

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 21 DECEMBER 1898

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

WEDNESDAY, 21 DECEMBER, 1898.

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

COPYRIGHT REGISTRATION BILL—
VICTORIA BRIDGE ACT AMEND-
MENT BILL—ELECTIONS ACTS
AMENDMENT BILL.

ASSENT.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of messages from His Excellency the Governor, intimating that the Royal assent had been given to these Bills.

QUESTION.

BORDER TRAFFIC.

Mr. MORGAN asked the Premier—

1. Have the Government given consideration to the report of the Commissioner for Railways on the border traffic between Queensland and New South Wales, recently laid on the table of this House, in which the Commissioner points out that serious loss of revenue to the railways of this colony has occurred in the past as a result of the unfriendly competition of the New South Wales railway authorities for the trade of the south-western border districts of Queensland, and that such loss will certainly continue to increase unless prompt measures are taken by the Government of this colony to restrain the unfriendly competition complained of?

2. If so, has the honourable gentleman any objection to state what action, if any, has been determined upon?

The PREMIER replied—

Government are fully impressed with the great importance of this subject, and as the attitude of the New South Wales department may require to be met not alone by fiscal enactment but by railway extension proposals, which cannot be submitted this session, they intend during the recess to consider what steps should be taken to successfully conserve and direct the border trade of the South-western districts to the Railway Department and business community of Queensland.

SUPPLY.

RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE.

RAILWAYS.

Question—That £283,861 be granted for the Maintenance Branch—put and passed.

LOCOMOTIVE BRANCH.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS moved that £240,653 be granted for the Locomotive Branch. There was very little alteration in the vote. In the Northern division there was an increase in the number of enginemen, firemen, and mechanics to the extent of twenty-nine, which accounted for most of the increase in the vote.

Mr. GLASSEY: Perhaps the Minister could give some information as to what inquiry was being made into the serious and lamentable boiler explosions which had taken place recently in the very heart of the city, but which, fortu-

nately, were not attended with any loss of life. He presumed that inquiries were being held, and, as far as his information went, he believed it was the intention of the department to still further investigate the matter, and call in the assistance of independent persons from outside the colony. The hon. member for Burnett had put certain questions to the Minister on the subject the other day, and since that time the hon. gentleman had had an opportunity of going more fully into the matter. He had no wish to reflect in the slightest degree upon the Locomotive Engineer, or to go into any details of the question at all. He wanted to be assured that the department was fully alive to the dangerous possibilities of such accidents, and the Committee wished to have the fullest and latest information the Minister could give them on the subject.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: He could inform the Committee that the Commissioner was taking action in the matter under the 45th section of the Railways Act. A commission was being appointed to inquire into the causes of the late boiler explosions, and the Commissioner was determined—and justly so—to make the most searching and thorough inquiry into the matter. He had written to the Commissioner in New South Wales asking that two of their most expert engineers should be permitted to come up and sit on the inquiry, and no stone would be left unturned to satisfy the public as to the causes of the accident and to give assurance that measures would be taken to prevent their recurrence. Seeing that an inquiry of that nature was to be held, he did not think it would be right for the Committee to discuss the subject at any great length or to have anything said that might prejudice the inquiry in any way.

Mr. GLASSEY agreed with the Secretary for Railways that it would be imprudent and undesirable to discuss the matter at any great length, particularly if the discussion was to have a tendency to prejudice the inquiry in any way. That, he was sure, had not been the intention of the Committee, but rather to see that the department was fully seized of the importance of the matter, and would not confine the conduct of the investigation to persons in our own railway service. He was satisfied with the assurance of the Secretary for Railways that thoroughly competent experts outside the service of the colony, and absolutely independent, would take part in the inquiry, and that it would not be prejudiced in any way. He saw nothing in the vote to find fault with. It was always a large vote, but every year the department was rendering more service to the State.

The HON. G. THORN: Seeing that an inquiry was to be held into the recent explosions, he would not prejudice it by saying what he had intended to say on the subject. He hoped the commission of inquiry would not be confined to locomotive men.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It will be composed of the most competent engineers that can be got.

The HON. G. THORN was very glad to hear that. Of course he knew quite well why the explosions had occurred. The cause must be known to anyone who knew anything of locomotives.

The CHAIRMAN: I remind the hon. member that in rising he said he was not going to prejudice the inquiry in any way.

The HON. G. THORN was only saying that one answer only could be given to the question as to what caused the explosions, but he was not going to give his reason for them.

Mr. PETRIE asked if it was the intention of the department, when more locomotives were required, to call for tenders for them?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The department would conform to the usual custom of calling for tenders for more locomotives when required.

Mr. FRASER was glad the explosions had occurred not in connection with locomotives of local manufacture, but in connection with "Yankee Shoddy." He hoped that if any more were required they would be made substantially, and made in the colony.

Mr. KIDSTON: The Committee should be gratified to hear the action the Commissioner was taking in this matter. He wished to direct the attention of the Minister to the fact that he had received information that some of the engines on the Central Railway were in such a condition as to lead to further accidents, if not attended to. There were nine engines with cracked tube plates, and the pressure had to be reduced 20 lb. and 30 lb. to the square inch on those boilers, which were being worked from day to day. A large part of our immunity from accident in Queensland had come from the fact that most of our plant was new; we were only now beginning to find out the sore places, and unless more care was taken in the inspection of boilers there would very likely be a larger number of accidents in the immediate future. He trusted the Minister would see that a competent man was sent to make inquiry. He could give the numbers of the engines privately if the hon. gentleman liked.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Very well.

Mr. KIDSTON: Another matter to which he desired to draw the attention of the Minister was the defective and unhealthy condition of the drain in the engine shop at Rockhampton.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: He was rather surprised to hear the hon. member speak as he had spoken of the condition of some of the locomotives on the Central Railway, because Mr. Pemberton, the officer in charge, was regarded as a competent man, and he could hardly believe that he would allow engines to work in that condition. However, the matter would be inquired into. He would also see that the condition of things in connection with the drain spoken of by the hon. member was remedied.

Mr. HARDACRE: It was satisfactory to know that a board of experts was to be appointed to inquire into the accidents that had occurred recently; but he would suggest that there should be a permanent board of inquiry and appeal. A great deal was heard about the recent accident, because it was in Brisbane, but on the Central line engines had run off the rails.

The SECRETARY FOR MINES: There is a reason for that.

Mr. HARDACRE: Yes, and there was a reason for a boiler explosion. A little while ago there was an accident on the Esk line.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: That was careless driving.

Mr. HARDACRE: It was careless driving in the eyes of those who pronounced a decision, and that was what should be guarded against—inquiries being made and decisions given by responsible heads of departments, who would naturally blame the men in charge of the engines if they could do so. If a permanent board of inquiry were established, that would go a long way towards preventing accidents, because it would make everybody more careful. About two years ago the condition of one of the lengths on the Central line was pointed out to him, and he found that the dog spikes could be lifted out of the sleepers with the fingers in many places.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: What part of the line?

Mr. HARDACRE: Not far from Duaringa.

Mr. MORGAN: Did you report to the Minister?

Mr. HARDACRE: He reported the case at the time; and he was informed that the same thing applied to other parts of the line, and that some day there would be a frightful accident. He did not know whether any part of the line was in that condition now, but he knew that some new sleepers were hurriedly sent up after he made the statement. If there was a permanent board of inquiry the heads of departments would take care that the line was not in that inefficient state. The board could also hear appeals from decisions of the traffic manager.

Mr. DUNSFORD hoped that whoever made inquiries into the condition of the locomotives, would also inspect the rolling-stock, and not confine his attentions to the Southern district. He had heard complaints from the enginemen and firemen on the Northern line that during the cattle season they had to work for very long hours. He read in a paper that one man acknowledged that he was so wearied out with long hours that he fell asleep, but of course he did not vouch for the correctness of that statement. Still the fact remained that the men were overworked, and only the engine-drivers received anything extra; the firemen and guards receiving neither time off nor extra pay. He was pleased to see that more men had been employed, but he did not know whether they had been appointed since this complaint had reached him or not.

Mr. CURTIS: The Minister informed him last evening that the reduced rates for passengers only applied to suburban lines about Brisbane, but on looking up the time-table for this month he found that the same discrepancy existed between the rates on the trunk lines in the Southern divisions, as compared with those in existence in the other divisions.

The CHAIRMAN: I would remind the hon. member that if it is the pleasure of the Committee that he should reopen a matter that was disposed of last night, of course it is all right, but he must see that the vote before the Committee is for the locomotive branch.

Mr. CURTIS: With the permission of the Committee, he wished to point out that the rate from Brisbane to Toowoomba was 17s. 5d., but for the same distance on the Central line it was 18s. 1d. From Rockhampton to Westwood, thirty miles, the fare was 5s. 8d., but from Brisbane to Rosewood, the same distance, it was 4s. 8d. On the Western line, the fare from Brisbane to Blaxlands, 150 miles, was £1 5s. 5d., but for a similar distance on the Central line it was £1 6s. 3d. Judging from these figures it appeared as if the statement of the Minister was hardly correct.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The discrepancy was easily explained. It was owing to the fact that passengers on the Southern and Western line had the advantage of the lower suburban fares, so far as those fares extended.

Mr. CURTIS: He wished to ask, on behalf of the hon. member for Port Curtis, whether it was the intention of the department to provide a platform and a goods-shed at Boolburra? The farmers who used that line had no shelter for their produce, which had to be left to the mercy of the elements, and it was the cause of a great deal of inconvenience and loss.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: He would make inquiries, and if circumstances warranted it a shelter-shed would be erected.

Mr. BROWNE asked what provision was made for the periodical inspection of locomotives upon faraway lines such as the Croydon to Normanton Railway?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The Locomotive Engineer visited all such lines periodically to see that they were in order.

Mr. BROWNE: He very seldom goes up there. Mr. SIM asked what the department proposed to do with the material for fifty-one miles of railway which had been going to ruin for a large number of years on the banks of the Norman River, the interest on the cost of which must amount to several thousands yearly. It had now been removed to Croydon, where it was stacked, but, seeing that the connection between Normanton and deep water was badly wanted, it was desirable that they should have some information in regard to the intentions of the Government. The material was purchased with a view of carrying out a vote of the House for the construction of the Normanton-Clooncurry railway.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member must be aware that this vote deals with the locomotive department. The question of railway construction was fully debated last night.

Mr. SIM: He had been informed by the Minister that he could bring the matter on this afternoon.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It was very much to be regretted that the material had been lying unused for so long. Shortly after it was purchased the colony was prevented from going on with railway construction, but he believed that in the near future the rails would be required for railway construction in the district.

Question put and passed

STORES BRANCH.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS moved that £3,541 be granted for the stores branch.

Question put and passed.

POSTMASTER-GENERAL—SALARIES.

The PREMIER moved that £146,835 be granted for the Postmaster-General—salaries. There was an increase of £8,495, chiefly arising from small increases to clerks of £10 each, in addition to which provision was made for additional switchboard attendants on account of telephone communication having largely increased.

Mr. GLASSEY: What is the increased income from that source?

The PREMIER: Last year the report of the department stated that there had been considerable activity in this direction, and that the connections numbered 671 in Brisbane, 46 in Maryborough, 36 in Bundaberg, 53 in Rockhampton, 80 in Charters Towers, and 55 in Townsville. Since 30th June there had been connected with the system, 205 subscribers in Brisbane, 10 in Maryborough, 17 in Bundaberg, 24 in Rockhampton, 67 in Charters Towers, and 13 in Townsville, making the totals: 853 for Brisbane, 54 for Maryborough, 47 for Bundaberg, 75 for Rockhampton, 145 for Charters Towers, 77 for Townsville, and 78 for Toowoomba. He should have liked to give the telephone revenue apart from telegraphs, but that was not shown in the report. He thought it should be, and would request the department to divide the amount in future if it could be done. The increases consisted first of a rise of £30 to the chief clerk, a very deserving officer, who had had no increase since 1884, and there were a number of increases of £10 each to clerks. Those increases were not confined, by any means, to Brisbane, but were distributed over the provinces. There had also been slight increases to storeman and packers. There had been seventeen additional junior assistants admitted at the probationary salary of £80 a year, and an increase of £1,300 was required to meet exchanges between

Cairns, Toowoomba, Mackay, etc. The whole Estimates showed considerable expansion, and that expansion was demanded by the public in connection with business arrangements. There was an increasing demand for local authorities to be supplied with meteorological information, to be posted up at the public institutions in the principal towns of the colony. It would be remembered that last year, though he explained that the demand for that information had not at that time been met, he showed that the cost of the meteorological information supplied throughout the colony, if charged for as ordinary telegraphic service, would have amounted to about £30,000. He admitted the importance of the information, but it meant considerable expenditure in the department, and he had no hesitation in saying that this year it would amount to some £40,000 or £50,000 if charged for as he said. Hon. members must remember that the department was one which required additional provision from time to time, or there would be an outcry that it was not keeping abreast of the public demands. And while there was a demand for an enlarged service there was also a demand for a cheaper service. Hon. members were aware that the intercolonial telegraph rate had recently been considerably reduced and though they had not yet agreed to the 1d. postage rate which Great Britain, Canada, India, and British Africa had established, there was a growing demand for increased postal and telegraphic facilities and for a reduction of rates.

Mr. GLASSEY: Has there been any loss in consequence of the reduction upon intercolonial telegrams?

The PREMIER: It had come into operation so recently that they could hardly gauge it yet, but it was very gratifying to know that the loss they suffered on the reduction in direct cable rates from Brisbane to London direct had now been more than made up. Hon. members would remember that the cable charges from Brisbane direct to London had been nearly double what they were from the southern colonies, and it was gratifying to know that the temporary loss due to the reduction in the Brisbane rates, which amounted to some £7,000 the first year of the reduction, had now been more than covered.

Mr. TURLEY: But no one is sending cablegrams but the Government.

The PREMIER was surprised that the hon. member was not aware that the Government cablegrams formed but an insignificant part of the business done.

Mr. TURLEY: Commercial houses used to take advantage of the southern rate.

The PREMIER: That was so, as they used to send their cables through Melbourne or Adelaide; but that was when the tariff from Brisbane direct was 9s. as against 5s. in the other colonies. While the rate was at 9s. the department received £14,000 per annum from cablegrams; when the change was introduced the revenue from that source shrunk in the first year from £14,000 to about £7,000, and remained stationary at that for two or three years. He was glad now to be able to inform the Committee that last year, notwithstanding the cheaper tariff, they had improved upon the position at the higher rate.

Mr. TURLEY: It must be only a couple of years since the reduction was made.

The PREMIER: It would be seen from the figures produced at the Postal Conference held at Hobart in 1898 that at the higher tariff Queensland received £14,974 in 1891; in the following year, under the reduced tariff, the revenue was £7,184; in 1893, £8,044; in 1894, £8,646; in 1895, when it was lowest, £5,860; and in 1897 it was £14,557. So that his statement was strictly substantiated by those figures.

Mr. GROOM: What about the New Caledonia cable—how does it stand?

The PREMIER: In regard to the New Caledonia cable, the free business was £700; the value of private messages was £3,464 for the year ending 30th June, 1897, as against £2,525 for the business done during the preceding year; so that there was a considerable increase. It was not necessary for him to refer to the increases in the department in detail. The officers worked faithfully and well, and were deserving of the remuneration they received.

Mr. GLASSEY: Of course this was a growing department, and increased services made increased expenditure necessary. It was gratifying to know that the telephone service was working satisfactorily and was appreciated by the public, but he was sorry the accounts of that particular branch were not given separately. He believed that a request had been made for telephonic communication between the fire brigade and the police department at Bundaberg, but he thought the matter had been left in abeyance owing to the absence of the Commissioner of Police. With regard to the increase of £30 to the correspondence clerk, though it was not worth while taking up time over such a small amount, he did not think an officer already receiving £400 a year had anything to complain about. At the same time he believed all the hon. gentleman had said about the officer in question. If advances were made it should be in the lower grades, and he had no fault to find with the small increases to the officers receiving small salaries. He wished to know whether the hon. gentleman had any official information as to a rather prolonged dispute between the heads of the Post and Telegraph Department, which had induced the Public Service Board to institute an inquiry. The *Telegraph*, in an editorial yesterday, took notice of the matter, and if what was said was true it was rather a serious matter. When the heads of a department got at loggerheads there must be something seriously wrong, and it must lead to confusion which should not exist.

The PREMIER: I think it is a mistake about introducing the name of the Electrical Engineer. I know nothing about that.

Mr. MORGAN: It is the outside electricians and the Electrical Engineer.

Mr. GLASSEY: The article in yesterday's *Telegraph* only emphasised to a great extent the rumours that had been going about for a considerable time past. He quite agreed with the writer of that article when he said that the department must of necessity suffer if such friction existed, and he thought hon. members should have the results of the inquiry by the board in their hands before the session closed. He observed that there were a number of letter-carriers who received salaries ranging from £50 to £140 a year, and he should like some detailed statement as to the number of officers who received the £50, and those who received larger amounts, his reason being that he thought there was a desire on the part of the heads of the department to introduce a number of boys into the service at small salaries. Of course the department must be worked as economically as possible; but it was impossible to work it effectively with boys instead of men. He also desired some information as to how section 51 of the Public Service Act was working in regard to promoting men who had been a considerable time in the service, without compelling them to undergo the examination prescribed by the board. He was glad to acknowledge the assistance he received from the Premier when the matter was before the House; but it had been alleged that there was great

nactivity on the part of the heads of the department in promoting these men in the manner intended by the House.

The PREMIER: Referring to the friction which was alleged to exist in the department, he cordially agreed with the remarks of the hon. member that if there were friction it would be disastrous to the service. But the hon. member had been misinformed in regard to the connection of the Electrical Engineer with any friction that might exist. The chief manager in the Telegraph Department was the officer who had taken part in the contention, and he had urged that he and certain officers under him should have the matters of promotion and appointment of their officers in their own hands. As this friction did not exist when he was in the department, he was not conversant with its origin, and could only give the information which had been supplied to him; but at present the matter was under the consideration of the Public Service Board, and until they had furnished a report he could give no opinion as to the merits of the case. He must say, however, that it would not do to have any divided authority in the department, and his present attitude was to support the Under Secretary, whoever he might be, who was the responsible executive officer, although his views might be modified when he received the report of the board. He had deemed it his duty to ask the Under Secretary for his report on the present situation, and he would read it if hon. members desired.

Mr. MORGAN: Have you received a report from the other side? I do not think we should have any *ex parte* statement.

Mr. GLASSEY: I think we had better wait until we receive statements from both sides.

The PREMIER: He thought that they had better wait until they had received the report from the board, but he was anxious to comply with the request of the hon. member to give the Committee all the information he could. The question resolved itself into this: Certain officers had represented that the performance of certain duties should be placed in their hands, and the Under Secretary considered they should be under his control. He would express no opinion on the matter until the report of the Public Service Board had been received. With regard to the letter-carriers and sorters, they were fed from the lower ranks, and as men attained their seniority they were promoted. Two were employed at £90 a year, 1 at £94, 16 at £100, 22 at £110, 18 at £120, 19 at £130, and 18 at £180. There was also a junior letter-carrier at £70, and 1 at £60. With regard to the 32nd section of the Public Service Act—under which letter-carriers and others who had been admitted to the department before a certain year were eligible to be classified on receiving certificates of fitness from the board—the position stood thus:—There were 152 officers under the 32nd clause—line repairers, 58; stampers and sorters, 13; letter-carriers, 70; switchboard attendants, 10; and 1 messenger. Certificates had been granted to sixty-seven, and appointments provided for twelve, and in progress of appointment there were nine. Of course it was impossible to provide classified appointments at once for all those officers, and they must be absorbed from time to time. The spirit of the 32nd clause was being carried out as rapidly as circumstances would permit.

The HON. G. THORN took exception to the remarks of the hon. member for Bundaberg with regard to the correspondence clerk, who was a very old and efficient officer. A better one could not be found in the service, and he was worthy of a much larger increase. In reference to post office accommodation for Brisbane, he under-

stood it was intended to carry on some of the work nearly half a mile away from the present building. He saw no reason why the building should not be extended to the rear, where there was ample room; that would be a much better arrangement than having the work carried on under two roofs. He trusted a contract would be let immediately for the extension of the buildings. He also took exception to the mail service to the Northern ports. He must say that the Government had shown a want of business capacity in that matter. At one time there was only one line of steamers plying to Northern ports, and the Government were compelled to give a large subsidy, but now there were no less than three lines of steamers running to Townsville. That was ample for all requirements. It did not matter whether merchants at Townsville obtained their letters in the morning or afternoon, because they had the use of the telegraph wires at a very cheap rate. Complaints were frequently made now as to the inadequate mail service to the smaller Northern ports and the Gulf ports, and he thought the Government had made a very bad bargain in entering into the present contract. There was only one ground for it, and that was that passengers were conveyed over the railway to Gladstone, but that was not a sufficient justification for such a bad arrangement as existed at present. He trusted that the Premier would see that the mail service was remodelled on proper business lines, and that all the Northern ports would be served with equal justice.

Mr. HAMILTON wished to know if the unsatisfactory running of the steamers as far as Cooktown since the new contract had been in force had been brought under the notice of the department, and whether steps were being taken to remedy the matter.

The PREMIER: The hon. member for Fassifern occasionally electrified the House with some marvellous statement, but he had never made a more marvellous statement than that the attempt which had been made to bring the remoter parts of the colony into closer relationship with each other by means of the new mail contract was discreditable to business men. Hon. members knew that it was an improved and an expeditious service so far as it went. It did not go as far as it ought to go at present, but that was due only to the fact that they had not been able to get satisfactory tenders to take it further. Anyone who, like the hon. member, had been in the department as a Minister, must know that in the olden times they were constantly receiving applications for remission of penalties on account of delays, due to the fact that under the old contracts the steamers subordinated the expedition of the mails entirely to cargo requirements. That was what was causing the delay beyond Townsville now. The tenders received from the old contractors carried with them a condition that there should be no penalties imposed for delay due to any cause whatever. It must be remembered that the delays caused the greatest dissatisfaction, because of the way in which they led to the disarrangement of the inland mail services from the different ports. It was nonsense to say they had not an expeditious service now, when one could get on board the train on Friday evening at Brisbane, and be in Townsville on Monday morning at 6 o'clock. It was almost annihilating time and space, and to business men the advantage was incalculable. They lost no business time at all. Leaving Brisbane on Friday evening they could spend a day in Townsville, and be back in Brisbane on the following Thursday morning. To say that the institution of such a service reflected discredit on the business capacity of the

Government was a most unfounded statement, and could only arise from a narrow conception of the position. The Government deeply regretted that the service could not have been extended right round to the Gulf ports.

Mr. DUNSFORD: That is the weak point.

The PREMIER: That was the weak point, but they were now in treaty with two companies, and he hoped that within a very short time the public would be informed that a contract had been entered into, providing for an expeditious service from Townsville calling at Port Douglas, Cooktown, Thursday Island, and the Gulf ports and effecting a great improvement upon the present service. He admitted that the present service beyond Townsville was perfunctory, and in fact the old service was becoming completely demoralised by delays which caused serious trouble and inconvenience in connection with the inland mails. But in connection with the service to Townsville, they had reduced the time, where the train was used to Gladstone, to about the time between Brisbane and Sydney, and had brought Brisbane and Townsville into very close contact. He did not consider that the work had by any means been completed as the Gulf ports had fair ground for complaint at the present time, and he had hoped to be able before now to have announced that a satisfactory tender had been accepted. It was possible that such a tender would be accepted by next week.

The Hon. G. THORN knew all about this subject. He was not complaining of the service to Townsville, but beyond Townsville and to the Gulf ports. Still he remembered starting in the old days from Brisbane on Saturday and being in Townsville on Tuesday morning, and the present service was only a few hours faster than that.

Mr. DUNSFORD: Twenty-four hours faster for Charters Towers letters.

The Hon. G. THORN granted that under the present service there was a chance of catching the Western mail train from Townsville, which there was not under the old service. But other parts of the colony were better off under the old service than they were at present. The Adelaide Steam Navigation and the Australasian United Steam Navigation boats were never charged demurrage; but the E. and A. boats were charged by the postal department if they were not up to time.

Mr. SIM was glad to hear from the Premier that arrangements were in progress by which a better service would be given to the Gulf. With respect to the inland postal service there was nothing to complain of so far as the Gulf was concerned, but a suitable sea service was very much wanted; and he was glad to be able to wire to the district the information given by the Premier this afternoon. He wished to draw attention to a rule made by the Electrical Engineer which required revision: Whenever a wire broke the line repairer must within twenty minutes—no matter what might be the state of the country, no matter how deep it might be under flood—make an effort to reach the point where the interruption occurred; and the Electrical Engineer required those men to take with them a soldering pot and soldering iron, though they were not necessary. He hoped the hon. gentleman would make inquiry into this, and have it remedied.

Mr. LEAHY had listened with a great deal of interest to the Premier's description of the excellent service between the Southern and Northern portions of the colony. While agreeing that there was some benefit in that, he thought there was a loss which ought to be considered. The boats charged exactly the same for taking a passenger from Brisbane to Townsville as from Rockhampton to Townsville, and that had the effect of taking a great portion of the

traffic off the line from Brisbane to Rockhampton, which was a serious matter, and ought to be put into the scale against the advantages that had been mentioned. He wished to know the intention of the department with regard to the extension of the telephone system in connection with the telegraph lines? All over the west in New South Wales there were telephones in connection with the telegraph lines, and the people there were enabled to communicate cheaply and rapidly, but in Queensland people had to go hundreds of miles in places to send a message, though they might be riding along a telegraph wire most of the time. We prided ourselves to a great extent on our progress, but in this respect we were hopelessly out of it compared with New South Wales. He admitted that there was a regulation in force dealing with this matter, but it was destroyed in the carrying out. There was so much red tape about it that it had no effect whatever. In New South Wales the system was a great success, and there was no reason why this colony should not be just as progressive. He hoped the hon. gentleman would go carefully into the matter, because if he did he could come to the conclusion that he would not only be conferring a benefit upon a great many people, but he would be increasing the revenue of the country.

The PREMIER: The hon. member perhaps was not aware that they had just passed a regulation which assimilated the charges here to those in force in New South Wales. The capacity of the department was limited, and they could not proceed as fast as might be desired, but there was no desire to retard the work. Of course their charges had been rather high in the past, and extensions had not proceeded very rapidly. There were two systems in force. Under one of them a man could obtain a license for £1 to erect any length of wire he chose, and he would be supplied with two instruments. In consequence of the absence of the Electrical Engineer he could not give them any information in regard to the other, which was in connection with stations. The matter would be thoroughly inquired into, and every facility would be given for the extension of the system. Instructions would be given to that effect.

Mr. LEAHY: It appeared from what the Premier had said that men had to pay a license-fee to enable them to do certain work for themselves. He could inform him that people living on their southern border were connecting with the New South Wales telegraph system by means of telephones, instead of with the Queensland system, which led to a great amount of business being done with Sydney which ought to be done with Brisbane. The extension of that practice would lead to far more serious consequences than those the border tax was intended to prevent, and the Premier should see that the officers of the department did their work, or made room for others who would. No fads of any individuals should interfere with the welfare of the country, or prevent the development of its resources or the increase of its commerce.

Mr. HAMILTON: The Premier had omitted to answer a question he put to him as to whether any steps were being taken to enforce the penalties under the contract for the conveyance of mails up the coast. The mails had been considerably late on many occasions.

The PREMIER: The contract was not signed, not having been yet completed by the Crown Law Department, and until it was signed no penalties could be enforced. This was another example of the difficulties connected with the delivery of mails expeditiously where the superior attractions of cargo presented themselves to steamboat owners. In the new contract they would be relieved from that embarrassing

situation. He might inform the hon. member for Fassifern, who seemed to think that penalties for delays were never enforced, that in one year over £2,000 had been received from this source. As soon as this contract was signed the penalties under it would be strictly enforced.

Mr. STORY: With reference to what had been said by the hon. member for Bulloo, he might say that he had waited on the Under Secretary in reference to a matter of telephone communication with a border township, and while he was met with every courtesy, yet they were blocked by a regulation which was positively absurd. It provided that before a telephone could be granted a cash deposit of £10 must be paid. He thought it would be quite sufficient for the Government to take the guarantee from a few responsible persons in the district, and if one left then he must find a guarantor to take his place. The Minister would find that telephone communication would increase very rapidly if restrictions such as the one he mentioned were removed. He desired also to mention a matter concerning reserves for mail coach purposes. In the early days mail carriage was based largely on grass contracts, and there were plenty of places where mail horses could be run; but now that land was being so rapidly selected, it was almost impossible to get any run for mail horses. The consequence of that would be that in a few years the contracts would be based on corn-feeding for the horses, and that would increase the cost to the country threefold. In his opinion it would be wise to make reservations of land for mail purposes, such reserves to be handed over to the contractor when the contract was made, and taken back again when the contract expired. Then when railways were extended to the district, the reserves would be available for selection or sale. He hoped the matter would receive the attention of the department.

Mr. HOOD: In reference to the collection of weather reports, to which the Premier had referred, they were not so carefully attended to in the outside districts as round about Brisbane. Where information in regard to the weather was most required it was not available. He had suggested to the department that those reports might be posted daily at the telegraph offices in the drought-stricken districts, so that people might know where rain was falling or was likely to fall. A short comprehensive report might be sent every morning to every telegraph station in the colony, and in that way the weather reports would be made the best possible use of. He had been informed by the Postmaster-General that such a system would cost a great deal of money, but he would point out that a very short report would meet the case. He hoped the matter would be given consideration by the heads of the department.

Mr. TURLEY: The Premier had spoken of the large amount of revenue that was being obtained because of the difference that was being charged in the cable rates, and he led the Committee to believe, though not intentionally, that Queensland had been increasing her revenue from that source since 1891, which, according to the hon. gentleman's statement, appeared to be the year when she entered into the contract. Seeing that the hon. gentleman was at the last Postal Conference, he must know that that was not true. Queensland only entered into the arrangement to take up part of the guarantee at the Postal Conference of 1897. The following paragraph appeared in the report of the Postal Conference:—

The reduction in the cable rates which came into force on the 7th July, 1897, appears to have led to the restoration of the business to Queensland, as by a return published by the Postmaster-General of South

Australia, it is observed that when the reduction of rates took place in the southern colonies, 1891-2, the number of Queensland messages, words and value, fell off considerably; but for the year 1897, during one-half of which the reduced rates were in force, the messages increased from 1,897 in 1896 to 4,182 in 1897. Words from 14,132 to 52,012, and the value from £6,559 to £14,557. The sum received by Queensland in 1896 was £180 4s. 6d., and for 1897 £256 7s. 4d.

The hon. gentleman must know that very few cables outside of Government cables were sent direct from Queensland. When speaking at the Postal Conference at the commencement of this year, the first thing thrown at the hon. gentleman was Queensland was coming into the union when there was no guarantee to be paid, and the only defence the hon. gentleman could make was to say that if there was no guarantee it would be all the better, but Queensland was prepared to pay if there happened to be a loss. He wished to put that right, as it was not proper that statement should go forth from a Minister which would be misleading and would make people unacquainted with the facts conclude that Queensland had been under the guarantee since 1891 or 1892, when, as a matter of fact, they had been loafing on the other colonies—taking advantage of the guarantee which the other colonies had been paying. He wanted some information with respect to two mail contracts for services between Warwick and Goondiwindi and between Texas and Stanthorpe. He had been informed that though there were other persons who were prepared to offer better terms to the Government than the present contractor for those services he had had sufficient influence to secure the extension of those contracts without fresh tenders being called.

The PREMIER understood that the contracts referred to had been extended, but it was very inconvenient to answer at a moment's notice questions of that sort. Notice of such questions should be given in the ordinary way, so that the department might be given the necessary time to supply the information.

Mr. TURLEY explained that the hon. member for Flinders had been promised that the information would be given when dealing with these Estimates. Under those circumstances, he was justified in bringing up the matter. He had not been on the deputation to the Postmaster-General on the question of the Electrical Engineer having the power under his agreement with the Government to do work for people outside as consulting engineer which he might get the permission of the head of the department to do, but he gathered from the papers that the Postmaster-General said that the question would be considered when a further engagement was being entered into, but no satisfaction had been given in the direction of the Postmaster-General refusing any longer to give permission to the Electrical Engineer to take outside work. There were a considerable number of engineers—amongst them one who had been a member of that House, Mr. George Phillips—on that deputation, and he was sure they would not misrepresent matters.

The PREMIER: Is Mr. Phillips an electrical engineer?

Mr. TURLEY: He was a consulting engineer but he understood that the engineers all round took any work connected with engineering, and where it dealt with a subject with which they were not familiar they entered into a kind of partnership with engineers acquainted with that work, and in that way secured the best advice possible. The law in Queensland was that no Civil servant should be allowed to take up outside work in competition with the public, and that was only just. It seemed to him monstrous that a gentleman getting a very fair salary from

the Government should be allowed to take outside work as a consulting engineer in competition with men who were not in the Government service. A man in such a position becoming connected with a firm of electrical engineers outside could do everything for that firm, and build up its business to such an extent probably as to sweep out all other people following the same line of business. Everywhere he went the Premier preached the doctrine that people should not encourage their children to enter the Government service, and yet the Government did all they possibly could to enable the Government Electrical Engineer to wipe out other people who were not connected with the service.

The PREMIER: Not at all. It is not so.

Mr. TURLEY: It was so. The hon. gentleman must know that there had been a number of instances lately where the Government Electrical Engineer had been permitted to do outside work that could have been done just as well by other engineers not in the Civil service.

The PREMIER: How many electrical engineers are there in Brisbane?

Mr. TURLEY: A considerable number, he believed. There were three in Sydney, one in Brisbane and Sydney, one in Rockhampton, and nine in Brisbane. Those consulting engineers could have done the work.

The PREMIER: I want to know whether they are electrical engineers?

Mr. TURLEY: He understood that they were. Surely there was choice enough there for any firm or municipality requiring the services of an electrical engineer. Numbers of cases had been mentioned where the Postmaster-General had given permission to go outside and practically take work—

The PREMIER: What are you quoting from?

Mr. TURLEY: From a number of papers handed to him to-day, in which there was a letter from the hon. member for Brisbane North, Mr. Macdonald-Paterson, to the Postmaster-General, as follows:—

I have the honour to ask you to be good enough to supply me with the following information:—

(a) Have you consented to Mr. James Hesketh, electrician, practising his profession privately; if so, from when?

(b) Is Mr. Hesketh still allowed private practice? If convenient an early reply will oblige me, as I have shortly to meet constituents relative to the matter.

This was the reply of the Under Secretary, dated 16th November, 1898—

I have the honour, by direction, to inform you—in reply to yours of the 10th inst.—that under the agreement made with Mr. Hesketh on his leaving England for Queensland, he was allowed private practice with the consent of the Postmaster-General.

This consent has been applied for and given to the following persons for the purposes named:—

The Exhibition Company, to advise as to lighting the Exhibition.

The municipal council of Ipswich, for a report on the question of electric lighting for the municipality.

The municipal council of Brisbane and the municipal council of Charleville, for the same purpose.

The Underwriters' Association of Queensland, to advise as to fire risks.

The Electric Supply Company of Charters Towers, to advise on technical matters connected with the company's operations.

The trustees of the Opera House, Brisbane, for advice in the interests of the public safety as to danger from fire, and to report on the condition of the fittings, and as to the proper method of supply of electricity to the Opera House.

Surely the Government were not going to import men to act as consulting engineers to outside firms and private individuals.

The PREMIER: That was for the public safety.

Mr. TURLEY: Was it for the public safety that he was required by the Exhibition Company?

The PREMIER: Doubtless.

Mr. TURLEY: And the Underwriters' Association?

The PREMIER: It was at their distinct request.

Mr. TURLEY: While the hon. gentleman made the community believe he was in favour of not rushing the public service to get employment, he entered no protest against persons in the employ of the State competing with those whom he advised to remain outside.

The PREMIER: I never said so.

Mr. TURLEY: They could not always judge by what people said, but by their actions. This was the last paragraph of the Under Secretary's reply—

In no case is permission given to Mr. Hesketh to act as consulting electrical engineer unless the Postmaster-General has first satisfied himself that no other independent consulting electrical engineer is available for the purpose, and that it does not conflict with his official duties.

In what way did the Postmaster-General satisfy himself? He thought the persons outside had good ground for complaint. They had to pay rates, taxes, and duty, besides having to find capital and pay their hands, while this officer was drawing a good salary from the Government and had no expense whatever, so that he could do the work at much less than the people outside. Surely the hon. gentleman did not believe in that sort of competition! And while other people had to pay their fares to the places they visited, this officer was able to travel at no expense to himself whatever. The people in the business in Brisbane were completely handicapped by the fact that the Government were continually giving permission to this gentleman to see to the erection of electrical works. That was what was complained of in this paper, and the whole of this was signed by a number of engineers in Brisbane.

The PREMIER: Not electrical engineers.

Mr. TURLEY: A number of them are.

The PREMIER: Trackson is one; the others are not. All this harangue is waste of time. I can give the explanation in a few minutes.

Mr. TURLEY: Only one member on his side spoke on this before he did.

The PREMIER: You could have said all you had to say in ten minutes.

Mr. TURLEY: All that had been said on the other side in two hours could have been said in a quarter of an hour, but the hon. gentleman was not game to tell his own supporters they were wasting time.

The PREMIER: Quite prepared.

Mr. TURLEY: He intended to say what he had to say whether it pleased the hon. gentleman or not. He would just refer to the comments of engineers who were interested in this matter—

The information contained in the attached letter of the Under Secretary and Superintendent of Telegraphs is not complete, and it is not correct, inasmuch as that the officer in question has been consulted by other public bodies and persons not mentioned in the attached letter—namely,

1. The municipality of Cunnamulla and the municipality of Thargomindah, with a view of lighting these two towns by electricity.
2. There is no mention of permission having been given him to act for the Brisbane Hospital in connection with a telephone system they had erected throughout the buildings of the institution.
3. Neither is there any record of permission having been granted to the officer in question to spend the whole of one week at the Supreme Court (and thereby neglect his official duties) in connection with an action against the Brisbane Tramway Company.

After he had given his evidence in this case he should have returned to his duties, and if an expert was wanted to watch the case for the plaintiff, he should have been obtained from the outside public. Or if the Government had required an expert to be present to

watch the case in the interests of public safety, the said expert should have been engaged upon that work only, and not in prompting counsel for the plaintiff and showing such a personal interest in the case.

"Underwriters' Association to advise as to fire risks."—Emphatic exception is taken to the Government helping to support such an association (it being controlled absolutely by private enterprise) by allowing one of their officers to take up such work. In Melbourne and Sydney similar associations have their own engineer whom they pay, but in Brisbane this work was hitherto carried out by a consulting engineer, who used to come up from Sydney when required by the association, which was two or three times a year.

"The trustees of the Opera House, Brisbane, for advice in the interests of the public safety as to the danger from fire."—This statement is not true, for had he been requisitioned for this particular work for advice in the interests of public safety, it would have been through the Home Secretary's Department, and not by the trustees of the Opera House. This contention is supported by the fact that a certificate had been issued previous to Mr. Hesketh's inspection by the inspector for the Fire Underwriters' Association, stating that the rules and conditions imposed by the association with respect to electric light installations had been carried out in this building.

This officer was placed in such a position that his duties in connection with the department might conflict with his duties to this association.

Respecting the last paragraph in the attached letter, the Postmaster-General did not take any means by advertising or writing to the various firms and consulting engineers to satisfy himself that no other independent consulting electrical engineer was available for the purpose. Appended herewith is a list of names of some gentlemen in Queensland and New South Wales who are willing to accept consulting work when anyone requires their services.

It is obviously unjust that people in business, having rates, taxes, and duty to pay, also interest on invested capital, and a large staff of hands to find employment for, besides other incidental expenses, should have to compete with a Government official drawing a big salary, and who has not even the expense of an office boy or stationery to provide for. This has been going on ever since the officer in question took office, and the amount of fees received for consultations by certain firms from customers have been reduced by more than one-half.

When it is arranged that the Postmaster-General stops this injustice that many consulting engineers, electrical engineering, and steam engineering firms are suffering from, it would be well that an advertisement should appear in the principal newspapers throughout the colony intimating that after a certain date the officer in question will not be allowed to do any work whatever outside his own department.

Remarks have frequently been made to the effect that either the Telegraph Department is overmanned or there is not sufficient work to occupy the whole of their most expensive officers' time and attention.

Respecting the report for the municipal council of Charleville. On Saturday, 3rd September, an electrical engineer arrived in Charleville from Brisbane, and called upon the town clerk with a view to having an opportunity of giving the council a cost (or any other particulars they might require) of illuminating the town by electricity, and in reply was told that they had entered into an agreement with Mr. Hesketh, and that his fees in connection therewith were very satisfactory—well they might be, as he would receive a railway pass from here to Charleville and back, and in all probability travelling expenses, and his salary would continue to go on just the same.

The Postmaster-General might cloak his action with respect to public bodies, owing to the fact that they would be borrowing money from the Government to carry out any particular work.

If that were the case, then no fees between the Brisbane Municipal Council, the Thargomindah Municipal Council, the Charleville Municipal Council, etc., and Mr. Hesketh would have to be arranged, as he would be requisitioned by the Works Department to report upon the value of the plant when erected, as a guarantee that the Government would be secure in advancing the money.

It should be distinctly understood that it is the principle that is being attacked, not the individual.

P.S.—Was permission granted the officer in question to consult with the No. 2 South Great Eastern Gold-mining Company?

He did not know whether it had been granted. Then there was a list following of consulting

engineers who were available. After entering their protest and pointing out that the practice complained of was a distinct violation of clause 70 of the Public Service Act, they said—

With respect to the letter of the Under Secretary and Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs, dated 16th November, 1898, we beg to state that had the Postmaster-General communicated with us we should have been and are always available to undertake the works he has allowed the Government Engineer to carry out.—John W. Rock, M.I.E.E.; Alex. Adams, C.E.; J. Wildridge and Sinclair; O. Granowsky; A. McDonald; P. Trackson, A.I.E.E.; W. Gibbon Cox, C.E.; George Phillips, C.E.; Claude Wm. Chambers; Geo. T. C. Wilson; Thomas Kirk, Assoc. M. Inst. C.E., M. Inst. M. and C. Engineers; E. Lloyd-Owen, M.E. and C.E.; R. A. Hamilton, C.E.

He might say that personally he was in favour of Mr. Hesketh's services being available to local authorities, but if he was allowed to charge a fee it should be paid into the consolidated revenue, as was done in the case of Mining Department experts who were called upon to do work outside of the Government service.

The PREMIER: When he interjected that the hon. member was wasting time he did so because he thought he was dwelling unnecessarily long on a matter which was susceptible of very easy explanation. He yielded to no one in the community in his desire to protect men who had their own bread and butter to earn by their own exertions from competition with public servants. In principle, he wholly coincided with the observations of the hon. member. Mr. Hesketh was a gentleman well known to be a specialist in electrical engineering, and arrived here when the Hon. Mr. Thynne was Postmaster-General. He was not aware at that time that he had permission to accept private work, but any blame which was attachable to anyone attached to himself, because when he became Postmaster-General he instructed Mr. Hesketh to perform a duty which it was represented to him could only be performed by a specialist. Mr. Hesketh was absolutely against accepting the work, and impressed upon him the inconvenience to which the department would be put by his having to perform such duties. At the time to which he referred there was no electrical engineer of any prominence or note in the colony, and he could assure the Committee, on excellent authority, that there was not a consulting electrical engineer in Queensland. The gentlemen to whom the hon. member alluded were civil engineers, and he would no more dream of asking any of them to effect an installation in his house than he would of asking the Chief Engineer for Railways to do so. He said, deliberately and advisedly, that at the present time there was not an electrical consulting engineer in Queensland. He came into office six months after the Electric Light and Power Act came into force, and he was at once applied to by the Fire Underwriters' Association to allow Mr. Hesketh's services to be utilised with a view of seeing that the electrical connections with buildings which were covered by their risks were satisfactorily made.

Mr. TURLEY: Another man used to do that previously.

The PREMIER: That might be, but satisfaction was not given, and at that time Mr. Hesketh was the principal electrical authority in the colony. He received the representations made to him with caution, and did not commit himself to any promise in the matter. About the same time it would be remembered that an accident occurred in connection with the cutting of one of the trolley wires of the tram service in South Brisbane, which resulted in a serious accident, as the electrical fluid, entering some premises there, resulted in a number of machines being destroyed by fire. He thought the hon. member for South

Brisbane had himself at the time impressed upon members of the House the necessity for some precautions being taken for the protection of their electrical operatives and the employees of the Tramway Company. The public mind was excited at the time about the possible effects of the introduction of the new electrical system, and understanding from Mr. Barton, who at the time was recognised as one of the pioneers of electrical installation—

Mr. TURLEY: Was he not a competent engineer?

The PREMIER: Yes; but Mr. Barton himself had represented to him the necessity for a gentleman like Mr. Hesketh supervising the introduction of electrical installations in connection with public and private buildings, for the protection of the whole community. Upon that he allowed Mr. Hesketh to tender his services, not as a permanent office, but to tender his advice for the time being as a consulting engineer upon electrical connections with buildings under cover to the underwriters' association.

Mr. TURLEY: Is he still acting in that capacity?

The PREMIER did not know what might have occurred during the past twelve months. The Municipal Council of Thargomindah at that time were introducing electric light installations and were most desirous to secure the services of Mr. Hesketh, and other towns had also expressed a desire to secure his services. He pointed out that at that time and still the heavy duties of the department almost occupied the whole of Mr. Hesketh's attention. The wires and poles in use by the department were in a very bad state, and hon. members would admit that they had been almost reconstructed and that entailed upon Mr. Hesketh very heavy departmental work.

Mr. TURLEY: He introduced a different system.

The PREMIER: And a very much more perfect system. He mentioned that to show that Mr. Hesketh's hands were full departmentally. With reference to the Opera House, the hon. member would easily understand that a faulty electrical installation in a building like that might be attended with most disastrous results in case of accident, and he had been assured that there was no other electrical engineer of sufficient capacity for the work. He understood there were young men rising now who were giving particular attention to that branch of engineering which required as much distinct study in engineering science as civil or marine engineering. When there was no other competent engineer available, he thought he was justified in lending the services of Mr. Hesketh in such cases, but his minutes upon his instructions—which could be called for—would show that they had been safeguarded by the condition that it was to be only a temporary convenience, and must not be construed into a permanent employment of Mr. Hesketh outside the service of the Government.

Mr. TURLEY: There is a postscript to that letter. Is there anything in that?

The PREMIER: He could give no information about that. He had no knowledge of it, as it had not occurred during the time he was in the office. With regard to the petition, he had seen nothing of it before, but while he did not disparage the professional abilities of the gentlemen signing it in the branches of engineering in which they had gained their diplomas, with the exception of Mr. Trackson, he did not recognise any of them as electrical engineers in the true sense of the term; and he repeated, on first-class authority, that Mr. Hesketh was at present the only consulting electrical engineer in Queensland. At the same time he would bring the apprehensions expressed under the notice of his

colleague, the Postmaster-General, and he was sure that no man would more readily conform with the wishes expressed than Mr. Hesketh. He was able now to give the information asked by the hon. member for South Brisbane with respect to the extension of the contract for running the mails between Warwick and Goondiwindi. The original contract was for three years, with one year's further extension, and that would end on the 31st December, 1899. There had been no alteration of the contract, the additional year being a feature of the contract itself. With regard to the Stanthorpe to Texas contract, the original contract was for three years, with two years' extension, ending on the 31st December, 1899. There had been no special extension granted beyond the period permitted by the terms of the original contract. With regard to what the hon. member for Carpentaria mentioned at an earlier period about telegraph line repairers having to carry soldering material as part of their equipment, he was informed that Mr. Hesketh had introduced the system because soldering produced a more perfect joint and rendered the line less liable to interruption, and he saw no reason to depart from the rule.

Mr. DIBLEY: The Premier was rather hard on Mr. Barton when he said that there was no consulting electrical engineer in Queensland till Mr. Hesketh came here. Mr. Barton had been teaching electrical engineering at the technical college for years, and it was rather hard on him and his pupils that such a statement should be made. He hoped the committee of the school of arts would take the matter up.

The PREMIER: Perhaps he had misled the hon. member. He wished to draw a distinction between contracting engineers and consulting electrical engineers. Mr. Barton was a contracting engineer, not a consulting engineer. In fact, he understood that Mr. Barton desired that Mr. Hesketh's services should be availed of in connection with certain work in which he was the contracting engineer.

The HON. G. THORN, referring to what had been said about the Northern mail service, maintained that it was very little better than the old service, and that the colony was subsidising steamers for running in competition with the railway. He was pleased that it was intended to run a steam service to the Gulf, and he trusted that the boats would not be small toys, but mail steamers worthy of that part of the colony.

Mr. SMITH considered the new mail service a great improvement on the former service, and it would be a still greater improvement if arrangements were made to make the inland services connected with the ports tally with the arrival and departure of the steamers. He wished to know whether it was likely that a reduction would be made in the charge for telegrams between Queensland and Victoria? A reduction had been made for the first ten words from 8s. to 2s., but there was some difficulty, he understood, with regard to the words beyond that number, owing to the charge in New South Wales remaining the same. Another thing he desired to know was whether it was likely that an agreement would be come to in respect to the proposed cable service between Vancouver and Australia?

Mr. FINNEY: He wished to draw attention to the fact that Mr. Watson, who had been in charge of the telephone department for nineteen years, was receiving the small salary of £220 a year, and had only received one small increase during the last twelve years. Also his assistant, Mr. Nelson, who had been twelve years in the service, was receiving only £120 a year. Those gentlemen had done excellent service, and were being paid ridiculously small salaries for men in their positions. Even clerks who required no

training at all were receiving more, and it was certain that if the Government wished to retain the services of good men they would have to pay them better. They had been offered appointments by Sydney people in connection with the work of restoring the metal switchboard, which showed they were thoroughly competent, and he could not understand why they were being paid so little.

Mr. PETRIE: He had much pleasure in supporting the statements of the hon. member for Toowong, and thought these officers had been very badly treated. They had been a number of years in very responsible positions, and it was about time that some consideration was shown to them. In regard to Mr. Hesketh, he was brought out here at a large salary, with the right of private practice, and had been within his rights in all that had taken place. He ought to be paid a good salary, because he was a good man, and he should be allowed a consulting practice the same as other professional men were. He had had a lot to put up with, and when the new arrangement was being made these matters should be considered.

Mr. McDONNELL: There were a few matters he would like to refer to. On the 1st of this month he asked the Premier the following questions:—

1. Have there been two appointments made as travelling mail officers upon the Northern Railway from Townsville to Hughenden?
2. If so, how many applications were received for said positions?
3. Were the positions offered to classified letter-carriers who held certificates from the Public Service Board under section 32 of the Public Service Act of 1896?

And the replies he received were—

1. The appointments have not been made.
2. Ten applications have been received.
3. The positions have not been offered to anyone.

He was rather surprised to find that the information given by the hon. gentleman was altogether wrong, as he had been told, as a positive fact, that these positions had been offered to ten other officers in the department, who declined to accept them. His point was that there were a number of classified officers, letter-carriers, who were not offered these positions.

The TREASURER: Are the local men to have no show?

Mr. McDONNELL: In this case the classified officers had the first show, and he wished to know why an exception had been made. When the Premier was Postmaster-General he initiated a system which gave great satisfaction to the men, and that was that notices of all vacancies in the department should be posted up, stating the salaries, and the men in the department who were eligible to fill them; but since he left that system had been discontinued, and only a favoured few knew what was going on. The hon. member for Toowoomba asked a question on the 19th of this month in connection with the question of temporary employment. He was given to understand that men were brought into the department to do temporary work, but the fact was that there had been for a number of years men kept in the department for the purpose of filling temporary positions, but there were officers in the department—letter-carriers and others—who were justly entitled to those positions and were qualified under section 32 of the Public Service Act. Those men were very much dissatisfied that they were not appointed. In the matter of promotions, he thought some better system should be adopted and more fair play meted out. In most departments the Minister had a say in the appointments, but it seemed that in the Post Office the high officials were allowed

to arrange everything. In 1897 a deputation of letter-carriers waited on the present Premier complaining of the difficulty of getting promotion and the unsatisfactory way in which increases were given, and asked the Minister to promulgate regulations dealing with the matter. The hon. gentleman received the men favourably, and gave them to understand that he would see that regulations were framed, but that had never been done. It was generally understood in the department that the high officials were not willing to give that fair play to the classified letter-carriers to which they were justly entitled.

Mr. MORGAN: The Minister, in moving the item before the Committee, had explained the reasons for the contemplated changes during the year, and he was followed by the leader of the Opposition, from whom members might naturally have expected to hear something of general interest to the public so far as the Post Office and Electric Telegraph Office were concerned. The hon. gentleman might have dealt with foreign and home mails, mails coastwise and inland, telegraph and telephone systems, etc., but instead of that he confined himself entirely to salaries. Practically there had been a repetition of last night's proceedings when the Railway Department was under review, and when hon. members devoted their time and attention to endeavouring to forward the interests of individuals rather than to a broad view of the question and the discussion of departmental administration. One would think from last night's discussion that the railways were provided to give billets to a number of persons, because hon. members utterly disregarded the interests of the community at large and advocated the interests of the men. The same thing had been going on in connection with the Postal Estimates. Hon. members representing suburban constituencies, where Civil servants were plentiful and influential, had brought forward detailed catalogues of grievances in respect to particular officers. He thought such a line of conduct was fairly open to protest by other members that the interests of the community should, in discussing the Estimates, be overshadowed by the interests of the individual. He did not blame individual members for that. He was complaining of the system which had been allowed to grow up, and which seemed to indicate that a change of some sort was necessary. Either a change by which the power of the Civil Service vote should be in some way curtailed should be made, or they should adopt a different system of dealing with the Estimates for the various public departments. Different methods of dealing with the Estimates were adopted in other countries, and they might with advantage adopt a different system here. Certainly the country got very little value from the irregular, disjointed, unsatisfactory, resultless discussions they had in Committee of Supply. After hours of such discussion, when the patience of members was worn out, and their strength was exhausted, in the small hours of the morning votes were rushed through for hundreds of thousands of pounds, and some of them absolutely without consideration. He feared that was what would continue until some such change as he suggested took place. As the representative of a country constituency he wanted an opportunity to say something on the railway Estimates, but he could not get in between the speeches of hon. members on the other side who were discussing the claims of the men in the service rather than the claims of the public.

Mr. TURLEY: At what time were the Estimates brought on?

Mr. MORGAN admitted that they had been brought on very late, but though the Government might be to blame for that, they should remember that they had reached a stage of the

session when it was necessary for them to make haste rapidly if they were to rise at a reasonable time.

Mr. TURLEY : How could you have a very full discussion under the circumstances ?

Mr. MORGAN : There had been sufficient time to have had all matters of importance dealt with fairly if hon. members had not occupied the time in the interests of the men and not of the community.

Mr. HARDACRE did not know whether other hon. members objected to the lecture they had heard, but he certainly did, especially as coming from the hon. member for Warwick, who might very properly take all his high and mighty remarks to himself, because he had heard the hon. member over and over again bring up a long discussion about the freight on a few pumpkins from Warwick, and upon small matters concerning individual farmers in his own district. With regard to the Railway Estimates, nine-tenths of the discussion upon them was upon matters which were not connected with the railway men's wages at all. He had himself for some time been greatly interested in the question, but he had deliberately limited his remarks to two speeches of five or ten minutes each. It should be remembered, too, that some members had refrained from speaking upon that subject at all, and that those who did had dealt with the whole body of railway servants and not with particular instances, and, further, the remarks were only necessary because of the injustice to which the men had been subjected by the Government for the last five or six years.

The CHAIRMAN : I think the hon. member has sufficiently replied to the hon. member for Warwick, and I ask him to confine his remarks to the vote before the Committee.

Mr. HARDACRE had no wish to say any more on the subject, but when individual members made charges of that kind they must expect to get something back.

At seven minutes past 8 o'clock,

The CHAIRMAN : In accordance with Standing Order 171 I call upon the hon. member for Carpentaria, Mr. Sim, to relieve me in the chair.

Mr. SIM accordingly took the chair.

Mr. KERR : Some few months ago the police magistrate at Longreach had been brought to Isisford to hold an inquiry into the conduct of the post and telegraph master there. The inquiry was held, and the papers sent down to the Public Service Board, and they had waited on the Postal Department to find out what had been the result of the inquiry. He had not been able to get any information about it. He wished the Premier now to say what had been the result. The inquiry was held because upon a certain day the officer in question at Isisford had been drunk and incapable, and two strangers had to be brought in to sort the mails. The matter was important, and he would not have referred to it if that had been the only occasion upon which that officer had been found in a similar state.

The PREMIER : An inquiry was held by the Public Service Board, and their decision was that the officer should be reprimanded, which was accordingly done.

Mr. KERR : If that was the result, the people could have very little faith in a Public Service Board inquiry.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS was surprised at what the hon. member had said. He had frequently been in the post and telegraph

office at Isisford, and his experience of Mr. Halloran was that he was a thoroughly sober man.

The PREMIER : There was no proof of intoxication.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS : He had never known him to take spirits, but he had seen him refuse. He was a very old officer in the service, and this was the first time he had heard of a charge being brought against him. He had known that gentleman nearly twenty years, and he was well known all over the colony as a true and faithful servant of the State.

Mr. KERR : He had not known Mr. Halloran twenty years, but he had seen him drunk in Isisford. On the Sunday to which he had referred that officer was in such a state that he fell down outside, and had to be assisted into his house.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS : When was that ?

Mr. KERR : In the month of July. He acknowledged at the inquiry that he was incapable of sorting the mail on the Sunday when it arrived by the coach. It was well known that Mr. Halloran was a drunkard.

The HOME SECRETARY : A disgraceful statement !

Mr. STEWART : It was a pity that the hon. member for Warwick did not, in addition to giving members on both sides a well-merited lecture, give them the benefit of his most excellent example as to how the vote should be discussed. He thought the colony was to be congratulated on its postal system, and was surprised that hon. gentlemen opposite, who were such strong advocates of individualism, did not attack this socialistic institution. This little instalment of socialism in our time showed the necessity of extending the socialistic system. They often heard the complaint that the Post Office did not pay, and that might be true to a certain extent, but he contended that the accounts of the department were not presented as they ought to be. The deficit last year was £67,000, but if the services performed by the department were charged for, as they would be if the system were in the hands of private enterprise, it would be found that the department was actually paying its way. For instance, the cost of weather forecasts was about £31,000 a year, and he did not think that ought to be entirely debited to the Postal Department, because if they wanted forecasts, and this institution were in the hands of private people, this amount would have to be paid. They also found that the value of "O.H.M.S." messages was £14,000 a year, so that in these two items alone they had a sum of £53,000, which, if actually paid to the Postal Department, would reduce this deficit to about £14,000. Even with their sparse population, their system was within measurable distance of paying its own way, which was a remarkable triumph for socialism. The hon. member for Warwick had complained about the amount of time taken up in discussing the private grievances of Civil servants. Of course the interests of the community were paramount, but at the same time it was not only the privilege of Parliament, but its duty, to see that employees of the State suffered no injustice which could be removed. Notwithstanding the efficient condition of the service, he could believe that some improvement was possible. While in some cases economy almost amounting to cheeseparing was carried on, in other cases extravagance was common, and heads of the departments should keep a firm hand upon all expenditure. It was one of his articles of faith in connection with socialistic enterprises

that they should be carried on without imposing too heavy a burden upon the State. If they could be they were a success, but if not there was always a danger of their breaking down, and he did not think any of them desired that their railway and postal services should drift out of the hands of the State into the hands of private individuals. Notwithstanding Queensland was only some forty years old, its postal service was in a better condition than that of Scotland when he was a boy.

Mr. BELL: There is no comparison between the two periods.

Mr. STEWART: He quite admitted that, but Scotland was centuries old, and had a postal system of considerable antiquity. He trusted that they would go on in the good way they had taken, and make their service even more effective than now.

The PREMIER: The hon. member for Bowen had asked him a question in connection with the inland mail services which ran in conjunction with the coastal services, and referred more particularly to the service between Bowen and Ayr. He had stated that the great object in connection with the coastal service was to insure regular communication with the inland services, and in almost every case they had accomplished that, but there were one or two services which required reforming, and possibly this was one of them. He could promise that the matter would not be lost sight of, as it was the intention of the department that all lines radiating from the ports inland should have the greatest possible facilities for despatch. With regard to the Pacific cable, he was sorry to say that notwithstanding that a report had appeared in the Press that Sir Sandford Fleming had proposed a more extended scheme of a Pacific cable together with an Atlantic cable, and that the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Chamberlain, had extended his approval to the scheme, yet no advice whatever had reached the department concerning that later proposal, so that the matter of the Pacific cable still stood *in statu quo*. At the last Postal Conference there was a very warm expression of opinion given by the Australian colonies there represented that it was desirable that a Pacific cable should be constructed immediately, and the proposal was that the Australian colonies should contribute four-ninths, and Great Britain and Canada five-ninths, of the expenditure. However, he was very glad to see that the matter had been revived in another shape by the proposal of Sir Sandford Fleming, and hoped that his action would have the effect of inducing steps to be taken in regard to the Pacific cable, in which all Australia was interested. With respect to the reduced rates for telegraphy between Queensland and Victoria, that was a matter which had been repeatedly discussed, even before the meeting of the Postal Conference at Hobart in March last, when negotiations were concluded as to a reduced tariff between Queensland and New South Wales. The rates in the latter case had been reduced by one-half, the charges now being 1s. for the first ten words, and 1d. per word for each additional word. Consequent upon that, negotiations were entered into with Victoria with the view of getting the former charge of 3s. reduced to 2s. for the first ten words, and 2d. for each additional word, but they had had to conclude the negotiations on the basis of 2s. for the first ten words and 3d. for each additional word. The credit was due to Queensland and Victoria of having endeavoured to induce New South Wales to allow the extra word to be charged 2d., each colony receiving one-third of that amount, but New South Wales stuck out for one-half, leaving the other half to be divided equally

between Victoria and Queensland. He had that moment received a telegram from the Postmaster-General of New South Wales as follows:—

Re reduction telegraph rates I agree to proposal that from 1st January next the cost of telegrams between Queensland and Victoria be 2s. the charge for extra words to remain as at present.

He regretted that in a small matter of that sort New South Wales had not shown a wider spirit and met her neighbouring colonies on equal terms, so that the general public convenience might be facilitated.

Mr. NEWELL: It had been stated by the hon. member for Bulloo and the hon. member for Balonne that places desiring telephone communication had only to deposit £10 with the department. That was news to him, because on three occasions when he had applied to the department to have telephone communication established in places in his district, he was told that £15 would be required in two instances, and £25 in another instance. He should like to know why different rates were charged in different parts of the colony? In one of the cases he referred to, the £15 had been paid to the department for some time, but up to the present the telephone communication had not been established, because, so he was informed, the department had not the necessary instruments. Would the hon. gentleman tell him whether the instruments had yet arrived in the colony, or whether the instruments the department had had in stock had been used to meet applications made subsequent to his? He might mention that at two of the places which had asked for a telephone, the telegraph wire ran right through, and that at the third it ran within half or a third of a mile of the spot where they wished the telephone to be located. When telephone or telegraph communication was demanded for a district, he thought it was the duty of the department to meet that demand if the circumstances of the district warranted them in doing so.

The PREMIER was informed that 200 instruments had arrived by the "Jumna," so that there would be no delay in supplying all requirements. He was also informed that £10 was the minimum charge, and that 10 per cent. on the cost of construction was the basis of the calculation. They had heard a good deal from hon. gentlemen representing country districts about the heaviness of the charge, but it struck him that residents in the city had cause to complain with greater justification. There were many people in the suburbs of Brisbane who had to pay £15 and £20 a year for the use of telephones and yet, recognising the convenience that they were, no complaint was made. While he desired to see the telephone system extended as rapidly as possible, he did not see that it was the duty of the State to supply every station and farm in the colony with a telephone. It appeared from what some hon. members said that the State should make no charge at all. He did not think there was any reason to complain of the charge made by the department.

Mr. STORY: His complaint was that the department really made a cash charge, and there was no guarantee about the business. In the case of guaranteed railways no cash payment was made, and the guarantee from the local body was considered sufficient. What did the Government want more than that?

Mr. NEWELL: In two instances out of three that he mentioned the payment had been made, and the money was in the hands of the Government, but no telephone had been supplied. The telephones he spoke of were really used in substitution for the telegraph, and people paid for sending their messages to the nearest telegraph

station, but in the towns subscribers to the telephone exchange had the free use of the wires for the payment they made. There was a considerable difference between the two things.

Mr. JENKINSON: In his district there was a place called Curra, at which a large cattle-trucking trade was carried on. He had requested the Postmaster-General to have a telephone established at the railway station, and the department demanded a cash deposit of £20. He thought a guarantee from local people would answer all purposes.

The PREMIER had not the slightest doubt that on the matter being represented to the Postmaster-General he would give his closest attention to it and see if the views of those who expressed themselves in favour of a change could be met. Hon. members would readily understand that there were guarantees and guarantees, and it was not always safe to accept a guarantee as a basis of ultimate payment. He could, therefore, quite understand the department being chary about accepting guarantees.

Mr. KIDSTON: Earlier in the session he moved for the production of a return showing the value of non-paying telegrams sent by the Telegraph Department, for the purpose of ascertaining the amount of work for which the department might fairly take credit when making up its accounts. It was unfair to blame the department for not paying when it did a large amount of work for the other departments for nothing. The Railway Department took credit for the work done by it for the various Government departments, and the Telegraph Department was entitled to do the same. The return showed that there was some need for reform, as the value of free messages was given at £53,000. With regard to three-quarters of that amount, it was merely an approximation, as the Premier himself had given the cost of telegrams connected with the meteorological department as £40,000 or £50,000. The people of the colony were continually crying out for more work being done in connection with the meteorological department, but they had no idea that it cost anything like that amount of money. The Telegraph Department had been unable to say what each of the departments had spent in telegrams. The Railway Department was able to allocate the non-paying part of its traffic without difficulty, and there was no reason why the Telegraph Department should have any difficulty in the matter. He had found on inquiry that the department made a record of "O.H.M.S." messages, but they were kept in one lump, and they were unable to disentangle them by any other method than going through all the messages. Every store-keeper kept the accounts of his customers separate, and there was nothing to prevent the Telegraph Department doing the same. If the Government departments had to pay postage on their written communications he did not see why they should not pay for their wire communications, because, in addition to the disadvantage of the present rule-of-thumb method of doing the thing, he was persuaded that it was an expensive system. Many messages were sent by wire which could very well be sent by post, while O.H.M.S. messages were also much more lengthy than there was any need for. Three years ago the Postmaster-General had called attention to the inordinate length of O.H.M.S. messages, and the Post and Telegraph Department had again called attention to it in a circular issued in May last. A little attention would remedy the evil, and not only lessen the amount of free work over the wires, but give them a clearer notion of the way in which the department would pay if it got credit for the work done for Government departments.

Mr. STEPHENSON asked the Premier whether there was any truth in the statement he had heard that the Electric Telegraph Department was in the habit occasionally of importing operators from the other colonies, chiefly from New South Wales? He was reluctant to believe that such was the case, but he had been informed that it was so; and if that state of things obtained there would be no incentive to the young men who were being trained on the staff of the department to put forth their best efforts to become efficient. It appeared to him, supposing the statement to be true, to be a distinct reflection upon the way in which the department was managed. He might also say that several of his constituents had complained of the length of time which ensued between the sorting of letters and newspapers at Ipswich in the morning and the delivery at their houses. Those complaints were not attributable to any lack of zeal on the part of the Ipswich Post Office officials, either sorters or letter-carriers, but arose from the paucity of the letter-carriers, and could be remedied at a very trifling additional expense. One of his constituents, who was also a member of the House, who resided within 250 yards of the post office, did not obtain his correspondence in the morning till after 11 o'clock, although it left at 9 o'clock.

The PREMIER: Why does he not have a private box?

Mr. STEPHENSON: He did not know. That particular gentleman could perhaps afford to do so, but a great many were not in that position. It seemed a most extraordinary thing that it should take two hours and upwards to deliver letters a distance of 250 yards. He was aware that that was a small matter, but it affected a considerable number of people at Ipswich, and he would ask the Premier to bring it under the notice of the Postmaster-General with a view to having the grievance remedied.

The PREMIER: There was no foundation whatever for the report or suspicion that any operators were imported from the other colonies for the purpose of filling the ranks of the service here. But it happened that at the time the reduced tariff came into operation there was a very great increase of business, and there were some men here, who had been previously employed in the other colonies, who made application for employment, and being experts they were taken on. But they were residing here at the time, and their applications were simultaneous with the increased demand for operators. With regard to the delivery of letters, those complaints were of continuous occurrence. It was obvious that in the course of a letter-carrier's beat some one must be last, and dissatisfaction must exist. He understood the department had tried the experiment of sending letter-carriers in one direction at the morning delivery, and in the opposite direction at the evening delivery, so that there was a sort of compensation. If any serious inconvenience existed, he would advise those who could afford it to take a private letter-box, thereby securing immediate delivery of their correspondence, and, at the same time, benefiting the revenue.

Mr. KIDSTON would again ask whether there was any likelihood of any reform being effected in the direction he had just indicated?

The PREMIER: He could not hold out any promise of immediate reform, because there were a good many difficulties in the way. Theoretically the hon. member was correct. It would be well that all departments should pay for all the services they obtained, but an increased staff would be necessary to give effect to what the hon. member desired. Perhaps it would be as well to leave it to the hon. member himself, when he came to that side of the House, to settle it as he pleased.

Mr. GLASSEY : The remarks of the Premier seemed to imply that there was some insuperable difficulty in the keeping of separate accounts as suggested. He did not agree with that at all. It was right that the Post Office Department should get credit for the services it rendered to the meteorological branch and to other departments of the service, so that it might be ascertained how far the Postal Department paid its way. He pointed out that in the Railway Department a separate account appeared in the annual report showing the value of the services rendered by the department to other departments of the State. He knew the Premier was very conservative, but he hoped the hon. gentleman would take a step forward in this matter, and recommend the Postal Department and other departments to carry out the suggestion mentioned by the hon. member for Rockhampton. The hon. member, Mr. McDonnell, had referred to the case of letter-carriers, stampers, and sorters in the department who deserved a step in advance. He could endorse what the hon. member had said, as he used to work with those men, and knew them to be excellent officers whose work was laborious and whose remuneration was very moderate indeed. He hoped the Premier would see that the matter was gone into, and the recommendations of the hon. member for Fortitude Valley carried out. The hon. member for Toowong had referred to the case of the men in the Electrical Engineer's department, and he agreed with that hon. member that £120 a year was too little for men in their position—men of considerable intelligence and ability, and who had had to undergo a severe course of training. He knew the Electrical Engineer had no desire that the men under him should not be sufficiently paid. He hoped the condition of the officers he had referred to would be improved, and that they would not have year after year to complain that they were being insufficiently paid.

The PREMIER pointed out that the fullest increase which could be given under the Public Service Regulations appeared this year on the Estimates for the men referred to in the Electrical Engineer's Department. With respect to the other officers mentioned, he would request the Postmaster-General to consider their case and give them such promotion as he could when suitable vacancies arose. Hon. members knew that in so large a department suitable openings for men might not be found on short notice, but he observed that the number of 32nd clause men was being gradually reduced. They were being drafted to classified positions and relieved of the necessity of having their case continuously represented to Parliament. There need be no apprehension that they would be unfairly dealt with, and he was sure the Postmaster-General would do justice to all men under his charge.

Mr. FINNEY pointed out that of the men he had referred to one had been many years in the service and had had only one advance of £20, and the other after being twelve years in the service was getting only £120 a year. Those men were experts, and if the Government had to get men from outside to do their work it would cost them thousands of pounds.

Question put and passed.

CONVEYANCE OF MAILS.

The PREMIER moved that £116,700 be granted for the conveyance of mails. The vote was increased by £200 in connection with the item "Gratuities to masters of vessels for the conveyance of mails."

Mr. BELL thought this was the proper vote upon which to refer to the system adopted by the department in selecting the contractors for

the conveyance of inland mails, and it was not an unjust criticism to pass upon the system to say that the department selected those contractors on the cheap and nasty principle. They made little or no reference to the good work a contractor might have done during the term of previous contracts, the sole determining factor being who was the lowest tenderer. He might perhaps strengthen his case if he were able to point out a better method; but he confessed that he was unable to do so. Perhaps it was not his duty to do so; but it was his duty to point out that the present system frequently worked injustice to individuals who tendered, and also to the people affected along the line of mail route. Quite lately it had been brought under his knowledge that in his own district men who had carried out mail contracts faithfully and well suddenly found themselves cast off by the department, merely because they were £5, £10, or £20 higher on the list of tenders than some newcomer.

The PREMIER : I do not think that is generally the case.

Mr. BELL : He was not prepared to say it was generally the case, but he was confident it was more frequently the case than the hon. gentleman imagined. He knew it had happened frequently in his own electorate, and he knew of instances in other parts of the country. From the point of view of economy he could quite understand the attitude of the Post Office officials, but he thought those officials should take into serious consideration the question as to whether some more just system could not be devised of letting out the mail contracts. He had known men who had a large staff of horses, who had kept the mail going up to time, and had given satisfaction to everybody along the route for several years, find themselves cast aside because some newcomer happened to tender £5 or £10 lower. It was bad enough when the old holder of the contract was ousted by a man who cut under by a few pounds, but it was a more grievous case when the new tenderer—as in several cases within his knowledge—in his anxiety to get the contract—offered to do the work for such a sum that it was absolutely unremunerative, and he was unable to get a sufficient number of horses, the result being that he carried on a starved service and there was general dissatisfaction. He had in his mind one or two cases in which this result had been brought about by this system of sweating—this tender system—and though he was not prepared to say what should be done by way of remedy, he felt so strongly on the matter that he called attention to it now, in order that it might receive the consideration of the department.

The PREMIER : No doubt there were evils in the present system, as there were in all systems under the sun, but the difficulty was to suggest some means of protecting the interests of the State and at the same time securing the services of men who would not be subjected to cut-throat competition. The hon. gentleman's remarks, if followed out strictly, would go in the direction of abolishing the tender system altogether, but he hardly thought that would give satisfaction; in fact, he thought that grave abuses would creep in than now existed. When he was in the Post Office several tenders came before him for consideration, and the principle he laid down was that where there was not a very heavy difference between the new tenderer and the old, if the old man had proved himself a thoroughly honest contractor, and possessed the materials for carrying out the service without the risk of interruption, the contract was awarded to him, notwithstanding that he was higher; but that had to be exercised carefully and cautiously. There would be grave dissatisfaction

if men were invited to tender and the lowest tenderer, though an untried man, was able to prove his *bona fides*, furnish satisfactory securities, and prove himself an honest and capable contractor, and he were passed over in favour of the old contractor at a higher price. He believed it would open the door to a great deal of political corruption, and while he recognised that there might be cases where services were conducted, as the hon. gentleman said, through excessive competition, yet he thought the interests of the public were better protected by the present system than they would be by departing from that system. Until he could see a better way or until the hon. gentleman could suggest a better system he thought they had better be content with the ills they had than fly to others they knew not of. It was a very difficult question, and he would have been glad if the hon. gentleman had supplemented his remarks by some practical suggestion.

Mr. BELL: He fully agreed that it would be difficult to suggest a better method, but there were one or two things that the authorities might do that would certainly lighten the evils of the present system. They ought to give greater weight to the past conduct of the contractor than they did. He was under the impression that no matter how good a man's past conduct might be, if a new tenderer happened to be a few pounds lower, the past goodness was not weighed in the balance at all. He thought the department ought to give to any old contractor, who had given satisfaction, an opportunity of coming down to the price tendered by the new man. It might be said that that would end in giving a man a berth upon a contract for a number of years; but even if it had that effect, he did not see that any evil would result, as long as he did his work well. At all events, it would be better than throwing a man aside who had given satisfaction, merely because another man had cut under him.

The PREMIER: Would that be fair to the other man?

Mr. BELL: The other man would not have a good record in connection with the work, and if they had to choose between the two, the man who had done his work well was more deserving of sympathy than the man who had had no association with the matter. Another matter he would allude to was this: The department had adopted a system of calling for tenders for alternative services, either by horse or by buggy, but he thought that in a great many more cases than was the case at present they should call for buggy services alone. The more they extended the buggy services the better, and he had been successful in substituting buggy for horse services in two or three cases in his own electorate, with beneficial results.

Mr. HARDACRE: His experience had been quite the opposite to that of the hon. member for Dalby, because the complaint generally made to him was that a certain large firm in the colony got all the contracts at a higher price, to the exclusion of *bona fide* tenderers of good repute who were willing to perform the service for less. Two cases had come under his notice—one in the Marilla electorate, and the other at Alpha, in his own electorate.

Mr. BELL: You are thinking of Cobb and Co., but there are a great many places where they do not run.

Mr. HARDACRE: He agreed with the suggestion of the hon. member that the old contractor be allowed to retain the service by coming down to the lowest tenderer. He did not think that any evil could result from that, because the new tenderer would have to pay down a deposit, which he would forfeit if he refused to carry out the service in the event of

the old contractor not coming down to the lower price. That would prevent him from putting in a dummy tender in order to bring down the old contractor to the lower price.

The PREMIER: The remarks made by the hon. member for Leichhardt in regard to Cobb and Co. being given these services at a higher price than other tenders were and were not correct. Take the case of the postal route from Mareeba right across to Georgetown and Croydon: That was let in sections, and it was quite possible that someone might have tendered for one of the intermediate sections at a lower rate than the large contractor; but at the same time the tender put in by the large contractor for the whole length might be less than the total amount for the sections taken separately, although the tender for one particular section might have been less. Between £2,000 and £3,000 was saved last year by accepting one tender for the whole length. No injustice was done to the small man, and it was a great convenience to the public, as it enabled them to book right through from Mareeba to Georgetown.

Mr. KERR thought the hon. member for Leichhardt was wrong about the Alpha and Tambo contract. The last time tenders were received for that service Cobb and Co. were £10 below the old contractor. The former contract price for the service was £100 per annum, but the successful tenderer subsequently transferred the contract to another person at the same price, and the transferee not being able to carry out the contract, it had to be undertaken by his sureties, who ran the mail to time and gave every satisfaction to the department. When fresh tenders were called for, their price, speaking from memory, was £240, and that of Cobb and Co., who got the contract, was £230. If the system advocated by the hon. member for Dalby had been adopted, the old contractors would have got the contract, but he did not believe in the system, as it was unfair to tenderers. The hon. member put his finger upon the right spot when he stated that there was sweating in the department. No one could run a coach twice a week between Alpha and Tambo for £100 per annum; that sum would not pay the grooms on the road. The consequence was that business people had suffered, and some of their accounts had not been settled yet. The department should know what was a paying price for running a mail service, and should discourage sweating. With regard to the lumping of mail contracts, he knew that owing to the adoption of that system the department had accepted the tenders of Cobb and Co. for services between Isisford and Ifracombe, and between Jericho and Blackall, though they were not the lowest tenderers, and that was not fair to the local men who had their vehicles and horses. The contracts should be given to local residents if their prices were reasonable.

Mr. SMYTH wished to draw attention again to a grievance to which he had referred on the Address in Reply, and which had been the subject of a resolution at the Postal Conference held in March last—that was the excessive postage on newspapers charged in Queensland. The rate was 3d. for the first 2 oz. and 3d. for every additional 2 oz. The postage on an 8-oz. newspaper sent from Queensland to one of the other colonies, and *vice versa*, would therefore be 2d., and on an extra large paper 2½d. The postage on the *Australasian* and other large newspapers was 2½d., but in the other colonies such papers could be sent for 3d. There were plenty of people in the other colonies who would send newspapers to their friends in Queensland if it were not for the heavy postal charges, and he hoped the Premier would consider the matter again and see if it could not be altered. Another matter he brought up on the Address in Reply

was the charge of 1d. or 2d., according to the distance, made by the department in Queensland for readdressing letters in cases where people had moved from one place to another. No charge was made for that in the other colonies, and if a letter could be readdressed there without charge it could be done in Queensland.

The PREMIER: With regard to readdressing letters there was much in the hon. gentleman's contention, but the statute prevented anything being done in the matter. It had been referred to the Crown Law Officers whether the Executive had that power, and they advised not. The question of postage on newspapers was an old subject of discussion, and the position remained practically unaltered. Correspondence had been laid on the table which showed the position which the matter had assumed. He did not know that anything could be done at present in view of the fact that there was already an annual deficiency of £65,000 on the working of the department. However, he would consult the Postmaster-General on the subject. Postage on newspapers was imposed, partly with a view of preventing Queensland being flooded with southern literature, and as a protective measure towards the Queensland Press, and in that light he believed there were members who still approved of it. Still, he must frankly admit that he did not like to see Queensland stand isolated from the other colonies, and if the department could see its way to abolish the charge he should be gratified. It must be borne in mind that the postal charges in the other colonies were not uniform, either in letter or newspaper rates. Victoria charged 2d. as the minimum postage on letters, whereas New South Wales charged only 1d., and in newspaper charges there was the same difference. His hon. colleague had not up to the present time seen his way clear to make a recommendation in the direction desired by the hon. member.

Mr. STORY was not sure that it was judicious of him to say anything at all on the subject seeing that he was general manager for a firm that had been referred to in connection with mail contracts, but he desired to make a little explanation in corroboration of what the Premier had said. No doubt Cobb and Co. did get contracts by means of the tenders being lumped, but the system saved the Government a lot of money. The small contractors referred to, if they were allowed to take up all the easily-run lines, would certainly not be powerful enough to take up the difficult mail contracts, and if the Government had to fall back on Cobb and Co. for those services alone they would pay very much more than at present. It was not necessary to go into figures, but it would startle some hon. members to know the absurdly low prices at which some contracts were carried out for the conveyance of mails. He could tell hon. members that Cobb and Co. did not, out of what they received from the Government, pay their wages sheet by some thousands a year. The idea that they stood in a favoured position was altogether erroneous. He could only endorse what the hon. member for Dalby had said, and point out that if contractors were driven down to the level of some of the lowest tenderers who were really not able to carry out their tenders, the result would be that the country would be badly served.

Mr. KERR: What about the sureties?

Mr. STORY: Even the sureties were not always able to carry out the work, and while they were being called upon to do so the public would suffer grave inconvenience. It had been hinted that Cobb and Co. stood in a more favoured position than any other contractors. In relation to himself, he desired to say that, being

a member of Parliament, he had never seen or signed a tender since he had been manager of the company.

Mr. BROWNE: The complaint in 1895 was that the Government had not accepted the lowest tenders, but the complaint of the hon. member for Dalby was that the Government was in the habit of accepting the lowest tender instead of sticking to well-known and reliable contractors. There had not been the slightest reflection on Cobb and Co., but in 1895 the Committee wanted some light thrown upon the system, and the late Premier, acting for the Postmaster-General, stated that it had been the practice for years to let the contracts to the contractor who was prepared to carry out the whole service for the lowest sum, as otherwise the department would be open to charges of favouritism. It was desirable that that should be known, because there was sometimes great dissatisfaction caused through people thinking that each service stood alone, and that the lowest tender should be accepted.

Question put and passed.

MISCELLANEOUS SERVICES (SUBDIVISION).

The PREMIER moved that £58,000 be granted for miscellaneous services.

Question put and passed.

METEOROLOGY.

The PREMIER moved that £1,590 be granted for meteorology. The vote was £50 less than last year, but it was deemed sufficient. The Government Meteorologist and his department gave satisfaction to the colony. He looked upon it as a very valuable branch of the public service.

Question put and passed.

AUDITOR-GENERAL.

The TREASURER moved that £8,905 be granted for the Auditor-General. There was an increase of £620. There were two additional clerks, owing to the increased work of the department. There were also some increases to the officers.

Mr. STEWART asked how it was that the accounts of Mr. Somers set with regard to the Imperial pension fund had not been audited by the Audit Department?

The TREASURER: An inquiry had been held by the Public Service Board, whose report he had just received, and he had asked the Auditor-General and the Under Secretary to the Treasury for their reports on the same thing. He was sorry that the account had not been audited. Of course the Auditor-General was an officer of Parliament, and was worthy of their confidence. He had not yet received his report on the matter, but he would publish it as soon as he got it.

Mr. KERR: Are there any other accounts which are not audited?

The TREASURER: That was the only Government account which had not been audited, so far as he knew. He believed the harbour boards' accounts had not been audited, but he had asked the Auditor-General to have them audited in future. The accounts of all the local authorities, schools of arts, and other institutions were audited so far as the Government endowment was concerned, and it was a wonder to him that such an important account as the Imperial pensions account had not been audited.

Mr. JENKINSON: Will there not be some difficulty in auditing it?

The TREASURER: He saw no difficulty at all in the matter. The Auditor-General had informed him that it had not been the custom of his predecessor to audit that account, and he thought it was not necessary. However, the Auditor-General would no doubt put his statement before Parliament in his next report.

Mr. STEWART: He had no wish to cast any reflection upon the Auditor-General, but he thought the very fact of his being an officer of Parliament ought to place him above the ordinary red-tapeism of the Civil Service; but in that case he appeared to have been governed by custom rather than by the exigencies of the service. He wished to know how much of the £100 voted for travelling expenses of the Auditor-General had been expended, and in what direction he had travelled.

The TREASURER: He had not the detailed account with him, but he knew that the Auditor-General was up North, having met him at Townsville. The Auditor-General generally took a trip round the country once a year, and sometimes audited offices himself.

Mr. TURLEY asked when the papers in the case of F. S. Hely, which had been ordered to be printed, would be laid on the table?

The TREASURER: Mr. Hely was not in the Auditor-General's Department, but he might inform the hon. member that he expected the papers would be in the hands of hon. members to-morrow morning.

Question put and passed.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1897-98.

EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE.

The PREMIER moved that a further sum of £30 be granted for contingencies, Executive Council.

Mr. STEWART said he did not suppose they could discuss the sum of £6,011 under the head of "Schedules," but he should like some information as to the item "Gratuity to Mrs. W. Blakeney, widow of the late Registrar-General, £800."

The PREMIER: That is paid by statute, at the rate of one month's salary for each year's service, the whole not to exceed twelve months' salary.

Mr. STEWART: Is there an Act of Parliament to that effect?

The PREMIER: Yes; the Civil Service Act of 1863.

Question put and passed.

CHIEF SECRETARY.

The PREMIER moved that £3,197 10s. 9d. be granted for travelling expenses, record reign celebration, increase of salary to Agent-General, Land Defence Force, and Marine Defence Force.

Mr. GLASSEY noticed an additional amount of £466 3s. 3d. down for travelling expenses in connection with the record reign celebrations, and he would be glad if the Premier would tell the Committee what was the total amount of those expenses. He wished to ask the Premier if he had any objection to ask the Agent-General to put himself in communication with some of the local bodies in Great Britain, such as the London County Council and the councils of Manchester and Glasgow, with a view to obtaining from them reports as to their working, and especially with respect to compulsory municipal insurance. He was sure the Agent-General would himself be interested in the matter, and very valuable information might be obtained.

The PREMIER would be prepared to-morrow to supply the hon. member with a full statement of the total amount of travelling expenses in connection with the record reign celebrations. He assured the hon. member that the attention of Sir Horace Tozer would be directed to obtaining from the London County Council and the other local bodies mentioned information concerning their work and concerning compulsory municipal insurance. He was sure that Sir Horace Tozer would take a deep interest in that and other matters connected with local government. The information might be of very con-

siderable service to them in dealing with the Local Government Bill, which it was the intention of the Government to submit for legislation if they occupied their present position next session.

Mr. GLASSEY: For many years in the old country he had devoted much of his time to the consideration of questions of local government, having held positions on the Sanitary Board and also on the Poor Law Board. The information he asked for would be of great value to hon. members who would be here next year to take part in the deliberations upon the Local Government Bill. Municipal insurance was a subject he took great interest in; it was coming fast to the front, and he hoped some day to see it adopted in Queensland. He might mention that the total amount of those Supplementary Estimates—over £120,000—was very considerable. Some of the votes for different departments were very large excess votes, and though they could not reduce them, as the money had been spent, they certainly required some explanation.

Question put and passed.

HOME SECRETARY'S DEPARTMENT.

The PREMIER moved that £23,151 17s. 9d. be granted for the Home Secretary's Department. With regard to what the leader of the Opposition had stated as to the amount of those Estimates, it should be remembered that many of the items were due to the operation of statutory enactments. Under Schedule D, for instance, there was an amount of £4,000 in connection with the Marsupials Destruction Act of 1895. Then there was the very large vote of £10,750 for "Hospitals generally." If the items which arose in that way were subtracted from the total it would be found to be considerably reduced.

Mr. GROOM: Would the hon. gentleman explain the vote for "Purchase of Annexes of International Exhibition, £1,000," under this department, and a vote of £1,602 18s. for a similar purpose under the Agricultural Department?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE explained that the wood of the annexes had been bought up here, and the iron had been supplied by contractors in Brisbane. The wood and iron were separate and belonged to different proprietors, and when it was decided to purchase the annexes it was found necessary to purchase the iron also.

Mr. TURLEY: In connection with the papers about which he had asked for information, would the hon. gentleman see that they were supplied to-morrow or at the earliest opportunity?

The PREMIER: He would instruct the Government Printer to get them out as speedily as possible. There was no intention or desire on the part of the Government to delay their production.

Mr. STEWART: Could the hon. gentleman give some information in regard to the £1,596 for contingencies, Labour Bureau?

The PREMIER: When the vote for charitable allowances was being discussed he pointed out that a new system had been introduced under which people in destitute circumstances and of good character received a small weekly dole which prevented them from going to Dunwich. This amount was required in consequence of the number of applicants who came under that classification.

Mr. JENKINSON: A promise had been given by the Premier that the advertising of electoral lists should be distributed as fairly as possible amongst the papers circulating in the districts to which the advertisements applied, and he understood that a circular to that effect was issued at the beginning of the year; but since then he understood orders had been given

cancelling that. He wished to know whether it was by instruction of the Advertising Board that the advertisements were published in only two of the Gympie papers, instead of being given to the three papers in turn?

The PREMIER: No instruction had been given by the Home Secretary's Department to restrict the necessary advertising of the electoral lists by the Advertising Board. This was another matter which he hoped would be placed beyond cavil when a principal registrar was appointed. He remembered the debate to which the hon. gentleman referred, and as far as he remembered the Advertising Board were instructed to pay particular attention to the views expressed as to giving full publicity to the electoral lists.

Mr. McDONNELL: The Chief Inspector of Factories had pointed out in his report the desirability of extending the provisions of the Factories Act to the meatworks in the vicinity of Townsville and Rockhampton, and to some of the works connected with the sugar industry in the neighbourhood of Bundaberg. He mentioned the matter now in the hope that the Minister would give it his consideration. With regard to the sum of £400 for a recreation reserve at Childers, he wished to know whether this was a subsidy, or whether the Government purchased the site and presented it to the people there? If the Government had acknowledged that principle in the case of Childers, he thought the Valley people, who had been trying to secure a reserve, had also a good claim.

The HOME SECRETARY: The case at Childers was very peculiar, as there was absolutely no Crown land there at all, or any land which was available for recreation purposes, so that it was necessary for the Government to step in. This purchase was completed during the tenure of office of Sir Horace Tozer, and he understood it was a very good bargain.

Mr. McDONNELL: It was purchased by the Government, and presented by them to the people of Childers?

The HOME SECRETARY: Yes, because there was no reserve at all. If people wanted recreation they had to take it on the public roads.

Mr. LORD: There was £208 7s. down for the repatriation of Paraguay settlers. Could the Home Secretary tell them how many men returned to the colony?

The HOME SECRETARY: He could not tell the hon. member the number. All he could say was that there was £208 7s. worth.

Mr. JACKSON wished to draw attention to certain complaints in connection with the administration of the Aborigines Protection Act. He noticed from an extract from the Mareeba paper, reprinted in the *Townsville Bulletin*, that the hotelkeeper at Muldiva stated that the blacks there literally rushed him for food; that he was afraid to refuse them, because they threatened him; that he could not employ them about the hotel without being fined for it; that it would be risky for miners to leave their camps without protection, because if the blacks could not get food by fair means they would not stick at murder; and that in fact the Act seemed to have been passed with the object of starving the blacks or forcing them to commit murder. He (Mr. Jackson) understood that the Act would be administered very liberally, but apparently that had not been the case. A similar case occurred at Bundaberg, but he was not familiar with it. So far as he could see, the Act had been well administered in the South, but it was different in the North.

The PREMIER: The condition of the blacks had been considerably ameliorated by the Act, the administration of which had been carried out

on lines conducive to their welfare. Of course the North was a very large place, and up to the present there had been no general inspection, but Commissioner Okeden, who had been there during the last six weeks, would visit every aboriginal centre, and make a full report, which would reveal the true condition of affairs, and any abuses could then be dealt with. The publication of the report would not be delayed.

Mr. DANIELS: The Act had been administered at Emerald in the most cruel manner. People there used to employ the blacks to chop wood, and supplied them with a shilling or two or rations in return, but owing to the way the Act was administered they could not do that now without taking out a license, which they did not care about doing, because they would be compelled to find accommodation for them, if required, on the premises. There was an old woman there with four children, and her husband had had to leave the district and go somewhere else. At one time she used to be employed in scrubbing at various houses, and the people used to give her food and also money enough to buy clothing for her children, but this Act deprived her of her employment. He was out there on a short time ago, and he found that the blacks on the banks of the Nogoa River were in a state of absolute starvation, owing to the fact that the game on which they had been accustomed to subsist had almost disappeared, and that the people in the district were afraid to give them occasional employment, lest they should be summoned for doing so, and fined.

Mr. NEWELL had received a letter calling his attention to the matter the hon. member for Kennedy had referred to in connection with the blacks at Muldiva, and had submitted the case to the Police Department. The department had not yet taken any action, as Mr. Okeden was absent at the time he made representations on the subject, but he had been promised that the matter would be attended to on the return of the Commissioner, who would, he believed, arrive in Brisbane to-morrow.

Mr. LEAHY wished to know if the attention of the Home Secretary had been called to a statement which appeared in the *Worker* last week, copied from some Maryborough paper, about a young gin—rather a good-looking girl—who had been living with a kanaka in the Isis Scrub. It was stated that the girl was remarkably well dressed, and that the inspector separated the couple and took the young gin down to Fraser Island. The paragraph further stated that it was said to be absolutely necessary to take those gins to the island, otherwise they could not keep the blacks there, and he believed there was a great deal in that. At the same time if the facts were as stated, it was a great hardship to that couple, who had their feelings as well as other people, that they should be separated, and he did not think they should be separated if the kanaka was treating the girl well.

The HOME SECRETARY: His attention had not been drawn to the matter, but he would have an inquiry made into the circumstances to ascertain if the statement were true. If it was true, he agreed that it was not a proper thing to separate the couple.

Mr. LEAHY was satisfied with having called attention to the matter, and was sure the hon. gentleman would do the right thing when he had ascertained the facts of the case.

Mr. GLASSEY asked what was the intention of the hon. gentleman with regard to the extension of the Factories Act, as recommended by the Chief Inspector?

The HOME SECRETARY did not remember having had the particular portion of the report of the Chief Inspector which had been

referred to brought prominently under his notice since he had taken office in that department, but he would inquire into the matter. So far as he had been able to see, the Act had not up to the present been worked with that degree of rigour that was evidently intended by the legislature. He was quite aware that a more rigorous observance of its provisions would be considered oppressive by some persons, but it was the duty of the Minister to carry out the law as he found it. Up to the present time there had been a certain amount of justification for not insisting upon a rigorous observance of the Act, because it was new; but with the beginning of the new year a more strict interpretation would probably be given to some of its provisions. He believed that in the districts which had been referred to the inspectors were officers of other departments, and he hardly thought they could expect that the Act would be satisfactorily administered unless the officers appointed were primarily and directly responsible to the Chief Inspector.

Mr. McDONNELL: The persons who had recommended the extension of the Act in those districts were the inspectors themselves. He had been given to understand that since the hon. gentleman had taken office there had been a change for the better in the administration of the Act, and he hoped there would be a still greater change in the future.

Mr. STORY: There seemed to be a shyness about discussing the item of £208 7s. for the "Repatriation of Paraguay settlers," and he did not know whether the Government or members opposite should be questioned on the subject. There might be some good accomplished by inquiring into the causes which led up to the expenditure of that money. He did not cast any slur upon people who had been unfortunate; but these settlers intended when they set out to give the world an object lesson and show how picked men outside the British Dominions, having money and determination on their side, could create a self-governing colony, and show to the world how easy it was to practise the principles of "Socialism in our time."

Mr. GLASSEY: This is communism, not socialism.

Mr. STORY: All the world knew that the scheme would be a failure, but some of the people having been brought back at considerable cost to the colony it would only be fair if they expressed their opinions and experiences, which would be worth a great deal more than the money which was to be voted for bringing them back. He should be glad to hear from the supporters of the Paraguay scheme who sat on the other side what their views were on the question.

Mr. HARDACRE would not reply to the hon. member, except to say that some of the strongest opponents of that scheme sat on the Opposition side of the House. He opposed it, and there was no stronger opponent of it than the hon. member for Bundaberg, who called it a ridiculous proposal. The hon. member showed his ignorance of what socialism was by confounding it with communism. The most ordinary dictionary would tell him the difference between the two things.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: I would remind the hon. member that we are now discussing a vote of £208 7s., which has nothing to do with socialism.

Mr. BROWNE: Hon. members were very anxious to know the difference between socialism and communism. That could easily be shown by consulting the records of the House. Communism was a vote of £208 for the repatriation of Paraguay settlers, and socialism was the expatriation of three agents—Messrs. Russell, Heussler, and Finucane—at a cost of £3,780.

Mr. McMASTER did not object to the item, but would like to know how much more remained to be paid? He believed that £2,000 had already been spent in bringing back to Queensland some of the misguided people who had been misled by a smart man into going to Paraguay. He had seen in one of the Maryborough papers that in the course of an interview one of those who had been brought back stated that he had gone from New South Wales, and thanked the Queensland Government for bringing him back from Paraguay. It was an act of kindness on the part of the Government to bring back misguided Queenslanders, but they certainly should not bring back those who had left other colonies. He would like to know if there were any more to be brought back?

Mr. HARDACRE stated that aboriginals in the Central district had been prevented from taking employment, and he wished to know whether the matter would be rectified? It had been going on for a long time, and he had called Mr. Okeden's attention to it three months ago.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The Premier said that it is to be rectified.

Question put and passed.

DEPARTMENT OF WORKS.

The TREASURER moved that £1,087 9s. 10d. be granted for the Department of Works.

Question put and passed.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE.

The HOME SECRETARY moved that £1,866 14s. 6d. be granted for the Department of Justice.

Question put and passed.

THE TREASURER.

The TREASURER moved that £15,972 18s. be granted for the Treasurer.

Mr. STEWART asked to whom the amount of £2,631 12s. 11d. had been paid in connection with the Queensland National Bank investigation.

The TREASURER: Messrs. Reid, Cameron, and Forrest, and the Auditor-General had received £600 each. The balance consisted of expenses, such as the cost of the committee going to Sydney.

Mr. BROWNE pointed out that there was an item of £3,149 4s. 8d. for the purchase of the "White Star." On the Chief Secretary's Estimates they had been informed that the price paid was £2,750. How had the difference arisen?

The TREASURER: The purchasing price was £2,750, but when she had come here she had to be altered to adapt her to the tropical climate.

Question put and passed.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS.

The HOME SECRETARY moved that £30,369 6s. 3d. be granted for the Department of Public Lands.

Mr. KERR, referring to the item—fees to counsel, £295 13s.—understood that there was a barrister permanently employed in connection with Land Court cases. Was that amount in addition to his salary, or was it paid to other barristers?

The HOME SECRETARY: The hon. member appeared to forget that the vote was for last year—before the appointment had been made. Of course, in important cases, where other counsel were employed, fees of that sort would still appear.

Mr. STEWART asked if the Home Secretary could give any details of the expenditure of the item—£1,323 9s. 10d.—arbitration—Roslyn Park Land Company, Limited, v. W. C. Hume?

The HOME SECRETARY: He could not give the details. The case was brought under

the Public Works Lands Resumption Act. It was at first considered that an excessive amount was demanded by the owners of the land. The case went to arbitration, and an award was made which the Government were prepared to pay. The owner, however, elected to disregard the arbitration award, and the case was subsequently tried before Mr. Justice Chubb and a jury, and the item represented the amount of compensation and costs awarded against the Government.

Mr. HARDACRE said the amounts paid as compensation for improvements on runs seemed very large.

The HOME SECRETARY: How did the hon. member know they were large? All the improvements had been valued by the proper tribunal, and would be repaid to the Government by the incoming tenants.

Question put and passed.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE moved that £8,592 14s. 5d. be granted for the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. DANIELS: When he moved his motion for a return showing the cost of the Redland Bay experimental farm it was called "not formal." As he might not have an opportunity to bring the question on again, he would ask what the cost had been?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE said he had no objection to lay the papers on the table, and would do so when the motion came on to-morrow.

Mr. STEWART asked what was the number of copies of the *Agricultural Journal* printed every month?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: 5,000.

Question put and passed.

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION moved that £2,707 10s. 5d. be granted for Public Instruction.

Question put and passed.

DEPARTMENT OF MINES.

The SECRETARY FOR MINES moved that £12,716 8s. 8d. be granted for the Department of Mines. The largest item was £11,609 for the purchase of specimens. They had the money available out of revenue, and he thought it a wise thing to buy them.

Question put and passed.

DEPARTMENT OF RAILWAYS.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS moved that £4,838 4s. 10d. be granted for the Department of Railways.

Mr. STEWART asked for details of the item, "Gratuity to widow of late A. C. Macdonald, £100."

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: He understood Mr. Macdonald was a station-master near Townsville, who was killed. It was the usual gratuity to widows whose husbands were killed while on duty.

Mr. STEWART: He believed the man's salary was considerably over £100 per annum. Under the Employers' Liability Act in the old country the widow would have been entitled to three years' salary. He considered £100 was not a sufficient gratuity to a widow whose husband had been killed in the Public Service.

The HOME SECRETARY: The hon. member should bear in mind that there was no imputation in this case that the loss of the man's life was in any way due to the negligence of any person but the deceased himself, and that was an essential condition precedent to recovery of any amount under the Employers' Liability Act. Question put and passed.

POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

The PREMIER moved that £10,335 6s. 6d. be granted for the Postmaster-General's Department.

Question put and passed.

AUDITOR-GENERAL.

The TREASURER moved that £46 2s. 3d. be granted for the Auditor-General's Department.

Question put and passed.

SUPPLEMENTARY TRUST FUNDS ESTIMATES, 1897-98.

The TREASURER moved that £25,688 7s. 4d. be granted from the various trust funds.

Mr. DRAKE pointed out—in connection with the use made of the subsidies granted from the fund raised under the Live Stock and Meat Export Act—that the subsidised firms were competing with private persons in the colony, and hon. members knew that that was not the intention in passing the Act. The intention was to stimulate the exportation of the products, and not their local sale by subsidised firms. He intended to discuss the matter on the Estimates for the current year, and he mentioned it now so that the Minister might be prepared with figures showing the amounts advanced from time to time under the Act, and the circumstances under which they had been advanced.

Question put and passed.

SUPPLEMENTARY LOAN ESTIMATES, 1897-98.

The TREASURER moved that £35,782 4s. 8d. be granted for the Departments of the Chief Secretary, Public Works, Treasurer, and Railways.

Mr. TURLEY asked whether the amounts down under the Sugar Works Guarantee Act for the Double Peak, Mount Bauple, and Isis Companies were in addition to, or included in, the amount of £500,000 voted last year?

The TREASURER: They are included in that amount.

Mr. DRAKE: The £500,000 was an amount fixed by the Act, and the Government could not go beyond it. He noticed that there were further amounts on the Estimates for the current year, and he hoped when the time came to vote them the Minister would let the Committee know what sums had been advanced and authorised, and how near they were to the limit.

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 to-morrow.

The resolutions were ordered to be received to-morrow.

JOINT COMMITTEES DURING RECESS.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of a message from the Council, asking the concurrence of the Assembly in a resolution to the effect that the Buildings, Refreshment Room, and Library Committees should continue their functions during the recess.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the House concurred in the resolution, and a message to that effect was ordered to be sent to the Council.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES BILL.

MESSAGE FROM THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of a message from the Council, returning this Bill without amendment.

SLAUGHTERING BILL.

MESSAGE FROM THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of a message from the Council, returning this Bill with amendments in which they invited the concurrence of the Assembly.

Ordered that the message be taken into consideration at a later hour of the day.

BRANDS BILL.

MESSAGE FROM THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of a message from the Legislative Council, intimating that they had agreed to this Bill, with amendments, in which they invited the concurrence of the Legislative Assembly.

Ordered that the message be taken into consideration to-morrow.

BRITISH PHARMACOPŒIA ADOPTING BILL.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL'S AMENDMENT—
COMMITTEE.

The HOME SECRETARY: The only amendment made by the Council was one postponing the commencement of the operation of the Act from January to July, and he moved that the amendment be agreed to.

Question put and passed.

The House resumed; and it was ordered that a message be sent to the Council intimating the concurrence of the Assembly in their amendment.

BRISBANE TECHNICAL COLLEGE INCORPORATION BILL.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL'S AMENDMENTS—
COMMITTEE.

The amendments in clauses 5, 6, and 8, omitting the word "Government," were agreed to.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION moved that the amendment in clause 11, omitting the word "Government," be agreed to.

Mr. LEAHY: Out of curiosity he would like to know if there was anything wrong in having the word "Government" inserted there?

The HOME SECRETARY: Yes. Under the Acts Shortening Act the word "Gazette" meant "Government Gazette."

Question put and passed.

The remaining amendment was agreed to.

The House resumed; and a message was ordered to be sent to the Council intimating that the Assembly had concurred in their amendments.

MINING BILL.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL'S AMENDMENT—
COMMITTEE.

On the Council's amendment in clause 114.

The SECRETARY FOR MINES: They could not get all they wanted, and he thought that on the whole they had done very well with the Council in regard to the amendments sent to and fro. The amendment of the Council in this clause was an improvement upon the present state of things, because it allowed any man to appear by agent. He moved that the Committee do not insist upon its disagreement to the amendment.

Mr. BROWNE: He had not got all he wanted in this Bill, but he admitted that the Council had met them in many matters; and such being the case, speaking for the mining members, he did not feel inclined to continue the controversy. They were willing to abide by the motion made by the Minister.

Mr. JACKSON: He did not think the amendment made by the Council was a good one, particularly if the wardens adopted a strict interpretation of the word "agent." The mere fact of a man having a miner's right would not entitle him to appear in court. An agent was defined as a person acting on behalf of an owner.

Mr. LEAHY: The definition of the term "owner" covers it.

Mr. JACKSON: He did not think the amendment was a good one, but he would not contest the point.

Question put and passed.

The SECRETARY FOR MINES moved that the Chairman leave the chair and report that the Committee did not insist upon its disagreement to the Council's amendment.

Mr. STUMM: He hoped that the Committee would not think him presumptuous if he took the opportunity of congratulating the Ministry, and more particularly the Secretary for Mines, upon the passage of this important Bill. As hon. members knew, the Bill consolidated no less than sixteen Acts of Parliament, and it introduced some very important amendments with reference to goldmining leases, mineral leases, and homestead leases, as well as in the administration of the law and the regulations for the working of the mines. That a layman should be able to pilot a measure of such magnitude through the House successfully—

Mr. TURLEY: I rise to a point of order. I should like to know whether the hon. member is in order in discussing the Bill upon the question before the Committee?

The CHAIRMAN: If a point of order is raised the hon. member for Gympie is not strictly in order. But when he rose he said the Committee might consider it presumptuous; and as no hon. member objected, he thought that the hon. member had the consent of the Committee.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. STUMM: If the hon. member for South Brisbane had done him the courtesy to intimate that he objected, he would not have spoken, but he hoped the hon. member would allow him to finish the few words he had to say. He did not think the hon. member would be able to say he had introduced any controversial matter. He wished to say that a layman could only pilot such an important measure through the House by the display of rare tact and moderation, and a capacity to appreciate and adopt suggestions for the improvement of the measure, no matter from which side they came—that was so long as they did not interfere with the scope of the Bill. Hon. members might differ, and probably did differ even now as to the value of the measure. But he was certain that the mining members were all agreed in the hope that it would be wisely administered, and that it would prove most beneficial to the mining industry generally, and result in giving it a very great impetus. He believed they were also agreed in the hope that the same liberal spirit, and the same well-balanced judgment, would be shown in the framing of the regulations with respect to alluvial claims, quartz claims, residence areas, machine areas, the fees, and other matters.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Question put and passed.

The House resumed; the CHAIRMAN reported that the Committee did not insist upon their disagreement to the Council's amendment in clause 114.

The report was adopted, and the Bill ordered to be returned to the Council, by message, in the usual form.

SLAUGHTERING BILL.

COUNCIL'S AMENDMENTS—COMMITTEE.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The Council had made a number of amendments in this Bill, but with one exception they were merely verbal, and were inserted for the purpose of making the wording more explicit. The first amendment was in clause 5, which defined an "expert" as a person "appointed" by the Minister. The Council proposed to substitute the word "approved" for "appointed," because an expert was not appointed. He moved that the amendment be agreed to.

Mr. DRAKE asked what guarantee hon. members had that the Council had made the amendments on the paper which had been placed in their hands? Of course they had every respect for the Secretary for Agriculture, but he did not think they should take even his word in a matter of this sort.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: He held in his hand the schedule of amendments made by the Council, and he did not ask the hon. member to take his word in the matter; but as there was nothing debatable in the amendments he thought they might be allowed to put them through to-night.

Mr. DRAKE would not like the hon. gentleman to suppose for one moment that he did not credit his word, but he did not think they were justified in dealing with the amendments merely on the list which he held in his hand.

The HOME SECRETARY: The printed list the hon. member held in his hand was merely circulated for the convenience of hon. members, and it exactly tallied with the list of amendments accompanying the official message sent by the Council.

Mr. BROWNE: The whole trouble was that everything was being rushed through at the end of the session. Instead of having in their hands a Bill showing the omissions in erased type and insertions in black type, they had the Bill which had been sent to the Council from the Assembly, and a list of amendments "to be proposed in committee by the Hon. W. H. Wilson."

The HOME SECRETARY: Yes, but we have the message from the Council.

Mr. BROWNE: They did not dispute the Minister's word; but they wanted to be able to follow the amendments as they were usually submitted. The Minister said the amendments were of no importance, but if they were it would be most dangerous to deal with them in this way.

The PREMIER: There was nothing in the Standing Orders which said that a Bill should be reprinted with the amendments shown in it, and at this late period of the session it was almost impossible to do so. The Secretary for Agriculture held the original message in his hand. He hoped hon. members would be content with that.

Question put and passed.

Amendments in clause 6 agreed to.

Amendment in clause 7 agreed to.

On clause 9,

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: There were four amendments in this clause which were not printed. The Council had inserted, after "isolation" on line 47, the words "under medical direction." He moved that it be agreed to.

Mr. DRAKE: Did that mean that there should be medical direction for the removal, or that after the person was removed he should be subject to medical inspection?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The medical direction referred to the isolation.

Mr. TURLEY called attention to the state of the Committee.

The CHAIRMAN: I am fully satisfied that there is a quorum within the precincts of the Chamber. I can see half-a-dozen members outside that window, and I am sure the hon. member is fully conversant with the fact.

Mr. TURLEY: According to the Standing Orders, when there were not sixteen members present in the Chamber—not within the precincts of the Chamber—it was within the rights of any hon. member present in the Chamber to call attention to the fact that business was being carried on without a quorum being present.

The CHAIRMAN: If the hon. member wishes me to ring the bell, I will do so.

The CHAIRMAN thereupon ordered the bell to be rung.

Mr. LEAHY: While they were waiting for a quorum to form, he desired to say that there seemed to be some opposition to proceeding with the consideration of the Council's amendments. He really had not been able to follow the amendments so far. If the amendments were printed they would not take more than ten minutes to dispose of to-morrow, but if they went on to-night it might take two hours.

Quorum formed.

The House resumed; the CHAIRMAN reported progress, and the Committee obtained leave to sit again at a later hour of the day.

The House adjourned at twenty-two minutes past 12 o'clock.