or partially, or remove the members of the board or any of them from office, and authorise the Minister to exercise all or any of the functions of the board for such time as he shall think fit, and may also forbid and prevent the filling of any vacancy that exists or may occur on such board until such time as he shall appoint. Notices of such supersession or removal shall be published in the "Gazette."

(2) The Minister may delegate any power or authority vested in him under this section.

(3) Any member removed from office under this section shall be disqualified for 12 months for re-election as a member of the board.

Mr. Wells was disqualified on the 7th July. Section 62 states—

When an extraordinary vacancy arises from any cause the election to fill such vacancy, in the event of more than one nomination being received, shall be held within two months from the occurrence of such vacancy, on a day to be fixed by the board, or the chairman:

Provided that, when such vacancy occurs within four months before the date fixed by this Act for the holding of an annual election, the seat may, with the approval of the Minister, continue vacant until that election.

The election is in April, so this seat should have been filled long ago.

The Honorary Minister: The Act says he must be disqualified for 12 months. How are you going to get over that?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: That is why I have brought the matter here. The people want to see why this man has been punished. He does not deny that he broke the law with regard to having a row with a citizen. He was brought before the court and punished severely; and he took his punishment without growling. He resents the whole of the circumstances of the case, because he maintains that if the truth had been told, the other man, and not he, would have been punished. He paid for the mistake he made by being punished by the court. Then the Minister took a hand and punished him further, which was very unjust. He was not given an opportunity by the Minister to defend himself.

Hon. A. L. Loton: Two punishments for the one crime!

Hon. E. H. GRAY: It is very wrong. I know that if the Minister had seen the file, he would not have interfered. My experience over a lengthy period has convinced me that the people can be trusted in matters of this kind. If a man does anything very terrible, no matter what position he holds, the public will soon make a protest.

There has never been any protest against Mr. Wells from the people of this district. Furthermore, no official representation was made by the board to the department. The members of the board went behind the man's back. A letter was written and all the members except one signed it. I think there are nine or 10 members and the men who dominate the board are those who be-

lieve in lower valuations and want everything to remain static. They desire to prevent Mr. Wells from working on the road board any more. We should not countenance anything like this. It is wrong and absolutely evil for a man to be assisted to punish another man in this way.

Hon. E. M. Heenan: He had no opportunity to defend himself before the Minister.

Hon. E. H. GRAY: No. A motion was moved but not seconded and that was the end of it; but behind the man's back, every member except one signed a petition to the Minister, asking for Mr. Wells to be removed.

Hon. W. R. Hall: It is a peculiar board, is it not?

Hon. E. H. GRAY: Yes. About 70 rate-payers in this ward quickly forwarded a protest to the Minister, but they have received no reply up to date. The position is very unsatisfactory. Mr. Wells himself admits that he made a mistake; but he maintains—and his contention is supported by a large number of people in and outside the district—that he has been punished very unjustly and should be allowed to continue his work, and that a proper investigation should be made to see that the road board carries out its duties properly.

My opinion of members of local authorities of this character is that they stand for election with the object of keeping valuations, and therefore rates, as low as possible. Under such conditions progress is impossible. They are a disgrace to the community and should not be tolerated. When such happenings occur, Section 122 should be evoked, the whole board suspended, and a new election held. An examination of the files will show the stand I took in the dispute about the rates. I stood by the previous board. The facts on the file should be sufficient reason for the Minister in charge to suspend all the members and have a new election. A man who has given 10 years' honorary service, as Mr. Wells has done, should not be treated like this, and I am very sorry that the Minister made such a mistake and that I have been compelled at the request of large numbers of ratepayers in the Fremantle road district, to move this motion.

On motion by the Honorary Minister for Agriculture, debate adjourned.

BILLS (10)—FIRST READING.

- 1, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act Amendment.
- 2, Gold Buyers Act Amendment.
- 3, Interpretation Act Amendment.
- 4, Fisheries Act Amendment (Continuance).
Introduced by the Honorary Minister for Agriculture (for the Chief Secretary).
- 5, Factories and Shops Act Amendment.
- 6, Licensing Act Amendment.
- 7, Marriage Act Amendment.
- 8, Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages Act Amendment.
- 9, Land Alienation Restriction Act Amendment (Continuance).
- 10, Feeding Stuffs Act Amendment.
Introduced by the Honorary Minister for Agriculture.

House adjourned at 6.5 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 8th September, 1948.

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