



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2328/27231>

This is a scan of a document number DUN/Speeches/3470  
in the Dunstan Collection, Special Collections, Flinders University Library.  
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/library/info/collections/special/dunstan/>

**Title:**

ALP broadcast regarding 'Sir Thomas Playford made one of his more revealing  
announcements' to 'demolish the emergency houses'.

Please acknowledge the source as:  
Dunstan Collection, Flinders University Library.  
Identifier: DUN/Speeches/3470

© Copyright Estate Donald Allan Dunstan

Good Evening,

Last week the Premier, Sir Thomas Playford made one of his more revealing announcements. I want to tell you about it and to have something to say about it - but first of all I want to give you the background so that you may judge the announcement for yourself.

After the war, in 1947, the Government was constrained to provide some kind of housing for people who were faced with emergency - who for some reason or other had nowhere to lay their heads nor where to provide shelter for their children.

Some Army huts were converted and later some other temporary houses of timber frame and asbestos sheet construction were built for the Government for the Housing Trust. The last of these were built in 1953. Since then there have been no emergency houses built. The total available at peak was 2,450 - there are now 2,147 of these left.

For these houses there is always a long waiting list. The Housing Trust's last quarterly statements says "Many applications are still being received for these dwellings, but only when tenants vacate can dwellings now be made available." This has meant that even where emergencies occur, it is often not possible to house the people concerned quickly, and it is those people who have had an application for emergency housing lodged with the Trusts for several months, who receive first consideration for vacancies. There are over 5,000 outstanding applications for emergency housing and these are not declining in number.

What alternatives are there for people who need rental accommodation urgently. Either they must find the money for private rental accommodation - and the rents here are on average very high indeed .. £6/-/- per week and over - or they must wait for an ordinary Trust rental house - and apart from those who get jobs in Elizabeth, the wait for these in the metropolitan

area is according to the Trust 4 to 5 years and in fact about 7 years. It is not getting shorter - we are still building at about the rate we were in 1953, have not caught up with the back-<sup>log.</sup>~~lag~~ in accommodation and can expect a 50% increase of people of marriageable age in the next ten years at the rate our population is developing.

It is apparent that some provision for emergency housing will be necessary for a long time to come.

However, it is also apparent that the houses which are being used for emergency housing have many unsatisfactory features. They are far below the standard set by the Building Act in construction; they are flimsy, drafty, inconvenient and, it is quite apparent, dangerous. For the public conscience has been awakened by a series of disastrous fires in the temporary houses, some involving loss of life.

It is quite true, of course, that according to the reports of the Coroner who has investigated the fires, carelessness has ~~been~~ apparently been responsible for most of them. But it is also true that if a fire is started in one of these emergency homes, ~~that~~ nothing can save them - they are like tinder boxes -; it is not easy to get out of them in time to avoid injury or even death in some cases.

Because of its concern over this the Labor Party, acting in conjunction with the T. & L. C. I approached the Premier and asked him to appoint a full scale enquiry into the fires and what could be done to prevent them. The Premier refused and said that he had had a report on alterations to make the houses safe, and that the cost was too great in relation to the value of the houses. After much argument he agreed to consider the appointment of a committee of enquiry if the A.L.P and the T.L.C. would submit to him a panel of names from whom he would select one to serve on the committee. The A.L.P. and T.L.C. refused to do this and said they would only submit one name. They then again approached the Premier

who agreed to take the matter of an enquiry to Cabinet if we would submit a name. This we did and were then informed that Cabinet had decided not to proceed with the proposal.

Then another fire occurred in which another life was lost. The A.L.P. and T.L.C. again went to the Premier and asked:

- (1) That the Cabinet would again consider an enquiry
- (2) That as a minimum measure the Government would consider putting in additional emergency exits from the houses, which might save lives in the event of fire.

The Premier said he would re-submit the proposal about an enquiry to Cabinet - though he was certain the answer would be "no". He said he would examine the proposal about emergency exits and if satisfactory would offer to the tenants that the Housing Trust would do the work if the tenants agreed to an increase in the rent as against the cost. (As the rents were increased over 30% in 1956 to meet the cost of amortising the cost of the houses in 12 years and as some of them have now been up 13 years, this was hardly a generous offer).

But he also said that he was going to ask for an extra £1,000,000 at the Loan Council meeting to enable him to demolish these houses and move the residents to permanent housing within five years. What is to be done for remaining emergency needs was not disclosed.

That very night - last Wednesday - he made the announcement on which I want to comment. He repeated his proposal to demolish the emergency houses and gave a reason for doing so. Now there are lots of valid reasons for wanting to get rid of th  
emergency houses - that they are sub-standard, <sup>that</sup> they are such that family life is often under a strain, that facilities provided in them are often primitive and that one wants to better them for the people involved, that they are dangerous and should be removed as the hazards of living in them are such that, if people are at all careless, the consequences in

loss of life and possessions may be disastrous. In other words, to some people the replacement of these houses with something better would be a matter of common humanity. Not, it seems, however, to the Premier.

This is the sole reason he gave for taking the step - and it is pretty revealing. I quote his words from "The Advertiser"; as he was broadcasting over the Advertiser station at the expense of "The Advertiser" ~~station~~ I think we may assume he was accurately reported.

"The Government", said the Premier, "has been most concerned that the temporary houses have been used as a basis for attacks upon the housing standards in this State generally. ....several serious fires in these houses have been used for political reasons for attacks upon South Australia's housing even by the State's own representatives in the Federal Parliament"

So what moves the Premier is not that it would be better for the people in them, or for the State generally that the houses should be replaced. What concerns him is that he, the all-powerful and omniscient, has been attacked over them. Revealing, isn't it? No wonder some young members of the Liberal party in a pamphlet said - "the Premier is virtually a dictator - he is more and more out of touch with the people."

Goodnight.