

Legislative Council

Thursday, 9th August, 1951.

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

QUESTIONS.

WATER SUPPLIES.

As to Collie-Narrogin Pipeline.

Hon. A. R. JONES (for Hon. A. L. Loton) asked the Minister for Transport:

(1) How many miles of the main pipeline from Collie to Narrogin have been completed?

(2) How many miles of pipeline have been delivered but not connected?

(3) Is there sufficient steel on hand to complete the Collie-Narrogin section?

(4) Have tenders for the supply of electrically-driven pumps for this section been accepted by the Government? If not, why not?

(5) At what date does the Government consider that the supply of water from Collie to Narrogin will become an accomplished fact?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Thirty and one-quarter miles.

(2) One mile.

(3) No.

(4) Tender of Kelly & Lewis Ltd. has been accepted.

(5) Time required for completion of main depends on the availability of steel plate, and no firm estimate of date of completion can be given.

STATE SHIPPING SERVICE.

As to Vessel for Fremantle-Esperance Route.

Hon. E. M. HEENAN (for Hon. G. Bennetts) asked the Minister for Transport:

Seeing that the new ship for the North-West will be in service in October of this year, and another ship is to be constructed, will the Minister give consideration to this ship being used on the Fremantle-Esperance run?

The MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE replied:

No. This ship is being built especially for the North-West coast to suit the special conditions of tides and other factors on that coast. Consideration will be given to reinstating the "Kybra" or similar vessel, if available, on the Fremantle-Esperance run when the new ship is delivered to the Government.

NAVAL BASE AREA.

As to Transfer from Commonwealth.

Hon. E. M. DAVIES asked the Minister for Transport:

Is he in a position to inform the House how far negotiations have advanced with the Commonwealth Government, in respect to the transfer to the State of that area of land known as Coogee Beach and Naval Base, in the Fremantle Road Board district?

The MINISTER replied:

The Commonwealth has been approached and a decision by the Department of Navy is awaited.

LICENSING.

As to Introduction of Amending Legislation.

Hon. A. R. JONES (for Hon. A. L. Loton) asked the Minister for Transport:

Is it the intention of the Government to introduce any legislation to amend the Licensing Act, 1911-1949, during the present session of Parliament?

The MINISTER replied:

The matter is receiving consideration.

BILL—SUPPLY (No. 1), £9,000,000.

First Reading.

Bill received from the Assembly and read a first time.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT (Hon. C. H. Simpson—Midland) [4.38] in moving the second reading said: This is the customary Bill presented at the commencement of each session by which Supply is sought to continue the services of government until such time as the Estimates are passed by Parliament. The Estimates are under preparation and will be submitted to Parliament at the earliest opportunity. Last year, two Supply Bills were approved by Parliament, the first for an amount of £6,000,000 and the other for £7,000,000, a total of £13,000,000.

The Bill now before the House is for £9,000,000, a sum of £3,000,000 in excess of that provided in the measure introduced at the beginning of last session. It is, perhaps, hardly necessary for me to dwell on the fact that the increased amount is due in a large measure to the increased cost

of all works and services. It is due also to very necessary additional loan expenditure consequent on the importation of such vital requirements as rollingstock for the railways, and steel, cement and plant for water supply and other important and necessary projects.

The sum of £9,000,000 requested under the Bill is required as follows:—

For Consolidated Revenue	£6,000,000
For General Loan Fund	£2,500,000
For Advance to Treasurer	£500,000

It was estimated that a deficit of £485,488 would occur for the financial year ended the 30th June, 1951. Actually, a surplus of £159,347 was recorded. The revenue for the year was £28,156,181, this having been £1,902,120 in excess of the estimate. Expenditure was also higher than was estimated, having been £27,996,834 against an estimate of £26,739,549.

Included in revenue was an additional sum of £1,000,000, being this State's share of a special grant of £15,000,000 to the States by the Commonwealth for taxation reimbursement. This grant was made for the specific purpose of assisting the States to meet the increased costs occasioned by the Commonwealth Arbitration Court's decision to increase the basic wage by £1 per week. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [4.42]: If I did my duty to my constituents, I should put forward a suggestion—I could not move an amendment—that the amount of the Supply Bill be reduced by the amount included for the furtherance of the Fremantle Harbour scheme. I feel that if I took that course I should be doing my duty not only to my constituents but also to the State as a whole. However, it is not my intention to pursue that matter this afternoon; I shall deal with it and other subjects during the Address-in-reply debate.

I rose to put two requests. The first is to suggest to Ministers that when answers are given to questions in this Chamber, typed copies should be supplied to the members asking them as well as being read out. I make this suggestion for the reason that unless a member takes down in writing, which is not always possible, the answer given by a Minister, it is necessary to wait almost until the sitting hour on the following day in order to check the answer with the question and ascertain whether it is satisfactory. If a copy of the answer were handed to the member after the Minister had read it out, it would be of great service to members.

In making this suggestion, I am not asking for something which is not done elsewhere. I understand that this is the practice in another place. If it were

adopted here, a member who was not satisfied with an answer given to his question would be able to follow it up next day with a further question whereas, under existing conditions, it is almost impossible to do that. That is No. 1 request for the consideration of Ministers.

The other request is that Ministers, when answering questions, should not adopt evasive methods such as are being adopted in giving those answers. I suggest that they should not treat members as schoolchildren or as people to be brushed aside and given the most evasive answer possible. As an example, let me refer to a question which I asked the other day and the answer supplied, and leave it to members to decide whether there is any cause for complaint. Apart from this, I might refer to a question asked by another member yesterday or the day before. He knew it was a Commonwealth matter and suggested that the State Government might take it up with the Commonwealth Government, but he was just brushed aside with a reply that this was a Commonwealth matter. In the latter part of his question he asked whether the State Government would take some action, but that was ignored. That is not the right sort of answer to give to a member.

We have a duty to our constituents and we perform that duty in the way we think is best. When a member asks a question, it is generally accepted that he knows the answer, but that is not always the case. A member on occasion might have an idea that a certain procedure is adopted by the department and may wish to find out whether that is correct, and so he asks a question in order to obtain an official answer. When a member does that, he is entitled to receive a direct answer and not be replied to in the evasive manner in which answers are given.

Let me quote from questions asked by me the other day. I referred to certain bores put down at Point Brown in connection with harbour construction and asked for certain information on the departmental file. The answer to question No. 1 was a clear "No." I had no objection to that, but will deal with it on the Address-in-reply. As an answer it was quite satisfactory. The second question I asked was—

At what depth did the 1929 test bores strike a satisfactory bottom at Point Brown?

The reply given was—

From ground line to bottom of bore, 80 feet.

That left me in the air, wondering whether the bores had gone down to 80 feet and got bottom or whether it was satisfactory from the time of starting. That question could have been answered

much more clearly than it was, for it would have been quite easy to say that the bore had proved satisfactory from the ground-line to the bottom. In the first question, I asked whether the departmental files showed that there had been failure to get a bottom down to 80 feet prior to 1929, but the department evidently did not know anything about that. In answer to the second question, I was told that 80 feet was the depth of the bore from the surface downwards. A clearer answer could certainly have been given. As I have remarked, it left me in the air, wondering whether a bottom had been obtained or whether the bores had gone down 80 feet and got nothing.

That is not as bad as an answer I received to a question about the spec-building scheme. I asked a question that could have been answered "yes" or "no", with possibly a little further explanation. Let me read the question and answer—

When permits are issued to master builders to build homes under the "spec-building" scheme, are any safeguards inserted so that they shall be—

(a) sold only to approved applicants; and

(b) sold at a reasonable price?

Hon. H. K. Watson: What do you mean by approved applicants?

Hon. G. FRASER: I wanted to know whether the permit when it was issued, would contain any provision requiring the purchaser of the house to be approved by the Housing Commission. I am not going to argue now whether that is right or wrong. Here is the answer I got—

The present system provides for releases of controlled materials under the ready-made house scheme, subject to an undertaking from the builder that he will inform the Commission of the name of the purchaser and the price received.

I asked straight out whether there were any safeguards, and whether these spec-builders have to sell to an approved buyer, and that is the answer I got. They have to submit a name. Again, all I can do is to make an assumption. If they do not have to sell to an approved buyer, why did not the Minister say so? He is trying all the time to evade the question. Surely the Government should not be ashamed of its policy, if it is its policy, to allow a builder to sell to anyone. Why try to camouflage it? Then I asked further whether there were any safeguards to see that the sale was at a reasonable price. This is the answer—

Should the price be considered excessive, the Commission withholds the issue of material releases to the builder for further building under this scheme.

In other words, should the price be considered excessive, the Commission would take further action. That might be a little more satisfactory as an answer than the earlier one. My last questions were—

(2) If the answer to (a) or (b) is "yes," what steps are being taken by the Government to see that the terms of the permit are carried out?

(3) If the answer to (a) or (b) is "no," will the Government take immediate steps to have the above-mentioned safeguards inserted in these permits?

To those questions no answer was given at all. The Government just tried to camouflage the whole position by giving a roundabout answer. I make the request to the Minister that on all future occasions when members ask questions they be given replies which can be understood, and which define the department's attitude. We do not want to be left in the air as we have been on a number of occasions. We have been told that the departmental and Government policy on certain things is such-and-such. We have accepted that; and when a constituent has come to us and made certain suggestions regarding these things, we have said, "No, that cannot be done. The Government policy is such-and-such." Then the following day, or maybe two days later, the constituent has come to us and said, "What you told me the other day is not right because the department is doing so and so, which is entirely foreign to what you said." We are simply left in the air.

If the department has a policy and we ask about it, surely it should tell us what that policy is, and not be ashamed of it. I assume that Ministers of the Crown do not do what they consider is not correct. They should tell us the position straight out. I am making this request for more definite replies to questions instead of the evasive answers we have had in the past. I will deal with other matters on the Address-in-reply. Probably the Ministers will say that the answers are the departmental replies. Well, a Minister should go through the replies before giving them in the House, and if he is not satisfied with them he should ask the departments concerned for better ones. A Minister should not simply read what some departmental head has given him, but should check it beforehand. I hope the Minister will take note of what I have said, and give consideration to the request I have made.

HON. C. H. HENNING (South-West) (4.55): I would not normally have spoken today, but I feel that I must because of the crisis which is confronting the dairying industry at present, and which has developed particularly during the last few days. When I spoke previously, I mentioned the need for development, but unfortunately time was against me and I did not finish dealing with one

or two small points. I mentioned the standard farm, but I did not say what was considered to be a standard farm. It is, I take it, one capable of carrying 40 milking cows, and with an area of pasture of at least 160 acres. It is essential, before we start opening new country for dairying, that we should give due consideration to those who have carried on the dairying industry for many years under great difficulties. That is the basis on which I spoke the other day. The reason is that if we open new country immediately, it will have to be developed and that will entail the use of a great deal of material that is in short supply. The existing holdings have the houses, outbuildings and plant that are necessary and, in many cases, the fencing.

In the South-West, 1½ million acres are devoted to dairying—that is, for the whole-milk and butterfat industries. I have not been able to get the exact figures of what is used entirely for the butterfat industry, but it is in connection with those supplying butterfat that I think it is so necessary to have this development scheme. Every year we have had trouble in getting the cost of production figure. Even if we get it, we will find that there will still be unrest in the industry, and that will continue until these people can be put on a fair average basis—that is, an average basis for cost of production as is worked on throughout Australia. Probably quite a number of members thought I was opening my mouth very wide when I said that 50 tractors were necessary. Well, we have millions of acres ready for clearing, taking the whole lot, the old development and the new. But we have to realise that no matter how big a tractor is, the maximum it has been proved to do is about 1,200 acres a year.

With 50 tractors we could expect 50,000 to 60,000 acres of development a year, and that is not very much when we consider the land that we have available and should be using to far greater advantage than we are at the moment. I believe, also, that very few people realise it will cost £9 to £10 an acre simply to put a bulldozer in and get the timber into winrows. That, as far as the farmer is concerned is only the start. He has to wait from three to five years, at least, before he gets a fully established pasture, and he has also to burn the timber in the winrows. In addition, he has to sow and do all he can to prevent the regeneration of the bush which is so prevalent. What, in short, I am asking for is that we complete the group settlement scheme. The idea in the mind of the Government, some 20 odd years ago, when the scheme was started, was purely and simply that Western Australia should have an industry that would support all its requirements, and also help to carry out something that was most necessary—the development of the South-West. In addition, it was to contribute to the larder of the world.

Our great worry at present is price. Unfortunately, no agreement has been reached, and it means that the butterfat producer is being denied a reasonable standard of living, which should be his right. It seems remarkable to me that we have an industry for which a special board is set up to find the cost of production and yet, when this is found, the people in that industry are unable to obtain that cost of production. The dairyman is asking for nothing more than that. We can go into the country today—not a great distance from Perth—and we can buy a bottle of beer and a pound of butter for exactly the same price. It would be an insult to anybody's intelligence to ask which provides the most benefit to the members of a family.

Hon. R. M. Forrest: And which costs the most to produce, too.

Hon. C. H. HENNING: The farmer is not so much concerned with how he gets the price; whether it is paid by a subsidy, or partly by subsidy as well as an increased cost to the consumer. We are told that if it is to be paid entirely from a subsidy, it will cost the Commonwealth somewhere about £28,000,000 a year. But, year after year there are these wrangles between the two authorities, and for months we wait for that price increase to come forward. This year we are told that it will cost in the vicinity of £12,000,000. Two years ago, it took five months to agree to an increase when the subsidy was to be extended by only £5,000,000. So members can see why the dairyman is getting completely fed up with the position.

There has been talk and action about holding up the supply of butter. That is not an ill-considered scheme, and dairymen do not intend to milk their cows and throw the product down the drain, as I have heard reported. The dairyman is considering the best method to hold up the supply of his manufactured product. He has the opportunity, and I think he can arrange it, to send his raw product to the factory for processing, so that it can be held there or in cold storage. Neither the marketing authorities nor the Government has any control over that product until the time comes for it to be sold. Therefore, I believe that arrangements could be made for the product to be held in that manner.

The dairymen are not the only ones concerned with this question. The Butter and Cheese Manufacturers' Association has also promised co-operation, and I wish to read a letter which appeared in "The Farmer's Weekly" under today's date, the 9th August. It is from the secretary of the Butter and Cheese Manufacturers' Association (Mr. J. Wade) and is as follows:—

Members of my association have asked me to intimate to you that they will be prepared, at any time, to confer with representatives of your Federation, for the purpose of deciding on a

course of action which will induce the several governments to realise the serious effect which their indecision is having on the industry and the urgency of reaching a decision without further delay.

At this juncture I wish to congratulate the State Government on sending the State Prices Minister to Melbourne to act with full authority. Had other governments taken that step, we would not have been in the unfortunate position in which we find ourselves at the moment. I also believe that the recent lead given, and the declarations made by this State Government have clarified the position as far as Western Australia is concerned. But the farmer is definitely against the dual control that has existed for four years; it all started off on the wrong foot. The majority decision of the Joint Advisory Committee was passed over and the minority decision has been carried into effect since that time. We do not want to upset the general life of the community but we are asking only for a reasonable return—a return which will enable the dairyman to employ labour on good conditions so that he will not be forced, as he is at present, to use his wife and family to secure him the bare necessities of life. I trust that the people as a whole will realise that the industry is out for one thing only—that is, to ensure that it obtains the cost of production.

HON. R. M. FORREST (North) [5.6]: In supporting the Bill, there is one matter I wish to mention. Recently I sponsored a family from England by the name of Dodd. This family comprises Mr. and Mrs. Dodd, two sons and one daughter, and they have now gone up to our station. They left England in the migrant ship "Cheshire," with 650 Britishers on board, of whom about 40 disembarked at Fremantle and the rest proceeded to the Eastern States.

After about two days' journey from England, the migrants were all assembled in the saloon and three padres welcomed them to Australia. One was a Roman Catholic priest, another was a Nonconformist padre and the other was a Church of England clergyman from Midland Junction. The Roman Catholic priest spoke first, then the Nonconformist padre addressed them and gave them a pleasant welcome. When the reverend gentleman from Midland Junction rose to welcome them he said, "Well, ladies and gentlemen, there is not much more I can add to what has already been said, but I would like to mention that I represent a parish in Midland Junction, Western Australia, and most of my parishioners are communists. So perhaps, ladies and gentlemen, I should call you 'comrades,' and say to you 'Welcome, comrades!'"

That might seem a laughing matter to some members, but I consider it most serious. These people were 100 per cent. British and I might add that Mr. Dodd and his family were very upset when they heard it. He wondered what he was coming to. This man is an electrical engineer by profession; he gave up everything and sold all his possessions in England to start a new life in Western Australia. When he heard these remarks, he wondered whether he had made a mistake.

Hon. E. H. Gray: Would not the parson be joking about it?

Hon. R. M. FORREST: Yes, they often joke about those sort of things!

Hon. E. H. Gray: There would not be five per cent. of the people in Midland Junction who are communists.

Hon. R. M. FORREST: He was definitely wrong, and that is what I am coming to. That clergyman was telling a deliberate lie; and if that sort of thing is allowed to continue, and immigrants coming to this State or any other part of Australia are led to believe that that state of affairs exists in this country, then it will be a bad advertisement for us. It is time that sort of thing was stopped. I took Mr. Dodd along to the Minister for Immigration and Mr. Dodd made a statement to him. I told the Minister that I was bringing the matter up in Parliament and informed him that I considered the clergyman should not have had the audacity to welcome Britishers in that fashion. To my mind it is a disgrace.

Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: Would there be any objection to naming the clergyman?

Hon. R. M. FORREST: I have no objection at all. He is the Rev. Painter from Midland Junction and I understand he was sent home to England to look after those members of his denomination who were on the migrant ship. No doubt he had a good trip, but I hope that he does not receive another one. Mr. Dodd informed me that because of the remarks of this reverend gentleman, a large number of Church of England people would not attend service on board the ship. The only reason I mention the matter is because I consider that something should be done to stop that type of clergyman coming into contact with immigrants for Western Australia.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: Hear, hear!

THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. G. B. Wood—Central) [5.13]: I did not intend to say anything during this debate and would not have done so had it not been for the remarks of Mr. Henning. I appreciate what he said about the efforts of the State Government. His was the first expression of appreciation that I have heard from anybody

connected with the dairying industry. I take strong exception to other representatives of the industry linking this Government up with other Governments in the Eastern States in their criticism of how we have abandoned the dairying industry. In other words, they say that we do not care what happens to it.

The State Government has tried very hard to bring other Governments into line with the Commonwealth in doing something for the industry. The Government has made proposals for some unilateral action to be taken. But it will be very difficult to take unilateral action because of the agreement between the States in regard to the equalisation fund, which is run by a board of directors. It is interesting to know that all the manufacturers in Australia have come to an arrangement that there will be only one price—and they will see to it—throughout Australia. In other words, if the State Government raised the price in this State by 6d. a lb. the producers in Western Australia would not get that 6d. but it would be distributed over all the producers throughout Australia. I mention this to show the great difficulties facing the State Government; and if nothing comes of our efforts, that will probably be the reason for it.

We are, of course, trying to get the Commonwealth Government to increase the subsidy. I took up that attitude at the Agricultural Council meeting at Brisbane two months ago. I said I thought it was right that the Commonwealth should carry some of the extra costs: if the price was increased, say, by a shilling, the Commonwealth could carry 4d. and the State could pass on 8d. Or it could be 6d. and 6d. or 6d. and 9d., or whatever was decided on. But owing to this agreement with all manufacturers in Australia, there is to be one price throughout Australia. If it had been possible to increase the price in Western Australia—let us say we had raised it by 9d.—we would have been flooded by butter coming from South Australia, costing about 1d. a lb. to get here, and that butter would have been thrown on to this market.

To make my point clear, it is possible that five States will agree to an increase in price and one State will stand out. I am only guessing when I say it is possible that Queensland will stand out. The Queensland producers will get the benefit of what the other five States do, and the price to the consumers in Queensland will remain at 2s. 2d. a lb. I mention this to show how difficult this butter business is. I do not agree with the idea of a hold-up, and I was very glad to hear Mr. Gray condemn it. One knows what little butter they eat in England and how they are able to find substitutes. I am sure a hold-up will do no good, and I do

not care whether the butter producers know my views. A hold-up would only incense the people. They would sit tight until the factories were filled with butter and cream and then the strike would break.

Like Mr. Henning, I do not believe that the cream will be poured down the drain. Surely the producers would not be so stupid! It will be put into the factories, and the time will come when they cannot hold any more, and when summer arrives it certainly will not keep. When the farmers have no money the strike is bound to break and they will have to go back, as was the case with the Fremantle lumpers. I do not want to say more, but I would point out the great difficulty with which the State Government would be faced in trying to do something entirely different to the other States, no matter how much it would like to do so.

HON. E. M. HEENAN (North-East) [5.20]: I intended withholding my remarks, particularly those relating to the goldmining industry, until the debate on the Address-in-reply. The present motion, however, gives me an opportunity to make a few observations right now; and as the position of the goldmining industry is deteriorating and can be regarded as somewhat urgent, I feel impelled to make my remarks at this stage instead of waiting any longer.

A glance at the map of Western Australia will quickly reveal to one that this country has many hundreds of miles of railway lines and many townships in far distant portions of the State, which are either directly or indirectly dependent on the goldmining industry. We are wedded to a policy of decentralisation. Public men, particularly in recent years, have enunciated that policy from time to time, and there can be no question whatsoever that the ultimate welfare of this country will depend on populating the more distant outposts of the State.

In Perth we have the spectacle of a city growing at an amazing rate. Wherever one travels on the outskirts of this city, one sees homes by the hundreds being built; yet if one can believe what appears in the daily Press, the demand for more homes and more accommodation indicates that there are many more thousands of people who want accommodation in the city. That position does not even in a milder degree exhibit itself on the Goldfields, where the reverse occurs. The spectacle is a very sorry one indeed and that, of course is due to the fact that for years past the great goldmining industry, which has done so much for this State, has been battling against an economic set-up which it cannot handle.

The position is that the price of gold has been pegged. The people who produce the gold have to sell it at this price and,

during recent years, they have had to do so in spite of increasing costs. The position has now almost arrived where it costs as much to produce an ounce of gold as the price at which the mining industry can sell it. If that continues, and it has been going on from month to month and from year to year, the obvious result will be the extinction of the gold-mining industry. I am not unfair enough to lay the blame for this state of affairs on the shoulders of the State Government, although I have from time to time in this House criticised the Mines Department for not giving sufficient inducement to prospectors and other small gold producers.

I am not sure, however, what can be done about the dilemma in which the industry finds itself over the price of gold, except that I do urge the State Government to do all in its power to prevail upon the Commonwealth Government in its turn to use its influence when the international monetary conference is held next month. The voice of Western Australia, which is the main gold producer in Australia, must make itself heard. In spite of this dire situation in the gold-mining industry, all we are hearing about today is the question of butter. That subject is making headlines in the Press of this country, and apparently the situation is acute; but the implications, as far as the goldmining industry is concerned are, in my opinion, much more grave.

It is amazing how complacent we appear to be, especially in Western Australia, which is so vitally dependent on this industry. We all know what the industry did for Western Australia in the days of the depression. Some of us believe that history will repeat itself and that the time is not far distant when Western Australia will again have to depend on its capacity to produce gold. Right now we are rapidly reaching breaking point; and I urge that our Government devise ways and means to let the people, not only of this State but of Australia and the world, know how vital is this question of an increase in the price of gold.

Recently I had the opportunity—the word pleasure is hardly the one to use—of travelling through the Murchison gold-fields with the Minister for Mines. That opportunity was given to me through his courtesy; but it is not altogether a pleasure to pass through those mining towns, because the spectacle is a very sorry one. In many cases, of course, large mines which were great gold producers have gone out of existence simply because the ore which produced the gold is no longer there in payable quantities. But in other cases the life in those parts is rapidly becoming too expensive and too unattractive for people. For instance, railway freights have been increased, and that means that everything people use in those places costs

them more than it costs those who live in the cities. If they want to go for a holiday their fares are very expensive, far more expensive than they were previously.

Freights and fares have been increased, and I understand that the question of pulling up the railway line between Meekatharra and Wiluna is under consideration. I think that would be a terrible step to take. Wiluna is a town which almost received its death blow in recent years. But it is still a centre for a sheep-raising and cattle-raising district. There are possibilities of mines being found in the area and of the production of copper and peanuts. While a railway line connects Wiluna with the rest of the State, there is some possibility, and even some likelihood, of its again coming to life and maintaining a prosperous community. I think the removal of the railway line would mean the death of Wiluna.

I know that the Minister is not a man who will sanction that step lightly, but I mention it because that is one aspect of goldmining life on the Murchison. The railway line up to Laverton and those places cannot be paying at present simply because the mining industry is passing through most difficult times. Life in those centres is unattractive and expensive. The price of gold has a lot to do with that, and I think that the policy which has been followed in recent years of increasing fares and freights on people who live in those parts is defeating its own ends. That policy tends to drive people out of the goldmining centres. It tends to induce them to come and clutter up the cities. In other words, it tends to defeat our policy of decentralisation.

THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT
(Hon. C. H. Simpson—Midland—in reply) [5.33]: I have been interested in the remarks of members regarding this Bill. Taking them in the order in which they were voiced, I will deal first with the two requests from Mr. Fraser. I will go into the question of members being provided with copies of the answers to their questions; and if it is the practice elsewhere and it can be done without undue inconvenience to the staff, I will ask that it be done.

In regard to Mr. Fraser's allegation that answers to questions are sometimes evasive, I would say that so far as I am personally concerned, I have gone to great pains at times to make answers to questions as full as possible. It has been said that any member asking questions may have one of three possible motives. He may desire to obtain publicity. That is quite legitimate. He may desire to embarrass the Government.

Hon. G. Fraser: Not really!

The **MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT**: It is a moot point whether that is not also legitimate. The third reason, and one which I believe animates most members who ask questions is a genuine desire to secure information, and my attitude has been that they do ask questions to obtain information which may be of value not only to them but very often to other members in the House. Consequently, I have tried to make the answers as full and as informative as possible. However, it has to be remembered that sometimes the officers who collate the information do not always know what is in an hon. member's mind and they may be honestly under the impression that the answers given are sufficient and adequate.

Sometimes when those answers are supplied to me, I, not being technically expert in the matters with which they are concerned, am not always in a position to know whether the answers provided are as full as members desire. A member still has his remedy, however. He can resubmit the question and can make a direct application to the department concerned for the information he desires. I think that in those cases the information is always forthcoming where it can be supplied.

The remarks of Mr. Heenan were very interesting. I can assure him that the Government is most concerned about the goldmining industry. When Hon. A. F. Watts, as Acting Premier, went to the Eastern States a few weeks ago, he was supplied with all the data we could give him to present to the Commonwealth Government with a view to seeing whether some pressure could be brought to bear in quarters where it would count in regard first of all to securing a portion of the free market of the world for the sale of Western Australia's gold; and secondly, seeing whether at the forthcoming international monetary conference in September some pressure could be brought to bear to have the dollar price of gold adjusted.

We realise that, in view of increasing costs, the goldmining industry must suffer, because gold producers have a static price for their product and they cannot avoid the impact of rising costs. We know that as the mines are situated at present, there is a limit to the increased costs which they can absorb. That is a matter which we have to represent to the Commonwealth Government, because it has expressed its desire to treat the goldmining industry as a permanent industry of national importance. I feel sure that when the time comes—as a matter of fact it has come now—that Government will give very serious consideration to the question of maintaining the industry.

I may mention that Mr. Lindsay Clarke, a gentleman very much concerned with this question, was in my office only yesterday; and he, too, was anxious to know the progress of the movement which had been

initiated by the Deputy Premier. I was able to tell him that the Deputy Premier had had an audience with Sir Arthur Fadden, the Federal Treasurer, and that Sir Arthur was giving the matter very serious consideration. Further, we have supplied the Premier himself with additional data to place before the Commonwealth Government during his present trip; and we have suggested that at least one of the representatives who attend the international monetary conference should be directly associated or concerned with the goldmining industry, because we do not believe that a Treasury official would necessarily have the same interest in the continuity of that industry as one who was directly associated with it.

We are hopeful that something may come of that. We have to remember that South Africa is one country which is probably more directly dependent on the prosperity of the goldmining industry than are we. Canada and the United States are equally concerned with the stabilisation of the price of gold. So we are hopeful that by the united conference of the countries concerned—and we accept responsibility as the premier gold producing State in Australia—there will be some measure of success in these attempts to achieve at the international conference in September the two objects I have mentioned.

With regard to railway freights, we realise that they have an impact on the goldmining industry. But under our telescopic system of rating, while the overall rate over the full length of lines is 30 per cent., actually the impact at Kalgoorlie is about 21 per cent.; and for centres further away from the coastal points of despatch, the rating is even lower. We realise that this does bear on the actual mines themselves. But it does not bear to the same extent on those who actually work there. The actual impact of the increase in freights on the individual commodity is very small indeed. I remember talking to one man about this, and I asked him if he realised what was the extra cost of railing a tin of jam from Fremantle to Kalgoorlie. He said that he did not, and I told him it was one-third of a penny. He replied, "Then I will not put the price up."

That is an instance of the low impact of rating which, after all, is only one of the items which go to make up the actual cost of living, and of the effect of which, generally speaking, the public is not aware. The wage earner has those increased costs taken into account in the quarterly adjustment of his basic wage. I will admit that the mineowner cannot, by any stretch of imagination, pass that increased cost on; and that is where we have recognised our responsibility to do what we can to help him in some way or other—either by means of Federal assistance or by trying to have an adjustment made in the price of gold or to secure a share in the free market of the world in regard to sales.

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 9th August, 1951.

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I was interested in what Mr. Heenan said about Wiluna, and he will be interested when I tell him that the State Government Geologist, Mr. Ellis, and another officer of the Mines Department, have made a special trip to Wiluna to survey the water area near the town with a view to ascertaining its potentialities and also to survey the possible mineral resources in that region. If Mr. Ellis's report indicates that there is a good supply of water which might be capable of being adapted to irrigation purposes, or something of that nature, I will pass on the information to the Minister for Agriculture and he will examine it with a view to seeing whether anything can be done in that regard.

The question of the existence of workable deposits of copper in that area is also one that will be examined by the State Geologist during his visit to Wiluna. I am grateful for the interest that has been shown by members in the matter of Supply and feel sure that they realise that money has to be provided to carry on the essential services of the State. I ask members to support the second reading of the Bill.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee, etc.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment and the report adopted.

Bill read a third time and passed.

House adjourned at 5.50 p.m.

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

QUESTIONS.

PYRITES.

As to Railings, Cost and Treatment.

Mr. KELLY asked the Minister for Industrial Development:

(1) What quantity of pyrites was railed from Norseman during 1949, 1950, and to the 30th June, 1951?

(2) What was the cost per ton on rails, Norseman?

(3) What was the railage to destination per ton?

(4) Where was the ore treated and by whom?

(5) What quantity was railed to Albany and at what landed cost?

(6) What is the estimated weight lost in extraction?

(7) What use is made of residues, if any?