

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 16th August, 1951.

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

QUESTIONS.

VEGETABLES.

As to Supply for Local Market.

Mr. NEEDHAM asked the Minister representing the Minister for Agriculture:

Will he take steps to ensure that the local vegetable market is fully supplied before allowing the export of vegetables to Singapore, so as to reduce the prohibitive prices charged to local consumers?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS replied:

The Department of Agriculture has no means of ensuring full supplies of vegetables to the local market.

SUPERPHOSPHATE.

As to Tabling Files on Pyrites.

Hon. E. NULSEN asked the Minister representing the Minister for Agriculture:

Will he lay upon the Table of the House—

(a) all papers and files appertaining to the development and production of pyrites in Western Australia, and

(b) all papers and files concerning the manufacture of superphosphate by using sulphuric acid extracted from pyrites?

The ACTING PREMIER replied:

The hon. member may inspect files at the Department of Industrial Development by arrangement with me.

RAILWAYS.

As to Purchase of Permanent Way Material.

Hon. E. NULSEN asked the Minister representing the Minister for Railways:

How many tons of railway permanent way material—and its value—were purchased on an average over the last three years ended the 30th June, 1951?

The ACTING PREMIER replied:

Average of 4,344 tons per annum valued at £123,430.

HOUSING.

As to Homes for Country Districts.

Mr. MANNING asked the Minister for Housing:

(1) What percentage of houses built in Western Australia during the past year were built outside the metropolitan area?

(2) Can he indicate how many will be built in the country during the current year, and what percentage this will be of the total for the State?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Figures for the year ended the 31st March, 1951 (the latest available), show that 40.4 per cent. of the houses built in Western Australia were outside the metropolitan area.

(2) It is anticipated that with the expansion of the Commission's pre-cut programme, the figure will be in the vicinity of 45 per cent. to 50 per cent.

WATER SUPPLIES.

As to Pipe-laying for Comprehensive Scheme.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE asked the Minister for Water Supply:

What is the nature of the progress made to date in the actual laying down of pipes in connection with—

(a) the southern section; and

(b) the northern section

of the comprehensive water supply scheme?

The MINISTER replied:

(a) Thirty-one miles of main conduit actually laid.

(b) Thirty-two and one-half miles of main conduit actually laid.

Orders are outstanding in the United Kingdom for 11,500 tons of steel plate, and efforts are being made to place an order for 5,000 tons of steel plate in the U.S.A.

PLASTER AND PLASTERBOARD.

As to Alleged Monopoly.

Mr. HOAR asked the Minister for Housing:

Is he aware—(1) That a virtual monopoly exists in this State today regarding the production of plaster and the manufacture of plasterboard?

(2) That this monopoly consists of an association comprising a small group of firms whose policy and activities preclude any outside competition in the manufacture and fixing of plasterboard?

(3) That part of the policy of the members of this association now is to refuse the sale of plasterboard unless the purchaser is prepared to accept the firm's labour and quote for fixing.

(4) That these quotes are excessive in comparison to all previous costs of fixing by contractors or free-lance fixers, and are considered by many reputable building contractors to increase the cost of home-building unnecessarily?

(5) If he is aware of these changes, does he approve of them? If not, what action does he propose to take to encourage further competition in this industry regarding the manufacture of plasterboard?

(6) Will he take some action against the manufacturers who refuse to supply plasterboard except on their own terms for fixing?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) There is a limited number of persons producing plasterboard who are not in any association and whom the Department of Industrial Development has been assisting to obtain supplies.

There is nothing to prevent additional plaster and plasterboard manufacturers establishing themselves if finance, plant and tradesmen are available to them.

(2) Answered by (1).

(3) A limited quantity of plasterboard is sold through merchants and direct to consumers without restrictions as to fixing. The policy of the manufacturers is to reserve a substantial portion for fixing by the manufacturer to ensure quality of work and provide material for skilled fixers permanently employed.

(4) I am not aware that quotes are excessive. The cost of fixing plasterboard is not subject to price control.

(5) In view of the need for plasterboard in the expanding building programme, the Department of Industrial Development and the State Housing Commission have rendered assistance and encouragement where possible and will continue to do so in bona fide cases.

(6) See answer to (4). No action is possible under existing conditions.

DRAINAGE.

As to Report on Metropolitan Survey.

Mr. J. HEGNEY asked the Minister for Water Supply:

(1) Has the comprehensive drainage survey of the metropolitan area been completed?

(2) Has a report been submitted?

(3) When will the report be available?

(4) If the survey is not complete, is it continuing?

(5) When is it expected to be finalised?

(6) Has a partial report been submitted? If so, will he make this available?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No.

(2) No.

(3) On completion of surveys, designs, estimated cost and financial aspect of the scheme.

(4) Yes.

(5) June, 1952.

(6) The survey has been completed for the Eastern Division, which covers the area between the Swan and Canning Rivers, Welshpool, and the Darling Scarp, and the preliminary design and estimated cost of draining this area has been prepared and is now receiving consideration by departmental heads before submitting report.

GOLD.

As to Publishing Commonwealth Report on Price.

Mr. YATES asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Were the contents of a communication received from the Federal Treasurer in connection with the increase in the price of gold, forwarded to the Chamber of Mines?

(2) If so, why was the Chamber of Mines selected to receive the reply?

(3) As there are many goldmine owners operating throughout the State equally interested in the contents of the Federal Treasurer's communication, why was it not made public so that mineowners generally would be informed at the same time?

(4) Will he give an assurance that all future information in connection with gold prices be made public, and not communicated privately to any particular section of the goldmining industry?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) Because it originated the representations.

(3) Because it was not considered desirable while the matter was still in the negotiation stage.

(4) No.

INCREASE OF RENT (WAR RESTRICTIONS) ACT.

(a) As to Deputation from Property Owners' Association.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) When did the Property Owners' Association see him, as a deputation, in connection with amendments to the Increase of Rent (War Restrictions) Act?

(2) Was it not months after the amendments had been made to the Act that I introduced a deputation of the Tenants and Home Builders' Association to him?

(3) What was the connection between the two deputations which caused him to answer as if the influence of both deputations could be similar?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) 12th August, 1950.

(2) Yes.

(3) My intention to demonstrate that neither tenants' nor houseowners' deputations had endeavoured to exercise undue pressure.

(b) *As to Consideration of Amending Bill.*

Hon. J. T. TONKIN (without notice) asked the Acting Premier:

Is it the Government's intention to suspend Standing Orders so that the Bill of which notice has been given to amend the Increase of Rent (War Restrictions) Act might be dealt with before the conclusion of the Address-in-reply debate?

The ACTING PREMIER replied:

I think I can assure the hon. member that the matter will be discussed before the end of the Address-in-reply debate.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Fifth Day.

Debate resumed from the previous day.

MR. STYANTS (Kalgoorlie) [4.40]: At the outset of my remarks, I would like to join with other members in expressing regret at the death of Sir James Mitchell, and also with regard to the passing of two who were our colleagues for a number of years, Mr. Tom Fox and Mr. Harry Shearn.

I was somewhat surprised at the attitude adopted by the Premier in his answer to one member who asked whether the State Government had made the recommendation to His Majesty regarding the appointment of the new Governor of this State. The Premier was anything but candid in his reply. He gave the impression that His Majesty was solely responsible for the appointment, and that the Western Australian Government had not been consulted at all. Why he should take up that attitude is a mystery to me because it is quite well known to every member in this Chamber, if not to the general public, that His Majesty would not think of making an appointment such as that of Governor of one of the Dominions unless the particular Dominion in question had been consulted in the matter.

The British Government, through His Majesty, would probably inquire into the matter, and I feel absolutely certain that the Western Australian Government was consulted, and that the Premier as the

head of the State, would have given his consent to the appointment of the gentleman who is coming out as the vice-regal representative. It appears to me a mystery why the Premier should not have been more candid and told the House the exact position. He probably had been consulted while in England, had cabled to his Cabinet in Western Australia and subsequently had given his approval to the appointment of the gentleman in question to fill the position of Governor of Western Australia.

I have read very carefully the Speech of His Excellency the Administrator. After we are here a few years we do not concern ourselves so much with what is revealed in a Governor's Speech as with what it conceals, because it appears to me that a great deal of the controversial legislation introduced during successive sessions has not been mentioned in any shape or form in the respective Speeches. So little of what is proposed to be brought down in the shape of legislation is generally mentioned that I was wondering whether the same position would arise on this occasion.

We were very pleased of course to see the Premier arrive back safely and in good health after his tour of the United Kingdom, and I have no doubt that he did quite a lot of important business on behalf of the State. I should say, however, that the people who most regretted the Premier's return to Western Australia would be the shipping companies because it does appear that they took the Premier for a ride while he was in England. If the newspaper reports are correct—and I am depending entirely upon them—the shipping that was obtained to move some 9,000 or 10,000 tons of goods from England to Australia was secured at something like double the ordinary rates.

It was reported that it was almost impossible to get shipping companies to undertake the shipment of goods from England to Australia and consequently exorbitant black market rates had been demanded. Because of the urgent need of the goods in Western Australia, the Premier, it was stated, had acceded to the exorbitant demands of the shipping companies which were something like 100 per cent. over the ordinary rates. Following on that, and probably before the ship was on the way to Western Australia, another report appeared in the local paper as follows:—

Shipping Outlook Brighter for this Country.

Advice had been received from London that a greater number of vessels were becoming available to load cargo from the United Kingdom for Australia, the chairman of the Overseas Shipping Representatives' Association of W.A. (Mr. H. J. R. Hooper) said yesterday.

Indications were that in the months of July, August and September the total of these dispatches would be not less than 93, compared with 87 in the corresponding three months of last year.

So actually there were a greater number of ships offering than were expected to be available during July, August and September and more than in the previous years. The report continues—

It was hoped that provided there was no undue delay in handling the vessels in Australian ports the accumulation of cargo waiting to move from the United Kingdom to Australia would be materially reduced in that period.

Included in the dispatches, Mr. Hooper said, would be several vessels chartered to cover the needs of the outward trade. Whereas up to now the shipment of goods in these vessels had carried an additional freight charge, it was now considered by owners that it would be preferable to secure a uniformity of rates by having the extra cost spread over all shipments instead of being in the form of a special surcharge on particular ships.

This special surcharge had been in the region of 40 per cent. over scheduled rates but the proposal now was to end this differentiation by imposing an overall surcharge of 15 per cent. on all cargo loaded from July 9.

This new surcharge would be combined with the present 10 per cent. surcharge to cover port delays in Australia, making a total surcharge of 25 per cent. This would be subject, as before, to periodical review in the light of circumstances.

So it would appear, if the information contained in the first Press article was correct, that the Premier was charged something in the vicinity of double the usual rates for the transport of 9,000 or 10,000 tons of goods to Western Australia, in which case the Premier was certainly taken for a ride by the shipping companies. It is not a very pleasant state of affairs for the taxpayers of this State.

Referring now to the migration agreement between the United Kingdom and the Australian Government, it would appear that we are receiving a fair percentage of a very undesirable type of migrant. I was particularly struck by the opinions of a Methodist minister who had been appointed by the Government to perform certain duties in connection with the migrants in South Australia. He informed the Press that because of his ability to speak seven different languages he had been appointed to that position. His opinion was that the migrants were of a very poor type. I know we have been told that these migrants are very carefully

screened and if that is correct, then all I can say is that the mesh of the screen must be a particularly large one, because we are certainly getting quite a number of very undesirable migrants.

I was rather surprised at the statement made by the Acting Premier—to my mind it was quite specious—that the number of migrants being brought into the country was one of the contributory factors in the inflationary trend that is apparent throughout, the length and breadth of Australia. True, these people, after arriving here have to be fed and clothed, but if our migration scheme is at all sound, the people coming here must produce a tremendous amount of wealth. A majority of them, I believe, work quite satisfactorily, and to say that they are the cause of the inflationary trend is specious reasoning because they contribute a great deal towards the national income of Australia.

Then again, I am greatly disappointed that only youths, almost schoolboys, are being called up for compulsory military training. I consider it is a shame. If war is likely to occur within the next two years, as we have been told by the Prime Minister, who said that we have to be ready to take up arms to defend Australia in 1953, it is no credit to us to be calling up schoolboys, youths of 18, as the only draft for military training. Probably half-a-million trained men could be found in Australia, men between the recognised military age limits of 19 and 40 or 45, men who received their training in World War II, but there must be quite a lot between the ages of 19 and 25 or 26 who have had no military training at all and, in my opinion, all of them should be called up and not merely the boys of 18.

I was rather struck by the warnings given the other night by the member for Nedlands regarding the danger in which Australia finds itself. From his remarks, one would gather that there were a lot of countries that would be likely to invade Australia within the next few years. I cannot think of any country that has the capacity to invade Australia or will have it for the next 20 years. Take our enemies and our potential future enemies, and what condition are they in to invade Australia? The first essential to a successful invasion of Australia would be a tremendously powerful air force, backed by a strong navy and backed again by an army of considerable size, plus a tremendous general transport system. What country in the world is there that is a potential enemy of ours and is in a position to comply with those conditions?

Mr. Hutchinson: There is one, at any rate.

Mr. Grayden: If we did not have strong defence forces, an invader would not need anything like such strong forces as you have suggested.

Mr. STYANTS: My contention is that there is no potential enemy of Australia having the capacity to invade this country, or likely to have it for the next 20 years. Consider the position of our former enemies. If what we are told is correct, Japan has little or no war potential. Her navy is at the bottom of the sea, sent there by American ships, assisted by Australian warships and certain ships of the British Navy. As regards air warfare, I have no doubt that Japan's potential is little or nil. Because of the pressure brought to bear by the United States of America, Japan is to be permitted to re-arm, but to what extent we cannot even guess at this juncture, so I think we can safely write Japan off for the next 20 years, seeing that she has not the air force, the navy, or the merchant ships to transport troops to Australia.

Let us pass on to Italy. The ships of the Italian Navy, like the Japanese warships, are resting on the bed of the ocean, and Italy is not likely to be in a position to invade Australia. I believe that Italy has not won a war for the last 200 years. As to Germany, that country is completely dismembered, the Russians being in occupation of one portion and the Americans and British of the other portion. So we can consider the question from the angle of any of our immediately past enemies or any of our present enemies.

Take China, which is generally regarded as being an enemy of ours—she is an enemy of the United Nations in Korea—what hope would she have of invading Australia? She has no navy; she has little or no air force. Probably on her own ground, she could put up an army of reasonable size, but how could she get it to Australia, and how could she maintain supplies for an army if she got it here? I think that a lot of warmongering has been indulged in simply to scare people. As I have shown, there is no country within reasonable distance of us that would be in a position to stage an invasion.

Mr. Hutchinson: What about Russia?

Mr. STYANTS: Russia has little or no navy.

Mr. Hutchinson: What about her fleet of submarines?

Mr. STYANTS: We have been told that an iron curtain has been drawn around Russia, but during the last eight or ten days the truth has leaked out. It was announced by the A.B.C. that a goodwill mission from England was touring Russia. If there is an iron curtain, how is it that this goodwill mission could go there and travel through the country?

The Minister for Health: Quite easily.

Mr. STYANTS: My belief is that Russia is no more desirous of invading Australia than is Australia of invading Russia. It does not matter what Mr. Menzies has said. In my opinion, quite a lot of the talk about

war has been hysterical talk because there is no country that has the potential to invade Australia or will have it in the next 20 years.

Mr. Grayden: Have you seen the figures quoted by England's Socialist Minister of Defence regarding Russia's strength in aeroplanes and in submarines?

Mr. STYANTS: I believe there is a much greater danger within our own community threatening the liberties of our people and democracy than there is from without.

Mr. Yates: You would agree that it would be better to be prepared than unprepared?

Mr. Grayden: You have to deal with the communists.

Hon. A. H. Panton: You have to get down to where your B.A.'s are to find the communists; they are not in the working class.

Mr. STYANTS: We shall have an opportunity within the next few weeks to deal with the communists and perhaps filch the liberties of a section of the people of Australia. I believe there is a greater danger to the liberties of our people from the operation of bureaucracy than there is from invasion from without.

Since members on the Government side have mentioned communism, I shall refer to what is known as the Red Bill. That measure was forced through the Commonwealth Parliament by the Government after 30 or 40 amendments had been passed in order to bring it somewhat closer into conformity with the ethics of British justice. Immediately the Bill was passed and proclaimed, it was challenged and the case went to the High Court of Australia. There, those seven learned judges, who were not influenced by any political bias or hysteria, declared the Act to be totally invalid and ultra vires the Constitution and against the principles and ethics of British justice. Let me read what Mr. Justice Williams said about it. This is the kind of thing that members opposite are prepared to foist upon the people of Australia. The report is as follows:—

Mr. Justice Williams said that the Act makes people liable to be deprived of important contractual rights without creating any offence, the commission of which would entail such consequences—

That is a great thing to back up—the deprivation of a man of certain contractual rights when he has not committed an offence of any kind! Yet Mr. Justice Williams said that was a provision of the "Red Bill" and it is a provision of the Bill the placing on the statute book of which the people of Australia will be asked to authorise. The judge continued—

—and, indeed, without proof that they have committed any offence against any law of the Commonwealth, without a trial in any court, and without

such bodies of people having any right to prove that they had not done anything prejudicial to the security and defence of the Commonwealth, or to the execution or maintenance of the Constitution or of the laws of the Commonwealth.

There we have it. Important contractual rights may be taken from a man without his having committed any offence or having been tried in any court of law; and that kind of danger to the freedom of the people of Australia, or a section of the people, is greater than is the danger of any invasion likely to take place in the next 20 years. I do not believe war is inevitable, but I believe there is a good deal of mistrust and suspicion between the major powers of the world.

Mr. Grayden: The Government of Great Britain has not said that war is not inevitable.

Mr. STYANTS: There is another matter which concerns the people of Australia. If certain proposals that are on foot are given effect to, other liberties of the people will be filched from them. The proposal to which I refer is the syndication of news by the main newspaper proprietors of Australia. By this method news will be derived by one source and distributed to the whole of the newspapers in the syndicate. There will be no variation; and, irrespective of whether what is published is the truth or the half-truth, or whether what is published is complete falsehood, stereotyped news will be submitted to the people, and there will be no ways or means of their obtaining any other information.

The news will be collected by the Australian Associated Press, the proprietors' instrument for the gathering of such news. One effect of syndication will be to reduce the membership of the Australian Journalists' Association. Peculiarly enough, the syndication of news is being sponsored by the very people who sedulously and consistently advocate the freedom of the Press. Nowadays, to my way of thinking, the freedom of the Press should be known as license and not freedom, unless it is freedom to publish what suits the particular purpose of the proprietors and to refrain from publishing anything that does not suit their ends.

The idea of a free, democratic and impartial Press is dear to all of us. It is one of the fundamental principles of our Constitution. Something along these lines occurred in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy and, if we can believe what we are told, it is happening in Stalin's Russia. I am inclined to believe that quite a lot of information that is published against Russia is propaganda; but the fact that there is no official opposition in the Parliaments of Russia would indicate to me that there is no freedom of the Press or any political freedom in that country.

I am quite prepared to believe that there is a system in Russia akin to syndication, one source collecting the news and distributing it en bloc to all the newspapers. We have also Franco's Spain where very much the same thing occurs; and, from all accounts, the situation in Argentina, under the rule of Peron, is very little different. The people are told, through the Press, whatever the Government in power decides to tell them.

At present there is some differentiation in Australia in the news items and political views and sociology appearing in our newspapers and the members of the public use their own discretion, reading between the lines and forming their own judgment. They sift the grain from the chaff and come to their own conclusions. The Australian Journalists' Association is the spearhead of the attack against the proposition to introduce syndication. For years that organisation fought the syndication of news from the national Parliament in Canberra. I do not know whether the association fights the proposal from the standpoint of the freedom of Press or whether it realises that syndication will take the bread and butter from many of its members.

In big cities like Melbourne and Sydney, the Australian Associated Press employs only five reporters. If syndication takes place and its activities are carried into a wider sphere so that all the newspapers of Australia are covered, the decimation that will take place of members belonging to the Journalists' Association can be easily understood. The newspapers use the newsprint shortage as an excuse for wanting to introduce syndication; but that is not valid. I feel certain that if they can implement syndication of news at present, they will use every means to retain it when newsprint becomes more plentiful. We know the enormous power that the Press of Australia exercises on Governments. I am not going to say that we receive a particularly good service at present.

Mr. Hoar: Look up at them now!

Mr. STYANTS: There is a particular reason why the members of the Press have walked out of the gallery. It shows their broadmindedness! I am a member of the House Committee, amongst others here, and the Press has decided to boycott the utterances of any member of that committee. Consequently, when I got to my feet, the entire representation of the Press walked out. That is why members will notice that no member of the House Committee, since the House opened, has been reported as the originator of any question that has been asked. The purport of the questions, and the answers given by the Ministers, have been reported but not the names of the members concerned. That, of course—I might just as well deal with this point—is because the Joint House

Committee saw fit to retain the strangers' room for the use of private members wishing to consult their constituents.

Pressmen have been admitted to the strangers' room, and while I do not know of any case of a reporter divulging information which he overheard or any conversations between members and constituents, I say quite definitely that reporters have no right to hear such conversations, whether they repeat them or not. I am not speaking as a member of the House Committee at present, but as a private member. I have a distinct objection to Press reporters sitting in the strangers' room while my constituents discuss confidential business with me, which those reporters could not help but overhear. Had the Joint House Committee decided to put them out on the street, I think they would have something to complain about.

Mr. Graham: You have some back in the gallery now.

Mr. STYANTS: They all walked out when I got on my feet. I did not intend to mention this matter, but I point out how broadminded they are and what they think of the freedom of the Press which they espouse so greatly. Had we decided that they would have to go out on the street, they would have something to complain about, but we offered them a privilege which they have never before had in the history of this Parliament. They, of course, have a room upstairs, and we made arrangements for the staff to supply them there with refreshments, and, for the time after the tea interval, we have made a table available for them in the dining room at which they can get whatever refreshment they require.

I leave it to the unbiassed opinion of members as to whether the Joint House Committee has been harsh with them. I want to tell them now that, as far as I am concerned, I never depend on any publicity they give me, and whether or not they get up and walk out when I am on my feet is a matter of no consequence to me. Whether they, and their proprietors, adopt the attitude which they have that any question by a member of the Joint House Committee will not receive publicity, under the name of the member, matters not the slightest to me. I do not depend upon "The West Australian," or any other newspaper, for publicity to remain me as the member for Kalgoorlie. The services I give to the people of Kalgoorlie are recognised by my constituents and I have ways and means, other than the Press, of bringing to the notice of the people I represent that I am looking after their interests.

As I say, I would not have mentioned this matter except for the fact that the reporters here today walked out en bloc, and had someone not interjected and so brought the matter to my notice, they would not be sitting in the Press gallery

now. As I have remarked, however, it does not matter one iota to me whether they are there or not. As a private member, I have a distinct objection to having anyone present in the strangers' room, except another member, when a constituent of mine comes to discuss confidential matters with me.

The strangers' room is the only one in the House where a private member can take his constituents, when the House is in session or within an hour of commencing. I repeat, I know of no instance of a newspaper reporter who has divulged anything he has heard, but I make the point that he has no right to hear it. On one occasion I was with a constituent of mine in the strangers' room when a newspaper reporter came in and ordered some refreshment. He sat there, and could not possibly have missed hearing what was said. My constituent said, "Who is this chap?" I said, "He is a newspaper reporter." He said, "Let us go outside because I do not feel inclined to discuss this matter within the hearing of anyone." I think his attitude was justified.

No one has a right to sit in that room and listen to what is said—I do not mean that they deliberately listen, but members know the size of the strangers' room. It is impossible for a person to sit there and not hear a conversation that is taking place a few feet away. That is my attitude. I think the newspaper men have been reasonably treated, and as far as I am concerned they are not going to get the strangers' room again because I consider it is the only place available to private members where they can discuss matters with their constituents, and they are entitled to it.

I want to deal with the revaluation of the Australian £. We know that if it had not been for the opposition of the Country Party in the Federal sphere to revaluation, it would have been an accomplished fact a long time ago. I know that the Country Party is in a difficult position, but at least it holds the balance of power. We have become more or less accustomed to regarding the coalition, both in this House and in the Federal sphere, as the establishment of the L.C.L. and the annexe of the Country Party. I have given a great deal of study to the question of the revaluation of the Australian £, and I believe that if it were brought into operation it would mean the extinction of the goldmining industry in this State. We are told now that the goldmining industry is experiencing great difficulty in continuing operations. I do not know whether that is a fact, or not.

In common with other State members, I am never taken into the confidence of, or consulted by, the Chamber of Mines. We are by-passed on every occasion. The Chamber goes direct to the Minister. As

a matter of fact, a gratuitous insult was offered to local members by the Chamber when the late Mr. Chifley, as Prime Minister, flew from the Eastern States for the purpose of discussing the price of gold with members of the Chamber of Mines at Kalgoorlie. As one of the members for the district, I attended. In addition, there were a couple of other members, and an Australian Workers' Union representative, and the Chamber of Mines objected to the local members being present while the discussion with the Prime Minister took place.

We know the condition of the mining industry only by what we read in the newspapers. I should say that even though the companies have received an increase in the price of gold from £10 15s. 8d. to £15 9s. an oz., as a result of the devaluation of the Australian £ to the dollar, the constantly increasing price of commodities, stores, etc., apart entirely from the tremendous increases that have taken place in the basic wage, must mean that they would gain very little as a result at the present time. I feel certain that even the richest of the goldmines would not show a 25 per cent. profit at the present time and, if we revalued the Australia £ to sterling it would mean the wiping out of that 25 per cent. exchange on the overseas price of gold. I do not believe that re-valuation would halt inflation even for a short time and I do not think that the commodities set out in the "C" series index, upon which the basic wage is computed, would be affected to any great extent.

When the New Zealand Government appreciated their £ to sterling, it thought that course would result in a considerable reduction in the basic wage and the cost of living, but, from the information I have gleaned, its reduction, due to re-valuation, was less than 5 per cent. The reason for that was that most of the commodities such as meat, bread, vegetables, butter, milk, timber, furniture, electricity, rents, coal, gas and water were not reduced in price at all through re-valuation. Certain commodities such as motorcars and some clothing imported from overseas would, of course, be affected.

The position of the primary producer under re-valuation would be that he would suffer a reduction of 25 per cent. in income from that portion of his production that was sold overseas. I saw recently an estimate of the effect of re-valuation on primary products exported from Western Australia. It was stated that wool would be affected to the tune of £10,000,000, gold £5,000,000, flour over £1,000,000, fresh fruit £250,000, dried fruit £17,000, meat £152,000, timber £175,000, and butter £24,000, or approximately £16,700,000 in all, which would be the loss to the primary producers of this State through re-valuation of the Australian £.

As an offset to that, certain commodities—nowhere near approaching the value of the primary products I have mentioned—would show some benefit to their importers through re-valuation. The greatest advocates of re-valuation are the newspaper proprietors, who would save 25 per cent. on their imports of newsprint. They are having great difficulty, not only with regard to supplies of newsprint but also through the price having risen tremendously, yet the estimated advantage they would derive would be, in the case of Western Australia only £45,000 per annum.

One of the factors contributing most to the inflationary trend of the last two years has been the constant increase in the Australian note issue. In 1939 the note issue of the Commonwealth was £56,000,000, and in the Press the other day it was shown as £278,000,000. That indicates a tremendous increase of spending power in the hands of the people—a sum much in excess of what is required for the legitimate business of the country. A great deal of evasion of taxation is taking place owing to the huge amount of money in circulation in the form of notes. Some people record only a small percentage of their business transactions in their official books which are available to the Taxation Department, a large proportion of their business being conducted in hard cash.

From time to time we read that some member of the underworld has gained knowledge that certain people are carrying large sums of money and the result then is that the police are called upon, after an assault and robbery, to endeavour to recover sums of perhaps £5,000 or £10,000 which the person robbed has been carrying about with him. Such persons are obviously those who have been evading taxation and conducting their business by means of cash transactions which never appear on the books.

As I will have plenty of opportunity later of dealing with our railways I will touch on that subject only briefly for the present. A matter about which I am deeply concerned—I do not know whether it applies to other departments to the same extent as it does to the Railway Department—is the incorrect and often completely false information that is supplied in answer to questions asked by members. I do not blame the Minister for the answers given in reply to questions by members but I do blame him when a clear-cut case of false information being supplied by his department is brought under his notice and he refuses to take action, as happened last session.

I then asked certain questions with regard to the quality, workmanship, etc., in relation to the "PM" class locomotives. I asked the Minister whether it was a fact that the workmanship in those locomotives was considered to be of the usual British standard, and the answer given stated that it was. I asked also whether it was

a fact that in the boiler of one of those locomotives 75 per cent. of the crown stays leaked at 75 lb. pressure during a test, and the answer given stated that it was not a fact. I asked also, in connection with one of those locomotives, if 70-odd tubes had been taken out, annealed and replaced after the engine had been on the run for only about three weeks. The reply was that that was not so, in spite of the fact that the day previously I had seen that locomotive over the pit and that work being done in the running sheds at East Perth.

With regard to the leaking of the crown stays, I might add that I had a copy of the report of the Chief Boiler Inspector, in which he drew the attention of the Railway Commissioners to the fact that 75 per cent. of the stays had leaked. The answer given to me in this House was that there was no truth in the assertion! When I asked was the standard of workmanship up to the usual British level, I had in my possession a copy of the report of the Chief Mechanical Engineer in which he expressed the opinion that it was not. I then asked for the reports of certain officers, experts in boiler construction, to be placed on the Table of the House and, strangely enough, the one which reported the 75 per cent. of crown stays leaking was missing when they were placed on the Table.

I brought all that under the notice of the Minister during the closing days of last session but apparently he made no inquiry at all in connection with it. That was a tacit encouragement to officials to give incorrect information, and I feel that that sort of thing is unfair to members, each of whom is here as the representative of his constituents. If he requires certain information, then he is entitled to the correct answer; if false information is given to a member, then the Minister in charge of the department should investigate the position to find out why correct answers were not supplied.

Then again, I asked some questions in connection with a contract for the purchase of "W" class locomotives. It had been reported to me that the negotiations were conducted through a local firm and as the contract price was something in the vicinity of £1,750,000, any local agent would receive a substantial sum of money by way of commission. It seemed remarkable to me that a large organisation, such as the Western Australian Government, should have to deal through a local agent instead of conducting negotiations direct with Beyer Peacock & Coy. in England for the manufacture of these locomotives.

In the first set of questions I asked, the point I wanted was cleverly evaded. I then asked "Is it a fact that the local company was taken into consideration, in any shape or form, in the negotiations con-

cerned?" The answer was that the initial negotiations were conducted between the Western Australian Government and Beyer Peacock & Co. But in regard to some of the details it was grudgingly admitted that the local firm had taken a part. So, judging by the nature of the answers given, and our knowledge of what takes place—as was referred to by the Leader of the Opposition the other night when he spoke about rake-offs—to inflate the cost of goods, I have not the slightest doubt that the local company, although only taking part in the negotiations in a minor way, received a considerable sum of money as commission. Of course, the Government would have to pay for that commission by an increase in the tender price.

I was very critical, and am still critical, of the "P.M." class locomotive. It has turned out to be a poor type of engine from a mechanical point of view, although not from the operational angle. These engines caused a lot of trouble, are still causing trouble and will continue to cause trouble. The type of bogey that is under the cab is such that their use has been restricted by the department, to trains which do not travel at a speed in excess of 40 miles an hour. However, from what I can find out from the mechanical staff, and from the drivers and firemen who operate the "W" class locomotives, the opposite is the case. These engines are a particularly good job. The mechanical staff—that is the boilermakers—and the engineering staff say that the workmanship is of a high standard, while the men operating these engines say that they are particularly good. While I am critical if I find something that does not measure up to standard, I like to give praise where it is due. Mr. Clarke—I think he is one of the Commissioners—went to England, I understand, to supervise the construction of the "W" class locomotives and I am sure a good deal of the credit for the job that has been turned out is due to the work that Mr. Clarke did.

Dealing now with a few parochial matters affecting my electorate, firstly I want to express indignation on behalf of residents in the Eastern Goldfields because the Great Eastern-highway, from Southern Cross to Coolgardie, has not been completed—that is, it has not been sealed to make it a black surface road and so bring it up to the standard required of a main highway. This highway is a most important one because it serves the needs of a large community on the Eastern Goldfields and it is also the main highway to the Eastern States. A good type of highway should have been provided many years ago, but unfortunately we are still waiting for it to be completed. I have travelled round other parts of the State and in some of the districts which I consider to be merely tourist resorts, and where the roads have very little traffic, there are good roads going to waste.

The roads in these districts, in many cases, have been broken up and re-made and are far superior to the 72 miles, or portions of the 72 miles, between Southern Cross and Coolgardie. I was disappointed in the answers given to me by the Minister for Works a few evenings ago, when he said that the Government is not expecting to complete the road this year, although it may be completed towards the end of 1952 if supplies of bitumen are available. There has been one excuse after another and I am sure it is just a question of the people concerned not having the will to get on with the job.

Another matter with which I wish to deal is one which could come under the heading of decentralisation; decentralisation in the sense that people should get the same services in the outback portions of the State as are afforded to those who live in the metropolitan area. In this instance the matter affects pensioners who reside on the Goldfields. I refer to the optical and dental services provided for those pensioners. From time to time I have asked questions particularly in connection with the dental service. It is well known that in the metropolitan area a pensioner can go to the Perth Dental Hospital and have a full denture made. For this service he pays only for the essential materials used—I think that is in the vicinity of 30s.

But, on the Eastern Goldfields no such provision is made for pensioners. It is true that where the health of a pensioner is seriously affected by the condition of his teeth, the Premier's Department will grant him a pass to enable him to come to the metropolitan area to obtain treatment, or treatment equivalent to what pensioners living in the metropolitan area can obtain. But that is not practicable as far as the Goldfields pensioner is concerned because if he has any stumps or teeth to be removed, which is frequently the case, he has to remain in the metropolitan area for a couple of months while the plates are made.

I have endeavoured to bring about an arrangement between the Health Department and the Dental Association on the Eastern Goldfields so that the pensioners in those areas can go to the local dentists to get what is known as "chairside work" carried out. The job could then be sent down to the Dental Hospital and the plate completed. In my opinion the Dental Association on the Eastern Goldfields has been most generous over a number of years. The members of this organisation give a tremendous amount of honorary dental service to the pensioners and indigent people on the fields.

These dentists were, and still are, prepared to do any extraction work necessary to relieve pain and this work would be done at any of the local hospitals. They tell me that they would be quite prepared to do the chairside work at Kalgoorlie for the actual cost involved; in other words, they do not

want any fee for the work, except the actual cost because over the last few years the cost of the materials involved has increased enormously. I think this is a reasonable proposition from their point of view. I would like to see the file which contains details of the negotiations between the Health Department and the Eastern Goldfields Dental Association, in connection with this matter. From what I can glean on the question, either from the officials of the Health Department or members of the Dental Association, I believe that if an effort were made the Government could easily arrive at a mutual and suitable arrangement which undoubtedly would be of great benefit to the pensioners on the Eastern Goldfields.

Almost the same principle applies to the provision of optical services for pensioners on the fields. A pensioner in the metropolitan area can go to the Royal Perth Hospital and have his eyes tested and his spectacles made for a very nominal sum. On the Eastern Goldfields, however, if a pensioner requires spectacles for the first time, or if he has to have his lenses changed, it will cost him anything from £6 10s. to about £9. I believe there is no insuperable obstacle to prevent the Government providing optical services for Goldfields pensioners identical with those for pensioners in the metropolitan area.

Again, I consider that if the will was there to do it, it would be quite easy to approach one or two, or perhaps more, of the opticians in Kalgoorlie who would be prepared, with the equipment at their disposal, to test a pensioner's eyesight and send the prescription to the Royal Perth Hospital where the lenses could be ground, fitted into a frame and returned to Kalgoorlie for final fitting. I repeat also that it seems to me there is a tremendous number of benefits that can be obtained, either from the Commonwealth Social Services Department or from the State department, by indigent people in the metropolitan area that do not extend beyond that area, and some definite steps should be taken to make those benefits available to people on the Goldfields.

Then there is the question of the distribution of free milk to school children. I realise that the scheme is only in its infancy. It has been talked about for quite a long time but its implementation has taken place only recently. Despite the assurances of the Minister and his officers, which I believe are quite sincere, namely, that every endeavour will be made to extend the scheme to the Goldfields, I think it will be quite a long time before the children in those parts will receive free milk, because there are a great number of difficulties to overcome.

I do not think the Government is in a position to give a guarantee as to the free milk supply, and as the milk will not be supplied from local sources on the Goldfields, owing to the dairy herds becoming

depleted, the milk will have to come from other parts of the State, and pasteurisation will have to take place at the origin of supply. The milk may come from the district of the member for Vasse, and it will be about five or six days old before the children on the Goldfields receive it. Either that or it will have to be kept chilled and pasteurised on the Goldfields. While I have no objection whatever and would not, either by word or deed, deprive the children of the metropolitan area of free milk, I am greatly disappointed that there is nothing more definite being done to distribute free milk to children on the Eastern Goldfields.

Then again, I want to protest against the tremendous increase that has taken place in the re-appraisal of valuations of blocks of land in the Eastern Goldfields district. I know that circumstances alter cases and that in some instances an increase in the estimated value of blocks would be quite justified, probably up to 100 per cent., but there are many cases where, after re-appraisal has taken place, people find that their land tax has risen and the valuation of their blocks has gone up by 400 or 450 per cent. There is no reason or justice in it. It is like appealing from Caesar to Caesar.

Further, as his land tax is bumped up 400 per cent., the resident on the fields will probably be involved in an additional payment of £2 or £2 10s., but if he puts into operation the legal processes to appeal against the revaluation, it will probably cost him more than it will to pay the increased land tax for five or ten years, even if he were successful in his appeal.

I was extremely pleased to notice in the Administrator's Speech that something is to be done to increase the payment to injured workers under the provisions of the Workers' Compensation Act. The Acting Premier mentioned the other evening, when dealing with the question of inflation, that he considered that the most harshly dealt with section of the community comprises those on fixed incomes, such as old age pensioners, Civil Service pensioners and those on superannuation and social service payments. I believe that the injured worker has received a worse deal during the last 12 or 18 months than any of the people I have mentioned.

The maximum payment for an injured worker under the present scheme is £6 per week, which was fixed when the basic wage—I am speaking from memory—was £5 9s. 6d., which meant that the compensation payment to an injured worker, his wife and children was well over the basic wage; but now, with the basic wage on the Eastern Goldfields over £10 per week, the unfortunate worker is still receiving only approximately £6 per week as a maximum. That situation has arisen because the Government last year refused to proceed with any

amendment to the Workers' Compensation Act, despite the fact that at the time when the measure was brought before the House from the Opposition benches, the basic wage was something like £2 in excess of the maximum payment the injured worker could receive. So I am particularly pleased that the Government does intend to rectify that grievous injustice which these men have been suffering during the last 18 months.

Not only does the inadequacy of the weekly payment perpetrate an injustice but so does the lump sum payment for the loss of a limb, for partial loss of a limb or for loss of efficiency of a limb, because it must be recognised that the purchasing power of £1 today is only about 60 per cent. of what it was when these compensation payments were fixed. I therefore hope the Government will be fairly liberal and endeavour to make up some of the leeway to these people by bringing down an amendment to the Workers' Compensation Act.

I was also pleased to notice that the Government proposes to make an increase in the amounts paid to retired Government employees and the employees of local government authorities under superannuation schemes. It must be a real struggle for those people to exist on a meagre pension of £2 or £3 per week with the extremely high prices ruling for all classes of commodities which they must purchase in order to keep body and soul together. I think the superannuation payments since the commencement of the inflationary spiral have risen only 25 per cent. In the latest figures I saw, the statisticians admitted that the cost of living, compared with 1939, had gone up about 97 per cent; and the superannuation payments of a person who had probably given 40 or 45 years' faithful service to the State, have only advanced a mere 25 per cent.

There is no need for me to endeavour to convince members regarding this position as they will realise that these people are having a very hard time in trying to live in any degree of reasonable comfort. In dealing with many of these retired Government employees—and not only Government employees but social service pensioners as well—I believe there is a huge reservoir of labour that would be available if certain action were taken with regard to payments made to, say, a Government employee when he reached the retiring age of 60 optional, or 65 compulsory.

This is particularly so in the case of skilled workers. If the Government would take the view that if this man were put off it would have to employ another man, frequently with very little experience and often with no experience at all; and that it would have to pay him the same wage as the experienced worker who had reached the retiring age was getting, there would

be no loss to the Government or State and there would be considerable advantage in that a great amount of labour would be available. This applies to social service pensioners and those who are 65 years of age—particularly the artisans and technicians—who are still capable of doing a large amount of work.

The pensioners realise, however, that if they do work which returns them an amount in excess of 30s. a week they lose their social service pensions and are not prepared to do anything that will bring them in an amount more than that. Consequently there are thousands of these men who could be used to supplement the tremendous labour shortage in this State if an alteration were made in that direction. From the State Government point of view, a suggestion worthy of consideration is to allow a skilled man—one who is capable of doing a good day's work—though he might have reached the retiring age of 60, to continue in his job and be paid his wages as well as his superannuation.

There would be no loss to the department if this were done. Any such arrangement would of course, be subject to the department having the right to dispense with the man's services at any time. That is all I have to say on the Address-in-reply. There are many other matters on which I could speak, but I will not do so this evening as I shall have other opportunities when the departmental Estimates and the Loan Estimates are under consideration.

On motion by Mr. W. Hegney, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.55 p.m.

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 21st August, 1951.

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

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

Fifth Day.

Debate resumed from the 15th August.

HON. R. M. FORREST (North) [4.36]: I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on the honour that has been conferred upon you

by His Majesty the King, an honour that I am sure you richly deserve; and I trust that you and Lady Seddon will live to enjoy very many years of happiness and prosperity. I also extend congratulations to the new members. I have known Mr. Henning for many years. He has been a successful farmer in the South-West and should be a great acquisition to this Chamber, especially when matters pertaining to dairy farming are being considered. The other new member, Mr. Murray, is not a stranger to Parliament, as he was for some years a member of another place. He is a worthy representative of the South-West and should be very helpful in this Chamber when matters affecting the timber industry are being discussed.

I propose to tell the House something about the proposal put before the Federal Treasurer, Sir Arthur Fadden, in June last for taxation exemption for the whole of our North-West and for the northern part of Australia. I may mention that the first meeting in connection with taxation exemption took place at Whim Creek, about 50 miles north of Roebourne, a few years ago, and was attended by delegates from the whole of the North-West territory extending from Wyndham to the Gascoyne. Following that meeting, a committee was formed, which has been working ever since. Its views were placed before the State Government and explained to one or two Federal members and, in the end, the efforts bore fruit, for in June of this year, the Federal Treasurer invited the members of the committee to go to Canberra.

I must thank the Acting Premier, Hon. A. F. Watts, for kindly inviting me to attend the conference. The delegation was headed by Mr. Watts, and the others were the then Leader of the Opposition, Hon. F. J. S. Wise; Mr. Frank Thompson of Pardu station, Port Hedland; Mr. W. Leslie of Karratha station, Roebourne; Mr. Lang Hancock of Nunnery asbestos mine in the Hamersley Ranges and myself. We all put our views before the Federal Treasurer, and we had what we considered to be a most successful meeting. I shall now read the proposal which was submitted to Sir Arthur—

It is proposed that a territory north of the 26th Parallel in Western Australia, the whole of the Northern Territory and an area of Queensland to be defined, shall be declared a tax-free area for a period of 30 years for all wage and salary earners. That all business enterprises whatsoever operating in the defined area, be they mining, pastoral, pearling, fishing, whaling, store or hotel keeping, or any other business, whether limited liability companies, partnerships or individual