

Legislative Assembly.

Thursday, 5 July, 1956.

Absence of Mr. Speaker—Questions without Notice—Death of the Hon. George Weir, LL.B., former Minister of the Crown—Poisons (Amendment) Bill—Ambulance Transport Service (Amendment) Bill—Fire Brigades (Amendment) Bill—The Presbyterian Church (New South Wales) Property Trust (Amendment) Bill—Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Bill (second reading)—Adjournment (Government Transport: Fares and Finance).

ABSENCE OF MR. SPEAKER.

The Acting Clerk announced the unavoidable absence of Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER took the chair at 11 a.m.

The opening Prayer was read.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE.

GOVERNMENT TRANSPORT: FARES.

MR. ASKIN: I ask the Minister for Transport whether return fares for children who travel by omnibus between Wynyard and the northern metropolitan beaches have been increased from 6d. to as much as 4s.? Is it a fact that in reply to my protest against the hardship that this would impose the Minister wrote, "My Government makes no apology for the fares charged children on buses as they are reasonable by any standard"? If these are facts, will he confirm in the House that his Government makes no apology for increasing children's omnibus fares by as much as 700 per cent.?

MR. ENTICKNAP: As I have said before, until the recent increases, children's tram and omnibus fares in this State were lower than those in any other State in the Commonwealth, and even with the recent increases, they still compare favourably with them.

VALUER-GENERAL: VALUATIONS.

MR. MORTON: I ask the Minister for Local Government whether recent values determined by the Valuer-General on residential property within the metropolitan area are causing owners some concern? Is the Minister aware of the persistent

rumour that the Valuer-General is being requested to treat all property as saleable with vacant possession, instead of on the basis only of the owner's interest? Will the Minister inform the House of the formula adopted by the Valuer-General in assessing values from time to time?

MR. RENSHAW: The Leader of the Opposition well knows that I am not one to start hares or chase rumours. The Valuer-General complies with the provisions of the Act under which he makes valuations from time to time. If the Leader of the Opposition presents any facts as distinct from mere rumours, I shall be happy to examine them and to put them before the Valuer-General for his comment.

MR. MORTON: I am asking the Minister to give hon. members, not necessarily today, but at the first opportunity, the formula adopted by the Valuer-General.

MR. RENSHAW: The formula is laid down in the Valuation of Land Act, with which the Valuer-General must comply.

MR. MCCAW: What is the formula?

MR. RENSHAW: Following determinations of matters of principle by the Land and Valuation Court it is amended from time to time. The Valuer-General is bound by the Act. The hon. member knows full well that questions have been asked about valuations on resumption, and in recent years the general attitude has been that the Valuer-General's valuation does not represent full value.

MR. STEWART FRASER: Not now?

MR. RENSHAW: The hon. member knows the reason for the trend. The general inflation of costs and of values has made the Valuer-General's valuation inadequate.

Hon. members interjecting,

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! For the third time this week I remind hon. members that when a Minister is answering a question he must be heard in silence.

MR. RENSHAW: I think that I have answered the question.

Mr. MURDEN: If the answer given by the Minister for Local Government is correct, will he consider amending the Act to ensure that property owners receive fairer treatment and do not suffer hardship?

Mr. RENSHAW: I can only repeat what I said a moment ago. If any hon. member has a proposition to put before me that may mean amending the Act to give equity to property owners both in respect of rates and resumption I shall be happy to consider it. These matters of valuation on vacant possession and on resumption to implement the Cumberland County Council plan are raised consistently by some of my colleagues, and a committee has been established within the Parliamentary Labor party to find ways and means of solving the problem. Attempts to escape one set of circumstances under the Act sometimes create an intolerable situation for the persons whom it is sought to help. If any hon. member submits a proposition to give equity in valuation and solve these problems I shall be happy to have it investigated.

KIAMA HIGH SCHOOL.

Mr. FOWLES: I ask the Minister for Education whether many necessary improvements to Kiama High School have been approved by the Department of Education for some considerable time? Is it a fact that the building authority is the Department of Public Works? Is it further a fact that delays by the department in carrying out this work have caused grave disappointment and inconvenience to the headmaster, staff, pupils and the fine body of citizens who have done so much for the students of this school? Is it a fact, also, that following my continued complaints, the Minister, in my company, visited this school some months ago and after inspection promised to have the work completed? Is the Minister aware that the work has not yet been carried out? If these are facts will he say what he intends to do to ensure that the work is done forthwith?

Mr. HEFFRON: Much work at the new high school at Kiama remains to be done. As the hon. member suggested,

it comes under the control of the Department of Public Works. The hon. member some time ago did accompany me on a visit to the school, and the work submitted then was approved. A request was made that my department should proceed with it as quickly as possible. A contract has been let for the work and in May last the contractor was asked to proceed with it. For some reason he was unable, but I understand that he will do so right away. I imagine that he will be on the job next Monday.

PETROL TAX: ROAD FUNDS.

Mr. JORDAN: I ask the Minister for Local Government and Minister for Highways whether an additional tax on petrol is being levied? Is it a fact that some of this tax will be set aside for expenditure on roads? Can the Minister say when a further distribution of these funds among local governing authorities is likely to be made?

Mr. RENSHAW: It is a fact that some additional money from petrol tax will be made available for expenditure on roads, but all parties in this House will agree that all of the additional tax should be available for this purpose. A pressing need exists for huge capital expenditure on roads. I take it that the hon. member's question relates to the distribution of funds among shires, and that comes under the jurisdiction of my colleague, the Minister for Public Works.

GEURIE WATER SUPPLY.

Mr. ROBERTSON: I ask the Minister for Public Works whether it is a fact, as reported in the *Wellington Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* of last week that one of the bores sunk to ensure an adequate source of water for the Geurie water supply was found to be dry? If this is a fact, will the Minister have exhaustive inquiries made to determine whether the bore was tested when it was put down, and if so, what tests were made? Also will he take all appropriate action to ensure that an adequate and permanent source of water is available for the proposed service?

Mr. McGRATH: It is a fact that two bores have been sunk in the area mentioned by the hon. member. Trials of the original test bores at these sites had shown that one would hold 8,500 gallons an hour while the other was reported to have been heavily water bearing. While one of the recently sunk production bores is very satisfactory, I am informed that the department is not entirely satisfied with the other and will take further action to establish a fully satisfactory supply.

FERRY MASTERS: CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT.

Mr. BLACK: I ask the Minister for Transport, further to a question that I put to him on 5th June last, whether he is able to tell the House how negotiations are proceeding on the conditions of employment of ferry masters and when he expects them to end?

Mr. ENTICKNAP: I fear that I have met grave difficulties that prevent my doing anything about the conditions of employment of ferry masters and other ferry employees. The Act under which Sydney ferries were taken over provides that the employees shall remain employees of the operating company. A conference on the legal situation has been held between the Crown Solicitor, the Chairman of the Sydney Harbour Transport Board and representatives of the company. Under the Act the company is the employing authority and, unless amending legislation is passed, it will not be possible to make the ferry employees Crown servants.

Mr. BLACK: Will the Minister examine that aspect?

Mr. ENTICKNAP: I will. The company is prepared to negotiate with the guild to correct anomalies.

NORTHUMBERLAND-AVENUE: DECLARATION AS SECONDARY ROAD.

Mr. COADY: I ask the Minister for Local Government and Minister for Highways whether I have made representations for the proclamation of Northumberland-avenue, Stanmore, as a secondary road? Is

it a fact that Johnston-street, which runs off the opposite side of Parramatta-road, has already been so proclaimed? Is it a fact, also, that much heavy traffic flows from Johnston-street along Northumberland-avenue? If these are facts will the Minister say what the present position is?

Mr. RENSHAW: It is a fact that the hon. member for Leichhardt has made representations for the declaration as secondary roads of some heavily trafficked roads in this area. I am not able to tell him the position concerning the declaration of Northumberland-avenue, Stanmore, but I will have inquiries made and will let him know the result of them as soon as possible.

HUNTER RIVER: RECLAMATION OF ISLANDS.

Mr. PURDUE: I ask the Minister for Public Works whether it is a fact that the Newcastle Harbour (Improvements) Act of 1953 provides for the reclamation within a specified time of certain islands in the Hunter River? Is it a fact, also, that to date the project has shown little progress? Is it further a fact that some years ago when Walsh Island was reclaimed, a 30-inch or 36-inch cutter suction dredge was used with much success? If these are facts will the Minister intimate whether the programme envisaged by the Act will be adhered to, and whether urgent consideration will be given to the provision of a 30-inch or 36-inch cutter suction dredge to replace the inadequate 16-inch cutter suction dredge that is in use on the project at Newcastle?

Mr. McGRATH: It is a fact that the Newcastle Harbour (Improvements) Act of 1953 provided for reclamation work to be done in Newcastle Harbour and on the Hunter River. Much of the work done since the passing of that legislation has consisted of pumping on to the islands sand and mud taken from the harbour and river beds. The department is trying to complete the project as quickly as possible, and I assure the hon. member that work will proceed. To expedite the project will cost much more money. When Walsh Island was reclaimed some years ago, two large dredges did much to hasten the completion of that programme. Increased

costs have caused the department to alter its methods. My information is that the programme outlined in the 1953 legislation is being adhered to and that the 16-inch suction pump dredge meets the requirements of the department. My officers inform me that the programme is proceeding according to schedule. The people of the Newcastle area need have no fears about the completion of the work, or of its being behind schedule. The hon. member for Waratah may rest assured that everything is being done to implement the programme outlined in the legislation.

EDUCATION EXPENSES.

Mr. McMAHON: I ask the Premier and Colonial Treasurer whether it is a fact that the Premiers of the States and the Prime Minister of Australia have difficulty from time to time in making their public utilities pay? Is it a fact, also, that since the election to the Commonwealth Treasury benches of the present Liberal-Country party Government costs have almost doubled? Is it further a fact that the recent increases in tram, train and omnibus fares that this Government has been forced to impose, have caused wide public consternation? If these are facts, will the Premier ask the Commonwealth Treasurer to increase the allowance for education expenses that may be deducted for income tax purposes. Will the Premier ask the Commonwealth Treasurer to increase from £75 to £100 the allowable deduction for education expenses of each child? Will the Premier also make a press statement informing the public that amounts paid for school books, uniforms and fares to school are deductible items?

Mr. J. J. CAHILL: I do not propose to try to answer the first part of the hon. member's question about what has happened since the present Federal Government took office. The second part of his question is the more topical; he suggests that it might not be generally known that school fares are allowable deductions from income under the education expenses item. Fares to school are deductible, as also are the cost of school uniforms and books and other expenses, up to £75 for each child.

If the press were to publish this information, that should be sufficient. I will examine the suggestion that this allowance be increased from £75 to £100 and will consider whether it is appropriate to put the matter before the Acting Prime Minister.

SCHOOL OMNIBUS SERVICES.

Mr. HUGHES: I ask the Minister for Education whether it is a fact that in 1953 the Government promised free school omnibus services in country districts, and whether this has given place to a subsidy system based on economic mileage rates? Is it a fact, also, that costs have increased to such an extent that parents have to pay from 5s. to £2 a week to get their children to school? Is it a fact that the Minister yesterday announced likely cuts in the subsidy rates, which must cause hardship to parents and deprive many country children of schooling? If these are facts, will the Minister urgently consider increasing the vote for school omnibus services, and increasing rather than decreasing the subsidies?

Mr. HEFFRON: It is a fact that about 1953, after progressively over the years increasing the percentage of subsidy to school omnibus services, the Government provided 100 per cent. of the cost of these services. I have told hon. members this before, but in view of the question I must repeat it. As soon as parents knew that they had no further financial responsibility for these services they concurred in almost every demand by private bus owners for increased subsidies. Some operators, using second-hand cars as school buses, and carrying only half a dozen children, held the gun at the head of the Government and demanded subsidies of 2s. 6d. a mile for their services, although other operators, whose buses were carrying over forty children, were not receiving a rate as high as that. Other bus owners made common cause with the operators who demanded these excessive rates. I said then that, if the private bus owners adopted such an attitude, and the parents of school children decided to support them, the country school bus system would go out of operation. That would have

been a tragedy. The Government wanted to keep the buses operating. To that end it appointed an inter-departmental committee to ascertain a fair economic mileage rate for school buses. The committee decided on a rate, with a provision that bus owners should be adequately recompensed if costs increased. That appeared to be a satisfactory arrangement, but a number of bus owners, taking advantage of their particular circumstances, have demanded from the school committees an amount higher than the economic mileage rate. As a consequence, those bus owners are receiving from some families more than £1 a week, as well as the amount paid by the Government.

Something must be done by the parents themselves. If the present operators will not run their buses at the economic mileage rate that has been laid down, then the parents should find other operators who are willing to do so. The public purse is not bottomless. When hon. members opposite left the government benches the cost of the school bus service was about £20,000 a year, and only a few areas were being served by subsidised buses. To-day there are 750 bus routes, and the service is costing about £1,000,000 a year. There is no prospect at the moment of increasing the subsidy for these services in any part of the State. On the contrary, we must accept the necessity to reduce them.

Mr. DARBY: Is it a fact that the policy of centralisation adopted by this Government has resulted in the closing down of about one-third of the one-teacher schools in New South Wales? Has this resulted in an increase in the average number of children being taught by each teacher in country schools? Is it a consequential fact that the number of country school teachers has been reduced by 250? Have these facts been taken into consideration in deciding the amount of money to be made available for subsidising bus travel for country school children?

Mr. HEFFRON: It is a fact that quite a number of one-teacher schools have been closed down throughout the State. Invariably this has been done at the request of the parents of children attending those

schools. If suitable transport is available, these parents want their children conveyed to bigger schools with a larger number of pupils and staff, where the lot of the child is usually better than in small one-teacher schools having perhaps a dozen pupils. Everyone agrees on that. The Government has aimed at progressively eliminating many of these small schools, provided that the request comes from the parents and that the department is satisfied that to do so is in the best interests of the children. As a number of small schools have been closed it might be thought that the Government has been saved a good deal of expense. However, increased enrolment in the larger schools has resulted in the need for additional classrooms. Hon. members representing country electorates know that often little one-teacher schools are lifted on to jinkers, carried to bigger schools, set down, and used there. There is no foundation for the suggestion that the Government is thereby saved money. If I could tell such a story to the Treasurer, and get away with it, it might be of financial benefit to my department. However, the argument is not soundly based. On the contrary every week, every month and every year education costs are mounting. It would be difficult to convince the Treasurer that money is being saved by closing small schools when it is realised that the cost of education, which was about £6,500,000 a year when I became Minister, is now over £40,000,000. I am afraid that I cannot assure anyone that when small schools are closed here and there money will be saved with which the department may build schools or extend its activities in some other direction. Costs are continually mounting and it is most difficult to obtain enough funds.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY.

Mr. FOWLES: I ask the Minister for Local Government and Highways whether the Prince's Highway is the main highway serving the South Coast district? Is it a fact that this highway is the main artery connecting Sydney with the important City of Greater Wollongong and all towns farther south? Is the Minister aware that at Fairy Meadow, approximately 1½ miles north of Wollongong, this road is under water

when rain falls and traffic is brought to a standstill, causing much inconvenience and delay both to the public and to business houses? If these are facts, will the Minister take whatever action is necessary to overcome this serious position?

Mr. RENSHAW: I am aware that the Prince's Highway is the main artery leading to the South Coast, serving in particular the City of Greater Wollongong and the electorate of Illawarra. I am aware also that officers of the Department of Main Roads, in conjunction with representatives of the Council of the City of Greater Wollongong, have investigated the effect of wet weather at the place mentioned by the hon. member, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ or 2 miles north of Wollongong, where flooding holds up traffic. The Department of Main Roads and the local council are preparing plans to rectify the trouble, and it is expected that remedial work will be begun during this financial year.

STOCKTON BRIDGE.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I ask the Minister for Local Government and Highways whether engineers of the Department of Main Roads are investigating the possibility of constructing a bridge between Newcastle and Stockton? If this is so, will the Minister inform the House of the progress that has been made and also when it is expected that the investigation will be completed?

Mr. RENSHAW: At the moment, I am not aware of the stage reached in the investigation, but I will ascertain the position and let the hon. member know later.

FARE INCREASES: SCHOOL CHILDREN.

Mr. CLOUGH: I ask the Minister for Transport whether there has recently been a steep increase in children's fares? If so, will he consider authorising immediately the issue of special concession passes to school children whenever they are visiting places of interest or travelling for competitive sport under supervision?

Mr. ENTICKNAP: There is no doubt in anybody's mind that fares have been increased. I have previously intimated that

I am looking into the issuing of term tickets for school children. No proposal to issue concession passes on the lines suggested by the hon. member is under consideration.

ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES: REPAIRS.

Mr. CRAWFORD: I ask the Minister for Local Government whether qualified radio mechanics, who must have a sound knowledge of the wiring of electrical appliances, are not permitted to repair electrical appliances in New South Wales? Is it a fact that in other States qualified radio mechanics are granted a limited licence, which permits them to repair portable electrical appliances? If these are facts, will the Minister have the position investigated and, if possible, allow qualified radio mechanics to repair portable electrical appliances?

Mr. RENSHAW: The law provides for the licensing of electricians by a committee. It is necessary in the interests of safety to ensure that only men with proper qualifications instal and repair electrical equipment. Portable equipment can be as dangerous as any other if repaired by an unqualified person. I do not know the qualifications required of a radio mechanic, or whether the standard in Victoria is different from that in this State. There is electrical equipment in almost every home in New South Wales, and it is imperative that any necessary repairs should be made by the best qualified men. The attitude of my department is that everything possible should be done to ensure the utmost safety in the use of electrical appliances, and the committee to which I have referred has determined the qualifications required by electrical mechanics, who are licensed to repair them. The chairman of that committee is the representative of the University of Technology and the other members of it are electrical tradesmen and electrical contractors. The committee can cancel the licence of any person who has obtained one improperly or has employed men to work for him who have not been properly supervised by a certificated electrical mechanic. The hon. member will appreciate the public risk that would be involved if

this regulation were not enforced. I will make inquiries into the latter part of the hon. member's question to ascertain whether there is any analogy between a wireless mechanic licensed in Victoria and one who is licensed in this State.

Mr. HEARNshaw: I ask the Minister whether the Electricity Authority of New South Wales has had under consideration for many months amendment of the regulations governing the issue of licences to electricians? If this is so, will he tell hon. members when the result of the Authority's deliberations will come before the House for consideration?

Mr. RENSHAW: From time to time propositions regarding the issue of electricians' licences have been put before the department and the Electricity Authority but there is no immediate prospect of any alteration to the existing regulations other than those relating to safety measures, such as in the repair of electrical appliances. The hon. member probably has in mind representations made by electrical contractors that a qualified person should be able to work for them outside his normal hours of employment. To my knowledge no amendment of the regulations in this regard is proposed.

GOVERNMENT TRANSPORT: SEASON TICKETS.

Mr. GRIFFITH: I ask the Minister for Transport whether he undertook to inquire into a suggestion I made on 7th June last for the introduction of season tickets on trams and omnibuses? If so, can he say whether a decision has been reached, and what it is?

Mr. ENTICKNAP: After the hon. member asked me his question I referred it to the Commissioner for Government Transport who has not yet given me his report.

MILLTHORPE PARENTS AND CITIZENS' ASSOCIATION.

Mr. CUTLER: I ask the Minister for Education whether tradesmen members of the Millthorpe parents and citizens' association have done a good deal of work at Millthorpe school at no cost to the Department

of Education? Is it a fact that they want to build with materials provided by the department a garage for the use of the headmaster? Will the Minister reconsider his department's decision not to provide those materials and thus give encouragement to those who give unselfish service to education in this State?

Mr. HEFFRON: I am aware that the tradesmen members of the parents and citizens' association at Millthorpe have done good work at the school by voluntary labour, and I commend them for their efforts. This practice, which I have encouraged as far as possible, is widespread throughout the State, and many parents and citizens' organisations voluntarily erect seats and other equipment with material provided by the department. At short notice I am unable to reply to the latter part of the hon. member's question dealing with the construction of a garage for the local headmaster. I will look into the matter and let the hon. member have a reply later.

ILLAWARRA RAILWAY: ADDITIONAL TRACK.

Mr. CROSS: I ask the Minister for Transport whether the work of laying an additional track on the Illawarra line to Sydenham, begun several years ago, has been abandoned and will he say what amount of money has already been spent on this project? If the work has not been abandoned, when is it expected to be completed and what is the estimated total cost?

Mr. ENTICKNAP: I do not believe that the hon. member expects me to give him an answer off the cuff. I will look into his question.

UNIFORM TAXATION.

Mr. WILLIS: I ask the Premier and Colonial Treasurer whether he is anxious to terminate the system of uniform taxation? Is the Government of Victoria appealing to the High Court of Australia against the legality of that system? Is the Premier prevented from doing likewise by the Evatt-dominated State Labor executive of New South Wales, as was Premier McKell in

1942? If these are facts, will the Premier submit this question to a non-party vote of the House so that he may receive a direction whether the Government should appeal to the High Court?

MR. J. J. CAHILL: I suggest that the hon. member put his question on the *Questions and Answers* paper.

MR. WILLIS: The Premier will never answer it if I do so!

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member's interjection is definitely disorderly.

DEATH OF THE HON. GEORGE WEIR, LL.B., A FORMER MINISTER OF THE CROWN.

MR. J. J. CAHILL (Cook's River), Premier and Colonial Treasurer [11.47]: I move:

(1) That this House desires to place on record its sense of the loss this State has sustained by the death of the Hon. George Weir, LL.B., a Justice of the Industrial Commission, and former Minister of the Crown in the State of New South Wales.

(2) That Mr. Deputy-Speaker be requested to communicate to Mrs. Weir and the family of the deceased the above resolution together with an expression of the sympathy and sorrow of Members of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales in the loss they have sustained.

(3) That, as a tribute of respect, this House do now adjourn until half past 2 o'clock, p.m., this day.

I know that the unexpected death of Mr. Justice Weir has brought much sorrow to many members of this House. I have no doubt that we have all felt in his passing a sense of deep personal loss. George Weir was a man endowed with a breadth of vision and outstanding administrative ability. As a young barrister, he entered this House as member for Dulwich Hill in May, 1941. His great capacity became evident at the outset of his parliamentary career and during the following Parliament, which was sworn in in May, 1944, he was appointed to Cabinet with the portfolio of Assistant Minister.

On 9th May, 1946, he became Minister for Conservation and he held that important post until 3rd November, 1952, when, after

suffering a serious illness, he was appointed Minister without Portfolio. From 3rd November to 29th December, 1952, he was Acting Minister for Transport. The Hon. George Weir resigned from Parliament in March, 1953, following his appointment to the Industrial Commission. In April of the same year he was appointed Chairman of the Crown Employees' Appeal Board. He was a member of this House for twelve years and served in five Parliaments beginning with the 33rd Parliament in 1941.

Our late colleague was born at Flemington in April, 1903, so at the time of his untimely death he was only 53 years of age. An indication of his great mental capacity can be gauged from the fact that he graduated with honours in Law at Sydney University in 1926, when he was only 23 years of age. He was admitted to the Bar in the same year. During a very active and most useful life his interests were indeed wide and varied. He was Chief Clerk of the Probate Office of the Supreme Court from 1933 to 1939; President of the Public Service Association of New South Wales from 1936 to 1939; President of the Australian Public Service Federation from 1937 to 1939. He resigned from the Public Service in 1939 to go to the Bar.

Other offices he held included: Chairman of Directors, Association of Co-operative Building Societies Ltd. from 1943 to 1946; Government Member, Co-operative Building Advisory Committee, 1941 to 1946; Chairman, New South Wales Government Service Co-operative Building Societies Nos 1 and 2, from 1938 to 1946; Chairman of Directors, Dulwich Hill Building Society, 1946; Director, New South Wales Co-operative Building and Investment Societies Ltd., from 1944 to 1946; and President, Men of the Land Society, 1954. Among his many other activities, our late colleague was a lecturer at the Henry Lawson Labor College, and he was a writer of note, being the author of *Probate Law and Practice* and *Fifty Years of Labor in Politics*. *Probate Law and Practice*, which Mr. Weir wrote in collaboration with a gentleman named Hastings, is so soundly written and constructed that it has been a standard guide for the legal profession in probate law for many years. This

work was founded on Mr. Weir's experience as Chief Clerk in the Probate Office. He was also the author of a number of pamphlets.

As a member of the Industrial Commission of New South Wales Mr. Justice Weir acquitted himself with great dignity, employing in that high office all the rare talents with which he was so richly endowed. As a member of this House the Hon. George Weir comported himself at all times in a manner that made him a credit to the institution of Parliament. He was a hard-working and conscientious member and Minister and the interests of his constituents were always a matter of first concern to him. He was a loyal friend and colleague who had the respect and confidence of everyone with whom he made contact. Perhaps I could pay no more fitting tribute to his memory than to say that in every respect George Weir was a fine Australian.

Mr. MORTON (Mosman) [11.52]: My colleagues and I want to be associated with the motion moved by the Premier, who has told us of the Hon. George Weir's brilliant scholastic career and his outstanding contribution to the welfare of this community. Our late colleague was a man who always thought of others and had the welfare of the community much at heart. A life devoted to constant effort, as was that of the Hon. George Weir, always earns the highest admiration of hon. members. In outlook he was both a thoughtful and a moderate man. His well-reasoned contributions to debates in this Chamber will be remembered by those who were fortunate enough to hear them. His passing affects us all. He was not only a faithful servant of the community, but also essentially a gentleman and a very nice fellow.

Our community is founded upon the efforts of men like George Weir, men who both believe and work. It does not matter that all did not share his beliefs; or that some of those beliefs may in fact have been wrong. Where there is both sincerity and effort, the net result must obviously be good. No words of ours can be an anodyne for the grief of his widow and his two sons,

but surely they will take comfort from the knowledge that this House appreciates the sterling contribution made by George Weir both to this Chamber and to society. We need more like him; this State can ill afford to lose men of such high character. It was my pleasure to know him and I was grateful for the many courtesies that he extended to me. I can only regret that his efforts were cut short at such an early age. My colleagues and I extend to his widow and two sons our deepest sympathy.

Lt.-Colonel BRUXNER (Tenterfield) [11.55]: My colleagues of the New South Wales Parliamentary Country party and I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in this motion of sympathy to Mrs. Weir and her two sons. All of us were shocked to hear that the life of the Hon. George Weir had been so abruptly ended at the age of 53 years—while he was still in his prime. It is not uncommon for older members of this House to end their time in somewhat similar circumstances, but it saddens us to think that a younger man who has had so vivid a career should be taken from our midst. Had George Weir been spared he had much work to do. It should bring home to all of us, and to the public, that men who undertake heavy responsibilities and who, like our late colleague, give unstintingly in many spheres of service, pay a heavy physical and mental toll. Unfortunately he has paid too much and leaves his wife and sons at a time when he should still be with them. In the twelve years that he served in this Chamber I knew him well. He was always a stout and friendly opponent and a courteous Minister. He served his party well; it owes him much. He brought to it a well-trained mind. His contributions in this House were always worth listening to and the community has suffered a grave loss in his passing. My colleagues and I wish to convey to his widow and sons our deepest sympathy on this sad occasion.

Mr. ENTICKNAP (Murrumbidgee), Minister for Transport [11.59]: I could not allow the occasion to pass without expressing my deepest sympathy to Mrs. Weir and her two sons. The late George Weir

and I entered the House at the same time and were close personal friends. He guided me in the early stages of my parliamentary career and his advice was always invaluable. He served this State well as Minister for Conservation. I followed in his footsteps and know the value to the State of New South Wales of his work in that field. He put his whole heart and soul into the job and laid the foundations on which a great department has been built. The entire State of New South Wales owes a great debt to the late George Weir and I feel the keenest personal regret at his passing.

Mr. HUNTER (Croydon) [12.0]: It is a strange aspect of political life that so often goodwill prevails between men opposed politically and that mutual respect so often derives from rivalries. This was the relationship between the late Mr. Justice Weir and myself because we were opposing candidates at the Croydon by-election in 1940. We finished that campaign with a respect and regard for each other that deepened as the years went by. The late Mr. Weir was a doughty opponent and a most honourable one. His campaign organisation was led by Mr. Hamilton Knight and the late William Carlton and I remember vividly that when the results were known I received from the late Mr. Weir a letter congratulating me upon an outcome that had been favourable to me and commenting upon the excellent relations that had existed between the opposing groups and their supporters. At the declaration of the poll Mr. Weir said that though the result had been much as was expected it seemed that the way had been opened in Croydon for the party that he supported to win the local government election. That prophecy was fulfilled within nine months.

One of Mr. Weir's leading supporters told me after the campaign that a better seat would be found for him and that his future progress in politics and in the State of New South Wales would be marked and honourable. I had great pleasure subsequently in seeing Mr. Weir elected to this Chamber as member for Dulwich Hill. He fulfilled in an outstanding manner the

predictions of his supporters and the Premier this morning has reviewed his scintillating career. I regret keenly the passing of Mr. Weir. He had a full life, but it is tragic that the price for it should be his loss at so early an age. He had a trained and sympathetic mind and one feature of his work that should be emphasised is that however high were the positions to which he rose in government and on the Bench, he never lost close touch with the many organisations and societies with which he was connected in earlier years. I honour his memory and have always respected the fair way in which he campaigned. The goodwill and mutual respect that existed between us as a consequence of our opposing each other in an election campaign will always inspire me.

Mr. MALLAM (Dulwich Hill) [12.5]: I join with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Country party and other hon. members in this motion of sympathy to Mrs. Weir and her two sons. I felt, as did all other hon. members, a great shock at the death of Mr. Justice Weir. Only two days ago I spoke to him when he was attending a meeting of the Prince Henry Hospital board, of which he was a most able member. George Weir possessed a judicial mind that was of the utmost value to all bodies with which he was associated. He was an outstanding member of this community and served this Parliament and the nation with distinction.

The late George Weir was a sincere and capable Australian and it is a matter for the utmost regret that he should die so suddenly and at so early an age. As the Leader of the Country party said, his passing while still young is the toll of the great work that he did. I was a co-director with the late George Weir in one of the many organisations for which he did so much able work, and I know how often he burned the midnight oil to further the interests and solve the problems of such bodies. The nation has suffered a great loss but that felt by Mrs. Weir and her family is infinitely greater. The late George Weir's two sons have just reached the age when they are able to take their place in the

world unaided but it is sad that they should lose the counsel and guidance of so wise a father.

I have lost a dear and loyal friend. In my electorate people frequently asked me how he was or expressed their pleasure at having spoken to him. They represented all shades of political thought. George Weir was always approachable; he had time for everyone and his memory will be revered for many years. His life has been a guiding star for all of us to follow. When I was first elected to this Chamber I expressed the difficulty that I felt in following in the footsteps of so able a Parliamentary representative and I remain conscious of the example that he set me. Everyone who knew the late George Weir will retain the happiest memories of his sterling character as a friend and a servant of the people of Australia.

Mr. LAWRENCE (Drummoyne) [12.8]: I wish to be associated with this motion, not only on my own behalf, but also on behalf of some 5,000 members of the New South Wales police force. On many occasions I sat with the late Mr. Justice Weir on the Crown Employees' Appeal Board, he as chairman and I as the representative of the Police Department. My association with him led me to admire his unfailing courtesy, his great efficiency, and the justness of his decisions. My feeling for him is shared by all ranks of the New South Wales police force.

The late George Weir lived in my electorate and I say to those who are near and dear to him that we mourn the loss of a grand man. No truer words were ever said than those of the hon. member for Dulwich Hill that George Weir was one easy to approach and ever anxious to give of his best to his fellow man. Almost every Saturday morning he could be seen in the little shopping centre at Five Dock, the focal point of a group of men and women seeking the benefit of his knowledge and wisdom and asking his counsel. He was a great Australian.

Mr. MURDEN (Ashfield) [12.10]: I wish to be associated with this motion of sympathy to the family of the late George

Weir and to join in the tributes that have been paid to him to-day. Every fine thing that has been said of the late hon. gentleman confirms the feelings of those who were privileged to know him. My first close contact with our late friend was during my term as alderman of the municipality of Ashfield, and I was associated with him later when I was mayor. What has been said about him here to-day is an accurate reflection of his personality and capabilities. He represented only a small section of the Ashfield municipality. I found him a likeable and helpful gentleman. The community and the House mourn his death. It is a tragedy that George should pass from our midst and that his wife, who also is possessed of a most loveable personality, and his family should lose his guidance and fatherly influence when he was so young.

Mr. McCAW (Lane Cove) [12.12]: It is over thirty years since I, as a junior clerk in the legal profession, first learned of the kindly, courteous and helpful character of the gentleman whose death we now mourn. Then a clerk in the Probate Office, many opportunities came his way to help clerks, particularly junior clerks, of the legal offices of this city. He gained a high reputation for his readiness to help his fellows, and I was one of many who benefitted by his assistance. We know not the mysterious ways in which nature works, and we fail to understand why men possessed of the qualities of the late George Weir should at so early an age, in the prime of life and at the height of service to the community, be taken from us. He has left many monuments. The pages of *Hansard* carry the record of many of his well-phrased speeches in this House. Another monument to his memory is the record of his lectures delivered in Lawson College. Many students of his political party appreciate their value. Members of the community, irrespective of political creed, are the richer for our former colleague's documentary contributions to the study of political science. These, also, stand as a monument to his memory. His service to the great departments of State during his years of public life is another. Many other monuments are to be found in the

records of the court over which he presided in recent years. If he were still with us I believe that what he would most treasure would be the warm place he occupies in the hearts and memories of the men who have served with him here, and in other spheres, and in those of his countless friends in his constituency and other parts of the State. In this widespread regard for the man his widow and family will find some consolation in their tragic loss.

Mr. STEWART FRASER (Gordon) [12.14]: It was my privilege to be associated with the late Mr. Justice Weir when he was active in the co-operative building society movement. I have good reason to remember his able leadership at a time when it was not easy for any instrumentality to provide homes for the people. My colleague the hon. member for Lane Cove referred to monuments reared in many quarters to the memory of our late friend. The most noble monuments of all are the homes that he helped to provide for the people of New South Wales, and his memory will be revered in the hearts of the many who have found happiness and contentment in them.

Hon. members and officers of the House standing in their places,

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned at 12.16 p.m.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair at 3.30 p.m.

POISONS (AMENDMENT) BILL.

Bill read a third time.

AMBULANCE TRANSPORT SERVICE (AMENDMENT) BILL.

Mr. SHEAHAN (Burrinjuck), Minister for Health [2.31]: I move:

That leave be given to bring in a bill to provide for the reconstitution of the New South Wales Ambulance Transport Service Board; for this and certain other purposes to amend the Ambulance Transport Service Act, 1919, as amended by subsequent Acts; and for purposes connected therewith.

This bill will amend the Ambulance Transport Service Act, 1919-1951, in various respects, the most important of which is the reconstitution of the Ambulance Transport Service Board. As hon. members are

doubtless aware, the board, which is responsible for the supervision of the ambulance services throughout the State, consists of seventy-eight members, including one representative from each of sixty-eight ambulance districts. It will be generally agreed that this number is far too great and tends to make the board unwieldy. Under the bill the membership of the board will be reduced to twenty-one. Details of the composition of the proposed new board will be given on the motion for the second reading. Suffice it to say that adequate representation will be given to district ambulance committees on the new board. Representation of the Government, the appropriate employees' organisation, St. John Ambulance Brigade and St. John Ambulance Association will be maintained. In addition provision will be made for ambulance superintendents to be directly represented on the board.

The proposed new board will take office on a day to be appointed, and for the purpose of constituting the new authority the present board will be charged with the duty of zoning the ambulance districts in the northern, central and southern areas of the State, from which some members of the board will be drawn. It is confidently expected that this smaller board will make for greater efficiency in the conduct of the service throughout New South Wales. Provision is made for the board to hold office for three years. Machinery provisions relating to nomination and election of members, filling of vacancies, vacation of office, and so on, are also contained in the bill. The definition of "life member" has been amended to increase the qualification from £10 to £50. Employees of district committees will be ineligible for appointment to the board, except superintendents, who are to be given direct representation.

The board will be given definite power of direction over district committees as well as powers of inquiry into the administration of these committees. When the board after due inquiry has decided that a district committee or any of its members has been guilty of misconduct in the administration and management of the affairs of the district, or has failed to take any action affecting such administration or management in

accordance with any direction of the board, the Governor, on the recommendation of the board, may remove any or all of the members from office, and appoint a new committee or an administrator to conduct the affairs of the district. The bill is designed to improve the management and control of ambulance services in New South Wales. A more detailed explanation of its provisions will be given at a later stage, by which time hon. members will have had an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the bill.

Mr. ASKIN (Collaroy) [2.35]: My colleagues and I are very unhappy about the general state of the ambulance services in New South Wales. The remuneration of transport officers is inadequate, and it is unsatisfactory that those engaged in the vital work of succouring the sick and the dying should be continually scratching for finance to carry on their services efficiently. Instead of having an opportunity to concentrate on their work, to study, and to improve their efficiency in the vital work of saving life, they are seen on street corners attempting to raise money by raffles, chocolate wheels and other devices. Hon. members owe it to the community to do something about this unsatisfactory state of affairs.

The Minister said that the Ambulance Transport Service Board is to be reconstituted with a smaller number of members, to make it more manageable. From what the Minister said, it is likely that my colleagues and I will not object to this feature of the bill. However, much will depend on what we find when we examine the measure. Very often the Government introduces legislation that it claims to be innocuous and formal, which on examination is found to contain matters on which we can justifiably adopt a different viewpoint. If this measure tends in any way to make easier the lot of those who maintain the ambulance services or to provide the public with a better service than the shortage of finance and other defects now permit, it will receive sympathetic consideration from this side of the House. We await with interest the Minister's second-reading speech.

Lt.-Colonel BRUXNER (Tenterfield) [2.38]: This measure is of interest to all hon. members, particularly those from the country. The members of the Ambulance Transport Service Board have been most constant in their attendance at meetings, and several members of my party in this House served on the board for many years, including Mr. John Reid from Casino, the late Mr. Gordon Wingfield from Clarence, and Mr. Arthur Budd from Byron, who all served faithfully and well on the board. However, I agree with the Minister that the board is unwieldy. All is not well with its administration. Mr. R. J. Hawkes, who has been chairman of the board for many years, has rendered yeoman service. Probably no one knows more than he does about the ramifications of ambulance service administration. He has done wonderful work, but like many others he is getting along the road of life, and he would like to see someone else take over his burden. Hon. members from country electorates are particularly interested in the administration of ambulance services, because slow development of the country is, new districts have developed, and under the present set-up, they have only an ambulance substation, which is a sort of poor relation of an ambulance district.

The residents of some districts in my electorate are obliged to raise between £1,500 and £2,000 each year, from their comparatively small populations, in order to maintain their own ambulance stations. The subsidies given to ambulance services in the past have been far too small, and lack of sufficient finance has prevented them from expanding as they should. I hope that the Minister will make provision in this measure for a better system of providing finance for ambulance services. The hon. member for Collaroy mentioned the fact that ambulance officers, who should remain at the ambulance stations, ready to care for the sick and the injured, have to spend most of their time cadging money for the maintenance of the services. If they did not do so, the ambulance services would not be able to carry on, especially in outlying districts.

The Government should make special provision to enable ambulance services to be provided in the thinly populated areas of the State, where pioneering work is still being done. Some areas in my electorate are still being developed. In those areas the timber and the pastoral industries are being conducted side by side. In one portion of my electorate there are fifteen sawmills, and it is well known that workers in sawmills run the risk of losing fingers or other members at any time, and it is essential that an ambulance service should be available to render immediate succour to persons injured in that way. We have, with some success, endeavoured to establish hospitals in those areas, but it is necessary to transport injured persons to the hospitals if fatal consequences are to be avoided. Ambulance services are, therefore, a most important adjunct to the hospital system, especially in sparsely settled districts. The position of our ambulance services is unsatisfactory, mainly because we have not allowed new services to be established as new districts have been opened up. When residents have developed a district sufficiently, they should be allowed to establish their own ambulance service. The Government may, of course, be required to assist financially in the establishment of that service. That principle has long been accepted with regard to public services established in newly developed areas. If this bill is framed with those considerations in mind, it will receive the cordial approbation of my colleagues and myself.

Motion agreed to.

Bill presented and read a first time.

FIRE BRIGADES (AMENDMENT) BILL.

Mr. C. A. KELLY (Bathurst), Colonial Secretary, Minister for Immigration and Minister for Co-operative Societies [2.47]: I move:

That leave be given to bring in a bill to reconstitute the Board of Fire Commissioners of New South Wales; for this purpose to amend the Fire Brigades Act, 1909-1955; and for purposes connected therewith.

The measure has been introduced for the purpose of reconstituting the Board of Fire Commissioners of New South Wales as from a day to be appointed. The board

consists of a president, who is appointed by the Governor, and seven other members, who are elected in accordance with the provisions of the Act. The fire insurance companies elect three representatives, and the metropolitan councils, country councils, volunteer firemen and permanent firemen each elect one representative. It is proposed to reduce the number of members from eight to five—a president appointed by the Governor and one representative each of insurance companies, councils, volunteer firemen and permanent employees. The insurance companies' representation will thus be reduced from three to one and the separate representation of metropolitan and country councils will be eliminated.

Although it is proposed to reduce the number of members from eight to five, it will be noted that the Government and the four other interests now represented on the board will each retain their voice in the administration of the fire service. It is proposed also to impose an age limit of 65 years for membership of the board and to increase the term of office of elected members of the board from three years to five years—which is now the term of the president. These amendments will bring about uniformity in the tenure of office of all members of the board. It is felt that the reconstitution of the Board of Fire Commissioners along the lines proposed in the bill will result in greater compactness in the statutory body responsible for the administration of the fire service and that this greater compactness will simplify administration and generally operate to the good of the service.

Public safety and security depend upon the fire service, and it is important that it should be administered sympathetically and efficiently, in order to ensure loyal and prompt service to the community. Hon. members are aware that the fire service has been disrupted on several occasions during recent years, and that public safety has been repeatedly jeopardised. The object of this bill is to streamline the administration, in order to eliminate such occurrences, and to provide more efficient machinery for the administration of the fire services.

In short, the bill provides that the number of members of the board shall be reduced from eight to five, that the retiring age of members shall be 65, and that various interests shall be represented on the board in the way I have outlined to the House. I ask the House to agree to the introduction of the bill so that it will be available to hon. members to examine it closely during the week-end and thus ensure a full debate at the second-reading stage.

Mr. MORTON (Mosman) [2.50]: This measure merits the deep consideration of every hon. member. Its effect is to reduce from eight to five the membership of the Board of Fire Commissioners and also to remove the chairman from office. An important principle is involved and during the week-end the Opposition will carefully examine the bill. The Minister said that its purpose is to streamline the administration of the Board of Fire Commissioners. That may be so, but others are of opinion that it will not increase the board's efficiency. The Minister referred to unrest in the service. From my observation it appears that this legislation has been introduced at the request of a section within the service that has been exerting political pressure for many years. Now, apparently, the Government has decided to give effect to the wishes of the section to which I have referred. If this action is proper, it should have been taken years ago. I am not saying that it should have been. What I say is that representations were made to the Hon. J. M. Baddeley to do what the Minister proposes now. The Government has procrastinated for all those years, perhaps having some doubt whether these representations were sound.

Obviously the bill cannot be debated at this stage, as hon. members do not know what it contains. However, the Minister quietly and perhaps judiciously did not say that what he wants to do is to sack a man who over a period of years has done a good job. This man was appointed first by a Labor government and re-appointed by a

non-Labor government because it was generally recognised that he had served the community faithfully and well. He was then reappointed by a Labor government. I do not want to introduce politics into this debate but I might observe in passing that this gentleman was not on my side of politics. At one stage he was the Labor member for King. The prime purpose of the measure is to sack him. Hon. members should carefully inquire whether this action is justified. I assure the Minister that he may expect a first-class debate.

Lt.-Colonel BRUXNER (Tenterfield) [2.55]: I do not intend to make any promise at all—I shall start the debate right now. As I said when speaking on another measure, I do not like boards. However, a board consisting of eight members is not unwieldy. This fault characterises a number of boards and should be avoided so long as worthwhile representation is not thereby sacrificed. The reason for the appointment of a board, instead of one person, is to widen representation. This measure affects the whole State, not just the city or the country. Local authorities all over the State have been represented on the Board of Fire Commissioners. If the bill is passed these local authorities will have only one representative on the new board. The other day in reply to a question the Minister said, "What more do they want? The Government will have only one representative, as will the insurance companies." The Minister represents Bathurst, a great inland city, and the surrounding district. The people in those outlying parts like to feel that they are given part in the administration of an important board such as this. They like to feel that they can nominate a representative even though, considering the enormous area, he could probably only inadequately represent all interested people.

The other day I pointed out to the Minister for Local Government that from time to time one hears arguments that by concentrating power in the hands of a few or by centralising some authority increased efficiency can be obtained and money saved, but that this is done at the expense of

destroying the most precious things that a country of this size can have—local interests and the right of local residents to have a say. I said that if we could preserve one spark of local patriotism, courage and endeavour we should do so, even if it costs us a little in hard cash, or efficiency. We should fan into a flame the incentive of local people to continue with their job of pioneering and developing the outback. That is the principle that has built up the British Commonwealth of Nations. We should give to our pioneers a share in the administration of their affairs. The Minister, in depriving them of their representative, is striking a blow at people who have always played their part. That provision will receive a hostile reception from my colleagues and myself. That is the only promise that I make. It is not very much to ask that the great local government authorities scattered throughout this State should be adequately represented on a board of this sort. I hope that the Minister will consider what I have said and the representations that have been made by councils. I do not suggest that the Government is using the machinery of this House to get rid of somebody whom it cannot remove in some other way. I hope that that is not so.

I have always been opposed to an age limit. I know many people of 65 years of age and over who could "lose" many of the younger people who are supposed to take their places. If an age limit were introduced into this House many of us would be put out of it, and we would be missed. There is no reason why the Government should use a sledge-hammer in this way. The Leader of the Opposition has pointed out that the gentleman concerned is an erstwhile Labor supporter. That is not to his discredit. Probably he has overcome that disability, which is much to his credit. He has been a friend of mine and has done a good job. I hate to think that hon. members would be asked to vote for a measure the purpose of which would be to remove from office somebody who has, according to his capacity and ability, done a good job. The part of the bill that affects the Country party is that which deals with

the representation of country councils. My colleagues and I want a representative of the country councils on the board.

Mr. DEANE (Hawkesbury) [3.2]: I may be a little offside with my colleagues on this matter, but at the second-reading stage I shall have something to say about the proposed removal from office of Mr. T. J. Smith, the president, about the proposed reduction in the number of members of the board to five, and about the service generally. At this stage all I wish to say is that the Government is acting wrongly. It should not reduce the membership of the board from eight to five; it should abolish it altogether. The fire brigade service, which is similar to the police force in that it protects life and property, should be run by one man, just as is the police force. Political appointments are not made to the post of Commissioner of Police, and should not be made to the post of President of the Board of Fire Commissioners. If the present occupant of the office is removed, no doubt another political appointee will replace him.

Recently statements appeared in the press concerning the resignation of the chief officer of the service, Mr. Milledge. It is now proposed that he should be appointed president of the board and become head of the service. At present there is dual control—control of the service by the chief officer and executive officers and control by the Board of Fire Commissioners. It does not make for discipline and a happy and efficient service when a senior officer gives an order and has it countermanded by a member of the board. This measure will not streamline the administration. I agree with the Leader of the Country party that if the number of board members is to be reduced it would be better to abolish the board. Why should the country representation be taken away? Recently the hon. member for Wollondilly asked the Minister a question without notice regarding the country fire brigade services.

Mr. C. A. KELLY: It was about the bush-fire brigades.

Mr. DEANE: The Colonial Secretary said that it was about bushfire brigades, but it was not. It was about the country fire brigade services, which have a big job to do. The councils, which want an effective fire service in their districts, should be represented on the board, if it is to be continued. It is bad for the Government to say to the country man, who is the life-blood of the nation: "We are not interested in you. The country services will be controlled by headquarters in Sydney." There is to be only one representative of all the local governing bodies, so that the country will have no representation whatever. I hope that the Minister and the Government will give the House an opportunity fully to debate this measure, which sets a pattern for the future. I hope, also, that the Minister will consider the suggestions that have been made to him with a view to making the fire brigade service efficient. I ask the Minister to reconsider the set-up of the board before the second-reading stage of the bill is reached. It is not too late to change the representation on the board and I ask the Minister, if he intends to reduce the number of members of the board, to go the full distance and abolish it.

Mr. ASKIN (Collaroy) [3.8]: The proposal for the reduction of representation on the board is suspect without a much fuller explanation than the Minister has yet given, although no doubt hon. members can look forward to it in his second-reading speech. At this stage Opposition members believe that it would be wrong virtually to eliminate country representation on the board. One of the Minister's predecessors, the Hon. J. M. Baddeley, gave an assurance to the Local Government Association that its representation on the board would not be altered without prior reference to that body. Hon. members have become accustomed to this Government's broken assurances, and here is another to be added to the list. The Opposition supports the Leader of the Country party in his protest against the elimination of direct country representation on the board, and I shall deal with another point on which I have some definite opinions. The principle of retirement at

65 years of age, which applies to the public service, is 40 years old. Thanks to the advance of medical science, man's expected span of life has increased considerably and a retiring age that was appropriate forty years ago does not meet present needs. Our community cannot afford the luxury of throwing on to the pension scrapheap fit and able men who want to give service and have the knowledge, training and experience to do so.

Mr. HEARNshaw: The present Commissioner, for example.

Mr. ASKIN: Yes. Who could possibly deny that the Leader of the Country party has given first-class service to the House and to this State? He is well past 65 years of age; so is the leader of the Government. The best example of all is Sir Winston Churchill, who would not have led our cause in the recent war if England had insisted on a retiring age of 65 years. Many examples of the Government's extending this age limit can be given. Mr. Hartigan and Mr. McLarty had their terms of office extended; so did Mr. Baddeley, the Deputy Premier. When he was appointed to the State Mines Control Authority he was almost 70 years of age.

Mr. STEPHENS: There is still the Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Bill.

Mr. ASKIN: That is so. Many men have continued to give splendid service after reaching the prescribed retiring age. I was about to mention Sir Edward Hallstrom of the Taronga Zoological Park Trust. I cannot think of a better example of a man's earning the right to an extension of his term of office. The name of Sir Edward is almost synonymous with that of the Taronga Zoological Park Trust. The Government extended the term of office of those gentlemen and I could cite many other examples. However, as soon as some other persons reach the age of 65 years the Government wants to retire them; it is even willing to introduce special legislation to get rid of them. The Commissioner for Railways who is 65 to-day, and the President of the Board of Fire Commissioners Mr. T. J. Smith, will not have their terms of office extended. The Government has gone

to great pains to get rid of them as soon as they reach 65 years of age. Both have had the temerity to challenge the constant demands of union leaders. Mr. Winsor two or three years ago took it upon himself to say that he would go to the Industrial Commission to have penalty rates reviewed in the hope that the transport service finances could be improved. If that had been done perhaps the recent rapacious fare increases would not have been imposed.

Mr. CHAPMAN: Why did the Commissioner not continue?

Mr. ASKIN: He was overruled. Mr. Smith, who is dealt with under this legislation, has also defended what he thinks is right and proper in the interests of the community and has not hesitated to tell union leaders, who do not always represent the rank and file, where they get off. When men like Mr. Winsor and Mr. Smith reach 65 years of age, out they go. Other gentlemen who have not offended the Government keep on going. This is a most unsatisfactory method of governing this State. The Government cannot make fish of one and fowl of the other. In the past fifteen years the Labor Government has appointed many of its supporters to key positions. The age limit for senior public servants should be extended. Only a few days ago the Minister for Health in the Western Australian Parliament, the Hon. Emil Nulsen, said that because State governments had lost the services of able senior officers who were still capable of giving many years of service to the State, but who had been compelled to retire at 65, it would not be long before Western Australia would have to consider increasing the retiring age to 70 years. The Federal Government has asked for the extension of the age limit of arbitration court judges to 68 years. It is most unsatisfactory to insist that the age limit of 65 years shall apply if it does not suit the Government to continue a particular officer's employment and to allow it to be extended in other instances. On behalf of the Opposition I promise a lively debate at the second-reading stage.

Mr. STOREY (Hornsby) [3.18]: I join those hon. members who oppose the age limit contained in this bill. I have had

long experience of officers of all departments and recently had a conference at Hornsby with the Board of Fire Commissioners. I did not get all that I wanted from them but the chairman of that conference, Mr. T. J. Smith, was the brightest brain at the table. I can see no sense in removing from his position a man who is physically and mentally capable of dealing with every phase of his administration. I have been battling for years to have the Sydney fire district extended, first from Mt. Colah to Mt. Ku-ring-gai, and second to all parts of the County of Cumberland where there is a water supply. One of the major bones of contention is that some of the lands in the area are vested in the Crown and are therefore not ratable. This has been given as the reason why my suggestion should be refused and the people in those areas should be left defenceless against fire.

Much of the opposition that I have encountered has come, unfairly and foolishly, from persons who do not represent local government or the executive control of the fire brigades. It is most important that the people of the County of Cumberland should have adequate protection against fire and the question whether Crown lands should be rated does not enter into the argument. I stand with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition on this matter. I stood with others who adopted the same view in 1945 when legislation was introduced to fix a limit on the ages of trustees of parks and reserves. I said then that it was a mistake to remove men from office simply because they had reached a specified age, and I adhere to that opinion. An example of the folly of that provision is Sir Edward Hallstrom. In this respect the Premier said a short time ago, in response to an interjection that I had made, that an extension of Sir Edward's term of office as President of the Taronga Zoological Park Trust should have consideration.

A few years ago the Government brought down a bill to extend beyond the normal retiring age the employment of Mr. McLarty, the officer in charge of the Government Dockyard at Newcastle. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has mentioned the outstanding example of the folly of

arbitrary retiring ages—Sir Winston Churchill. No one will gainsay the brilliance of his brain but had he been the holder of some office in New South Wales instead of that of Prime Minister of Great Britain, he would have been compelled to retire many years ago. The High Court of Australia is the supreme judicial body for this Commonwealth. One might describe its members as the rulers of Australia because their decisions on law have at times set aside the actions of Parliament itself. The members of that court remain on the bench until they are seventy years of age and the wisdom of this procedure has never been questioned.

I consider that the chief consideration is the suitability of a man for his position. I have known Tom Smith for about thirty years. I remember when he was active in the political life of this country and I was a young man. I say without fear of contradiction that he has a brain bright enough to ensure that he will hold his own in any forum of men. He is mentally and physically fit and the present charter of his office provides for his continuance as president of the board. Therefore it is a mistake to remove him by an Act of this Parliament. The legislation is not novel; in about 1938 a gentleman who was in charge of the Department of Railways was removed by an Act of Parliament. Such a procedure is wholly undesirable. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition hit the nail on the head when he emphasised the waste that is incurred when men retire, as in the public service, between the ages of 60 and 65 years. Usually they are in the heyday of their mental capacity and able to give most efficient service to the State. When a man is physically and mentally qualified to continue in his office it is wrong to remove him, especially if it is done for political expediency. I have known for many years the men who have made up the Board of Fire Commissioners from time to time and I am qualified to give testimony to the bright brain of the present president.

Mr. HEARNshaw (Eastwood) [3.27]: I await the second-reading speech of the Minister with a great deal of anxiety,

which arises from my conviction that the bill will have a political objective. If my fear proves well founded, I shall strenuously oppose it. If hon. members accept the principle that politics is to be the determining factor in administrative functions, this honourable House might as well close its doors. The present Minister for Health when he was Minister for Transport proclaimed with great pomposity that political control of the railways would answer all the problems of that service, but it has failed lamentably. There is already evidence of political interference by the Minister in the affairs of the fire brigades. This Government brought down legislation for a forty-hour week for fire brigade officers after such a working week had been denied by the established industrial tribunal, which made a long and thorough investigation of the industry. Mr. Lambert, who is the secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, has written me a letter telling me that he is not a Communist. I accept that statement; I cannot deny what he says. But the fact remains that the motives he has shown, the methods he has employed and the influence that he has exercised upon the Minister will be evidenced at the second-reading stage of this bill. This House should legislate without fear or favour. Democratic control lies in the supervisory function of Parliament and its responsibility for action at the proper level, but the sanctity of control and administration by Parliament is being invaded by this bill. Consequently, I propose to examine it most carefully and if it violates the great principles of democratic parliamentary government, I shall oppose it to the utmost of my power.

Mr. McCaw (Lane Cove) [3.30]: The speeches already made from the Opposition side of the Chamber on this motion suggest that objections to the measure will fall under three headings. The first is that it might be directed at an individual. Perhaps the Colonial Secretary will give an assurance, and support it with evidence, that this is not so. But it is a widely-held belief. If based on fact, it is a most sound reason

for the Opposition's voicing strong disapproval of the measure. Second, the establishment at this late stage of a 65-year age limit for members of the Board of Fire Commissioners is wrong in principle, and Opposition members are opposed to it. I will lend my whole-hearted support to their objection. Additional criticism to that of the Leader of the Opposition may be levelled at this measure. It is not long, since in this House I asked the Premier whether the Government would consider the introduction of amending legislation to enable those who serve on voluntary trusts to continue to serve the community after they have attained the age of 65. The Premier's reply clearly indicated that in his view ample justification existed for my suggestion. He referred to the office held by Sir Edward Hallstrom on the Taronga Zoological Park Trust. Many similar instances have been mentioned this afternoon by the hon. member for Collaroy.

It is not long since the Minister for Conservation—then Minister for Transport—urged that the 65-year age limit was bad in principle, and that citizens should be permitted to serve longer. In Western Australia legislation is either being prepared, or will soon be considered, to remedy this anomaly. I will strenuously oppose this measure if it is directed at an individual and if by means of it hon. members are helping the Government to sack a man who for many years has given excellent service. I pay a personal tribute to Mr. T. J. Smith. I do not know whether the bill is directed at him personally. It would be most reprehensible for this House to lend itself to legislation aimed at individuals, more especially at those who, for many years, have served the community faithfully, as Mr. Smith has done in the capacity of Fire Commissioner.

An even stronger reason exists for opposing the measure than all these—one that was mentioned by the Leader of the Country party. I refer to the inadequacy of representation on the Board of Fire Commissioners. The Colonial Secretary said, "We will make

the board more compact; we will streamline it by reducing its numbers from eight to five". We may pay too high a price for streamlining and compactness. The leader of the Country party, and I think one other hon. member, referred also to what has been instanced as a breach of an assurance by the Government on representation on the board of local governing bodies. I know nothing of this but if it is true the offence becomes greater if the Government gave the Local Government Association an assurance that it would confer with it before introducing legislation to decrease its representation. I call attention to another provision of the bill to which the Minister referred, which carries inadequacy of representation still further. Hon. members were told that the insurance companies, which now have three representatives on the board, are to have only one. Those companies contribute 75 per cent. of the cost of providing the protection given by the Board of Fire Commissioners. I believe the remaining 25 per cent. of the cost is borne equally by local government and the State Government. The Government, for its 12½ per cent. contribution, will have one representative on the new board, and local government is to have equal representation. Both therefore have a 20 per cent. representation.

However, the insurance companies, which contribute 75 per cent. of the necessary funds, also are to have only 20 per cent. representation. They now have three representatives on the board of eight members, constituting 37½ per cent. of the board. Their percentage representation is almost cut in half, but their contribution is not to be similarly reduced. Let me make it clear to hon. members that I hold no brief for insurance companies as such, but I do hold a brief for justice and fair play, and also for representation where there is taxation. The insurance companies' representation in the ratio of one to two is to be reduced to one to three and three-quarters. Hon. members have been told that the Local Government Association has not been consulted about the proposed reduction in its representation. They have been told also that the Government assured the association that it would be consulted before any

change was mooted. May I ask, without being unduly curious, whether the insurance companies' organisation was consulted about the proposed reduction in representation? A board of five members may be more compact, more streamlined, more manageable and more amenable than a board of eight members. However, members of the Opposition, in view of criticism that has been levelled by those who know more about this matter than I do, cannot but be somewhat suspicious of the proposal. As has already been said, we on this side of the House await with much misgiving the events of the next few moments when the Minister presents the bill.

Motion agreed to.

Bill presented and read a first time.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (NEW SOUTH WALES) PROPERTY TRUST (AMENDMENT) BILL.

Mr. R. B. NOTT (Liverpool Plains), Minister for Lands [3.38]: I move:

That leave be given to bring in a bill to make certain provisions relating to Crown grants of land for or for the use benefit or purposes of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of New South Wales; for this purpose to amend The Presbyterian Church (New South Wales) Property Trust Act, 1936; and for purposes connected therewith.

At one time it was the policy of the Crown to dedicate Crown land, including sites for church schools and residences, for church purposes. The Crown grants which issued for these areas contained provision for forfeiture in the event of the land not being used for the purpose for which it was dedicated. Notwithstanding this forfeiture provision, it has been the practice to permit church authorities to deal with dedicated lands as they have deemed fit and they have sold areas no longer required by them. Both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church Trust Property Acts contain provisions which validate transfers where dedicated lands have been sold by those churches. No such provision is contained in The Presbyterian Church (New South Wales) Property Trust Act of 1936, and the Presbyterian Church authorities have asked that the bill be introduced so that transfers of certain lands the church has contracted to sell may be completed.

Further details of the measure will be given at the second-reading stage and I am sure that all hon. members will wish to support it.

Mr. DEANE (Hawkesbury) [3.40]: My colleagues and I support the bill. The Minister has made several important references to the Presbyterian Church (New South Wales) Property Trust and the Act of 1936. The intention of the bill is to bring this trust into line with those of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England in respect of land sales. This is a wise provision. These three churches have large land holdings, and where they have not been able to use property for the purpose for which it was originally vested in them they should be able to dispose of it as they see fit. I was pleased to hear the Minister say that the forfeiture clause in the Act has never been used. In his final remarks the Minister said that the bill will validate sales of land by the Presbyterian Church, for which it has already contracted.

Mr. R. B. NOTT: It will enable purchasers to obtain title.

Mr. DEANE: That is wise. My colleagues and I will study the bill, but as far as I can see we shall not oppose it.

Mr. STEPHENS (Byron) [3.43]: My colleagues in the Country party and I agree that this is somewhat of a machinery measure to give to the officers of the Presbyterian Church (New South Wales) Property Trust the right to transfer land so that title will issue as with land transferred by the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. The Minister might have intimated whether similar amendments will be necessary in respect of properties of other churches.

Mr. R. B. NOTT: The provisions already apply to the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, and separate action will be necessary for other church trusts.

Mr. STEPHENS: The necessity for independent action for each church trust would be obviated if suitable provision were

made in this bill. The Minister's explanation of the measure was clear. Lands were vested in the churches for various purposes, and legislation provided that if they were used for any other they would be forfeit. However, this power has not been exercised. No one will argue against the provision to enable churches to complete land transfers so that title can issue. The measure will bring the Presbyterian Church (New South Wales) Property Trust into line with other churches. This is highly desirable and my colleagues and I support it.

Mr. JORDAN (Oxley) [3.45]: I must peruse the bill in order to appreciate its full import. I am interested in the disposal of land vested in the Presbyterian Church at Port Macquarie. That land has been held for a considerable time under a deed of grant from the Crown for the building of a church, a manse, and a school. The church did the prudent thing and constructed its buildings on only part of the land. It has subdivided the remainder, which it desires to sell. However, the Registrar-General has taken the view that the deed of grant created an express trust and that any other user of the land would be a breach of the trust. A question of title is, therefore, involved. In previous matters of this kind solicitors who handled the conveyance of church property have approached the Crown Solicitor for a proclamation under section 10 of the Conveyancing and Law of Property Act of 1898. On the production of the proclamation, the Registrar-General has seen fit to register the title. However, the Crown Solicitor has altered his opinion on the matter, and this proclamation is not now forthcoming. He has stated that an amendment of the Presbyterian Church (New South Wales) Property Trust Act is necessary so that proper title to the land may be established, and I assume that this is the purpose of the bill. True it is that the Parliament has made similar provisions for the right of transfer of properties formerly held by other churches, and it appears that the bill will validate the transfer of land by the Presbyterian Church, thus bringing it into line

with the Acts relating to the property of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.

Motion agreed to.

Bill presented and read a first time.

HUNTER VALLEY FLOOD MITIGATION BILL.

SECOND READING.

Debate resumed (from 4th July, *vide* page 765) on motion by Mr. Wetherell:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Upon which Mr. Chaffey had moved:

That the Question be amended by leaving out all the words after the word "That" with a view of inserting the words "the Bill be referred to a Select Committee for consideration and report.

(2) That such Committee consist of Mr. Wetherell, Mr. J. H. Robson, Mr. Robertson, Mr. L. J. Tully, Mr. Deane, Mr. Robinson and the Mover.

(3) That the Committee have leave to sit during the sittings or any adjournment of the House,"—instead thereof.

Mr. ROBINSON (Casino) [3.50]: The amendment moved by my colleague, the hon. member for Tamworth, that the bill be referred to a select committee, is highly commendable. The only proper way of dealing with this important matter is to appoint such a committee to investigate and report upon the bill. As its title implies, the bill is concerned with flood mitigation, and it is a somewhat short-term measure. Also, it is a machinery bill, not a works bill. I feel, however, that other matters connected with this proposal should be considered by the Government and by this Parliament. Hon. members should consider this measure as a machinery measure, and in relation to the broad concept of flood control and mitigation, and other matters connected therewith. The Hunter Valley is the part of Australia that has been most ravaged by flood since the development of this country began. Although I have no close first-hand knowledge of this valley, I have some knowledge of flood problems, having always lived in the Richmond River Valley, where, as is well known, floods occur frequently and inflict great hardship. My colleague, the hon. member for Upper Hunter, has *always*

maintained a deep interest in the problem of flood control. When the House debated this problem last year, following the flood disaster in the Hunter Valley, that hon. member made a fine contribution, and I recall that, in conclusion, he made this pertinent statement:

I would clutch at any straw which might bring relief.

He was speaking as one of the sincere members of the Opposition, who realised that flood mitigation and control, and associated problems, are not easy to deal with, but that we all have an obligation to assist as far as possible those citizens and property owners who are affected by floods and their aftermath. The hon. member for Maitland, who was elected to this House only a short time ago, told me recently of his own interest in the Hunter Valley. We all regret that he is not in the Chamber, but he is absent for a very good reason. He is now abroad, where he hopes to study flood problems. On his return he will be able to give the House the benefit of his experience.

The flood problem concerns human life and the interests of the community in the flooded areas. The interests of individuals, of course, are most important, but equally important is the broader question of the productivity of the river flats. The productive capacity of this State is largely governed by the fertility of the river valleys. Those who have studied flood problems in the United States of America and other countries have returned to Australia with the conviction that the future of New South Wales is largely dependent on our capacity to solve the flood problem. And it is in the river valleys we have an opportunity to produce enough food to meet the requirements of our growing nation. Those who are interested in flood mitigation should consider the basic problems involved, and relate them to the particular situation in the Hunter Valley, with which the bill before this House is primarily concerned.

The provisions of the bill may become standard provisions for coping with flood problems in other districts. If the House agrees to the amendment moved by the hon. member for Tamworth, it

Mr. Robinson.]

will have an opportunity effectively to consider the matter. In order to do so, however, the House should have access to the information the Government has received since the special committee was appointed to investigate and report upon flood problems. The Minister, in his second-reading speech, should have given more information on what the Government was told by that committee. I am grateful to him, however, for having given me the opportunity to peruse the report that the Government received on the Hunter River Valley. That report contains much useful information. I direct the attention of hon. members to the part of the report on finance, which reads:

The committee concurs in the recommendation of the special conference on financial policy in respect of drainage and rivers and foreshores improvement works, that the Government subsidy should be 66-2/3rd per cent. unless there are special reasons for it to be otherwise.

The report continues:

In the case of the Hunter River, because of special circumstances which apply, the subsidy by way of Government assistance should be 75 per cent.

That reference implies that some specific action has been taken by governmental inter-departmental committee on the question of a financial policy for flood mitigation. The Minister might have referred to this in his second-reading speech, but it is so significant that we should have had a more concise statement on its substance and background.

It is obvious that any government has to be mindful of its financial capacity to back such a policy. I do not suggest that the Government should underwrite a policy to a particular extent but if we are to give proper consideration to flood mitigation proposals definite evidence is needed of the Government's policy and the finance that is to be made available. I commend the Government on the information given in the report but I am disappointed that hon. members have not been given a more definite intimation of the Government's overall policy. The committee's report discloses that a great deal of work has been done in the Hunter River district. The Minister said that though much had been accomplished, only six specific areas had been

studied. These investigations necessarily will continue for a long time, and that is all the more reason why hon. members should be told about the Government's future policy.

I assume that the Department of Public Works and the Department of Conservation will continue the important work of engineering investigation and survey, but no specific administration has been solely entrusted with this most important work which undoubtedly will require tremendous engineering capacity, considerable expense and a big staff. The engineering capacity of the Department of Public Works that could be applied to flood mitigation would be determined by the extent of its other activities, as would the contribution made by the Department of Conservation. A slight respite from flooding and a reduction of the clamour for flood mitigation would slow down engineering and investigational work. In a few years, when another flood will certainly occur, we should find that what ought to have been done had not been done. For an effective approach to flood mitigation, in the first instance specific services must be set up with a single task to which to apply themselves solely and permanently. I am pleased that the Minister intimates that this measure proposes to some extent to meet that need. I trust that he will explain what is intended. From my knowledge of flood mitigation I have no doubt that each river system requires a specific plan. No river systems are identical. The problems of each of our coastal rivers are entirely different and the requirements for flood mitigation and control vary. For that reason separate consideration must be given to the flood problems in each of the river valleys. The policy adopted will determine the extent to which the problem can be dealt with effectively.

It is proper that the Hunter Valley should receive the consideration that it is getting under this bill. I have visited the area to examine the flood problem and to see for myself exactly what has been happening. I first went to Maitland in 1953, before the disastrous floods that have since occurred. I was appalled at the extent to which the floods have denuded the fertile

valley and prevented the community from living a normal life. I related what I saw there to the circumstances in my own area on the Richmond, and realised at once that something would have to be done to solve the problems on the Hunter before they get out of hand. I realised also that appropriate measures would have to be taken to prevent a similar tragedy on other rivers before the position is made considerably worse by further erosion. For that reason I am particularly interested in the Government's proposals in respect of the Hunter River. I am most concerned that the recommendations in the report are of a short-term nature. The measures that this bill will enable the authorities to take will scarcely do all that is needed to solve the problem. Serious erosion damage must be repaired, and much more work will need to be done before there can be actual flood mitigation. The full scheme could not be implemented in less than, say, twenty years, and until a full flood-mitigation programme is completed there will not be proper flood control in the river valley.

The measure must be related to three vital considerations—first, the ability of the existing administration under earlier measures and this amending legislation, to arrest erosion; second, its capacity to bring about a measure of flood mitigation; and, third, the ultimate and important requirement, the implementation of works in a long-range plan which will give some degree of flood control. I have examined the Water Act, 1912, which will be amended in certain respects by this bill; the Local Government Act, 1919; the Rivers and Foreshores Improvement Act, 1948; the Hunter Valley Conservation Trust Act, 1950, and the Newcastle Harbour (Improvements) Act of 1951. I have tried to ascertain the need for legislative authority for even a small programme of about £260,000 worth of work now proposed for the area. The committee appointed last year specifically reported that difficulties in the existing legislation must be removed before certain work can be undertaken. The House must ensure, even if this is a small beginning, that the administrative machinery is provided to enable

a qualified authority to deal with the whole problem of flood mitigation on the Hunter.

I want to escape the trap that so many others have fallen into in quoting what is done in the United States of America. The problems there are vast, but in regions in the United States of America where some measure of success has been achieved, a single authority has been created to handle the whole of the flood mitigation work. The Tennessee Valley Authority could be taken as the pilot example. That vast scheme does not differ much from the Snowy River scheme in the legislative delegation of power to a constructing authority. Until power is vested in a capable authority that will use it equitably and with discretion, the difficulties that apparently have been encountered by the Government under existing legislation will continue. Obviously difficulties will arise when a further programme of works must be carried out.

The bill does not overcome the lack of authority to cope with the essential requirements of flood mitigation. I do not want to deal with its specific provisions at this stage; in Committee all hon. members can examine these details. Other hon. members have announced their intention to move amendments and I look forward with interest to ample opportunity for debate at that stage. I want to emphasise the need to clarify, before the Committee stage is reached, some of the problems of overall policy, such as finance and the Government's intention to give the departments referred to in this legislation ample capacity to deal with the work that this measure is intended to cover. Doubtless some progress has been made and I do not suggest for a moment that the people in the river valleys are shirking their responsibilities.

The Minister mentioned at the introductory stage that in the Hunter Valley enthusiasm for the works that the Government has in mind is considerable. He mentioned also that on his visit to the area he observed the vast extent of the fund of local knowledge on what is required. I am certain that he is mindful also of the great divergence of opinions about what is needed. There are no two ways about it; flood mitigation is a subject that arouses

striking differences of opinion. A discussion, whether in this Chamber, in local government or elsewhere, will always reveal conflicting points of view on what should be done, but there can never be any reasonable dispute about a finding that is based on sound engineering facts which are the product of efficient investigation by trained persons. The only way for any government and for the authorities concerned in the work of flood mitigation to discharge their responsibilities is to rely at all times upon sound engineering advice. If the debate on this bill does no more than ensure that all action is based on sound technical principle, hon. members will have done a service for the Hunter River Valley and for citizens of this State who from time to time suffer through floods.

I hope that when the Minister replies to the debate he will deal with principles and thereby enable hon. members at the Committee stage to deal with the provisions of the bill in a manner that will ensure their effectiveness. The whole of the State of New South Wales watches this measure with considerable interest and especially great is the interest of the people in my electorate on the Richmond River, and of residents of the electorates of my colleagues along the coast on the Macleay River, the Tweed River, the Clarence River and the Hawkesbury River. This measure is of considerable significance to them all. Obviously the success of flood mitigation works in the Hunter Valley is important to the success of similar measures in every other portion of the State that is prone to flooding.

The Government's references to its policy for financing works have been sketchy and I remind the Minister that it has suggested for river valleys other than the Hunter an approach different from the one contained in this bill. For example, it has been suggested to the people on the Richmond River that they form a county council to deal with flood problems under the provisions of the Local Government Act. Such a proposal would restrict the activities of the Department of Public Works to the tidal regions of the Richmond

River. A county council has already been formed on the Macleay River. The effect is that the funds made available by the Government through the Department of Public Works for flood mitigation work can be expended only within the tidal limits of that river. The basis of the Government's contribution to works is £2 for every £1 spent by the local body. One difficulty at which this bill is aimed is division of control but on the Government's own recommendation that division already obtains on the Macleay River and could well obtain on the Richmond River.

Within the tidal limits of the Macleay the Department of Public Works has jurisdiction. On the upper reaches the Department of Conservation enters the picture. Different areas are under separate control and departmental policy, administration and other functions are determined separately. Difficulties are created almost to the point of confusion, and one finds no clear approach to the problem. I favour inter-departmental consideration of these problems. However, success can be achieved only by the creation of a single co-ordinating authority. It is wise to seek advice from various departments, and for those bodies to deal with technical problems. They should determine matters within their province, but success will not be achieved if the various projects are implemented separately.

It is possible that at this early stage no decision has been made about the control of the project by one authority; yet hon. members recall the passage of various measures in this House, such as the Newcastle Harbour (Improvements) Bill and the Hunter Valley Conservation Trust Act that provided for the constitution of the Hunter Valley authority. There is ample support for a suggestion that control should be vested in a single authority. It seems that this will not happen, for hon. members are asked to consider legislation designed to solve problems caused by the activities of various departments, and to settle differences created by existing legislation. There should be a single plan for one river, with a single authority to handle flood mitigation and flood control. I am sure the Minister realises the need for such a plan. Some

authority must have sufficient power to safeguard the rights of the individual and to see that those who contribute towards the project receive justice.

The Government should bear its share of the cost. The Minister, during his second-reading speech, said that about 450 acres of fertile land had eroded from the banks of the Hunter River and had been swept down the river in the form of silt. Many successfully operated farming properties close to the banks of the Hunter River suffered heavily through erosion. The property owners cannot have their soil restored but I am sure that they will be called on to contribute to the cost of this project. Their contributions in the form of rates paid to their local councils will be forwarded to the Hunter Valley Conservation Trust. Some property owners who have suffered heavy losses through flooding cannot be compensated under this legislation for their losses and will be required to contribute towards the project to save someone else from suffering similar losses. Hon. members should ensure that the individual property owner is not called upon to bear an unfair burden. It is true that property owners have a right of appeal against the Valuer-General's valuations and this legislation provides for compensation to be determined by an assessment board with a right of appeal to the Land and Valuation Court.

However, that does not solve the problem. A person who loses half his property loses half his income, and the valuation of his property is reduced by half, though he is still paying the full amount possible in the circumstances in which he is placed, not because of anything that he has done but because of the misfortunes of floods. Adequate opportunity must be given for the bill to be dealt with completely at the Committee stage; time is limited during the second-reading debate. I urge the Minister to give full consideration to the broad concept of flood mitigation and to the essential needs of the particular river valleys concerned, so that this measure will be the basis for a sound and positive approach to this vital problem.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT.

GOVERNMENT TRANSPORT: FARES AND FINANCE.

Motion (by Mr. Wetherell) proposed:

That this House do now adjourn.

Mr. PURDUE (Waratah) [4.28]: I wish to refer briefly to a matter upon which I asked a question in the House on 20th June, to which a reply has not yet been made. I requested that an all-party committee be set up to consider all means of effecting economies and increasing revenue in the railway, tramway and omnibus services, with the object of lessening the effect of the serious fare increases that have recently been imposed. I asked that question not with the object of embarrassing the Government or the departments concerned, but to make a constructive contribution to this difficult problem that confronts the Government. I have had thirty-eight years' experience as a railway officer, and I have knowledge also of tramway and omnibus administration, because the Newcastle City Council, of which I am a member, investigated fully the subject of omnibus finance when it considered taking over the transport services in that city. During that investigation I had the opportunity of acquiring a complete knowledge of the operation of similar services in other capital cities in Australia. Having that information at my disposal, I know that some constructive suggestions can be made that will be of value to the Government and the State.

I have received representations from the Cardiff Workshops Committee, the Newcastle Chamber of Commerce, the Newcastle Trades Hall Council, parents and citizens' associations, mothers' clubs, the Union of Australian Women, and many other organisations urging an easing of the heavy burden that has been placed on the shoulders of those least able to bear it. They refer particularly to the load on the basic wage earner with a large family of school children, and on apprentices who have to pay these heavy increases. In view of this, I ask the Premier to take action to cancel these heavy increases until the proposed committee has been set up and consideration has been given to these proposals, or, if he is unwilling to do that,

I ask him substantially to decrease the incidence of these drastic fare rises so that the burden may be eased from the shoulders of those who are so heavily hit. I know that some organisations have made demands on the Government. I do not believe in that, but many have made urgent appeals. In the interests of the community at large I appeal to the Premier, the Minister for Transport and to Cabinet as a whole to review the increases.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned at 4.31 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday, 10 July, 1956.

Absence of Mr. Speaker—Printed Question and Answer—Questions without Notice—Government Timber Contracts—Government Transport Undertakings: Fares—Motor Traffic and Transport (Amendment) Bill—Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Bill (second reading)—Adjournment (Moree-Mungindi Area: Fodder).

ABSENCE OF MR. SPEAKER.

The Acting Clerk announced the unavoidable absence of Mr. Speaker.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER took the chair at 2.30 p.m.

The opening Prayer was read.

PRINTED QUESTION AND ANSWER.

HOUSING OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS.

Mr. TONGE asked the PREMIER AND COLONIAL TREASURER,—(1) What is the amount of rent paid annually by the New South Wales Government for office accommodation for Government departments that cannot be housed in Government-owned buildings? (2) Which departments are so housed and what is their location in the city? (3) Will he consider the erection of a large modern building on Government-owned land to house all these departments, the saving in rent to pay for the new building?