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Title:

ALP broadcast regarding 'high proportion of disastrous fires in temporary emergency houses'.

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A.L.P. BROADCAST 11th July, 1960.

DON DUNSTAN - MEMBER FOR NORWOOD

Good Evening:

We have just been handed an object lesson in how the Government acts in this State, and it is a valuable opportunity to measure the public statements of our one-man Government against his actions.

Listeners will remember that for some time all sections of the Labor movement have been concerned at the high proportion of disastrous fires in temporary emergency houses. These houses, built of timber frame, asbestos and hardboard catch alight so quickly that they can and have proved death traps. It is true enough, according to the evidence that fires have started in the homes through carelessness on many occasions, but it is also the case that once a fire is started the whole place is ablaze in no time.

The Labor movement has taken several deputations to the Premier asking for a full-scale inquiry into these fires, or at least an inquiry into what measures could be adopted to minimise risk to life in case of fire and to see what measures could be taken to lessen fire risk. It has also proposed some reasonably cheap fire-escape measures.

The Premier has blithely refused to adopt any of these proposals. His first reaction was to do nothing about the fires, other than to have coronial inquiries into each one.

Then, not because of concern over the fires, but because he said, fires in emergency houses had been a cause for political attacks on him, he answered that he would seek £1,000,000 extra loan fund in order to demolish the emergency homes and accommodate their present occupants elsewhere.

In other words there was to be no interference with the Housing Trust's existing building programme - extra houses were to be built in order to provide for those now in

emergency housing.

As was to be expected, this announcement brought headlines in the newspapers and the Premier sought to gain public keudos from his masterly and constructive solution to the problem.

What happened? South Australia's public works program already called for an increased expenditure of substantial proportions. The Premier was already committed to asking for more than he got from Loan Council last year. As it turned out, the amount we got was £31,767,000, as compared with £30,385,000 the previous year. This was much less than was sought. The amount provided for Housing was £5,000,000 - the same as the previous year.

So we didn't get the extra million to demolish the temporary houses and build new ones. But that hasn't deterred the Premier. He has decided to press on and demolish the emergency homes nevertheless. He is not turning the occupants on the streets - he is putting them into houses built on the Housing Trust's existing rental programme and this means that people who have had applications for rental ~~xxxx~~ ^{homes} in to the Trust for years will now find that they have to wait longer than the previous average 5-7 years because the Premier has to give preference to the people moving out of the emergency homes.

So we have no greater provision for homes than we had before. There are over 2,000 emergency homes. In the last two years over 3,000 applications for emergency accommodation have been received and only a few of them catered for in such vacancies as occurred. There is a waiting list of many thousands for ordinary rental homes. The Trust only builds just over 3,000 houses a year under all schemes - including all types of purchase homes. The effect of the Premier's decree to demolish the temporary homes has been to reduce by 2,000 the units prospectively available for housing families and set back South Australia's rental housing program by over two years despite the fact the housing needs are increasing not decreasing.

The only reason he has given for this is that he has been politically attacked over fires in emergency houses. But he had a reasonable remedy there - and that was to accept the offer of the Labor movement to co-operate in an enquiry to find ways of minimising fire hazard and providing measures for the safety of life.

That the Premier has adamantly refused to do - but he sought to cover up what he intended to do by saying that he would get an extra £1,000,000 to provide alternative accommodation for the present emergency homes dwellers. He must have known full well that when he went to the Loan Council meeting, with Commonwealth Loans undersubscribed, he hadn't a snowball's chance in a very warm region of getting it - but that does not deter him from making announcements designed to hoodwink the public as to what was happening.

Why is it that our morning daily, which featured his announcement about the extra million make it clear after the Loan Council meeting that the announcement was all eye-wash, and that the Premier was merely doing what is, as a matter of pique because his stubborn intransigence and refusal to take reasonable measures had produced condemnation from Labor men here and in Canberra? I leave the answer there to you, dear listener. Imagine what the Advertiser would have said if a Labor man carried on this way.

But in the meantime, a great deal of misery is to be caused for years to come to South Australians who need emergency housing and are now told that no one is now to be allowed to go into an emergency house as they are to be demolished when they fall vacant and more discomfort and worry is to be caused to those who have waited their turn of years for a Housing Trust rental home and who will now be told they must wait a couple more.

Good Night.