

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

THURSDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 1896

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The SPEAKER took the chair at half-past 4 o'clock.

QUESTIONS.

CLEVELAND AND REDLAND BAY MAIL SERVICE.

Mr. GLASSEY (for Mr. Kerr) asked the Premier (for the Postmaster-General)—

1. Has the mail contract between Cleveland and Redland Bay been let to Mr. Lingley for a horse service?
2. If so, are fresh tenders to be called for a coach service?
3. If fresh tenders are to be called, is compensation to be given to Mr. Lingley?

The PREMIER replied—

1. The tender of Nellie Lingley was accepted on 31st October for a service by horse, or by wagonette when required.
2. No.
3. No.

GRAMZOW AND REDLAND BAY MAIL SERVICE.

Mr. GLASSEY (for Mr. Kerr) asked the Premier (for the Postmaster-General)—

1. What is the average number of letters carried between Gramzow and Redland Bay?
2. How many residents in that district ask for this service?
3. Did the Beenleigh and Gramzow postal officers advise in favour of running a mail to Mount Cotton *via* Gramzow to Beenleigh thrice weekly in place of the present service of twice per day?
4. Will the Minister lay their report on the table of the House?

The PREMIER replied—

1. No record in chief office.
2. Cannot say. The service has been in existence for more than six years.
3. Department has no report.
4. No.

NOTE.—The Redland Bay and Gramzow service is only a portion of the through line from Beenleigh to Redland Bay, and the tender from 1st January next has been accepted for one year only (to the end of 1897), from which date it is proposed to run the whole as one service under one contractor, and not two as at present. The present time-table is, however, framed starting from Beenleigh to Redland Bay, and returning on the same day, which practically throws the whole of the correspondence on the Beenleigh route. According to last return, the average monthly correspondence between Beenleigh and Gramzow was about seventy-two letters, eighty newspapers, sixteen packets; and from Gramzow to Beenleigh fifty-five letters.

USE OF THE STEAMER "OTTER."

Mr. KIDSTON asked the Home Secretary—

1. Did the Government grant the use of the steamer "Otter" to the Hon. W. H. Wilson, or some other person, last Friday afternoon?
2. What sum was charged for the use of the said steamer on that occasion?

The HOME SECRETARY replied—

1. The "Otter" was used between the hours of 4 and 6 last Friday afternoon by a member of the Ministry desirous of contributing in a small degree to the welcome offered to a visitor from Great Britain, one eminent in his profession, and whose mission to this colony, in the cause of technical education, was highly appreciated by a large section of the community.

2. The only extra expenditure incurred by the use of the steamer on this occasion was, as nearly as possible, 7s. 6d. for coal and 6d. for oil. No charge is made for the use of steamers under this department, which are generally used for departmental purposes, and occasionally only to dispense hospitality.

Mr. KIDSTON: I will ask the hon. gentleman, without notice, whether other citizens who wish to entertain their private friends will have the same privilege extended to them?

The HOME SECRETARY: I can assure the hon. member that each case will be determined on its merits.

Mr. KIDSTON: That is not an answer to—

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member is now transgressing the rules with regard to answers to questions.

RAILWAY EMPLOYEES' WAGES.

On the Order of the Day being called for the resumption of the adjourned debate on Mr. Hardacre's motion—

1. The new railway regulations dealing with the wages of employees are extremely unsatisfactory.
2. The old rate of wages existing previous to the retrenchment of 1893 should be restored—

Mr. GROOM said: When I moved the adjournment of the debate when this question was last before the House, it was to enable the hon. member for Leichhardt to get his motion placed at the top of the business-paper, so that he might have an opportunity of getting an expression of opinion from the House upon it. As an illustration of how a member's actions in this Chamber may be misunderstood to his disadvantage, I may state that it has come to my knowledge, from several railway employees, that my simple proposal to adjourn the debate has been construed into a desire on my part to burke the question altogether; that by putting it off till the 19th November I actually put a block on the hon. member having an opportunity to reply to what had been said in opposition to the motion. I moved the adjournment of the debate at the request of the hon. member for Leichhardt, but this is an illustration of how keenly what transpires in this Chamber is watched by the public outside, and how a member's actions are sometimes misconstrued, because some of the railway employees thought that by the 19th November the House would have prorogued, and there would be no further opportunity of expressing an opinion on the matter. It is because this has come to my knowledge that I think it necessary to make this explanation. I take it that the hon. member for Leichhardt is desirous of coming to a decision this afternoon, and I am not going to make any lengthy speech. Indeed, no lengthy speeches are necessary, because the hon. member for Leichhardt placed the question from the point of view of the railway men very clearly before the House, and the Secretary for Railways stated the case of the Government in an equally clear manner, while the Home Secretary endeavoured to show the House and the country the proper way in which we should regard this question. I and my colleague are in this position: This was the burning question in our electorate at the late general election, and the Ministerial candidates as well as my colleague and myself gave a distinct pledge that we would support any effort which was made in this House to have the wages of the railway men placed in the position in which they stood prior to the retrenchment of 1893. If the hon. member divides the House upon the question, my colleague and I shall be bound to vote for the motion. I was present when the retrenchment scheme was carried in 1893, and I refreshed my memory this morning by looking up what took place on that occasion. Sir T. McIlwraith, when announcing his retrenchment scheme, promised that, if the state of the

colony improved and the railway revenue increased, there would be no objection to restoring the wages of the railway employees. The retrenchment scheme was necessarily drastic, but no one complained at the action of the Government in trying to restore the finances. The Government scheme fell more heavily upon men with small salaries. I assisted the then leader of the Opposition in endeavouring to have a sliding scale, beginning with a reduction of 5 per cent. on the small salaries, increasing it to 10 per cent. on the intermediate ones, and again increasing it to 15 per cent. on the larger salaries, and I still hold that that would have been the wisest course to pursue. The House, however, thought otherwise, and adopted a uniform reduction of 10 per cent. on all salaries in excess of £150. The Railway Department is not exactly under the control of this House, and the Commissioners, who governed that department, reduced the wages of the railway men by from 15 to 25 per cent. Though that was a very severe reduction, it was cheerfully borne by the men, but when the salaries of ordinary Civil servants were restored they naturally thought that they were entitled to the same measure of justice; and I think there is reason on their side. The Estimates show that £12,000 has been placed at the disposal of the Commissioner in order to restore the wages of the railway men to something like what they were in 1893, but the men complain that the new regulations and new classification deprive many of those in the service in 1893 from receiving any substantial increase out of this £12,000. Under the new regulations, those who have been in the service under five years get nothing, while those who have been over five years and under ten years get 3d. per day extra, and on the Southern and Western Railway the men who will get nothing number 382. I have been in communication with some of these men to find out whether there is any dissatisfaction in regard to the new regulations, and I am bound to say, from representations which have been made to me by men who are by no means inclined to exaggerate or to say that they have a grievance where none exists, that the new regulations have not given satisfaction. I know that members of Parliament are sometimes led astray by hearing only one side of a question. Sometimes, in my early political career, on the strength of whispers which came to my ears, I made very strong speeches in this House, and only discovered from the reply of Ministers that I had been entirely misled and had discovered a mare's nest. I dare say other hon. members have had similar experiences; but now that I have reached a more mature age I take care before attempting to remedy grievances in this House to ascertain that the facts are as stated to me. In this instance, since the speech of the hon. member for Leichhardt and the reply of the Secretary for Railways, I have instituted inquiries, and I have found that the hon. member for Leichhardt is to a large extent borne out by the men—that is, so far as the Southern and Western line is concerned. I cannot say anything with reference to the Central and Northern Railways, because I have had no communication with the men on those lines. That being so, and having made the promise that I did at the general election, I think it is only fair that the wages of the railway men should be restored. The only strong point which has been made in the debate on the other side was that urged by the Home Secretary, who seemed to think that in considering this question we should consider whether the wages paid to the men in 1893 were actually fair, and whether they were not in a measure excessive. Well, I take it that the Commissioners, who fixed the wages in 1893, knew exactly what the men were worth.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: They were not fixed in 1893.

Mr. GROOM: No, prior to 1893. We passed the Act placing the railways in the hands of the Commissioners in 1888, and it is to be assumed that Mr. Mathieson was able, from his knowledge of the men along the various lines, to gauge the capabilities of each employee. In adopting the scale of wages at that time he was able to gauge them accurately so as to give them a fair rate; and I am prepared to accept the rate which existed in 1893 as one which in the opinion of the Commissioners was fair. Therefore, when I was asked by the electors if I would pledge myself to vote for the restoration of these men's wages to what they were in 1893, so as to put them on a par with the Civil servants whose 10 per cent. reduction had been restored, I felt in duty bound to answer the question in the affirmative, and I did so. And the fact that two gentlemen who on that occasion represented the Ministry—both highly respectable gentlemen who, if they had been able, would have carried it out—were asked the same question and gave the same answer, is an indication that, as far as the Ministerial side is concerned, there was also a strong desire that the old rate of pay should be restored. That being so, and having heard the arguments urged on both sides, I think I shall be acting in accordance with right and justice by voting for the motion. That I intend to do; and I may say that the opinion I have expressed this afternoon is the opinion of my hon. friend and colleague, Mr. Fogarty, who will also vote in support of the motion if the question goes to a division.

Mr. CURTIS: I desire to say a few words in support of this motion, more especially that I consider the employees on the Central Railway system have been specially hardly dealt with in this matter of retrenchment. I understand that under the old regulations the men in the Southern division were paid 6s. 6d., and a reduction of 6d. a day was made in their case; the men in the Central division were paid 7s., and they were reduced 1s. a day; the men in the Northern division got 7s. 6d., and they were reduced 1s. a day. I believe that under the new regulations men over five years in the service are now entitled to an allowance of 3d. per day, and men over ten years in the service 6d. per day; and I will show how this operates. In the case of the South it means the restoration of 50 per cent. of the reduction to men over five years in the service, and the restoration of the whole amount of the reduction to the men over ten years in the service. In the case of the Central and Northern districts, it means a restoration of 25 to 50 per cent., so that the men in those divisions are unfairly treated as compared with the men in the Southern division. In dealing with this matter, consideration should be given to three important factors. In the first instance, we should consider the cost of living; in the second place, the climate; and in the third place, the paying capabilities of the lines. In the Central division the cost of living is 25 per cent. greater than in the South, and in the Northern division the difference is greater still. There is no doubt that the climate is somewhat more severe in the Central than in the Southern division, and that it is more severe in the Northern than in the Central division. With regard to the cost of living, it must be borne in mind that the railways in the Southern division run to a considerable extent through agricultural districts, and the employees are enabled to supply themselves at first hand from the producer with vegetables and other necessities of life, while the men in the Central and Northern divisions are compelled to buy them in Rockhampton and other towns at retail

prices. It must be evident that the conditions of life in the three divisions vary to a considerable extent, and that the men in the Central and Northern divisions are placed at a great disadvantage compared with those in the Southern division. One argument of the Secretary for Railways was that the railways do not pay. He was taking the whole of the railways of the colony; but I do not think that is a fair way to deal with the matter. We must bear in mind that there are three divisions and three separate railway systems; and that years ago successive Administrations brought forward proposals for financial separation in order to prevent territorial separation. If we have the management of our own affairs—as we ought to have had long ago—it is only fair to assume, from the fact that our railway system is a paying one, that we could pay our railway employees a fair rate of wages; and that would be more than they are receiving at present. As a Central member I am prepared to consider this question as affecting three railway systems, and not one, because if the proposals for the financial division of the colony—

The SPEAKER: The hon. member is now wandering outside the lines of the motion. I ask him to confine himself to it, and not to wander away into the question of financial separation.

Mr. CURTIS: I have no desire to go outside the motion, but I was only illustrating my argument. Those proposals were admissions that the people of the Central and Northern divisions should have the expenditure of their own revenues, and if that had eventuated they would be in a position in the Central division to pay their railway employees a fair wage.

The SPEAKER: I remind the hon. member that he is going entirely away from the question; his remarks are not at all relevant to it. I must ask him not to bring in any side issues but to confine himself to the question.

Mr. CURTIS: I bow to your ruling. I believe a special case has been made out for the employees on the Central and Northern railway systems. I do not say that the men employed on the Southern system are not entitled to an increase, but they are not under the same disabilities, and many of them are paid the wages they received under the old regulations. I say that the conditions applying to the three systems separately should be taken into account, and the Central system is paying 5 per cent. which is more than either of the other systems. I shall have much pleasure in supporting the motion.

Mr. FITZGERALD: The hon. member for Leichhardt put the case fairly from my point of view, and the hon. member who has just sat down has also treated the question in the light in which I desire that it should be presented to the House; but in connection with the regulations there is another point I should like to mention. I refer to the alteration made in the regulation dealing with the free carriage of rations for railway employees. Under the former regulation the employees had their rations carried free from the coastal town, those on the Central line getting the free carriage of rations from Rockhampton. By the new regulations the employees now receive only the free carriage of rations from the nearest township. This means that they have to pay local rates, which include the cost of carriage from Rockhampton to the township from which the rations are obtained.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: They are allowed 6d. a day extra.

Mr. FITZGERALD: They are allowed 6d. a day more on portions of the line, but the hon. gentleman forgets that that allowance was given when the employees had their rations carried free from Rockhampton. The very necessities

of life are dearer to them now than they were under the old regulation, and the result is that the Government is in pocket under the new regulation, as they get the cost of carriage on the rations to the township from which they are obtained by the employees. The employees have lost something by the new regulation covering the carriage of rations, and they should get something in lieu of what they have lost. I desire to call attention to that as an additional reason for supporting the motion.

The HON. J. R. DICKSON: This question presents itself to me in a dual aspect. I am quite desirous of removing any legitimate grievances submitted by any class of employees in the Government service; but I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that we have recently constituted a Railway Department under a Commissioner, that the railway administration might be removed from political influence. We ought to respect that wise and salutary provision of Parliament; and by a too sympathetic recognition of the claims of the employees of the Railway Department we may be breaking down that wise barrier against political influence in the administration of the department. I should be sorry to think that that barrier should wholly cause us to ignore the reasonable claims of the railway employees; at the same time I deprecate very much the parading of the railway employees or any other class of public servants as martyrs suffering great injustice, that our sentiments may be asked to overrule our duty to the State in connection with the work those public servants are called upon to perform. I should be pleased if the Minister would inform the House that he intended to represent to the Commissioner the very strong feeling which exists in connection with this matter, and see how the reduction in wages could be ultimately removed and the men placed in a better position than they are at present. I understand that £12,000 has been placed on the Estimates this year for that purpose; I am very glad that that is so, because, if the circumstances of the colony and the returns from the railways justified it, I should be glad to see the wages of those men restored to the full amount they obtained prior to 1893. I am not a believer in low wages. I recognise the fact that high wages increase the circulation of money, and not only benefit the recipient but also the community in which the recipient is employed. But, while I should like to see the rate of wages to these men restored, I should be very reluctant indeed to pass a vote of censure upon the Commissioner, or to say that Parliament is desirous of interfering with the prudence of his administration. I may perhaps be considered to be amenable to political influence in this matter, from the fact that several of my constituents are connected with the railways, but I take a wider view of the question, and am quite prepared to incur their indignation and censure in consideration of my higher and paramount duty to the State. If the returns from the railways had improved and were covering expenditure, then I should feel justified in supporting this motion.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: They were £7,000 to the bad last year.

The HON. J. R. DICKSON: But to make this bald affirmation that the rate of wages existing previous to 1893 should be restored is a proposition I hardly feel inclined to support without fuller information and a fuller investigation of the circumstances. I would rather support a recommendation that the Minister should confer with the Commissioner and request him to endeavour to effect what is desired by this motion as early as practicable. The Commissioner is a better judge of this matter than hon. members of this House can possibly be, and for

the sake of temporary popularity outside I am not going to give my vote for interfering, in a political sense, with the administration of the Commissioner. I would therefore suggest to the hon. member that he add a few words to the motion, to the effect that the Minister be requested to confer with the Commissioner for Railways with a view to endeavour to give effect to his proposal as early as practicable.

Mr. GRIMES : I should be very glad to assist in getting the railway employees the same rate of wages as they received in days gone by, if the railways as a commercial concern would run it ; but we have to take that into consideration. The hon. member for Rockhampton wanted to separate the railways into different divisions, and say that they should pay one rate of wages in the Central district because the Central Railway paid pretty well, and another rate in another portion of the colony. But I do not see how that would work, because, though the Central Railway may pay well this year, it does not follow that it will pay next year, and a railway that is not paying so well this year may pay very well next year, so that we should be continually altering the wages of the men. There is a great deal of force in the remarks of the hon. member for Bulimba. We have placed the railways in the hands of a Commissioner, and we expect him to run them on commercial lines and make them pay, or at any rate to run them in such a way that they will not be a loss to the colony. By passing this motion we should be unduly interfering with him in the conduct of his business, and not only that, but we should also be passing a vote of censure on him for his action in reducing the wages of the railway men. I should like hon. members to remember that while one portion of the community are urging that the wages of the railway men should be increased, another portion, who have equal claims to consideration, are urging a reduction in railway fares and freights, which would cut the receipts down considerably. Speaking for the farmers—and there are many farmers' friends on the other side—I should be very glad to see the railway freights cut down as low as possible, so as to give the farmers a chance of making a living from their labour. There are a large number of farmers whose returns, after they have raised their produce and paid railway and other charges, do not give them as much as is being earned at the present time by railway lengthsmen. I can appeal to the hon. member for Rosewood in this matter. He told us the other day of the deplorable state of the farmers ; no doubt that the heavy railway freights have helped to bring them into that condition, and it would be very unfair for us to put the Commissioner in such a position that he must pay increased wages and, at the same time, reduce the freights. We should leave the matter in his hands to do what is fair between the two parties, and I am not going to advocate the claims of the railway men as against those of another class in the community. They are no worse off than the small farmers, and for that reason this resolution is too strong. If the manager of any company were placed in a position of that kind, he would vacate his office, because he would be unduly interfered with. With reference to the old rate of wages, are other things restored to the old rate ? Is anyone getting the same income as before 1893 ?

An HONOURABLE MEMBER : You are getting more.

Mr. GRIMES : I am getting £150 more as a member of Parliament, but my income is considerably less.

Mr. DANIELS : Has the price of arrowroot gone down ?

Mr. GRIMES : The price of all produce has gone down, and if the hon. member is a friend of the farmers, and is in touch with them, he will know that their incomes have been reduced by half since 1893 ; and to ask us to increase the rate of wages of the railway men to their full rate is too much. When the receipts from the railways will permit it I shall be pleased to vote for a motion of this kind, but the Secretary for Railways has told us that there is a deficiency, and somebody has to make it up, and if we increase the expenses the taxpayer will have to bear the increased burden.

The HOME SECRETARY : An additional £12,000 a year is being paid this year.

Mr. GRIMES : That is a considerable instalment, and surely the hon. member for Leichhardt should be satisfied with that for one year, and hope that a similar addition will be made next year. I hope the hon. member will not press the matter further.

Mr. McDONNELL : I am very pleased with the way in which this motion has been received by hon. members on both sides, and the remarks I shall make will not prolong the debate as I am anxious that a vote on the subject should be taken. I was surprised to hear the remarks of the hon. member for Oxley, because I think he pledged himself at the general election to vote for a motion to this effect.

Mr. GRIMES : I have never given a pledge in my political career.

Mr. McDONNELL : It might not have been a pledge but a promise. The hon. member certainly promised at Indooroopilly that if this motion were brought forward he would vote for it. There are two points I wish to refer to. In the first place my colleague said this was the first time he had heard that the wages of the railway employees were unsatisfactory to them ; but I would point out that during the elections all the candidates for the Valley were asked this question. I do not know whether my colleague was, but I was, and I promised to support such a motion. It did not matter to me whether they were railway employees in that electorate or not, because I look beyond the Valley. I am here to do the best I can for the people of the colony generally, and that is why I rise to support this motion. The Secretary for Railways, in reply to the hon. member for Leichhardt, gave a comparative return of the wages paid in the different colonies, but he omitted to tell us that there was a difference in the hours worked. Our men work one or two days in the week longer than the men in the other colonies, and that makes a material difference in the rate of wages. Another important point is that our railway revenue is increasing every quarter, which should induce Ministers to favourably consider this motion. Of course, we have been told that the railways do not pay, but if we were allowed to enter into the question of why they do not pay, we might bring forward some very forcible illustrations. During the last few weeks several signal-cabins which cost some £30,000 a few years ago have been closed. I contend that if those cabins were not required at that time it was simply a waste of money which might have been devoted to increasing the wages of the men.

The HOME SECRETARY : Can you show us that the wages are not fair ; that is the question ?

Mr. McDONNELL : I think the hon. member for Leichhardt has given the most forcible proof that the wages are not fair. And it is not fair to compare the wages paid by the Government with those paid outside, because it should be the object of the Government to try to pay high wages in order to set a good example to other employers. Men employed by municipal

councils receive higher wages for the work they do than the ordinary lengthsmen on the railways receive.

Mr. ANNEAR: No fear; not at all.

Mr. McDONNELL: I think what I say will be borne out by my hon. colleague in connection with the municipal council; I do not think they would employ men at the same rate of wages as are paid to the railway employees. Take, for instance, the wharf labourers. I do not think the Minister for Railways would offer them the same rate of wages that are paid to the lengthsmen, who have to work all day in the broiling sun.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The wharf labourers have to work, and it is not permanent work.

Mr. McDONNELL: I am quite aware of that, but I contend that no class works harder than the railway men. They have to handle steel rails which give out a great amount of heat, and as the hon. member for Leichhardt has explained they are relegated to the back blocks of the colony and have not the same advantages as men working under other conditions. Of course, we cannot introduce the question of hours, and I could have wished that the hon. member for Leichhardt had so framed his motion as to permit of that being done. If he had done so, very forcible arguments could have been brought forward. I was rather astonished at the speech of the hon. member for Bulimba, who partly took exception to the motion; but he supported a similar motion last night in connection with the teachers. The hon. member for Leichhardt has brought forward this motion to gain an expression of opinion from the House, and certainly the hon. member for Bulimba has taken up a rather peculiar position with reference to it. From one end of Queensland to the other this question has been placed before parliamentary candidates, and I am certain a majority of members of this House have seen the justice of the claims of the railway men, and have promised that they would vote for a motion of this sort.

Mr. STEWART: I am sorry that I cannot agree with those members who have said that we are interfering with the business of the Railway Commissioner in taking this matter up. I have no desire to interfere unduly with the Commissioner, but Parliament has the interests of every member of the community in its hand. If we find that any section of the community is being hardly and unfairly dealt with, it is our duty to interfere on behalf of that section. With regard to the argument raised by the hon. member for Oxley, I would ask him whether he would feel justified, if he thought the railway rates were too high, in bringing the matter before this Chamber, and agitating for a reduction? I am not quite sure that he has not done so on a former occasion. It is our business to protect those who use the railways against unduly high rates, and it is our business to protect the employees on the railways if we think the regulations issued by the Commissioner operate to their disadvantage. All that we claim is that the railway service shall have the same justice meted out to it that other Civil servants have. In 1893 all the employees of the Government had to submit to a reduction, and to their credit, I will say, that every man submitted without cavil. They recognised the difficult position in which the colony was placed and they loyally bowed to the inevitable, on the distinct promise that when "the corner was turned," to use a familiar phrase, the old rate of pay would be restored. Now, what has happened in other branches of the service? In the Post

Office the men reduced have not only got back their reductions, but a large number of them have received £10 and £20 increases.

The HOME SECRETARY: Not in the Post Office.

Mr. STEWART: I know what I am talking about, and if any hon. member doubts what I say let him turn to the Estimates, which bear me out. The only exception that has been made is in the case of the railway employees. That is what I object to. The Secretary for Railways will say at once that the railways are not paying. Is any other branch of the Civil Service paying so far as we can discover? Is the Post Office paying? That is the first ground of complaint that the railway servants are singled out for special treatment. The second ground of complaint is that distinctions are made within the railway service itself. The junior member for Rockhampton went very minutely into that question, and after what he has said, I do not think it is necessary for me to dwell upon it. He has shown very clearly that the Southern railway servants are placed in a much superior position to the railway servants on the Central and Northern lines. I ask hon. members why that should be? Just contrast the position of a railway servant on the Darling Downs, near Toowoomba, with the position of a railway servant out at Bogantungan, on the Central line. One man, comparatively speaking, is in heaven, while the other is in the other place. That is a very fair comparison.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: That part of the Central Railway has the finest climate under the sun.

Mr. STEWART: I am not referring to climate, but to the hard conditions of life. Just look at the men on the Southern and Western line! Almost everything they want is grown at their very door, while every article those people on the Central line want has to be imported and conveyed to them from Rockhampton. The men on the Darling Downs can get potatoes, vegetables, almost everything they need. The men on the Central line have to eat rotten potatoes very often, and rotten beef, and weevily flour. In fact, they are placed at an enormous disadvantage in every way. The cost of living is very much greater on the Central and Northern lines than it is on the Southern and Western line. I hold that for that reason, if for no other, leaving the question of climate out of the matter altogether, the men on the Central and Northern lines should be paid a comparatively higher rate of wages than the men on the Southern and Western line. There has been another very unsatisfactory regulation introduced in connection with the wages of the railway employees, and that is the difference that is made on account of length of service. If a man has been in the service under five years he gets no increase; between five and ten years he gets 3d. a day increase; over ten years he gets 6d. a day increase. I ask why this distinction should be made? One man is doing just the same work as his neighbour. It is not a question of skill. The Home Secretary said a man who had been in the service ten years was presumably a more skilful man than one who had been in the service a shorter period. That does not hold good at all. No man is admitted permanently into the railway service as a lengthsmen until he has proved his capacity to do the work. He has to serve a certain period as a probationer. When he has shown his skill he is put on as a permanent hand. Three or four men are detailed to do the work of a particular length, and no matter what a man is paid, whether it be 6s. or 6s. 3d. or 6s. 6d., he is expected to keep up his length, and if he does not there is trouble. The man who gets 6s. a day has to do just as much work as the man who gets 6s. 6d.

I ask whether such a condition of things is not likely to create dissatisfaction within the service? In any other rank of life it would be sure to do, and I am certain it will have that effect in the railway service.

The HOME SECRETARY: Then seniority goes for nothing?

Mr. STEWART: One man has to do as much work as another; he is as responsible as his neighbour; and if seniority, in the hon. gentleman's opinion, ought to count for something, in my idea it should not.

The HOME SECRETARY: I keep you to that on the Public Service Bill, to-night.

Mr. STEWART: There is a difference between Civil servants and railway lengthsmen. In the higher grades of the public service experience does count for something, and one position is more responsible than another; but with railway employees who have to do mechanical work, and where one man has to do as much work as another, to introduce differential payment is a direct injustice. The Home Secretary, when discussing this question, said a very fair way of coming to a conclusion would be to take the wages paid for similar work by the outside public. I will give the hon. gentleman a few quotations from the Central division. For pick and shovel men the Rockhampton Council pay 7s. per day; the North Rockhampton Council pay 7s. per day; the Mount Morgan Council pay 7s. 6d. per day; the Mount Morgan Gold-Mining Company pay 7s. 6d. per day for navvies; and the Gogango Divisional Board pay 5s. per day and food. Comparing these rates with the rates paid by the Government, we find that in every case, with the exception of the Gogango Divisional Board, they are higher than those paid by the State. So that the hon. gentleman's argument, as far as that is concerned, falls to the ground; and I have no doubt that the further West we go we shall find that divisional boards and other public bodies pay comparatively higher wages. Then, again, the farmers' position has been compared with that of the lengthsmen, and we are told that farmers have earned much less than lengthsmen. I admit that in many cases farmers do earn less than lengthsmen, but the position of a farmer and the position of a lengthsman are as different as day is from night. When a man goes on a selection he proceeds to build up for himself a home which will be a home to his dying day.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: So do the lengthsmen.

Mr. STEWART: No such thing. The lengthsman does nothing of the kind. The very moment a lengthsman is not able to wield his shovel and peter he has to go, and the longer he works on the railway the less able he is to use his shovel and peter; whereas if a man is fairly fortunate as a selector, in his old age he can live under his own vine and fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid.

Mr. McMASTER: We have been told of lengthsmen with 300 head of cattle.

Mr. STEWART: I am talking of lengthsmen in general, not of particular lengthsmen. The farmer makes a permanent home for himself; the lengthsman is simply a casual public servant. I will not detain the House longer. I think the various speakers have given very good reasons why this resolution should be agreed to.

Mr. ANNEAR: I regret I was not present when the hon. member for Leichhardt moved this motion; and I may say I have not had time to read the hon. member's speech, which I have no doubt was a very interesting one from his point of view. With one part of the resolution I entirely agree; that is, that the new railway regulations dealing with the wages of employees

are extremely unsatisfactory. I approach this question in a business kind of manner, and not in any way as a political matter. I do not wish to appear before my constituents, or the people of the colony, as if acting as a vote-catching machine, and using expressions in the House which I would not use outside. I was in the Central districts some twenty-six or twenty-seven years before the hon. member for Rockhampton North came to the colony. When that hon. member has been as long in this House as I have been, he will find, if he wishes to make his arguments effective, that he must be sometimes consistent. I would draw attention to a speech delivered by the hon. member a few days ago during the discussion on the Estimates of the Lands Department.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member cannot refer to any speech made during the present session.

Mr. ANNEAR: I would ask your ruling, Sir. The hon. member, when speaking, classed the climate of the Southern districts with that of the Central districts.

The SPEAKER: I have already said that the hon. member cannot comment upon any speech made during the present session.

Mr. ANNEAR: I am going to comment upon the speech made by the hon. member this afternoon. The hon. member referred to the wages paid to railway men in the Southern portion of the colony, and also to those paid in the Central districts. From his remarks he made it appear that it was almost impossible for men to work in the Central districts, and I was going to refer to the fact that the hon. member was very much disappointed that a sum of money had not been placed on the Estimates for the establishment of an agricultural college in the Central district.

The SPEAKER: Order! If the hon. member is now referring to a speech made by the hon. member for Rockhampton North during a previous debate of this session, he is out of order.

Mr. ANNEAR: It is very evident I am very often out of order. I am very sorry, but I am only following the line of argument of the hon. member. I have been in this House now for something like thirteen years, and I have always tried to be in order, and I may say that I have never been so pulled up as I have been this session.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member is perfectly in order in referring to anything which has been said during this debate; but he must not comment upon any speech made in any other debate during the present session.

Mr. ANNEAR: I shall accept your ruling, Sir. Referring to the remarks of the hon. member for Rockhampton North this afternoon, I can say that from my experience of the Central districts—and I may say that I have only once had the pleasure of going as far as Longreach, in the district of the hon. member for Mitchell, though I have travelled a little bit in different parts of the world—I think the best land and the best territory I have ever seen exists in the Central districts. In fact, there is not only room for a district there, but room for a kingdom. Before sitting down I shall show that I am not attempting to lower the wages paid to the men working on our railways. I believe there should be some equity in the apportionment of the wages paid to all employees in the Railway Department. The hon. member for Rockhampton North referred to the wages paid by the local authorities in Rockhampton, but he must know that the men employed by the local authorities are not constantly employed like the men in the Railway Department. When wet days comes and men are not able to continue their work, they are not

paid by the local authorities, but there is no deduction from the wages of railway men for wet days.

Mr. KERR: They have to be on duty.

Mr. ANNEAR: If it was raining so hard that the men could not stay outside, I do not think their wages would be deducted.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: No.

Mr. ANNEAR: The hon. member for Leichhardt on one occasion referred to the necessity for the erection of some shelter-sheds along the railway lines, and I see that the humane suggestion of the hon. member has been carried out throughout the length and breadth of the colony. I would now like to say a few words with reference to the remarks made this afternoon by the junior member for Fortitude Valley. I am sure hon. members will acquit me of being guilty of any egotism when I say that I know as much about men working outside in this colony as that hon. member, though I have no doubt he is an authority on the subject of employees in drapers' shops. The hon. member made the same statement as the hon. member for Rockhampton North: That men employed by the municipal councils are better paid than the men in the railway service. I do not think they are. The hon. member also referred us to the other colonies. I spoke about the other colonies the other day. In New South Wales railway men employed around Sydney and Newcastle receive 6s. per day, while those employed in the country districts receive 5s. per day. Those figures should show that the wages of our railway employees compare more than favourably with those paid in New South Wales. As representatives of the people we have another great question to consider. I shall quote the losses sustained on our railways for the last five years. My figures are undeniable, as they are taken from the statistics of the colony, and they are somewhat alarming.

Mr. KERR: Don't shock our nerves.

Mr. ANNEAR: I have no desire to shock the hon. member's nerves. I am sure his nerves, and the nerves of every member of this House, are just like mine this afternoon—like the Rock of Gibraltar—immovable. The people of the colony will see that the members of this House can work all day and all night, and then come up smiling the next afternoon. The loss on our railways in 1892 was £255,005; in 1893 it was £290,254; in 1894 it was £321,895.

Mr. FINNEY: Does that include interest?

Mr. ANNEAR: When we have spent £18,000,000 on the construction of railways, this would only be a fleabite towards the payment of interest. In 1895 the loss was £239,942; and in 1896 it was £252,779. In five years there has been a loss, after paying interest and working expenses, of £1,359,875. When hon. members see that, it will cause them to pause. I find that the loss I have given is a great deal less than the actual loss; but I did not wish to exaggerate. Coming to the motion before the House, I believe that on the Estimates there is £12,000 to restore the reductions made in wages in 1893; and hon. members should ask how this amount is to be apportioned. If my information is correct—and I think it is—I believe the engineers, surveyors, and inspectors have had a good deal of the reductions on their salaries restored to them, and this £12,000 is intended chiefly to restore their former salaries; while the men earning 6s. and 7s. a day have very little restoration made to them. If such is the case, I do not think it is fair. The money should be fairly apportioned. If a man receiving £300 a year was reduced 10 per cent. and a man receiving £150 a year was also reduced 10 per cent., and the time came round for their reductions to be restored, the man with

the lower salary should receive the same rate of restoration as the man with the higher salary. I believe that all members were questioned during the last general election as regards the restoration of wages. This was the reply of my colleague; it was my reply; and it shall be my reply this afternoon: If it can be shown to me that men employed in the railway service are receiving less than men employed by private firms doing similar work outside it is my duty to try to redress that grievance at once. But I do not see why men employed by the Government should receive more wages than men employed by private firms to do similar work.

Mr. DANIELS: Why did you give £3,000 for a railway commissioner?

Mr. ANNEAR: Because he had the ability to manage our railways and was worth that amount. He was such a capable man that the Government of Victoria offered him £500 a year more. Why do we pay judges large salaries? Because of their education and their ability to do the work for which they were appointed, and I must say that I cannot see the justice of this new classification, which I will read—

"The rate of wages payable to the following mechanics—namely, fitters, turners, blacksmiths, boiler-makers, coppersmiths, moulders, brass-finishers, machinists, body-builders, pattern-makers, coach-makers, and carriage-trimmers, provided that they have served an apprenticeship or have proved themselves to be competent workmen, and that their general conduct has been satisfactory, shall be as follows:—"

Suppose a carpenter is required by the Railway Department. They must have a man who has served his apprenticeship; he must be a competent workman; he must have a set of tools which costs from £30 to £35; and they offer him 7s. a day in the South and 7s. 6d. a day in the North for the first year; 8s. in the South and 8s. 6d. in the North for the second year; 8s. 6d. in the South and 9s. in the North for the third year; 9s. in the South and 9s. 6d. in the North for the fourth year. After having been employed three years at 9s. a day on Southern railways or 9s. 6d. a day on Northern railways, he will receive 9s. 6d. in the South or 10s. in the North. If 100 competent miners are wanted by one of the mines on Charters Towers—I will appeal to the members representing that goldfield—the day they go to work they receive the current rate of 10s. a day. Under this classification a mechanic must be a competent workman, with a good record; he must be "the strict Q.T." in everything, and he has got to start work at 7s. a day!

"Carpenters and tinsmiths will be paid as above up to 8s. 6d. on the Southern railways and 9s. 6d. on the Northern railways, which rates will be the maximum." Here is where the carpenters and tinsmiths are knocked out of it again—

"Leading hands, other than carpenters and tinsmiths, will be paid the following rates:—The first year, 10s. in the South, and 10s. 6d. in the North; the second year, 10s. 6d. and 11s.; the third year, 11s. and 11s. 6d.; and the fourth and subsequent years, the maximum rate of 11s. 6d. in the South and 12s. in the North. A special class including painters, brush hands, shop enginemen, examiners, furnacemen, bolt-makers, and belt makers will be paid at such rates as the work upon which they are engaged warrants, but shall not in any case exceed 8s. per day on the Southern railway, and 8s. 6d. per day on the Northern railway."

I cannot see the justice of this new classification. If I am erecting a building I require competent workmen, and they are paid the current wages from the time they start work. I do not say to them: "You must work for me for three months for less than the current wages until I see what you can do."

Mr. DANIELS: You are faulting the railway management.

Mr. ANNEAR: Neither the Railway Department, the Commissioner, nor the Minister claims

to be infallible. Like other people they are liable to make mistakes, and I have seen hundreds of instances when these things have been called attention to by hon. members and the mistakes made have been rectified. The junior member for Fortitude Valley said the rates paid in Queensland did not compare favourably with the rates paid in New South Wales. I have shown that in New South Wales there is a differential rate, and there should be such a differential rate in Queensland. The men working in and around the towns of the colony are at greater expense than those working fifty and 100 miles away from the towns. On that account the Government of New South Wales pay the men working in and around Sydney and Newcastle 6s. per day, and those working in the country 5s. a day. A few weeks ago I had occasion to go into the electorate of the hon. member for Port Curtis, and while visiting a friend there I saw a beautiful cow in the yard, for which I was informed my friend had given £5 to a lengthsmen. The lengthsmen away from the town have the public domain to run their stock on, and they pay no rent and no rates and taxes. One hon. member mentioned in this House that a lengthsmen on the Northern line between Townsville and Hughenden had as many as 300 head of cattle, and the hon. member for Cambooya knows that the lengthsmen in his electorate compete with the farmers. On the whole I want to do what is fair, and I know I am repeating myself when I ask the Minister and the Commissioner to see that the £12,000 put down for restoration of wages reduced in 1893 is fairly distributed amongst all the men employed in the department. If that is done I do not think there will be much cause for complaint. I have the honour to represent an electorate in which a large number of railway men reside. Owing to the floods and the washing away of bridges there is no town in the colony where the railway employees have been put to a more severe test than those in the town of Maryborough, where they had to ferry goods and passengers across the Mary River. I have had to cross there several times myself, and I can bear testimony to the loyalty with which the men performed their duties, notwithstanding that their wages had been reduced. I regret that I had not the pleasure of listening to the speech of the hon. member for Leichhardt when he introduced this motion, or to the reply of the Minister, because if I had I should have been able to entertain the House a little longer than I have done. I trust that the hon. member for Leichhardt will take into serious consideration the speech delivered by the hon. member for Bulimba, for I am sure that if he accepts the suggestion made by that hon. member we shall arrive at a satisfactory conclusion on this question more quickly than by the mode he proposes. I have gone pretty fully into the question of the new regulations dealing with the wages of railway employees, and I say that they are very unsatisfactory indeed. I would particularly draw the attention of the Minister to the regulation which states that boys of sixteen years entering as apprentices in the Railway Department shall commence at 1s. per day in the South, and 1s. 3d. per day in the North. Why, when I was sixteen years of age I was earning a man's wages! But here they are to get only 1s. and 1s. 3d. per day. At seventeen years of age they get 1s. 6d. per day in the South, and 2s. per day in the North.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: They have just come from a college, a grammar school, or a university.

MR. ANNEAR: That makes my argument all the stronger. The parents of these lads have been spending money in sending them to a

grammar school or to college, and then the lads are to start in life with 1s. per day. There is more sense in the regulation when you come to employees of twenty-one years of age, as they get 6s. a day in the South and 7s. a day in the North. We have now between 2,000 and 3,000 miles of railway open in the colony, and I hope that we shall live to see the day when there will be 10,000 miles open for traffic. We have all the elements required for the working of such railways in the colony. We have young men of stamina and ability to fill all the positions mentioned in these regulations, and the young men starting at these different avocations should begin with fair remuneration. I trust that what has been the rule in Ipswich in times past will not be the rule in future, because, as hon. members know, there was a time when Ipswich and Ipswich influence ruled the destinies of the colony. We have now a Minister representing, not a Southern constituency, but the city of Townsville, which I call the cathedral city of the North, and he will see that equity and justice are meted out to all classes of the community in different parts of the colony. I regret that I should have taken up so much of the time of the House, and in conclusion I may say that I think the motion of the hon. member for Leichhardt was moved in all sincerity. I am sure he desired to benefit the class to which both he and myself belong. Although we are not working men in name, we are in reality. I have seen the hon. member working very hard in this city, and I do not think there are two men in the colony who have worked harder than he and I have. Such being the case, we can sympathise with our co-workers. The hon. member for Cambooya does not seem to be pleased with the old Commissioner, but I regret that he ever left Queensland. However, I believe in the new Commissioner, Mr. Gray, and believe he will perform his duties faithfully and with credit to the office he holds.

MR. DUNSFORD: The speech of the hon. member for Maryborough has certainly been entertaining, but, taking it all in all, it was unsatisfactory. The first part was an attempt to show that the railway employees are in as good a position as men employed outside, and in the latter part he showed that they had great cause for complaint. To show that the hon. member was wrong when he said the wages paid to the railway men compared favourably with those paid by private individuals, I will quote a passage from the *Northern Miner*. We are attempting to pass a motion that will affirm the desirability of restoring the wages of railway employees; and I may point out that even during the last month a reduction has taken place which caused a small strike at Charters Towers. The *Northern Miner* of the 9th November, which is not a Labour newspaper, said—

"Some inconvenience was experienced during the end of last week by a strike of the casual labourers who were unloading the trucks, etc., on the railway station. It appears that the Government cut the wages of the men down from 7s. to 6s. 6d. per day, the latter, about half a dozen, refused to accept the reduction, and the stationmaster, Mr. Dillon, had to employ some guards, who happened to be off duty, to keep things going, until he found substitutes for the strikers."

Fancy 6s. 6d. per day in a place where bread is 1s. a loaf! This is not an isolated case, because the lengthsmen are only receiving 7s. per day. The Home Secretary asks if these men are receiving a fair wage, but I would ask him and the Secretary for Railways to put themselves in the places of these men in Charters Towers, or places where the cost of living is still greater. I may point out that labourers employed by the municipal council and the divisional boards receive 10s. per day for eight hours work, while

these casual labourers, who are only employed now and again, are paid only 6s. 6d. This paper also says—

"As it is there have been several complaints about goods not coming to hand. If the Government followed the rule of private people, and gave the men 8s. 4d. a day, they would secure a better class of men, get the work done as cheaply, and there would be fewer damaged goods."

Was the Commissioner right in employing men at these starvation wages? I ask the Home Secretary to consider the matter. Will he say that this is a fair wage? Let him answer me by interjection. You are not game enough to reply, but you are not backward in interjecting when it suits.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member must address the Chair.

Mr. DUNSFORD: I wished to draw the Home Secretary, but he is not to be drawn. The *Northern Miner* advocates a higher rate of wages in the North, and a petition is now on its way here signed by 200 railway men who are dissatisfied with their positions. The Commissioner has also made a regulation to the effect that the maintenance men are to buy their own shovels; I am sure the Minister is not in favour of that. Although he is not responsible for it, these things should be brought under his notice and made public, because even the Commissioner may be influenced by the voices of hon. members and by public opinion into doing something like justice to these men. I was astounded to hear the hon. member for Maryborough say there had been a loss upon our railways during the last few years of something like £1,359,000 outside of interest. It is only because we are paying an abnormally high rate of interest on the capital expended that the railways are not paying, and if we continue to pay 4 per cent., why should these unfortunate men be penalised for it. If we can afford to offer the bank money at $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., we should be able to procure the necessary capital for our railways at something like the same rate. Some of our railways are returning from 8 to 10 per cent. The whole of the Northern line, with the Ravenswood line thrown in, pays £8 6s. per cent., so that they are paying handsomely. That should be taken into consideration, and, as far as the North is concerned, the men should be restored to their former rate of wages. I have other matters to speak about, but time will not permit; but I hope the House will express such a unanimous opinion that the department will not continue to pay the miserable wages which the men are now receiving.

Mr. JACKSON: I understand that a considerable number of members on the other side object to the wording of this motion, but are in sympathy with its object, and would like to vote for the amendment which I am going to move. The amendment reads—

"That the Minister for Railways be requested to confer with the Railway Commissioner with the object of reviewing the present railway regulations which are alleged to work unsatisfactorily, and of endeavouring to increase the wages of the railway employees to the amount paid before the retrenchment of 1893."

I am not going to take up much time in speaking to the amendment, as the question has been thoroughly debated. I am thoroughly in sympathy with the object of the original motion, but seeing that this amendment is more satisfactory to the other side of the House I hope it will be passed without any further debate. We want to get a division upon this amendment, and I hope it will be carried. There is a feeling of dissatisfaction throughout the railway service with regard to these regulations, and I think for the sake of the small amount that would be involved it would be well for the Government to make a change in the direction we have asked. It will certainly give satisfaction to a large

number of hard-working employees of the Government. I move that all the words after "that" be omitted with the view of inserting the words I have read.

Mr. HARDACRE: I have been interviewing a large number of members on both sides of the House with regard to this amendment; I have also consulted those who were in favour of the original motion and also the Secretary for Railways, who has said that he will accept the amendment. I feel that if the amendment is unanimously carried it will have more practical effect than my original motion, even if it were carried. I have therefore decided to accept the amendment, my only endeavour being to try and get the wages of these men restored. This amendment, although couched in different language to my motion, practically means the same thing, and coming with the full approval of the House it will perhaps have more effect.

Mr. ARMSTRONG: The hon. member might at least have been generous enough to mention the original framer of the amendment. I had an amendment in my hands a few minutes ago which the hon. member for Leichhardt would not accept. The hon. member for Bulimba then drafted another amendment, which he showed to the Secretary for Railways, and, hearing that I intended to move an amendment, handed it to me. I immediately took it to the hon. member for Leichhardt, and asked him if he would accept it. Now he says that he has interviewed every member on this side, and that we have promised to accept it. I say no one has approached them on the subject—certainly not the hon. member for Leichhardt, and certainly not myself. The only person on this side who was asked whether he would accept it was the Secretary for Railways, who said he would accept it if moved, and it was supposed it would be moved by me.

Mr. HARDACRE: That is untrue.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. HARDACRE: Incorrect.

Mr. ARMSTRONG: There is no incorrectness about it. The proposed amendment is due entirely to the hon. member for Bulimba, and it is only right that it should be accredited to him. I think the amendment is one which will meet the case. I have always been of opinion that the railway employees occupy a difficult, onerous, and responsible position, and that they are deserving of the most considerate treatment. They should be paid and paid well for their work, and they should be paid in full; that is, the system of giving concessions in lieu of wages should be stopped. Not only do the men themselves object to concessions in lieu of wages, but the people settled along the lines and who depend upon the lengthsmen for making a living out of their own business naturally complain. I never could see why a lengthsmen, or his family, or anyone connected with him, should be allowed to travel over the line at a quarter the cost charged to anyone else. I do not hold with the contention of many hon. members that the lengthsmen have been underpaid during the past two or three years. No doubt retrenchment fell heavily on some of them; but reduction of wages and incomes had fallen even more heavily on men who had not the certainty of a Government cheque at the end of the month. That is the position of the farmers and the large producers, whether of sheep or cattle, who are contributing to keep the railways in order and to make them pay. At the same time, as the railways are now returning a better revenue, and as the colony is in a more prosperous condition, some portion of the money they were retrenched might be restored to them. But let them be paid the full amount of wages their work is worth, and let there be no

concessions in lieu of wages. As I had intended to move this amendment, naturally I shall have much pleasure in supporting it.

Mr. McMASTER: There is no member of the House who would like more than myself to see lengthmen or any other workmen better paid; but there is none who more detests this hankey-pankey business of trying to get or snatch vote. That is what all this really means. The hon. member for Leichhardt said he had consulted most members on this side, who had expressed themselves in favour of the amendment. I saw him talking to the hon. members for Bulimba, Lockyer, and Toowong, and the Secretary for Railways. That was all. We are all as anxious to see justice done to the lengthmen as the hon. member for Leichhardt, but we are not going to silently accept an amendment moved at ten minutes to 6 for the sake of getting a snatch vote. They are not going to get a snatch vote, and it is their own fault if the question is talked out. It is the hon. member for Leichhardt's own fault, and the lengthmen may well pray, "Save me from my friends," or would-be friends. If the amendment was going to be moved by the hon. member for Kennedy it should have been moved earlier.

Mr. JACKSON: It is the same thing as the motion.

Mr. McMASTER: It is very different from the motion, and if it had been moved at half past 5, when the hon. member for Maryborough sat down, we should have been in a position to have expressed an opinion whether it ought to be substituted for the original motion. But the hon. member, who thinks he knows all about parliamentary dodges, got the hon. member for Kennedy to move it at the last moment and take the House by surprise. I object to that style of doing business, and the hon. member knows well that we on this side are not going to sit quiet and let him catch a snatch vote in this manner.

At 7 o'clock, the House, in accordance with Sessional Order, proceeded with Government business.

SUPPLY.

REPORT FROM COMMITTEE.

Mr. ANNEAR, as Chairman of Committees, presented a report from the Committee, covering the resolutions passed in connection with the departments of Public Lands, Agriculture, and Public Instruction.

Resolutions agreed to.

RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE.

The TREASURER, in moving that the remainder of the Estimates-in-Chief be postponed until after the Supplementary Loan Estimates for 1896-97 had been disposed of, said that his reason for making the motion was because he believed that in so doing he was consulting the convenience of the Committee. It had been intimated on previous occasions that it would be necessary to pass a Loan Bill during the present session in order to cover the expenditure authorised by Parliament, and he wished to include some of the items in the Supplementary Loan Estimates in the loan proposals. If those items were passed he hoped to be in a position next week to table the loan proposals for the year. He thought they should have those loan proposals before them so that hon. members might have time to consider them; it was with that object in view that he wished to dispose of the Supplementary Loan Estimates this evening. Question put and passed.

SUPPLEMENTARY LOAN ESTIMATES, 1896-7—LOANS TO LOCAL BODIES.

The TREASURER moved that £35,900 be granted out of the loan fund account for loans

to local bodies. The first item was £14,000 for loans to harbour boards. Last session they passed an Act constituting a harbour board at Bundaberg, in which they gave the board power to borrow to a limited extent. The board approved of borrowing from the Government in preference to borrowing from the outside public, and had applied to the Government for a loan of £14,000 in order to provide a dredge of the best and latest type. They had ascertained the price for which the dredge could be supplied, and the Governor in Council had approved of the loan. He now asked for the appropriation of the money so that the board might carry on the work for which it had been constituted. The actions of the board had so far met not only with his approval, but with the approval of the public. The second item was £6,500 to the Brisbane Board of Waterworks. From the footnote it would be observed that £30,000 had been voted in 1892-3. The board had not yet exhausted that vote, and therefore the remainder of the vote had lapsed, and that was a revoting of £6,500 of it. The board informed him that they intended to substitute a line of pipes under the footpaths for the mains under the roadways, this being necessitated by the proposed substitution of wood paving for the present system of forming the roadway. The third item was £15,400 for the Cairns-Mulgrave tramway. This work was authorised last session. As hon. members would see, this was a loan to the local authority. The total cost of the tramway would be £25,400. £10,000 had already been voted; and this vote was to enable them to complete the construction of the tramway.

Mr. GLASSEY need scarcely say that he favoured the loan to the harbour board in the district he represented, at the same time he had never been very favourable to those harbour boards.

The TREASURER: You will not trust the people.

Mr. GLASSEY: He would trust the people. He had always believed that main roads, railways, and rivers ought to be under the control and supervision of the national Government; but there were purely local matters which the people might very properly undertake and control. He believed the men connected with the Bundaberg Harbour Board were some of the smartest men in Southern Queensland; but the Treasurer might have carried out his promise, or implied promise, that his intention was to put all the harbours in good order before handing them over to these local bodies. That was what he said the other day.

The TREASURER: No.

Mr. GLASSEY: The harbour of Bundaberg and some others were not in a very good condition, and it was unfair not to do anything for them considering the amount voted for repairing the harbour works at Townsville. He believed it would be found in *Hansard* that the Treasurer implied, if he did not state explicitly, that he was of opinion that these harbours should be put into fairly good working order at the expense of the State before the local boards undertook their control.

The TREASURER: You had better look it up.

Mr. GLASSEY: Coming to the Cairns-Mulgrave tramway, he thought this place got £10,000 before.

The TREASURER: I mentioned that.

Mr. GLASSEY: And this vote of £15,400 made the total nearly £26,000. This was one of the favoured places. He had no objection to these places getting a reasonable amount provided other districts were similarly treated; but he strongly protested against this favouritism, because certain influential persons were either in the Ministry or sitting behind the Ministry.

The TREASURER: What rot!

Mr. GLASSEY : It was as patent as the sun ; and he was sure that before the harbour board was established in Brisbane a considerable sum would be expended in addition to what had already been spent to put the port in order. He hoped there would be no partiality ; but so far as his observation went there was undoubted partiality shown in connection with expenditure on the harbours of the colony.

The TREASURER : Of course it followed naturally, because the Government proposed a thing, that the hon. member for Bundaberg would say it was wrong.

Mr. GLASSEY : Not necessarily.

The TREASURER : It was impossible for the Government to do anything right or fair ! There must be always some bad motive, some partiality, or something the Treasurer had up his sleeve, in connection with the most simple thing proposed by the Government ! All the parties who had approached the Government had been met, the Bundaberg board had no grievance, and the hon. member would like to show that they had one.

Mr. GLASSEY : The hon. member for Musgrave says the same thing.

The TREASURER : They had asked for that loan, and the Government proposed to give it to them. Where was there anything wrong or any bad motive in that ? As they were without a grievance the hon. member must manufacture one for them, and the grievance he manufactured was that all the harbours must be put into first-class order before they were taken over by the local authorities. Could anything be more absurd ? Was he to spend a million of money to make a harbour at Mackay before the local authority was asked to take it over ?

Mr. GLASSEY : You cannot consider that Mackay will ever be a harbour.

The TREASURER : What did the hon. member mean by a "harbour" ? Those amounts were only loans which would have to be repaid with interest, and the hon. member was not satisfied because the Bundaberg board was getting the loan they asked for. If a loan was asked for Townsville under similar conditions, no doubt it would be given.

Mr. GLASSEY : They have got £28,000 without a loan.

The TREASURER : The House had agreed to that, and it was done with. They did the same thing at Rockhampton, considering there were certain works that should be done in the public interest. The expenditure at Townsville was due to an accident, and it was right that the harbour there should be put in the condition in which it was when it was handed over. That Bundaberg would get its share of any general vote that was passed for harbours went without saying. The hon. member had not referred to the waterworks loan, so he supposed that must be all right. With regard to the Cairns tramway it was understood that the work would cost about £25,000, and the £10,000 voted last year was a vote on account. The local authority had since estimated so far as they could that the actual cost would be £25,400, and he was now asking the Committee to allow the Treasury to advance the balance of the sum required to complete that work.

Mr. HOOLAN : It had always been the policy of the Queensland Government to spend money freely—what they had got, what they were going to get, and what they probably never would get. That was the position of the present Government ; loan after loan was coming along. First of all they had extraordinary votes in the shape of gifts, and then, when the members could not "chew the lugs" of the Government sufficiently to get them as gifts, they came along in the shape of loans to local bodies, and the Lord only

knew whether they would ever be able to pay interest or principle. The Lord knew it because He knew everything, but the Premier and the members of his Cabinet had not the slightest idea whether they ever would or not.

The TREASURER : Speak for yourself. We have in the Treasury the financial position of every local authority in the colony.

Mr. HOOLAN : The municipality of Cairns was so heavily indebted to the unfortunate bank under reconstruction that it could not pay interest on its overdraft, and could only scrape up enough to pay interest on the municipal debt to the Government. Were it not for the connivance and influence of the Government, the Queensland National Bank would have foreclosed on it long ago. They had wastefully and criminally spent large sums on utterly worthless works, and they used their influence as a Government town returning a Government supporter to get that large sum of money for another utterly worthless work, which under the most favourable circumstances would not return interest upon the money to be spent on it. Hon. members should seriously consider their position. They would shortly be asked to sit in judgment on other persons for spending money, and night after night they were voting loans which they did not know would ever be redeemed. They were already pledged to £250,000 of loan money under the Sugar Works Guarantee Act. Municipalities all over the colony through their agents in that House were privately pulling the Government's leg or chewing the Government's lug for money, and when they could not get it they were going in for loans. It was all very well for the Treasurer to laugh. The hon. gentleman knew he would not be here to meet it all, and he could turn round and say, "My troubles about it." If the hon. gentleman had exercised a little of the wisdom the country gave him credit for, he would practise a little prudence in these very straitened times, when the country was already indebted for more than they could pay. Who were the people to whom that money was to be advanced ? People who could not pay their debts. The big majority of those councillors of public bodies would not pay their private debts ; they wanted to grab money where they could, and when the ratepayers refused to have further rates levied on their properties they turned round and financed—their financing being getting loans from the Government, and never paying the interest. That tramway would be as big a bugbear to the town of Cairns as the present Cairns Railway was to that State. It would be a worthless expenditure of public money by a local body who, in their every transaction since they had been a local body, had been utterly reckless as to what they did with the funds entrusted to them. There was a feeling in the country that if a local authority was insolvent they should get money from the Government and spend it, never minding about the interest or the repayment of the principal ; and the Committee should exercise their discretion by only granting loans which were required for some public work that would be of public benefit and likely to prove remunerative. The people of Cairns could get along very well without that very expensive work, which was not needed for the progress of the district, and in any case more money was asked for than was necessary for that tinpot line.

The TREASURER never knew when the hon. member was serious. In this case he had directed a most undeserved tirade of abuse against the town of Cairns, and the most absurd thing about the matter was that the town of Cairns had nothing to do with the business. It was another local authority altogether—namely, the divisional board. But not only did the hon. member abuse Cairns without any reason ; he

scandalised the whole local government of this colony. He (the Treasurer) held that the local government of this colony would stand criticism with any local governments in the world. It was quite true that there were exceptional cases in which local authorities had got very heavily into arrears, but the number was very small. The local authorities, as a rule, had up to the present time most manfully and honourably met their engagements, and because there were one or two exceptions, of which Cairns was not one, was that any reason why the hon. member should indulge in that amount of abuse of the whole system? He was a thorough believer in local government, and in trusting the people of a district to know what was best for their own district. The Committee had already approved of that loan being granted by voting last session a portion of the money required for this tramway.

Mr. McDONALD : We were told last session that it would only cost about £15,000.

The TREASURER did not think so, but whether they were or not, the local authority was perfectly solvent, and perfectly prepared to pay the interest and redemption money in accordance with the provisions of the Local Works Loans Act. The tramway would open up and develop the resources of the district, and even if it did not pay, if it increased the productions of the colony, and increased their exports, it was a desirable thing. The whole of the accounts of the inspecting engineer, Mr. Phillips, were in favour of the line, and he had not heard one word in disparagement of it from anyone except the hon. member for Burke, who knew nothing about the subject, and who had proved his ignorance of it by getting off the line and talking about the municipality of Cairns, which had nothing to do with the matter. The work had been approved of, after due inquiry, and it would be absurd now to refuse to advance the loan, seeing that the line was actually under construction.

Mr. HOOLAN knew quite enough about this matter to give an authoritative opinion about it, and was not in the habit of getting up and making statements that were not substantiated afterwards. Three years ago he gave an opinion upon a certain subject, and now he had to give that opinion again with crape on his hat for the Treasurer and his supporters. His opinions were always worth listening to, and they were valuable to himself if they were not to the Government. They were all recorded, and if he had uttered any false prophecy it would be recorded also. The Cairns people were not in a position to give this guarantee. They had an overdraft at the Queensland National Bank which they could not pay, and they should have no more public money whether it was voted or not. It was all very well for the Home Secretary to interject that the money was voted unanimously, but that had nothing to do with it. It might have been voted when most hon. members were on the verandah smoking, or drinking beef-tea in the refreshment room. Hon. members might say it was right, but he contended that it was wrong, and time would reveal which. The Treasurer said their local bodies would compare favourably with any in the world, but it was too soon to say whether they would or not. Up to the present they had been spoon-fed, and they would continue to be as long as the Government had a shot in the locker, and the loss would fall upon the taxpayers. It was all very well to talk about prosperity, but there would be a general burst up amongst these local authorities, and if the Auditor-General or any other unbiassed person were to give an impartial opinion, he would say that these bodies had already gone far enough, and should have no more public money

until they put themselves in a better position, or the requirements of the times demanded it. It appeared that half of this sum was voted last year unanimously, and now the rest was asked for. This was a Government trick; it was not indigenous to this Government, because it was practised by all. First they got the pants, and then they came and asked for the singlet and coat. Then they find they must have a hat and a pocket-handkerchief to wipe its perspiring brow; that was how public works were carried on, and how large sums of money were obtained. They had enough of these disreputable non-paying public works and wanted no more, and in a few years those hon. members who were not rejected would see him sitting on the other side patching up the tremendous bungles of the present day that were voted unanimously in thin Houses.

The TREASURER said the hon. member had wasted a lot of time in abusing local authorities, but he (the Treasurer) had had a considerable experience of them, and must say emphatically that at no meeting of any local authority had he ever had to submit to such an exhibition as he had had to submit to that night.

Mr. HAMILTON said the hon. member for Burke had merely expressed an opinion regarding the solvency of the Cairns board; but the Treasurer's position enabled him to state facts, and he had authoritatively informed them that, although one or two local boards had not paid up, Cairns was not one of them; also that the Cairns board was perfectly solvent. He had represented that district for many years, and knew that the members of the board were too level-headed to undertake the scheme unless they knew it would pay. The agricultural country which that tramway would open up was equal to any in Queensland, and both the agricultural and mining industries would be benefited by its construction, in addition to which it would be a lucrative investment.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS said he knew a little about the matter, and could assure the hon. member for Burke that the Cairns municipality had nothing to do with this tramway, which was being undertaken by the divisional board, which was well off. The line would go through good land, tap three sugar-mills, and practically bring the head of the Mulgrave, where there was some gold-mining, fifteen miles nearer to the coast. The board were satisfied that the line would pay working expenses and interest and also the redemption, because there was a good deal of traffic there, and the river was not navigable. The line would tap about ten miles of splendid land. Most of it would be brought under cultivation if the tramway was built.

Mr. McDONALD : They were told last year, in reply to the hon. member for Enoggera, that this tramway would cost £20,000. Now they were told it was to cost £25,400, and this all came of the new-fangled way the Treasurer had of asking for loan money. Previously it had been the custom to ask for the whole probable cost of a work, but now the hon. gentleman asked for a vote on account so that he could know the exact expenditure every year. He should not wonder if next year they were asked for £5,000 or £6,000 more for this work. If it was constructed on the same principle as the Cairns Railway it would cost £1,000,000. When it was found that a big bungle had been made, and they had spent a large amount of money, they would be told it was absolutely necessary to complete the work. He thought the hon. member for Burke was quite justified in the remarks he had made. He did not know either whether the vote for harbour boards was justified.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: That is for a new dredge for Bundaberg.

Mr. McDONALD: Perhaps the expenditure was justifiable, but he should like to have some more information upon it.

The TREASURER wished the hon. member would exert himself to become acquainted with facts. This was not a public work at all. It was the first instance in which a local authority had taken advantage of an Act passed some years ago to enable local bodies to undertake such works. If a local authority was enterprising enough to undertake such work, and the Government were satisfied of the solvency of the local body, there was no reason why they should not undertake it. He could assure the hon. member that the work would be completed for £25,400, and he could not see what reason the hon. member had for saying that, because in former days Governments used to bring down estimates for railways, showing what the total cost would be, therefore they should stop the whole of this work.

Mr. McDONALD: I never said any such thing.

The TREASURER: That was the hon. member's argument, and he was entirely wrong, because this was not a Government railway; there was no analogy between the two. The old system of building Government railways was this: Before plans and specifications were brought down for approval it was the practice to pass a Loan Bill in which was provision for certain lines which were specified; but the surveys of those lines had not been made, and no one could tell what they would cost.

Mr. DAWSON: The estimated cost was put down.

The TREASURER: But what data was there for the estimate? It was absolutely necessary to have data to go upon before reckoning up the cost of a railway. What happened then? The Loan Bill was passed. There was no provision that Parliament should appropriate any money after that. Look into any of the Loan Acts up to 1890, and it would be seen that the only money to be appropriated by the House was the amount spent in the salaries of the Chief Engineer and his staff. After passing the Loan Bill, with that exception, the House was never asked to appropriate a single farthing of money. That was often pointed out, and in 1891 they had to pass a general Bill to indemnify all the Treasurers from the foundation of the colony up to that time for the expenditure of loan money. In 1890 the new Audit Act was passed, which stated that they should provide for each year's expenditure by itself, estimating as nearly as they could the amount they would spend within the one financial year. That was the correct thing to do. With regard to railways previous to 1888, the Minister used to say a railway would cost £90,000 or £180,000, or whatever it might be, but the House had no check upon him. Now it was taken out of the hands of the Minister. The Commissioner was the responsible man for making the estimate, and he sent down, under seal, his estimate of cost, probable traffic, and so forth. That had been done in all cases since 1888. In the present case they were not dealing with a Government railway but with a loan to a local authority, which local authority had satisfied the Government that it was in a good financial position, that it would be able to carry out that work, and that the line, when carried out, would be of great benefit in developing the resources of that part of the colony. It was idle to say the Government were favouring one part of the colony more than another. Any local authority making the same claim, taking the same responsibility, and proving to the Government that it was in a sound financial position, would get the very same concession.

Question put and passed.

DREDGING NARROWS.

The TREASURER moved that £5,000 be granted out of the loan fund for harbour works—dredging Narrows. He might explain that a paper was circulated when the plans of the work were laid before the House some week or two ago. The House had approved of those plans, and the estimated cost was £16,000. What he asked for now was the probable expenditure for the present year. If the House authorised this expenditure it would be taken by the Government as an authority to enter into a contract for the work. Since the matter was before the House tenders had been received for the work. They had not been dealt with yet, but he was in a position to state that the whole work could be carried out for very much less than was represented in the report. Instead of £16,000 it could be done for about £10,000. It would take three or four months before the work could be started, and then nine months or more to complete it, so that he reckoned they would not spend more than £5,000 during the present financial year. The object of the work, as hon. members knew, was to make a connection, after the Bundaberg-Gladstone railway was finished, from Gladstone to Rockhampton. The scheme was that a daily train would run from Brisbane to Gladstone; that, on the arrival of the train, a steamer of light draft, to be provided by the Commissioner for Railways or the Marine Department, would be in attendance, carrying passengers, mails, and parcels either to Broadmount or Rockhampton at any time of the tide.

Mr. McDONALD: How will it affect the big steamers going North?

The TREASURER: As soon as the cutting near the mouth of the Fitzroy was done, for which the money was voted previously, he expected all the Northern boats, such as the "Wodonga" and the "Arawatta," would not anchor at Sea Hill, but go on to Broadmount. It would save an immense amount of lightering and other expense. He hoped there would be a daily service between Rockhampton and Brisbane. It would bring Rockhampton into touch with the rest of the world. It would also enable people living in the far West to get—

Mr. KERR: We want a railway from the Central line to Gladstone.

The TREASURER: That might come some day; it was not in view yet, and the present scheme would serve a very good purpose in the meantime. He did not think they should postpone the carrying out of this scheme because some day there would be a railway between Rockhampton and Gladstone. They would be able to run from Brisbane to Broadmount in twenty-one hours, and the deepening of the Narrows would tend to reduce the rates to Rockhampton, which were now very high, because the steamship companies were bound to compete with the Government for the passenger traffic. At the same time it would afford a comfortable and easy way of getting to the Central districts, and he had no doubt that thousands of people who now passed the Central districts would avail themselves of the opportunity of seeing those districts. Even this small accommodation would help largely in settling the lands in the Central districts. He knew there were some people in Rockhampton who would oppose the proposal, but he wanted to make Rockhampton a city in spite of itself. The more facilities that were given for communication to any city the better that city ought to be.

Mr. McDONALD: But you ruined Rockhampton by passing the railway to Broadmount.

The TREASURER: What nonsense! Leith had not ruined Edinburgh; Port Glasgow had

not ruined Glasgow. By providing more facilities for export, and by providing for one handling instead of three, they reduced the cost of production and increased the produce of the country. That was the design of this scheme.

Mr. SIM: The people in his district were in hopes that the Government would give them some consideration. Years ago a special dredge had been built to provide a means of access to the port of Normanton. The dredge had been removed ostensibly for the purpose of being repaired, but the then Premier, Sir T. McIlwraith, had given a distinct promise that she would be sent back to Normanton as soon as the repairs had been completed. At present the dredge was not in the Norman River, wherever she might be. Normanton was by no means an unimportant port. It fed a large and rising district, and was the port of one of the coming goldfields of Australia, and yet it was suffering from the absolute want of the expenditure of even £1 upon it. He asked the hon. gentleman to bring forward some scheme whereby Normanton might be opened to the shipping of the world. Many years ago, in the days of what was called the transcontinental railway, the necessity for a great Northern port had been recognised, and so long as the present indifference to the wants of the people of the Gulf district continued, so long would they labour under a great grievance. He had drawn the attention of the Treasurer to the question on a previous occasion at a rather late hour, but he now rose at a more convenient hour to press the honest demands of the district upon his attention, and to ask that before the session closed a sum of money would be placed on the Supplementary Estimates for the purpose of improving the port of Normanton. This was the third occasion on which he had brought the wants of the port and district under the notice of the Government.

Mr. CURTIS had much pleasure in congratulating the Government on the proposal to deepen the Narrows. He looked upon this as a work of first-rate importance, not only to the Central division but to the whole colony. Anything that would improve and accelerate the means of communication between the Central division and the rest of the colony would be of great advantage to all Queensland. It would also enable the people of Northern Queensland who were not good sailors to land at Broadmount and travel by rail from Gladstone, so that the work was of great importance to the people of the North as well as to those of the Centre and the South. It was true, as the Treasurer said, that Rockhampton was to some extent an isolated place; and he believed it would derive great advantage from the work proposed, which would bring it into closer touch with the great ocean highway of commerce, and would be to the advantage of the whole of Central Queensland. There were some who thought the extension of the line to Broadmount would damage Rockhampton, but he believed it would be of great advantage in many ways. The Treasurer had stated that the total cost of dredging the Narrows would be something like £10,000; but if it cost £20,000 it would be well worth the expenditure. The extension of the Gladstone railway he looked upon as merely a question of time. It was part of the national coast system to Rockhampton, and the sooner it was constructed the better he would be pleased. He believed that the majority of the people of Rockhampton would hail with great satisfaction the construction of that line.

Mr. BOLES did not think that £10,000 or even £20,000 would carry out what the Treasurer had in view. The attempts to make artificial harbours and channels had resulted in failure, though about £1,500,000 had been spent on them, and they were in a worse state now than they were twenty-five years ago. In a place where

two great bodies of water met—continually coming up from two depths, where there was rock to contend with—was it reasonable to suppose that £10,000 was going to clear a roadstead in that place? Already £5,000 had been expended, and according to the evidence of nautical men the Narrows were in a worse condition now than before. If the Treasurer would take the bull by the horns and run the line from Gladstone to Rockhampton, that would be cheapest in the long run and would settle the question of giving the people of the Central division the privileges to which they were justly entitled. Even if this money were expended, it would be found necessary in a few years to go on with the railway, and this expenditure would be only money thrown away. He was not going to oppose this motion. In a general way they should be thankful for small mercies; but he had always been opposed to expenditure of this sort, because he held that the proper policy was to connect our best ports with the interior by railway. He wished to ask the Treasurer who drew the plans of the proposed work, because he recollected that surveys were taken some time ago by a gentleman who he understood was not very *compos mentis*.

The TREASURER: You had better be careful what you say.

Mr. BOLES knew for a fact that the gentleman who made the plans some years ago in the first instance was not looked upon as a competent man, and was considered not to be in a *compos mentis* condition at the time.

The TREASURER: Tell us who he was at once.

Mr. BOLES did not care about mentioning the name, but he wanted to know whether the estimate was based on the old plans or upon new ones. If it was based on plans taken by an incompetent person, the hon. gentleman might find himself in the wrong after a certain amount of money had been expended.

The TREASURER was surprised at the hon. member talking as he had done. He had distinctly said that the estimate was based on tenders received last week. Even supposing the surveys were bad, it would be seen from the conditions of tender that the Government took no responsibility for the accuracy of the surveys. A channel had to be made 80 feet wide at the bottom, with certain batters on each side; the work had to be completed for a certain sum of money; and the contractors had to take their chance as to what they might have to do. The hon. member's talk about surveys made years ago by an incompetent person was quite beside the question. Why any hon. member representing Gladstone should oppose that vote he could not understand. It was all very well to say they should complete the line from Gladstone to Rockhampton; but, even if the House approved of the plans and voted the money, he believed it would be several years before that line was completed, and if the work now proposed only lasted for four years it would do some good. He believed it would be ten years or more before the line was completed to Rockhampton.

Mr. BOLES: You will have an offer to build it by guarantee next year.

The TREASURER: If the hon. member came along with a satisfactory guarantee they would no doubt be able to accommodate him, though he thought that was a line which should decidedly be built by the Government and for which they should not ask a guarantee. But he did not believe the whole of Gladstone could guarantee the line. He did not know whether the guarantee would be of any use when they got it. It was an extraordinary thing that when they tried to do people good they turned round and snapped at them. This proposal would do great good for Gladstone, and the hon. member

representing the place said it was all wrong—because it was a proposal of the Government! If the hon. gentleman did not oppose the Government he probably would not be elected again. That was the gist of the whole thing.

Mr. McDONALD: The statement of the Treasurer was a most remarkable one. He did not know why the hon. gentleman, under the circumstances, had come down with that amount on the estimate at all. He could wait until the hon. gentleman came back. When a member got up to ask information the hon. gentleman in charge of the vote went outside.

Mr. BOLES: Of course he knew that the proposal would do a considerable amount of good for Gladstone, but they had to consider the colony as well as Gladstone, and it was far better in the interests of the colony to complete the line from Gladstone to Rockhampton immediately. The experts of the Railway Department had said that the interest upon the cost of construction would be met three times over by the saving in maintenance and rolling-stock which the connection between the Southern and Central railway systems would bring about. It was all very well to say that Gladstone could not find the guarantee, but a Treasurer more favourable to Gladstone might some day be in power. Though at one time they were not favourable, a majority of the people of Rockhampton now would support the line. He believed that Gladstone would get a portion of the trade, but the connection would not materially injure Rockhampton. They had meat works at Gladstone, and they wanted to see them given every facility.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The Government have done very well for Gladstone.

Mr. BOLES: He had said before that the Government had done more for Gladstone than any other Government, and he gave them all credit for it, but he could not allow the vote to pass without saying that the policy of the Government should be to connect Gladstone with the Central line. The Treasurer said he had received a tender for the work proposed in the vote for £10,000, and all he could say was that he would watch the work with interest to see whether the opinions of a number of experts on the subject would be confirmed or not.

Mr. KIDSTON had no intention of opposing the vote, and would not have spoken if it had not been for a remark of the Treasurer, which would lead people to believe that he was conferring that great benefit upon the people of Rockhampton in spite of themselves. He gave the statement an unqualified denial. There was no reason why Rockhampton people should oppose such a work, which would confer a benefit not only upon Gladstone but upon Rockhampton and the Central district generally. At the same time, he agreed with the hon. member for Port Curtis as to the difficulty that would be experienced in keeping the Narrows open. He looked upon the proposal as one for a temporary work, and the permanent work would be the connection of Gladstone with Rockhampton by the railway.

Mr. KERR: The hon. member for Port Curtis was not to be blamed for not accepting the proposal, and, considering the diversity of opinions expressed and the belief that the channel would silt up in no time, the hon. member was justified in asking for information on the subject. The expenditure on that work would be money chucked away, something like the expenditure on the Fitzroy River. Why should the people of the Western portion of the Central district have no deep-water port? He was in favour of the completion of the line to Gladstone, and also of the extension of the line from Gladstone to Rockhampton, or, better, to some point of the Central Railway about Westwood. There was too much of that looking

after the coastal towns, and neglecting the interior. They had heard a great deal about Brisbane and Townsville being octopuses, but the people of the Western district were commencing to think that Rockhampton was as great an octopus as Brisbane. What they wanted was the connection of their railway with deep water.

The TREASURER: The line to Broadmount will effect that purpose.

Mr. KERR: Why should the Western people have to send their wool down through Rockhampton to Broadmount when the Central Railway could be connected from Westwood with Gladstone, which had a natural harbour in which all the fleets of the world could anchor? Dredging would be necessary before large ships could go up to Broadmount, and the charges which were made for lighterage in the past, when goods had to be sent down the Fitzroy, was not such a pleasant experience that they desired a repetition of it. He was sure that if that money was spent on dredging the Narrows they would have to be continually dredging the cutting to keep the silt out of it, and before the Government incurred that expense they ought to have an estimate made as to how much it would cost to take the railway from Gladstone to Rockhampton, if it was intended to take it there, though he contended that it should be taken to some point on the Central Railway.

Mr. MACDONALD-PATERSON regretted to have to say that the hon. member who had just spoken knew very little indeed of the matter under consideration. As Flinders once said, the Narrows was one of the most splendid channels for connecting Port Curtis with Keppel Bay, and the making of this cutting could be effected at comparatively small expense. If the Narrows were never dredged, and the Fitzroy River were never dredged, no railway could compete successfully with the water carriage, whether that railway were from Rockhampton or Westwood to Port Curtis. Ships went up there a quarter of a century ago before there was a spadeful of sand taken out of the Fitzroy. As to the remark that too much attention was paid to the coastal towns, Rockhampton would survive the aspersions cast upon it as a commercial centre by the hon. member for Barcoo. It was in existence for years before there was a sheep on the Barcoo, and yet because the West had grown up at the expense of Rockhampton, and at the expense of the Southern territory, the hon. member would now divert the tide of traffic which had gone legitimately to that centre, and send the fat sheep, fat cattle, wool, and other produce of the Western district by another route. Rockhampton would have been a fine place if they had had only 6 feet of water in the river instead of 16 feet, and he said unhesitatingly that it had never had justice done it. He hoped the hon. member for Barcoo would remember that he represented a constituency that was the offspring of the enterprise of the men who went from Rockhampton to the Isaacs, the Mackenzie, the Comet, the Nogoia, and other rivers; and among those men who swarmed over to the Barcoo was the hon. member for Warrego, who was one of the best colonists they had ever had. It was no use trying to divert trade from its natural channels, and it was no use the hon. member for Barcoo telling them that Gladstone was a noble harbour. Gladstone was only a miserable little inlet, but Port Curtis was a beautiful harbour, and if he had not heard the late Dr. Lang describe it he would not have been in Queensland now. He might remind them that the best harbours in Great Britain were not the seats of commerce, but the majority of the commercial towns were situated in most inconvenient places. The Thames, the Mersey, and the Bristol had all to

be dredged, and no attempt was ever made to interfere with the natural outlets of trade. There were other harbours in Australia besides Port Curtis, some of which had never been named, and he could remember one that had never even been referred to in that House, that had splendid land all around it. The Narrows when dredged would not silt up as the hon. member suggested. For miles the channel was composed of a material that would stand when once it was cut, and according to the most eminent engineers, the channel would not only be maintained, but would possibly be benefited by the tidal action. To connect the Central line with Gladstone, as the hon. member wished, would require 70 miles of railway, and the cost of carrying wool would be about 4d. per ton per mile, or a cost of 23s. 4d. per ton for the whole distance; while hundreds of men would be willing to punt it from the Rockhampton wharf to Gladstone for the 3s. 4d. per ton. That showed that the action of the Government was not only defensible but wise. He had advocated the deepening of the Narrows for years as the alternative to building a railway 70 miles long at a cost of £7,000 per mile. He did not think that any man of average common sense would advocate spending almost half a million of money to establish what the hon. member for Barcoo called a connection between Rockhampton and Gladstone for the purpose of carrying wool or anything else. And not only would they have to spend £500,000, but they would have to maintain a man per mile of railway to preserve the line from the disastrous floods which were experienced in that region. He said let the £500,000 go to the lengthening of the trunk line from Longreach to the border, to give their brothers in the far West an opportunity of bringing their stock and supplies over a railway which would not exceed from £1,500 to £3,000 per mile. In the meantime it was sound policy to open up the Narrows to enable a shallow-draft steamer to run from Gladstone pier to Broadmount pier, and thus form a link connecting the Southern system, the coast system, and the Central system of railways. Then the hon. member for Barcoo said they had to dredge to get into Broadmount. The hon. member knew very well that the proposed dredging was simply to form a short cut into Broadmount Harbour, and that if the tide be caught at the right moment any steamer could get into Broadmount without spending a shilling on dredging. He was present at the first land sale in Rockhampton, and thinking the time was far distant when Herbert would become a township he never bought an allotment of land although it was sold at that time as low as £7 an allotment. The reason why the place did not go ahead was on account of the selfishness and blindness of a few men in Rockhampton, who determined that they would rather compel the Government to pour tens of thousands of pounds into the Fitzroy than seek to touch the outer world at the deepest spot of the river. He hoped the Government would pursue a policy which would force the people of Rockhampton to come into contact with the outer world, and if they were still sleepy when they got there, at all events there would be facilities for new blood to come in and develop the grand territory which had been referred to. He was glad to have had an opportunity of learning the ignorance of at least one Central member as to the policy which ought to be pursued in the development of the Central district. Amongst the many schemes that had been promulgated during the last twenty-five years the Government had chosen the wisest, and he sincerely trusted the works would be rapidly executed and speedily opened for public traffic.

Mr. KERR wished to say [a few words in reply to the hon. member—

The TREASURER moved that the Chairman leave the chair, report progress, and obtain leave to sit again.

Mr. McDONALD: He must take objection to the manner in which the hon. gentleman got up, when an hon. member was on his feet, and moved the adjournment of the debate. It was the third occasion the hon. gentleman had done it this session, and it was a deliberate insult to the hon. member who was speaking. One evening it was deliberately done when the hon. member for Burke was speaking.

The TREASURER: I come here to do business.

Mr. McDONALD: The other members had quite as much right in the Chamber as the Treasurer, and he, for one, declined to be insulted by him or anybody else. It was a disgrace to the hon. gentleman that, when the hon. member for Barcoo had commenced to address the Committee, the hon. gentleman should move the Chairman out of the chair; and any Premier who would degrade his position in such a manner was not fit for the office he held.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS thought the Premier was quite justified in moving the adjournment of the Committee after the speeches they had had from the hon. members for Port Curtis, Barcoo, and Brisbane North. He and other members were in the House at 4 o'clock this morning, and those who were not there at that time ought to have some regard for those who were. At this period of the session they ought to get through a little business, but there had been no business in the proceedings of the last two hours.

Mr. BOLES did not think anybody could accuse him of wasting time. He had spoken twice, and not more than ten minutes on each occasion. The hon. member for Barcoo spoke for about five minutes, and all the rest of the time had been occupied by the long, rambling, dreary speech of the hon. member for Brisbane North. He owed a duty to his constituents, and he had tried to do it. From past experience he knew that money spent on dredging had always been swamped, and it would be so in that instance. It would not carry out the object of the Premier to make a roadway between the Central division and the South, and it was his place to show what the Government might have done, and that was to continue the railway from Gladstone to Rockhampton. There were one or two other matters which had been referred to by the hon. member for Brisbane North that he wished to refer to.

The CHAIRMAN: I would call the hon. member's attention to the fact that the question before the Committee is "That I do now leave the Chair, report progress, and ask leave to sit again."

Mr. McDONALD rose to a point of order. He wished to know if the motion was not of an obstructive character? If it was, it could not be put.

Mr. KERR: He had been accused of wasting time, but no hon. member took up less time than he did. It was a deliberate insult to him for the Treasurer to move the Chairman out of the chair when he had possession of the floor. He challenged the Treasurer or the Secretary for Railways to say that he had ever obstructed business. The hon. member for Brisbane North had attacked him; what he had said would go forth in *Hansard*, and he was evidently not to be allowed to reply to the hon. member. The hon. member had twitted him with being a young man, and with not having been long in the country, but, if the hon. member's verbosity was the result of his long residence in Queensland, he (Mr. Kerr) thanked God that he had not been long in the country. From what had occurred he inferred that he was not to be allowed to reply to the

hon. member because he was a supporter of the Government, but if the Chairman left the chair he intended to take another opportunity of replying to the hon. member.

Mr. TURLEY would like to know whether the motion could be put from the Chair, because the name of the hon. member for Barcoo had been called by the Chairman as being in possession of the floor, and that hon. member had commenced his speech when the Treasurer came in and moved the Chairman out of the chair. Supposing an hon. member on the other side was in the middle of a speech, would a member on his side be in order in rising and moving the Chairman out of the chair? He thought he would be out of order, and he did not think the question would be allowed to be put.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member for Brisbane South having raised a point of order, I feel sure the hon. member will see that I have only followed what has been the practice ever since I have been a member of this House. I have never seen any exception taken to the leader of the House moving that the Chairman leave the chair, report progress, and ask leave to sit again. I did call upon the hon. member for Barcoo, but the hon. member had not commenced his speech when the Treasurer moved me out of the chair, and when the Treasurer rose the hon. member for Barcoo immediately sat down. However, to be strictly in order, I think that the contention of the hon. member for Brisbane South is correct.

Mr. TURLEY: If any hon. member on the other side was in possession of the floor, whether he had just commenced his speech or was simply stopping for a moment, and if any member on that side rose and moved the Chairman out of the chair, the moment the Chairman rose the hon. member on the other side would immediately resume his seat; but it would be quite out of order for the motion to be put from the chair. Such a practice would give any member on the front Treasury bench an unfair advantage over hon. members on that side; it would enable him to burke discussion. They should have a thorough understanding as to whether the Treasurer could override the usages of the Committee simply because he was put out at the way business was being conducted when he returned to the Chamber.

Mr. GLASSEY: As the Chairman had referred to the practice of the Committee, he wished to point out that one very bad practice was growing up—this session particularly—that was the practice the Treasurer was getting into of losing his temper. The hon. gentleman should keep calm, and allow business to be proceeded with in a rational manner. He did not desire to have a repetition of the previous night, although good business had been done at 4 o'clock that morning. He hoped the hon. gentleman would withdraw his motion and go on with business.

The TREASURER said he did not come into the Chamber carried away with self-conceit at any rate. He had many failings, but that was not one. He simply saw that the Committee was not in the humour to do business, and that there was no use in wasting time. When a Minister was in charge of Estimates, it was for him to say whether he would go on with them or not; but if hon. members were desirous of doing business, he was prepared and most willing to withdraw the motion. Hon. members were desirous of getting the vote through, yet they kept on talking. He could not understand that.

Mr. KIDSTON: Are you stonewalling?

The TREASURER: There was no man he despised more than a stonewaller.

Mr. DAWSON: You made three half-hour speeches on your own Estimates.

The TREASURER: He emphatically denied having done so. If hon. members were desirous of dealing with the Estimates, by all means let them do so; and in order to test the temper of the Committee he begged leave to withdraw the motion.

Mr. McDONALD maintained that the motion should not be withdrawn. In the first place, the hon. gentleman had no right to move the motion, and it should not have been put from the chair; at the same time he thought every credit should be given to the Chairman for the manner in which he had dealt with the matter and the ruling he had given. He hoped that ruling would be a lesson to the Premier after the unruly and unmannerly conduct of which he had been guilty on so many occasions.

Mr. HOOLAN: He was once the victim of the hon. gentleman's rudeness, but he did not wish to deceive him, like the hon. member for Bundaberg, by giving him to understand that if he withdrew the motion there would be no discussion.

Mr. GLASSEY: I did not say so.

Mr. HOOLAN: He was going to discuss the next vote fully and elaborately, and would call for a division.

Motion—That the Chairman leave the chair, report progress, and ask leave to sit again—by leave, withdrawn.

Original question put and passed.

RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS moved that £33,500 be granted from loan for railways. The first item was £12,000 for the purchase of four miles of branch railways, known as Thomas's West Moreton and New Swanbank. Those lines were now under offer to the Government, and if the Committee gave authority to purchase they would be bought. Thomas's line was two miles long, and Mr. Thomas was charging a royalty of 4d. a ton on all the coal going over the line. The Commissioner thought the purchase of these lines would develop the coal-mines west of Thomas's line, and was satisfied that it would pay interest and working expenses. There was also a sum of £3,500 for an extension of the Sandgate line half a mile beyond the present terminus. It was not intended to build a station; only a shelter-shed and a platform. At present, on holidays especially, a great number of families went to Sandgate, and it was a great drawback for women and children to have to walk nearly half a mile to get to the beach. The Commissioner was satisfied that the extension would more than repay interest on the cost of construction. At present the Sandgate line paid 6 or 7 per cent. on the cost. The next line was that from Mayne to Enoggera, for which £10,000 was asked. The plans were passed last year, but no money was voted for its construction. The total cost of the line, 3 miles 64 chains in length, was estimated at £45,000; so that the Committee would be committing the country to that expenditure if they voted this £10,000. The line was guaranteed by the Windsor Shire Council and the Enoggera Divisional Board. The next item was £10,000 towards building the line from Kabra to Mount Morgan. The estimated cost of the line was £64,000, so that if the £10,000 was voted this year the country would be committed to an expenditure of £64,000. This line was guaranteed by the Mount Morgan municipality and the Mount Morgan Gold-Mining Company; and the Commissioner was of opinion that it would produce a handsome surplus after paying interest and working expenses.

Mr. GLASSEY: With reference to the purchase of the West Moreton line, he wanted to know if there was any report from the Commissioner as to the amount of mineral coming over

the line, and if there was any report from the Mines Department as to the quantity of mineral in the district served by the line? In all his experience in connection with coal-mining since 1857 he had never known of such a condition of things as he had witnessed in that district for a number of years. That a man, because he happened to get the first grip of a position in the locality, should be allowed by the Government of the day to connect the points of the Government railway with a private line, and then for years levy blackmail on his competitors in the same trade and drive them out of the market. And now, after he had taken the cream from his own mine and let it to a number of men on tribute, he came forward and asked the Government to buy back the line, and the Government had the simplicity to ask the House to vote £12,000 for the purchase of it. He wanted the fullest information on the subject, and he ventured to say the proposal would not be found to be such a rosy bargain. The line should have been out of that gentleman's hands years ago. If the information to be supplied was not in his judgment satisfactory, he would take such action as he deemed necessary.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: "It is never too late to mend." Mr. Thomas did not want to sell his line at all; it was the people on the line who wanted it bought. The Commissioner was satisfied that he could get interest and working expenses on the purchase. The line was in good running order, having been relaid only a few years ago, and the Swanbank line was almost a new line. At present 10,000 tons of coal a month was being turned out at Mr. Thomas's mine, and the Swanbank mine was expected to turn out from 4,000 to 5,000 tons a month.

Mr. GLASSEY: How much now?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Nothing now, because they could not pay the royalty on Thomas's line.

Mr. GLASSEY: And so that industry has been blocked for years by one individual, with the sanction of the Government.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: They wanted to remedy that now. At the time the line was built he believed it was a fair thing to do, as the Government of the day would not build it, though asked by Mr. Thomas to do so, and by building it himself that gentleman had developed that part of the country. He had anticipated the inquiries of the hon. member for Bundaberg. Mr. Fryar had reported that it would take 100 years to work out the coal in that district at the rate at which they were turning out coal now. If the Committee was not satisfied with that information he would ask Mr. Jack to report upon the matter, and there would be another opportunity to discuss the question on the Loan Bill.

Mr. GLASSEY: Then I ask you to postpone the vote.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: If they postponed the vote they could not bring it on in the Loan Bill, but if it was passed now, and he could not get the information required, the hon. member could move the excision of the vote from the Loan Bill. The people of the district were anxious that the Government should get the line.

Mr. GLASSEY: Not at this price.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS could assure the hon. member that last year £13,000 was put down for the purpose, but the matter had not been brought on. Mr. Gray, in the meantime, had been able to take £1,000 off the price, but not off Mr. Thomas's price, as that gentleman did not want to sell, and they could not compel him to sell the line.

Mr. McDONALD: If you construct one of your own alongside he will soon come to terms.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS was satisfied that they could build a new line for less than the £12,000, but what was the use of that when they would have no trade?

Mr. GLASSEY: Did the Minister wish the Committee to believe that unless they were prepared to accept Mr. Thomas's terms nothing could be done to relieve those people? What nonsense! Parliament was omnipotent in such matters, and if that gentleman was not prepared to take a reasonable price they could regulate his charges upon the persons who used his line. A new line could be built for one-half the money that was asked for, and he hoped the Committee would not agree to the price proposed to be paid. With regard to the amount of mineral in the district, and the length of time it would last, he had no hesitation in accepting the opinion of Mr. Fryar on those matters, but at the same time he would suggest to the Minister that he should postpone the vote until such time as hon. members had the information he referred to in their hands and were able to give the subject full consideration.

Mr. SMYTH pointed out that several other mines besides Mr. Thomas's would be served by this railway, and that if it yielded a good revenue it was well that the Government should have the benefit of that revenue. Mr. Thomas did not wish to sell the railway, but would rather keep it, as he would be the gainer by so doing. He carried the coal from other mines at a purely nominal rate, and it was unfair to make an attack upon him in connection with that proposal to purchase the railway, which was made in the interest of other coal-miners in the district. He hoped the question would be considered on its merits, apart from any personal considerations.

Mr. CROSS had no intention of making any disparaging remarks about Mr. Thomas. Like many other individuals he had simply taken advantage of the existing social system, but the position he occupied was inimical to the progress and development of an important industry. Neither that Parliament nor any other body of men would wish to rob Mr. Thomas of a brass farthing. He was entitled to be refunded any expense that he had incurred and no more; but as a matter of fact the greatest jurists agreed that no man had an absolute title to any land whatever; that they only held it by the sanction of the State. Mr. Thomas did nothing but levy blackmail under a power given by Act of Parliament, and if he or any other person stood in the way of the development of a district the Government should pass a short Act resuming the land, and the matter of compensation could be dealt with by arbitration. He wished it to be distinctly understood that he would not confiscate any man's property. The Secretary for Railways had practically admitted that the royalty levied by Mr. Thomas prevented his competitors from making a reasonable profit, and thereby prevented remunerative employment. That admission was sufficient to justify the Government in stepping in and removing this element of blackmail. There was nothing to prevent Mr. Thomas levying a royalty of 1s. per ton on all the coal that passed over the line, and no man should have such a power to paralyse competition.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: If the hon. member had read the Tramways Act he would have seen that Mr. Thomas could not charge what he liked; the Commissioner could at any time intervene, and say what was fair and reasonable. Hon. members opposite had asked what had Mr. Thomas done, and in reply to that he might

say that a man who opened up a district, whether it was the Etheridge or Bundanba, and started an important industry, did a great deal more good than hon. members were doing in that House. If the man who made two blades of grass grow where only one grew before deserved well of his country, then the man who started a new industry also deserved well of his country. The charge of levying blackmail was not justified by any evidence before them. The great question was: Were the people likely to be put in a better or a worse position by this transaction? It was at the instigation of the people of the neighbourhood that the matter had been brought forward. Mr. Thomas was not desirous of getting rid of the line, and were the hon. member for Burke and his friends going to stand in the light of the people? If the hon. member's contention was correct, the evil could be rectified under the Tramways Act. The hon. member for Bundaberg did not admit that there was anything in vested interests, but he said they should compel Mr. Thomas to take a lower price than he could be compelled to take. If the matter were referred to arbitration, the award would not be based on what the line had cost but what it was worth as a going concern. Then it must not be forgotten that it was a part of the bargain with the co-operative miners that their coal went over the line. If another line were built and the Government could not get the freight, where would be the use of the line? It did not seem to him that they could better their position by refusing to purchase this line, and no alternative scheme that had been proposed would benefit the State or the miners in anything like so great a degree.

Mr. GRIMES explained that a Bill passed through Parliament gave Mr. Thomas power to build this railway, but there was nothing in it to enable the Government to take it away from him without compensation. Mr. Thomas had been a benefactor to the coal proprietors in the neighbourhood of the line. They were saving from 6d. to 1s. per ton in freight, and they were placed in a far better position than they would have been if Mr. Thomas had not had the enterprise to build the railway over untried land. It was therefore reasonable that he should be compensated not only to the extent of the cost of the railway but of the profits he was able to make out of it without unduly pressing upon those who used the line. For the hon. member for Clermont to advocate that a Bill should be passed to force Mr. Thomas to give up his property was confiscation and repudiation, and he was surprised that the hon. member should advocate such a thing.

Mr. Cross: That is a lie.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS moved that the hon. member's words be taken down. It was time that kind of thing was stopped.

The CHAIRMAN: Do I understand the hon. gentleman to move that the words be taken down?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Certainly, unless the hon. member withdraws them and apologises. He would not sit there and listen to such language without a protest.

Mr. CROSS: He had interjected the words with a strong conviction that he was being grossly misrepresented; but as the words were unparliamentary he would withdraw them unreservedly.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS, with the permission of the Committee, would withdraw his motion.

Motion withdrawn.

Mr. GRIMES would only add that if hon. members wished to do Mr. Thomas a friendly turn they would vote against the item. Mr.

Thomas did not want to part with his railway, which was a profitable investment for him, even at the moderate rates he was charging. But in the interest of the district it would be well for the Government to purchase the line and conduct the traffic on it themselves.

Mr. CROSS wished the Secretary for Public Instruction would confine himself strictly to facts. He had charged the Labour party with being in favour of confiscation and robbery, whereas he (Mr. Cross) had distinctly declared that he did not believe in robbing any man of anything. He did not believe in confiscation, but he believed in the law being set in operation so that Mr. Thomas would get equitable compensation. The Secretary for Railways had given as one reason why the line should be purchased that it would tend to develop the coal industry in the district, and he quite agreed with that, but at the same time the Government should not quietly submit to Mr. Thomas's terms. If the matter was submitted to arbitration a fair value for the line would be paid.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS admitted that the Government could build a line alongside for less than £12,000, but there would be no traffic for it. At present Mr. Thomas's mine was turning out 10,000 tons per month; and the Commissioner was satisfied that the line would pay working expenses and 4 per cent. on £12,000.

Mr. DANIELS failed to see why they should buy the line at all. According to the Secretary for Railways, the owners of the line were crushing others engaged in the same industry by charging an unfair rate. That being so, it was the duty of the Commissioner to make the owners reduce the rate.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Coercion!

Mr. DANIELS: Yes. The owners were using coercion. They said they would make the other people pay or would make it so hot for them that they would bring pressure to bear on the Government to buy the line at twice the cost. He maintained that no more than the fair value should be paid for the line.

Mr. HOOLAN: Nobody wanted to deprive Mr. Thomas of his just rights; but the fact remained that the Government wanted to buy a line from a strong supporter for double what it was worth, and treble what it cost to construct; that Mr. Thomas had been working it constantly for a number of years, and had reaped a large benefit; that it was badly constructed, and that the sleepers were nearly worn out and the rails chipped. They had been told that if they wanted to do Mr. Thomas a good turn they would refuse to buy the line. As he had a friendly feeling towards Mr. Thomas, he would do his best to leave that gentleman in undisputed possession of that piece of property which was so valuable to him. The proposal was neither feasible nor sound, and it had the appearance of extreme dishonesty. It did not matter to him whether the Government carried it or not, but he took the proper political course of raising his voice against it on behalf of his constituents, and he was prepared to abide the result. He thought the thing a job which no Government should consent to, but it certainly showed the effects of a policy of alienating the rights of the people that they might afterwards be taxed to buy back again. From experience he believed that this vote would not be the last of the claims made in respect of these lines. Those votes would go through without challenge from a solitary member on the other side, and he thought they were going altogether too far in the matter of borrowed money.

Mr. CRIBB: It would be better for hon. members to try to be fair instead of accusing other people of dishonesty. When this line was built, even Mr. Thomas himself considered that

it was a rather risky undertaking; but it had turned out a success, and there was nothing dishonest in his asking a fair price for a property that he did not want to sell, and that was yielding him a good return. The Commissioner was satisfied that the transaction would give the Government a good return.

Mr. McDONALD: With regard to the argument that if a new line were constructed Mr. Thomas would refuse to allow the 10,000 tons of coal which were raised in his mines every month to go over that line, if he did that the Government could say that they would refuse to carry his coal over their line. But really there was no hurry for the purchase of the line, as the Government had power under the Act to compel Mr. Thomas to reduce the rates of carriage for coal to a reasonable amount. He hoped that some member would move that the vote be reduced very considerably.

Mr. GLASSEY: As the hon. member had said, there was no necessity to buy the line, because the Government had power to regulate the tolls in such a manner as would afford relief to the other colliery proprietors in the district. Certainly they should not pay that price for it if his vote could prevent it. There was no chance of getting the vote through, and with a view of bringing matters to a head he moved that the item be reduced to £6,000.

Mr. CRIBB: The hon. member for Flinders seemed to be under the impression that Mr. Thomas was engaged in coal-mining at present, but such was not the case. That gentleman had never approached the department with the idea of selling the line; the overtures had been made by the department at the instance of the coal proprietors in the vicinity. The effect of carrying the amendment would be that Mr. Thomas would refuse to sell the line, in which case those who used the line would have to pay the present rates.

Amendment put; and the Committee divided:—

AYES, 18.

Messrs. Glassey, Stewart, Kerr, Kidston, McDonnell, Turley, Fitzgerald, McDonald, Dibley, Browne, King, Dunsford, Cross, Hoolan, Hardacre, Sim, Drake, and Dawson.

NOES, 25.

Sir H. M. Nelson, Messrs. Foxton, Philp, Dalrymple, Tozer, Collins, Stephenson, McMaster, Bridges, Curtis, Battersby, Hamilton, Grimes, Stumm, Cribb, Corfield, Story, Newell, Callan, Armstrong, Lord, Smyth, Tooth, Crombie, and Macdonald-Paterson.

Resolved in the negative.

Mr. HOOLAN asked for some information about the Enoggera railway, and as to guaranteed railways generally. What position would the colony be in if the guaranteed railways did not pay?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The Enoggera railway passed through the lands controlled by the two local authorities who had signed the guarantee. If there was any default in paying, under the guarantee the Commissioner could levy rates.

Mr. HOOLAN wanted to know whether the line would pay? It seemed to him there was too much guarantee on paper, and not enough in the shape of coin.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The plans of this railway were passed last session, and they were now asking for a vote on account. The line was 3 miles 64 chains in length, and its estimated cost was £45,000, or £11,842 per mile; interest at 4 per cent. would be £1,800, and working expenses £1,155; total, £2,955. It was estimated that the receipts would pay 2 per cent. interest on the capital cost of the line.

Mr. HOOLAN: It was evidently intended to spend the bulk of the £45,000 for the benefit of private property-owners, who would make a good thing out of it. It would be interesting to know

who was pulling the wires for a railway which would be non-paying when constructed. The Government were entering upon a most dangerous practice, and one which would end in financial disaster.

Mr. DRAKE: When the proposal to construct a railway to Enoggera was before the House last session, there was a hope of being able to get it constructed by another route. That now seemed to be almost hopeless. Those of his constituents who were in favour of taking the railway by another route did not seem to have taken any steps to obtain a guarantee from the local authority for that route; and under the circumstances he did not feel justified in offering any opposition to the vote. It was a district that should have had railway communication a long time ago, and he did not think the district should be debarred from it because the residents were not unanimous with regard to the route that should be adopted from town. He would ask the Secretary for Railways whether he would bear in mind the recommendation of the select committee, backed up by the opinion of Mr. Mathieson, that the station should be taken about 25 chains further than the site shown on the plan?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It was a question whether he had power to go any further without getting the plans of the extension approved of; but he would make inquiries and see whether the line should be extended to the point mentioned.

Mr. CALLAN: He had been one of the members of the select committee who had recommended the extension, and he strongly urged the Secretary for Railways to look into the matter. The evidence was strongly in favour of the extension.

Mr. McDONALD believed that the Sandgate extension would practically end in a swamp. £3,500 was a very large sum to spend on such a line. He had heard the hon. member for Moreton advocate that the Sandgate Railway should be extended in the opposite direction. No reason had been given why the extension should be made, unless it was proposed for the special purpose of serving the hon. member for the district.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The plans were approved of six or seven years ago, and a contract had been let for £6,000 or £7,000, but owing to a new Ministry taking office this, as well as several other lines, had not been gone on with, and the contractor had been given a sum of money to annul the contract. The original intention was to have a station at the proposed terminus, but the present Commissioner considered that a shelter-shed would be sufficient. He was convinced that the line would pay well.

Mr. McDONALD: The fact that a contract had been let was no reason why they should build the line now. The plans of other railways had been passed, but the lines had not been proceeded with. Before they were asked to vote this money they should have had the plans placed before them.

Mr. BATTERSBY said that he had never advocated any extension of the Sandgate railway in that House. When deputations had waited on the Minister asking for the construction of the Redcliffe line, he had contended that the nearest way would be by going round by Brighton. It had been currently reported that the former contractor had been paid £1,000 to cry off.

Mr. BRIDGES: The main reason for building this line was that it would pay. The Sandgate line had always paid, and no doubt it had helped to make up some of the deficit caused by railways in the Central district. If members visited Sandgate on holidays they would not hesitate to

vote for the extension. He believed most of what had been said against this extension was meant partly as a joke.

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER : Don't stonewall.

Mr. BRIDGES said he had neither the ability nor the inclination to stonewall. He believed in getting on with the business, and when a question came to a division he generally voted somewhere.

Mr. KERR denied the hon. member's statement in regard to the Sandgate line making good the deficit on the Central lines. The hon. member was getting very well paid for the votes he had given this session.

Mr. KIDSTON explained that the profits on the Sandgate line did not make up the deficit on the Southern lines.

Mr. HARDAIRE thought that this item ought to be strongly opposed. The extension started in a swamp, and ended in a back yard. There was no population along the route, and it was not the line wanted by the people of the district. It went through the property of people who had pulled the wires to get the line constructed. He wanted to know why it was a good railway now if it was bad last year, what further information there was to show that it was going to be profitable, what was the population along the route, and who were the persons going to be benefited.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS : They had fought out this question last session, when full information respecting the line was given. The remark made by the hon. member for Barcoo respecting the hon. member for Nundah was very ungenerous. He had never asked any member to vote for any line. Did he support the Bowen line because the hon. member, Mr. Smith, was a consistent supporter? or had he proposed the Gladstone line because the hon. member, Mr. Boles, was a consistent supporter of the Government? Railways were not party measures and should not be treated as such. If hon. members did not think those were good railways to build they could vote against them. He would ask no hon. member to vote for them.

Mr. KERR had never said that the hon. gentleman had used any influence to secure the vote of the hon. member for Nundah. He did say that the hon. member for Nundah was getting the railway for the votes he had given in support of the Government, and he said it now again.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS : Then it is unworthy of you.

Mr. KERR : He was there to say what he thought; and with respect to the railway that Port Curtis had got, the hon. member for that district would have been a long time on that side of the House before that railway had been built if it had not been that it had been commenced at both ends and a gap was left in the middle which was the laughing-stock of the colony.

Mr. HOOLAN : If there was one member of the Government whom hon. members on his side respected it was the Secretary for Railways, but they had a right to take some notice of a vote that sneaked about the House from one side to the other and was always given in a surreptitious manner against the principles advocated by the member giving it on the public platforms. With respect to the Enoggera railway the hon. member for Enoggera of course knew his own business, but an expenditure of £45,000 on that railway was something monstrous, and before the Loan Bill came on he should use all the means that were at his disposal to find out through whose property the line would pass. Such a sum should not be spent on a suburban railway of three miles either about Brisbane or in any other part

of the colony, as it could only end in the usual financial disaster that had overtaken so many private persons.

Question put and passed.

The House resumed; the CHAIRMAN reported that the Committee had come to certain resolutions, and the Committee obtained leave to sit again on Tuesday next.

The reception of the resolutions was made an Order of the Day for Tuesday next.

The House adjourned at sixteen minutes past 12 o'clock.