

# Legislative Assembly.

Thursday, 4th August, 1949.

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

## QUESTIONS.

### FISHERIES.

*As to Size and Catch of Schnapper.*

Mr. KELLY asked the Minister for Fisheries:

(1) As it has been authoritatively reported that both the average size of individual schnapper and the seasonal catch from Shark Bay during the season just completed is very much smaller than in past years, would departmental records support this contention?

(2) What was the total poundage of schnapper recorded from Shark Bay for the 1947, 1948, and 1949 seasons?

(3) What catch of schnapper was recorded from Safety Bay for the 1947, 1948, and 1949 seasons?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The average size of individual schnapper appears to be the same this year as in past years.

The 1949 season's production is not known as all returns are not to hand.

(2) Schnapper recorded from Shark Bay—

1947—557,971 lb.

1948—222,093, lb.

1949—Figures incomplete.

(3) Schnapper recorded from Safety Bay—

1947—12,565 lb.

1948—20,040 lb.

1949—Season does not commence until October.

## BETTING.

*As to Police Action on Racecourses.*

Mr. MARSHALL asked the Minister representing the Minister for Police:

In view of the alleged successful and effective results of picketing S.P. shops, as reported in "The West Australian" of the 2nd August, will he see that the police are instructed to take like action against persons wagering on horse racing on racecourses, in order to stamp out betting on racecourses (excluding the totalisator)?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING replied:

Following the policy adopted by all Governments here and elsewhere, it is not intended that the police be instructed to prevent betting on registered racecourses.

## STATE BATTERIES.

*As to Official Visits and Treatment of Sands.*

Mr. MARSHALL asked the Minister representing the Minister for Mines:

(1) How many times has the Superintendent of State Batteries visited Linden in the past 12 months?

(2) What was the cost of the visit of the Superintendent of State Batteries to Linden on the 12th March, 1949?

(3) How long did that officer stay there?

(4) Did the superintendent make a further visit to Linden within the following month. If so, when and for what purpose?

(5) Is a private operator at the Mount Ida State Battery retreating the sands there?

(6) If so, what is the nature of his work, and what are the royalty terms?

(7) Will he give an assurance that the operator is not treating prospectors' sands?

(8) Can he say when these prospectors' sands will be treated?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING replied:

(1) Three times.

(2) Proportion plane charter Kalgoorlie, Yarri, Mt. Ida trip, £10. Departmental vehicle used for Yarri-Linden section.

(3) Two and a half hours.

(4) Yes. The 4th April. Battery business, including a meeting with local prospectors.

(5) Yes.

(6) Endeavouring to prove a process for treating some discarded refractory copper tailing. Royalty,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of gross value of recovery.

(7) Yes.

(8) No, but full payment to prospectors is now being made under a recent decision of the Minister to pay for all tailings untreated at the 30th November last, which includes all prospectors' tailings at Mt. Ida.

## TOBACCO.

### *As to Distribution Committee.*

Mr. LESLIE asked the Premier:

In connection with the questions asked by me this session regarding the Western Australian Tobacco Distribution Committee, have any further inquiries been made to obtain the information sought, and can he yet advise—

(1) What is the composition of this committee, and where do they meet?

(2) What is the name of the executive officer of the committee, and where is his office situate?

The PREMIER: replied:

(1) The Western Australian Tobacco Trade Distribution Committee consists of three members comprising a representative each of the retail tobacco trade, the wholesalers, and the manufacturers, and members do not receive any payment for their services. The committee meets at different places.

(2) The name of the secretary is Mr. G. H. Elkington and his address is c/o. W. D. & H. O. Wills (Australia) Limited, corner of Murray and Milligan Streets Perth.

## COAL.

### *As to Production in 1949.*

Mr. MAY asked the Minister representing the Minister for Mines:

Will he advise the total tonnage of coal produced from the following coalmines and open-cuts, as from the week ended the 8th January, 1949, to the week ended the 25th June, 1949:—

Co-operative Mine;  
Proprietary Mine;  
Stockton Mine;  
Cardiff Mine;  
Griffin Mine;  
Wyvern Mine;  
Phoenix Mine;  
Stockton No. 2 open-cut;  
Black Diamond open-cut?

The MINISTER FOR HOUSING replied:

	Tons.
Co-operative Mine .. ..	39,461
Proprietary Mine .. ..	65,076
Stockton Mine .. ..	41,468
Cardiff Mine .. ..	51,366
Griffin Mine .. ..	31,710
Wyvern Mine .. ..	28,765
Phoenix Mine .. ..	1,366
*Stockton open-cut .. ..	77,384
Black Diamond open-cut .. ..	26,372
Total .. ..	362,968

\*No separate record maintained of portion referred to as Stockton No. 2 open-cut, as the hon. member has already been informed.

## UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

### *As to Finances.*

Hon. J. T. TONKIN asked the Premier:

(1) Has Mr. C. H. King had any discussion with him or officers of the Treasury concerning the University finances since his appointment to the University Senate?

(2) Has Mr. King made any written report regarding University finance to him or to officers of the Treasury?

(3) If discussions have taken place, or reports have been made what were the dates of the occurrences?

The PREMIER replied:

(1) Mr. King has had many discussions with the Under Treasurer regarding the University's finances as they are both members of the finance committee of the Senate.

(2) No.

(3) The discussions have taken place on numerous occasions since Mr. King was appointed a member of the Senate.

### BUILDING SUPPLIES.

#### *As to Increase in Prices.*

Mr. STYANTS asked the Minister for Housing:

Since the 1st January, 1949, what has been the percentage increase in price of the following building materials:—

- (a) tiles;
- (b) bricks (per thousand);
- (c) plasterboard and ceilings;
- (d) stone foundations;
- (e) galvanised iron guttering and down piping;
- (f) galvanised corrugated iron;
- (g) timber—3 x 2;  
timber—flooring boards;  
timber—any other kinds commonly used in the erection of dwelling houses?

The MINISTER replied:

Since the 1st January, 1949, there have been approximate percentage increases in price of building materials as follows:—

	%
(a) Tiles—terra cotta ..	71½
cement .. ..	81½
(b) Bricks—metropolitan wire cuts .. ..	10
other wire cuts ..	25
State pressed ..	41¼
Cardup pressed ..	23½
(c) Fibrous plasterboard ..	Nil
(d) Stone foundations ..	4½
(e) Galvanised iron guttering and down piping ..	7½
(f) Galvanised corrugated iron .. ..	6¾
(g) Timber—scantlings ..	6½
t. and g. flooring ..	7½
joinery ..	5

### SUPERPHOSPHATE.

#### *As to Deficiency in Weight.*

Mr. PERKINS asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) Is he aware that one farmer at Belka, in connection with the agent last year, weighed 12 bags of super. at random and recorded the following weights—159, 178, 175, 170, 178, 186, 177, 176, 177, 160, 176, 173 lb. (correct weight should be 186 2-3rd lb.) and the manufacturers admitted a deficit of 27 cwt. in 19½ tons which the manufacturers made good?

(2) Will he arrange that officers of the Weights and Measures Department keep a check on super. weights to see that correct weight is delivered to purchasers?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No.

(2) The matter will receive attention.

### SERVICEMEN'S LAND SETTLEMENT.

#### *As to Estate of I. C. Burgess.*

Mr. BRAND asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) When will the sub-division of the estate of I. C. Burgess at Strawberry take place?

(2) Has any of the land been let for cropping or agisting during the present year?

(3) When does he anticipate this property will be settled?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Commonwealth approved of sub-division on the 7th July, 1949.

(2) No land was leased for cropping, but stock were agisted from the 26th March to the 28th July, 1949.

(3) Prior to next cropping season, precise date depending upon accommodation being constructed.

### KALGOORLIE ROAD BOARD.

#### *As to Residential Rights-of-Way.*

Mr. McCULLOCH (without notice) asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) Is it a fact that the Minister has refused a request by the Kalgoorlie Road Board local authority to install rights-of-way in certain reserves which have been thrown open for building purposes?

(2) If the answer is in the affirmative what method does the Minister propose could be adopted by this local authority to clear sanitary and rubbish receptacles?

(3) Is the Minister aware that sanitary and rubbish receptacles will of necessity have to be carried over front lawns if he persists in his refusal to have rights-of-way installed?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) The blocks are of sufficient width to provide for a side entrance.

(3) No. It should be possible for the occupiers to provide paths.

### NAVAL BASE HALL.

#### *As to Retention.*

Mr. FOX (without notice) asked the Minister for Housing:

(1) Is he aware that the only hall available to the people of Naval Base camp is about to be removed by the Commonwealth Government?

(2) Will he make representations to the Commonwealth Government with the object of having the hall retained at the camp, as it is the only hall within at least six miles?

(3) Will he advise the Commonwealth Government to use new material in the erection of amenities and reserve this amenity at the Naval Base camp for the residents living there?

The MINISTER replied:

(1), (2) and (3) I have heard of the possibility of the removal of the hall to which the hon. member refers and I have asked the Secretary of the State Housing Commission to ascertain the facts and report to me at the earliest possible moment. I will then see what can be done. It seems to me, personally, that the retention of the hall for the purpose mentioned by the hon. member would be justified, and in that case representations will be made.

### BILL—WHEAT POOL ACT AMENDMENT (No. 3).

#### *Second Reading.*

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. L. Thorn—Toodyay) [4.45] in moving the second reading said: This is a small Bill, first introduced in another place, and its

object is to amend the Wheat Pool Act, so as to provide for an official trading standard for oats. A standard has been set by the Department of Commerce in regard to the export of oats, but there is no official standard for trading between farmer and merchant, between farmer and farmer or between farmer and corporation. Over the years there has been a gentlemen's agreement in regard to the standard for oats, but there has been no official standard. The gentlemen's agreement dates back to 1925.

In the framing of the amendment this standard, known as the W.A. Standard Feed Oats, which was decided upon by produce merchants in 1925 and has been successfully used by the Department of Agriculture ever since, has been adopted. The export of oats is somewhat spasmodic but often, in the case of a line going oversea, the Department of Agriculture is required to certify as to its quality. The fixing of an actual f.a.q. standard for oats—similar to the fixing of an f.a.q. wheat standard—has objections owing to the difficulty of collecting sufficient samples and the fact that only a small percentage of the harvest is marketed. In the interests of all concerned, an official standard is desirable. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. J. T. Tonkin, debate adjourned.

### BILL—TRAFFIC ACT AMENDMENT (No. 2).

#### *Second Reading.*

THE MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT (Hon. A. F. Watts—Kating) [4.47] in moving the second reading said: This is a small amendment to the Traffic Act, rendered altogether necessary by the passing last year of the third party motor vehicle insurance legislation which created a trust. The necessity for the amendment arises out of two difficulties that have become manifest. Under Sections 9 and 10 of the Traffic Act there is a stipulation that number plates of a vehicle, which it is not intended to continue to license, must be returned to the local authority within 14 days. Under the Motor Vehicle Third Party Insurance Act passed last year it is provided that a policy of insurance shall extend for 15 days after the lapse of the license, in order to give that

period of time within which to renew the license and take out further insurance, which are now coincident proceedings, and it is therefore desired that the two periods of time should be brought together. This Bill consequently proposes to substitute the word "fifteen" for the word "fourteen" in the various places mentioned in the measure itself.

The other matter arises to a substantial degree out of the same legislation, in that it provides for a permit to be issued by a local authority—under the Traffic Act "a local authority" includes the Commissioner of Police—to enable a vehicle to be driven or towed to a garage for repairs, even if it is not otherwise licensed or is licensed only by that permit. Unless the local authority can give a permit, no policy of insurance can be issued as the vehicle is not licensed, and consequently any vehicle being driven to a garage, not licensed and not under permit, would be uninsured and in that event in the case of accident complications would arise.

There was recently a case in which a motor vehicle that had not been used for a considerable time, and that was therefore unlicensed—it had not been used because it was not considered to be in a sufficiently satisfactory state of repair for the ordinary user—was being driven to a place to be garaged. On the way a couple of people asked to be given a ride and shortly afterwards there occurred an accident to the vehicle and the people who had been given a ride were killed. In the absence of any policy of insurance, which was the position in that instance, and in the absence of any permit, they were not covered by any insurance policy. Therefore, it is considered desirable to make provision for a permit to cover such an eventuality. Both the proposals in this Bill have been recommended by the parties concerned in the licensing and insuring of vehicles. The remarks that I have made sum up all that the measure contains and I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Graham, debate adjourned.

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

### *Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 28th July.

**MR. RODOREDA** (Roebourne) [4.51]: But for the fact that there is an amendment in this Bill which is consequential on an amendment that this House passed last year it seems to me that the Bill is unnecessary. It is purely a trifle. In fact, in the amendment to the provision relating to a member of Parliament and to his wife voting for the electorate which the member represents it verges, I think, a little on the farcical. Our present Electoral Act, as such, was introduced in 1907 by the member for Nedlands who was then Attorney General, and that is the first time that the provision allowing a member and his wife to vote for the electorate which the member represented was incorporated in the Act. The provision itself was taken from the Commonwealth Act which in those days did not give that right to the wife of a member. It caused quite a discussion when first introduced to this House in 1907. In those days Mr. Angwin moved to delete from Section 17 the words giving the qualifications to the wife of a member to be enrolled for the electorate which her husband represented. Following some considerable discussion in those days, Mr. Horan said this—

The subclause was absurd and should be struck out, and the only reason it was included in the Bill seemed to be to give a man and his wife a vote each in the district which the member represented in Parliament; and sometimes one or two votes decided an election.

The Attorney General in the course of his reply had this to say—

As pointed out by the member for Ivanhoe, the absence from the roll of the name of the member for the district was sometimes regarded as a grievance by local electors, who saw in that fact an indication that the member had deserted the district and ceased to be interested in its fortunes. To adopt the amendment would be to enact that it was fitting a husband's domicile should be different from that of his wife.

I think the brains of the member for Nedlands have sharpened considerably since those days because I cannot see any sense in that reasoning. To adopt that amendment would be to say that the husband's domicile should be different from that of his wife. The section in the Act giving the wife an opportunity to vote has nothing whatever to do with her domicile. Further on in the debate Mr. Angwin came back with this—

If the only evidence members could afford their constituents of continued interest in the district was the inclusion of their names on the local roll, it was clear their interest in the district was small.

Of course, there was no question that he was right on that.

Mr. Fox: The Attorney General is listening very closely.

Mr. RODOREDA: Further on, Mr. Taylor said—

But it was not wise that the wife of a member should vote in her husband's electorate. If that happened to be an outlying district, the wife would not know the conditions existing in the district, and possibly the election might turn on one vote. Of course the wife knowing her husband so well might vote against him.

If we retain this provision in the Act that may happen to us too, which would nullify the provision altogether. Seeing that there was discussion on that clause when this first Electoral Bill was introduced I find myself in agreement with those members who opposed this section in the Act. I can see no valid reason why a member of Parliament and his wife who live outside the electorate represented by the husband should have a vote for that electorate. For a start, it is giving a member a lead of two votes in an election and I do not think that would be a democratic way to conduct an election. In any case, the position we are now arriving at in these amendments seems to be rather farcical. Section 17 (3) states—

Any member of the Legislative Assembly, and the wife of any member of the Legislative Assembly, may claim to be enrolled for the district mentioned by such member, and when so enrolled shall be deemed to live in such district.

Clause 3 of this Bill then goes on to say—

And if that district is wholly or partly included, pursuant to the provisions of any Act, in another district, however named, that member and the wife of that member may claim to be enrolled for that other district to vote at the general election next following the inclusion and while so enrolled be deemed to live in that other district.

When introducing this Bill the Minister said that that provision applied to a member who was contesting an electorate of which his old electorate formed a part and that is what the Bill is presumed to do. But in my opinion the Bill does nothing of the sort. There is nothing at all in the Bill to say that the member must be standing for the

seat of which his old electorate forms a part. Take the instance quoted by the Minister of the Perth electorate when he said that that electorate had ceased to exist but portions of it had been included respectively in the North Perth, East Perth and West Perth electorates. On reading this Bill it seems to me that the present member for Perth could decide to have himself enrolled on, say, the East Perth roll and contest the electorate of Subiaco. That is the position we are arriving at with that amendment.

The Attorney General: That would not be practical though, would it?

Mr. RODOREDA: I am not talking about practicability. I am talking about what the Bill says, and it is on that we have to make our decision. Take the case of the member for Forrest! The Forrest electorate has disappeared and I believe it has been incorporated in four other electorates. Therefore, under this Bill the member for Forrest could claim to be enrolled on any of the rolls of those four electorates and yet contest the Canning seat. That is the farcical position we have arrived at with this amendment. When an important piece of legislation such as the Electoral Act is amended for the sole purpose of giving a member and his wife a vote, and only following a Redistribution of Seats Bill, I consider it is wrong. The section as it is would have been quite sufficient to look after all normal elections except those occurring after any Redistribution of Seats Act. Are we to be so foolish as to go to the length proposed in the amendment for the sole purpose of benefiting ourselves against an opponent who may not be a member of Parliament? To do so would be absurd.

The next proposal is to amend Section 100, which will empower the Minister to appoint polling places bordering on or outside the district for which electors are voting. That amendment is unnecessary. The Act contains no limitation to prevent this being done.

The Attorney General: The Solicitor General advises that it does. You can see his opinion if you wish.

Mr. RODOREDA: I should not care to pit my knowledge against that of the Solicitor General, but if any member reads the section in the Act, he will see that there is

no limitation. At the same time I have no objection to the proposal because it will clarify the position.

The third amendment deals with Section 119. The inclusion of the question, "Have you within the last preceding six months bona fide lived within that district?" is consequential on the amendment passed last year making three months' residence an essential qualification for enrolment. We have got ourselves into a farcical position, and if the Minister wishes to rectify the difficulty, he should get the Crown Law authorities to redraft the amendment to Section 17. I feel confident that the interpretation I have given is correct.

**MR. HEGNEY** (Pilbara) [5.2]: I desire to comment briefly on the provision that the member for Roebourne referred to just before resuming his seat. Under the Act, notwithstanding the residential qualification, it is competent for a member and his wife to be on the roll for the district represented by him. After the Minister had moved the second reading of the Bill, the member for Roebourne informed me that he was under the impression that only one member, namely, the member seeking election for a particular seat, would be entitled to remain on the roll. This is a point that ought to be cleared up.

Take my own case; I represent the Pilbara district. Although there are few people in it, part of the district will be transferred to the Kimberley district. The major portion of Roebourne district will be transferred to the present Pilbara district and the balance to the Gascoyne district. My name and that of my wife appear on the roll, but so far as I am aware the names of Mr. Rodoreda and his wife do not appear, although it is understood that Mr. Rodoreda will be the Labour candidate for Pilbara and no doubt will perform well at the election.

I have as much right to retain my name on the Pilbara roll as Mr. Rodoreda would have to be enrolled. If it is the intention of the Minister that the names of my wife and myself shall be struck off the Pilbara roll, I consider that would be quite indiscreet. I shall be the member for Pilbara until the day of the election and it will then be too late for me or any other member to get his name on another roll. This

applies to practically every member of the House. Some of the existing electorates have been distributed over two or three other electorates and the present names of districts will disappear so that some members will be seeking return for other seats. I hope the Attorney General, when replying to the debate, will clarify the position and outline exactly what will occur if we agree to the amendment.

**THE ATTORNEY GENERAL** (Hon. A. V. R. Abbott—North Perth—in reply) [5.6]: The provision is designed to enable a member at his own option and only at his own option to have his name transferred to a district of another name if the new district contains portion of his old one. Consequently the member for Pilbara will appreciate just what will occur. I do not intend to discuss the merits or demerits of the section of the Act because that is not under consideration. What I stated about the member for Perth was quite right. His electorate will go out of existence, but he will still be nominally a member for a district which, at the close of this Parliament, will cease to exist. Therefore, if he seeks election for a district of which his old one forms portion, he may be put on the roll.

Mr. Rodoreda: What if he does not stand?

**The ATTORNEY GENERAL**: Probably the interpretation of the member for Roebourne is correct, but we are here to deal with the situation in a practical way and that is the way the draftsman interpreted the instructions of the Government. The draftsman did his best to give effect to a simple request and I consider that, from a practical point of view, he has succeeded. The position of the member for Pilbara is quite clear. His name and that of his wife may remain on the Pilbara roll and they may vote in that district or transfer to Mt. Hawthorn, if he resides in that district.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*In Committee.*

Mr. Perkins in the Chair; the Attorney General in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1 and 2—agreed to.

Clause 3—Amendment of Section 17:

Mr. RODOREDA: The Minister said that this was a practical way of meeting the situation and that the draftsman had done his best to carry out the instructions of the Government.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: If the instructions were as clear as the Minister's statement, no wonder he did not succeed.

Mr. RODOREDA: If the instructions were no clearer than the amendment, it is a sorry lookout for us. I can visualise a very simple amendment to achieve what the Government desires. Let me point out what will happen if the amendment be agreed to. Nothing in the amendment could prevent the member for Pilbara from retaining his name on the roll for that district.

The Attorney General: Have you any objection to that?

Mr. RODOREDA: Not in the least. Under the amendment, my name and that of my wife, which have been struck off the roll, will be restored. This means that I could normally expect to get four votes in my favour, because the present member for Pilbara would not have time to get his name on the roll for the district he proposes to contest. Is that fair?

The Attorney General: I could willingly have adopted that attitude, but I did not.

Mr. RODOREDA: No, the Minister dodged the issue. Other members will have the same experience.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The Minister may not be a candidate yet.

Mr. RODOREDA: We shall know in the morning whether he will be with us again. A member might not wish to get his name on a particular roll; he might desire to give two votes to a fellow member. The position is farcical. I ask the Minister to report progress and get an amendment drafted that will carry out his intention.

Progress reported.

## **BILL—PRICES CONTROL ACT AMENDMENT (CONTINUANCE).**

*Second Reading.*

Debate resumed from the 26th July.

HON. A. B. G. HAWKE (Northam) [5.15]: The object of this Bill is to extend the existing legislation controlling prices in this State from the 31st December of this

year until the 31st December, 1950. Although in my opinion the legislation which Parliament passed in 1939 and which is still on the statute book is better than that with which we are now dealing, the Government indicated last year that it was not prepared to proclaim the former legislation, but would insist on passing this new legislation, which has now been in force for roughly 12 months. In speaking to the Bill now before the House, the Attorney General gave us a fair amount of information regarding the movement of controlled prices in the State during the time the present legislation has been in force. He also told us of the various conferences which have been held in the Eastern States at which were present the Ministers for Prices of the various States. Notwithstanding that the information the Attorney General gave us was interesting and informative, it did not provide the House or the State with what in my opinion is vital information urgently required to be made available at least to members of Parliament at this time.

The Minister seems to be perfectly satisfied with the present system of control; he appears to think that no better system can be devised and apparently believes that prices have been kept as low as it was possible to keep them during the time this legislation has been in force. The fact that price levels have risen only by a certain percentage in this period is not necessarily proof that the legislation has been completely effective, or even very effective. In order to judge the degree of its effectiveness, we require much more information than was given us by the Minister. For instance, how can we possibly be in a position to judge whether the price of jam should have risen by, say, 10 per cent. during the past 12 months? It is true that the Attorney General told us that a considerable number of checks had been made by the officers of the department. He said that 3,090 checks upon prices had been made from the 20th September, 1948, to the 31st May, 1949, and that 509 per month were being made at present.

While that information is interesting, it does not assist us in ascertaining whether the price increases which were authorised should have been authorised to the extent they were. The Attorney General could have been much more helpful to us had he told us the results of the checks and inves-



tigations made by the officers. We should have before us information regarding the number and the nature of the breaches which were discovered and the names of the firms that committed those breaches. We should know the number of prosecutions recommended, the nature of the breaches and the names of the firms concerned, and in addition the decisions of the Attorney General upon those recommendations. We might also have had the numbers of the prosecutions launched and the decisions upon them by the various magistrates. We might also have had information giving the names of the firms and businessmen who were found guilty of having committed breaches of this legislation.

The Attorney General: They have already appeared in the Press, of course.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I doubt whether all of them appeared in the Press. Some of these offences were committed in the country and, whilst they might have been reported in a small country newspaper, they certainly would not appear in "The West Australian." Not knowing the number of prosecutions launched under the Act and the regulations, it is not possible for us to ascertain either the names of the firms concerned or the nature of the breaches committed by them. Unless we have those particulars, knowledge about the number of prosecutions and the firms prosecuted could be misleading. For instance, officers of the Prices Department visited Northam some months ago. The local people were pleased to learn of the visit, because they believed a number of breaches would be discovered in connection with the sale of essential commodities and that such discovery would lead to prosecutions and subsequently to the reduction of the prices of those commodities.

So far as I was able to ascertain, the only persons or firms prosecuted as a result of the visit of those officers were the publicans, all of whom were prosecuted for having put into each glass about a teaspoonful less beer than should have been put in it. If that is the manner in which prices legislation is being administered, policed and enforced in this State, there is something radically wrong, because that kind of administration reduces the whole thing very nearly to the level of a farce, and almost leads people to believe that the general run of businessmen could be exempted from close attention by the administration and probably exempted

from anything in the nature of a prosecution.

I am aware that some people in the community consider beer to be the most essential commodity of all, but they are in the minority. The great majority regard essential foodstuffs and, to a lesser degree, essential items of clothing and footwear, as the vital commodities. Consequently, they are anxious that the prices charged for them should be severely controlled and policed in the interests of consumers generally. I have watched the newspapers, especially "The West Australian," very carefully over the years to obtain information about prosecutions launched for breaches of the Act and regulations. I suppose other members have done likewise. If so, they will, with me, doubtless be extremely surprised at the small number—the infinitesimal number—of business firms of any consequence who have been prosecuted.

The Attorney General: That is a very nasty suggestion about reputable firms.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I am afraid the Attorney General is very worried in mind and troubled in spirit today. I understand it is a crucial day in his political existence, and it is possible the events that are to take place in the future are having an unbalancing effect upon his mind. I am not by the wildest stretch of imagination seeking to reflect on any business firm, large or small.

The Attorney General: I thought you said you were surprised at the small number of offences being committed.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I did not say that.

The Attorney General: Were you not suggesting it?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I was not even suggesting it. What I said—and I repeat this only for the benefit of the Attorney General—was that I had been surprised, reading "The West Australian" day after day, at the very small, almost infinitesimal, number of firms of any size which had been prosecuted for breaches of the prices control system. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, you very quickly realise that if I were indirectly trying to cast any reflection, it was upon the Attorney General himself and not upon any business firm.

The Attorney General: You could not have one without the other, could you?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Business firms can only be prosecuted for breaches of this

system if the administration responsible for policing it is vigilant enough to discover breaches which these firms commit from time to time; and the administration is under the direct control, we hope, of the Attorney General. So, if the business firms of which I speak have committed breaches of the prices system, and the breaches are not discovered and reported, the responsibility is not in any way theirs, but that of the Attorney General and his officers.

The Attorney General: The big firms, and others have been surprisingly honest.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: It is most interesting for the Attorney General to declare to us that these big firms have been surprisingly honest.

The Attorney General: I said "and others."

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: We know that the Attorney General, by virtue of the fact that he has been a practising solicitor and, I think, a barrister, in the metropolitan area for years, would have had close contact with these business firms over a long period, and would know them, and their methods and systems. Evidently the Attorney General expected them not only to breach the prices control system, but to be extremely and cunningly dishonest.

The Attorney General: Quite the reverse.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: During the first part of my sentence the Attorney General is studying something about the endorsements for the Liberal Party for Mt. Lawley. Midway through the sentence he drops the paper, listens to the second half and then comes in with an interjection which has no relationship at all to what I was trying to say. I will have to go over that point again. I was saying that the Attorney General has been a solicitor, and I believe a barrister, in the metropolitan area for many years, and, as a result, would have had close contact and association with these business concerns and the persons responsible for their management. Consequently he would know them well prior to this prices control system coming into operation. He must have expected that they would be using every device of a cunning type known to the business world for the purpose of trying either to breach the prices system, or to get around it. But evidently, as a result of his experience, he has been relieved in

mind, because he told us a few moments ago, by way of interjection, that they had been surprisingly honest.

I think that interjection constitutes a dreadful reflection upon the business community, in general, of the metropolitan area, because the Attorney General would not have been at all surprised at what he describes as the honesty of the business community of the city if he had not had good reason previously to be extremely doubtful about the honesty of the methods which some of them, at least, have used in the past. In my opinion there have been many more breaches of the prices control system than have been discovered. That is only natural. I do not think anyone could devise a system, and I am sure no-one could devise an administrative set-up, which would discover every breach of the system. That would be humanly impossible, but I very much doubt whether the prices control system in its administration has been as effective as it should have been. But we do not know. All we do, as consumers, is to pay the prices demanded of us by the business community.

Members are aware of the fact that rising prices, followed by rising wages, have constituted something which has given me much more worry than any other single factor during the last two years. On previous occasions in this House I have tried to stress the vital importance of this problem so far as our people and our State are concerned. I am positive, in my own mind, that the Attorney General has no real appreciation of the seriousness or danger of the problem. I know the Premier, in delivering his Budget speech the other evening, expressed the hope that by the end of this financial year, inflationary tendencies would have ceased and a movement in the other direction have commenced. I would like to have the same opinion as the Premier on that point.

My feeling is that the movement of rising prices and wages will continue for much longer than another eleven months unless the problem is taken hold of in a very solid way. I regard it as being serious enough to warrant a secret session of this House, or of Parliament if that is thought necessary. We ought to have a look at every detail of the prices structure in this State, from the bottom to the top. We should know much more than we can possibly

know as ordinary members of Parliament, of the way prices are built up in respect of commodities. We are aware, even if we have not had much practical experience in the business world, of the way prices can be inflated and enlarged, how this cost can be created, some other cost added and another plussed up until the original manufacturing cost of an item becomes increased twice, thrice, fivefold and in some cases as much as tenfold.

We know, too, from our practical experience over the years, that some persons and firms get much more out of the final sale price of many commodities and articles than their efforts warrant. We know all about commissions, and all the rest of it. We know all about the middle-men; or do we know all about them? I do not think we do actually. We ought to learn more about their activities and the burden they place upon the prices structure, and more about the influence which the share they unfairly take has in raising wages and salaries, and thus increasing the cost of production and making it thereby more difficult for industry to carry on successfully, if at all. We ought to decide, at this particular time, whether we are going to make a genuine attempt to study properly this inflationary problem to the limit possible in a State like this.

I am sure if we could have a secret session when we could have made available to us, confidentially, the build-up of the final retail prices of articles and commodities, we would, in respect of many of them, be astounded at the way the community is exploited by men and firms who render little or no service either in the production or the distribution of the articles concerned. I know we can, if we wish, just allow the problem to take care of itself, more or less. We can hope with the Premier, if we are simple enough to do so, that this inflationary process will somehow or other miraculously come to an end on the 30th June, 1950. If we do that we will be living in a fool's paradise, and putting our economy in serious danger. Where does the Attorney General think all this inflation and upward movement of prices and wages are going to end?

The Attorney General: That is a world problem.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Of course it is a world problem but are we less competent than the people of China, or Peru, or anywhere else, of having a good solid look at the problem? Would we be less competent than they, after we have surveyed the problem in every detail, to find some effective way of preventing this dangerous movement of prices and wages from continuing? I am not one of those Australians, or one of those Western Australians, who stupidly thinks that all wisdom resides on the other side of the world. Australia has led the way in many directions in her short history. It is not beyond the wit, knowledge or ingenuity of Australians perhaps to lead the world in respect to this problem.

Mr. Reynolds: Hear, hear!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: We would be worse than cowards if we failed to make even an attempt. I feel so extremely worried about this problem that during the last few moments I have advocated holding a special secret session of this House for the purpose of having placed before us, for our study, complete details of how the price structure of every essential commodity is built up.

Mr. Reynolds: Why not move in that direction?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: If we are going to continue as we have been doing, allowing prices to rise, allowing a 6s. increase in the basic wage to take place in one quarter of the year, then undoubtedly inflation will come to an end. But the end will be a complete crash of our industries, our economy and near insolvency for the Government. We know from the speech of the Treasurer when introducing his Budget the other evening, how this inflationary movement has affected State expenditure from Consolidated Revenue.

I do not know exactly how much an increase of 6s. per week in the basic wage will cost the Railway Department but I would not be surprised if it amounted to £250,000 or more per year. There will be correspondingly increased costs to other departments because of that basic wage increase. Does anyone in this Chamber think that the basic wage has now reached its top because it was increased by 6s. a week in the last quarter? That rise brought the basic wage in the metropolitan area to

£6 13s. 2d. per week, which represents a rise of over 17s. per week during the last 12 months.

In fact the present Budget, as introduced by the Premier, provides for increased charges which inevitably will have the effect of putting up prices and, in turn, again putting up wages. This mad or vicious circle, as it has been described over the years, of prices rising and of wages chasing them, sets up a continuous movement if it is permitted to go on without any drastic effort being made to bring it to an end. It would be an easy thing for any Government just to continue a prices control system which allowed the manufacturer a certain margin, the wholesaler a certain margin, agents certain margins, and finally the retailers certain margins. That is easy.

It does not require any initiative or skill or undue brain-power to allow a system of that kind to operate. It has been operating for the last two years and especially for the last year. I think the existing position is so serious and the prospects for the next year so dangerous as to make it imperative that the Government or Parliament in this State should study this problem of price increases in great detail, with nothing held back from us, and then decide whether the dangers to our industries and to our economy are not such as to warrant us as a Parliament doing something drastic about the existing margins of profit and perhaps, too, about the profits which simply take in the handling of commodities when the right to handle the commodities to get them to the consumers is not necessary at all.

I suppose everyone of us, from our practical experience, knows all the different arrangements which exist in trade and commerce, all the honourable undertakings of how certain things must go through certain additional channels in their roundabout process of travelling from the manufacturers to the consumers. I am positive the members of this House representing the farming districts would know a great deal about that matter. They would know how the prices of motor trucks, tractors, farm machinery of all kinds and other essentials needed by the farmers are loaded up exorbitantly in regard to the final price which the farmer pays because of the parasites who muscle in at some stage of the journey of these requirements from the manufacturer to the farmer.

Mr. Reynolds: My goodness, you are talking sense now!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I think the least my very good friend the member for Forrest can do, is to withdraw the word "now." I know the Deputy Premier is extremely well informed upon the problem of which I am now speaking. I notice a question which formerly, at any rate, worried him considerably and caused him to make up his mind that he would not only use his best endeavours to get a lot of these people off the farmers' backs if ever he was in a position to do so, but to determine that he would, no matter what obstructions were put in his way as a member of a Government, insist that remedial action be taken and, if he could not prevail upon the majority of his colleagues in his Cabinet to support him, he would walk out of the Cabinet. In "The West Australian" of the 23rd January, 1947, there is a report of what is described as a powerful attack on the Wise Government by the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Watts, at a public meeting at Mount Hawthorn. This is one of the things he said:—

The aim of the league was to reduce the cost of living. Indirect taxation should be cut down where possible. There were some unnecessary channels of distribution between producers and consumers which inflated the charges of goods and added to the costs of living. We say that we will find out these unnecessary people and these unnecessary costs and take steps to remove them.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Who said that?

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: His intentions might have been good.

Mr. Marshall: He never thought he would be up against Downing & Downing, though.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I have sufficient faith in the Deputy Premier to believe he still holds strongly to those beliefs.

Mr. Marshall: I don't know; he has a very slippery hold on them now.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The fact that he has not been able to take the action which he declared was necessary and which he still knows is necessary, is because of the unholy political alliance in which he happens to be caught up. That has put him into a Government, the majority of the members of which would not, under any conditions, lift a finger to interfere in any way with the profits and

preserves of these people condemned on the occasion in question by the Deputy Premier, who was then Leader of the Opposition.

The Minister for Education: I think that is purely supposititious, like a great deal more of your perorations recently.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: Now that the Deputy Premier is not prepared to accept my expression of faith—

The Minister for Education: I am not complaining about that; it is the last portion of your remarks of which I am complaining.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: —in his belief that the position was not as it was in 1947 before he became a Minister and, because he says that my suggestions are based on supposition, I ask him point blank why he has not done these things.

The Minister for Education: I think you will find a lot of them have been done.

Mr. Triat: What rot!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I happen to represent a district in which there is a large number of farmers and I say it has not been done, and I am sure the member for Wagin, even the member for Beverley—

Mr. Reynolds: Ah! What a man!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: —would agree with me it has not been done. As a matter of fact, farmers are being plundered today by the middlemen, by the unnecessary men in the field of trade and commerce in the same way as they have always been plundered. Fancy agents, for instance, getting £200 for tractors sold in their districts when it does not need a fraction of effort to sell them! Tractors, because they are so scarce and badly needed, as soon as they become available and are allocated by the Tractor Control Officer, are passed out immediately to the farmers who are lucky enough to have tractors allocated to them.

The Attorney General: They have to be serviced afterwards, of course.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: The Attorney General has raised another racket operating in the field of trade and commerce which is implemented in the machinery field, that being the servicing of those machines and the charges imposed upon the farmers for the servicing of them. I am hoping that as the years go by, the farmers will continue their support of the cooperative movement and that they will go beyond the retail stores

and will develop their own servicing system for their agricultural machines. I should hope, too, that if there have to be agents to handle tractors in country towns, the farmers might be able to set up their own organisations to do it.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Would that be possible under a Coalition Government of this sort?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: If there were an abundance of machines and salesmanship were required to sell them in competition, the salesman doing the work would be entitled to be paid for his services, but it is ludicrous that, in this period of shortages in all types of farm machinery, the pre-war charges in respect of agencies should continue. I am urging very strongly that we should take worthwhile action to grapple with this problem of continuously rising prices followed by continuously rising wages. If we do not, then undoubtedly the final episode will be an economic crash.

Speaking of our secondary industries, we know how much they are at a disadvantage in normal times owing to the competition of similar industries in the Eastern States. If we are just going to allow the prices of commodities and wages to rise, and the rise in wages to be another justification for a further rise in prices, and with that further rise in prices inevitably bringing about a further rise in wages, that mad, vicious circle will undoubtedly bring us sooner or later—and not much later—to a complete economic crash.

I should hope that if a secret session of the type I have suggested could be held, we could not only study the question of the prices structure in complete detail, but could also subsequently discuss the related question of wages and salaries.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The Government cannot afford time for a secret session.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: If given the opportunity, I believe we could devise ways and means by which, for a period of years at any rate, we could arrest this alarming inflationary movement. If we could arrest it for only three years, world conditions by that time might have settled down considerably compared with what they are today and we might find a world-wide cessation of the inflationary movement and, in its stead, a movement to some extent in the opposite direction. I appreciate only too well that the

tremendous war costs incurred by various countries have to be borne by us and by posterity. I am aware that those costs have to be recovered year by year through taxation, and that taxation is a charge upon the cost of production and has to be recovered in the prices at which goods are sold to the people. I know that the wage earner must have remuneration sufficiently high to enable him reasonably to purchase for himself and his dependants the necessities of life and, I should hope, a reasonable measure of the comforts of life in these days of mass and scientific production.

The suggestion I have made should not be brushed aside as being too difficult of acceptance by the Government. I hope that Ministers will not display feelings of supreme tenderness for certain sections of the trade and commerce structure of the State. I hope no member of the Government will feel that, if a secret session were held, some traders might fear that confidential information touching their affairs would be available to members of the Labour Party, for instance. In a secret session of the sort, names of firms need not be mentioned, but could be listed as A., B., C., and D., or designated by numbers. Then we could be shown the costs right from the beginning where the raw materials enter the factories, the charges necessarily added in the process of manufacture, the price at which the article is sold at the factory door, the costs of transport, whether the goods are delivered to a wholesaler or direct to a retailer, just how many middlemen come between the manufacturer and the retailer, and the margins of profit made by all of those people. I think we could have given to us a complete and vivid picture of the price structure, and of what is fair, reasonable and necessary within it, as well as the surplus cost which is loaded on to the price of goods for services rendered, which services—if they are necessary at all—are tremendously overpaid.

The Attorney General: Would not wage-pegging have to come into such an inquiry?

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I said a short time ago that after we had clearly and completely examined the prices structure, we should, in trying to devise ways and means of controlling prices better, also give earnest consideration to the control of wages and salaries, in order that we might

at least for a period of three years endeavour to establish a stable economic system in the State and thus give industry a chance not only to succeed, but more importantly a chance also to save itself from destruction.

I am convinced in my own mind that our industries, as well as our community activities, are in grave danger of being financially wrecked if the present system of rising prices, followed automatically by rising wages, is allowed to continue for another year or so. In the circumstances, I support the second reading of the Bill; but I make the earnest plea to the Government to consider seriously the suggestion I have made. I hope that in considering it, the Government will see merit in it, accept it and convene a secret session of Parliament to study this question much more closely.

**MR. HEGNEY** (Pilbara) [6.10]: When the Attorney General introduced this Bill he made a strong, but unsuccessful, effort to convince the House that he had made an unqualified success of his administration of this legislation since the State took over price-fixing control last year. He tried to convince the House that the administration was adequate and efficient, that there were enough inspectors and that there was no room for improvement in the control. I propose to show that the administration is not all that could be desired. The Minister has either demonstrated a serious neglect of the administration of the department or he is standing aside with the idea of sabotaging the Act. I say this because of the statements made by members of both sections of the Government on the prices referendum. Although they indicated that prices would be controlled, we know they will do everything possible when the time is opportune to get rid of prices control altogether, and the opportunity will be from their point of view, not from the point of view of the people.

The Minister for Education: I showed you the other night that State control was just as effective as Commonwealth control had been. You cannot deny that.

**Mr. HEGNEY**: I do not usually reply to interjections, but I hope to show before I conclude that the Minister is not correct in making that interjection. Shortly after the Act was passed last year—I think on

the 29th or 30th October—a conference of Prices Ministers was held in the Eastern States and a number of items were decontrolled. Mr. Finnan, who was the chairman, made the following statement, which appeared in "The West Australian" of the 30th October, 1948:—

There was still a real danger of a spiralling increase in the cost of living. There were demands for price increases from many quarters, but the job of the State Prices Ministers was to protect the consumers. One of the most disappointing features was the number of increases on goods which the State Ministers had regarded as being in such plentiful supply as to be no longer in need of control.

*Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.*

Hon. F. J. S. Wise called attention to the state of the House.

Bells rung and a quorum formed.

Mr. HEGNEY: It will be seen from the statement I have read that no sooner had controls been lifted from certain commodities—as a matter of fact, before the ink was dry on the statutes—a number of goods were increased in price and the chairman of the conference of State Prices Ministers rightly indicated that it was the function of those Ministers to protect the consuming public.

Before I proceed further along these lines I desire to draw the attention of the House to the entire lack of regulations promulgated under the provisions of the Act. When the Bill was being introduced and debated last year, I persistently requested—and other members did the same—that a copy of the Commonwealth regulations should be made available. The Minister was not able to supply members with copies of those regulations. In the Act, provision is made for the operation of the Commonwealth regulations until such time as the Government brings down regulations appropriate to the State Act. Although I have made inquiries from time to time and although the Act came into operation on the 20th September, 1948, nearly twelve months ago, no regulations have yet been tabled nor have they been gazetted by the Minister.

The Attorney General: I have been making a big effort to get them printed.

Mr. HEGNEY: The Minister has been making a big effort! Nearly twelve months have elapsed and the results of his efforts are practically nil. I suggest that if the

Minister were honest he would say that he made a very feeble effort, if he made any effort at all. In reference to an Act of this kind—one of the most important placed on the statute book—the Minister tells us, nearly twelve months after the measure was passed, that he has made efforts to have the regulations implemented so far as this State is concerned. It is an absolute scandal, and one way to sabotage—I use the word in its full sense—the effective operation of this Act. There is quite a long section dealing with the regulations which will be in vogue until appropriate regulations are gazetted by the State. From that time until now the Government has apparently not seen fit to submit appropriate regulations in accordance with that Act. Subsection (2) of Section 14 of the Act provides that—

Until regulations relating to any matter—

- (i) are made pursuant to the provisions of the last preceding subsection;
- (ii) are published in the Gazette; and
- (iii) are laid before both Houses of Parliament as required by section thirty six of the Interpretation Act, 1918-1938; and

(iv) are no longer liable to be disallowed the Commonwealth Regulations with appropriate adaptations shall, subject to the provisions of and by force of this Act, take effect and have the force of law relating to that matter from and after the commencement of this Act as if they were regulations made under the provisions of the last preceding subsection and validly promulgated and not disallowed.

Can the Minister tell us how many copies of the Commonwealth regulations are available? What efforts has he made to see that the regulations are printed and duly tabled? The Premier told us the other day, or he indicated, that the Government is endeavouring to close this session as soon as possible, and it is quite likely that this session as well as last session will have expired before we have been able to peruse any of the regulations and know what they contain. The Minister has shown a wonderful lack of enthusiasm in not seeing that the requisite regulations were drawn up and duly tabled. In "The West Australian" of the 20th August, 1948, the following appeared in a leading article:—

Under the method adopted in the West Australian Bill as introduced by the Attorney General (Mr. Abbott) the Commonwealth regulations to be taken over en bloc are not subject to Parliamentary examination during the debate.

We did not have the opportunity and this House was not extended the courtesy of being able to examine the regulations as they then existed under the Commonwealth law. The article goes on—

On that particular point the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Wise) and other members of his party have been able to bring forward some cogent criticism. The Government is also denying itself the benefit of constructive parliamentary discussion on specific aspects of the Commonwealth regulations in advance of the further conference of the States at the end of this month. While the West Australian Government might well have found the parliamentary time for such discussion, it must also be conceded that it should have an effective Control Act on the Statute Book when the Commonwealth hands over.

There is clear intention in the Bill that new State regulations will replace the Commonwealth regulations when they are worked out to conform to the conditions and the best interests of our own State in collaboration with the other States. The main objections of the Opposition to the Bill will retain real force only if there is undue delay in honouring this promise. State regulations superseding the existing Commonwealth system will, of course, be subject to debate and disallowance when tabled in Parliament. There is obvious need both for that safeguard and for the amendment foreshadowed by the Acting-Premier (Mr. Watts) to ensure that there shall be no breakdown of effective control administration during a period between the possible disallowance of a new State regulation in either House and the framing of an acceptable substitute.

"The West Australian" which, after all, is the mouthpiece of the Liberal Party, indicated that regulations were necessary. I repeat, that from last August or September, when the Act was passed, there has been no submission to this House of the appropriate and necessary regulations in accordance with its provisions. I would like the Minister when replying to the debate to outline what efforts he made, and what obstacles were in the road of tabling these regulations for the benefit of members, and of consumers and traders throughout Western Australia.

I want to deal for a few moments with another aspect of price-fixing. I have asked a series of questions of the Attorney General with respect to the operation of the Act, and he has indicated that the number of inspectors has been reduced from 111 to 71. He is satisfied, according to his replies to other questions, that the Prices Control Act is being administered and implemented with all due efficiency. I also asked the Attorney General whether he knew that

blackmarketing was going on in connection with certain commodities. He was not aware of that. I propose to deal with that aspect of our price-fixing legislation during my remarks.

I will turn now to the statement I made when the Estimates were being discussed last year—I think on the 3rd November—when I mentioned certain phases of the price-fixing legislation. I indicated that as soon as Parliament rose, the Government would put the soft pedal on price-fixing and would have no hesitation in sabotaging the effective administration of the department, and so make the measure and regulations innocuous. I also stated that the Liberal Party and the Government would try to throw off all controls as soon as they possibly could, and that the basic wage would rise in accordance with the industrial laws of the State, by at least 10s. or 15s. a week. But the Premier, in more than one interjection, suggested that I was a false prophet.

We will see who the false prophet was. I made the definite statement which appears in "Hansard" of the 3rd November last, that the Government would not worry about protecting the interests of the consumers once Parliament had risen, and that in accordance with the increased price of commodities wages would necessarily increase. The Premier interjected and said I was a false prophet. The position is that when the referendum was carried on the 19th May, 1948, the basic wage under the State law was £5 15s. 9d. On the 26th July, when the Bill was introduced, it was £5 17s. 5d. We find that the basic wage has progressively increased as follows:—

		£	s.	d.
1st November, 1948	..	6	1	7
9th February, 1949	..	6	4	9
2nd May, 1949	..	6	7	1
22nd July, 1949	..	6	13	2

If we compare the basic wage at the time of the referendum with today we find there is an increase, not of 10s. a week, but 17s. 4d. I will go one further and say that if a comparison is made between the time the Act was passed and now, we find the basic wage has increased by 15s. 9d. per week. One could see, without being a prophet, that no other position could arise; that there would be an increase in the basic wage once the Government had got Parliament into recess. But the Premier, in his genial way, just lent across and said, "A false prophet.



Your forecast is wide of the mark." In other words he suggested I did not know what I was talking about.

The position now is that I have been proved to be the prophet, and the Premier the false prophet. The figures I have quoted are not my own, but those of the State Arbitration Court. They are declared by the President of the Court after receiving reliable and up-to-date statistics from the Statistician. I have said that prices have increased. Wages have risen because prices have increased, and under the present industrial arbitration law wages must continue to increase while there is an increase in prices. The Attorney General, who introduced the Bill, tried to give the impression that prices increased because wages were on the upgrade. But anyone who understands the A.B.C. of economics knows that wages are continually chasing prices, and not vice versa. Yet we have the Attorney General trying to blame the 40-hour week, and increasing wages, for the increase in prices.

But there was no talk in 1948 of any increase in wages, or obstacle to prevent the Government from effectively controlling prices if the referendum were defeated. The people were told that prices and rents would be effectively controlled once Commonwealth jurisdiction ceased. The basic wage figures I have quoted amount to irrefutable evidence that the Government has not been able to control and stabilise price-fixing in this State. We were also told that prices of other commodities and services would not increase. But I find the Government has been obliged to increase tram and trolleybus fares by 25 per cent. and 33-1/3 per cent. Some time ago it increased the price of electricity, and quite recently it has increased transport charges generally in the way of fares and freights. But there was no talk of increasing the costs of services or prices when the referendum was held last year. The Government then said it would be able to control prices very effectively if the Canberra control ceased.

I wish at this stage to quote from an advertisement which appeared in "The West Australian" of the 7th March, 1948. I do not propose to read it all. Some of it I will deal with during the Estimates. It would be a little out of order to do so now because it does not deal with prices. Some,

however, does. The advertisement was authorised by the Liberal Party, and the portion I wish to refer to is as follows:—

A message to "Strap-hangers" (or "The Sardines of Wise"). Consider our trams! They are obsolete! They are dirty! They are overcrowded!

And so it goes on, and then we come to this—

Labour again promises you the world but its head is too far in the clouds and its manoeuvres too close to the wind. In 1947 (as in 1943) it talks airily of spending millions but the stark truth is that Labour cannot even provide its people with a decent and comfortable threepenny tram ride.

Since that was published and since the referendum was held, the Government has found that it has had to increase the cost of the 3d. tram ride. There are now twice as many strap-hangers and the trams are just as dirty. Another cutting from "The West Australian," dated the 6th March, 1947, states—

The Arbitration Court gives, but the Labour Government takes away. Housewives! A word about that 5s. increase in the basic wage. How Labour robs the worker. The Liberals will fight for higher wages and reduced costs.

As I have said, costs have increased and practically no article of consequence has decreased in price since the referendum or since this Government took office. That advertisement suggests that the people should give the Liberals a chance to show what they can do. I was one of those who believed that, after a period of Labour Government, the Liberal-Country Party Government should be given a chance to show what it could do. If members opposite speak honestly they will agree that members on this side of the Chamber have given them every chance over the past two years, and have been moderate and constructive in their criticism and advice to the Government and its followers. The Government has been given every chance and I think that after two years it has been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Mr. Leslie: Take the marble out of your cheek.

Mr. HEGNEY: If the gentleman from Mukinbudin would keep quiet he would hear some more. I come now to another aspect of price-fixing in relation to which the Government and the Minister controlling this department have fallen down on the job. Where is the Minister at present?

The Minister for Housing: I am his deputy.

Mr. HEGNEY: I will refer now to meat. For some time past I have been endeavouring to induce the Minister to see to it that the regulations are enforced, and to ensure that price lists are exhibited prominently in all retail butchers' shops so that the consumers may know the prices at which they are purchasing meat and whether they are being exploited. It is a real problem and goes deeper than the average man thinks. I feel sure that the Government is not seized of its responsibility in regard to the prices that people are paying for meat today. Ever since the referendum there has been an upward trend in the price of meat. In "The West Australian" of the 1st November, 1948, reference was made to the increase in the price of meat. On the 13th April, 1949, there appeared in "The West Australian" a long list of prepared meats, the prices of the majority of which had been increased. On the 30th April, 1949, there appeared in the "Daily News" an article with the heading—

**Sharp Increases in Price of Perth Meat.**

In the "Daily News" on the 2nd May, 1949, reference was made to the lifting of price control with respect to meat. The heading is—

**Perth Meat Buyer Urges Lifting of Price Control.**

And the article reads—

Complete decontrol of meat prices was the only solution to the meat problem, said Secretary H. B. Halvorsen of the W.A. Livestock Buyers' Association today. "The present set-up, in which there is no limit to the price the wholesale butcher has to pay for livestock, but there is a limit to the price at which he can sell the meat to the retail butcher, has meant that the wholesale butcher has been losing all along the line. With the laws of supply and demand operating freely, the public would get meat at a price at least no higher than at present, and quality and service would come into their own again. Blackmarkets flourish when there are controls—without controls there could be no blackmarket."

Said President Len Pethick of the Meat and Allied Trades Federation: "The price increase is unfortunate but I can't see any possibility of it being otherwise at present. Meat is always scarce at this time of year and this year the position is worse than usual."

In "The West Australian" of the 1st August, 1949, appears the following:—

**No Meat to Sell. Goldfields Butchers' Difficulties.** It is understood that no butcher

shops will be open in Kalgoorlie or Boulder tomorrow, all meat available having been sold long before mid-day yesterday.

It goes on to explain that a meeting of Goldfields butchers had taken place and that members hoped to meet the Premier who no doubt would solve the whole problem as usual. Under the sub-heading of "Black Market or Insolvency" there appears the following:—

Advice that none of the Kalgoorlie butchers would open for business today had been conveyed to him by telephone, the President of the W.A. Division of the Meat and Allied Trades Federation, Mr. L. Pethick, said last night. Kalgoorlie butchers in common with metropolitan butchers had been forced to buy livestock at a price which, when the animal was slaughtered, was far in excess of the legitimate wholesale ceiling price, Mr. Pethick said. For years the Prices Branch has advocated that once the ceiling price was exceeded, butchers should cease to bid. This was actually what the Kalgoorlie butchers have done and the result was that the people of the Goldfields were deprived of an essential commodity. For many months, said Mr. Pethick, country and metropolitan retailers had been losing heavily through the excessive price of livestock. If this continued they had two alternatives—the black market for meat or insolvency. To the Kalgoorlie butchers and many metropolitan butchers neither of these alternatives was acceptable. It was an intolerable situation and should not be allowed to continue. The Meat and Allied Trades Federation throughout Australia had consistently advocated decontrol of meat. Until this was done, temporary breakdowns such as that at Kalgoorlie were inevitable.

That is one aspect of the black market, and I will give one or two other instances before leaving that point. There is more than one way of robbing the people. On the 7th April, 1949, there appeared in the "Daily News" an article headed "Incorrect Scales." It states—

Two city butchers were fined in Perth Police Court today for having had incorrect scales on their premises. They are W. Pope & Coy. and Pope & Aylett, both of Murray-street, Perth. Both pleaded guilty. W. Pope & Coy. were fined £4 10s. for having had two incorrect scales. Pope & Aylett were fined £3 for having had three incorrect scales.

That is the position regarding the black-marketing of meat. Only the other day I asked for a pound of short loin chops in a Perth butcher's shop. I knew the fixed price was 1s. 4d. When the assistant went to wrap up the meat he said, "1s. 9d." I asked him "Do you know the fixed price of this meat is 1s. 4d.?" He said, "Yes,

but you had better see the boss. Those are my instructions." I saw the boss, who said, "I will make out a ticket for you." I know that is not an isolated case. I know that meat is sold at a price far and away above the fixed price. I challenge the Minister to prove me wrong when I tell him that there are shops in Perth where no price lists are displayed. When I asked a question the other day as to whether he was aware that a black market existed in regard to the price of meat, he said he did not know. All the butchers know, and practically everyone in Western Australia knows as well. Who is going to protect the interests of the consumers?

While dealing with this aspect of black-marketing and price-fixing, I propose to refer to another gem—if I may call it that—which appeared in "The West Australian" of the 28th May, 1948. I say now, and I say unequivocally, that this type of advertisement is scurrilous and despicable and it appears under the authority of Mr. Palmer, of 115 St. George's-terrace, Perth, the secretary of the Liberal Party. I repeat, it is scurrilous and despicable. There appears a cartoon of Mr. Chifley, a communist being depicted on one side of him and a black-marketer on the other side.

Mr. Hoar: Where is the Attorney General?

Mr. HEGNEY: Members of the Liberal Party should hang their heads in shame because such an advertisement appears under the name of that Party. The advertisement states—

#### The Yes-Men.

Leading the "Yes" vote in the Prices Referendum will be the Communists, the Black Marketeers and Chifley's Canberra Power-chasers.

The Communists will vote "Yes" because they favour dictatorship.

The Chifley socialists will vote "Yes" because they favour centralised control which is a form of dictatorship.

The Blackmarketeers will vote "Yes" because they were BORN under Canberra control and THRIVE under it. They FEAR "State" Control because it is more directly under the control of the people.

These are the unholy trinity of "Yes-Men" who will combine to fasten the fetters of dictatorial control on the people of Australia.

That is a statement made—not so long ago—by the secretary of the Liberal Party on behalf of the Liberal Party of Australia. Yet

today we find that blackmarketing is rampant and the Attorney General has been in control of the Prices Branch for approximately twelve months. He does not know, or pretends he does not know, much about the blackmarketing that is going on. What has he done? I challenge him to tell the House what he has done to prevent black-marketing.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Do not be rough on him!

Mr. HEGNEY: He has not done anything, as far as I can see but, by his inactivity and neglect, he has allowed black-marketing to go almost unrestricted. In "The West Australian" the other day there was another reference to profiteering in the sale of meat. That has been going on for some considerable time, and I say quite definitely that no notice has been taken by a great number of people of the price-lists published in "The West Australian." The price-lists, showing the various types of meat and their prices, have not been exhibited in the shops and consequently the average person is not certain of the price he should be paying for his meat. The time is overdue when people should know just what they have to pay for meat, as well as for other commodities.

I proceed now to deal with another charge of blackmarketing made on behalf of the Liberal Party against the Labour movement. This occurred two years ago during the State election campaign. This appears in "The West Australian" of the 26th February, 1947, and is headed, "Labour's 'Pie-Crust' Promises." This seems most appropriate today, when we find that most of the promises made by the Liberal and Country Parties two years ago are of a pie-crust nature. The relevant section dealing with prices is as follows:—

#### Labour's Housing Racket.

That is a very strong word.

Here's a brilliant example of how the Labour Government controls and price-fixing have penalised home-seekers.

#### How Prices Rise with Wise.

Average 5-room timber house.

Cost in 1939	..	..	£531
Cost in 1946	..	..	£1,049

I invite the Minister for Housing, if he cares to interject, to tell me what the cost of a house like that would be today. I will answer for him. It would cost nearer £2,000 than £1,000. The article continues—

The above figures were given in evidence by officers of the Workers' Homes Board before the Arbitration Court on 10th February, 1947.

We had no black market until we got a Labour Government.

I challenge the Attorney General to wipe out the black market existing in this State. He has held his high and honourable office for two years and has been Minister for Decontrol—or I think Minister for Price Increases would be a more apt term—since last September, and I invite him to demonstrate to the House, successfully, if he can, which I doubt, just what his activities have been with respect to the elimination of blackmarketing. I do not propose to read in detail information in connection with the sale of homes, but it is most relevant. As members know, the cost of homes has a direct influence on the cost of living and wages. Only recently the Minister for Lands referred to blackmarketing as far as land sales were concerned. Amongst other remarks, there appears this statement in "The West Australian" of the 19th July, 1949—

#### Operations of Housing Price Racketeers.

Methods adopted by blackmarket racketeers to gain high prices in the sales of residential property were mentioned by the Minister for Lands (Mr. Thorn) yesterday when he moved the second reading of the Land Sales Control Act Amendment (Continuance) Bill in the Legislative Assembly.

I do not propose to read in detail what the Minister said, because members have an idea what happened. Suffice it to say that the position is so serious that a Select Committee is now sitting and taking evidence on blackmarketing that has been operating for a long period in connection with the sale of homes. I again invite the Minister to let the House know just what he has done in that and other directions. I also invite other members of the Ministry, too, to let the House know what they have done to squash this blackmarketing that has cropped up over the years. Yet, when it suits them, and they think they can gain a temporary political advantage, they are prepared to get down in the gutter to gain a few extra votes or poison the minds of a few people against their political opponents.

In a weak moment before tea, the Minister for Education interjected and said that the Government had made a great success of price-fixing. I wish to follow through my references to blackmarketing and see what

effect it has on the basic wage that is declared from time to time in this country. I give the Minister for Education credit for being sound on occasions when he is submitting his argument, but this occasion is an exception. Among other things, he referred to the fact that the price level had increased by a less severe percentage under State control than that which had operated under Commonwealth jurisdiction, and he implied that the index figures showed that Western Australia was going along pretty well. We find in the "Daily News" of the 20th July, 1949, this report which the Statistician submitted for public consumption—

#### W.A. Was Top in June Quarter Price Spiral.

Canberra, Wednesday: Living costs increased more in Western Australia during the quarter ended June 30 than in any other State. Compared with the June quarter of 1948, the index shows these increases for five towns in each State: Western Australia, 13.4; Tasmania, 10.9; Victoria, 10.3; New South Wales, 9.4; Queensland, 9.3; South Australia, 9.1. The figures show that the cost of living is highest in Broken Hill. Next come Kalgoorlie, Geraldton and Canberra. In the capital cities, the cost of living increased most in Perth (5.1 per cent.) followed by Brisbane (3.3 per cent.) and Melbourne (2.9 per cent.). The main causes were rises in clothing costs in all States, milk in New South Wales and Queensland. Bread in Victoria, and meat in Western Australia.

There again is an indication that the legislation in this State is not working as satisfactorily as the Attorney General and the Minister for Education would have us believe. I desire to refer for a few moments to blackmarketing. As members know, the basic wage in Western Australia, as in the other States, is based on evidence largely submitted by the statisticians, and it is customary for the staff of the Statistician's office to visit retail traders in certain towns throughout the length and breadth of Australia periodically and take the prices as shown in those shops. Under the Census and Statistics Act the traders are obliged to supply specific and correct information under penalty of a heavy fine. These employees of the Statistician's office periodically collate these prices as to clothing, various kinds of groceries, boots and miscellaneous items, including meat.

When these statisticians visit the butchers in different towns they are supplied with the fixed prices for meat and not the black

market prices which this Government is allowing to operate. Meat is an important ingredient in the composition of the basic wage in this State and in every other State in the Commonwealth. For the benefit of the House I will quote an extract from Labour Report, 1947, No. 36, issued by the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics at Canberra. This report shows how important meat is as an ingredient in the composition of the basic wage and the determination of price levels in Western Australia and in the other States. On page 15 of the report appears this—

The percentage distribution for Melbourne in the base period was practically identical with that of the six capital cities as a whole, and has continued to be representative of the relative movement of prices in the capital cities up to the present time. For this and other reasons, therefore, the percentage distribution of the Melbourne "aggregate expenditures" has been published in previous issues of this report and these figures for the December quarter, 1947, are shown in the second column of the table for comparison with those of the base period of 1923-1927:—

I want to explain here that the basic wage is comprised of items such as food and clothing, housing and miscellaneous items. Under this table food and groceries have been itemised into—

- (A) Groceries.
- (B) Dairy produce.
- (C) Meat.
- (D) House rent (four and five rooms).

and the expenditure on those items for the December quarter of 1947 is 12.53 per cent. of the aggregate amount. This gives members an indication as to how important meat is in the make-up of the basic wage. The basic wage is £6 13s. 2d. today, so one will get an idea of what this means in effect to the wage earners whose basic wage is fixed by the Arbitration Court on figures collected by the statisticians and supplied no doubt by the retail butchers in the various towns; indicating that the fixed price is being charged. The workers in this country are being robbed of hundreds of thousands of pounds as a result of the activity of the Government in this regard. That is to say, it is not ensuring that the meat is sold at fixed prices and not at blackmarket prices.

The Minister is sitting there with a self-satisfied look and certain that his price-fixing administration is a huge and unqualified success. I would like to deal with another

aspect of the price-fixing legislation which, to my mind, indicates to members on this side of the House and to many people outside that the Government is not seriously anxious to police and administer the Act which has been placed on the statute book. I reiterate what I said last session that as soon as this Government, from its point of view, finds it opportune to get out from under it will tear the Act to pieces and the regulations with it. But it is not prepared to do it now because it is not in a very suitable position to do so. However, if the time came when it was able to get a clear majority it would have no hesitation in sabotaging completely the administration of this Act.

Mr. May: What would be done with the Minister?

Mr. HEGNEY: I am one of those who believe that there must be some control of certain commodities all the time. That is, if wages are to be controlled by an Arbitration Court then there must be some permanent control of certain commodities which the people continually require. Because, if we do not do that the purchasing power of the pound will continue to decrease. It is only natural that the basic wage, although nominally increasing, will be reduced in respect to the purchasing power of the pound. To demonstrate my point I will quote the remarks of Mr. Dunphy, the President of the Arbitration Court, when he delivered his judgment on the interim declaration of the basic wage on the 26th February, 1947—

Basic wage increases depend upon and follow rises in price levels,

and this may be of interest to the Attorney General who tried to indicate to us that prices were chasing wages—

and a criticism commonly levelled at a basic wage increase is that no real benefit accrues because the cost of the increase is automatically added to the price of commodities thereby passing back to the consumer whose wages have just been increased. In this State where we have reason to pride ourselves on a generally sane industrial outlook I believe the majority of workers are more interested in real wages than in high wages. A high monetary wage is useless unless a worker can get value for his money so that a basic wage increase which increases prices all round is not a real increase at all.

At the present moment the increase I now propose to authorise is granted under circumstances differing from those existing at

the time of any previous declaration. The Australian economy now has, as one of its regulators, a price-fixing system which has been implemented in the war years and which, taken all round, has been reasonably successful in Western Australia. The combination of functions between a wage-fixing tribunal and a price-fixing authority is theoretically an ideal system depending for its effectiveness upon the efficiency of both.

Never before in the history of the basic wage has the Court's declaration upon general inquiry been supported by the essential safeguards of price fixation. From the evidence submitted to the Commonwealth Court and re-presented to this Court it appears certain that some of the cost of the increase will be absorbed and some passed on to the consuming public, but the efficacy of the price-fixing system in its relation to the protection of real wage standards will be tested as the result of our present declaration.

This quotation indicates that the fixing of the prices of certain commodities is essential. Doubtless the argument will be advanced, probably by the Attorney General, that where certain commodities are in full supply there is no need for any control, but I would remind him that for a long time competition in relation to many commodities has been superseded by combination. There can be times when the supply of a commodity is plentiful and yet the price is high. If the price is controlled at the source, legislation is necessary to ensure that the people are not exploited.

I desire to quote an advertisement that was the product of the Liberal Party of Australia at the time of the referendum on prices, to which the L.C.L. and Country Party subscribed, in which an assurance was given to the people that, if the referendum were defeated, price control legislation would be put on the statute book and that rents as well as prices would be controlled to the fullest possible extent. Yet we have propaganda of the following insipid and imbecille type published in "The Australian Women's Weekly," doubtless with the object of making the womenfolk fearful of what would happen if the referendum were not defeated. It read—

Your husband's wages are at stake and yours, too, if you are in business or industry. If you give the Chifley Government permanent power to control prices, it will mean that they can hold down wages as well. Unless you want this to happen, vote "No" in the Referendum. A "No" vote does not mean that control over prices and rents will

disappear. It simply means that, if the Commonwealth does not extend the present legislation, your State Government will keep rents and prices down.

It said, not that rents and prices would be kept down to a stabilised level or in accordance with the cost of living but that "your State Government will keep rents and prices down." The Attorney General is a prominent and honourable member of the Liberal Party and I should like him to answer the question that that advertisement poses. As a representative of the Liberal Party, will he explain to the people why those pie-crust promises have not been fulfilled? He cannot do it successfully because he and his friends knew at the time, just as they know now, that such propaganda amounted to deliberate untruths. Yet it was inserted in the Press throughout Australia in order to warp the minds of the people, mislead them and misinterpret what would happen if the Commonwealth referendum proposals were carried.

The States now have the responsibility of price-fixing on their hands. I am not one of those who believe that the States can do everything. It is idle to cry too much over spilt milk, but I am satisfied that the Commonwealth could have controlled prices far more effectively than could the States. It is only necessary for one of the States to withdraw from price-fixing to cause a complete collapse of this control. There is a real danger of Victoria's withdrawing. Some few months ago, reports were received to the effect that that State intended to withdraw from price-fixing. Imagine what would happen if one State withdrew! The result would be that the whole fabric which the States' Co-ordination Committee has built up would fall to the ground.

I am labouring under no delusion. I firmly believe that, if the present Government were returned to power tomorrow with the requisite majority, one of its first acts would be to toss over price-fixing altogether. Where Governments really desire to control prices and do the right thing, difficulties unquestionably arise. I do not consider that the States have unlimited power to deal with prices, but they have certain power and the Government has not exercised it. I may instance the price of meat, which is one of the chief commodities required by the people. I deliberately refrained from dealing with other commodi-

ties, but I invite the Minister to make an inspection and inquire into the prices of such requirements as footwear, dresses, millinery, haberdashery, etc., on which huge profits are being made. In connection with these lines, no brilliant activity is being displayed by the department to ensure that the people are protected.

If the Minister sincerely desires to protect the interests of the consumers and effectively to carry out the provisions of the Act, he will be more active in and attentive to his department than he has been up to date. I am aware that, as regards imported commodities, certain difficulties stand in the way. When the States endeavour to reach unanimity on certain questions, there are bound to be differences of opinion, so that at any stage of the negotiations between Prices Ministers, a breakdown might occur.

This House, in my opinion, has received scant courtesy from the Minister in connection with his administration of the department. The legislation was passed on the 20th September, and although he has almost beaten a track between Perth and Sydney by his attendances at conferences, never once have we received information about the conference proceedings or his own activities. When administering legislation of this sort, it is most important that the Minister should ensure that thorough inspections, including complete and continuous checks, are made of commodity prices, not only in Perth, but also throughout the State. He should also ensure—although this may not be the duty of the Prices Minister—that the Weights and Measures Department pay attention to scales.

If a consumer receives only 13 oz. for 1 lb. of meat or sugar, obviously he is paying a relatively higher price for the commodity. Therefore the Minister for Police should take steps to ensure that scales are checked from time to time in order that the interests of the people in this direction might be safeguarded. I have pleasure in supporting the second reading of the Bill and hope that the Minister, in his reply, will outline the reasons why he has shown such neglect, and if the Bill be passed and the duration of the Act be extended for 12 months, I hope he will show more activity and enthusiasm in his administration of the department than he has shown up to date.

**MR. STYANTS** (Kalgoorlie) [8.30]: I intend to support the Bill, but not because I think the Act has proved effective; rather do I consider it has been a partial failure both as regards its administration and its application. I was not satisfied with price control even under the Commonwealth Government. I considered it was not giving 100 per cent. service to those whom it was intended to protect, but it certainly was doing a much better job than has been done by the State since price control was vested in the various State Governments. It was predicted by members on this side of the House and by those who voted for the retention of price control by the Commonwealth Government that an almost certain abandonment of prices control would take place if control were left to the six individual States, each with its own control authority attempting to fix prices.

The member for Pilbara read an extract from the "Daily News" which indicated that for the June quarter Western Australia headed the list as far as increase in prices of commodities was concerned. Not only was it in that unenviable position—a position of doubtful honour—for the June quarter, but if statistics were available at the moment they would show that the rise in the price of commodities in this State since control was taken over by the State Governments was higher than in any of the other States, and that therefore we were in the same invidious position.

During the debate on another Bill earlier in this session, I interjected that a wholesale increase in the cost of commodities had taken place because of the action of the State Ministers in relaxing controls. This was hotly denied by interjection by the Minister in charge of price control. I draw his attention to the fact and ask him whether it is not correct that at the very first meeting of the State Prices Ministers held after the passing on of price control to the States, some 3,000 articles were de-controlled. That is correct and there has been an increase in the price of almost every one of those articles. I believe that there has been an almost indiscriminate abandonment of actual price control on many things.

It will be remembered that in 1942 the then Prime Minister of Australia, the late Hon. John Curtin, pegged wages and fixed prices at those paid on the 10th February,

1942. This was done in an endeavour to stabilise the economy of the nation and it worked fairly successfully; but unfortunately with the cessation of hostilities, when it was seen that an Allied victory was inevitable, pressure was brought to bear upon the Commonwealth Government to relax both wage-pegging and prices control. On the one hand pressure was exerted by the unions and their members for the discontinuance of wage-pegging, and on the other hand pressure was brought to bear by the employers' federations and by factory owners to have price control lifted.

The pressure became so great that gradually, little by little, controls were lifted, until now we have got into a mad upward spiralling of prices, accompanied by an increase in the basic wage at intervals of three months. No doubt the Minister will contend that many of the increases in the prices of commodities were caused by the withdrawal of subsidies paid by the Commonwealth Government. Some members may recollect that I asked some questions of the Minister earlier in the session about price control. I asked him how many edible items which are in the regimen that goes to make up the the list upon which the basic wage is computed had had a subsidy paid on them prior to the State taking over prices control which had been subsequently withdrawn by the Commonwealth Government.

The Minister could quote only one item on which a subsidy had previously been paid and afterwards withdrawn, and that was potatoes. I also asked him how many articles in the regimen were still being subsidised by the Commonwealth Government and he admitted there were still three, namely, tea, butter and cheese. The only item not edible from which the subsidy had been withdrawn was wool. That was an item of some magnitude, because it affected the price of worsted and other cloths. I put it to members, is it likely that the Commonwealth Government, or any other Government, would agree to continue to pay subsidies on articles over which it had no control as far as price was concerned?

If prices are not controlled then there is very likely to be panic buying and hoarding. This is what happened in the early stages of the war, when people with ample capital at their disposal bought and hoarded goods. I do not blame the Commonwealth

Government. Once it lost control of prices, it was but logical that it should refuse to pay subsidies. One of the articles very generously decontrolled by the Prices Ministers was refrigerators. I do not think anyone in these modern times would regard a refrigerator as a luxury in a home.

• Hon. J. T. Tonkin: I think the Minister said he going to lift the control on radios, too.

Mr. STYANTS: I think everyone nowadays regards a refrigerator as a necessity, as well from an economical as from a health point of view. Immediately the control was lifted prices sky-rocketed. I was in Sydney in April of this year and made some inquiry into the manufacture, the wholesale cost and the retail price of a certain type of refrigerator. I do not desire to advertise any particular firm and, unless I am requested to do so, I shall not name the type of refrigerator I am speaking of. Members may, if they so desire, check my figures. This refrigerator is sold by a firm in Sydney which manufactures it. The price is £54 5s. It is a motorless type and can be worked either by electricity or gas.

The popularity of this type of refrigerator in New South Wales is outstanding. Every unit that can be turned out by the company is readily snapped up. The gas company in Sydney—the Sydney City Council—will buy any surplus the company has and will then sell the refrigerators on time payment to consumers. I made some inquiry as to what was the wholesale cost and I was informed by a representative of the company that the refrigerators are sold to the Army for £39 15s. I did not make inquiry as to the production cost because I thought that would be an impertinent question to ask. But they are sold at £39 15s. to the Army, so it can be reasonably assumed that the manufacturing costs are not more than £30. They are retailed on a time payment basis to the residents of New South Wales for £54 5s. with a £6 deposit.

On coming back to Western Australia, I found that there are two agencies for this particular machine here and that the price is £70. I made inquiries as to what the cost would be of getting one crated and sent from Sydney here and discovered it was £8. So the agencies in Western Australia are getting the packing costs and the freight plus £8 and are charging the public of



Western Australia £70 for an article of which the manufacturing cost is not more than £30 in New South Wales. That is some indication of what takes place when there is no price control.

People will endeavour to tell us that it is the cost of production which makes these articles dear to the consumer, but in many cases it is nothing of the sort. I know there are indent agents in Fremantle who import goods from the Eastern States and overseas, and the only handling they do is that when the goods arrive at Fremantle they see that they are transferred from the ship's slings into railway trucks and sent away into the country to some other wholesale agent, who then sends them to the retailer, who sells them to the public. That means that the manufacturing costs are added to by a margin of profit over and above those costs. Then the indent agent in Fremantle, who only sees that the humper transfers the goods from the ship to the railway truck, gets a 25 to 30 per cent. rake-off. They are sent to the wholesale agent in the country who gets another 25 to 30 per cent. rake-off. Finally the retailer gets a like amount. So it is not production costs that are inflating the prices of articles today but the fact that many people between the producer and the consumer are getting a rake-off.

Mr. Wild: The hon. member is misinformed regarding the refrigerators. Even under price-fixing the allowable margin in Western Australia in the metropolitan area was only 10 per cent.

Mr. STYANTS: Despite the great knowledge of the hon. member, the facts quoted by me are absolutely correct and, if it is necessary, I can inform the House of the make of the refrigerator to which I have referred and can direct members to the manager of the firm who gave me the information in Sydney; and the margins of profit made by the intermediaries between the maker and the users can be substantiated.

Mr. Wild: The refrigerator to which you are referring was being retailed in Perth for £68 15s. before price-fixing was lifted and today it is being retailed at £70.

Mr. STYANTS: I do not know what the price was before control was lifted, but this type of refrigerator is manufactured and sold to the Army throughout Australia for £38 15s.; for £54 to the people in Sydney; and for £70 here.

Mr. Grayden: The point you are avoiding is that it was selling for £68 15s. here before price-fixing was lifted.

Mr. STYANTS: It was sold for £58 and is now £70.

Mr. Grayden: It was sold for £68.

Mr. STYANTS: All I can say is that profiteering was in operation while price-fixing was in force, or while this particular type of article was under control, and it has continued and increased since.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Profiteering has always been in force.

Mr. STYANTS: In my opinion the Government has contributed very largely to the increase in the cost of living. If there is one certain way to increase the cost of living it is to increase railway freights and the Government has imposed two increases in railway freights. While that may not have a very alarming effect in the metropolitan area, where most of the cartage is done by motor vehicles, it has an alarming effect in the country districts, which are a long way from the seaport, so that goods have to be transported hundreds of miles and freight has to be paid on them. It is hard to assess the amount which would be involved by a 20 per cent increase in railway freights such as took place some time ago. We had that increase plus another 7½ per cent. rise, which means that there has been something like a 30 per cent. addition since this Government took over. I am not much concerned about the financial position of the railways so long as they are rendering a developmental service to this State. But there is no doubt that the Government has contributed in no small measure to the increase in the cost of living by increasing railway fares and freights.

There is another matter. The Government bought the electricity and gas undertaking from the Perth City Council. The ink was hardly dry on the agreement when the Government raised the price of both commodities distributed by that agency. To cushion the blow to the consumers, it was stated that the average increase would be 1s. a week. Even 1s. a week would mean an increase in the cost of living, so far as the metropolitan area was concerned, of scores of thousands of pounds. But it was not 1s. a week. Those who are receiving their accounts now, with the increased charges debited against them, find the increase is considerably in excess of 1s.

An endeavour was made to show that the domestic rate had been increased less than the industrial rate. But after all, whether the industrial rate or the domestic rate is increased or—as in this case—both rates are increased, eventually the result is the same. The consumer—the working man—is the person who pays for all of it; for it would not be claimed by any member that if the cost of power for working a factory producing certain goods is increased, the proprietor is going to bear that increase. It will be passed on to the article produced and that will be purchased by the consumer, so that eventually the rank and file of the public pay for both the domestic and the industrial increases that have taken place.

The Premier: They still compare very favourably with those in other Australian States.

Mr. STYANTS: I am not prepared to admit that is correct. But even if it is—

The Premier: It is.

Mr. STYANTS: —I still say that there is no reason why, if the price of something soars to abnormal heights in the Eastern States, we should endeavour to emulate them.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That is half the trouble with the present Minister.

Mr. STYANTS: That may be the case. I understand on pretty good authority that the officers of the department are in fear and trembling each time he goes away to these Ministerial meetings, because they feel that on almost every occasion he agrees to relinquish control of some article, or to an increase in the price of something already under control.

Then there is the matter of the increase in the price of meat last February. I can understand that quite a good case might be put up for an increase in the price of meat at this time of the year because of the seasonal changes that take place from summer to winter and the lack of feed. But there was no justification for granting an increase, for those reasons, last February. There was then an abundance of feed and plenty of stock. Yet, the people who were already paying famine prices for their meat were involved in further increases. Here is an indication of how increases take place in certain commodities that must eventually affect the cost of living and the basic wage. Today, the Minister for Housing, in answer to certain questions of mine

as to what had been the approximate percentage in increases in the price of certain building materials since the 1st January of this year, had this to say—

Tiles—	Per cent.
Terra cotta .. .. .	7½
Cement .. .. .	8½
Bricks—	
Metropolitan wire-cuts ..	10
Other wire-cuts .. .. .	25
State pressed .. .. .	4½
Cardup pressed .. .. .	23½
Fibrous plasterboard .. ..	Nil
Stone foundations .. .. .	4½
Galvanised iron guttering and down piping .. .. .	7½
Galvanised corrugated iron ..	6½
Timber—	
Scantlings .. .. .	6½
T. & G. flooring .. .. .	7½
Joinery .. .. .	5

Those increases will mean an addition to the cost of a home. Rent is one of the items taken into consideration when assessing the basic wage. It is certain that this will eventually mean an increase in the cost of commodities and in the basic wage, and that is something that will benefit nobody. It would be interesting to know what evidence was put before the Prices Branch to justify an increase of 25 per cent. in the price of bricks.

The Minister for Housing: I can tell you that. They threatened to close down through continued losses.

Mr. STYANTS: If a union threatens to call its members out on strike if they do not get an increase of £1 per week, it does not necessarily follow that they will immediately get the £1.

The Minister for Housing: I saw their figures. They were losing money.

Mr. STYANTS: It seems that the State pressed bricks went up only 4½ per cent. while Cardup bricks went up 23½ per cent., and wire-cuts 25 per cent.

The Minister for Housing: It was the small yards that had to go up.

Mr. STYANTS: I draw attention to the difference in the method that is required when determining the basic wage which, of course, is a remuneration, or the price or cost of the only commodity which a man has to sell—his labour—and that which is adopted by the producer of some article when he wants an increase in price. All the factory-owner has to do is to take along his books to the Prices Branch and, without

refutation by any third party, the department investigates the figures and decides on the increase. Let us see what takes place in fixing the value of the worker's labour. He has to go to the Arbitration Court and parade his poverty in public, in order to get what is considered to be a bare living wage. He has to claim a certain number of articles of clothing for himself, his wife and his family.

The list, which is taken into consideration in computing the basic wage, contains such items as, so many ladies' singlets per annum, so many men's singlets, and so many pairs of boots and shoes for the children. It even goes into the night attire—the number of pairs of pyjamas for a man for 12 months. The worker has to claim for the different foods he and his family will eat. He has to show a certain amount for entertainments. Of course, the working man's entertainment is a football match, at about 1s., on a Saturday, and a picture show for the wife and children during the week, because he cannot afford anything else. He has to establish that he wants a certain amount for doctors' and chemists' bills, and it is just too bad if he is unlucky enough to exceed the amount allowed for those items, and it probably is exceeded on the average, because it then has to come out of either the clothing or the food allowance. So there is a vast difference between establishing the claim of a factory-owner for an increase in the price of his commodity, and that of the working man when he is trying to fix the price for the only commodity he has to sell, his labour.

Bearing in mind what I say is a degrading spectacle of having to parade his poverty in the Arbitration Court in this way, I sometimes wonder why it is that communism and some of these other foreignisms do not get a greater hold in the community than they already have. Dealing with the question of the control of meat prices, I would like to ask the Minister to explain how the butchers are operating legitimately at the present time. If he thinks it is possible, will he tell us how it is that metropolitan butchers can go to the Midland Junction saleyards and buy wholesale on the hoof at a price 25 per cent. in excess of that which is allowed to them retail, and still be able to sell retail to the public at the fixed price? If he can tell us how that is done, I would be very pleased, and I might be

prepared to alter the somewhat sinister opinion I hold at present, that it is not being done within the four corners of price control. It is probably being done under the conditions outlined by the member for Pilbara.

I believe very few people go into butchers shops actually knowing the price of meat. The price lists are not prominently displayed and it is possible that many people, like the hon. member who was called upon to pay 1s. 9d. for a lb. of chops the fixed price of which was 1s. 4d., are paying far too much. Although the administration of price control, even under Federal legislation, did not produce 100 per cent. results, and the effective results have been much less since the control was taken over by the State, I feel that there are some commodities over which there is a restraint. I refer to goods which, owing to their scarcity, would go sky high in price if controls were lifted. For those reasons I feel I must support the continuation of this legislation for a further 12 months.

**HON. J. T. TONKIN** (North-East Fremantle) [9.1]: I do not think the Government has any definite policy in the matter of price control. There is a system that has grown up. It is simply this—that from time to time traders who desire increases in prices present a case and sometimes the increases are granted straightaway, while at other times they are deferred. Almost always, however, they are granted in the long run. That price spiral, about which the Premier talks, is on the up and up. Despite the fact that we were told that Mr. Wise was responsible for rises in prices and that if he were removed from the Premiership such rises would not continue, that has not been borne out. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that "Prices rise with Wise" was a slogan on the lips of supporters and members of the present Government. Prices may have risen during the time of the Wise Government, but no-one in his right senses would say that they have stopped rising since then.

The Premier: It has been the same all over the world.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: That was not allowed as an excuse then.

Mr. Marshall: You never told the electors that, on the hustings. You only mentioned prices rising with Wise.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The statement has been made that alterations to the basic wage are disastrous because they result in increased prices and that therefore in the long run the worker loses, but those who say that are trying to put forward an argument for a pegging of wages in order, they say, to retard the increase in prices.

The Attorney General: That has been done in England.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: That may be so, but I hope it will not be done here. Members of the present Government know very well that prices drag wages behind them, and sometimes a considerable distance behind, and that increases in prices always take place before wages are increased. As a matter of fact it was a Liberal Government that exploited that theory and there are five members now on the Government side of the House—three of them at present Ministers—who took advantage of that, as I shall endeavour to show. Prior to 1934 the unions had to make separate applications for increases of wages and it frequently took a year or even two years before their cases were heard and the wages fixed. All that time the prices would be rising month by month, but wages remained the same because the workers could not get before the court. When they eventually came before the court and a declaration was made, it was made on the quarterly figures that then obtained and it remained in force for three years. If prices continued to rise from then on, as indeed they did, the worker had no redress. His wage remained the same while prices continued to go up and the fact that his wage remained the same for three years did not prevent prices rising. In 1925 a Labour Government altered that and provided for a declaration of a basic wage covering all organisations. The wage was to be declared in June of each year and the award had a currency of 12 months.

That was a big improvement on the previous situation, but nevertheless it meant that if prices continued to rise for 12 months after the wage was declared the worker had no redress, but had to suffer a reduction in real wages. As soon as a movement started in the opposite direction, after a period of 20 years during which wages had lagged behind prices for the whole time with the exception of the year 1914, a Liberal-Country

Party Government introduced a Bill to alter the Industrial Arbitration Act and provide for a quarterly declaration. The result was that the Statistician would submit to the Arbitration Court figures to show that prices had fallen and on those falling prices an altered wage would be declared to take effect immediately.

Then the worker could benefit for three months only. If he had a wage declared in 1928, for example, and prices were falling, the Liberal-Country Party Government would not allow him to enjoy the increase in real wages for 12 months but said, "Now we will have a quarterly declaration to keep wages in line with falling prices." There is the acknowledgment that wages are tagged to prices and drag behind them either up or down. There are five members supporting the Government—three of them Ministers—who supported that legislation, proving conclusively that they understood its import and believed in its principle.

The Minister for Housing: It is very useful today.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Of course it is, but the Minister cannot have it "heads I win, tails you lose."

The Minister for Housing: I agree.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Nothing was done for 20 years while wages lagged a mile behind prices.

Mr. Marshall: They lagged two and a half years behind prices.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: There was no attempt, then, to make a quarterly adjustment, but immediately the trend sets off in the opposite direction, along comes a Liberal-Country Party Government—of the same type as we have today, with three members of this Government being members in the Parliament at that time and supporting that Government—and it alters the Industrial Arbitration Act to provide for a quarterly adjustment, against the opposition of the Labour Party. If members want any further proof that prices drag wages up or down, then they are hard to please. Anybody who gives the matter a moment's thought will appreciate that that must be so because the basic wage is declared upon certain statistician's figures submitted at that time. And what do we find?

Immediately a wage is declared it affects prices of all sorts of commodities. Why? Because contractors put a clause in their contracts that variations in the basic wage will apply. They do not put that in when wages are falling but, when wages are chasing prices, and prices are rising, they invariably include it in their contracts. That means that the increased wages are passed on immediately to the purchasers of commodities. Therefore it is not very long before the worker is back where he started. But he cannot gain on the other trend either. He cannot gain any advantage when prices are falling.

The Minister for Housing: It is a rise and fall clause, you know. It operates both ways.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: It is a rise and fall clause all right, but they put it in only when prices are rising.

The Minister for Housing: I do not know about that.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: They leave it out when prices are falling. Just imagine a contractor, when wages are falling, putting into his contracts a clause that the prices are subject to the rise and fall of wages. Can members imagine that happening?

The Minister for Housing: I can imagine it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Then the Minister has a vivid imagination.

The Minister for Housing: I can imagine the other side putting it in.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Can the Minister imagine a contractor agreeing to insert a clause like that when wages are falling?

The Minister for Housing: I can.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: He is the man who does the work and he simply would not do it. It is idle to say that a contract provides for a rise and fall. Of course it does. Because the man who puts it in is as safe as a bank when he does so. He knows that prices are on the up and up, and with this Government in power and this Minister for Prices in control, he is doubly safe and there can be no possibility of a fall. The Minister has definitely broken faith with this Parliament and the Government's responsibility. This is a sample of the treatment we get. You will remember, Mr.

Speaker, that we criticised the Government when this legislation was introduced. We said that so much of this structure depended upon regulations and if those regulations were tabled, as they would have to be, the Legislative Council might disallow them.

Mr. Marshall: That was our great fear.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Whilst the Government might be honest enough in its intention to have the regulations enacted, there was no guarantee of what might happen. The other night a discussion on a certain Bill in the Legislative Council confirmed that fear. There was no guarantee that the Legislative Council would not move to disallow the regulations when they were laid on the Table of the House. However, the Minister said he was determined to put the regulations on the Table. This is what he said:—

On the day we take over subsequently State regulations will be laid on the Table of the House.

Where are they? I will agree that this is the same session but it is a different year and it is much later in the session. The State has taken over price control and did so some time ago.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I do not think the Attorney General knew at that time that it was going to be the same session.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We have not seen those regulations. Does the Attorney General make promises lightly with no intention whatever of carrying them out?

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Of course he does.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: If he does, then I repeat my accusation of two years ago that the Government is practising fraud. The Attorney General knows that anybody who makes a false statement without any belief in its truth, with the intention that it should be acted upon, and inducing people to act upon it to their cost, is guilty of fraud. That is precisely what the Attorney General has done because he secured the passage of this legislation by making a promise that the State regulations would be laid on the Table of this House subsequent to the Government taking over. He said, "On the day we take over subsequently State regulations will be laid on the Table of the House." Where is this perspicacity in decision that the Minister for Housing talks about?

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Where?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: That was supposed to be the keynote of an efficient Ministry—perspicacity in decision.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: He meant indecision.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Attorney General certainly has not that quality. He made a statement that the regulations would be laid on the Table of the House. He subsequently forgot about that promise in a most convenient manner and has not done anything about it. How does the Government regard that conduct?

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Very lightly, I am afraid.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We are here as representatives of the people and the Opposition has been regarded as important a part of the structure as the Government. It is there to look after the interests of the people that are not being looked after by the Government. We had a promise made to us in order to secure our support—that State regulations would be promulgated and laid on the Table of this House.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: But the Minister does not believe in regulations; I think that is the trouble.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Where are they? We are entitled to ask whether they are going to be laid on the Table of the House or will they be ready when the House has risen? We understand that it is the Government's desire to get out of here as quickly as possible.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Naturally!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: What sort of Government is that when the word of a Minister cannot be relied upon? I refer back to wages trailing behind prices. Members will recall the judgment of Mr. Justice Powers in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. He sought to give the workers some compensation for this lag and provided a loading of 3s. per week which he added to every basic wage declared. This was an endeavour to make up to the workers for what they were losing because their wages were dragging behind prices. Yet we have supporters of the Government, and members of the general public, saying that the increases in wages are responsible for the increases in prices. They are lagging behind all the time. I do not know whether you have had any occasion lately, Mr. Speaker, to try to purchase footwear for children.

The prices that have to be paid are astonishing. It costs more now to provide footwear for a child of five or six years of age than it did to provide footwear for an adult a few years ago. How on earth people with three or four children manage to keep them clothed and shod is a mystery to me. These prices are on the up and up all the time. The manufacturers say that it is necessary to make provision out of their returns for reserves, for obsolescence of their plant and so on. This spiralling is going on all the time increasing prices. During the recent black-out when it became necessary for most people to provide themselves with some alternative means of lighting many had to fall back on the use of candles. Have you any idea what they had to pay for them, Mr. Speaker?—7½! They had to pay more for one candle than they had to pay for a packet of them a few years ago.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: They are 2d. each in Tasmania.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Candles—7½d.! It is a scandal! So it goes on! And what does the Government do about it? Has it attempted to look for some other policy to try to arrest this spiral and enable the people to live?

Mr. Triat: The Government blames Old Ben for it of course.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: This Government declares itself in favour of decontrol! The Minister said the Government was strongly in favour of decontrol. We have no effective control, that is certain. Members have mentioned the price of meat. If the story as to that were fully told it would be laughable if it were not tragic.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Pathetic!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Honorary Minister for Agriculture had no fears about it at all. He said, "If the price of meat goes up you can effect a remedy by eating less meat."

Mr. Marshall: They are very logical, these fellows.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Honorary Minister for Supply and Shipping said, "You can effect a remedy by buying cheaper cuts." Those are the ideas of members of the Government on price control. They must be because those members express them. If the price of meat goes up, eat

less meat; if the price of bread goes up, eat less bread; if the price of clothes goes up, wear less clothes.

Mr. Marshall: The girls are doing that, anyhow.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: How do you know?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I believe the Government is a party bankrupt of ideas. Is that the way to tackle a problem of that nature? The Government has a meat advisory committee to assist it. Recently, I asked a few questions as to whether this advisory committee had made a single suggestion to the Government, and, secondly, whether, if it had made suggestions the Government had acted on any, and the answer was quite evasive. It was to the effect that as some of the suggestions might be the subject of legislation, nothing could be said about them. Might be the subject of legislation, but not this year!

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Or this week.

Mr. Marshall: Or next week.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: That is the type of thing we get; evasion all along the line; no attempt to face up to the proposition; nothing concrete, no plan that we can build on and assist in! A policy of negation and evasion, from a Government which believes in decontrol and yet is forced, because of circumstances, to continue control if it can get its friends in another place to agree with it, which is by no means certain as we have seen from what happened the other evening!

The Attorney General: I disagree with you there.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I would not expect the Minister to agree with me; he disagrees with statements he makes himself. When I said earlier this evening that the Minister promised to decontrol whales, he looked at me in amazement. Perhaps the Minister would like some proof. I will give it to him. I suggest he looks up "Hansard" No. 1 of 1948 at page 481.

The Attorney General: Whales were decontrolled.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I would say that that would make a marvellous contribution to the problem of the increase in prices. That would assist our economy tremendously—to decontrol whales!

The Minister for Housing: It must be, because the Commonwealth decontrolled them.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: And if one keeps on with the Government's ideas, that is, if one buys whale-meat, one has plenty of room to eat less of it because one would still have plenty left. It is quite a good policy for a Government of this type to decontrol whale-meat as a first item, that is, by a Government that believes in decontrol. The Minister wanted to start with the big things, so he started with whales.

The Minister for Housing: We decontrolled birdseed, did we not?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I suggest that the Government get right down to this problem and see whether it is not possible to alleviate the burden that is being carried by most of the people; an increasing burden as prices increase and wages are dragging behind all the time. There might have been an increase of 6s. 1d. in the last declaration of the basic wage but the price increase has already wiped that out. So nominally, wage increases are worth considerably less than they were before the declaration. The Premier comes along here with all the optimism in the world, introduces a Budget and says he hopes that the price spiral will finish, or words to that effect.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: He is having a pipe dream; that is his trouble.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Of all the problems concerning this or any other Government, this is one of the greatest magnitude. I will admit that it has, in all countries, called for the attention of the men with the best brains and the best endeavours to find a solution. But some policies have been more effective than others, and I say, without fear of successful contradiction, that the method employed by the Commonwealth was far superior to the present one.

The Attorney General: There is no difference from it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Oh, yes there is. There is this difference: that the problems in some States are different from the problems in other States, and at a conference of Ministers one of them might be over-ridden by the Ministers from other States where the problems are different from those in his State, and thus a decision is arrived at which is unstable for some of the partners in the scheme.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Will the Minister deny that that does not happen?

The Attorney General: Yes.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: I am afraid I will have to speak.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: That is the weakness in this set-up and we know there are differences. Take the price of one commodity, for example! The Minister knows that the price of potatoes is much less in this State than it is in Victoria.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Do not be personal.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: There are a number of other commodities similarly affected. If it suited the Ministers from certain States, who believe that a certain line of policy was in the interest of their State they, being unaware of the impact upon some other State, might effect a change and that might possibly be disadvantageous to one or more States. That could not happen under Commonwealth control. Consequently this is no improvement whatever. We can recall how members of the present Government, during the referendum campaign, spoke loudly, wherever they had the opportunity, against Commonwealth control of prices. They said that the States would do much better. Well, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the best judges of what has been done are the people who feel the result. No words of mine will make any difference to the effect of the policy; the people know whether it has been successful or not. The Minister only needs to move amongst the people and ask them whether they think price control today is more effective than it was under the Commonwealth. Without the slightest doubt, if another referendum were held next week on the same question, it would be carried.

The Minister for Railways: Then why does not Mr. Chifley, if he thinks that, hold another referendum?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I watch the newspapers carefully to keep myself informed as well as possible, and sometimes read the advertisements. I have seen a number of advertisements by Mr. Menzies and shall quote one that he features—

The present price control is such a shocking mess that you should get rid of the Commonwealth Government.

The Commonwealth Government is not in control of prices at all, so, if there is any mess, the State Governments are responsible for it. Mr. Menzies says there is a mess and he ought to know.

Hon. A. H. Panton: He should be a good judge.

Mr. Marshall: Yes, he has made mess enough from time to time.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I suggest that members go to the reading room and turn over the files of "The West Australian" and they will see, not one, but dozens of such advertisements, urging people to defeat the Commonwealth Government because price control is a failure.

The Honorary Minister for Supply and Shipping: Did not that appear in an old paper?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: No, in a paper issued within the last three or four months. So not only will people tell us that price control is a failure, but Mr. Menzies also says it is a failure. His remedy, however, is to put the Commonwealth Government out, although the Commonwealth is not in charge of price control. There is obviously something wrong with the staff work there. It needs to be looked into.

The Minister for Housing: I think there is something wrong with someone else's staff work, too.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Minister for Housing surely would not say that such advertisements are not appearing.

The Minister for Housing: I do not know. I was thinking of a remark by someone else.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: So we have it that on the experience of the people and on the declaration of Mr. Menzies, the Leader of the Liberal Party of Australia, price control under the State Governments is a failure. In face of that, we have the Attorney General saying that we should continue with it. Although this is the same session, and although we have argued this matter before, it is not altogether uninteresting to have the same speeches being made twice on the same subject in the one session, because the Government prefers to have one session instead of two. However, that by the way.

I do not desire to detain the House much longer on this question. To me the Government has been an abject failure in handling the matter. There has not been a single



instance where anything it has done in connection with the control of prices could genuinely be applauded. All that is happening is an attempt to put a bit of a brake on. Although requests for increases in prices are not granted immediately, we generally find that subsequently they are granted, and so prices are on the up and up. If any regulations have been framed to deal with price-fixing, I do not know of them. Consider the articles on the breakfast table!

The Attorney General: What about jam?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: What about it?

The Attorney General: The price of jam has been reduced.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: How much?

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: One needs a lot of money to buy jam.

Mr. Marshall: How long since it was reduced?

The Attorney General: Some months.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: We do not appear to have much information about it. Everywhere we look, we find an increase in prices. I was hoping that the Minister would answer for me today a very simple question that appeared on the notice paper.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: It was not simple enough.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: It is a question the answer to which, I suggest, could have been obtained in less than five minutes. But the Minister had the question postponed. Did he adopt that course because he thought the information might be used in this debate? The Government has increased the price of a certificate issued for a change of name for adopted children from 10s. to £2.

The Attorney General: This Parliament did.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: No, this Government with its majority.

The Attorney General: You did not oppose it.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Is the Minister sure?

The Attorney General: Yes, you did not say anything about that item.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Minister evidently had time to look that up, but he could not give an answer to my question.

The Attorney General: I remembered it. I was in the House.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: The Minister should not be sure. He is suggesting that when the Government introduced the Bill to authorise an increase in a number of charges for various services, there was no opposition from this side of the House.

The Attorney General: No, I did not.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Or that I did not oppose it.

The Attorney General: I said you did not oppose that particular item.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: Have we to dot every "i" and cross every "t"? The Minister might as well say that there are a number of features of this Bill that I have not opposed. I do not oppose the Bill, because I know that it is necessary. What I am strongly opposed to is the worthless administration of this legislation. It is of scarcely any value at all in keeping prices down. One member tonight quoted a newspaper report to the effect that the price increase in Western Australia for last quarter had been the greatest of all the States. How can the Minister reconcile that with the statement that price control in this State is effective?

It remains to be seen what will happen to the regulations if they are brought down before Parliament rises, which is by no means certain, although they were promised to us months and months ago. As the regulations provide the structure for the administration of the Act, members can realise how essential it is that the regulations should be confirmed by Parliament. The Bill as introduced, contains very little to indicate the policy to be followed, but we were told that the regulations would provide the structure and that State regulations would be tabled.

Well, I repeat, where are they?

MR. McCULLOCH (Hannans) [9.39]: The object of this Bill is to continue the Act until 1950. I do not know whether the intention is to continue the control of prices or to allow prices to get out of hand. They are certainly out of hand now. Since the State took over control of price-fixing, the Goldfields office of the department has been closed. Two male officers and one female officer have been transferred. I am certain that since then not more than one inspector has visited the Eastern Goldfields to check prices. Does the Minister suggest that by

reducing employees we will get better administration or better supervision? We have heard much about the effect of the 40-hour week on prices, but when the Commonwealth had control these officials were working 44 hours per week. There is now no official at Kalgoorlie policing prices. I have noticed that many shops in Perth do exhibit lists and tickets showing the prices of commodities. In my view, however, an automatic detective would be needed to find price lists and tickets exhibited in Goldfields shops.

We have heard the subject of meat discussed tonight. I presume the meat referred to was beef and mutton; but at Kalgoorlie we have reached the stage when the people are being sold horseflesh. I am not blaming all the master butchers on the Goldfields, as it was only one butcher who was selling horseflesh. The price of meat on the Goldfields is certainly high. I have a document from the Master Butchers' Association and wish to quote from it the following extract:—

In the issue of "The West Australian" dated the 23rd July, 1949, the Prices Commissioner, Mr. Mathea, issued a warning against meat profiteering. Mr. Mathea stated that retail butchers could assist by refusing to pay more than the maximum wholesale prices for their supplies.

It would be absolutely impossible for the master butchers on the Goldfields to carry on business if they had to procure their supplies from Perth. The Prices Commissioner was aware that profiteering was going on, but I have yet to learn that he has launched any prosecutions against the butchers on the Goldfields. Indeed, there have been very few prosecutions for offences under this legislation on the Eastern Goldfields. Not long ago, my wife went to a butcher's shop and bought some steak. When she told me the price of it, I said that it seemed high to me and I suggested she should go back and find out what sort of steak it was. She has the Scottish instinct and accordingly interviewed the butcher, who said, "That is Eye steak." Has anybody heard of Eye steak? It seems that it is but necessary to give meat another name and any price can be charged for it.

I was pleased to hear the Attorney General interject that there is no difference between State control of prices and Commonwealth control. On the Wednesday prior

to the closing of the prices referendum, I heard the Minister for Education say that if the people voted "No," prices would be reduced. He was giving the Labour Party whacks about socialism. Now the Minister admits that price control has not altered, so what was socialism under the Commonwealth must also be socialism under the State. It is obvious to me that prices can be controlled and I am certain that most people would be pleased if they were. It is also obvious that as prices rise the basic wage rises also. If prices are pegged, the basic wage should be pegged also and if that were the case now we would be on a much better footing than we are today. As the basic wage rises, so the standard of the working man falls. I say that unhesitatingly. As long as high prices prevail the worker is unable to purchase nutritious food.

We know what happened at the beginning of World War I. and it happened at the beginning of other wars. Many men were found to be unfit to join the Armed Forces and it was proved that their physical condition was due to bad feeling. People should be able to purchase nutritious food—not tinned rubbish—at reasonable prices, but today the housewife has to buy in the cheapest market. I remember Mr. Mathea visiting Kalgoorlie when prices were first controlled by the Commonwealth Government. Representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and merchants gathered at the Kalgoorlie Town Hall to meet him, and I heard one merchant say he had had a complaint from one of his customers about orange skins being too thick. "Well," Mr. Mathea said, "do not worry about that; make your skin thick, too, and take no notice of it." During the war, when the Commonwealth controlled prices, this legislation was not properly policed; but today the policing on the Goldfields is much worse.

The Commonwealth did introduce legislation to prevent blackmarketing. I believe that certainly had some effect on the merchants of Kalgoorlie and Boulder and prices were stabilised. Members will recall that in February, 1942, wages were pegged and prices stabilised. Between then and 1946 there was only a five per cent. increase in prices. However, when the pegging of wages ceased everything went up. The day that we can peg prices we will automatically peg wages, and that will certainly be much better for the masses of working

people in this country. In 1939 the Government—not this Government but a Labour Government—introduced a fair rents measure. That Act has not even been policed, for rents on the Goldfields today are out of all proportion to what they were in 1939.

I am aware that it was provided that when additions were made to a house a certain percentage of increase was to be allowed in the rent; but that is not being done today. Rents on the Goldfields are such that many workers have not been able to meet them. In "The West Australian" every day we see houses offered for sale at £3,000 and £4,000. Would anybody try to tell me that that is "dinkum"? It is a ramp. There is no question but that it is just a pure ramp. If one goes to rent a house he has to pay £20 or £30 for the key; and even when one gets in he has to accept a receipt for only half the rent.

I support the Bill but I hope the effect of our passing it will not be a continuance of the ramp that is taking place, and that the Minister will see that his officials give better attention to prices, price lists and tickets, and the rentals being charged on the Goldfields at present.

**MR. OLIVER (Boulder) [9.53]:** I support the Bill but, like other members who have expressed themselves, I am a little fearful as to what the results will be when it becomes law. I will be very brief, but I do want to inform the House of the disastrous effects rising prices are having on the goldmining industry. It has been clearly shown here tonight that wages follow prices. The goldmining industry is in the unfortunate position of producing a commodity the price of which is arbitrarily fixed. Whatever increase there may be in wages and in prices of goods connected with the industry there is no possibility of the losses sustained being recouped by the passing on of those extra costs.

This was very obvious to most intelligent people a year or so ago. I have a very vivid recollection of discussing the position with several mine managers prior to the defeat of the Federal referendum on price fixation. They realised at that time that the policy of defeating the referendum was wrong because they knew they would be amongst the victims. What they thought then has unfortunately come true.

The people were told that price control under the States would be far more effective than control by the Commonwealth. They have had plenty of time to reflect on the matter. Certainly the people who are concerned with goldmining have had time to reflect and feel the full effect of the defeat of the referendum proposals; because today we see the goldmining industry in the doldrums, a situation to which the defeat of the referendum largely contributed.

I well remember that immediately following that defeat I put up a case for a wage increase for workers in the goldmining industry, and the effect of the loss of the referendum was mentioned during those proceedings by the other side as to what was to be expected in the future. They fully realised what was in front of them because they were well aware that wages would increase, that they would have to absorb the increases and that prices would not be controlled. I do not propose to delay the House.

All I ask is that when the Attorney General has this Bill made law he will give effect to it; that he will make some attempt really to control prices. If he does not do so, we can expect the basic wage, in a year or so, to be not £6 and some odd shillings but £10 and some shillings; because as prices rise, wages must follow, and once we get into an inflationary trend the spiral will move faster. If the Attorney General does not give heed to what has been said tonight he will be faced with a far more serious situation next year than has been the case this year.

**MR. LESLIE (Mt. Marshall) [9.58]:** I was rather intrigued with the statement of the member for North-East, Fremantle that the method of price control operated by the Commonwealth Government was successful and that the method operated at present under State control is definitely not.

**Hon. J. T. Tonkin:** That is what Menzies thinks.

**Mr. LESLIE:** It is definitely what the hon. member thinks, too.

**Hon. J. T. Tonkin:** So I do.

**Mr. LESLIE:** The position is that if the method of control by the State is wrong, so the method adopted by the Commonwealth was wrong. I am of the opinion that I am correct in saying that.

Mr. May: Because it is not being policed.

Mr. LESLIE: It is not a question of being policed but of the method under which it is carried out.

Hon. A. H. Panton: What is the difference?

Mr. LESLIE: We have heard a lot of talk about the price-fixing business, but so far not one constructive word of criticism as to what is to be done with this very serious trouble.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: We will get none in the next few minutes, that is a certainty.

Mr. LESLIE: The time when the control of prices should have been tackled was when it was first introduced. If members would study the recommendations that were made by Professor Copland, I think it was, they would find that the method adopted by the Commonwealth Government, which is now being carried on by the State Government, was entirely different from what he proposed, and it defeated the objective. What I would prefer to see, if it is necessary, is price-fixation. Today we have a control that ensures that everyone gets his fair cut, as one of the speakers on the other side said tonight. Instead of getting down to a proper basis and saying, in every case, "There is the value of the article," it has been done in only one instance, and that is in primary production. The authorities have fixed the price of primary products but nothing else. The Commonwealth Government started it, so if it is wrong for this Government it must have been wrong for that one.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Two wrongs never made a right.

Mr. LESLIE: What is done is that they just see that everybody gets a fair share. Apart from the fact that prices control is based on a wrong principle, the breakdown occurred when wage-pegging was lifted. Then it got out of hand. The Commonwealth Government found at that time that its system of price control could not be operated. But it was too late then to introduce a system of price-fixation, which was the correct thing. It could have been done at that time because wages were fixed. With fixed wages we have fixed costs, and with fixed costs we can have fixed prices. Unless there is a basic fixation somewhere, all that can be done is to control the margin of

profit. Everybody, even the worker, operates for a profit. A man wants something over and above the bare cost of living, and he is entitled to it.

Hon. A. H. Panton: He has to scrap for it.

Mr. LESLIE: So has everyone else. Because the margin of profit diminished when wage-pegging ceased, and because everyone wishes to be assured of his margin of profit, prices have had to be continually raised. If the present system is not operating satisfactorily—

Mr. May: Obviously it is not.

Mr. LESLIE: That is so, and it is because the whole basis is wrong.

Mr. Marshall: You should have been in the Ministry and it would all have been fixed up.

Mr. LESLIE: The moment an employer is required to pay a higher wage, he wants a return on what he pays. As the costs rise so the margin must increase.

Mr. May: The wages would not go up if the costs did not rise.

Mr. LESLIE: The question of wages and costs goes back to the old conundrum—Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: What is your opinion on that?

Mr. LESLIE: I am not expressing opinions, but giving facts. Prices were controlled so long as the Commonwealth Government kept to wage-pegging. When it gave way in one direction to a pressure group, the whole structure on which it was built, fell.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The hon. member asks a question, but imagines he is stating facts.

Mr. LESLIE: Does the member for North-East Fremantle refer to the question about the chicken and the egg?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: Yes.

Mr. LESLIE: Can the hon. member answer that question?

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: No.

Mr. LESLIE: Neither can I. Members opposite kept referring to the fact that the people voted against the referendum last year. Those members are either unable to grasp the real significance of the issue which was before the electors at that time, or are deliberately blinding themselves to it.

Mr. Triat: The electors will tell you that at the next election.

Mr. LESLIE: The electors voted against power being handed for all time to the Commonwealth to control prices under a system which was wrong and was not operating. They did not for a moment vote against prices control. The only issue was whether the powers should be handed to the Commonwealth for all time. The Prime Minister, in a spirit of pique because his referendum had been defeated, like a little boy who will not play with the child next door, said he would have no more of it.

Mr. Fox: You wanted price control, and you got it.

Mr. LESLIE: The people were satisfied that it was not desirable to hand control for all time to the Commonwealth, and that is the issue on which they voted. It was not a matter of the continuation or not of prices control, and, as I say, the Prime Minister's action was taken in a spirit of pique. To add insult to injury, the Commonwealth Government immediately afterwards removed the subsidies which were assisting in keeping prices down.

Mr. Graham: You knew before that it was going to happen.

Mr. LESLIE: We knew nothing of the sort.

Mr. Graham: You were told that from every public platform by the Prime Minister.

Mr. LESLIE: I defy the hon. member to produce anything to show that the Prime Minister said to the people that if they voted against the referendum he would immediately hand the control to the States. All he said was that the States could not do it. The electors said that the States could, and that they were not prepared to give the powers for all time to the Commonwealth.

Mr. May: You asked for the baby, and you got it.

Mr. LESLIE: The only trouble is that we took over a baby which was pretty badly reared.

Mr. Triat: You have made a bad job of it since, too.

Mr. LESLIE: We now have the job of making something of it.

Mr. May: You are making a mess.

Mr. LESLIE: The trouble is the Commonwealth pulled from underneath the structure of price-fixation the main prop—

wage-pegging—on which it rested. Had that not gone, prices would have been controlled right through, because they would have been controlled under the system originally put up by the instigators of the scheme—the economic advisers to the Commonwealth Government—which was price-fixation. That is the only way to control prices, if it can be done, but where are we going to start? I can just imagine the tirades that would come from the other side of the House if we suggested that we should start with wage-fixation.

Mr. Triat: You bet your life!

Mr. LESLIE: We did not hear any tirade from members opposite then about that Government of their own political colour, but they know that the method I have mentioned is the only thing that will be effective. Prices started to rise the moment wage-pegging was removed.

Mr. May: Mr. Chifley did not ask you to take over the controls.

Mr. LESLIE: I would remind members that every increase in prices snowballs as it goes along. A five per cent. sales tax on an article at the manufacturing end becomes a 25 per cent. charge to the consumer. It is the basic costs that must be fixed. If we once fix the price of an article in that way we have control over it. If the debate is to continue I hope there will be less unjust criticism and more indications of how the problem should be tackled. We know prices are going up, but surely there is no need for us to continue covering the same ground all the evening.

I support the Bill and would also support it if it contained provision that the price-fixing commissioners were definitely to fix prices. Although they do go to the producer and say "There is an article and that is what you are to sell it for, regardless of cost," they do not approach the manufacturer in that way. If they fix a price today the cost goes up in some other direction and when the manufacturer's costs rise he can get permission to increase his price. I would like to hear some member deal with the fixing of prices and costs of production and wage costs.

MR. MARSHALL (Murchison) [10.12]: I am sad at heart, Mr. Speaker, at the thought that there is a prospective member of the Federal House in this Chamber this

evening. What a tragedy! Incidentally, I will deal with some of the matters he has mentioned. I suppose he has heard nothing of the Commonwealth regulations that were supposed to be absorbed into this legislation last September. He has never seen them and would not have troubled to read them had he seen them. He does not know that they contain all the machinery he is talking about.

Mr. Leslie: Why did not the Commonwealth Government apply it?

Mr. MARSHALL: Why does not the hon. member's Government apply it? The Commonwealth Government applied those provisions more effectively than has been the case since the State took over the controls. Since this Government took over, although we were given an assurance that the regulations would be laid on the Table of the House the moment the measure became law, we have not seen them. They contained all the machinery that the hon. member asks for—and he is going to the Federal House.

Mr. Hegney: He thinks he is.

Mr. MARSHALL: He is aspiring to it, but if the electors understand his ability as we do he will never get there.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. MARSHALL: The rise in commodity prices took place when the Commonwealth Government removed the pegging of wages, according to the hon. member. What a remarkable statement for a member of Parliament to make! The fact that wages were no longer pegged did not mean that wage-earners would experience an increase in income unless it could be justified before the Arbitration Court. Actually there has been a gradual increase, such as has taken place for as long as I can remember.

The Attorney General: Do not forget that margins were also increased.

Mr. MARSHALL: I would advise the Attorney General not to interject. It will be unwise for him to do so. While there is a general tendency for the aggregate price-level to rise, within that aggregate there has been a sudden and unjust rise in the case of many essential commodities. The hon. member said that the action of the Commonwealth in releasing the pegging of wages started the upward spiral, but that is ridiculous. The men who go to the Arbitration

Court have to parade their poverty in order to get an increase in wages. I wonder has the hon. member ever seen the deplorable circumstances under which Arbitration Court cases are conducted, when the advocate puts witnesses, male or female, into the box and makes them parade their poverty in order to justify an increase in wages. Such an increase can be justified only on the ground that the cost of living has gone so far beyond the reach of the workers that they are unable to exist any longer. That is the case on which the court has to adjudicate.

I agree that when wages rise the increase is ultimately reflected in the cost of production, but the cost of living must rise before the Arbitration Court will grant an increase in wages. That was enunciated clearly by the member for North-East Fremantle. Even without that, every member of Parliament should know that a case can be presented to the Arbitration Court only on the basis that the cost of living has gone up. If that cannot be proved the worker cannot get a wage increase, and the same thing applies to the basic wage. In that case statistical figures must show beyond doubt that the cost of living has risen before an increase in the rate is granted.

It is ridiculous for the hon. member to roar and rave, without logic, and talk about price-fixing. How far does price-fixing apply to the primary product that goes into the abattoirs? When is there any fixing of the prices there? Is there any price-fixing when bullocks and sheep are sold in the auction-yards at Midland Junction? Of course there is not! They bring whatever price the butchers offer on the open market. From my own experience I know that bullocks costing £8 or £9 have gone to Midland Junction where they fetched £24 or £25 per head, and the same kind of thing applies to sheep. Yet we have the hon. member talking about price fixation. Is there any fixed price there?

Mr. Leslie: But the seller does not demand those prices. It is the buyer's price and that is a different thing. I would not mind putting my own price on things.

Mr. MARSHALL: The hon. member had better not do that, because he would not bring very much. So we see that the hon. member can cover up one of the basic factors in the increased cost of living. All

too readily are members who represent primary producers anxious to smother up the great concessions which are given to those primary producers. I will not deny that those concessions and considerations are deserved when we are passing through adverse times.

Mr. Leslie: We have seen many of them.

Mr. MARSHALL: I know that wheat and super. have been hauled at very little above cost. That concession was given when wheat was 10d. or 1s. 3d. a bushel, but the farmers are still receiving the same concession and they are now being paid 17s. a bushel. Therefore do not let the hon. member talk about price-fixing because he is on bad ground.

Hon. A. H. Panton: That quietens him.

Mr. MARSHALL: A lot more will be said about super. and wheat, and the price of primary products, before this session is finished.

Mr. Leslie: You are on dangerous ground there.

Mr. MARSHALL: Am I? I have very serious doubts whether this Government is sincere as regards price fixation. There are members of the Government who, both in season and out of season, never fail, when on this side of the House, to attack any form of control. They use very strong language in condemnation of it. As those members are now component parts of this Government I consider I would be within my rights in assuming that the presentation of this Bill is sheer hypocrisy. Let us see what the Attorney General had to say about controls.

The Attorney General: I do not necessarily want to know.

Mr. Graham: I bet you don't.

Mr. MARSHALL: In Volume 2 of "Hansard" 1946 at pages 2270 and 2271, speaking on a controlling measure, the Attorney General had this to say—

This Bill is to continue the operations of the Building Operations and Building Materials Control Act, 1945. It might appear to be a very innocuous Bill, but it is to continue what I consider to be the very objectionable principle of control and regimentation by the Government.

The Attorney General: I think I followed on and said that it was necessary, did I not?

Mr. MARSHALL: The expression of opinion which I quoted, needs no correction. The Attorney General said, "What I consider to be the very objectionable principle of control." When he made that statement he was not in a position to alter the situation; but he is now. He knew that this Bill, at that time, would be carried because of the majority of members who supported it.

The Attorney General: Didn't I?

Mr. MARSHALL: And in the same volume of "Hansard" 1946, at page 2275, we have the Honorary Minister for Supply and Shipping giving an opinion in regard to controls. This was taken from the debate on the same measure and she stated—

At present we have so many controls that we might call our Australia not Australia-bound, but Russia-bound. Only this morning another person came to me whose name I can give the Premier. He was able to get a permit but could not get a permit covering a garage. He was told, "You can have the building, but we consider you do not need a garage." He did need it, but bureaucracy said that he did not.

And we have quite a number of these statements by members of the present Government. They all clearly and emphatically indicate that those members do not believe in controls.

The Attorney General: Neither does your leader, where it is not necessary.

Mr. MARSHALL: So I think I am entitled to assume that the introduction of this measure is merely another effort to deceive the community because the members of the Government can say, "Well, we have introduced a measure for the control and fixation of prices and no Government can do more." I again remind the little magpie from Mukinbudin—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. MARSHALL: There is every provision in the regulations, plus the Act, for the fixation of prices from the time the article is produced until it ultimately reaches the consumer after passing through its various avenues. But, if the Government is not sincere, then price fixation is useless. If the Government in control of it refuses effectively to administer it, then it is of no value to the community. That is the point. If a Government is insincere—and I feel that this one is—it is no use having a measure of

this kind. I know full well what is happening. The St. George's-terrace guinea pigs are members of the Party concerned and they attend its meetings and give it their instructions. We have instances almost every day where this Government comes along and gives concessions and privileges to men who are in high official positions in the Liberal Party. That is really all this Government has done and therefore I am doubtful whether there is any sincerity about the matter. I have very grave doubts about it, but there can be no doubt that price fixation is the very soul of this community socially and industrially.

Unless the Government takes this position seriously and makes up its mind to give effective supervision and control over price fixation it will not be very long before individuals and industries alike will be frustrated. One of the speakers behind me has mentioned the goldmining industry. It cannot exist for much longer. It is a practical impossibility for it to do so, because it is not likely that the companies will continue to operate at a loss, which some of them are doing today. This Government has been generously assisting them by forcing up the cost of production, increasing railway freights and not giving correct supervision to mining requisites and the prices for them, and, in general, another colossal burden for these companies to carry is the increase in the cost of living and the basic wage rises.

Mr. May: Only half the cost of living has gone up.

Mr. MARSHALL: Yes, but that all figures in the cost of producing their commodity, as is well known to the Minister. It is becoming a serious problem indeed with the price of the product fixed and the cost of producing it constantly, and now speedily, rising. When I tell the Minister that it takes about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  ounces of gold to pay every individual on the mine the basic rate, taking no other cost into consideration, he will be amazed. The company pays  $1\frac{1}{4}$  ounces of gold for every individual on the mine drawing the basic rate, and extremely few are on that rate. I wonder what my friends opposite, who represent the spring onion-growers, would say if, for argument's sake, they could get 30s. a bushel on the open market and were compelled by law to let their product go for 10s. a bushel.

What a hue and cry there would be if the Government prohibited them from selling their products in the open market. But the goldmining industry has to tolerate that.

So, not only the goldmining industry but also many other industries are on the threshold of ceasing to operate. They cannot continue to operate because of the speedy increase in the cost of production. Quite naturally, the purchasing power of the recipients of wages is gradually decreasing, and they cannot afford to buy goods at present prices. This problem is of such importance that it requires a great deal more attention to achieve effective control, and seemingly this Government is not prepared to exercise it. I quite agree that there is a tendency for the general price level to rise slowly, which will no doubt continue, but there are certain factors within the price level which rapidly jump and cannot be justified. Some of these things have an important bearing upon the fixing of the basic rate. For instance, one cannot get material such as I am wearing now, but those lines of suiting material which go to make up a gentleman's suit of coloured tweed or of light material, I purchased before the war for £3 12s. 6d. per suit, or even up to £5 5s. per suit, but now a suit of the same material costs £15 15s. or £16 16s., a 250 per cent. increase. Can that be justified?

Hon. A. H. Panton: You would not get a suit similar to the one you are wearing for £15 15s. That is a real gentleman's suit.

Mr. MARSHALL: One could not buy a suit such as I am wearing for £25 now. It is no use the Minister trying to tell me that he can justify an increase of 250 per cent. on articles of that nature. That is a very important factor and applies to all sorts of wearing apparel. The member for North-East Fremantle mentioned the cost of infants' footwear. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that I had to pay £4 5s. for a pair of shoes only recently?

Mr. May: You are a capitalist!

Mr. MARSHALL: I am not; I am an unfortunate individual being exploited. I do not know whether the hon. member would care to see me walk down the street barefoot, but shoes, as everybody knows, are impossible of purchase by the basic wage-earner, because he has to pay the same price as we do. We know that shoes which were



bought for 30s. or 37s. 6d. before the war are now around the £4 or £4 10s. mark. I suggest that those prices cannot be justified.

Hon. A. H. Panton: The quality in them is not as good as it was before, either.

Mr. MARSHALL: No, that is the point I was about to mention. Take men's socks, for instance! I remember a time when I could buy a pair of socks which would last me for three or four months, but now a pair will last me only about a fortnight. Not only are we paying increased prices, but we are also receiving inferior quality. The price has gone up and the quality has gone down. So we are robbed both ways. I want the Minister to understand that the population of the outback centres is speedily being depleted. One cannot blame women, with their husbands, for making towards the city under the circumstances.

I was on the Goldfields a few months ago and I entered a greengrocer's shop, the proprietor of which I knew very well. He showed me a sample of the vegetables he was retailing and the prices being charged for them. One small carrot, just the bare carrot with the green cut off, was being retailed for 8½d.! Lettuce that were in a state which could not be considered very appetising were selling for 1s. 6d. and 1s. 9d. each. The position is so tragic that the people cannot buy them and will not buy them. I wrote to the Honorary Minister for Agriculture about this matter and he told me that the cause of these extortionate prices was that buyers for foreign markets were forcing up the price in the local market. Surely to goodness it is the responsibility of the Government to protect our own people rather than to feed Asiatics. Do they realise at all their responsibility to the people in the outback? I do not object to our surplus production being sent anywhere where there is a market for it, but I consider our own people should be fed first.

I walked into a fish-shop not so long ago to buy something which I consider extremely tasty. I used to buy the same article for 6d., 8d. or 9d. That article was a small crayfish, but for some reason the method of selling it has been altered because they now sell crayfish by the pound, and thus the crayfish I bought for 6d. a year or two ago now costs me 2s. 10d.

Mr. Bovell; Tomatoes are the same.

Mr. MARSHALL: A few weeks ago, while on my way to visit a patient in hospital, I entered a shop and asked for a pound of bananas. I wanted the best, and I received three bananas for 1s. 6d., that being the fixed price. There are commodities which are essential to everyday life and these are the exorbitant prices that have to be paid for them. The matter should be investigated. Such prices cannot be justified.

Nobody can convince me that the cost of producing the commodities I have mentioned has increased to such an extent as to warrant the pushing up of the retail price by 200 to 300 per cent. over the pre-war price. It is ridiculous that this should be permitted. It simply goes to show that the Government is not actively engaged in exercising complete control over prices under this legislation.

In my opinion, we have reached a crisis. Something must be done and done quickly; otherwise the repercussions will be so intense that members of Parliament will be filled with sincere regret. We cannot allow things to continue as they have been going. In saying that, I do not lose sight of the fact that some of these commodities were subsidised by the Commonwealth during the war period. It has been noticeable that the person who devised the scheme for holding prices at a given level has never been mentioned. We have to thank Major Douglas for that. He introduced other theories that members of the Government would be well advised to study. I would probably not have risen to speak but for the remarks of the member for Mt. Marshall and his vigorous attack, which was about as logical as are most of his utterances.

HON. J. B. SLEEMAN (Fremantle) [10.43]: The hour is late and I consider that other members have said enough to satisfy the House what a complete failure price-fixing has been in this State. My object in speaking is to ask a couple of questions which I should like the Minister to answer when he replies.

Last year, when he introduced the original legislation, he told us he was going to arrange for the Advisory Committee to be a body of technical experts. I endeavoured to get a member of the Housewives' Association appointed to the committee. Had the House agreed with me, I believe that a better job would have been done than has been done

by the technical experts promised by the Minister. If there are any committees on which a woman is entitled to sit, one is a committee dealing with prices and the other a committee dealing with milk. When I moved in that direction last year, not one member on the Government side of the House voted for the proposal, and so the housewives were left without representation. I should like the Minister to tell us what has become of the expert technicians. Why are they not doing a better job?

During the black-out anyone who needed candles—and many people had to use them—was required to pay 7d. each for them.

Hon. A. H. Panton: 7½d.

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: At the time I am speaking of, the price was 7d. each. Yet, in Tasmania, candles could be purchased for 2d. each. Why, then, should they cost 7d. here? Another instance of exorbitant prices is the charge for hurricane lamps. I have a newspaper cutting dealing with another grievance about prices. It states—

While people are heavily gas-rationed, a most inferior local methylated spirits has been inflicted on housewives for 1s. 8d. a bottle. My time for boiling one small kettle was one hour; the time for cleaning the kettle afterwards was much the same.

If price-fixing has been so successful as the Minister would have us believe, why should inferior methylated spirits be costing 1s. 8d. a bottle and candles which cost 2d. in Tasmania be charged for at 7d. here? Why also the exorbitant level to which the price of hurricane lamps has risen? I leave it at that and shall await the Minister's reply with interest.

Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I move—

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion put and negatived.

MR. MAY (Collie) [10.46]: It seems to me that, in the part played by the member for Mt. Marshall in this debate, he ran true to form, although his remarks were very brief. The only solution he could offer for the control of prices was the fixation of wages. I should like to remind him and other members on the Government side of the House that it was not at the request of the Commonwealth Government that the control of prices was taken over by the States. I recall clearly how the Liberal Party strove

to obtain the power from the Commonwealth and it is well to remember the extent to which that Party went to obtain control.

Members may have heard some of the statements that were broadcast over the air, not always in the evening when the man of the house was at home, but during the day when the woman was at home alone. One day I listened in and the statement was made, "You do not know where your husband is likely to be sent if the referendum is carried." That was the sort of sob-stuff put over the air to enable the States to obtain control of prices. The broadcasting of such propaganda must have cost thousands of pounds—it might have approached the million mark—and there is no doubt that the party concerned was exceedingly liberal in spending somebody else's money in that direction.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: They like doing that.

MR. MAY: One might well ask, "Where does the money come from?" Now I ask members to consider who are the real producers of a country. The workers are the only ones who are real producers, and they must have produced the wealth that was eventually filched from them by the Party that wanted to gain control of prices—wealth that was spent by the Party to the detriment of the working class. I do not think it is anything to be proud of. There is no need for me to comment on what has happened since the State assumed control of price-fixing; as previous members have spoken at length on that subject. In my opinion, it is the working man who feels the position most keenly. He is the man who is suffering today as a result of this legislation. What happens as between the worker and the capitalist? The worker, in order to get a fair wage, must approach the Arbitration Court and produce evidence to maintain his standard of living. Has the capitalist to go to the Arbitration Court in order to have his profit fixed? Of course not.

MR. YATES: The Taxation Department looks after that.

MR. MAY: And the capitalist knows how to dodge taxation, too.

MR. YATES: It is the business houses, not individuals.

MR. MAY: I hope the time will soon come when the staff of the Taxation Department will deal with such people. Some interesting figures will be disclosed. Recently we

have been told that the Taxation Department has caught up with its arrears of work and is now in a position to catch some of these people. I hope it does; we shall be surprised to find who they are.

Mr. Yates: You sound as though you were in the clear!

Mr. MAY: As I said, the worker goes to the Arbitration Court in order to obtain his just wages. The merchant does not have to approach the Court. As far as his profits are concerned the sky is the limit if he can possibly reach it. I am quite sure the working class would welcome fixation of wages provided a similar course were set in regard to the cost of commodities. Until such time as the Government really controls prices, the only alternative the worker has is to make application for increased pay in order to meet rising costs, and thus maintain a decent standard of living for himself and his family. I would like the Minister to take some determined action in this matter. Personally I do not think that up to date he has taken it seriously enough. If he and the other members of the Government were in the unfortunate position of people on the lower rungs of the ladder and suffered as they do, I feel sure they would make every effort to sheet home offences committed by people who are contravening this legislation, who have no respect for human nature and who grasp at every penny they possibly can. We should all make some determined effort to improve the position and the Government should set the example. I would say to the Government, "Do your job as the Commonwealth would have done it had control of prices remained in its hands."

**THE ATTORNEY GENERAL** (Hon. A. V. R. Abbott—North Perth—in reply) [10.55]: I will do my best to answer the numerous questions raised by members who have spoken to this Bill. The hour is rather late and, if I do not mention the particular items in which they are interested, I shall be glad if they will call on me and I will do what I can to give them the necessary information. I am pleased at the support members have given the Bill, but I am not so pleased at the criticism they have levelled against the administration. I realise that that criticism is not of a very hardworking branch of the Civil Service, but of the Minister, and I take it as such because the

State, has a most efficient prices branch, with a hardworking, loyal and devoted servant of the State at its head.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: It is criticism of Government policy.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Yes, there is no doubt that every serious-minded man must give some thought to the issue raised by the member for Northam. Economic stabilisation is a world problem today and I will take the liberty of saying that the Premier also is worried about it. So is the Prime Minister. It is the duty of every person to give thought to this problem.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: The Premier wired from Wyndham to say how pleased he was that price control had been returned to the State.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The member for Pilbara raised the question of the regulations under the Act. All I can say is that no member has ever asked me for a copy of the regulations from the day the original Bill was discussed until now.

Mr. Hegney: We should not have to ask you. You should have laid them on the Table of the House.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: They have been in the hands of the Government Printer for some little time but, as members know, even Parliament cannot get all its printing done. As soon as the regulations are printed they will be laid on the Table of the House. I do not want to be critical, but when a member observes a palpable breach of the law and condones it without reporting it to me, I think he should have given the matter of reporting it more consideration. After all, it is exceedingly difficult to administer this legislation and I would willingly accept any assistance members could give me.

Hon. F. J. S. Wise: Have you noticed anything about the Attorney General in the Land Sales Control Act?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I do not know why the Crown Law Department was not asked to give some accurate information, but it was not. The information is available. The member for Kalgoorlie raised a question about railway freights. The hon. member knows that the Prime Minister has clearly indicated that unless the Government does something to reduce the railway deficit,

our position with respect to the Grants Commission will be prejudiced. That was clearly stated and published in the Press.

Mr. Styants: Do you take directions from the Prime Minister?

The Premier: Sometimes we have to.

Mr. Styants: When it suits you.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: There has been some comment about how easy it is to get price rises. I have never heard that from anyone in industry or commerce.

Mr. Graham: Naturally!

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I have never heard it was easy; and in my experience a great deal of evidence has to be submitted before any increased margins will be given. Increases are made on an Australia-wide basis; and, since the States took over, the margins have been continually not increased but reduced.

Hon. A. H. Panton: They must have been pretty big margins at the start then!

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: Members representing the Goldfields are right when they suggest that their districts are suffering from the controlled price of gold; but that is something beyond the powers of this Government, which cannot grant an increase in that direction. It was tentatively suggested by the Premier to the Commonwealth that something should be done to permit of free trade in gold; but it was pointed out, and rightly so, that under international agreements entered into by Australia, that was not possible. I think that taking it over all, the States have established a very effective control of prices. That may not be the opinion of all members. I am not saying that there is not one item here and one item there which has not been unjustifiably increased in price, but over all the control has been very effective.

Mr. Hegney: Why has the basic wage gone up 17s. 4d. since you took over?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: The 40-hour week would have some effect, would it not? And increased margins might have an effect, and also the withdrawal of subsidies. I want to quote the same authority that the member for Pilbara quoted. I refer to Mr. F. J. Finnan who, as everyone knows, is Minister for Labour in the New South Wales Government. That Government is of the same political party as our Opposition. I would therefore expect Mr. Finnan to be

a little critical, after all that members of the Opposition have said tonight. This is what he said at the time of the prices conference in Perth. I quote from an item in "The West Australian" of Saturday, the 14th May, under the heading of "Unanimity of States on Price Control" as follows:—

"It is a job that earns no handclaps, but I consider that the States have done exceptionally well since they took over control of prices from the Commonwealth last September," said the New South Wales Minister for Prices (Mr. F. J. Finnan) in Perth last night.

Mr. Finnan said that it had been predicted that there would be unanimity of policy amongst the States, but that prediction had been proved wrong. Prices were still well under control. There had been some major increases, no doubt, but these were almost entirely due to the Commonwealth withdrawal of subsidies.

That is what Mr. Finnan said, and I agree.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

*As to Committee Stage.*

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I move—

That Mr. Speaker do now leave the Chair for the purpose of considering the Bill in Committee.

Question put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes .. .. .	26
Noes .. .. .	16
	—
Majority for .. ..	10
	—

**AYES.**

Mr. Abbott	Mr. Murray
Mr. Ackland	Mr. Nalder
Mr. Bovell	Mr. Nimmo
Mr. Cornell	Mr. Perkins
Mr. Doney	Mr. Read
Mr. Grayden	Mr. Seward
Mr. Hall	Mr. Shearn
Mr. Hill	Mr. Styants
Mr. Leslie	Mr. Tonkin
Mr. Mann	Mr. Watts
Mr. Marshall	Mr. Wild
Mr. McDonald	Mr. Yates
Mr. McLarty	Mr. Brand

(Teller.)

**NOES.**

Mr. Coverley	Mr. Needham
Mr. Fox	Mr. Nulsen
Mr. Graham	Mr. Oliver
Mr. Hegney	Mr. Panton
Mr. Hoar	Mr. Reynolds
Mr. Kelly	Mr. Sleeman
Mr. May	Mr. Triat
Mr. McCulloch	Mr. Rodoreda

(Teller.)

Question thus passed.

*In Committee.*

Mr. Perkins in the Chair; the Attorney General in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1 and 2—agreed to.

Clause 3—Amendment of Section 18:

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: I would like the Attorney General to answer a question I have already asked him. He ignored me. Who are the technicians that he promised us last year he would appoint on the Advisory Committee?

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I am sorry I neglected to answer the hon. member. The chairman is Mr. Court, a chartered accountant, and the members are Mr. Schnaars, a conciliation commissioner of the State Arbitration Court, and Mr. George Broomhall of Goode, Durrant & Murray Ltd.

Mr. HEGNEY: I move an amendment—

That at the end of the clause the word "one" be added.

From the debate this evening and the statements of the Attorney General it is quite evident that we will not return to normal times by the end of next year. It is apparent that some price-fixing legislation will be required for at least 12 months beyond 1950. The Minister for Housing realises that the supply of necessary materials will not catch up with the demand within the next 12 or 18 months. The Attorney General, who is in charge of price-fixing legislation, will also admit that it is necessary that this measure should have effect until at least the end of 1951. An extract from the leading article of "The West Australian" of the 20th August, 1948, is as follows:—

So long as the production of essential commodities is inadequate to satisfy the public demand, the maintenance of reasonable price control is an essential factor in combating inflation.

Again, on the 28th July the leading article of "The West Australian" states —

Parliament is being asked to extend price control to the end of next year and there is not much doubt that the Government's request will be granted. The continued upward movement of Australian costs and prices provides a case for the maintenance of selective control for a limited period; but, notwithstanding changing economic conditions abroad and at home, more plentiful supplies of some goods and consumer resistance to rising prices, it may be that safeguards will still be necessary after 1950. The factors that would make arbitrary supervision of industry and commerce unnecessary are unlikely to make their appearance simultaneously.

"The West Australian" represents Liberal policy, so it will be admitted that these controls will be necessary after the end of 1950. The Attorney General will be anxious to overthrow all controls as soon as he possibly can. We would safeguard the position if we inserted this harmless amendment making the Act effective until the end of December, 1951.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: This is not an advisable amendment. Price-fixing is a co-ordinated scheme between all the States and can only be carried on successfully while they all agree to it. In each of the States, with the exception of Queensland, the measure is an annual one. This class of legislation is always made from year to year. It is a good idea to have it reviewed annually as it allows members to express their opinions thoroughly, as they have done tonight. No good can come of the amendment, and it might cause a good deal of confusion.

Hon. J. B. SLEEMAN: I am not prepared to support the amendment. I do not think the measure is worth 2d. All it has done is to legalise profiteering in the last 12 months. I am not going to give it two years of life unless the administration is altered considerably. I will grudgingly agree to its continuing for another 12 months to see whether the system can be improved.

Amendment put and negatived.

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: What we have just done shows where we can get when we deal with the same subject in the same session. The motion upon which we have just taken a vote is precisely the same as a motion put earlier this session, namely, to continue the Bill until 1951.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! What is the member for North-East Fremantle discussing? Is he discussing this clause?

Hon. J. T. TONKIN: I am telling you, Mr. Chairman, that what has been done is completely out of order.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Clause put and passed.

Bill reported without amendment and the report adopted.

*House adjourned at 11.20 p.m.*