

## Legislative Council.

Tuesday, 6th September, 1949.

### CONTENTS.

	Page
Question : Parliamentary Superannuation Fund, as to representation of Country Party .....	1729
Bills : Bees Act Amendment, 3r. ....	1729
Prices Control Act Amendment (Continuance), 3r., passed .....	1729
Building Operations and Building Materials Control Act Amendment (Continuance), 2r. ....	1729
Increase of Rent (War Restrictions) Act Amendment (No. 4), Assembly's further message .....	1734
Electoral Act Amendment (No. 3), 2r. ....	1734

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

### QUESTION.

#### PARLIAMENTARY SUPERANNUATION FUND.

*As to Representation of Country Party.*

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Is he aware that, by a motion he moved (which was adopted by the House at 1.15 a.m. on the 10th December, 1948, being the final business of the sitting) appointing the President and the Chairman of Committees as trustees of the Parliamentary Superannuation Fund—they being the representatives of the Legislative Council—the Country Party members were left without representation?

(2) Is he aware that four of the five trustees appointed under the Act are members of the L.C.L. and one is a Labour member the Treasurer being included in the four trustees representing the L.C.L.?

(3) As the Country Party members have no representation among the trustees, will he give the House an opportunity of correcting this oversight?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) No, but a motion was moved at 1.15 a.m. on the 11th December, 1948, to appoint two trustees to represent this Council and the two members holding official positions in this Council were nominated by the Chief Secretary without any consideration of any political affiliations.

(2) No. At the time the House appointed the trustees the Liberal-Country Party did not exist.

(3) The Chief Secretary has no authority under any Standing Order or the Parliamentary Superannuation Act, 1948, to give the House any opportunity for correcting any oversight, imaginary or otherwise, in the appointment of the trustees, and he refers the hon. member to Section 9 of the Act, which sets out very simply the procedure to be adopted on original and future appointments, and no mention is made therein to any party affiliation.

### BILLS (2)—THIRD READING.

1, Bees Act Amendment.

Transmitted to the Assembly.

2, Prices Control Act Amendment (Continuance).

*Passed.*

#### BILL—BUILDING OPERATIONS AND BUILDING MATERIALS CONTROL ACT AMENDMENT (CONTINUANCE).

*Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 2nd August.

HON. SIR CHARLES LATHAM (East) [4.36]: Unfortunately, the Bill is one of those pieces of legislation which provides plenty of opportunity for talking, but very little for making alterations. After the discussions that took place during the first session of this Parliament, and the early part of the present session, I was hopeful that some amendments would have been brought down to give us an opportunity to remove some of the restrictions.

When the measure was previously before the House, I tried to persuade the Government of the necessity for removing the controls over secondhand materials. No provision is made to do that even today, despite the fact that it would not affect materials for new buildings. I regret, for that reason, that the Government has not seen fit to introduce an amending Bill which would give members an opportunity of expressing themselves in some tangible way so as to afford some relief for people who are seeking homes. The position now is that we either have to accept or defeat the present Bill. I propose to support the second reading because I know there is absolute urgency still to have some control over building materials.

It would be unwise for this State, despite the fact that there is a lot of talk about the Eastern States removing restrictions, to do away with controls altogether. To permit competition between moneyed and non-moneyed people for homes would be scandalous and could not help in any way to relieve the anxiety and difficulties of those who today are trying to find homes for themselves. For that reason I think members must support the Bill. At the same time I hope that we can persuade the Government to introduce further amending legislation this session and that we shall be given some information as to what it proposes to do. Under the existing Act the Government has an opportunity if it so desires to make alterations in the conditions relating to the granting of permits or to remove the necessity for permits altogether. The Act is flexible enough for those purposes.

The delays experienced by people who make applications seem to be growing instead of diminishing. I have been told that most applications from country districts are dealt with almost at once. My experience, however, has not been anything like that. One day last week a man who wants to build a home—he is getting married in February and desires to have a house rather than a tent to live in—saw me about the position. I rang the State Housing Commission and was told that it would be probably 12 months before he would get a permit.

Hon. G. Fraser: He is lucky.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I hope he does not have to wait for 12 months. I think some speeding up could be achieved if the Commission adopted an attitude different from what is apparent today. I do not think enough small houses are being built. I am satisfied that people would be quite prepared to have small houses of about 7 or 8 squares rather than live under their present conditions.

Hon. A. Thomson: And have to pay 35s. and £2 a week rent for about one square.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I had an instance yesterday. A person came to see me. There are two of them living in a small room, 10 x 12, and they have stored what little furniture they have. I believe it is almost impossible for them to move because of the two beds. These people are paying 30s. a week for that room.

Hon. A. Thomson: For one room!

Hon. E. H. Gray: They are very silly, are they not?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: What can they do? They have no other alternative except to live in a tent. Unfortunately there are not many places in the metropolitan area where they are permitted to do even that. Therefore the position is pretty bad. I have a plan with me and I would like members to have a look at it. It has been loaned to me by a member of this House. It is a nice little building and I understand that a contract has been let for six or seven of these houses at an estimated cost of £700 each. There are two bedrooms, one 12 x 12 and one 8 x 10.

Hon. G. Fraser: Did you say a bedroom 8 x 10.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Yes, and one 12 x 12.

Hon. G. Fraser: It is very small.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It is all right for a child's bedroom. As a matter of fact, I have lived in an 8 x 10 tent and I daresay the hon. member has done so too. I have even seen two men living in an 8 x 10 tent and I consider that size to be quite suitable for a child's bedroom. It would certainly be better than some of the conditions under which people are living at present. There is a living room 12 x 16, a good-sized kitchen 18 x 8, and a verandah. There is a detached bathroom and laundry which are combined in the one building. The total area is approximately eight and a half squares and I understand that the cost will be approximately £80 a square, which works out at roughly £700.

I admit that it has only a galvanised iron chimney but if a brick chimney was provided it would not increase the cost by very much. This type of cottage would be most suitable for people who are living under very bad conditions in many parts of the city. I commend the idea to the Government because the use of these buildings in some of the outer suburban areas would be of benefit to the people. The cottage has a tiled roof, ordinary asbestos walls and the usual flooring. There is a cement bath and the ordinary type of copper. Many people, now living under unsatisfactory conditions would think

they, were living in a palace if they had one of these houses, and I am sure that the hon. member who loaned me this plan would be quite agreeable to the Government making use of it. If we built 1,000 of these cottages we would be meeting the requirements of many people living under hardship conditions.

We are told that the Eastern States people have considerably reduced controls and in some places almost eliminated them altogether. I do not think that Western Australia is in that position although I daresay we are sending a lot of the timber from here to enable some of the other States to lessen controls. I was reading in the daily paper, I think yesterday, where somebody was complaining that if the issue of permits were removed there would be a number of seaside shacks put up. That could be controlled very easily by making the local authorities responsible to ensure that no permits were granted unless the homes were to be permanently occupied. I would not say that houses should not be built at the seacoast because that would be too restrictive altogether, but encouragement could be given to people where the buildings were to be used only for the housing of families.

I regret that we seem to be suffering in this State from the leading articles in "The West Australian" which try to determine what is to be said in this House. I have a very strong objection to that practice because it is a bad policy for a newspaper, which has a monopoly, to publish a leading article on the day that a Bill will be discussed in the House, although probably expressing the views of the majority of members of this House. It makes a member feel that he is taking for his speech information that he has received from the newspaper. The leading article in this morning's paper is not the only time it has happened; it has occurred on several occasions in recent months. It is very embarrassing to members of this House when "The West Australian," on the day a Bill is to be discussed, publishes a leading article on the subject. However, there is no objection to a newspaper publishing its own comments but it is most unfortunate to find that a policy, which has been fathered by the leader-writer of "The West Australian," is practically dictated to us.

Hon. G. Bennetts: It may be telling the Government what to do.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It is not telling the Government but it is practically instructing members of this House what to do. If "The West Australian" has leading articles, then let them refer to the other House. This House is quite capable of judging its own policy regarding what is for the good of the people of this State. We can do our own business equally as well as "The West Australian" and probably do it a good deal better because we have more responsibility to carry than that newspaper.

Hon. L. Craig: Do you not think they should be allowed to express their views?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Yes, at a suitable time.

Hon. L. Craig: When is a suitable time?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Not on the day a Bill is to come before the House. It makes members feel embarrassed if they have to stand up and repeat what they have read in that morning's issue of "The West Australian."

Hon. L. Craig: Not at all.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Perhaps the hon. member does not object to it, but I do.

Hon. E. M. Heenan: I remember you speaking about the freedom of the Press on another occasion.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I have no objection to the freedom of the Press but dictation of policy is totally different. On that occasion my remarks were quite correct, so I do not accept that challenge from Mr. Heenan. I am quite capable of expressing my views without assistance from the leading article of "The West Australian," especially when it has a monopoly.

Hon. E. M. Heenan: Would you not like to agree with that newspaper?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Unfortunately, I am agreeing with it on this occasion; but I do not like people to think that I have had to take a lead from the newspaper or that I am incapable of making a speech without the assistance of the leading article.

Hon. E. M. Heenan: Surely one would not think you were weak enough to do that!

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It is hard to tell what some people may think. I am not weak enough to try and link this Bill up with a motion which was before the House some little time ago. However, it is hard to say what people may think at any time. I am in the unfortunate position of having to tell the Government that I intend to support this Bill. Before this session is completed amending legislation should be brought down that will enable us to ease some of the restrictions. I have previously advocated that we could very well release control over permits on houses up to 8 or 10 squares in the country districts. This would be along the same lines as was advocated in a speech by the Commonwealth Minister for Works and Housing. He said that it would assist decentralisation.

Hon. R. M. Forrest: You say there should be no restrictions?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I would not say that, but some of these elaborate houses require the use of materials that would provide two or three homes in other places. There should be a limit to that sort of thing, and it would be a great help to people in the rural areas. We preach decentralisation, but fail to practise it. If we carried out that objective, then elderly folk who want to retire and live amongst people with whom they have been friendly, would be able to provide themselves with homes in the district which they have been working, and they would not be forced to go elsewhere. We know that elderly folk do not easily form friendships as was possible when they were young. That being so, greater opportunity should be provided to enable them to secure homes in the rural districts instead of their being forced into the city to find accommodation, only to be lonely because they are not among friends.

We have recently been discussing a piece of legislation by which the responsibility for making homes available to their owners, or to others requiring them, is forced upon individuals. I hope further consideration will be given to that matter and the Government should take an early opportunity to deal more effectively with the problem. It is a responsibility that the whole of the people should carry and it should not be foisted on to individuals. It is cowardly for us collectively to evade responsibility and throw

it upon individuals who can ill afford to bear it. I hope to hear from the Chief Secretary that the Government will consider the early introduction of legislation to ease up these restrictions.

HON. G. BENNETTS (South) [4.53]: I support the second reading of the Bill. I differ from some of the references that have been made concerning the metropolitan area as against the country districts. In outback places we do not require the elaborate homes that can be seen in the city area. Take the position of Norseman, which is a gold-mining centre with, as we know, a life of 20 or 25 years. In that centre can be seen homes costing about £500. They consist of three- or four-roomed houses constructed of weatherboard and asbestos, places quite adequate for such a centre. That applies also to Higginsville, Coolgardie and other mining townships. Coolgardie at one time was a prosperous mining centre, but in later years its importance from that standpoint deteriorated. In consequence, many of the homes there were pulled down and re-erected elsewhere.

On the other hand, the metropolitan area is more stabilised, and larger and more elaborate homes are warranted here. Most decidedly residents of the outback are not prepared to spend £1,000 or £1,200 on the provision of homes. In my opinion, small dwellings should be decontrolled altogether, but the State should retain power to ensure that the people in the country are able to secure timber and other necessary supplies. That is essential if we are to encourage people to stay in the outer areas instead of forcing them to come to the already overcrowded metropolis. If members were to tour the metropolitan-suburban area, they would see hundreds of houses being erected. Then again, at larger country areas and distant ports we find, for instance, that at a place like Albany during the last 12 months or two years probably 200 homes have been erected. I am not certain about the number, and I stand to be corrected in that respect.

Members: You are wrong.

Hon. R. M. Forrest: How many were erected at Kalgoorlie?

HON. G. BENNETTS: The municipal council, the local road board and the branch of the R.S.L. at Kalgoorlie took a hand in the matter and put up buildings for them-

selves. We have had very little assistance from the Government. I know of one case where the stumps for a home have been down for 12 months—I have not the name of the person concerned at the moment, but I could supply it—and nothing has been done since.

Hon. H. Hearn: What is the reason for that?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: The inability to get timber supplies.

Hon. E. M. Davies: That was one of the items decontrolled.

Hon. G. BENNETTS: Yes. Since that step was taken, we have had very little timber on the Goldfields. I told the House of the result of my inspection of the timber yards at Kalgoorlie and Boulder. I could not see enough timber on that occasion to provide for a two- or three-roomed house. I quite understand why it is so. The big timber merchants can get huge contracts from the builders in the metropolitan area who can run their trucks into the yards, collect the timber on order and dump it on the site, without the necessity to bother about railway trucks and freights. The workers are the ones to suffer in these days. If the controls were lifted, the blokes out-back would get a damn sight less than they are today.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. G. BENNETTS: When many of the pioneers arrived in this country, they had to get their timber supplies from the bush.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Where did you get yours from?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: From the bush. In 1896 there were no timber yards, and the pioneers had to provide their own timber supplies from wherever they could get what was necessary.

Hon. L. A. Logan: Real pioneering!

Hon. G. BENNETTS: That is so. We were not like a lot of you gentlemen who have been spoon-fed. It has been because of the slavery of the men in the back country that wealth was produced and sent to the people in St. George's-terrace.

Hon. A. L. Lofon: Were you bottle-fed or spoon-fed?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: I was neither. My family were among the pioneers in this country. I have been in the North-West,

too, and know the difficulties there. I was brought up in the hard way and I know what it is to suffer. In those days we had to provide our own camps. When my mother and her five children went outback, they had no home to go to. As a matter of fact, the miners from the Great Boulder mine built ours. They got saplings from the vicinity and these were stuck in the ground and bags put around them. An oil drum was our fireplace. There was no water laid on in those days and all we got for all purposes was one gallon per day. As time went on and people were able to save a little money, they provided themselves with better homes. That is how they did it. Everything was done piecemeal.

That is how I had to do it when I got married. I had no money and had to start from scratch. It is only recently, since I have made the grade in politics, that I have been able to provide a decent home for my family. Surely members will agree that the time has arrived when greater consideration should be extended to those who live in outer rural areas. I was talking to an elderly lady today, one who was a pioneer at Kalgoorlie in the very early days. She now has two homes in the metropolitan area. She is a widow whose husband was killed in a mine. As a result of his savings, she was able to purchase two homes, but they are occupied by returned soldiers and she is unable to secure possession of either of them.

She has a pension, but it has been reduced to the extent of the rent she is receiving from the properties. She has no home to go to and her family have to provide a roof over her head. I certainly want controls to continue so as to cater for the needs of the working class who want timber and other necessities for their homes. It should not be left for the wealthy section of the community to secure what they need.

Hon. R. M. Forrest: Who are the wealthy section of the community?

Hon. G. BENNETTS: They are all around me. I wish I were among them.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: You say you are among them!

Hon. G. BENNETTS: Too right, I am! However, I am speaking in the interests of the working class whom I represent and

to which section of the community I belong. I want to see the people outback obtain decent homes or the materials to provide them with roofs over their heads. Sir Charles Latham has referred to the building of beach cottages, and I agree that if we did not have control, plenty of them would be erected. I know a few that have been built by wealthy people in the district to which I belong, and they are used only as summer residences. If controls were removed, many others would be built.

On motion by Hon. W. J. Mann, debate adjourned.

**BILL—INCREASE OF RENT (WAR RESTRICTIONS) ACT AMENDMENT (No. 4).**

*Assembly's Further Message.*

Message from the Assembly received and read notifying that it had agreed to the Council's further amendment No. 2 to the amendment made by the Assembly and had disagreed to further amendment No. 1.

**BILL—ELECTORAL ACT AMENDMENT (No. 3).**

*Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 23rd August.

**HON. G. FRASER** (West) [5.3]: It is not my intention to debate this matter at any length because I think members will agree that most of the amendments are desirable. My main purpose in rising is to correct a misunderstanding that has arisen in connection with the reply made by the Leader of the House to an interjection. The question was raised as to whether a present member would be entitled to have a vote for the new district for which he sought election. The Leader of the House said, "Yes". I think, however, that there has been a misunderstanding and it might be just as well at this stage if the point were cleared up. My reading of the Bill is that the retiring member can have both his name and that of his wife placed on the roll for the new electorate he is contesting, if it is part and parcel of his old seat.

The Chief Secretary: That is so.

Hon. G. FRASER: But not if he is contesting an entirely foreign electorate.

The Chief Secretary: I think that is so.

Hon. G. FRASER: It is just as well to have the point cleared up. To me, the Bill is quite clear on that point, but probably the Chief Secretary misunderstood the interjection and, as a result, he gave the reply he did.

The Chief Secretary: I think you are correct.

Hon. G. FRASER: The other parts of the Bill are necessary. The provision regarding polling booths is essential because quite a number of the old, regular polling booths, to which people have been accustomed to go for many years, will be practically on the boundary lines of new electorates. There are several instances in my own district. The Plympton school at East Fremantle has always been used as a polling booth and is very handy for people in portion of East Fremantle and the top part of Fremantle.

Under the alteration of electorates, that booth will now be on the boundary of two electorates and if this Bill were not assented to, this would cause a great deal of inconvenience, because the nearest polling booth is a considerable distance away. If this amendment were not agreed to, people living within 30 or 40 yards of the present polling booth would have to travel three quarters of a mile to another booth. Such instances could probably be multiplied considerably throughout the State. So it is wise that we should make an alteration permitting polling to take place outside an electorate. If we agree to that, we shall have to agree to one or two other amendments concerning questions to be put to people when they present themselves for their ballot papers.

I think that sums up the whole Bill; and now that I have cleared up the misunderstanding concerning the right of a member and his wife to enrol in a district in which they do not live, I am quite satisfied. I support the second reading.

On motion by Hon. Sir Charles Latham, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 5.7 p.m.*

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