

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

THURSDAY, 13 AUGUST 1885

Electronic reproduction of original hardcopy

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Thursday, 13 August, 1885.

Petition.—Questions.— Formal Motions.— Motion for Adjournment.—Railway from Bowen to Houghton.—Message from the Legislative Council.—Pacific Islanders Employers Compensation Bill—consideration of Council's amendments.—Additional Members Bill—Legislative Council's amendments.—Adjournment.

The SPEAKER took the chair at half-past 3 o'clock.

PETITION.

Mr. BROOKES presented a petition from more than 2,000 inhabitants of Brisbane, in favour of the principle of local option, and moved that it be read.

Question put and passed, and petition read by the Clerk.

On the motion of Mr. BROOKES, the petition was received.

QUESTIONS.

Mr. SHERIDAN asked the Minister for Works—

1. Is the trial survey for the railway from Maryborough direct to Gayndah, *via* Mungarr, finished?

2. Is the survey of the permanent line from Maryborough to Gayndah, *via* Mungarr, commenced?—and, if not, when will it be commenced?

3. When is it likely that plan and book of reference for the first section, Maryborough and Gayndah Railway, will be laid upon the table of the House?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. W. Miles) replied—

1. The trial survey, *via* Mungarr, of the proposed Railway from Maryborough to Gayndah is finished.

2. As the alternative survey to Gayndah *via* Isis Scrub is not yet completed, it would be premature to commence the permanent survey to Gayndah.

3. As soon as possible after the route is decided.

Mr. SMYTH asked the Minister for Works—

1. Have the Government decided the route of the Gayndah Railway line?

2. Are they in possession of surveys from Kilkivan to Gayndah?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS replied—

1. The Government have not yet decided upon the route which should be adopted for the Gayndah Railway.

2. No trial surveys have been executed between Kilkivan and Gayndah.

Mr. NORTON asked the Colonial Treasurer—

1. Have beacons been placed in position in the Boyne and Calliope Rivers in the Port Curtis district?

2. If not, what is the cause of the delay?

The COLONIAL TREASURER (Hon. J. R. Dickson) replied—

The beaconing of the Calliope is now completed, and a report upon the beaconing of the Boyne River is being prepared. I cannot give any reason for the delay; but the work will be proceeded with with all possible expedition.

FORMAL MOTIONS.

The following formal motions were agreed to:—

By Mr. FOOTE, in the absence of Mr. Macfarlane—

That there be laid upon the table of the House, a Return showing—

1. Total number of yards of tweed in each year, for the last eight years ended June, 1885, bought by the Government.

2. Number of yards bought from the Queensland Woollen Company for the same eight years.

By Mr. HAMILTON—

That there be laid upon the table of the House, a Return showing the total amount of payments made out of Loan during the past financial year, in the Southern, Central, and Northern districts respectively.

MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT.

Mr. DONALDSON said: Mr. Speaker,—Before the House proceeds to the business on the paper I wish to refer to a matter of some importance, and I shall conclude my remarks with a motion for adjournment. Some time ago representations were made to the Government from several parts of the country with regard to the price charged for Press telegrams. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that you yourself have upon more than one occasion consulted the authorities upon this question, and I have also done so without receiving any satisfaction. I therefore think it desirable to bring the matter before the House in order that the Government and hon. members may know the position of the country Press with respect to the rates the proprietors have to pay for telegrams. I have no doubt it is within the recollection of hon. members that some time last year, when the Premier was Acting Postmaster-General, a deputation of gentlemen connected with the Press in this city waited upon the hon. gentleman and drew his attention to the telegraph rates in force in this colony. They pointed out then that the price in New South Wales, from Sydney to Tenterfield, was 1s. 6d. per 100 words, and from Tenterfield to Brisbane 4s. 2d. per 100. The Premier remarked then, that when he was in the South some months previously he was very much surprised to find how brief was the telegraphic news from this colony which appeared in the Southern Press, and I believe I am right in saying that he was convinced that the reason of that was that the price charged for telegrams from this colony was enormous. The result of that interview was, that the price in Queensland was reduced from 4s. 2d. to 1s. 6d.; and that at the present time telegrams can be sent from Brisbane to Sydney at 3s. per 100 words. Messrs. Buzacott and Cowlishaw, who represent three daily and two weekly papers, were the gentlemen I referred to as interviewing the Premier. They represent the leading papers of Brisbane, and I believe it is no secret that they are good paying properties. A considerable concession has been granted to them—a concession that has not been extended to the proprietors of other papers in this colony, as I shall presently take an opportunity to show. No doubt at the time that matter was brought before the Government those gentlemen made out a good case; but I think they might at the same time have said a few words for their country brethren. If on that occasion they had pointed out the position the country Press was in, it is probable that the concession granted to the metropolitan journals would have been granted

to the Press generally. At the present time the proprietors of papers published in this city have the advantage of receiving intercolonial telegrams at the rate of 3s. per 100 words, whereas telegrams sent to country papers are charged at the rate of 4s. 2d. for the same number of words. What is the result? The result is this: that country papers, having only a limited circulation, are compelled to keep their messages down to the lowest possible extent, and consequently cannot supply their subscribers with as full news as they wish to do. I do not think I can better illustrate this than by referring to some of the telegraphic reports of Parliament published by the country Press. A very great interest is taken by people in the country districts in the actions of members of this House, and yet I have often seen such short reports of the proceedings in Parliament in country journals as, "The Rabbit Bill passed its second reading last night," or "The Land Act Amendment Bill was read a second time." There was not the slightest information given to the readers as to what were the contents of these Bills. Consequently, people have to wait many days until the papers of the city arrive before they can get full information. Now, in a country like this, if there is one matter in which the people manifest more interest than any other it is information relating to the prosperity or otherwise of the colony. It has been announced by the Colonial Treasurer that on Tuesday next he will deliver his Budget Speech. I believe everyone in the colony is anxious to know what is the real financial condition of the colony, especially at the present time, when we are passing through such a depressed season; and if Press telegrams could be sent at a low rate I have not the slightest doubt that lengthy and full telegrams of the Treasurer's Financial Statement would be sent all over the colony to papers published on the following morning, showing what is our position. But the rates are so high now that proprietors have issued instructions to their agents in Brisbane to send as short telegrams as possible, and the consequence is that the messages received are of the most meagre description. All of us who take up the papers in the morning desire to see what the telegrams are and what is the news—not only from the adjoining colonies, but from all parts of the world—and I must say that the Brisbane papers supply us with full information in this respect. The same desire for telegraphic information exists in the country towns. As I have already pointed out, country papers have only a limited number of subscribers; the local news cannot be much, and it is very desirable that they should have the latest news from the metropolis and other parts of the world, and more particularly, when Parliament is in session, lengthy reports of its proceedings. I do not think any hon. member will deny that in all countries the Press is a great necessity, and the same remark applies to the country districts of this colony, and every facility should be given to the papers to get their messages at as low a rate as possible. I know places which the city papers do not reach until ten or twelve days after publication. In fact, I live in a place myself which it takes twelve days for papers published in Brisbane to reach. People residing in districts like that wish to learn as much as possible before the metropolitan papers arrive, and are particularly anxious to see war telegrams and other information of that kind as early as possible. I do not think that I can do better than read a leading article on this subject, from the *Morning Bulletin*, published in Rockhampton, as it deals with the matter more explicitly than I could. It says:—

—Some time ago Mr. Griffith promised to consider the practicability of reducing the present exorbitantly high

telegraph rates, but so far as indications go he appears to have no intention of taking the matter up, either now or in the immediate future. To the Press, therefore, is devolved the task of recalling attention to the subject, and pressing upon Ministers the necessity and justice of the demand for a cheaper telegraph tariff. There is first of all the question of the ordinary commercial message, intended for delivery within the colony. It is probably premature to ask for a sixpenny rate, but the present extremely short message might surely be lengthened by, say, five words, making the total number fifteen words for 1s."

I may here observe that when I was in Victoria recently the price of telegrams between New South Wales and Victoria was reduced from 2s. to 1s., and the Government of Victoria decided that messages of six words should be transmitted from one station to another for 6d. I have reason to believe, from the large number of messages transmitted since then, that this arrangement has produced a very satisfactory result. The article proceeds to state that—

"With respect to the intercolonial message there is certainly room for a material reduction. New South Wales and Victoria have recently lowered the charge between the two colonies to 1s. for ten words, and they have re-pointed out to the department here the desirability of fixing the rate between Queensland and New South Wales at the same figure, with a corresponding re-adjustment of the Queensland-Victorian tariff; but Ministers have refused to entertain the idea, on the ground that our telegraph lines require a greater maintenance expenditure in proportion to population. This plea, however applicable in the past, will hardly apply to the present order of things. There is now a large, lucrative, and constantly growing intercolonial trade, which would be appreciably stimulated by a lower telegraph rate. In fact, the revenue derivable from the increased number of messages that would immediately follow such a reduction would probably more than recoup the department for the outlay incurred in making the necessary changes. Something like this has recently been witnessed in the working of the Railway Department. No sooner were the traffic charges for stock lowered to an equality with those of New South Wales than a large increase of traffic receipts took place, and it has every appearance of being maintained.

"But, substantial as are the reasons for urging a general reduction of commercial telegraph rates, they are yet light beside those which are embodied in the demand for a cheaper Press tariff. In England Press telegrams are only charged at the rate of 1s. per 100 words, or one-fifth the commercial rate; in Queensland 100 words are charged 4s. 2d., or half the ordinary rate. The Press rate between Queensland and New South Wales is, after the first hundred, only 3s. per hundred, or about one-fifth the commercial figure; between Queensland and Victoria it is 4s. 6d. per hundred, or about one-fifth the ordinary tariff. It is thus clearly evident Press telegrams passing from Queensland to New South Wales and Victoria are accepted at the same proportionate rate as in England—namely, one-fifth the usual message rate; whereas a Press report, passing between any two telegraph stations in Queensland, is charged one-half the ordinary rate. Moreover, the figures quoted prove another and more striking inconsistency, which the Press of the colony will do well to note. They show, to take a practical illustration, that the *Sydney Morning Herald* can get a Press report of 2,000 words telegraphed from Cooktown to Sydney cheaper than the *Brisbane Courier*; in fact the *Herald* will save more than 20s. by the transaction. The charge would be—Cooktown to Brisbane, 4s. 2d. per 100 words; Cooktown to Sydney, 3s. per 100 words."

I contend that is a tremendous handicap against the colonial Press. It may be urged that we are not at the present time able to send such long messages upon our lines in consequence of the press of business on them; but if that argument is true how is it that such a message can be sent from Cooktown to Sydney at a lower rate than within our own colony, and that the Queensland Press should be handicapped in this way? There is no reason for me to argue further upon this point, for it is in itself so ridiculous and absurd. The writer of this article further says:—

"How did this absurd anomaly arise, and by what gross economic sophistries is its continuance justified? With one, or perhaps two exceptions, there is no colony

in Australasia so much in need of a cheap Press rate as Queensland, yet this most precious boon to settlers in the far distant interior is not only persistently withheld, but denied as it were in inverse ratio to the need. It is not supposed that the Telegraph Department can, in its present state of equipment, cope with any great increase of Press or general business consequent upon a reduction of rates, and it is particularly desirable whatever reform is resolved upon should be based on a broad and progressive principle of development; but it is contended that Ministers over-estimate the magnitude and cost of the changes required.

"With a view to show what has been done in perfecting Press telegraphy in other countries, as well as to suggest a good means by which the same may be accomplished here, let us select England as being at once the best and most familiar example. For the purpose of illustration London may be described as the great heart and controlling centre of the system. Into the English metropolis pour, by a thousand channels, a never-ending stream of intelligence from all parts of the civilised world. This mass of news is for the most part received and assorted by two great Press agencies, known respectively as the Central News and Press Association. The leading newspapers of the country pay these agencies to supply them with full and accurate reports of all important passing events. Accordingly, as soon as important intelligence is received in London, no matter whether from home or foreign sources, it is classified and despatched by wire to almost every town and hamlet in the three kingdoms. Parliamentary news is treated in the same way. By this means it is calculated that from 300,000 to 500,000 words are telegraphed from London nightly during the parliamentary session. This represents the total quantity handed in and paid for, but it would be a mistake to suppose actual manual labour is required to despatch that amount. The saving is effected by the free and general use of Wheatstone's automatic apparatus, and by the judicious linking together of the leading towns into several great trunk lines, whereby one sending is made to serve for a large number of stations. The principle of automatic telegraphy lies in this: that once a Press report is transcribed, or 'punched' as it is technically called, it becomes available for being sent mechanically, and, of course, it may be thus used for conveying the report over any number of lines, so that if the telegram has to be sent to fifty different towns one transcription or sending will suffice for all. Such, in outline, is the method by which the extraordinary quantity of press-work is dealt with in England, and it may be mentioned that, with such celerity is it got through, it is rare indeed any provincial newspaper is obliged to go to press before the supply has been delivered."

I may mention that several of our provincial papers—those in Ipswich, Toowoomba, Warwick, Dalby, and Stanthorpe—are all published on Saturday morning, consequently one message will supply the whole of those papers. It cannot be urged against this that each of these papers will require a message to be sent separately, because they are all on the same circuit, and one sending will be sufficient for the lot. The article proceeds:—

"Anyone, who has had no connection with the sub-editorial work of one of the leading English or Scotch dailies, has no conception of the immense mass of news received through telegraph channels. It is not uncommon to see from two to four pages filled with telegraphic matter alone. Such is the readiness of the Government to place wire facilities at the disposal of newspapers at cheap rates, that editors find it profitable and expedient to hire what is called 'special wires.' These wires all start from London and terminate at the editorial rooms of the provincial paper for which they are employed. They are chiefly used for correspondence of a semi-private nature. Metropolitan newspapers do not, of course, require special provincial wires, but organs like the *Times*, *Standard*, *Daily News*, and *Telegraph* have all one or more special wires leading from their private offices to the principal European capitals. These are principally used for the conveyance of secret intelligence, or news of a specially valuable kind. In considering whether or not the principle and method of the system here brought forward can be made applicable to colonial wants, it may be remarked that so far as the strictly scientific aspect of the question is concerned the presumption is in our favour. The Australian climate is noted for its dryness, and a dry atmosphere is the most suitable for effective telegraphy. In fact, electrical disturbances, due to causes beyond engineering control, may here be regarded as at a minimum. If London found it possible to communicate with Calcutta by way of Teleran, and by means of repeaters

or translators over such a vast distance, and through such a varying atmosphere, it may be affirmed as practicable to work between any two extremities of this continent, where the external conditions are uniform, and subject to few changes. It is, however, not necessary to mention these facts to our telegraph authorities; they are presumed to be perfectly conversant with the points of the matter; and as soon as Parliament sanctions the necessary alterations they may be relied upon to give them speedy and effective form. To the Government, therefore, an earnest appeal must be made for a cheaper telegraph tariff. On behalf of the Press, the demand is both just and pressing. Queensland is rapidly emerging from a condition of national infancy to one of vigorous youth, and assuming a new and prominent position before the eyes of the world. The great questions of Imperial and Colonial Federation are agitating the public mind; measures of important and far-reaching significance are being discussed in our assemblies. On these and kindred subjects the people require the latest and fullest information, and the Press alone can give it; but not if enterprise is chilled and prosperity threatened by a high repressive telegraph tariff. The public will never grudge reasonable outlay, where the object tends, as this does, to benefit all classes. Whoever desires to see Australia advance in intelligence and unity of national character, strong both within and without, will assuredly favour every extension of the telegraph, and the granting of every facility necessary to enhance the value and usefulness of a free and independent Press."

I do not think it is necessary for me to say much more. That article is in itself such a good argument that it traverses the whole of the ground which I should perhaps have taken a much more circuitous route to traverse. I feel confident that the attention of the Government having been called to the matter they will give it their earnest consideration; and I trust before long that our tariff will be so altered that the country Press will be put in a better position than they are in at the present time. I think I have mentioned that the country papers have issued orders to their agents here to supply as short messages as possible, because of the excessive charges. I hold in my hand a copy of a small country paper, the *Tharyominidah Herald*. It certainly is very creditable to such a small paper to spend so large a sum in telegrams, and I am assured by the proprietors that the amount would be considerably increased if the charges were reduced. In the other colonies the cheap Press telegrams are sent after 8 o'clock in the evening, when there are few, if any, public telegrams; and the result is that the leading papers in New South Wales and Victoria print, I suppose, a larger quantity of telegraphic intelligence than any other papers in the world. I have here a copy of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and six columns of that are filled with telegrams about the working of the new Land Act that came into operation the day before. I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that the public would not have received that information had the charges been as high there as they are here. Again, the English news is always telegraphed to the *Melbourne Argus* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* from Albany. If the result of the low rates in other colonies has been such a large increase in business, I believe we are quite justified in seeking to follow their example here. We claim to be a progressive colony; so far as our means allow we always adopt the newest and best inventions; and surely we are not going to admit that our telegraphic system is so imperfect that we cannot take the messages. If our present wires or the present staff are not sufficient to stand an increase of business, surely there can be no objection to increasing them if the business is sufficient to justify the expenditure. I believe this matter will commend itself to hon. members, and I trust that before long the evil complained of will be remedied. I beg to move the adjournment of the House.

The PREMIER said: Mr. Speaker,—I am sorry the hon. member did not tell me he was

going to bring up this subject, because in that case I should have put myself in a position to give the House some information with regard to it. I am taken quite by surprise, and though the matter has come under my notice, my memory does not serve me so that I can give any definite information. I know one of the first things we did on coming into office was to reduce the price of Press messages between this colony and New South Wales; and for my own part I was anxious to make a corresponding reduction all over the colony, but the answer we got from the Telegraph Department was that the present wires and staff would not be sufficient for a much greater increase of business; and that if a very much larger quantity of Press matter were sent new wires would have to be provided. I confess I was not satisfied with that answer, although it satisfied the Postmaster-General at the time—Mr. Garrick, I think. The subject occupied the attention of his successor, Mr. Mein; and the present Postmaster-General has it under his consideration. I should be glad of any arrangements that would make it practicable to reduce the price of Press messages. The papers in this colony are very enterprising. Some of them in the North get very full telegrams, and compare extremely favourably in that respect with those in the South. Others are not so enterprising. Of course I cannot say what effect a reduction in the price of the telegrams would have. One thing the hon. member drew attention to, which I think is not exactly applicable—that was with regard to the messages received by the Sydney and Melbourne papers from Albany. We offer the same facilities for messages from Albany, with an extra charge of 1s. 6d. per 100 words. I do not think that is unreasonable. I regret that I am not in a position to give the House any definite information on the subject, as I might have done had the hon. member told me he was going to bring it forward.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH: When are we likely to have the Postmaster-General's report?

The PREMIER: I think it is ready now. I saw the draft report in print in the hands of the Postmaster-General some time ago.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH: I think the hon. member for Warrego has done right in calling attention to the anomaly as to prices charged for telegrams sent in the colony and those sent to the other colonies. It is an anomaly that ought to be accounted for at any rate, that a telegram from Cooktown to Brisbane should cost 50 per cent. more than the same telegram from Cooktown to Sydney. With regard to the general question of reduction of the cost of telegrams, I suppose the prospect held out to us by the Postmaster-General of shilling telegrams for sixpence was only an after-dinner suggestion, made without consultation with his colleague, the Treasurer. We may perhaps hear something about it on Tuesday. We cannot discuss this matter until we have the Postmaster-General's report, and I think it is not creditable to the department that we should be waiting for that report still. Those reports ought to have been laid on the table as soon as the House met. There is not the slightest justification for any departmental reports not being ready by this time. The Auditor-General's report is, as a rule, on the table, and that is a report not excelled by any other department. He generally gives information up to within a month of the date the report is presented. Here we have an important department whose report up to the 31st December last we have not yet received. Without that report it is impossible to discuss this subject. No doubt the

report will deal with this matter, especially as the Postmaster-General contemplates in the near future so great a change as the reduction of the telegraph charges to something like one-half the present rate.

Mr. PALMER said: Mr. Speaker,—When the Postmaster-General's Estimates were going through committee last session, I drew the attention of the Colonial Secretary to the anomaly that you could send a telegram from Stanthorpe to Normanton, right through the colony, for 1s., whereas if you sent a telegram from Stanthorpe to Tenterfield, or any place ever so little across the border, the charge was 2s. I recollect I was laughed at for suggesting that we should reduce the price of telegrams between Queensland and New South Wales to 1s.—which is, I believe, the charge between Victoria and New South Wales, and between Victoria and South Australia. But I find I was not so very far out after all. Now that this question of telegrams has been raised, I may say that I have a cause of complaint with regard to the extension that was promised in the district I represent—from Normanton to Burketown. That work should have been carried out some months ago, but on making inquiries the reply I received was that an extraordinary bungle had been made with regard to the shipment of the iron poles necessary to the carrying out of the extension. The poles came on by one vessel, while the small gear, without which they could not be erected, were sent on by another. The consequence of that will be that no extension can be carried out this year. Apart from that, the time has now, I think, arrived when the rate for ordinary telegrams between this colony and New South Wales should be reduced to 1s. As to Press telegrams, the case so well made out by the hon. member for Warrego is one which must commend itself to the attention of the House.

Mr. DONALDSON: I have hardly anything to add to what I have already said. I may say, however, with regard to one remark made by the Premier, that it was only this morning I determined to bring the question forward to-day, and I have been so very busy that I had no opportunity of calling upon the hon. gentleman and acquainting him with my intention. I need hardly assure him that it was not brought forward as a "surprise" motion, and I will conclude by expressing a hope that, now the hon. gentleman's attention has been called to the subject of complaint, he will find a remedy for it before long.

Question of adjournment put and negatived.

RAILWAY FROM BOWEN TO HAUGHTON.

Mr. CHUBB, in moving—

1. That the House approves of the plan, section, and book of reference of the proposed railway from Bowen to Haughton, as laid upon the table of the House, 8th November, 1883.

2. That the plan, section, and book of reference be forwarded to the Legislative Council, for their approval, by message in the usual form.

—said: In addressing myself to the motion standing on the paper in my name, I may remark that, at first sight, it may perhaps appear to be of a somewhat revolutionary character—attempting to take out of the hands of the Minister for Works his proper functions. But such is not my object, nor my intention. My object is to obtain an expression of opinion from hon. members of the House on the subject with which the motion deals. It is the only way by which I can obtain that expression of opinion, my previous attempts to obtain information from the Minister for Works by means of questions having been met by certain answers upon which

there could be no discussion. I have, therefore, thought it my duty to table a motion in this form, with the hope that a full and fair discussion on it may possibly induce the Government to change the views they have hitherto held on the subject, and proceed to carry out the work which I desire to see done. A short historical sketch of the matter may perhaps be useful to hon. members in dealing with the question. So far as my memory serves me, it was first introduced into the House in 1882, when a petition was presented by the gentleman who then represented Bowen, from a large number of residents of Bowen, Charters Towers, and the Kennedy district. I think that the petitioners numbered close upon 2,000, and their prayer was for railway communication with Charters Towers—that was, for a connection with the line from Townsville to Charters Towers. That petition was followed some months afterwards by the then Government placing on the Loan Estimates a sum of £150,000 for a railway from Bowen to a place called Haughton Gap.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Nobody knows where Haughton Gap is.

Mr. CHUBB: The hon. gentleman knows very well where it is. The place of junction at that time proposed was some thirty-four miles from Townsville, at a place that goes by the name of Haughton Gap; although the mountains there are not very high. That money was voted by the House, and I may say that it was voted without a division, after a discussion in which several members of the present Government expressed themselves in favour of it. The Premier was one, and Mr. McLean, who sat with him, was another; the Minister for Works was silent on the subject, but not a single member who now sits on that side of the House objected to it—although immediately before they had all voted against a railway from Emerald to Springsure. When the Haughton Gap line was proposed it was adopted, as I said, without a division. Matters went on; the line was surveyed, and the plans and book of reference of the first section of the line—some thirty miles—were placed on the table of the House by the Minister for Works of the late Government (Mr. Norton). He was, however, unable to carry his motion for the adoption of the plans, because the Government were shortly afterwards—if they had not already been—defeated, and retired from office. I may say with reference to that line that it was one which must have met with the approval of a great many hon. members on both sides of the House. It combined many qualifications which a line would require. So far back as 1879, the then Colonial Treasurer, Mr. Dickson, advocated a system of coast lines, and in introducing the question of a large loan—£3,000,000—he made a great point that the then Government intended to initiate a system of coast lines. Now, the proposed line from Bowen to Haughton fulfils all the requirements of such a line. The hon. gentleman in charge of the Works Department shakes his head, but I say it does. The first fifty or sixty miles of the line does not go more than ten or twelve miles from the coast at the furthest point; therefore, to that extent it does fulfil that requirement—as being a coast line. Again, it passes over perfectly level country. I believe the plan on the table shows that in the first section—and I believe it is the same right through—there is no cutting deeper than three feet. The plan also shows that there is plenty of ballast, a fair amount of timber—in fact, all the facilities necessary for making a cheap line, and one in which no engineering difficulties exist.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: What about the Burdekin?

Mr. CHUBB: The Burdekin had to be crossed on the line from Townsville to Charters Towers, and it can be crossed again without any engineering difficulties. When the present Government came into office, at as early a date as possible a question was asked the Minister for Works whether he intended to ask the House to approve of the construction of this section of the line; and his answer then was that he had not sufficient information to say when he would be able to ask the House to do so; and he stated on a subsequent occasion his intention to go over the line himself. I believe the hon. gentleman did go over the line some time later; but in the following July I asked him if it was the intention of the Government during that session of Parliament to ask the House to approve of the plan, section, and book of reference of the first section of the authorised railway from Bowen to Haughton Gap, which were then upon the table of the House. The answer of the hon. gentleman was "No." Subsequently to that, sir, a question was asked, in my absence, on my behalf, by my hon. friend the member for Port Curtis. This was some four or five months later. The question was—

"1. What progress, if any, has been made during the present year in surveying a line of railway from Bowen to or towards the Bowen River?"

"2. Will the Minister, during the present session, lay upon the table of this House the plans and book of reference of such railway, or a section thereof, and ask the necessary Parliamentary sanction for the same?"

I would remind hon. members—probably some of them will remember it—that in the meantime the Minister for Works had been to Bowen, and had substituted a railway in a different direction, which extends to a place called the Coalfields, which railway the hon. gentleman said he intended to make in place of the other one. The answer of the hon. gentleman on that occasion was this:—

"1. A preliminary survey has been made from Bowen to the Coalfields, and a party is now engaged surveying a trial line.

"2. Until further reports are received from the Chief Engineer it is difficult to state positively when plans and book of reference can be submitted for approval of Parliament; but if such plans, etc., can be furnished in time, they will be submitted for approval this session."

Well, they were not submitted, Mr. Speaker; and again this session I asked the Minister for Works whether he intended to ask the House to approve of any plans for the railway towards this Bowen Coalfield? The answer I received was that decision had been postponed, pending further information respecting the line. Now, sir, I wish to draw the attention of hon. members to the distinction between that answer and the one I got so far back as October of last year. This year the hon. gentleman seems to make it a condition that the construction of what is called the Bowen Coalfield line is not to be made, or no steps are to be taken towards its construction until more information is obtained respecting the nature of this coalfield. But when he was questioned last year with reference to this line no stipulation of that kind was made. Indeed, he promised that if the plans could be furnished they would be submitted for the approval of the House that session. There was no question then about coal. His only excuse then was that the plans were not ready, and if they had been got ready in time they would have been laid upon the table and the House asked to approve of them. The position of the electorate is this: They are languishing for railway communication of some kind—either communication with the Northern system, which goes out into the interior of the colony, or an extension in the direction specified by the Minister for Works—while every other district has works in progress which were passed by this House not so long ago—other

works which have been since approved of by this House. Hon. members are well aware that the vote for this line was passed so far back as 1882. The money was raised by loan and is now lying in the Treasury waiting to be spent. But although this work was sanctioned so far back as that, I will briefly read the following list of works that I have been able to ascertain have since that been passed by this House and carried out while this has been left neglected. There is the survey from Rockhampton to Emu Park; deviation, South Brisbane; survey of a railway from Brisbane to Mount Cotton; extension of the Brisbane Valley Branch; line from Stanthorpe to the Border; Cooktown Wharf line; Highfields branch extension; line from Maryborough to Urangan, Maryborough Wharf branch; line from Howard to Bundaberg; extension of the Cooktown Railway; another extension of the Fassifern line; North Coast Railway from Caboolture; duplication of line from Brisbane to Ipswich; Townsville Jetty line; the Mackay to Hamilton extension; and I daresay some others that I have forgotten. Several of these works, sir, have been actually approved of before the money was voted by Parliament for them. I believe the Caboolture line is one which was sanctioned by Parliament before the money for its construction was voted. I ask hon. gentlemen to say whether justice has been done in this matter. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." The people of Bowen are anxious for railway construction. It has been promised, and they are entitled to it; and they ask the Government to do one thing or the other—"Either give us the line we want," that is, the line the plans of which are now on the table, "or give us the line you say you will give us; do one thing or the other." The line to the Coalfields does not meet with the approval of the greater portion of my constituents. I admit that some of them are in favour of it, but the greater portion approve of the line proposed by the late Government. I have this further to say: That the line as proposed by the late Government, from Bowen towards Haughton Gap, would be about ninety-nine miles or one hundred miles in length. It must cross the Burdekin, and it can do so at two places, one called Clare and the other Ayr, which are twenty miles apart, Ayr being lower down the river nearer the mouth. Whether the line goes to Haughton Gap or Townsville, or to the Charters Towers line, it must cross the Burdekin at one of those places or between them. This line which is now proposed is the first section—about thirty miles in length—and is common to any line which may be made from Bowen to Townsville, if a coast line is ever to be made and if the Government are sincere in that respect; and we have only to look at the map to see the coast line which is plotted out from Brisbane up to Gladstone. Some portion of that line is already under construction. If we look further up on the map we shall see, if the Government are not disposed to make the line from the Haughton Gap—if that is not the true route—that it will be very easy for them to alter it, and make it in the direction of Townsville; they can make the line from Bowen to Townsville *via* Clare or Ayr, or between the two, but whether it goes to Townsville or Haughton Gap, thirty or forty miles of it must pass along this route, for the reason that it runs close to the sea-shore, or within four or five miles of it. It is bounded on one side by the sea, and on the inside it is bounded by a large mountain called "Round-back," which it must go round, because it cannot go over or through it, and there is just room enough for this line to pass there for the first twenty or thirty miles. Therefore any line in this direction must be made by this route. I am

satisfied that the Ministry cannot come to any other conclusion in respect to that. I believe I am correct in saying that the first fifty or sixty miles, or at least forty miles, will have to go along that route. Under the circumstances—the plans having been ready for nearly two years—I submit to the House that it is extremely hard that the line should not be commenced, more especially as there is a fair amount of good land there. I do not say it is of first-class quality, but there is some very good land. There is as good land there as there is upon some other lines. I am reminded upon that point by some remarks that the hon. Minister for Works made when he asked the House to extend the Fassifern line. That line he spoke of as being good, and one that was required; but it would not do as it stood—it was necessary to carry it further to make it pay. There is as much to be said in favour of this line as of many of the others. I submit that it would be only a fair thing that the Government should take it into consideration, in justice to the constituency that I represent; and I ask the House to assent to this section in order that it may be commenced. If it is found afterwards that the route proposed beyond that is not the best one, it could be continued by the route which may be considered best, in the direction of Townsville. I am given to understand that the people of Townsville are very anxious for a railway in the direction of the Burdekin. All people want railway communication in this country where towns are so far apart. People have found that railway communication is the cheapest communication they can have, and that which affords the greatest facilities. A line from Bowen to Ayr, and connecting Ayr with Townsville, would be a pure coast line, and my constituency would have no objection to a line in that direction. They want to have communication with the Northern lines, either at Townsville or upon some portion of the Northern line, so that they may have the benefit of that extension. Another matter is this: The hon. gentleman said he did not see why a line should be made from Bowen to Townsville, or in that direction, when there was water communication between those two places. If this is a good argument or a sound one, where is the consistency of running a line from Brisbane to Gympie, or to Cleveland, or to any other such place? I do not say it is a sound argument; I think it is a bad argument. The line from Brisbane to Gympie is a very necessary one, and one which I approve of and voted for. I think that the argument that we should not build railways because we have water communication is a very poor one. I may add this: that if Bowen be connected with Charters Towers by rail it will not affect Townsville in any way, as that place is so prosperous that communication of that kind, which it was afraid of at one time, would not do it any harm now. Still the effect of communication with Charters Towers will be that that place will be brought at least ten or twelve hours nearer Brisbane, because, at present, there is 120 miles of coast line between Bowen and Townsville, and then eighty-five miles of railway. There will be sixty miles more railway, but the coast line will be avoided, and a railway train travels much faster than a steamer, so there would be an advantage in point of time. That is one of the grounds upon which I advocate the line. Bowen, like every other town, is entitled to be placed in communication with the railway system of the colony, and it is entitled to this railway more especially as the House has sanctioned the expenditure and voted the money, which money is now in the Treasury. It is only fair that that money should be spent in the direction which the House has sanctioned. I trust that hon. gentlemen will see

the justice of my appeal, and will help me to insist upon the Government doing what they ought to do to this electorate; and I ask the House to approve of the plans of a railway which has been sanctioned by the House for upwards of two years.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS said: Mr. Speaker,—I will not take a lesson from the hon. member for Bowen; and I will take no apology from him at all about bringing this matter before the House. He had a perfect right to do so, and he has done it very moderately indeed; so moderately, in fact, that he has not given one single reason at all why the line should be built or the money should be spent. This matter was brought under my observation by a deputation from Bowen. Very shortly after the present Government came into office a deputation came down to ask the Government to recommend this railway, and if their dignity had not stood in their way they might have got it. They told me, in putting forth their claims for this railway to connect Bowen with the Northern line, that they were desirous of having some share of the trade of the interior. It struck me as most extraordinary, that if the Government had built a line from Townsville into the interior they should be asked to build another to compete with it. That gave me a suspicion that there was something wrong, and I said to myself I would not overlook it; that the only thing, to my mind, that will justify the building of this line is if the country be adapted for close settlement. I went up there and travelled over the place, and, although I made every inquiry, I could not find where Haughton Gap was. I inquired of Mr. Hannam, who has a pretty thorough knowledge of the country, and neither he nor anybody else could tell me where it was. However, it was sufficient for the purpose, I believe, that it would connect somewhere about thirty miles or thirty-five miles from Townsville. The length of the line from Bowen to connect at Haughton Gap, as the hon. member pleases to call it, is 120 miles, and if the railway were made the consequence would be that those who would use the line would have to pay an additional amount of freight equal to the difference between thirty-five miles to Townsville, and 120 miles to Bowen. I believe that some of the inhabitants of Charters Towers advocated this Haughton Gap railway because the cost of landing goods by lighter at Townsville was so heavy, and they thought it would be cheaper to get their goods direct from Bowen. However, the Government propose to carry a branch from the main line at Townsville station to the jetty breakwater which will obviate that difficulty, and, of course, the people at Charters Towers will now be perfectly satisfied. The construction of this short line will suit their purpose very well, and will be much more advantageous to them than having to pay the additional carriage from Bowen to Townsville. When I travelled over the country which the proposed railway would traverse, a great portion of it was under water. There are three cattle stations there, and, with one or two exceptions, the country is utterly worthless for settlement. It is very well adapted for grazing cattle, but is not fit for any other purpose. It is a sandy, loamy, worthless country, quite unsuitable for cultivation. The only thing that would have justified the Government in constructing this line would have been country adapted for close settlement. There is some good land at Inkermann, but that is all in the hands of private individuals. But there is the further objection to this line, that it would compete with another Government railway already built. Rival companies may endeavour to run one another off the road, they may compete with one another as our steamship companies are doing at the present time, but it would be a suicidal policy for any

Government to compete with themselves. I spent some time in Bowen, and I must say the people were very kind to me, but the cry I heard everywhere was, "All that we want is for you to spend money here." They did not care, Mr. Speaker, if the railway was going to the moon so long as we spent money in their district. Unfortunately, Bowen is one of those cities or towns that are in a state of decay. The people are clearing out; and the conclusion come to by those who are still there is that they cannot exist unless money is spent in the district by the Government. I contend that it would be the greatest waste and swindle ever committed to build a railway from Bowen to Haughton Gap for the purpose of competing with the Townsville line. The hon. member who moved this motion made the suggestion that the line might be carried by way of Ayr. I believe myself that whenever a coastal line is carried out, as it will be some day, it should go in that direction. That line will be a long one and will cost a large amount of money; and in the meantime I think it would be utter folly to commence a line between Townsville and Bowen until the line is carried out right along the coast. It would be folly to commence to build it in patches and spend Government money in a few places just to please the hon. member's electors. And that was the only argument offered by the hon. gentleman from the time he got up till he sat down again. He could give no reason for the construction of the line; he did not show that there would be any traffic on it: in fact, he said nothing at all in its favour; all he wanted was the money.

Mr. CHUBB: That was shown before when the House voted the money.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I have no doubt, as I have said, that there will be a line from Bowen to Townsville some day, but that time is very far distant. The hon. gentleman made some allusion to my promising the line to Bowen, and said that I made it a condition that unless the coalfield turned out successful it should not be constructed; and that at another time I stated that it would be made whether the coalfield was successful or not. I never made such a promise.

Mr. CHUBB: I did not say that. What I said was that the answer the hon. gentleman gave me the other day and what the hon. gentleman said last year were inconsistent. One makes the success of the coalfield a condition, and the other is given apart from any question of coal at all.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member has been long enough in the House to know that answers to questions do not always disclose everything that a member would like to get. He can look over the answers that I have given on this question, and he will find nothing of the nature he has mentioned. I may, however, inform the hon. member that the Bowen Coal Field has turned out a success; that two seams have been gone through, one at 60 feet and the other 72 feet 8 inches; and I am told that the coal is of a very superior description. I have not the slightest doubt that the people of Bowen would even take a railway there without coal. It does not matter to them where it is taken so long as the Government spend the money, and that was the only argument advanced by the hon. member in favour of this motion. I have not the slightest doubt that some time or other there will be a coastal railway between Bowen and Townsville. In travelling over the country in that district I saw that there was not an acre of land fit for agriculture until we reached Inkermann. The land there is very good; but it is all freehold, and I believe it was purchased at a very moderate price. I do not mean to say there was any-

thing wrong in the way it was obtained—and I am making no accusation as to how the land was acquired—I only say that it was acquired at a very moderate rate.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH: What land are you referring to?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The land in the neighbourhood of Inkermann. The hon. member may laugh and jeer if he likes: I say that the only land along the line, of good quality, is located near the cattle station called Inkermann, and I believe that land was acquired at a very low rate. It would be a very fine thing for the owners, I know, to have a railway running through their land to enhance the value of it, but I do not see my way clear to make it. If that land could be thrown open for settlement, and a large population settled upon it, there would be some ground then for building the railway. There are, as I have said, only three cattle stations along the 120 miles I travelled between Bowen and Haughton Gap, and hon. members know what a very few hands need be employed to look after a few thousand head of cattle. Yet the hon. member asks this House to spend £150,000, because it has been borrowed, to build a railway where no one is settled, and above all to compete with a railway we have already in existence. If the hon. member carries this motion all I can tell him is that I shall not continue to be Minister for Works. No man who would ever sanction such a downright swindle on the country could have any right to occupy the position of Minister for Works. I hope hon. members will oppose this motion. I have already promised the people of Bowen that if the coal-mines at this coalfield turn out successful I will build them a railway there; and not only there, but I think it should go further than that—over the range to Bowen Downs. There would then be some legitimate inland town, and not an endeavour to carry the line to where it will benefit no person in existence.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN said: Mr. Speaker,—I am very sorry the Minister for Works has taken up such an antagonistic position to this railway, and he certainly might have given some better reasons for having done so than he has given. He has stated that the only reason given by the hon. member for Bowen for the making of this railway is to have the money spent, and he says that is all the people of Bowen require. I know the people of Bowen a good deal better than he does, because I have been oftener there; and I know the country through which the hon. gentleman says he has travelled a good deal better than he does, because I have been oftener there; and I believe he is mistaken entirely as to the quality of the land on that line and as to what the result of building that railway will be. He says the people want that line for the purpose of competing with Townsville for the western traffic. Supposing they did want it for that purpose and it could be shown that it would be beneficial if it were made—why should it not be made? Does the hon. member not recollect that he passed a railway—what is called "the direct line to Warwick"—which is to come into competition with a line already built and paying very well; and that almost every pound of traffic will be divided with the Warwick line if this line is built?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: That is a different case altogether.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN: That line will cost also a total amount of at least eight times the cost of the line now asked for by the member for Bowen; and there are twenty or thirty miles of this direct line to Warwick which

will cost more than the costliest mile on the Main Range, and portions of that cost £20,000 a mile. Yet the hon. member gives this as a reason for not making this Bowen railway, when he has actually himself done what he disapproves of now—if not by making the railway, by borrowing money for the purpose. The hon. member says there can be no close settlement on this line. How many railways have we made at present in districts in which there is not much room for close settlement? He objects also that the land which would be suitable for close settlement on this line is freehold land. If we are not to make railways in a district unless through land which the Government own we shall shortly make no more coast lines, and shall have to make them all into the interior, though coast lines are just what hon. members on the other side are most crying out for—lines in the settled districts. Another objection the hon. member has raised is that the coast line should not be made in patches. Is not that the very thing we are now doing? Are we not making it in patches now? We have one patch from Maryborough to Bundaberg, and another patch now about to be made—the plans for the first section being passed—between Brisbane and Gympie. What disadvantage will it be to make another patch between Bowen and Townsville, with the intention of carrying it further north? The hon. gentleman's arguments will not bear examination. Again, the hon. member for Bowen has placed the matter in an alternative point of view. He says he is quite willing to take a line that must be ultimately made, as admitted by the Minister for Works himself—the line *vid* Ayr to Townsville—but that in any case the first section—Bowen to Haughton Gap—must necessarily be made, and where can be the objection to making this first section? The objection is in the last statement of the Minister for Works—because there is land there acquired at what he calls a low rate of purchase. It was acquired, I suppose, at the current rate of purchase at the time, whatever it was—I do not know whether it was 10s. or 15s. an acre. What harm, then, was it for the proprietor to have got it, and why should Bowen and Townsville be denied railway communication because a proprietor on the way had obtained land at 10s. or 15s. per acre? Could anyone have advanced a sillier argument? I know the land from Inkermann to the Burdekin is very good land indeed, and from the Burdekin along to Townsville the land is first-class land, and for six or eight or ten miles from Townsville there is first-class country over four-fifths of the distance. So that in reality the objection the Minister for Works has raised against the making of this line is no objection whatever, and should be no objection in the minds of reasonable men and in the minds of men who have sanctioned the making of railways at present for far less reasons than those which can be given for this railway. There is water communication, no doubt, between Bowen and Townsville, but there is equally water communication all along the coast; and hon. members opposite were, I think, the authors of the idea of a coast line—which I think myself is a good idea, and one which I have no doubt future Governments will carry out as well as the present Government. I will give my support to the hon. member for Bowen in this matter if he goes to a division, not believing that the line will have to be made to Haughton Gap, but that the first section will be made, and then it can be carried on across the Burdekin towards Ayr, and from Ayr to Townsville.

Mr. MIDGLEY said: Mr. Speaker,—If the Government do not regard the carrying of this motion as a too serious matter, I feel inclined to vote for it. I think the hon. member for Bowen

has good and just ground for complaint. I remember when I first came to this colony, Bowen was looked upon as a rising, promising, busy seaport town; and I heard a great deal about its inland resources and its harbour. Nearly all the northern towns that came into existence before or since have been favoured more or less with railway communication, and Bowen appears to be the only coastal town that has been so far ignored. I speak feelingly on the subject of Ministers having control of these matters to an undue extent. I represent a constituency that had money voted for the completion of a line seven years ago; and I have been subject to no end of misrepresentation and trouble and annoyance, all of which should have fallen on the Minister for Works. Some people in a constituency, if their member is free and independent, as the representative of free and independent electors ought to be, say, "We do not get what has been promised, because he is free and independent." On the other hand, if he is a faithful, devoted, and unquestioning supporter of the Government, they say they do not get it because he is too submissive and loyal; and between one and the other it is difficult to know what to do. When a railway has been approved by this House, and the money has been borrowed for its construction, I think it should be out of the power of the Minister or Government to veto the construction. I do not know that I should have spoken on this subject, but that it gives me an opportunity to get into *Hansard* what I intend to be a protest against the misrepresentation to which I have been subjected with regard to a matter of this kind; and also to get into *Hansard* a little conversation I had with the Minister for Works. If I had brought this matter before the House every time I have been urged to do so, I should have been regarded as an intolerable nuisance. I am glad of this opportunity to say that in a conversation I had with the Minister for Works I was assured that this railway of mine—or rather of ours—would be gone on with without further delay, and that a very important railway advocated by a very important member of this House had to stand aside until these plans were finished and tenders called for. I think if the Minister for Works really wished to do good work in stopping a needless railway—I suppose it could not be stopped now—he would stop the line from Cooktown inland. All that has been said against the Bowen line, from the information I have, would apply tenfold to that line. I am told that the money spent on that line will be utterly wasted, that there is no possibility of it paying interest or anything else; while here at Bowen we have a place with a good harbour, and good inland country. I think after the assurance given last session, after the money has been voted and the plans were prepared, the hon. member for Bowen was fully justified in bringing this matter before the House.

Mr. NORTON said: Mr. Speaker,—The motion before the House to-night raises the very important question how far a Minister is authorised to stop, on his own responsibility, work which this House has ordered to be done. Now, sir, with regard to this particular line, the money was voted in 1882, and I presume it has been raised and is now available. Not only that, but when it was proposed to sanction this line I believe I was the only member who opposed it. I said at that time I did not think it was desirable—and in that I am in agreement with the Minister for Works—that the House should encourage, or seem to encourage, the construction of two lines that would work in opposition one to the other. But when the question of the line being stopped altogether is put before the House, then I think

the House has a right to demand a sufficient explanation from the Minister for not going on with it. Some time ago, if I remember aright, the Minister for Works said he would not construct that particular line, but would construct another line from Bowen, which I suppose was intended to compensate for the loss of this one. We were led to understand that a line was to be constructed from Bowen to the Coalfields, the only official report in connection with which was that they were burnt out and of no value whatever. Now, if the information the Minister has given us to-day had been available at that time, it might have been some reason for proposing to construct that line, but there was nothing at that time to lead the House to believe that the Coalfields were of any practical value whatever. Subsequent borings have led to the discovery of other beds of coal beneath this coalfield which are valuable. The Minister for Works, in arguing against expenditure on this line because the Bowen people wanted the expenditure, appeared to be arguing against himself, because the only argument he used, or appeared to use, in favour of the line to the Coalfields was that as the Government did not intend to carry out the Haughton Gap line they would give the people of Bowen something else. That was the hon. gentleman's entire argument, and in talking now about the people there wishing for the expenditure he has condemned the action of the Government last session. The question of how far a Minister is entitled to stop the expenditure of money which has been authorised by the House is a very important one. Supposing the present Ministry went out of office, leaving behind them a number of untouched lines which the House had authorised, and the next Ministry were to refuse to carry them out, on the very same grounds which were now urged against the carrying out of the Haughton Gap line. They would no doubt get a majority to enable them to carry out their intention, but it should be remembered that those same lines had been authorised by a large majority in the previous Parliament. If that sort of thing were to be permitted—if one Minister after another could take proceedings of that kind—it would soon reduce government to an absurdity. The plan proposed the other night by the leader of the Opposition would probably obviate all such difficulties. If plans of proposed railways were examined in committee before being authorised by the House, any incoming Government would be bound to carry them out, because there would be evidence that sufficient information had been forthcoming to show the necessity for them. With regard to this particular line, I have always objected to it, and I object to it still, because I believe it would be of far less advantage to the district than a line which should join the Northern Railway to Townsville. We have commenced a system of coast railways, and even the Minister for Works admits that this line may be carried out when the coast line is completed as far as Bowen: but it is a question whether the coast line should be made continuously from south to north, or whether it should be constructed in patches. I see no reason why they should not make it in patches as occasion might require. If there is any reason for the construction of a particular section, why should it not be carried out? A line from Townsville to Bowen might be just as useful to that portion of the country as a line from Brisbane to Gympie would be to this, and if there is any strong recommendation for its construction I do not see why it should not be done although it does happen to be a disconnected portion of the great coastal route. Another argument of the Minister for Works, to which I have before referred, was that it is not right to make one

line to compete against another existing line. But what about the Drayton and Toowoomba line—will not that compete with the existing railway? We have another instance in Brisbane. We are extending the line from the terminus and joining it on to the Sandgate line at Bowen Park. Will not those lines compete with each other? Will it not also compete with the tramway which has now been established? There may be reasons for bringing the terminus further into the city, but there can be no reason for running the line straight on to Bowen Park to compete with the Sandgate line and the tramway; especially as the tramway is much more convenient for the public, running along the main thoroughfare and stopping at every corner where it is desired it should stop. A similar case of competing lines was mentioned by the hon. member for Townsville. With regard to the land through which this line is to pass, I may say that I went through the country about two years ago, not by the route the Minister for Works spoke of, but from the Burdekin River below Ayr to Bowen, and I saw some 100,000 acres of really first-class agricultural land. If the Minister for Works went the direct route to Inkermann he would go a great portion of the way through forest country which is not fit for agriculture; but it is quite a mistake to say there is no land in the district fit for agriculture except immediately in the neighbourhood of Inkermann. The question now arises—Should the fact that the land about Inkermann was being purchased make any difference in the construction of this railway? Are we to accept that as a reason why the Minister for Works should refuse to carry out the wishes of the House with regard to any railway? I think it is a great misfortune that Ministers for Works should know anything about those matters, because if, as in this case, there is reason to believe—as I do from the manner in which the hon. gentleman concluded his speech—that there is any political feeling in it, it is likely to lead to bad results—results which ought not to be allowed or tolerated by this House. I believe a great deal of the land referred to would be taken up and made use of for agriculture or close settlement if this line was carried out. I consider that the people of Bowen have been very harshly used in regard to this matter. The plans and sections for this railway have been laid upon the table, and if the late Ministry had remained in office they would have asked the House to assent to the work being carried out—at any rate, the first thirty miles. I think, myself, the best route would be from Bowen to Ayr. It is a level road almost the whole of the distance; the only difficulty is in crossing the Burdekin River; but whichever way the line goes it will have to cross that river, and, I believe, from there it would go to a point thirteen or fourteen miles from Townsville, and there join the present line to Charters Towers. It has been said that people do not know where Haughton Gap is, but there is not the slightest difficulty in finding that out. I am sure the Minister for Works knows where it is, and that the Attorney-General knows something about it; if he does not the Minister for Works can give him all information respecting it. I shall feel bound under the circumstances, Mr. Speaker, to support the motion of the hon. member for Bowen—that is, if he presses it to a division, but I think he will not, as it is evident that it is to be regarded as a party question. I would strongly advise him, after it has been discussed, to withdraw it. I think that is the best thing he can do, because, after the information he has given and the discussion that has taken place, I think further consideration may be given to the matter.

The PREMIER said: Mr. Speaker,—There is something very singular connected with these plans that I do not think the House understands, and also something very singular connected with the circumstances under which they were placed upon the table of the House. At the commencement of this Parliament—after the then Government had been beaten, and knew that they could do nothing—the hon. member for Port Curtis, then Minister for Works, laid upon the table plans and sections—at least, certain things which were described as plans and sections and book of reference for this line. The papers are here, sir, and they bear upon the face of them notes showing that when the hon. gentleman laid them on the table he could never even have seen them. He laid upon the table no plans at all, but two different sections—two routes trying to get to the same place. Which of them was he going to ask the House to approve of? I am sure I do not know; and I am also sure that the hon. member for Bowen does not know which of the two lines he means to ask the House to approve of. The fact of laying these plans on the table was not what it ought to be—an act of distinct Ministerial responsibility—and that is what I wish particularly to call attention to. Asking Parliament to approve of any line of railway is an act which must be done by someone with Ministerial responsibility. It is a very important act. It is asking Parliament to agree, in fact, to the expenditure of a large sum of money and to adopt a particular route. That is a proposition which, under our theory of government, can be only made by someone with Ministerial responsibility. If it were to be allowed that every member of the House could bring forward propositions of that kind and carry them through, there would be an end to Ministerial responsibility, and no Government could tolerate having Ministerial functions taken out of their hands in that way. If, for instance, private members of the House could undertake to lay down the expenditure that is to be made in any direction without Ministerial sanction, of course no Government could in honour hold office under such circumstances. Indeed, it is well understood that when a member proposes to take out of the hands of the Government a matter that distinctly requires, according to the theory of government, to be done with Ministerial responsibility, it is equivalent to saying that the Government are not worthy of the confidence of the House. In any case like this I say the House is entitled to know, before it is asked to commit itself to any line of railway, whether it is the best route that can be selected for the purpose. That is a matter which it is the business of the Minister to inquire into before asking the House to assent to it, and the House is entitled to have the opinion of the Minister. In the present case, not only was no information given about the line, but the hon. gentleman who laid the plans on the table did not believe in it. When the Government were beaten, it was a mere idle form to lay the papers on the table. The hon. gentleman had not even opened the bundle from the Chief Engineer for the Northern district, to see which of the two plans proposed he intended to accept. They were received by the Commissioner for Railways on the 7th November, and laid upon the table of this House on the 8th, without inspection, and without the Minister in charge of the department having made up his mind what was the proper thing to do. I am sure that if he had done so he would not have placed upon the table two plans inconsistent with each other. I remember one occasion when that was done before.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH: I remember your Government doing it this year. It does not require a long memory for that.

1885—2

The PREMIER: The case I refer to happened about ten years ago with respect to a little bit of line about two miles long.

Mr. SCOTT: And one of the plans was lost and has never been seen since.

The PREMIER: It was done through inadvertence on the part of the Minister, whom no one would charge with being incompetent.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH: Which line was it?

The PREMIER: I forget, but it was a thing of no consequence at all. I say there has been no exercise of Ministerial responsibility with respect to this line at all. As to the merits of the line, I do not consider it necessary to discuss that now. I think I have given quite sufficient reason for opposing the motion. The objection is insuperable. Of course if hon. members think that we are incapable of presenting proper railway lines for construction, and are willing to support the motion of the hon. member for Bowen and construct a line which nobody has examined—which nobody has ever seen—which no Minister has ever asserted is a proper line to be made—by all means let them do so; but it would be a matter of very serious consequence. One other matter I wish to say a word or two upon. The hon. member who spoke last referred to some comments made by my hon. colleague, the Minister for Works, as to this being an alternative line, one portion of which would compete with the Townsville line. He said it was analogous to the Valley railway competing with the tramway. I do not see any analogy at all. The hon. gentleman's idea of competition must be very different from mine. Talking about competing with tramways, it might as well be said that railways compete with bullock-drays or Cobb's coach; of course they do. When a new connecting route is chosen or an alternative one made, to bring greater traffic and facilitate settlement in the district, that is not competition but a very good thing indeed. The hon. gentleman might say that opening a new road is entering into competition with the existing one. The main reason I have given for opposing this motion is that the railway has never been the subject of any Ministerial proposition, made with Ministerial responsibility, and therefore it ought not to be entertained. I am not sanguine enough to think that hon. gentlemen opposite will support that proposition when they are out of office, although they would maintain it when they are in office. There was another argument used that I do not think can be accepted, and that was that the mere fact of one Parliament having intended to make a railway will prevent any future Parliaments from discussing the same question.

Mr. NORTON: It is not a future Parliament; it is an individual Minister stopping it that I object to.

The PREMIER: I do not understand the hon. gentleman. The railway cannot be made until this Parliament approves of its being made. I understand the hon. gentleman to say that although he disapproves of the railway being made, yet, because the previous Parliament approved of it, this Parliament is bound to make it. His argument means that if it means anything. If this Parliament is not bound to make it, then hon. gentlemen are free to vote according to their consciences in the matter; unless this Parliament is bound to exercise no discretion, the hon. gentleman is bound to vote against it.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said: Mr. Speaker,—The Premier does not take up a proper position upon this matter. The position

is this: In 1882 the then Parliament voted £150,000 for a railway from Bowen to Haughton Gap. They immediately took action upon that and borrowed the money for making that line. They took the additional action of instructing their engineers to survey and forward to Parliament plans and sections of that railway. That was done, and when the Government received these plans and sections they did as they were in duty bound; they laid them before Parliament for the purpose of, at some future time, asking the sanction of Parliament for the construction of the line according to those plans. Up to that time their course was perfectly constitutional. In fact, that was the only course they could pursue. The meaning of the hon. gentleman's argument is that, if there be any chance of the Government being defeated, they must not even take the responsibility of laying a paper on the table of the House. Their responsibility is gone; there must be somebody else—the future Premier—who is to take action at that stage. The contention of the hon. gentleman is absurd. We did our duty up to the last day we were in power, and among the duties forced upon us was that of laying before Parliament the plans of the first section of that railway. The hon. gentleman tells us that we did it in such a hurry that we sent forward the packet from the Northern Engineer, and put it upon the table without investigation. That is just the kind of argument that the hon. gentleman indulges in when the gentleman who can reply to it, from his own personal knowledge, has not the opportunity of speaking. I can tell the hon. gentleman, upon the face of those papers, that he has made a gross blunder. He said there was no plan whatever laid upon the table. There is a plan.

The PREMIER: That is a section, not a plan. There is nothing to show where the line goes to.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH: Cannot the hon. gentleman tell the difference between a plan and a section? This is a plan of the line for thirty miles. Bless my soul! has the hon. gentleman no knowledge whatever? Does he not know the difference between a plan and a section? Taking it as I read the title sent by the "Engineer-in-Chief, Queensland Railways, Central and Northern Division, Bowen to Haughton Gap Parliamentary plan, 0 miles to 30 miles." Another one is called by Mr. Willoughby Hannam, "Queensland Railways, Bowen to Haughton Gap, Parliamentary section." There are two sections for the thirty miles, and there is a plan exactly in the form that they have always been laid before the House. Surely the hon. gentleman has been talking simple nonsense! These are the regular plans and sections, done in the same way as we have always had them laid upon the table. With regard to the argument used by the Premier, that the hon. member for Port Curtis had taken up a very extraordinary position in saying that we are to revise the action of a past Parliament, he puts the matter wrongly altogether, and tries to put the hon. member wrong also. I say that it is perfectly competent for us to revise what a past Parliament has done. I think it would be a great pity, if we made a blunder, that a future Parliament, and perhaps a better Parliament, should have no means of rectifying it. I do not think we are bound, without option, by what our predecessors have done. But there is a proper and constitutional course of getting away from a resolution we have come to, and the hon. gentleman had a precedent before him. We once passed a railway up the Main Range, and afterwards we obtained a better knowledge of the subject, and asked Parliament to reconsider its decision, and Parliament did

reconsider it, and came to the conclusion that they should not build that railway. That is the proper business-like course; and what is done by the Minister for Works here? He has come to the conclusion that it is a good Parliamentary dodge not to make this line from Bowen to Haughton Gap.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: We do not know it at all.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH: The hon. gentleman has never done anything else but exaggerate since I have known him. In a very characteristic speech he made this afternoon—and he is accustomed to make these short, little, sharp, unmeaning speeches—he rather went beyond himself: he said, in a very exaggerated and hasty way, that there was nobody in the district who knew anything about Haughton Gap. He could not find it. That is one of the humorous exaggerations of the hon. gentleman. People, when they are talking business, call them by a very different and much plainer term. But the House is accustomed to this term "exaggeration," so we pass it over. He told us that the country from Haughton Gap to Bowen is worthless, and in the same breath he said he went over it when it was covered with water. He ought to be a good judge upon that point. I remember the newspaper accounts of his visit. He went over it so fast that deputations were not able to overtake him until he reached Bowen. The Minister for Works must be a smart man to "lick" a deputation who are anxious to secure a railway in the district, as the Bowen people are, and justly so. Then he went further than that, and told us that there was no good land on the Burdekin. That was news to me, because I have heard the hon. gentleman and his colleagues referring to the wonderful lands up there that were obtained at such an insufficient price. I have never seen better land anywhere than I have seen upon the Burdekin. If this Government had only left that land alone it would have been developed in a way that would have caused a smile to spread over the faces of business men, not only in Bowen but in Townsville. I will guarantee that there is no finer land for sugar-growing than there is in the neighbourhood of Ayr, and from there to the sea-coast.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: They have all water carriage.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH: The hon. gentleman is nothing if not inconsistent. I remember how he commenced his political career. He made one speech, and that was upon a railway that was made where there was water carriage. He was made a Great Liberal because he advocated the railway from Ipswich to Brisbane. That was the only thing he ever did in those days. He stuck to the party that wanted this railway when the great point against it was that Ipswich was in direct communication with the metropolis by water. Then how does that argument strengthen the position of the hon. gentleman? There is nothing whatever in an argument of that kind. The hon. gentleman has made up his mind on this matter—he does not object to the railway from Bowen to Haughton Gap in itself, but he is determined—for private reasons—not to allow that line to be constructed, and he put on the Estimates for last year a line from Bowen to the Coalfields. Whether those coalfields are west, north, or south, we never could get out of him, and he has been ever since searching for them and putting telegrams in the papers showing their success. Coal might be got up there, and if so there would be some justification for putting this line on the Estimates last year. The fact,

however, is that the hon. member has no intention of making the line from Bowen to the Coalfields any more than he has of making the line from Bowen to Haughton Gap. The only thing he wished to do was to swell the sum put down for the North, and to place the amount for this line on the Estimates so that he might have the money to spend in the South. That is what he is doing. The money has already been borrowed for the Haughton Gap line and has been spent or is being spent in some other way. The hon. member for Port Curtis or some other hon. member seemed to be under the impression that the money was lying in the bank to the credit of that line, but it is not; it has gone to some other part of the colony. I think the action all through with regard to this railway is discreditable to the Government, and I believe they will find that it will be subversive of our credit. If we borrow money on the credit of having thoroughly made up our minds what public works we are to carry out, and then apply the money in another way, what will capitalists think of us? This line is one of the public works that we had made up our minds to carry out. It was discussed and approved of by every member on this side of the House. The hon. member might say that we passed those Estimates in the same manner as the Estimates of the ten-million loan were passed; but we did nothing of the kind. I remember that the hon. member for Port Curtis objected to this line, and he was the only one who did object to it. The Premier and every one on his side of the House supported it, and the Minister for Works was present and said nothing against it. To show that this line was universally approved by that side of the House, I would point out that the railway that passed the committee previous to the Bowen line was thoroughly discussed; that was the Springsure line, which the Minister for Lands has described as a swindle. It was discussed by the Premier and the Minister for Works, and the Haughton Gap line was the next one passed by the committee. Well now, the Springsure line has been proceeded with by the Government, in order to get a seat for the Minister for Lands. The contract has been let, and the line is now in course of construction. Yet another line, of which they have approved, is passed by on the fiat of the Minister for Works. He says it shall not be built.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: You are quite right.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH: I know perfectly well that the Minister for Works is stupid and obstinate enough for anything. I thoroughly believe the hon. gentleman will never make the line as long as he is in office, and that it would be better for the country and perhaps for his party if he were not there long.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I will not take a leaf out of your book.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH: It would be a great deal better for the hon. gentleman if he had the good sense to read the text of it and make the application. The hon. member for Fassifern, in speaking on this question, intimated that if the matter was not regarded as a very serious one by the Government and as one that would jeopardise their position, he would like to support the motion of the hon. member for Bowen. Such a pitiful wail as that ought, I think, to receive some sort of consideration from the Government. I know the Premier will give way for once—I could not stand it myself—and let the hon. member do as he likes. I could see the colleague of the Premier wince when the hon. member for Fassifern applied the doctrine of the Bowen and Haughton Gap Railway to the Cooktown Railway, and

how evidently annoyed he was as he thought, “Here is one of our principal supporters actually saying that it is a great mistake to go on with the Cooktown and Maytown Railway.” I have no doubt this will be remembered by the Opposition, and that they will have it made known in big letters all over the Cook district at the next election. It is perfectly well known that the member for Fassifern does express whatever common sense there is on the other side of the House.

Mr. SHERIDAN said: Mr. Speaker,—Before this discussion closes, I wish to say one or two words. The hon. member for Bowen, in the very able speech he made in introducing this motion, enumerated a great number of railways, and amongst others he spoke of the Maryborough and Urangan Railway. I merely wish to observe that that line is entirely a private undertaking, and in no way whatever, either directly or indirectly, can it be brought to bear on the subject at present under discussion.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. C. B. Dutton) said: Mr. Speaker,—The hon. gentlemen on the other side of the House who have advocated this Bowen Railway have never attempted to show or venture to express a belief that it will be a paying line in time, or, at all events, within a reasonable time. There has been no attempt to show that. Upon what principle has the appeal—this *ad misericordiam* appeal on behalf of the people of Bowen being made to the House that this line should be started—been grounded? Why, that it is necessary in order to preserve the town from extinction. And why is it in such a condition? Because it has no back country worth anything, and the people have only the Government expenditure to live on! It is for no other purpose than for that one thing that the construction of this line is desired. Whether a railway should be carried out simply for the purpose of keeping the town alive is, I think, a question which this House might seriously consider. The hon. member for Mulgrave has compared this Bowen line with the Springsure Railway. But they are not parallel cases. One is a feeder of a great trunk line carried to a small centre of population and into a rich district, but the other does not appear to go anywhere at all. It will simply go along the coast line for the purpose, at some future time, of connecting the whole of the coast towns by railway from Brisbane to the North. But if that is an object it is desirable to attain, what is the use of commencing at the further end before we commence at this end? It would be perfectly useless; and if that line is to be of value it can be carried on and extended gradually from the point of commencement in Brisbane. The line asked for will be of no practical value either to the people in that district or to the country generally. The hon. member for Fassifern, in expressing his doubts as to the way in which he would vote upon this question, referred to the Cooktown line, and said he believed it was a valueless one inasmuch as it has never paid anything at all; but surely it can be no reason why, because one line of that kind has been started, that system should be extended by building a line to a place which nobody can tell anything about. But I do not say that the Cooktown line is in the same position. It certainly goes back to a place where there are large diggings and where a number of diggers are at work, and where there may be still much prosperity achieved from digging pursuits, though I understand that at present they are not in a very hopeful position. The member for Townsville, in speaking of the character of the lands through which this line would pass, said it was a

matter of no consideration whether the land through which the line was carried was in the hands of the Government or of private individuals. I say it is a matter of very material consideration to the country generally. In the one case the construction of the line would enhance the value of the land for the people of the country generally, and in the other it would enhance the value of the land for a few private individuals. I do not say that is a reason why the line should not be built, but it will be a better reason for the construction of the line if it enhances the value of the lands for the State generally. The objection raised by the Minister for Works that this line, if constructed, will compete with a line already in existence, appears to me to be unanswerable. The only object the people of Bowen appear to have in view—and there can only be that one object—is that they wish to compete with Townsville for the trade of the western country. Whether they will succeed or not is a matter of question, but I maintain that the attempt to do it is absolute folly. The hon. member for Townsville also said it would compete with the steamer traffic. I do not consider that a good argument.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN: I never used such an argument.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I understood the hon. gentleman to use that as an argument to justify the construction of that line.

Mr. NORTON: Your own colleague used that argument.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The hon. member is quite wrong there. He did nothing of the kind. I think he referred to it as an argument used by the hon. member for Bowen, pointing out that it was an argument that could not be maintained seriously for a moment. In his estimate of the quality of the land through which this line would pass I think the Minister for Works was pretty correct. From all the information I have been able to gather from land commissioners and Crown lands rangers the land would appear to be pretty much of the character he has stated. There is valuable land in narrow strips along the river, and the only place where there is any quantity of good land is at Inkermann. A great deal of the land there is very good land indeed; but the majority of the land through which the line passes is very poor country, somewhat similar to the country on the Fitzroy—a poor cold clay. The land about Inkermann is as good as any land in the colony, but we know that it is already in the hands of private people, and it would not be nearly as advantageous to build the railway under these circumstances as if the land at Inkermann was in the hands of the Government. I only hope that the House will express by their vote their dissent from any such proposition as this.

The PREMIER said: I rise, sir, to make an explanation. I stated that there were two plans laid on the table of the House in connection with the railway, but, since I have heard what the hon. member for Mulgrave has said, I have inquired and find I made a mistake. I was misled by the book of reference which refers to an alternative route. As I made the mistake, I think it right to take this opportunity of correcting it.

Mr. CHUBB, in reply, said: It is quite evident, after the remarks of the Premier, and especially of the hon. gentleman at the head of the Works Department, that this motion, if put to a division, will be treated as a party one. I see the thing so plainly that I do not intend to be so unwise as to push matters to that extremity. My intention, therefore, is to withdraw the motion, but before doing so I

wish to refer to one or two remarks made by speakers on the other side of the House. The Minister for Lands is quite incorrect in the remarks he made in reference to the arguments used on this side of the House. In the first place, I never laid it down at all that a railway from Bowen towards Townsville would be able to compete with the steamer traffic. What I did say was, that the Minister for Works used as an argument against the making of that railway that the people of Bowen had water communication already with Townsville, and it was therefore absurd that they should ask for railway communication, and on that I asked whether that was consistent with his advocating the building of a line from Brisbane to Gympie, where water communication could also be made use of. I said that his argument on that point was unsound and could have no effect. I was rather surprised to hear the hon. the Minister for Lands speak in reference to the Springsure Railway as he did just now. This is the first time that hon. gentleman has justified his action in that matter. If the hon. gentleman has been correctly reported in the Press, he described that railway as a "gross political job." I said, and I repeat, that if the Minister for Lands was correctly reported by the public Press when he went before his constituents to ask them for a seat in the House, he stigmatised the Springsure Railway as a gross political job, and said he would oppose it. When he went back for re-election, as Minister for Lands, he said he would support the railway being made on two grounds—first, that because it had been approved by the House people had been induced to speculate in land in that neighbourhood; and, secondly, that when the House had approved of a work it was only just that it should be carried out. I am surprised at the hon. gentleman having the hardihood to stand here to-day and oppose the railway I am asking for when he acted in such a way with regard to the Springsure Railway. The hon. gentleman also said that this was a railway a great part of which would go through private property, and that it was not right to make railways through private property. But the Springsure line goes nearly every inch of the way through private property, and so do many of the lines that were approved last session. Again, that hon. gentleman said it was not right to build a railway which would compete with a railway already in existence. I have already pointed out, and I will point out again, that a line by way of Ayr would not compete with the line to Charters Towers, for it is a coast line connecting Bowen with Townsville. Then the Minister for Lands said the leader of the Opposition had contrasted the Springsure Railway with the railway from Bowen to Haughton Gap. But that hon. gentleman did nothing of the kind. What he did contrast was, the conduct of the Government with regard to the Springsure Railway, and their conduct with regard to this railway—carrying out one work which they had voted against but which was sanctioned by the House, and refusing to carry out another to which they assented, or at least did not oppose in any way, and which was also sanctioned by the House. I was much obliged to the hon. member for Fassifern for the amount of sympathy he showed in this matter. That hon. gentleman said in plain words that he would vote for my motion were it not that he thought the position of the Government might be jeopardised. In other words, he was prepared to vote for justice to the constituency that I represent, were it not that it might damage the Government. I believe I have the sympathy of a good many more hon. members on that side whose mouths are closed in consequence of this matter having been made a party question.

As I see no chance whatever of being able to carry it at the present time, I ask leave of the House to withdraw the motion.

Motion withdrawn accordingly.

MESSAGE FROM LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

The SPEAKER informed the House that he had received a message from the Legislative Council, returning the Marsupials Destruction Act Continuation Bill with an amendment, to which they requested the concurrence of the Legislative Assembly.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the message was ordered to be taken into consideration on Tuesday next.

PACIFIC ISLANDERS EMPLOYERS COMPENSATION BILL—CONSIDERATION OF COUNCIL'S AMENDMENT.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the Speaker left the chair, and the House went into Committee of the Whole to consider the Legislative Council's amendment in this Bill.

The PREMIER said the only amendment made by the Council was the insertion of the words "except as hereinafter provided" in the 6th clause. It might be suggested that some of the damages contemplated in the 3rd paragraph of that clause were to some extent of a prospective character, as they would relate to the whole period during which the labourers would have remained in the service of the employers. The amendment appeared to contemplate a subsequent modification of some principle in the Bill, but as no such modification appeared he saw no objection to the amendment being agreed to. He moved that the Legislative Council's amendment be agreed to.

Question put and passed.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the CHAIRMAN left the chair, and reported the resolution to the House; the report was adopted, and a message ordered to be transmitted to the Legislative Council intimating that the House had agreed to their amendment.

ADDITIONAL MEMBERS BILL—LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL'S AMENDMENTS.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the Speaker left the chair, and the House went into Committee to consider the amendments of the Legislative Council in this Bill.

The PREMIER said the Bill was introduced by the Government at the earliest day of the session with the object of enabling the elections to take place as soon as possible, and it passed through that House without any amendment. It provided that for the purpose of getting electoral rolls for the new electorates the existing rolls should be taken, and the names should be divided according to the situation of the place where the qualification arose. It might of course happen that in a few cases, where people were just on the border of two districts, they might be entitled, from different qualifications, to a vote in each district. It was not thought desirable to delay the elections for the purpose of enabling entirely fresh rolls to be compiled, and therefore the provisions he had mentioned were adopted. The Legislative Council, for the purpose of benefiting those few people—there certainly would be very few—had proposed a scheme which would allow over 3,000 people in each instance to claim to be put on the rolls, and which provided for no steps whatever being taken to check the *bona fides* of those claims. He was not prepared to ask the Committee to agree to any scheme of that kind—a

scheme so crude that it could not commend itself to any hon. member. He did not see that any injustice would be done to anyone by the Bill as it stood; and he thought it would be a pity to delay the elections for the purpose of providing for the few persons who would be affected by the amendment. The scheme proposed by the Legislative Council was—

"Any registered voter who, at the time of the passing of this Act, is possessed of qualifications as a voter in both divisions of either of the divided electorates may, at any time prior to the holding of the first revision court for such electoral district, lodge a claim to be placed on the electoral list of the new electoral district for which he is not already registered as an elector, and such application shall be received by the clerk of petty sessions for the district and entered in the supplementary list aforesaid."

That claim would be dealt with, without any provision being made for publishing lists of those persons, or for objections being made to them. None of the precautions that were ordinarily taken would be adopted to prevent the stuffing of the electoral rolls. In fact it would be roll-stuffing made easy. If it was intended to allow additional claims to be added, then the ordinary provisions should be adopted for publishing the lists, and for objections being made and determined in the ordinary way; and while that was going on provisions should also be made to allow other claims by persons not now on the roll to come in, of which he believed there were a great many in each electoral district. Under those circumstances he moved that the amendments of the Legislative Council be disagreed to, and the reasons he proposed to offer were these:—

Because they would allow of the addition of names on the electoral rolls, without any provision for the prevention or detection of false or unfounded claims.

Because it is not desirable that claims to be inserted on an electoral roll should be allowed, without the names of the claimants being publicly notified, and full opportunity being given for lodging objections to such claims as may be unfounded.

Because the small number of persons who would really be entitled to have their names inserted in both rolls, does not warrant the delay in bringing the Act into operation, which would be necessarily caused by a proper scheme of dealing with new claims.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH said he did not understand the argument of the hon. the Premier upon the point that had been raised. The hon. gentleman stated that the amendment proposed by the other Chamber might have the effect of adding 3,000 people to the roll. He did not think that was the intention, nor did he think it would be the effect. What was aimed at was, to put the electoral rolls of the two subdivided districts of Townsville—namely, the district of Townsville and the proposed district of Musgrave—into the same position, so far as the electoral rolls were concerned, as they would have been had the district been subdivided a year ago in the way that the Bill now proposed to subdivide it. That was, that if certain people, for instance, resident in Townsville, were on the Townsville roll according to the present Act, on account of the residence qualification, at the same time they might be quite entitled to be on the new proposed Musgrave roll on account of property qualification. He would point out that if the division had taken place a year ago those people would have been on the roll, and why should they be left off it? As a matter of fact, they would be put on the roll as soon as the usual courts were held by which they would be enabled to do so. He did not think that the smallness of the number of people affected the argument at all. They wanted to get the rolls made up both for the Townsville and the Musgrave electorates, so that the people who were actually entitled to vote should have votes for those districts. The hon. gentleman must see at once that if they were divided according to the system that he

proposed it would necessarily confine a certain number of men to one vote in one district, whereas, if the Bill had been passed previously, they would have been entitled to two. Why deprive those men of their votes? He thought it was only fair that a man should have his vote, and no single argument could be used against it. There might be something in the arguments that the elections would be deferred by adopting the amendment, but he did not think delay necessary at all. Why should those who were now on the rolls not be allowed to remain on for both places, and why should the court say, "You must vote for Townsville alone during this election," whereas had the electorates been established a few months ago a man would have been entitled to vote for both electorates? They would certainly be doing an injustice if some such amendment was not accepted, because they would be depriving men of a right that they certainly had before the roll was divided. They had a right to vote for a member for the whole district as it was now constituted, and the House was now taking away a portion of that right, and saying, "You will vote for Townsville or Musgrave alone," as the case might be. Why should a revision court not be authorised to give a right that a number of electors actually held at the present time?

The PREMIER said he was afraid the hon. gentleman had not done him the honour of listening to his arguments. The case of Townsville was the only one worth consideration, because very few electors of Mitchell would be placed in the position of being deprived of their rights. But there were a few people who had property in Musgrave and lived in Townsville, or *vice versa*. At the present time those electors had one vote. By the Bill they would have three; but there were a few who would only get two. Now, for the sake of giving every man his three votes, was it worth while delaying the election? A great deal might be said in favour of doing so, but his argument, he thought, was unanswerable, and that was that if they allowed people to make claims to be put upon the electoral rolls they must also allow their claims to be objected to in the ordinary way. As the clause stood now with the amendment, every one of the electors of Townsville now on the roll—some 3,500 in number—might make a claim to be put upon both rolls. A great many had no such right; but all persons might claim, and there would be no opportunity of investigating or checking the claims. A person would simply come forward, put in a claim, and his name would be put upon the roll, with no provision for objecting, no publication of the list, and no check of any kind whatever. There was no way of finding out whether a man had any qualification, because he might put in his claim up to the last moment the court sat. A more admirable scheme for stuffing rolls he had never heard of. If the amendment was to be adopted the elections must simply wait until proper lists were made out and proper objections sent in. Claims must be in, the lists must be published, provision must be made for objections, the court must deal with the objections, and, finally, there must be the compilation of the rolls. Now, if that was desired let it be understood that the elections were to be put off until the compiling of the annual rolls in December or January, and while they were doing that they must also give those persons who were not on the rolls at the present time an opportunity of getting their names on. Why should persons who were not on the rolls at the present time not have as good an opportunity of getting on them as those persons whose names would be on one roll and not on the other? The system proposed was entirely defective—defective because it did not

provide against fraud—defective because it dealt with an extremely limited class of persons. The Committee really had to consider between adopting the amendment with a great number of consequential amendments and consequent delay in the elections, or adopting the Bill as it passed that Chamber. He understood that the general wish of the constituencies and the House was that the Bill should come into operation at once, but if the amendment were carried it certainly could do no such thing.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said the whole of the argument of the hon. member was directed towards the phraseology used in the amendment. He had not the slightest doubt that it was not intended that a simple application should have the effect of getting a name on either roll. The amendment read—

"Any registered voter who, at the time of the passing of this Act, is possessed of qualifications as a voter in both divisions of either of the divided electorates may, at any time prior to the holding of the first revision court for such electoral district, lodge a claim to be placed on the electoral list of the new electoral district for which he is not already registered as an elector, and such application shall be received by the clerk of petty sessions for the district and entered in the supplementary list aforesaid."

Of course, there would have to be some way of proving the qualification, and it ought to be proved by the revision court. A court ought to be appointed whose duty it would be to check the applications, but that ought not to involve any considerable delay. Personally, he thought the elections ought to be conducted as nearly as possible on the rolls as they existed. If they separated the rolls, as provided for by the Bill that had passed that Chamber, they would be depriving certain voters in the Townsville electorate of their right to vote in Musgrave, and *vice versa*. They would have in the separated rolls two distinct rolls, and although the same names would appear they would deprive certain electors of a portion of their qualification. That was an injustice that ought to be remedied, and, in fact, would be remedied in time—when the next annual revision took place. He thought the amendment was open to the objection made by the Premier—that the application was only to be made to the clerk of petty sessions. That ought to be amended, and the names ought to go on the supplementary roll until after it passed the revision court. He thought the court ought to be able to adjudicate without going through the usual routine of exposing the names in order that objections might be made. For instance, a man in Townsville having a property qualification for Musgrave should be put on the Musgrave roll on proving his qualification, and *vice versa*. The effect then would be that the new rolls would fairly represent the position of the roll in existence at the present time, but the subdivision of the names would not, because it would deprive men who had a right to vote in both electorates of the privilege of voting in more than the one.

The PREMIER said that injustice would be done in a few cases, but he did not suppose there were fifty altogether, and possibly there were many less than that number. If the scheme proposed by the amendment were adopted it should be with proper supervision, because at least as much care should be taken in regard to the compilation of the electoral roll, with a view to an immediate election, as when claims were made without a view to an immediate election. New rolls could not be completed before November at the earliest, and it was a question between getting perfect rolls and waiting till that time, or holding elections under the existing rolls. If the Government had proposed an elaborate scheme for the compilation of complete rolls, they might justly have been accused of putting off the election

for additional members as long as possible, but the Government brought in a Bill at the earliest possible moment which would enable the elections to take place at the earliest possible time.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN said the whole thing could be done within the limit of subsection 1 of clause 5, which provided that the Government could notify the time, which must not be less than fourteen days nor more than two months after the passing of the Act, for holding the revision courts. It could all be done within two months, and if hon. gentlemen would turn to subsection (g) they would find provision was made for objections being taken. And why could they not be taken to the supplementary list as well as to the other?

The PREMIER: Because there is no provision for anything of that kind.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN: There is the same provision.

The PREMIER: No. That supplementary list was published last July.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN said the subsection to which he alluded provided that a court should inquire into and adjudicate upon all objections duly made to persons whose names were on the quarterly and supplementary lists, and should expunge the names if any objection was substantiated. How was that objection to get before the court, if a similar objection to the supplementary list could not get before it in the same way? He was prepared to admit that some precautions would have to be taken against names appearing upon the supplementary list which should not be there; at the same time they should provide against injustice being done to any person. That remark applied to Mitchell as well as to the Townsville electorate. In either case there were a good few people who had a right to vote in both electorates. As to the delay, he thought it scarcely likely, unless the elections were indecently hurried, that the member for Mitchell would take his seat by the end of the session, unless it was going to be protracted. Neither did he see how the member for Musgrave could take his seat within that time, though it was possible the member for Townsville might do so. Musgrave, Mitchell, and Barcoo must have a longer period between the days of nomination and election than Townsville, and if they allowed only half the period which was the limit in subsection 1—that was one month instead of two—for the holding of the court, and after that the Speaker issued his writ, and between the days of nomination and election another month elapsed, that would bring them to the end of the session—at least he hoped so, and he thought the Premier and the Colonial Treasurer hoped so too. Therefore, as far as delay was concerned, the amendment would only affect the member for Townsville; and though he should like to have a colleague, he should like him to represent all the people of Townsville. And the thing could be done without any more delay than he had stated.

The PREMIER said the scheme proposed by the Bill was that the new rolls should be made from the existing roll and the quarterly list compiled in July. Under the Electoral Rolls Act a list of claimants was made up in July and dealt with by the revision court. A period of three months was ordinarily allowed to elapse between the time the names were placed on the list and the time at which objections were adjudicated upon, but the Bill provided that the July list should be used in making up the roll for the new elections. According to the scheme of the Legislative Council, claims could be sent in up to the day the revision court sat. A supplementary

list was mentioned, but there were no provisions for making or publishing it or for allowing anyone to see it. That was the alternative to the scheme proposed by the Government; but the proper way would have been to allow a certain time after the passing of the Act within which persons might send in their claims to be placed on the rolls for the new electorates; to provide for a court to deal with those claims; to make out lists to allow of objections being sent in; and to provide for a court of revision which should make up the roll. That would have been the proper way to make the rolls complete; but that was not the scheme adopted by the Government, and the reason why the Government took the existing rolls as the basis was simply in order that the new members might take their seats during the present session. If the Committee desired that delay should take place, the Government would be perfectly satisfied, because they had no burning desire for the assistance of the new members at present; but they did desire to give additional representation to the electorates in question as soon as possible.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN said it was impossible for the members for Barcoo, Mitchell, and Musgrave to take their seats much before the end of the session, no matter how it was worked. It was easy enough for the member for Townsville to take his seat. The electorate was very small and the claimants were known to the justices, who would adjudicate. They would all be property holders who would be more or less known to the justices. So that, he thought, an exception might be made in the case of Townsville, at any rate. He hoped the hon. gentleman would provide a scheme which would allow Townsville to be represented before the end of the session, and, at the same time, prevent any unfair play with regard to the electoral rolls.

The PREMIER said it was merely a question of choice between two evils. If there was no objection to the election being put off for a few months he would bring in an amendment providing for a complete revision of the lists. If it was desired that the election should take place soon they could reject the amendment. The Government were indifferent in the matter.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN: The only election that can take place is Townsville.

The PREMIER said he was sorry the hon. member for Mitchell was not present, because he would like to have heard what that hon. gentleman had to say. If hon. gentlemen would prefer that the elections should be deferred until the rolls could be compiled they could have it so. But the Council's amendments would not be what were wanted. The necessary amendments would cover about a page. Hon. gentlemen would now surely understand the position. It was simply a question of delay.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH said he admitted that it was simply a question of delay. If a claimant wished to get on both rolls he ought to be obliged to give the same notice as if he had been a claimant for the first time. But that was a perfectly different case altogether. They divided an electorate into two portions, and certain of the electors, if the electorate had been divided, would have been entitled to a vote in both. In dividing the electorate so as to get the voting power for each district, according to the way in which the roll last left the revision court, it was clear that certain men upon that roll ought to have a vote for both and others would have a vote for only one. They could not certainly represent the old roll upon the new one, unless they gave some men a vote for both districts. They wanted to place them in

exactly the same position as if separate rolls had been made out for each district. He did not see that it came in ill that they should take in the claims of new men. They had all the claims in up to the last court, and had thus run the gauntlet of the exposure to public comment as to whether they were entitled to be put upon the roll or not. The only thing was, were they entitled to be put upon both? The court referred to in clause 5 was quite competent to deal with that question. In addition to deciding which of the voters should be in Townsville and which in Musgrave, they wished to give them the privilege of saying whether a certain number should not have a vote in both. The claimants who asked for a vote in both should state distinctly what their claims were. They should state, for instance, that they had property in Musgrave and resided in Townsville. The court would then have two things before it: it would have the electoral roll as it existed now, and it would have the claims of certain parties who claimed to represent both parts of the district. The same machinery that was provided for deciding which should be in Townsville and which in Musgrave could be used to decide whether a person had a vote for both. If it did not appear clear to the court, upon the application originally sent in, whether the qualification appeared in Townsville or the Musgrave district, it could call evidence in the same way that it could call evidence to see whether a claimant had a right to have a vote in both; so that he could not see that there was any occasion for the slightest delay. As the hon. gentleman had said, there could only be a few men who would be affected; but that did not affect the argument, because to do an injustice to fifty voters was to do an injustice to the whole colony. Fifty voters might turn an election. But, at all events, it was an injustice; and the object of the amendment was to put the new rolls upon exactly the same basis as the old ones. He found that there was a fault in the machinery—they had not provided that the supplementary lists should be made up by the clerk of petty sessions. But there was no need for it. They had all run the gauntlet of the revision court and proved their cases.

The PREMIER: Without any objection?

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH asked what objection was wanted? They simply sent in a claim and the court adjudicated upon the evidence brought before it.

The PREMIER said that was rather too risky. They never allowed a man to make a claim without anybody being there to see that it was *bonâ fide*. He was not going to ask the Committee to do it. The hon. gentleman said it only applied to persons already upon the roll. Every one upon the roll—3,500 persons—could send in claims. If they were all honest there would be nothing in it; but when they were dealing with compiling electoral rolls they had to deal with persons who were not honest, and when there were 3,500 names that might be made use of for the purpose of making fictitious claims they should be careful. He was disposed to think, upon the whole, as the hon. member for Townsville seemed to think, that if there would be no practical loss by the delay caused by waiting to compile complete rolls they might as well be complete while they were at it.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS said it would be an injustice to the district of Mitchell, which was not affected at all by the contention of the hon. gentleman opposite. There were very few persons there whose names were upon the roll who were not continually resident in the Barcoo

district itself. Consequently, they would much rather have a member there to represent them before the close of the session than to miss the opportunity of having additional representation, which would inevitably be the case if the proposition made by the other side were agreed to. It would disfranchise the Barcoo during the present session.

The COLONIAL TREASURER said he was inclined to think that it was desirable to adhere to the Bill as originally passed by that House, with the view of getting all the additional districts represented as early as possible. It was better to afford them that advantage, even at the risk of debarring a few electors of the colony from having the privilege of a double vote—that was to say, if they had qualifications in the second district which was now to be taken out of the Townsville electorate, and had the right to exercise a vote for that second electorate. Well, he did not agree with the hon. gentleman at all on that point. He thought those electors had no more right to a double vote—indeed not half as much—as the men who happened by accident not to be on the roll at the present time but resided in the district, and were directly interested in the return of the representative. The men who were on the roll of the Townsville electorate had no right to have conferred upon them a double voting power, while at the same time men residing in the Mulgrave electorate were to be debarred from having the right of electing their representative. He thought a great deal was to be said for those men who were not on the roll at the present time, but who ought to have a vote. Therefore, he was of opinion that if it was necessary to give the present electors of the Townsville electorate a double vote, it was equally necessary to allow those men who resided in the Musgrave portion of the electorate to have a choice in the election of their representative. He could see that they must accept the Bill as it stood, or else allow the quarterly revision court to make up a proper roll, and thereby delay the return of the new representatives to that House. He was sure that the electors interested would much prefer to be represented in that Chamber as early as possible even though they lost a certain amount of voting power, to insisting upon a complete roll being made; for after all, any little defect of that kind could be rectified—and would be rectified in a short time. He, therefore, thought it was far better to disagree to the amendments of the Legislative Council, and endeavour to get the additional representation as early as possible.

Mr. CHUBB said he was inclined to agree with what had fallen from the Colonial Treasurer. It seemed to him a case of two evils, and that the lesser evil would be to allow the Bill to stand as it originally left that House, and have the elections as soon as possible. If the members were not able to take their seats during the present session, the Committee would then know that they had done nothing to retard their doing so. He was, therefore, disposed to support the motion of the Premier for disagreeing with the amendment proposed by the Legislative Council.

Mr. DONALDSON said he regretted very much that the hon. member for Mitchell was not present that evening, as he would have been able to give hon. members some information regarding the way in which the electors in his district, who would probably be entitled to vote in both electorates, would be affected by the Bill. He (Mr. Donaldson) was informed that there were very few who would be deprived of their right under the Bill as it originally left that Chamber. Of course, as had been said, they had to choose between two evils, and he had

always been taught that it was better to choose the lesser. If a few persons were disfranchised in one electorate it might be a hardship, but it would not be a very great grievance. On the other hand, if they accepted the amendment they would delay the election, which would be a greater evil, as the whole electorate might be unrepresented during the present session. For those reasons he was inclined to agree that it would be much better not to agree to the amendments made by the other Chamber. If they were adopted it would be necessary, as the Premier had stated, to make other amendments in order to complete the scheme, and that would delay the possibility of a member being returned by those electorates this session. He thought it was very desirable that every facility should be given for the election of the additional representatives.

Question—That the Legislative Council's amendments be disagreed to—put and passed.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the CHAIRMAN left the chair, and reported that the Committee had disagreed to the Legislative Council's amendments in the Bill.

The report was adopted.

The PREMIER moved—

That a message be sent to the Legislative Council, intimating that this House disagrees to their amendments in the Bill, for the following reasons:—

Because they would allow of the addition of names to the electoral rolls without any provision for the prevention or detection of false or unfounded claims.

Because it is not desirable that claims to be inserted on an electoral roll should be allowed without the names of the claimants being publicly notified, and full opportunity being given for lodging objections to such claims as may be unfounded.

Because the small number of persons who would really be entitled to have their names inserted in both rolls does not warrant the delay in bringing the Act into operation which would be necessarily caused by a proper scheme for dealing with new claims.

Question put and passed.

ADJOURNMENT.

The PREMIER said: The next Order of the Day is the Elections Bill, which was adjourned last evening on a question of considerable importance; and as nothing new is likely to be added to the discussion by going into committee on it this evening, as the time that has elapsed has been too short to throw much further light upon the subject, I propose to move that we adjourn until Tuesday next. On Tuesday next there is a motion of which my hon. friend the Minister for Works has given notice, but that I believe will be almost formal. After that my hon. friend the Colonial Treasurer will, in Committee of Ways and Means, make his Financial Statement. I presume it will not be desired to go on with the debate on the Financial Statement on the same evening. After that we will take the Legislative Council's amendments in the Marsupial Bill, and will then deal, if there is time, with the Rabbit Bill and Elections Bill. I move that this House adjourn till Tuesday next.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN said: Before we adjourn, as the Premier has mentioned the Elections Bill I will take this opportunity to bring something under his notice which I regret to say I was unable to bring before the House when that Bill was in committee, as I was absent from the House when clause 31 was passed. On the second reading of the Bill I pointed out that I considered the manner in which registration should be claimed was very well provided for by this clause, but that it simply applied to future claimants. I asked the hon. Premier then to consider the question of how he would purge the rolls of the names of persons on the roll now

unlawfully, and asked that persons on the roll now should be obliged to make claim for registration again in the way proposed in this clause. The hon. member may remember that?

The PREMIER: Yes.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN: Had I been present when that clause was before the Committee, I would have brought the matter more prominently under the hon. gentleman's notice. I think he might consider this question as he is going to recommit the Bill.

The PREMIER: I cannot see how it can be done.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN: I am quite sure the hon. gentleman will be able to see it if he chooses. I have more faith in his ability than to believe that he cannot devise some means by which the present rolls can be thoroughly purged. I am quite certain that they required purging, not only here but all over the colony, and the sooner it is done the better, as the sooner we shall have correct and pure representation of the people of the colony. I will bring this question up when the Bill comes before the Committee again, and I will not stop until I have something done in the matter, because I feel that the rolls, as they stand at present, are thoroughly corrupt.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH said: When the Elections Bill comes on next week, is it the intention of the Premier to proceed with the clauses of the Bill under consideration, and defer, for recommitment, the consideration of the debated point of the voting-paper, or does he intend that we should proceed with that first?

The PREMIER said: The question as to whether the ballot-papers should be identified by numbers for the purposes of scrutiny, or not, is an abstract question, and one that can be discussed at once, and it is, I think, as well to decide it at once. If we decide to adhere to the present system we can go on with the discussion of the Bill as it is; but if we consider it desirable to make a change it will naturally take some little time to arrange for the necessary alterations. I propose that we should discuss the question as to whether we will make a change or not, first, and settle it; and if it is decided to make a change we can postpone those clauses which would be affected by it, and by the time the other clauses of the Bill are passed we shall be prepared with the necessary amendments. I think that a proper course to take, and I hope hon. members generally will give their very serious attention to this subject between now and Tuesday next, in order that they may be prepared to come to a decision. I confess that to my mind the arguments for and against the change appear to be nearly equally balanced.

Question put and passed; and the House adjourned at seventeen minutes past 8 o'clock.