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Title:

Handwritten radio script regarding 'high proportion of disastrous fires in temporary emergency houses'.

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AKP 3430
(Don Dunstan)
Monday 11th July 1969

Good evening

RECORDED

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

Listeners will remember that ~~for~~ for some time all sections of the Labor movement have been concerned at the high proportion of disastrous fires in temporary ~~houses~~ emergency houses. These houses, built of timber frame, asbestos, & hardboard, catch alight so quickly that ~~they~~ they can & have proved death traps. It is true enough, according to the evidence, that fires have started in the houses 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 ~~to~~ into what measures could be adopted to minimize risk to life in case of fire, and to see what measures could be taken to lessen fire risk. It has also proposed some reasonable steps 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 fire, but because, he said, fire in emergency houses had been a cause for political attacks on him, he announced that he would seek £1,000,000 extra loan fund in order to demolish the emergency houses and accommodate their present occupants elsewhere.

In other words there was to be no interference with the Housing Trusts existing building programme, extra houses were to be built in order to provide for those ~~at present~~ now in emergency housing.

As was to be expected, this announcement brought headlines in the newspapers, & the Premier sought to gain public kudos from his wasterly construction 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 £9,000,000 - the same as the previous year.

So we didn't get the extra million to ~~rebuild the~~ demolish the temporary houses & build new ones. But that hasn't deterred the Premier. He has decided to press on & demolish the

emergency houses 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, & this means that people who have had applications for rental houses in 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 married off the emergency houses.

So we have no greater provision for houses than we had before.

There are over 2,000 emergency houses. In the last two years over 3,000 applications for emergency accommodation have been received, & only a few of them catered for in such vacancies as occurred. There is a waiting list of many thousands for ordinary rental houses. The Trust only builds just over 3,000 houses a year under all schemes - including all types of purchase houses. The effect of the Premier's decree to demolish the temporary houses has been to reduce by 1,000 the units prospectively available for housing families, & set back S. A.'s rental housing programme by over two years, despite the fact the housing needs are decreasing, not increasing.

The only reason he has given for this is that he has been politically attacked over first 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 minimizing fire hazard & provide measures to 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 house dwellers. He must have known full well that when he went to the Loan Council meeting, with Commonwealth Loans under subscribed he had not 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 announcements about the extra million make it clear after the Loan Council meeting that ~~the~~ 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 don't know the answer that to you, dear listener. I 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 Australia who need

emergency housing I am now told that we are
 is now to be allowed to go into an emergency
 house as they are to be demolished when they
 fall vacant, I was disappointed & worried
 to be counted to those who have waited their
 turn of years for a Housing Trust rental
 home, & who will now be told they must
 wait a couple more.

Goodbye,