

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 1899

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QUESTIONS.

THE SAMOAN QUESTION.

Mr. McDONALD (*Flinders*) asked the Premier—

1. Will he inform the House if this or any of the Australasian colonies were consulted regarding the agreement that has been entered into between Great Britain and Germany with reference to the former relinquishing her claims of control in Samoa for concessions in South Africa and elsewhere?

2. Is it the intention of the Government to protest against any such action of Great Britain in allowing a foreign power to annex territory that should form part of the Australasian Possessions?

3. If so, will the Chief Secretary lay upon the table of the House all papers and correspondence in connection with same?

The PREMIER (Hon. J. R. Dickson, *Bulimba*) replied—

1. The Government were informed officially, by telegram through the Lieutenant-Governor, of the nature of the proposed arrangement, so far as it relates to the Pacific, before the agreement was concluded.

2. The Government consider the exchange of territory to be highly in favour of Australian interests.

3. The correspondence is confidential, and cannot be laid before Parliament without the consent of the Imperial authorities.

THE TEACHERS IN CENTRAL SCHOOL, BRISBANE NORTH.

Mr. O'CONNELL (*Musgrave*) asked the Secretary for Public Instruction—

1. The number of teachers, other than pupil-teachers, employed at the Normal or Central School, Brisbane North?

2. The number of pupils taught by each teacher in what is generally known as a class or form?

3. The number of pupil-teachers employed at the said school?

4. The age of the said pupil-teachers?

5. The date of the appointment of said pupil-teachers?

6. The number of pupils taught by each pupil-teacher in what is generally known as a class or form, and the number or the designation by which the said class or form is known?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS (Hon. D. H. Dalrymple, *Mackay*) replied—

Brisbane Central (Boys).

1. Thirteen.

3. Twelve.

TUESDAY, 14 NOVEMBER, 1899.

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

PAPERS.

The following papers, laid on the table, were ordered to be printed:—

Return to an order, relative to disbursements from Agent-General's account current, made by the House, on motion of Mr. W. H. Browne, on the 7th instant.

Fourteenth report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, Building Societies, and Trade Unions.

Correspondence respecting status of officers of the Marine Defence Force who are not qualified seamen.

Report to the Department of Public Lands by Mr. Dividing and Assessing Commissioner F. W. Woodbine, as to the losses in stock by the pastoral tenants of the Crown, caused by the ravages of the tick pest in the North and North-western parts of Queensland.

Name of Teacher.	QUESTIONS NOS. 2 AND 6.*		Question 4.	Question 5.
	Pupils enrolled.	Class or draft.		
Kerr, J. S. ...			Years.	
Airey, P. ...				
Buckett, Thomas ...	60	Vc 2		
Inglis, Thomas ...	25	Va 1		
Hernon, P. ...	47	Vic		
Kemp, Jas. ...	60	Vc 1		
Bell, D. J. ...	42	Via		
Joyce, D. E. ...	33	Vib		
Brand, Chas. ...	68	Va 2		
Campbell, Don ...	47	Vb 2		
Forsyth, P. J. ...	57	IVd		
Vardon, G. L. ...	45	IVc 1		
Smith, Geo. ...	55	Vb 1		
Davies, E. G. ...	59	IVa 2	18-1	1-7-95
Brazil, N. J. ...	76	IIIa	18-2	1-7-95
Bickmore, E. J. ...	61	IIIb	17-2	1-11-96
Davidson, Jno. ...	73	IVb	16-4	27-9-97
Wallin, A. E. ...	70	Iic	17-2	27-9-97
Brazil, J. J. ...	52	IIf	16-1	16-3-98
Kemp, L. C. ...	44	IVc 2	16-5	16-3-98
White, G. T. ...	57	Ila	15-5	28-3-98
Blair, And. ...	47	Ia	16	28-2-99
Jobst, Jos. B. ...	8	Ia	16-3	28-2-99
Bartlett, Jas. S. F. ...	56	IIc 1	15	27-3-99
Palfrey, A. ...	28	IIc 2	14-4	27-3-99

Brisbane Central (Girls).

1. Thirteen.
3. Four.

Name of Teacher.	QUESTIONS NOS. 2 AND 6.*		Question 4.	Question 5.
	Pupils enrolled.	Class or draft.		
			Years.	
Berry, Margaret...	54	VI 2 & 3		
Cowell, Amelia ...	49	VI 1		
Lintern, Annie ...	44	V 3		
Hogbin, Gertrude ...	50	V 2		
Morgan, Elsie ...				
Gillingwater, Minnie ...	50	V 1		
Higgins, Mary ...	41	IVa 3		
Singer, Margaret ...	46	IVb 3		
O'Brien, Ada ...	55	IV 2		
Geddes, Ada ...	55	I 4 & 3		
Mulligan, May ...	92	III 3 & 2		
Black, Agnes ...	68	III 3		
Ryan, Annie ...	55	III 1		
Thompson, Annie ...	49	IV 1	19-2	1-2-26
Cameron, Mabel ...	45	III 2	19-7	1-2-96
Lade, Ruth G. ...	48	II 1	18	8-9-97
Agnew, Eliza M.	26	I 2 & 1	18-6	1-2-97

Brisbane Central (Infants).

1. Two.
3. Three.

Name of Teachers.	QUESTIONS NOS. 2 AND 6.*		Question 4.	Question 5.
	Pupils enrolled.	Class or draft.		
			Years.	
Stores, Frances ...	26	Ia 4		
Moodie, Jessie ...	45	I 2		
Mayo, Clara ...	45	I 1	17-5	1-10-96
Kennedy, Ethel I.	36	I 3	18-8	9-9-97
Blaine, Adeline M.	33	Ib 4	15-7	10-7-99

*NOTE.—The number in Arabic numerals show the enrolment in the several classes or drafts. The number of pupils present on any day is usually somewhat less than the enrolment. The number in Roman numerals indicates the class; the letter with index indicates the draft of the class.

RELATIVES OF TRANSVAAL CONTINGENT

Mr. LESINA (*Clermont*) asked the Premier—

Is he aware that in a recent issue of the *Charters Towers Eagle* it is stated that a subscription list is being taken about that town for the purpose of raising funds to assist the wife and children of one of the Transvaal contingent?

The PREMIER replied—

I am not aware.

THE FITTING OF THE "CORNWALL."

Mr. DAWSON (*Charters Towers*), without notice, asked the Premier—1. Has he observed in the Press damaging statements made by Lieutenant-Colonel Thomson with reference to the "Cornwall"? 2. Has he any information to give the House upon it?

The PREMIER replied: I have nothing more to state to what has appeared in the Press. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomson was one of the members of the Transport Board; and had, therefore, the conduct of the arrangements on board the "Cornwall" before she left.

RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE
BILL.

SECOND READING—RESUMPTION OF DEBATE.

On the Order of the Day being read for the resumption of the debate on the second reading of this Bill,

Mr. DAWSON (*Charters Towers*) said: I regret that the second reading of this Bill is coming on to-day. I should have preferred that the Elections Bill had been gone on with and completed first. However, this Bill is before us, and I suppose we shall have to discuss it. I may say that I read it through very carefully, not only once, but two or three times, in order that I might thoroughly understand it, and see if it was anything nearly approaching to the Bill we anticipated was going to be introduced by the Government when the House first heard that a Works Committee Bill was to be introduced into this Chamber. And I have come to the conclusion, after a very careful perusal of the Bill, that it is disappointing in its aim and also in its method. Even admitting that the object aimed at, or the principle embodied in this particular Bill, may be good, the method adopted in it is such as to destroy whatever virtue there may be contained within the four corners of the Bill. I listened very carefully to the remarks, the very well connected remarks, of the hon. gentlemen in introducing the Bill. He had certainly got his subject up well, and he made the very best of a very bad case; his remarks reflected credit on his ingenuity and capacity. Now, the hon. gentleman was evidently labouring under a very grave misconception. Not only did I listen to his speech, but I have since read it in *Hansard*, and the whole purport of his remarks was based upon the way in which the works committee had worked in New South Wales. He set to work to prove that they had tried an experiment of this description in the colony of New South Wales—that they had had a measure of the kind now proposed to this House in operation there for some eleven years—and that all political parties, as well as the public, were perfectly satisfied with the establishment of that committee. Therefore, he argued, as it is in New South Wales, so it will be in Queensland if we adopt this Bill. But the hon. gentleman missed the point in the case; there is a very great deal of difference between the Act of New South Wales and the Bill we are now called upon to adopt in Queensland. If hon. members will carefully go through the old Act of New South Wales, together with the amending Act, and compare it with this Bill they must necessarily come to the conclusion that this Bill contains all the evils of the New South Wales Act without any of its virtues. It is rather a wild statement for the Minister to make, that they have made an experiment in this direction in New South Wales. They have not done anything of the kind. When the hon. gentleman made that statement, the hon. member for Brisbane South, Mr. Turley, interjected "No." The New South Wales Parliament has not adopted this particular principle, for their Act embraces all public works, while this Bill only includes railways.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: I admitted all that.

Mr. DAWSON: No; the hon. gentleman did not admit it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The principle is identical, but the scope is less.

Mr. DAWSON: The hon. gentleman said, at page 939 of the last issue of *Hansard*—

I may mention, in passing, that this is no experimental legislation. The legislation proposed by this Bill has been tried in other colonies, and has proved to be a marked success.

Mr. LESINA: Not in the same form.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It is in existence actually in this form in New South Wales.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Go on.

Mr. DAWSON: The hon. gentleman is entirely mistaken; it does not exist in this form in New South Wales.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: I explained that later on.

Mr. DAWSON: The hon. gentleman is claiming blood relationship between this Bill and the Act in operation in New South Wales, but I contend that as this Bill does not embrace the subjects embraced in the New South Wales Act, we are asked to accept all the vices of that measure without any of its virtues.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: See what I said in reply to the hon. member for South Brisbane. I explained it all there.

Mr. DAWSON: The New South Wales Act has proved a great success; nobody can deny that for a single moment, for the establishment of the works committee in New South Wales has done a great deal of good for the people of that colony.

Hon. E. B. FORREST: They do not think so down there.

Mr. DAWSON: I beg to differ from the hon. gentleman; they do think so.

Hon. E. B. FORREST: Many of them don't.

Mr. DAWSON: The information I obtained during the time I was in New South Wales was to the effect that the establishment of that works committee had resulted in a great deal of good to the taxpayer. They certainly required it in New South Wales more than we do in Queensland, because there was a great deal more corruption in New South Wales than there has been in this colony.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear! Oh, oh!

Mr. LESINA: Question.

Mr. DAWSON: There is no question about it. Whatever has been done by past Governments in Queensland, they certainly can show clean hands as compared with the Governments they have had in New South Wales. At any rate, that is my opinion. Some of the revelations that have been made in New South Wales are rather startling. They have not had checks on public expenditure there the same as we have had in the shape of local authorities, as has been very properly pointed out by the Minister who introduced this Bill. There, the Treasurer, or any Minister for the time being, has even now wider powers and a greater facility for abusing his position than a Minister has in Queensland, however anxious or desirous that Minister may be to abuse the position he chances to occupy by a political accident of the moment. But the great virtue of the New South Wales Act is that it is not strictly confined to railways. This Bill proposes right through from the beginning to the end, and the hon. gentleman in introducing it contended right through the piece, that it was not necessary, nor was it judicious or wise, to embrace anything in the Bill except railways, and that is exactly the point on which I join issue with the Minister. As a matter of fact we do not require this Bill so much for railways as we do for other public works in Queensland.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: What other public works do you require it for?

Mr. DAWSON: I will mention the other public works by and by. What is our position with regard to the construction of railways? The hon. gentleman stated in his speech that every hon. member must admit that blunders had been committed in the past in the construction of railways, that railways had been constructed without sufficient information, and that a certain amount of political influence had

been exerted to get railways constructed in localities where they should not have been constructed—or, to put it shortly, that railway jobs have been committed in this colony. The hon. gentleman says that every hon. member in this Chamber must freely admit that. I certainly do freely admit it, but I say that when the hon. gentleman desires a change in this direction, it is not only incumbent upon him to get an admission from hon. members that jobs of that description have been committed in the past, but it is absolutely essential for him to prove to the House that such jobs have been committed since we have had Railway Commissioners.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: A blunder may not be a job, you know.

Mr. DAWSON: The hon. gentleman put it in the polite way for which he is so noted, but everyone understood what the hon. gentleman was referring to, and he certainly was referring to railways constructed in wrong places and in wrong localities, and he suggested that that was done because we had not sufficient information, and because of some evil influence as well, the whole thing operating to produce the result that these blunders were committed. I want to know from the hon. gentleman how he will escape this position: When the Railway Commissioners were appointed they were appointed for this very purpose—to prevent these blunders from ever occurring again in the colony of Queensland.

Mr. GROOM: They were appointed to stop political influence.

Mr. DAWSON: Yes, to stop political influence—to stop these blunders. It was in order that members of this House should be furnished with the very best up-to-date information as to the proper place in which a railway line should be constructed they were appointed. That is the reason we have Railway Commissioners at the present time, and I want to know if, since the appointment of those Commissioners, there have been any of these blunders complained of by the hon. gentleman committed in the colony of Queensland?

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Very few railways have been constructed since.

Mr. DAWSON: I say it is absolutely incumbent on the hon. gentleman, when he is asking this House to change the system in the conduct of railway construction, to show that the one we have at the present time is not a good one, or that some evils have crept in under it. The hon. gentleman has not attempted to do that, and I say he certainly should do it before he calls upon members of this House to adopt this new system and put the taxpayers of the colony to extra expense, without showing us in what way we are going to be benefited by one single penny. I desire all who are enthusiastic supporters of this Bill to devote some little attention to that point. If they have any arguments to show that the Railway Commissioners have been a failure, and that blunders in the construction of railways have just been going on the same as before their appointment, let us know about the matter, and let it be shown that this will be a more effective method of checking these blunders than the existence of the present Railway Commissioners. This is another point on which I desire to say a few words: I say that even if the hon. gentleman can prove that these blunders have been committed under the management of the Railway Commissioners, and under the present system of conducting railway construction, I say he has further to show that these blunders now being committed can be remedied under the provisions of this Bill. He has never attempted to do that, and I do not think he can do it.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Oh, yes; quite easily.

Mr. DAWSON: What is the present system in conducting railway matters? There are the book of reference and plans to be laid on the table of the House, and it is then competent for this House to appoint a select committee to inquire into the matter before going any further. As a matter of fact, very frequently, where there has been any dispute as to the route or as to the advisability or otherwise of constructing a proposed railway into a particular district, that is exactly the course we do take. A select committee is appointed with power to send for persons and papers and to take all the evidence they can possibly rake up in connection with the case and furnish it with a report to this Chamber, on which the proposal is afterwards discussed and determined.

The PREMIER: That is only while the House is sitting.

Mr. DAWSON: What is there in the wide world to prevent the hon. gentleman, if he so desires, giving that committee power to sit while the House is not sitting? As a matter of fact, if it is necessary they should travel, the hon. gentleman could easily give them the power of travelling, and it would not be the first time a select committee has been given the power to visit the scene.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: They always sit here.

Mr. DAWSON: No, no; it is quite a different thing. If this is all the hon. gentleman seeks to do now, this Bill is but waste-paper, because we have got that now.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: This committee may sit when the House is not sitting.

Mr. DAWSON: Does the hon. gentleman mean to say that without this Bill we could not appoint a select committee with power to call for persons and papers and to take evidence?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: They could not sit during the recess.

The TREASURER: They could not travel.

Mr. DAWSON: The hon. gentleman could give them power to travel.

The PREMIER: They could not sit during the recess.

Mr. DAWSON: Then after the proposal leaves this Chamber there is an additional check. It is absolutely necessary before the Upper House can discuss the matter at all that it must be submitted to the consideration and report of a select committee. In this House it is only optional that it should go to a select committee, but in the other place it is imperative. We have then, I think, in railway matters a very good and efficient check on the blunders the hon. gentleman has complained of. Further, I would like to direct your attention to this matter: When our select committees want to take evidence they call the Railway Commissioner, the Chief Engineer, the Deputy Commissioner, and probably an outside expert like Mr. Phillips. They take their evidence, and draw it up in the shape of a report, which is submitted to this House. The committee appointed under this Bill will do exactly the same thing.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Oh, no.

Mr. DAWSON: I say yes.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: A different class of men altogether.

Mr. DAWSON: That is a most remarkable statement to come from the Secretary for Railways—that they are not going to take the evidence of their own officials, the Railway Commissioner and the Chief Engineer, upon the construction of railways in Queensland. If that is so, the sooner the Bill is killed the better.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Hear, hear!

Mr. DAWSON: I certainly should be prepared to trust the Railway Commissioner, the

Chief Engineer, and Mr. Thallon sooner than any outside authority on the construction of railways.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

The PREMIER: Their evidence will be taken also.

Mr. DAWSON: The Secretary for Railways says "No"; it is to be a different class altogether.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: In addition to the officials' reports.

Mr. DAWSON: Is there any one class of persons in the colony competent to give an expression of opinion as to the wisdom or otherwise of constructing a railway that cannot be reached by means of one of our own select committees?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: We want persons who have a knowledge of the country it will pass through, its possibilities, and so forth.

Mr. DAWSON: I remember when there was a railway discussion on in this Chamber—one of the most heated railway discussions I suppose that has occurred since I have been in the Chamber. It was on the proposal to construct a line from Hughenden to Winton, and the Rockhampton bunch, led by the Secretary for Railways himself, desired railway construction to Winton—out from Longreach to Winton.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: No, we never asked for it.

Mr. DAWSON: The Northern and Central members had a contest as to the route. Both agreed as to the advisability of railway communication with Winton, but the question was as to the starting-point. After the Secretary for Railways and those with him found they were completely beaten, they changed their ground, and wanted the line to go from Hughenden to Kynuna.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Exactly. That is where it ought to have gone.

Mr. DAWSON: What happened on that occasion under the provision we have now for conducting railway construction? We had a select committee on that proposal. If I am not mistaken, I was a member of it, and I know they took evidence and submitted a report. They not only took the evidence of the Railway Commissioners and the Chief Engineer for Railways, but the evidence, as the hon. gentleman states, of those who were living in the township of Winton and who knew the country. We took their evidence as that of men who knew the country—as experts.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: You did not act upon it.

Mr. DAWSON: We did act upon it, and the railway was opened only the other day, and I think the hon. gentleman travelled upon it.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: You did not act on the evidence given before the committee.

Mr. DAWSON: We did, and we completely routed the Central contingent.

[4 p.m.] Every available person who had any knowledge about the matter while we were discussing that railway on that occasion was reached by that select committee.

Mr. JACKSON: I was a member of that select committee.

Mr. DAWSON: The hon. member for Kennedy was a member of the committee, and he will recollect that we had some men from Winton who had been living there for years and years and knew every inch of the country, and if we could do that on that occasion without this Bill, in the name of common sense, why cannot we do the same thing again if necessity arises without this Bill?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: If this Bill had been in existence the line would never have gone to Winton.

Mr. DAWSON: I cannot understand where the hon. gentleman is. I asked the question if he could point to one class of persons who could not be reached by a select committee that would be reached under the provisions of this Bill, and the hon. gentleman said, "Yes, those who were living in the locality and knew the country;" and I related that incident to tell the hon. gentleman that a select committee, as appointed at the present time, proved in that case that it could reach that class of persons, and that it is unnecessary to have this Bill to reach that class of persons. I would like to mention here, that while believing this Bill is not calculated to advance us any further in removing those blunders connected with the construction of our railways, or enable us to get any more information to guide us to a wise conclusion in our deliberations in this Chamber than we have under the present select committee system, I believe also, that by the acceptance of this Bill we shall be weakening the position we occupy at the present time; and I will tell you why. We have in the Railway Commissioner a man who has certainly got some backbone.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. DAWSON: And I believe there is more than one instance where that gentleman has been called upon to report on a railway, and from his experience and expert knowledge he has refused to recommend its construction; and even when he has been asked to report again and reconsider his decision he has point blank refused to do it because he did not believe it was a railway that would do any benefit to the country, and he refused to recommend what he did not believe was worth recommending. I am given to understand that there is more than one instance of that, and that is a very good protection to us. And then there is another matter. Even after all, when this committee under this particular Bill is appointed, the report will only come up for discussion and determination by this House in the same way as the report comes up for consideration under the select committee system we have now.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: No. There is more information.

Mr. DAWSON: I ask the hon. gentleman if anywhere within the two covers of this Bill he can show that he is giving that committee power to do anything without the consent of this Chamber.

The TREASURER: Except report.

Mr. DAWSON: Cannot a select committee report?

The PREMIER: Not fully.

Mr. DAWSON: I suppose the hon. gentleman is referring to clause 10. What is to prevent us, when a proposal comes along for a select committee to take evidence and report upon a railway route, embodying in the resolution the powers that are embodied in clause 10 of this Bill? Is there anything in the wide world to stop that?

The PREMIER: They have not the time at their disposal.

Mr. DAWSON: Not the time at their disposal! Clause 10 is headed "Powers and duties," but after all it is only an instruction. It is an instruction to that committee that they must bear constantly in mind certain things, and take the evidence bearing on the matter; they must have those ideas constantly in their minds; they must elicit evidence in that particular direction. It is not a matter of time at all; it is an instruction as to the character of the evidence.

The PREMIER: They must have time to obtain that information.

Mr. DAWSON: Quite so, and what is to prevent them? I fail to see where the question of time comes in at all. Supposing all the members sitting on this bench were appointed on

this committee, would they require more time to elicit the particular evidence, than if the same members were appointed under our present select committee system? Does the hon. member say it is going to give them additional brains and activity? I doubt it very much. If it was going to manufacture brains in that way it would be a very good thing for members of the Opposition to introduce a dozen Bills for the instruction of hon. members opposite.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It gives them time to travel over the route themselves.

Mr. McDONALD: To travel over the route and drink wine.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Oh, no.

Mr. DAWSON: I notice that the hon. gentleman sounded a little note that struck rather harshly on my ear when he stated that we must make some difference in the mode of railway construction, and then immediately went on to say that he was not referring particularly to State railways, but he referred to syndicate railways—railways to be constructed by private enterprise, and he particularised one district—the Cloncurry district—and dilated to some extent on the great wealth there was in that district, and said that owing to the great mineral wealth in that district it was proved necessary that a railway must be constructed there. If this proposal is to alter our mode of railway construction in the direction of encouraging syndicate railways, even if every other provision in the Bill was a good one, I would bitterly oppose it if that was the object aimed at.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The Bill is silent on the subject.

Mr. DAWSON: The hon. gentleman dilates on the great mineral wealth in one particular district, and advocates that a private railway should go there. The mere fact that that great wealth is there is absolute proof to my mind that the Government should construct that railway, and the taxpayers reap the benefit of that great wealth.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Hear, hear!

Mr. DAWSON: It was a little note that appeared to me to be an indication of something behind, and it struck harshly on my ear. The hon. gentleman further pointed out—and this apparently was his trump card—that it was necessary to have a committee of this description, because there is a large number of railways asked for, and in some places—one place in particular—there were five rival claimants—that is the railway to St. George; and that it was necessary, seeing that there were five rival claimants, that there should be a committee of this description in order to determine which one of those five rival claimants should be successful. I contend that it is not necessary to have anything of the kind. It is not even necessary to have a select committee to decide on a question of that description. What is absolutely necessary is that we have a Government with backbone enough to do the right thing when they know it to be the right thing.

The PREMIER: We want to know what is the right thing to do.

Mr. DAWSON: This particular matter has been before the present Government ever since it has been in existence, and of Governments before it. They have gone over the routes. They have had reports upon them. They have had expert evidence of all kinds and descriptions. I believe the Premier went as far as to promise one of the claimants that they should receive the first consideration. I say that, instead of having elaborate machinery of this description to determine such a question, it is for the Government when they know—and surely to goodness they have the best means of knowing; their funds are not stinted; their railway servants

have the necessary ability to undertake inquiries and make a recommendation—it is for the Government, I say, having this information before them, to put their foot down and say, "This is the best route for the people of the colony, and we are determined to carry it out." They would then earn the respect and esteem of all the people of the colony. I think the system in the Upper House is a much better one than we have here. There it is imperative that every railway proposal shall go before a select committee. Here it is only optional. That system, I think, might very well be extended to this Chamber. It happens now and then that railways come along, with the necessity for which every member of the Chamber is convinced, and that being so why should there be the long delay necessitated by the reference to a committee of this sort?

The PREMIER: This would facilitate matters.

Mr. DAWSON: This means that every railway proposal costing over £20,000 would have to go before the committee. For instance, nearly every member of the Chamber is in favour of the Bowen railway going to the 37-mile peg. But though we may not be exactly unanimous as to that, I have never heard an adverse word said as to the construction of a railway from Croydon to Georgetown. That would cost more than £20,000, yet before we could incur a penny of expenditure on a work which we are all satisfied, on the evidence we have, is a wise thing for the country to undertake, the whole business will have to be gone through over again, and experts will have to be called in to prove to us that of which we are already convinced. I have been endeavouring to show that the confining of this committee strictly to railways is no justification whatever for their endeavouring to force this Bill upon the Chamber, and that whatever justification there may be for a works committee it is that it should embrace all public works costing over a certain amount. We have already, as I have said, got an efficient check upon our railway construction. But public works are being constantly constructed in the colony for which no permission is asked from the House before the Minister authorises their construction. It was pointed out by the hon. member for Bulloo, and I think by the hon. member for Wide Bay, on the debate on the Financial Statement, that the colony was committed to enormous amounts of unauthorised expenditure for public works, and that the item is increasing; that there is a class of our public works over which the members of the Chamber have absolutely no control, and that there would be some justification for the appointment of a committee which would take evidence and report to the House on works other than railways costing over £20,000.

Mr. GROOM: That is where the saving has been in New South Wales.

Mr. DAWSON: That is what I was about to point out. The great leakage in this colony is not in railway construction, but in other public works done on the sole responsibility of the Minister, of course approved of by the Cabinet. When a work is authorised, and the money is expended, they come down to the House and ask us to vote the money, and if we refuse to vote the money, what is it? It is repudiation. In the expenditure of this money we are absolutely helpless. Whatever committees we may desire it is where this great leakage is. As the hon. member for Drayton and Toowoomba has pointed out, the great benefit that has resulted from the existence of this committee in New South Wales has been a saving of money in exactly this direction, and not on railways. As a matter of fact the great saving of money on railway construction in New South

Wales, and their present flourishing condition, is due to the master-hand of the late Mr. Eidy. The expenditure on railways is really the only thing we now have any check upon before the taxpayer is called upon to pay, and with which members cannot be charged, if they object to the expenditure, with trying to cast dishonour upon the colony. I certainly think we should have some check upon public works expenditure. It would result very beneficially to the colony as a whole, and it would certainly do the Northern portion of the colony a great deal of good, and I have no doubt my hon. friend, the member for Rockhampton, will say that Rockhampton will get a little more justice in future under a system of that kind than it has had in the past. I will not pursue that point any further. I will only ask hon. members to compare this Bill with the New South Wales Act and see whether it embraces anything like the same ground. As I pointed out in the earlier portion of my remarks, even if the hon. gentleman succeeds in proving that the principle embodied in this Bill—the object he is aiming at—is a good one, the method he has adopted has destroyed it, has taken all the virtue out of it. Take, for instance, New South Wales. When I was down there making inquiries I found all political parties were enthusiastically in support of their Act, especially after the Amending Act was passed, which dealt with all public works, but they complained that one great defect in their Act was that the Premier was to nominate the members of the committee. They proposed that if they were nominated by the Premier, that they should be elected by the Assembly. But in this Bill the hon. member has not gone as far as New South Wales. He proposes that the members of this committee shall be elected as members of an ordinary select committee are elected; that there shall be no ballot; that it will be a kind of formal motion, without ballot at all. What we should endeavour to do is to remedy the defects in the New South Wales Act, and not to perpetuate them. I certainly say that, if this Bill passes its second reading, I intend to vote against that principle as far as I possibly can. I say that the nomination and election of members to sit on this committee should be the same as the nomination and election of members of this House by their constituents. Then there is another matter—a matter of very profound importance in connection with this Bill: In the New South Wales Act, if the committee is elected as I have indicated, then that committee chooses its own chairman and vice-chairman.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Hear, hear!

Mr. DAWSON: But under this Bill the Government reserve that right to themselves, and I object to this as a vicious principle. It puts too much power in the hands of the Premier—I don't care who the Premier is—for the time being, and I do not refer to the hon. gentleman who at present occupies the position of Premier personally, for I suppose this Bill will survive all future Premiers until it is wiped out of existence. I say that is a power that should not be placed in the hands of any one man who happens by the accident of politics to occupy the position of Premier. That power—to select their own chairman—should be in the hands of the members of the committee—they should be enabled in their wisdom to select a member to occupy that important position. And considering that that position carries extra remuneration, that makes it all the more objectionable. Squaring dissatisfied friends or obnoxious opponents is not uncommon in politics, and this is one of the opportunities that a man might take who is desirous of adopting a method of this description.

Mr. LESINA: The trail of the serpent is over the whole.

Mr. ARMSTRONG: The constitution was so in New South Wales in the first instance.

Mr. DAWSON: Just so, but there is an Amending Act.

Mr. ARMSTRONG: You were alluding to the first proposition, saying that it was pernicious.

Mr. DAWSON: The election is now effected by Parliament, or if the members become disqualified or cease to be members of Parliament, they must vacate their seats on this committee. In fact, the Minister has left out one of the most useful democratic principles, and has inserted one of the most vicious.

The PREMIER: That is your opinion.

Mr. DAWSON: There are a lot of matters in this Bill which I do not think it is necessary for me to go into at present. Clause 10 provides that certain instructions shall be given to this committee, and I am really surprised that the hon. gentleman did not copy the New South Wales Act, and ask our proposed committee to take evidence in the same direction as it is taken there.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: The local authorities here carry on most of the public works.

Mr. DAWSON: The local authorities do not carry on the chief public works. They carry on certain works, such as the repair and maintenance of roads and the building of bridges in their own boundaries.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Yes, and harbour and river works; there are harbour boards.

Mr. DAWSON: They have not established one in Brisbane yet, and the question is whether some of these people will not be called upon to be relieved of their responsibility in this respect before long.

Mr. KIDSTON: That is an open question, whether we shall not have to take them over again after federation.

Mr. DAWSON: There is another matter in connection with the committee in New South Wales. They have the power to get assessors to assist them in arriving at a just verdict, but there is no provision in this Bill for anything of this description. We find in this colony, in our mining, land, and electoral laws, that the judge receives great assistance from these assessors.

Mr. FORSYTH: Read clause 9.

Mr. DAWSON: Yes, I overlooked that. It is undoubtedly one of the best provisions that could be put into this Bill. As I have said, I intend to vote against the second reading, not because I object to the principle of a public works committee which will take expert evidence, and which will be able to afford this House such evidence that will enable it to come to a wise decision, and will enable them to carry on good government; but the hon. member has not endeavoured to do that. He has endeavoured to bring about something which will be absolutely useless and unnecessary, and which, in my opinion, will leave us in a worse position than we are in at the present time. I shall vote against the second reading.

The PREMIER: I hardly expected that the hon. member, the leader of the Labour Opposition, in rising to speak on this Bill, would take it to his heart to express his cordial approval of it. The rôle of the hon. gentleman appears to be, that whatever we do or say it is not right. As a rule, whatever we propose is sure to meet with the condemnation of that hon. gentleman. But he has given a certain amount of approval to the principle of the Bill, which I was very gratified to hear. In his opening remarks he advocated that the principle of the Bill should be enlarged, so as to include public works, and I

almost expected that he would have followed up that declaration by announcing that if we intended to include public works beyond a certain amount it would meet with his approval. There is a great deal to be said on the question of public works being included under this Bill.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

The PREMIER: But we have thought it better that this Bill should deal with railways only, because the question of railway construction in this colony is one of the most urgent importance; one concerning which the Government receive so many deputations and requests, that it is desirable to consider as early as practical which lines are the most urgent, and which should be first proceeded with. Now the position of railway construction in this colony has for some time, owing to the circumstances of the colony, been such that the Government have not been able to proceed with it anything like as largely and as fully as the public demand.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: You give promises.

The PREMIER: No, we give railways as the public demand them. Here we are

[4.30 p.m.] situated in an immense extent of territory half the size of Europe, populated by less than half a million of people, who are pursuing the industries and developing the resources of the colony in sparsely populated districts where they require to be provided with facilities of communication with the ports and the oversea markets of the world. In former days railways were considered perhaps as luxuries to be given to the large centres of population. At the present time we must recognise that they are an absolute necessity for opening up the country and encouraging settlement. This standing committee, therefore, will have cast upon it the duty of recommending for the acceptance of Parliament certain proposals for railway construction which it will be within the financial ability of the colony to undertake. Now, in the first place the Government have not the financial ability to carry out all the railways which are from time to time demanded, and in the second place it is very difficult to decide which of the railways should be carried out, or by what routes they should be taken, and how they will affect population settled along the route chosen. Therefore, I contend that the intervention of a standing committee which will have an opportunity to work during the recess, and which can seriously deliberate upon, and consider the best routes for the various lines to take, gathering a large amount of information which the Government can only obtain through their officials, will have a distinctly salutary effect. Their labours will possibly result in throwing an entirely new light on the different routes proposed, and taking that view only I think the Government are amply justified in bringing forward this proposal for the appointment of a permanent committee to enable railway construction to be proceeded with as early as possible, and without that delay which is likely to attend it if the Government themselves have to consider these various matters. I wish it to be distinctly understood that the object of the Government in pressing this Bill is to accelerate railway construction and not to retard it, and I am quite certain that if this committee is constituted there will be a certain amount of railway construction entered upon more immediately than would be the case if the system we have pursued hitherto still continues to exist. I say there is a great deal of force in the proposal to extend the principle of the Bill to works generally, but I want to point out the urgency there is, especially for railways. With regard to works, I agree with a great deal of what the hon. gentleman has said, and while I contend the Bill is more

immediately valuable in its present shape, I am not at all unprepared in committee, if it reaches that stage, to hear a discussion as to whether works of a certain character should not be included. That is a matter for the House to determine. I want a good practical measure, and from my own observation of the embarrassments of railway construction in this colony I have thought that by confining the Bill to railways it would be less cumbersome and we might get it through more readily.

Mr. DAWSON: Are you willing to withdraw this Bill?

The PREMIER: I am not going to withdraw this Bill, but I say that in committee we may discuss the question of including works. I do not give any promise of the acceptance of amendments; but it is a question upon which a great deal may be said, as to whether works of a certain character should not be included. I may mention here that I am of opinion that the Bill as it stands is quite sufficient for the day, and introduces a principle which hereafter may be extended to works—perhaps with benefit to the colony. But I would point out that there is not the same necessity for works being referred to a standing committee as exists in New South Wales. Here we have our local authorities very actively engaged. We have our harbour boards and other local institutions, which take upon themselves the conduct of public works, and I do not think there is the same embarrassment in deciding upon public buildings in the towns of the colony as there is in deciding upon the many applications for railways. That is why I wish to draw a distinct line of demarcation as between the urgent necessity for a public works committee generally and a railway committee. Now, something has been said by the hon. member concerning the bungalows, or rather the leakage, in railway construction. Well, this Bill is not introduced to deal with the question of leakage. I think our railways have been constructed—I may not perhaps use the word “economically”—but I do not think the general application of the term “leakage” is just, or can be applied to them either intentionally or otherwise. Our railways perhaps have at the outset been dealt with under a certain amount of political influence. There is no use in attempting to disguise that position, and it is with a view of having an independent tribunal to deal with these matters, and intimate which lines in their opinion are likely to be most beneficial to the country, that this Bill is submitted for the approval of the House. I wish to give the Railway Commissioner, and the Traffic Manager, and the Engineer-in-Chief, and in fact all the railway officials, the highest credit for their ability and intelligence in the manner in which they conduct the Railway Department, but at the same time these gentlemen, able as I have said they are in their respective departments, are not the best judges of a policy which will suit the country, and which will open it up for settlement. While I give them credit for their administration of the railways which are constructed, and the engineers credit for the ability in railway construction, yet at the same time there is a very great difference between offering recommendations and advice as to whether a railway will pay, and the character of the country it will traverse, and deciding upon a railway policy. That is a matter to which the standing committee would specially devote time and investigation. They will have also the benefit of conferring and consulting with the railway officials, and will be able to submit a comprehensive and deliberate report upon the proposals which my hon. colleague will introduce, and their report will naturally carry much more weight coming as it will from an independent tribunal divested of party politics. Parliament will

have more confidence in a report coming from an independent tribunal than it would in a report coming from the Government or from the railway officials. I may at once say that while I respect the ability of our Railway Commissioner, yet I know from having been in the Railway Department that there is a tendency, and there must be a very natural tendency, on the part of any gentleman occupying that position not to press on railway lines unless there is a probability of their paying from the start. Our railways produce at the present time something over 3 per cent., and it is very natural that the Railway Commissioner does not want to increase the number of non-paying railways, and thereby reduce the average earnings which he is enabled so satisfactorily to exhibit to Parliament and the country. While I do not wish in any way to disparage the ability of the Railway Commissioner, yet it is a natural tendency in a gentleman placed in that responsible position not to speculate too much in regard to railway extension. It may be the safer policy; but on the other side he may err through adopting a policy of extreme caution, and retard the development of this country, which, I allege, can chiefly be promoted by the extension of railways commensurate with our financial ability to pay for them. The committee itself will, I take it, hold an impartial position. They will discriminate between injudicious expenditure, and expenditure upon a railway which, although there is no probability of its paying for the first year or two, must certainly pay in the future. In a recommendation by the Railway Commissioner, he wishes, naturally, to show to the country that the percentage of profit upon our railway system has been maintained. The public do not look below the surface in these things. So long as the Commissioner reports that our railways are paying 3 per cent. upon the capital invested, above working expenses, the public is satisfied; but supposing it drops to 2½ per cent., the blame is laid upon the department, while it may be entirely due to having initiated the construction of certain lines which do not for the first year or two provide sufficient revenue to maintain the equilibrium of the railway revenue. I do not therefore say there are any blunders to be charged to the Railway Commissioner. I think that the country has had very valuable services from the Railway Commissioner, and from the railway officials. It is not with a view to protect ourselves from blunder that this Bill is introduced. It is to endeavour to infuse more activity into railway construction than is shown at the present time. I think railway construction should be continuously progressive. At the present time, as my hon. colleague has told us, we have approached the end of our construction, and there is not a single railway going on at the present time.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Not one.

The PREMIER: That undoubtedly disturbs the labour market, and is not altogether creditable to the country.

Mr. W. THORN: Whose fault is it? It is the fault of the Government.

The PREMIER: If the hon. member wants the Goombungee railway, his best chance is with the railways committee. Until the committee takes that railway into serious consideration with the numerous other applications before the Government, that will not be one of the lines which will be placed in the forefront of the proposals of the Secretary for Railways.

Mr. JENKINSON: Not while the hon. member is on this side.

The PREMIER: I hope we all look at the general interests of the country. I am sure the committee will not regard proposals for railways

in the light of whether the hon. member who represents the district concerned sits on one side or the other. The committee that it is proposed to appoint has this great advantage that it is not merely a sessional committee, which terminates its labours when this House rises. Of course, I am not prepared to say that, even if the committee was formed this week, it would be able to do a great deal of work during this short session, but at the same time I am convinced that there is work which could be done even this session, and that we will have work before us before we rise, which, though it may not be of a very extensive character, will yet enable us to resume railway construction; and during the recess I trust that the committee will make itself fully acquainted with the various plans and specifications to be supplied to them, and at the commencement of another session there will be another opportunity of dealing with a very much larger scheme of railway construction than we can possibly deal with at the present time. Even at the present time, as I say, under this committee, we will be able to resume railway construction, of which I see very little chance if the Government proceed in the old-fashioned manner, because every hon. member on both sides of the Chamber has his heart upon one line, which he considers of more importance than all the rest, and the difficulty would be to obtain anything like an affirmation of the wisdom of proceeding with railway construction unless that special line is amongst the number brought forward.

Mr. ARMSTRONG: What about getting six impartial members of the committee?

The PREMIER: I hope the six impartial men will not be interested in the railways which will be brought before them. It is to be hoped that the gentlemen who will be appointed to these positions will discharge their duties impartially and with credit to the colony, from whichever side they may come—and I hope a fair number will be taken from either side. With regard to the committee of the Legislative Council which invariably investigates railway proposals after they have left this Chamber, it is a matter for the Council to decide whether that committee will continue to exist. The Council will have a certain number of their members appointed to this committee, and I fancy that their being represented on the committee will induce them to forego their old committee which they now appoint to deal with these matters. I do not know that I need remark upon the appointment of members under the Bill. The appointment of members of the committee is dictated by an opinion that there should be a fair number of members from both sides of the Chamber and from the Legislative Council, and, notwithstanding the criticism of the hon. member for Charters Towers, I think the appointment of the chairman of the committee may very properly be left in the hands of the Government of the day, inasmuch as the Government ought to have a voice in the construction of railways, and the chairman would, to a certain extent, represent the views of the Government. However, that and other matters may very well be discussed in committee. The Bill is framed with a view to enabling us to at once resume railway construction, and matters of detail are properly left to be considered in committee. While I do not think the leader of the Labour Opposition has in any way discredited the Bill, he generally threatens opposition because it comes from the Government, and his approval of the general principles of the Bill should justify hon. members in coming to a favourable conclusion. I do not want to take up time unnecessarily. My colleague, the Secretary for Railways, has placed

the details so fully before the House that there is nothing more for me to say. The justification for the Bill is to be found in similar measures being retained on the statute-books of New South Wales and Victoria. They have had years to consider the propriety or otherwise of working under this system, and if they have retained it for so many years upon their statute-books we may rest assured it is because the people in our sister colonies appreciate it.

Mr. McDONALD: Would you apply the same argument to their Elections Acts?

The PREMIER: We will deal with the Elections Act on another occasion. We don't want to confuse the two matters. At present we will confine ourselves to this Bill. I know from hon. members of the respective legislatures of New South Wales and Victoria with whom I have conversed that the system has been found of vast benefit. I may even quote the name of Mr. John Mathieson, our late respected Chief Commissioner.

Mr. McDONALD: What—respected?

The PREMIER: He is now Chief Commissioner for Railways in Victoria, and warmly approves a measure of this sort. I have heard him express himself in terms of the strongest commendation. But, apart from that, the fact that the measure has remained for so long on the statute-books of those colonies is sufficient proof that its working has been beneficial. Its benefits will be even greater here where really we are surrounded by a great many more difficulties than appertain to a small country like Victoria, or even to New South Wales. In those two countries their whole systems are worked from one common centre, while here we have railways right throughout the length and breadth of this great territory—disjointed parts of a system which I trust hereafter will be one; but that, of course, has to be worked up to. It involves a great deal more consideration than merely a question of a line from a common centre as in the southern colonies. I think that the only objection which is entertained by hon. members is the fear that it will retard the speedy acceleration of railway construction. I wish to disabuse their minds distinctly of that. My colleague, the Secretary for Railways, is prepared to place certain proposals for railway construction before the committee for immediate consideration, and there will be no delay whatever in the matter. I am certain that if he were to lay them on the table of this House at present, and refer them to any independent committee this House might appoint for its report, the probability is that the work would be unperformed at the close of the session. I think that that would be a huge calamity at present. I would wish to remove from hon. members' minds the impression that the Government in any way want to shelter themselves from the responsibility of railway construction, or that they desire to retard it.

Mr. GLASSER: Why not select one or two at once on which there is general unanimity?

Mr. DAWSON: The Croydon-Georgetown line.

The PREMIER: The hon. the leader of the Opposition says the Croydon-Georgetown line, as if it would meet with universal acceptance. I am quite surprised at the hon. gentleman saying that, having been so many years in Parliament and seen the difficulty there is in passing railway proposals through this House. I am certain that if I were to introduce that line without others it would not go through quite so readily as the hon. member imagines. Having been in the railway chair, I have seen the applications for the line from Croydon to Georgetown, and from the east of Georgetown, and if that one line were proposed probably one would vote for it and seventy-one might dissent from it.

Mr. GLASSEY: Why not select the Gladstone-Rockhampton line.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Hear, hear!

The PREMIER: I do not know why that should not be submitted to the committee. It is proposed that all the railways should be submitted to the crucible of this committee. I think it is a very good plan. I do not know why, if that line is submitted to it, there should be the slightest delay in dealing with it. They could even go over the line between a Friday night and Tuesday, when we resume deliberations in this Chamber, so that they would not be taken away at all from their legislative duties. I consider there would be no delay at all. For the sake of uniformity we desire that all the lines should pass through the committee, and I think it is as well that that principle should be maintained with regard to all the work that there is to perform. I should like to point out to hon. members who are here for their first session that they have not seen the trouble and difficulty there is in passing a railway policy or a railway scheme. I am sure that if they had been here in earlier years, or even in recent years, they would have seen the difficulty there is under the present system of passing proposals even for well-considered railways just through the jealous feeling that exists among other members whose railways are not brought forward. This matter has received full consideration from the Government, and the speech which was delivered by the Hon. Secretary for Railways has not been in any way attacked by the hon. the leader of the Opposition. I feel confident that the House in giving assent to this Bill will be introducing machinery which will enable railway construction to proceed smoothly and efficiently and in the interests of the general public.

MEMBERS on the Government side: Hear, hear!

Mr. McDONALD (*Flinders*): From what I can see of the whole tenor of this Bill it is this: the Premier at different times has promised so many railways to Government supporters that the Government are now in a difficulty, and they have brought down this Bill as a sort of buffer between the promises they made and their supporters. It has been a common thing, at different times in the history of the Government, at the time of an election, for telegrams to be sent to men standing for certain constituencies, saying that if so and so is elected the Government are prepared to go on with and construct a certain railway; or, if not in so many words, that the Government are prepared to construct a railway, and generally the party who read that particular telegram was a Government supporter. The presumption to be drawn from the telegram that was sent went directly to show that if the Government candidate was returned it was most probable that the line would be built.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: This Bill will do away with that very abuse.

Mr. McDONALD: The hon. gentleman says the Bill will do away with that very abuse. I should like to point this out—that the position we are in to-day is exactly the same position we should be in if we had had that committee. I should like to remind the Hon. the Secretary for Lands of a little railway that the hon. gentleman introduced to this Chamber, and which the hon. gentleman knows a little about. I refer to the Mirani-Cattle Creek line. We know that line was a huge job.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It was nothing of the sort; but it suits your purpose to say so.

Mr. McDONALD: It was commented on by the leading papers of this city as a job.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: And it was run by the Labour paper at Mackay for all that it was worth.

Mr. McDONALD: That was well-known. So much so was it that this House practically decided it would not go on with it. I should like to point out that when the plans, specifications, and books of reference were tabled it was found that the railway authorities commented adversely on the construction of the line. They told us in their report distinctly that there was no possibility of it paying in the near future.

The TREASURER: You are mistaken.

Mr. McDONALD: I am not mistaken, as the hon. gentleman will see if he will go through "Votes and Proceedings" and the report of the Railway Commissioner at the time. The railway authorities said it would not pay for a considerable time.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Not immediately.

Mr. McDONALD: I think "considerable" was the word that was used; but I will not dispute with the hon. gentleman. That was what was meant, at any rate. The result was that the line was not constructed; but if Parliament had done as Parliaments have done in the past, and not taken the advice of the Railway Department, it is probable it would have been built.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: And it would have paid them to do it.

Mr. McDONALD: It is questionable. According to the report of the railway authorities, they were of opinion it would not. As a matter of fact the Mackay railway does not pay at present, and I think this would only have added another burden to that line.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: No. It would have helped to make it pay.

Mr. McDONALD: The Secretary for Railways, in introducing this Bill, made a very laboured attempt to show that there was a large number of railways to be constructed, and that it was because there was this large number of lines that people wanted there should be this buffer—namely, this railways committee. The hon. member then specially selected one particular route. That is the line to the border, *via* St. George. He spoke of introducing that particular railway this year, and then went on to point out that there were five different lines that wanted to be constructed.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Oh, no!

Mr. McDONALD: In any case only one of those lines could possibly be constructed. The hon. gentleman also stated that he could not

possibly get the fullest information [5 p.m.] at the present time with regard to railways proposed to be constructed.

I interjected, "Do we not get the fullest information under the ordinary system of introducing lines into this Chamber?" And the hon. gentleman said, "No," distinctly. I look upon that as a direct charge of incompetency against the heads of the Railway Department in this colony. When the Minister in charge of that department comes down and tells the House that the reports which have been submitted to the House in regard to particular railways are inadequate, I think that is a direct charge of incompetency, or, if not of incompetency, of a wilful attempt on the part of the railway officials to mislead the House. The Minister in charge of the department ought to be the last person to make such a charge against the railway officials. I have always understood that a Minister was charged with the duty of protecting the officers of his department from aspersions of that description. If we are not getting reliable information from men who are paid high salaries by the State to supply that information, how, in the name of common sense, are we going to get it from a committee appointed

by this House? If we cannot get it from the one set of men, I think it is reasonable to suppose that there is no possible hope of getting it from the other set of men; because we know that the men who will be appointed by this House as members of the railway works committee will be more or less interested in everyday politics, and, whether consciously or unconsciously, will be biased in their opinions. You cannot get away from the fact that there will be certain railways in which they will be more or less, directly or indirectly, interested, and that their opinions in regard to those railways will be biased. The Bill provides that a certain number of members shall be appointed on this committee, and that they shall have certain powers, also that certain powers shall be conferred on the Government. One of the powers proposed to be conferred on the Government is that which allows them to select the chairman of the committee. It is well known at the present time who the chairman is going to be, and if I were a sporting man at all I would lay a wager that I could write down the name of the chairman.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Perhaps his merits are so conspicuous.

Mr. McDONALD: I do not know whether they are or not; but I know that it is currently reported, whether rightly or wrongly, that the hon. member for Maryborough, Mr. Annear, is to be the chairman of this committee.

Mr. KEOGH: A very good man, too!

Mr. McDONALD: I am not saying whether he is a very good man or not. It is also reported that the hon. member for Rosewood is to be a member of this committee.

Mr. KEOGH: A very good man, too!

Mr. McDONALD: I know that the hon. member has been actively canvassing for votes for some considerable time.

Mr. KEOGH: I do not think so; I think you make a mistake there.

Mr. McDONALD: I may make a mistake, but there are a number of members in this Assembly who do not make much of a mistake about it. I say that the introduction of this Bill is an attempt to satisfy certain members who cannot be satisfied in any other way. The hon. member for Herbert, Mr. Cowley, is also openly spoken of as certain to have a seat on this committee.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: A very capable man.

Mr. McDONALD: He is a very capable man. But I want to know where the direct experience of those gentlemen in railway construction comes in. I am prepared to admit that the hon. member for Maryborough has had experience in that direction, but I ask hon. members to compare the hon. member for Maryborough with the hon. member for Rosewood, and the hon. member for Herbert, if they are to be appointed on the committee. My opinion is that if the present railway authorities, through overwork or otherwise, cannot supply the House with the necessary reports on proposed railways, it is the duty of the Government to appoint three or four experts, pay them good salaries, and let them do the work that it is proposed should be done by this committee. I certainly think that a committee under the patronage of the Government would be far inferior to such a committee of experts as I suggest.

Mr. KEOGH: Suggest your men.

Mr. McDONALD: It is not necessary for me to suggest any names; my proposal is not before Parliament. Probably when this Bill passes we may have some proposals with the hon. member's signature to them. At the present time we have in the Railway Department men who have a practical knowledge of railway

construction, and I do not think, as the Secretary for Railways does, that we have been deceived by their reports. I think their reports in the past have been full and ample, and that if we had acted on the reports of the railway authorities on all occasions there would not have been the blunders the hon. gentleman has spoken of in railway construction. But the fact is that the reports of the railway authorities have always been ignored by the Government, or by Parliament, and members have sought to pass railways for purely political purposes.

The TREASURER: We cannot table a line without the Commissioner's report; you know that.

Mr. McDONALD: I know that, and I say that if we had always acted on the Commissioner's report, and had not voted for lines for political purposes, we should not have committed the blunders spoken of by the Secretary for Railways.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: Do you admit that any railway has been a blunder?

Mr. McDONALD: Yes, I admit that the Cairns railway was a huge blunder. And why was that huge blunder committed? To satisfy a certain political party, and for no other reason. The clamour of a number of members for the construction of lines in different parts has been purely to satisfy their constituents, and quite irrespective of whether it was going to be a benefit to the country or not.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It was believed that Herberton was a very rich district.

Mr. McDONALD: Is it not a rich district?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Yes.

Mr. McDONALD: Well, the line is not paying at the present time, nor is it likely to pay.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I say that was the reason it was constructed.

Mr. McDONALD: It was not the reason at all. The whole country knew the reason why that line was constructed. It was constructed purely to win a seat for the Government of the day.

Mr. HAMILTON: The Government was in at the time.

Mr. McDONALD: I know it was in at the time, and it was purely to keep the Government in power that that line was constructed.

Mr. HAMILTON: It was the Opposition and not the Government who wanted it.

The SPEAKER: Order, order!

Mr. McDONALD: The Secretary for Railways himself gave me the strongest reason for opposing this Bill. He told us that if this Bill was passed and the committee were appointed, they could go on and consider certain lines at once. Where are they going to get their information from at once? As a matter of fact this Bill provides that the committee can sit only during the recess.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: No.

Mr. LEAHY: They can sit any time Parliament is not actually sitting.

The TREASURER: They can sit every morning during the session.

Mr. McDONALD: I was under the impression, from the way this clause reads, that they could not sit unless when Parliament was not sitting. Now it appears that they can sit during the morning and at any time when Parliament is not sitting as well. It strikes me that that is a strong argument why there should not be any member of this House on the committee at all.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Hear, hear!

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: Why?

Mr. McDONALD: I will tell the hon. member why. For this reason, that if they are going to sit on this committee while the House is

sitting they are going to neglect their parliamentary duties, and considering they are paid to attend to their parliamentary duties it is not acting fairly or honestly to the constituencies that send them here to sit on this committee, because I do not care who the member is, if he wants to attend properly to his parliamentary duties, it is physically impossible for him to do so if he has to sit on this railway committee in the morning and then has to attend to his parliamentary duties in the afternoon. It is physically impossible for any man to do that, and that is one of the strongest reasons why no member of Parliament should sit on this committee. Another reason for introducing this committee was that lines should not be brought down and submitted to Parliament and rushed through in a hurry. But what did the hon. gentleman say five minutes afterwards? He said, "Let us pass this Bill, and there are certain lines we can submit to the committee, and we can have them brought down before this session rises." If that is so, would it not be rushing them through in a hurry? Why, if they were brought down to-morrow they should lay on the table for a certain number of days before they can be dealt with. Then they have to pass this House, and go through a select committee of the other House to be passed there, and what possible good is there in trying to deceive the public generally by saying that if this Bill is passed at the present time there are hopes of getting railway proposals submitted by the committee to this House to be passed this session? The hon. gentleman, again, in his speech refers to certain private railways, and after mentioning them he goes on to say: "The Bills for these are now ready." What I would like to ask is: If the Bills for these railways are already in existence, what is the use of passing this Bill to submit these particular proposals to this committee?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Those are private railways.

Mr. McDONALD: Does the hon. gentleman wish the House to believe that private railways are not to be submitted to this committee?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: I only desired the House to know that these proposals had been made.

Mr. McDONALD: I presume from the hon. gentleman's interjection that there are two classes of railway construction to be gone on with in this colony. One to be gone on with by the State is to be under State supervision and under the supervision of this committee, of the Railway Commissioner, and finally of this House. But what does the hon. gentleman want to do in connection with private railways? He now tells us that these private railways are not to be submitted to this committee at all. If he takes up that position, there is no need for this Bill at all, so far as private railways are concerned. Again I would like to ask the hon. gentleman what he means by "Bills for these are now ready?"

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: You ought to know what it means.

Mr. McDONALD: I take it that it means that the Government are prepared to go on with the construction of railways by private enterprise without this committee at all.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Hear, hear!

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Not without this House, though.

Mr. McDONALD: If it is a good thing to construct private railways without this committee at all—

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: We do not risk the country's money in a private railway at all.

Mr. McDONALD: Yes, we do. That is the very thing I differ from the hon. gentleman on. We are risking the country's money on them. Though not directly the money involved in the first construction, we risk the country's money in the public having to pay very highly for the advantages given to the company. The hon. gentleman ought to know it. He ought to know that wherever you have lines built by private enterprise there is more corruption than anywhere else. Take America, and in connection with the passing of private railways there, has there not been more corruption, deceit, lying, and bribery in connection with the passing of those railways than there has been in connection with any other railways in any part of the civilised world? The hon. gentleman mentions these private lines, and amongst them the line from Normanton to Cloncurry, and he says, "Bills for these are now ready." I presume these Bills are going to be presented to Parliament this session, but whether they are or not I do not know. I can speak of the Normanton-Cloncurry line, as I know more about that than about the others. The very company that now proposes to construct that line owns eleven out of the twelve freehold copper leases in that district, and ever since they have had control of those particular leases, they have never spent a threepenny-bit upon their development.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: They cannot do it without railway construction.

Mr. McDONALD: Sixty miles further away an unfortunate worker discovers a mine. He is a man of no influence, but he manages to discover this mine, and after considerable trouble and at his own expense he manages to send ten tons of the ore away and proves the value of this particular mine, and so sells it to a very wealthy syndicate, with the result that he has made a fortune out of it.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Did they make it pay?

Mr. McDONALD: But this goes to show that if there was any desire on the part of this particular company that wants that particular line they would have made some attempt to develop the mine they already own.

The TREASURER: They lost £150,000.

Mr. McDONALD: The present company never lost a three-penny bit; it was after that company failed that it fell into the hands of the present owners.

The TREASURER: The former owners too.

Mr. McDONALD: They may have had a few shares. I beg to differ from the hon. gentleman. They may have held a portion, they may be interested in the company, but as a matter of fact they only hold shares the same as anybody else, and it came to them through the mortgage. Since that company failed they held on to the freehold properties, and they never made any attempt to develop the country, and now they are asking for a railway when they know a number of other people who are prepared to develop the country are likely to make it a success, and they are going to come down and reap the benefit.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Is either company prepared to do it without railway communication?

Mr. McDONALD: The company there is prepared to make an attempt to develop the mines, and that is more than the present company is prepared to do.

The TREASURER: They have made the attempt and failed.

Mr. McDONALD: I maintain they have not failed.

The TREASURER: It is the same people.

Mr. McDONALD: The failure of the original company was not altogether in connection with the railway. However, I may state that being opposed to the construction of these lines I think that if it is right to have a committee at all to consider the construction of railways it should be above all those in connection with private enterprise that should be submitted to them. Another objection I have to it is that it allows works under the cost of £20,000 to be undertaken as at present without reference to the committee. About Brisbane at the present time there are works to a very great extent—I do not know the exact sum, but it must amount probably to £120,000 or £200,000 in and about Brisbane. These works are being gone on with at the present time, and what for? Principally to satisfy a number of Brisbane constituencies.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: That is not the case.

Mr. McDONALD: It is not because there is any real necessity for them as far as the State is concerned, but merely to satisfy a number of constituencies in and about Brisbane. That is the reason why these particular proposals have been gone on with. I think if this committee is going to be of any value at all—if it is going to be of any assistance to the House in forming our opinions in connection with the consideration of various lines, then I think that not only railways but public works generally should be submitted to the committee for their approval, and further I do not think that £20,000 should be the limit, I think £5,000 should be sufficient. At present it is proposed to carry out certain works on the Sandgate line, and I think they will probably cost £30,000 or £40,000.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It must be done.

Mr. McDONALD: I quite agree that it is work that should have been done years ago.

The TREASURER: The sanction of Parliament has to be obtained for the expenditure.

Mr. McDONALD: I do not remember the plans being put on the table of the House for the Woolloomin deviation.

The TREASURER: It is on the Estimates.

Mr. McDONALD: Here is a work likely to cost £30,000 or £40,000 that has not been submitted at all, and I presume in the ordinary course of events such deviations as that would not be submitted to the railways committee, and that is another reason why I am opposed to this particular Bill. The hon. gentleman in his remarks on Friday night went on to say that he was prepared, if the Bill gets into committee, to introduce a clause which would allow sectional committees in connection with the proposal. That is a good argument, to my mind, why the number of members could be reduced very largely so that there would be a much smaller committee, and hence less expense to the State would be incurred. However, that is a matter of detail which can be dealt with later on. The hon. gentleman went on to state that if this particular Bill is not passed it means a delay in the construction of railways for some considerable time—for twelve months or two years I think the hon. gentleman said. I asked at the time how he arrived at that particular conclusion, but the hon. gentleman did not seem to care to reply to the interjection. I maintain that whether this Bill is passed or not it will not prevent the Government from carrying on the works they desire to carry on at the present time. The hon. gentleman knows that a number of specifications and permanent surveys are ready in the Railway Department ready to be submitted to Parliament at any moment.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Ready to submit.

Mr. McDONALD: Then the hon. gentleman's argument falls to the ground when he says that if this Bill does not pass we cannot go on with any railway construction this year, because the hon. gentleman admits that there are a number of proposals ready for submission to Parliament, and which I presume could be placed on the table of this House at once. If they are ready to be submitted to the committee, what does that mean? That means that the committee has to take the advice and the information given by the railway authorities at the present time, or what is in the possession of the railway authorities at the present time? Does not that carry out exactly what I have already stated? Seeing that the committee has to depend largely on the Railway Department at the present time, I think it is a mistake to get it at second hand through this committee. I think we ought to get it at first hand through the railway authorities, and then we would be in a better position to deal with it. If the hon. gentleman thinks it should be filtered through this particular committee, and by some magic process the committee will bring it to bear on the information they receive, they will bring it down to the House in such a form that the House will swallow it straight off, in my opinion it will not curtail discussion one iota, nor do I think it will influence the House one way or the other whether it is brought down by the Government or brought down by this committee. And as to it being the buffer which the Government thinks this proposal is at the present time, I think the Government will find out that it will be a failure; and the dissatisfaction, if there has been any, in the Chamber, with the present mode of railway construction will go on just the same

[5.30 p.m. as it has done in the past. I would much prefer to have railway proposals directly submitted to Parliament instead of having them submitted first to the committee and then to Parliament. In any case, according to the Bill, the House will have to go through exactly the same performance that it does now.]

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Some with better information.

Mr. McDONALD: Where are you going to get the better information? Can you get better information by a committee of this House than you can by experts outside it? If the hon. gentleman thinks so, all I can say is that the sooner he sacks the whole of his railway staff the better. But in my opinion the railway experts, as far as railway construction is concerned, are far more reliable than any committee of this House can possibly be.

Mr. LESINA: And are not subject to the same political bias.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Railway construction and railway policy are two different matters altogether.

Mr. McDONALD: The hon. gentleman says that railway construction and railway policy are two different things. Fortunately the country is beginning to recognise that, and it ought to have recognised it years ago. The railway policy of the Government has been generally to construct lines with the view of gaining votes irrespective of whether they would pay or not. Let us just refer to the Winton line, to which the Secretary for Railways was so strongly opposed, which he even yet condemns, and of which the Treasurer was so strong an advocate. The Secretary for Railways was so strong an advocate for another route that he severely censured the Government for diverting the Western traffic from Rockhampton to Townsville, and he still says the line was a mistake. As a matter of fact, as far as we know, that particular line, for which the money was borrowed at less than $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., is paying 5 per cent., and yet he called it a mistake.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It would have paid quite as well if it had gone to Kynuna.

Mr. McDONALD: I question it. I question whether that route would have paid at any time, for the simple reason, which the hon. gentleman ought to know, that there is a great difficulty all along that watershed in obtaining artesian water. It is only on the Flinders watershed that you can get artesian water at a reasonable depth. On the Diamantina side you have to sink to a great depth for it.

Mr. ARMSTRONG: And there is natural water also.

Mr. McDONALD: Yes, and there is no natural water along the route favoured by the hon. gentleman. What I am drawing attention to is the fact that the line, as far as it is constructed, is paying 5 per cent., and I contend that that is a good investment for the country. The hon. gentleman in his speech the other night said very little about the Bill. True, at the end he quoted about three-fourths of the Bill clause by clause, but the information to be gathered from the remarks about the Bill itself was practically *nil*. His discourse dealt almost entirely with railway construction. He told us it was the policy of the Government to build light lines to assist farmers. He told us that that had always been the policy of the Government, yet we have never seen any attempt to put that policy into execution. As I understand, the Government are now prepared to waive that policy—to put it on one side altogether—and to submit all proposals to the railways committee. It is just possible that the railway committee may not adopt that policy at all; their policy may not be to construct light lines for farmers. Where, in that case, does the Government policy come in? and what is the use of the hon. gentleman talking about the policy of constructing light lines for farmers, unless it is the intention of the Government to “bull-doze” the committee and to say to them, “As we have brought you into existence, we expect you to carry out our policy, and to recommend to Parliament the construction of light lines for farmers.” In my opinion, the construction of those light lines is necessary, and ought to be gone on with. But since I have been in the House the Government—and it has been the same Government all along—have never had any railway policy at all. The policy they have adopted from time to time has been with the view of receiving the support of certain constituencies. The hon. gentleman himself has pointed out repeatedly that the policy of the Government should have been to extend the main trunk lines in the different divisions of the colony. That, I understand, was at one time the State railway policy, but unfortunately it was not carried out. If it had been, a good deal of the present difficulty would never have occurred, and the country would now have been reaping the benefit of such a policy. In short, the railway policy of the Government has been one of expediency; they have brought forward only such proposals as would assist to keep them a little longer in office. I do not know that I have much more to say on this Bill. I certainly do not think that in the present condition of affairs the Government are warranted in asking us to pass a measure appointing a committee of this kind. A committee consisting entirely of members of Parliament is exceedingly likely to have a party bias, and I contend that such works as the construction of railways should be kept outside the influence of politics altogether. I think if it were left to experts, far better results are likely to accrue, than by leaving the matters to a committee of this kind. I also think that if it is necessary to have a committee of this kind, that it should be a committee to deal with public

works generally—that no work costing over £5,000 should be gone on with without the sanction of that committee. As far as New South Wales is concerned, although a number of people there have spoken in favour of this particular system, it has been generally understood that where that committee has been most successful in reducing expenditure has been in public works and not in connection with railway construction. I remember one proposal was brought before this committee in New South Wales to build a new Parliament House, which was to cost half a million of money, and the committee recommended the sum of £20,000 be expended on the present structure. It was stated at the time that the committee had saved a very considerable sum of money in this way; and in a number of other proposals, but not of so great a magnitude, the committee have reduced the expenditure to a very large degree. Then there is another aspect of the question: I think this committee is going to cause a good deal of log-rolling, in the way of members getting seats on this particular committee. Already at the bare mention of this committee there has been a large amount of log-rolling in connection with the appointments. I believe it is quite possible that a person, without any stretch of imagination, could name three or four members who are to sit on this committee.

Mr. LEAHY: You could name a dozen.

Mr. McDONALD: I could name a dozen who have been promised.

The TREASURER: By whom?

Mr. LEAHY: By the Government.

The TREASURER: No.

Mr. McDONALD: Yes, I could if I so desired name a dozen promises by the Government, and I feel certain that I could name three out of the dozen who will be on the committee.

The TREASURER: You know the best men in the House.

Mr. McDONALD: It is not a question of the best men in the House. It means that the men who are most dissatisfied with the Government, or the men who have rendered the best service to the Government, are the most likely to get on this committee.

Mr. LEAHY: Some of the promised people will fall in the soup.

Mr. DAWSON: That is a certainty.

Mr. McDONALD: I am quite confident that if this Bill passes, the Government, instead of finding that it will be the means of satisfying a number of members and making their position more secure, will find that there will be a great deal more dissatisfaction than there is at the present time. I have already mentioned the names of a number of gentlemen who have been promised positions on this committee, and we all know why the clause was inserted with regard to the selection of the chairman of this committee. In New South Wales the committee elects its own chairman, and why not have a similar provision in this Bill? If the measure gets into committee I intend to fight that particular clause in order to get the chairman appointed by the committee themselves.

Mr. CALLAN: Plenty others will do the same.

Mr. McDONALD: I am very glad to hear that we have some converts on this question from the other side. I do not think it is right that the Premier, or the Government, should have the right of appointing the chairman of this committee, because it only places another office, to distribute to some of their supporters, in the hands of the Government. That is a bad thing at all times. We have seen a number of offices attempted to be thrown round—and this only adds another to the large list—by which the Government try to satisfy discontented supporters. For these reasons I am opposed to the

Government having the power to appoint a chairman to this committee. We all know that it has been proposed that the chairman of this committee is to be the hon. member for Maryborough, Mr. Annear.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: No.

Mr. McDONALD: Well, see if my words do not come true if the Bill is passed.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: No; it is the hon. member for Herbert.

Mr. McDONALD: That must be a later development; it certainly was not a development a few days ago. If the hon. member for Herbert is to be chairman, I am sadly misinformed.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: You're very sorry.

Mr. McDONALD: Yes, and I offer the hon. member for Maryborough my sincere sympathy. If the matter comes to a ballot, the hon. member for Maryborough will get my vote.

Mr. LESINA: How you must love him!

Mr. McDONALD: It is not a question of affection at all. It is a question of the man best able to fill the position. The whole proposition in this Bill, coming in as it does at the tail end of the session, is merely a consolation stakes to satisfy discontented Government supporters.

* Mr. STORY (*Balonne*): The hon. the leader of the Labour Opposition said this afternoon that if blunders had been made by the present Commissioner, that would be a sort of justification for this Bill. I do not think it is necessary to give any such proof, because the position we have arrived at now in the matter of railway construction is somewhat unique. There is nothing in the way of railway construction coming on at present, and there are such a number of claims for railways that I do not see how the Commissioner could advise the Government on them; and also I do not see how the Government can support any one line, with any hope of carrying it, when so many lines are asked for. In fact, I heard one hon. member say out plainly that he would vote against every line proposed until his own line had been passed. That is a perfectly honest sentiment, and I dare say that opinion is shared by many other hon. members of this House. Every man's own line is of more importance to him than any others, and justly so in many cases. I am perfectly willing to admit that a committee of this kind is wanted, but I do not think the Government have chosen the right sort of committee. I am quite in accord with the hon. member for Flinders when he said that a private committee would have been better. I could name three or four men outside the House, whose verdict I would rather take on any railway than that of any number of hon. members of this House, and I only regret that a private committee has not been suggested. The leader of the Labour Opposition has said that the Government should decide which line was the best to be built; put their foot down and say that is the line we will build. But the Government could do nothing without the support of their followers; and where every man was interested in his own line, it is a position very hard for the Government to take up. I say that the only good that this committee can possibly do under any circumstances is to present a report; and if the Government will put their foot down, make the matter contained in the report a party question, and carry out their recommendations, then there would be some finality where there are a good many different opinions as to certain lines.

Mr. DAWSON: Hear, hear! That would certainly be an improvement.

Mr. STORY: If the committee is to be of any good at all, the Government must back them up in their report, because if they do not do that,

the result will be that it will have no weight at all. It will be submitted to the House and be kicked backwards and forwards like a football. Every member who is disappointed with the report will vote and work his strongest against it, with the result that a report prepared at the cost of a great deal of trouble may be thrown out, and we will have the same old bone of contention amongst us that we have without any report at all. In saying this, although I am deeply interested in a railway, yet if the committee brought up a report adverse to the route I am interested in, and said that it was not the best one, and if the Government supported their conclusions, I would be perfectly willing to accept their verdict. On the other hand if the report is only brought in as a report, and something to talk about, I will fight for my railway as I have no doubt others members will, and we will not get one inch further forward. Now, there is one great safeguard in the Bill which I think hon. members have not mentioned, but it is well worth consideration. I refer to subsection 2 of clause 3, which provides that the committee shall be concurrent with the existence of the Parliament. It reads—

Save as hereinafter provided, the members shall hold office during the existence of the Legislative Assembly which is in existence at the time of their appointment and no longer.

That is well worth while trying even as an experiment, because if we find that the reports which the committee bring up and submit to Parliament are not treated with due respect—that a fight occurs and the report is overruled—then I say it would be the duty of the next Parliament to sweep the committee out of existence.

The TREASURER: Each new Parliament elects a new committee.

Mr. STORY: Yes; but I would then sweep that sort of committee out of existence, and appoint an independent committee of practical men, outside the influence of Parliament, whose advice and report would at any rate start some sort of railway construction. So long as we stay in our present position we are doing nothing; we are pleasing no one. If we have a railway committee, they must make reports, and if the Government will back them up it is quite possible that railway construction will start almost at once. Some portion of the community will then be satisfied, and the remainder will live in hope that their turn will come very shortly. Now, there is one clause which the Minister gave some little prominence to, and that is the one which provides that no member of the committee interested in a special line shall vote on that line when it is before the committee. I think that is no safeguard at all. We all know there is a certain amount of sympathy and help which one member will extend to another. If an hon. member on the committee is interested in a particular line, it will be very strange indeed if he cannot depend upon the help of some of his own committee-men to get that line recommended.

Mr. JENKINSON: You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours.

Mr. STORY: No, I do not say that. I am taking it for granted that the members of the committee are as honest and honourable as other members of the community, but it is just a matter of persuasion or evidence, and if I am interested in a line and happen to be on the committee—which I will not be under any circumstances—and I could persuade some of the members that mine was the better line of the two which were proposed, I would expect them to help me, and it would not be very hard, when it came to considering country that I knew nothing about, to persuade me that the line they were

interested in was better than another which had been proposed. As each member will not have the local knowledge necessary to decide, he will have to depend upon the evidence of the sitting member as the best evidence that can be got. There was an instance of that only two sessions ago when a question of railway construction came up in this House, and I am proud to say that the House took the opinion of the sitting member as worth as much at any rate as the opinion of any other member who discussed the question. I think it is quite possible, and proper too, that the local man's knowledge should count for something even with his fellow committee-men.

Mr. TURLEY: They took his opinion in preference to that of the Railway Commissioner on that occasion.

Mr. STORY: I say even then they were perfectly correct. When it comes to a question of mere local knowledge, the man with local knowledge is better than the railway expert. The question I refer to was one of local knowledge, and affected the matter of site for a railway station only. The local knowledge on that occasion was triumphant, and I do not know that I have heard one man who regrets it, except those who were particularly interested in the opposite site. Now, according to the Bill, the committee may call in the help of assessors. That is a very valuable provision; but it makes me wonder why the assessors should not be allowed to do the work altogether without the committee. There, again, is an argument in favour of an independent committee outside of Parliament.

Mr. SMITH: Irresponsible.

Mr. STORY: They might be irresponsible, but I do not know that men holding high positions on our Land Court, paid high salaries, and being remarkable for their probity and uprightness, can be held to be irresponsible under any circumstances. Such men have their characters to consider, and are often more responsible than a member of Parliament would be who is only elected for three years, and who then might retire, or not be nominated at the next election. I do not see that any man who is good enough to put on a committee like this can be looked upon as an irresponsible man. We do not look upon the members of the Land Court as irresponsible, and they have almost supreme power in the department which they administer.

Mr. SMITH: That is just the reason they are successful.

Mr. LEAHY: And their office is fixed.

Mr. STORY: I suggest that there should be an independent committee. If this committee is a failure, an independent committee constituted something like our Land Court, with a fixed position and fixed salaries for its members, would be more preferable, and I fancy the Government would derive more benefit from their reports and advice than from a parliamentary committee. Of course I am discussing the Bill as it is. It is no use criticising it as it is not. I say this is a step in the right direction, and I intend to support the Bill, but that does not preclude me from giving my opinion upon it, and suggesting that it is not as perfect as it might have been if it had been framed upon different principles. I am not going to take up the time of the House at any great length, but I would point out that clauses 10 and 13 contain the whole of the Bill. The rest is merely detail. The Minister, after consultation with someone—it does not say whom—makes a motion in the House that certain lines shall be referred to the committee. Then the House, if it thinks fit, refers it to the committee for report. I call

[7 p.m.] special attention to the numerous matters laid down by clause 10, upon which the committee are to report. They

are too numerous to read, but by glancing down the list, hon. members will see that they are matters with which only experts can deal. Ordinary members of this House could not frame a report upon those different points. The committee bring up their report, and, under clause 13, the report is submitted to the Assembly. The House can either adopt, reject, or alter the report in any way they like, and if it is adopted, it goes to the Council in the ordinary way, and the Council can either adopt or reject it as they think fit. Clause 14 provides that if the Assembly declare by resolution that it is not expedient to construct a proposed railway "no proposal for a railway identical in substance with the railway referred to shall be submitted to the Assembly until after the expiration of one year from the date of such resolution, unless the Governor in Council, by notification in the *Gazette*, declares that, in view of the public interests, it is desirable that such proposal should be submitted to the Legislative Assembly." Therefore, if the House has decided that a certain railway proposal shall not be entertained, and it goes to the Council, and they also decide that it shall not be gone on with, the Governor in Council can bring it under the consideration of the House again. I am only mentioning these facts to show that unless the Government strongly back up the committee, the result will be that after all the trouble of taking evidence in connection with any railway proposal, the matter has to come before the House, and is fought out in the old style, just as if we had no committee at all. Clause 15 provides that when a proposed railway is referred to a committee, and that committee ceases to exist before the railway has been reported on by them, it comes up before the next Parliament. I can quite understand a railway being submitted in the last session of a Parliament, to which there is strong objection taken by some hon. members, and they fight it, and waste a lot of valuable time until Parliament comes to an end, in the hope that in the following session another committee may be appointed which will deal more leniently perhaps with a railway they have some special affection for. Clause 19 deals entirely with fees. Hon. members must admit that those fees are not sufficiently large to bribe any hon. member to try very hard for the position, either of chairman or member of the committee. He will certainly work hard for the money he gets. The unfortunate part of that clause is that I do not see how it is possible to get the best men we have got on either side of the House on the committee. I understand that there will be five members from the Assembly, three from the Council, and one appointed by the Governor in Council. As a large amount of travelling will probably have to be done by the committee, or by a section of it, the members who constitute the committee can only be chosen from members who have a certain amount of leisure, or at any rate, no business duties which keep them in Brisbane from day to day, as the fees are not sufficient to induce our best business men to allow themselves to be nominated for service on the committee. Nevertheless, in spite of all that, this Bill is decidedly a step in the right direction, and it is well worth trying until the end of the present Parliament, at any rate, and although we are guided to a certain extent in introducing the Bill by the results that have been achieved by a similar committee in New South Wales, it is not necessary that we should continue the committee unless we find its assistance valuable. It is an open secret all over the colony that the Government stand or fall on the second reading of the Bill. Now, I would like to call the attention of hon. members to this fact: Supposing the

second reading is lost, and the Government go out and the Opposition come in, can the Opposition, or any Government they may constitute, form a Government that dare introduce one railway scheme in this House with any hope of carrying it?

Mr. GLASSEY: Yes, certainly.

Mr. STORY: Not one. We have got to the point that this Parliament cannot deal with the number of railways that have been asked for. With the exception, probably, of one short railway from Gladstone to Rockhampton, every other railway brought before this House will find as many opponents as it will supporters, and I am perfectly certain that no Government that can come into power can introduce a railway scheme, and, as the leader of the Labour Opposition said, put their foot down and say, "These are the railways we intend to have, and we are going to carry them through."

The PREMIER: Hear, hear!

Mr. STORY: It is impossible for them to do so, because every member has some particular railway that he is interested in. Can any Government get support for any railway but that there will be four or five members who, by supporting that railway, will lose all chance of the railways they are interested in themselves? I am positively certain that any other Government will have to bring in some sort of a Bill like this to get a committee, at any rate, to support them by their report; but if the Government will make a party question of the committee's report it will throw a very serious responsibility on to the committee. They will have to be absolutely careful of the evidence they take; their report will have to be very carefully considered; there can be no bias; there can be no log-rolling at all, because the Government make a party question of their report. It will force the Government, or the House rather, to choose the very best men they can get in this Assembly to form the committee, because it will not do to have on it men—whatever Government is in power—whose report can be cavilled at in any way. I think that under these circumstances, if the Government would do that, we should get a committee elected for service, not for show, and that we should get some benefit out of their reports. Because I hope the Government will take up this line or something like it, I am going to support the second reading of this Bill, because it is a step in the right direction. At present we are just at a dead level of uselessness in the matter of railway construction; but this Bill, if it can be passed, will, I think, give an impetus to it. If the committee does good work—and it will do that if it understands its responsibility—it will be a valuable body; if it does not do good work, when the Parliament meets in three years' time it will have the matter before them, and it can either get a better committee or, what I consider would be better, appoint a private committee to undertake the duties which will devolve on them.

* HON. E. B. FORREST (*Brisbane North*): I am very pleased to observe, from the speeches that have been made, that there is likely to be some healthy opposition to this Bill. I am very much opposed to it myself, and I say at once that if it goes to a vote I will vote against the second reading.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Hear, hear!

HON. E. B. FORREST: I object to it on several grounds. I am opposed to it because I consider the appointment of the committee is a wholly unnecessary procedure. I believe, moreover, that the committee will involve a waste of money. I believe, moreover, that it will involve a waste of time—that it will be the means of delay-

ing railway progress and railway extension for at least two years, and perhaps for the life of this Parliament.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It will do nothing of the sort.

HON. E. B. FORREST: If it were extended in the direction indicated by the hon. the leader of the Labour Opposition—he suggested it did not go far enough, and that it should be extended to public works—it would have no more attractions for me. I am opposed to the thing altogether for the reasons I have stated. Speaking of railways—because that is really the Bill that is before the House—I say this in view of what was stated by the Secretary for Railways in his speech the other night in moving the second reading, and which has been partly affirmed by the Premier this afternoon, the assurance that if this Bill were passed a number of railways would be put through this session. I will quote his words. I took them down at the time. They struck me as a remarkable statement; and although the Premier affirms it to some extent, he does not go so far as the Secretary for Railways. He said—

The committee would bring up a report this session for several lines, and the Government would then submit the plans, etc., for the approval of the House.

I should like to ask whether that statement was put forward in the expectation that anyone, either inside or outside the House, would believe it?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Anybody but yourself believes it. It can be done.

HON. E. B. FORREST: Is it possible anybody can believe it—I repeat it—in view of the surroundings? Look where we are in the session? How long is the session to last? If you tell me we are going to sit on into next year then I am prepared to believe it will come on. But I hope the session will close before Christmas, or, at all events, about Christmas, and unless this House is to sit into next year the thing is simply an impossibility. Here is the other House, to which everything has to be submitted by this House, gone out of session until next month, as far as I recollect. How are they to be got? Are they to be summoned to pass this Bill in order that these measures may be brought forward? The thing is perfectly ridiculous. I venture to say there is not a man either inside or outside this House believes that, even if the Minister himself believes it.

The PREMIER: The other House meets next week, not next month.

HON. E. B. FORREST: Never mind if the Council meets next week. If this Bill were passed through both Houses to-night, nothing would be done this year if the committee are any good. I look upon it as a reflection upon the intelligence of the House to try to stuff a statement of that sort down our throats. There is this to be considered in connection with it. It conveys the idea that a lot of information that would be furnished to this committee is now ready. If that is so, why cannot we have a look at it for ourselves? What is this House for? What is the House sent here to do?

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: What do you know about the country?

HON. E. B. FORREST: I get my information about the country from the reports furnished to this House. You propose to appoint a committee to get information about the country; but instead of the committee judging of the country from their own personal observations, you propose to furnish reports to it.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: You judge the matter from Queen street.

HON. E. B. FORREST: What country are you talking about? If you will tell me what

country you are talking about, I will tell you what I know about it.

THE SPEAKER: Order!

HON. E. B. FORREST: This is digression, and I am not responsible for that. It is proposed to send this committee—at least, I presume so, from what the Secretary for Railways says—over the country. Then its report will have to come before this House, and we shall have to judge of that. That is what the practice is to be. Assuming that this is what is to be done, I do not think that anything can be done before this session closes. It appears to me that there is very little work for this proposed committee. It is supposed that there is a lot of estimates and surveys ready. And what are we here for? Why is all this information, which it is presumed is in the possession of the Government, to filter through the committee in order to come before this House for the House to judge of it? The House is as competent to judge of it as the committee, and the sooner we have it here the better. There was another remark made by the Secretary for Railways in his speech speaking of New South Wales. He said—

During the last eleven years upwards of £20,000,000 had been submitted to the committee, and £7,000,000 had been saved.

Now, I say that that is simply a statement. There was not one figure given to substantiate it.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It is from the report.

HON. E. B. FORREST: For the simple reason that it could not be.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It is the report of the committee.

HON. E. B. FORREST: It is the report of the representative of the *Courier* that was sent up from Sydney which you quoted. All the information you placed before the House was quoted exactly from the report sent up by the *Courier* representative in Sydney.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Nothing of the sort. I quoted from the report of the New South Wales committee.

HON. E. B. FORREST: I have as much justification for saying that £7,000,000 has been lost as you have for saying that £7,000,000 has been saved, more particularly if you go to the New South Wales *Hansard*. If you had been in the New South Wales Parliament and heard what goes on down there, you would find that some of the worst lines that have been constructed in that colony—some of the most unprofitable lines—were recommended by that committee. That is what is happening down there; that is what they believe down there; and I say that, in the face of a statement of that kind, it is just as fair for me to say that they have lost £7,000,000 as it is for the Minister to say that they have saved £7,000,000. When we are talking about so many millions having been saved it is just as well to look at the blue-book on the table, and see what it is that the committee in New South Wales claim as savings. I have looked at the report of the committee, but, as I have not had time to go into it thoroughly, I shall only refer to the first item on which they claim to have effected a saving to the country, and that is the proposed railway from North Shore to Sydney. That railway was as a matter of course condemned. But does anyone believe that if the evidence the committee had before them with regard to that railway had been submitted to the Assembly in New South Wales the line would have been passed? Certainly not. Yet the committee claim to have saved the country £500,000 because they condemned that proposition. I say that if the line had been submitted to the New South Wales Assembly it would have been condemned, for no one would ever dream of

building a railway over the harbour and destroying that harbour for the purpose of establishing railway communication between North Shore and Sydney. The thing is ridiculous. And yet it is argued that the committee saved the country a large sum of money because they condemned that railway, and the same line of argument is adopted with regard to other savings. First we were told that the committee had been the means of saving millions of pounds, then it dropped down to hundreds of thousands, and I suppose if we keep this discussion going for a week we shall find it dropping down to hundreds of pounds.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Who said that?

HON. E. B. FORREST: It has been said inside and outside of this House. I have seen it in the Press, we heard it here this afternoon, and we also heard it here last Friday. Turning now from New South Wales, let us see what the railway committee is doing in Victoria. I have here the sixth general report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways in that colony, and hon. members will see how many thousands of pounds they have saved that colony when I have finished referring to that report. During the years 1894, 1895, 1896, and 1897 seven railway proposals were submitted to the committee in Victoria. The total estimated cost of those railways was £442,000, so that if they had saved the lot the saving would have been under £500,000. But what did they do? They recommended an expenditure of £165,000, and rejected a proposed expenditure of £277,000. My friend, the Secretary for Railways, would, no doubt, claim that they saved the country £277,000. But they did nothing of the sort. You require to look into the reasons for rejecting those lines, if you wish to arrive at a correct conclusion as to their action. There are only seven of them, and I shall show what was done in each case, but without mentioning names, as that is unnecessary. The first proposal was for £19,000; they passed that. The next was for £62,292; they rejected that, but shortened the distance. Instead of carrying a railway, say, from Too-womba to Warwick, they shortened it by cutting it half-way at Clifton, and that is the way they saved money in that instance. But is there any evidence to show that if that railway had been submitted to the Assembly in Victoria they would not have done the same thing? I contend that the same thing would have been done by Parliament. The House is not devoid of brains any more than the committee, and they would have had brains enough to amend that proposal if it was necessary. The third proposal, which was for £15,436, was rejected. The next was for £55,331, and the committee simply did the same with that as they did with the second—they recommended that the line should be built for part of the distance only, at a cost of £19,000. The next proposal, which was for £38,162, they recommended; the next, which was for £51,077, they also recommended. Then we come to the big proposal of £201,000, and what did they do with that? It was postponed, and goodness only knows what was done with it afterwards. But according to the arguments we have heard on this matter they saved the country £201,000 simply because they postponed the proposal. When listening to the statements about these committees saving the country thousands, or hundreds of thousands, or millions of pounds, we should look into the figures and see what they really mean, and how the alleged saving has been effected. I contend again that in the face of the facts I have mentioned I have as much right to say that £7,000,000 were lost by the committee in New South Wales, as the Minister has to say that £7,000,000 were saved.

There is one other matter in connection with the Minister's speech that I should like to refer to. The hon. gentleman discreetly omitted any reference to the report of the *Courier* representative on this matter.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: I took my information from the committee's report.

HON. E. B. FORREST: There is one little matter in connection with the report which the hon. gentleman entirely omitted to make any reference to, and I mention it now because I consider it is rather an important point, and that is that the establishment of this proposed committee will simply mean the creation of another railway staff, independent altogether of the Commissioner, the railway engineers, and the railway staff generally. The *Courier* representative states in his report, which was published last Friday, that what the cost of the committee may be can only be very roughly estimated; it may be anything up to £10,000 per annum. I should like to know whether it is proposed to saddle this unhappy country with £10,000 per annum more to consider railway proposals, because if it is I hope the House will rise as one man and condemn it.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: If it would cost £100,000, you would like to get the railway you want.

HON. E. B. FORREST: How does the hon. gentleman know that? The railway proposals are not under discussion now, but when they are I shall know what railways I want to see constructed. It appears from the statement of the hon. gentleman that several lines are ready to be submitted to the House. Why are those lines blocked? Why don't the Government bring them on here, and let us have a look at them? Why don't they let us see what railways they propose to build, and let us have some idea of the Government policy in this matter? We are informed that they are blocked for want of more information. The present Ministry have been in office long enough—

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: Too long.

HON. E. B. FORREST: I do not say that, and I do not mean that; I say they have been in office long enough to have obtained information in regard to one or two lines in particular, and concerning which it has been said for the last ten or fifteen years the Government have been obtaining information. Hon. members have only to take the records of Parliament, and read *Hansard* for 1884, 1886, and 1895, to see that that has been said with regard to some lines that are particularly wanted now, for a particular reason. In 1895, the present Treasurer, who was then Secretary for Railways, promised certain surveys and reports.

Mr. GLASSEY: What railway is that?

HON. E. B. FORREST: For one or two railways, particularly for the border line, for which there are five routes proposed. Those surveys and reports were promised in 1895, and the Minister took the opportunity in [7.30 p.m.] 1895 to inform the House that in 1896 he would be in a position to lay plans and specifications before the House and determine the route the line was to take. Now we are in 1899, and I would like to ask what has been done beyond that mere promise? Nothing in any way at all, and now we find they still want more information about this particular line.

The TREASURER: Four or five routes have been surveyed since then.

HON. E. B. FORREST: I am giving a quotation from the hon. gentleman's own speech. He promised in 1895 that he would bring the line before the House during the next session, and be prepared to recommend the route it should take. That is four years since, and nothing whatever has been done.

1899—3 o*

The TREASURER: When was that?

HON. E. B. FORREST: That was in 1895. I submit that more information is not what is wanted at all. What is wanted is more nerve, more determination, more inclination, and more desire to push along with railway construction and extension that is badly wanted.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: So long as it is in your direction.

HON. E. B. FORREST: Never mind about my direction at all. I will tell the Secretary for Railways all about what I want when we get on to the question of railways, but just now I want to point out that it is not more information that is wanted. What is the good of getting all this information? They must have reams of it locked up in the pigeon-holes of the railways office. They must have tons of it, to use a rather vulgar expression, and what is the use of collecting all this information and then making no use of it? The information should be obtained to be made use of, and not to be locked up in the pigeon-holes of the Minister's office month after month and year after year, and go no further.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: You will hear all about it.

HON. E. B. FORREST: Before I leave the 1895 report I would like to refer to the fact that, when the Cunnamulla-Charleville extension was under discussion, it was suggested—but not by a Minister—that a committee such as the one now proposed should be created. What was the Minister's reply at that time? That there was no time for it, and no necessity for it; and now, four years afterwards, after all the information they have got, we find that they think it is necessary to ask for this committee. That is all the insight we have had from that to the present time into the railway policy of the Government. I consider the present proposed committee is entirely unnecessary, and in saying that I think it becomes necessary to point to the machinery we have already got for controlling railway proposals. We have, first of all, Parliament, consisting of two Houses—the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly. We have got them; and then we have got the Minister, whose duty it is to formulate the business for Parliament. We have, in addition, the Commissioner for Railways; in addition to him, the Chief Engineer for Railways; in addition to him, the Deputy Commissioner for Railways, Mr. Thallon; and their staffs. Now it is proposed to complicate matters by handing over the whole thing to this committee. They will mix the whole thing up so far as they are concerned, and they will upset everything everybody else has done. Everything that the Commissioner, the Engineer, the Deputy Commissioner, and experts of that sort have done will be upset by this committee. They will draw up a report and come to the House here with it, and then, of course, we will upset them. That will be the solution of the difficulty, and we will be again where we started from, with the additional disadvantage of having had the whole thing properly humbugged. In speaking of this committee and its functions, we heard this afternoon a most extraordinary statement—that they are to be charged with some portion of the policy of the Government. What have they got to do with the policy of the Government?

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Hear, hear!

HON. E. B. FORREST: What is this House for? Here is a committee to be composed of three members of the Legislative Council, five of the Assembly, and one chosen by the Government, and they are to take charge of this House. What was the House returned for? I say distinctly so far as the railway policy of the

Government is concerned, to determine what that should be irrespective of committees or anybody else. This committee should have nothing whatever to do with it, and I should be sorry to think they would venture to touch in any form whatever the policy of the country with regard to railway construction.

MEMBERS of the Opposition : Hear, hear !

HON. E. B. FORREST : I would say that of any committee, and I would not care if I was a member of it myself. They have nothing whatever to do with the railway policy of the country. Under the Bill they will have to perform exactly the duties now performed by the Commissioner and his staff.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS : Hear, hear !

HON. E. B. FORREST : And because they are not experts I submit they have no right to be there for any such purpose. Comparing the duties of the Commissioners with those of this committee I will occupy the time for a few minutes while I read the duties of the Commissioners, as set out in the 27th clause of the Railway Act of 1888. The clause is as follows :—

Before the plans, sections, and book of reference of any proposed railway shall be laid before Parliament, the Commissioners shall transmit to the Minister a statement under their official seal showing their estimate of the cost of the proposed line, including therein the value of the land proposed to be resumed, and all traffic on the line, and any other return likely to be derived therefrom. No resolution approving of such plans, sections, and book of reference shall be adopted unless and until such statement shall have been laid before Parliament.

That is what is imposed upon the Commissioners as their duty, and they perform that duty, I contend, very well, and it is shown by their reports, some of which I have got here. I have four of them here, but I am not going to read them. I took the trouble to compare them with the reports furnished by the New South Wales and Victorian Railway Commissioners to their Parliaments, and the reports furnished by those Commissioners are in no sense better than those which were furnished here by the Commissioners for Railways. Here the Commissioner gives every information and detail that can be furnished, and the only thing he does not furnish is the evidence of what are called "local people," and later on I shall refer to some of that evidence taken in Victoria to show what it really means. I have read the clause of the 1888 Act which sets out the duty of the Commissioner here, and the reports of the Commissioners I have here bears out and confirms my statement that so far as information is concerned there is as much if not more information supplied in them than there is supplied to Parliament in the reports of the New South Wales and Victoria Railway Commissioners. Now, as to the Commissioner, we have read in the newspapers lately that the Commissioner is too busy to give his attention to work of this sort, and the statement is made that "justice demands that he should be relieved of this intolerable burden."

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS : Who said that ?

HON. E. B. FORREST : I say that if justice demands that it demands a great deal more than that. It demands that the Railway Act of 1888 should either be amended or repealed. There is not the slightest doubt of it, if the Commissioner is to be relieved of this intolerable burden. I may say I have never heard Mr. Gray complain. He has got a good position, and a very good salary, and he is doing his work very well.

MEMBERS of the Opposition : Hear, hear !

HON. E. B. FORREST : He looks remarkably well, although I am sorry to hear he is very ill

now. (Laughter.) At all events, he looks well, is in the enjoyment of everything he wants, and he is doing his work well. I have never heard him complain of being overworked—certainly nothing to justify this statement we have had in the last few days—that justice demands that he should be relieved of his intolerable burden. I say again, that if justice demands that, it demands a great deal more than that. Victoria and New South Wales rushed in and appointed three commissioners, and we did the same because they had done so. The question was never studied as to whether it should really be done or not ; and it was done here because Victoria and New South Wales made up their minds to rush in, in big ship fashion. Queensland necessarily followed, and appointed three commissioners.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS : And you are superior to the lot.

HON. E. B. FORREST : With what result ? After experimenting for seven years with three of them we had to get rid of two. We found that they had nothing in the world to do—three of them—and they could do nothing but fight with one another, and what was the result ? Parliament, in that common-sense way in which it deals with matters, came to the rescue and said, "Two of you must go," and two did go. And now we have one left. He is able to do the work, and is doing it, and he does not at all feel that justice demands that he should be relieved of this intolerable burden. I have dealt with the duties of the Commissioner, and I will now deal with the duties of the proposed committee. They are contained in clause 10 of this Bill, which says—

(1.) The committee shall consider and report upon every proposed railway which has been submitted and explained in the Legislative Assembly by a Minister of the Crown, and has been referred to the committee by resolution of the Legislative Assembly upon the motion of such Minister.

(2.) In considering and reporting upon a proposed railway the committee shall have regard to the following matters—

They are set out in categorical form—six of them, and I say that with the exception of the second, everything set out here is embraced in the instructions given to the Commissioner in section 27 of the Railway Act. The first one is—

The estimated value of the private lands (if any) required to be resumed for the purposes of the railway. Read one of the Commissioner's reports. It is all set out there. Full particulars are given. The second one is not expressly provided for in the Railway Act, but it is taken into consideration. It says here—

The enhanced value (if any) which would be given by the construction of the railway to the remaining portions of such lands from which resumptions would be made.

As a matter of course, the railway arbitrator takes this into account in assessing the damage that is done. He naturally takes into consideration, not only the actual damage in connection with the portion resumed, but also the profit arising out of the portion not resumed ; so that it is really acted upon both by the Commissioner and the railway arbitrator. Then we have—

The estimated cost of the railway (including station buildings and signalling) when completed.

All information about that is given in the reports—far too much, I think—

The estimated working expenses of the railway, including traffic, locomotive, and maintenance charges.

That is all here in the reports—

The probable revenue which would be derived from the traffic on the railway and the class of traffic from which the principal portion of the revenue would be derived.

That is in the reports fully set out with every possible detail—

Any other special advantages which are likely to accrue from the construction of the railway.

I say that every condition imposed on the proposed committee is imposed on the Commissioner; and if this committee is appointed, the same men will have to do the work, and it will have to be reviewed by people who don't understand it. Now, I will just refer to clause 8, which deals with the question of evidence to be given. The committee has power, you will observe, to compel witnesses to come before them. I think that is a power which Parliament does possess now, and properly so, but you find that the chairman of the committee, whoever he may be—and we have heard something about one or two hon. gentlemen being appointed—he has more power than anybody else—he has the power of sending a man to gaol for a month or two if he does not answer a question, or if he, in the terms of the clause, is deemed to have conducted himself in a disorderly manner. Who is to be the judge of the disorderly manner? You might as well say that I am disorderly now addressing the House, and order me to gaol for a couple of months. Is that the sort of power that should be given to any chairman—I don't care who he is? It is all very well for Parliament to compel persons to give evidence in the public interest, and I think the proposed committee should have that power; but I am not prepared to say that the chairman should have the power of sending anybody to gaol at his own sweet will.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: You are a perfect old Bismarck.

HON. E. B. FORREST: I'm all right; if you leave me alone I can take care of myself. As regards these powers, I would like to ask if they have ever been exercised. I do not know of one case, and I have hunted through the records to find out. I am speaking of the power of compelling anybody to come to give evidence, and forcing them to answer questions, and I cannot find a single instance in which the power has been exercised; and if it has not been exercised in the past, what right have we to suppose that it will require to be exercised? While I am disposed to leave it in the hands of Parliament, I see no reason for handing it over to this committee. As regards obtaining evidence, we know that not only here but all over Australia there are plenty of people only too anxious to come forward and give evidence. They all want a railway to their own doors, and they are only too glad to come forward and give their evidence, and tell all about it, and they come. There is no necessity for this provision, and if the Bill gets into committee I will endeavour to have that knocked out. Turning to Victoria, we find that an Act similar to this Bill, except that it extends to public works, was passed in 1890. The number of members on the committee then was thirteen, but in 1893 there were nine members. They found out no doubt that they had too much to carry, and they reduced the number from thirteen to nine. In 1891 they passed an Act under which the members were allowed to take fees—the chairman four guineas, and the members of the committee three guineas each. In 1898, when they must have begun to feel that the country was getting full of them and the business, they reduced the chairman's fees to 31s. 6d., and the fees of each member to the miserable guinea. What does that mean? Does it not mean that it is going down all the time? It has got itself fastened on Parliament, and Parliament cannot get rid of it for obvious reasons to which I need not refer—they cannot shake the committee off, but if they could get rid of those

vested interests their name would be "Walker" within twenty-four hours. The reduction of their fees is a first evidence of collapse, and Parliament at the first opportunity will clear it out, and quite right too. Notwithstanding all that has been claimed for it, what do we find in Victoria by their own report? I will give it to you from the report itself, for fear you won't believe it. In the sixth general report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways, page 13, I find this—

In the fourth general report (1896), paragraph 8, the committee drew special attention to the difficulty experienced in obtaining reliable statistics as to the probable traffic on proposed new railways, and stated— "In New South Wales an experienced railway officer, with a knowledge of the quality of land and of the freight value of the varying products grown in different districts, is sent to inspect a projected line. He spends as much time as is requisite in going very carefully through the district to be served by the extension; he personally collects statistics of the probable traffic from each holding, computes its freight value, and estimates the proposed prospective development of the district by reason of the railway facilities to be afforded. He then reports to the commissioners, who carefully review the returns. A full report by the commissioners is then placed before the Public Works Standing Committee, whose duties in dealing with the line are thus greatly facilitated."

I should think so. This is their recommendation in connection with that paragraph—

The committee then strongly urged that such a system be at once adopted in this colony. Attention is again called to this matter, which the committee regards as highly important.

In other words the Victorian committee propose to obtain the information they want to enable them to furnish their report wholly and solely from the Commissioners themselves and the railway staff. What does that mean? They are full of the job, and they are simply preparing a way to get out. You cannot have a stronger condemnation than that of the working of the Victorian committee. They have not carried the resolution I have just read yet, but I have no doubt they will do. As I have remarked before in reference to evidence given elsewhere, we cannot help coming to but one conclusion. No doubt some of it is valuable, in a sense; but much of it is not, and you cannot help feeling impressed with the idea that everybody wants the line exactly to suit himself. That is the basis upon which all the evidence is given. It is their aim and object to tell us what they think of it as far as it will affect themselves. The report I have in my hand is one of a proposed railway from Fern-tree Gully to Gembrook, and it involves an expenditure of £60,000 to £70,000. The index to appendices on page 12 will show the House what sort of evidence is furnished and how the reports are made up. You will see that it is all obtained from one quarter. It is as follows:—

- (a.) Report by the Railway Commissioner on proposed narrow-gauge railway from Fern-tree Gully to Gembrook.
- (b.) Engineer-in-Chief's estimate of cost for 2 feet 6 inch gauge railway.
- (c.) Report by the Railways Commissioner on the proposed railway.
- (d.) Engineer-in-Chief's estimate of cost for 5 feet 3 inch gauge railway.
- (e.) Report by committee of railway officers on proposed narrow-gauge line.
- (f.) Estimate of probable goods tonnage and revenue by committee of railway officers.
- (g.) Government Statist's return of settlement, cultivation, and production of the district served by the proposed line.

Then we come to a list of "further appendices"—

- (h.) Memorandum by the Railway Commissioner forwarding amended estimates and revenue, and further report by departmental officers.
- (i.) Further report by committee of officers after giving evidence before the committee and re-visiting the district.

(j.) Amended estimate by railway officers of probable goods tonnage and revenue.

Every information they got is from the department so far as that is concerned. There are twenty-two pages of evidence attached to this report, of which twelve are given by the Commissioner and his staff, and ten by the local people. So that the Commissioner and his staff knock them out even in the matter of evidence, which is supposed to be the very thing they are particularly qualified to give. I am not going to quote any of the evidence; it would amuse you too much if I were to read some parts of it. That some of the evidence is valuable, I admit; but some would have been far better left out, and certainly is not worth the expense of printing. Here is another report of a proposed railway from Quambatook to Ultimo, which involves an expenditure of from £50,000 to £60,000. The index to appendices contains two items—

(a.) Report by the Victorian Railways Commissioner on the proposed railway.

(b.) Detailed estimate of cost of line, from the Engineer-in-Chief.

Turning to the minutes of evidence I find there are six pages, every page of which is given by people from the Commissioner's office—people connected with the department. If that is the way these reports are prepared, it is not good enough to spend £10,000 upon them. If it is good enough for Victoria it is not good enough for Queensland to spend £10,000 over work of this kind. And that is exactly what will happen.

THE PREMIER: Why should it cost £10,000 a year in Queensland?

HON. E. B. FORREST: It is wrapped up in so many words that nobody can get at it; but it costs £10,000 a year in Victoria, and if it costs that amount there it will do so here, and I, for one, will resist as long as I can Queensland being saddled with £10,000 per annum for a job of this kind.

MR. BROWNE: The job would not be worth having for less.

HON. E. B. FORREST: Coming now to the necessity for railway construction. We have been committed within the last few months to federation, and under that circumstance the duty has been cast upon the House of taking steps to attend to railway extension without any delay. I am speaking with reference to the railway extension that is necessary for the protection of the trade of our border districts, not only of Southern but of Central Queensland. The Southern border trade has already been tapped by New South Wales in three or four places, and she is going to tap it in two more places. The same experience will follow in the Central district the moment South Australia commences—and they are on the job now—to extend its line to the border near our Central territory. If this House has got a duty of any kind to perform that duty is not to waste an hour, much less two or three years, in providing the railway extension that is required for the protection of our trade. A lot of our southern trade has already gone, and more will soon go unless a determined effort is made to prevent it. The extension from Charleville to Cunnamulla, so far as it affects the border trade, is of no avail, and it cannot be, looking at the fact that the distance from Cunnamulla to Brisbane is 605 miles as against 503 from Bourke to Sydney. It is hardly likely, under the Commonwealth Bill, that they are going to carry our traffic over 605 miles at the same rate that they can carry it to Sydney over 503 miles.

MR. STORY: You are not taking the distance from Cunnamulla into consideration. It is only the border fence that is equidistant.

HON. E. B. FORREST: I am speaking of the distance from Brisbane. This subject of

border extension has been referred to in 1884, in 1886, and again in 1895. It was dealt with in 1886, and was carried in this House by a very large majority, but was lost in the Legislative Council by one vote. We have nothing to do with that now. I merely refer to the fact that this border extension business was before the House in the years I have mentioned. I will say this, that if there was a necessity then—which, no doubt, there was—for seeking to protect our border trade, there is ten times more necessity for it now that we are committed to federation. There is only one way out of the difficulty now. Federation has left us only one feather to fly with, and that is to take the lines to the border by the shortest route. If we do not the trade of the south-western border and that between the Central district and South Australia will have gone from Queensland for ever; and in that case I think we had better go to Sydney too, for we shall do far better there than here.

We can do the business of Queensland [8 p.m.] land in Sydney far better than in Brisbane. There is not the slightest doubt of that. The Minister for Railways may laugh, but business men in Brisbane know perfectly well that they can do Queensland business on more favourable terms in Sydney than in Brisbane. I hope the second reading of this Bill will not be passed. At any rate, I am going to vote against it.

* THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS (Hon. D. H. Dalrymple, Mackay): I have listened very attentively to the hon. member who has just resumed his seat, but I cannot understand his arguments. The latter part of his argument, whatever it was intended for, is certainly an argument against federation. He tells us that the distance from Sydney to the border of the colony is less than the distance from the terminus of our existing line—Cunnamulla—to the port, and he also tells us that trade can be done far better in Sydney than it can be done in Brisbane. I would like to know how this is to be remedied after we have federation? I do not suppose that the hon. gentleman imagines that this Bill which is now before the House will in any way affect the geographical positions of the various places he has mentioned. It seems to me that under federation and without a differential tariff, according to the hon. gentleman's argument, all the trade of the South-western country must go to Sydney whether Brisbane is ruined or not. Whether this Bill is passed or thrown out that will not affect the position which the hon. member has described.

HON. E. B. FORREST: Indeed it will, and you know it.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Then the hon. member was singularly unfortunate in trying to show that.

HON. E. B. FORREST: That's quite likely.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The distance from Sydney to the border will not be diminished one iota by the passing of this Bill.

HON. E. B. FORREST: I say that the length of the line will be altered.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The length of that line is not likely to be materially altered. I presume the existing means of communication with Sydney will still continue, and how will the length of this line be altered by the passing of the present Bill? It will not assist in any way the hon. member's railway from Cunnamulla to the border. Whether this line will go to the border before anything else takes place, I do not know. Whether that is the reason that lies at the bottom of the hon. member's opposition to this Bill, I do not know; or whether it is based on another circumstance—that, as was pointed out

some time ago by the metropolitan Press, the hon. member was to be the leader of the new party.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Oh, oh! and Hear, hear!

Hon. E. B. FORREST: No! You know better. The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I do not know anything of the kind. It is quite possible that the hon. member for Fortitude Valley, who was lately editor of the *Worker*, and the hon. member for North Brisbane who represents a plutocratic constituency, embrace on this question for anything I know to the contrary. The arguments of the hon. member for North Brisbane do not in any way affect the railway to Cunnamulla.

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: From Warwick to the border.

Hon. E. B. FORREST: The border line.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I mean the border line. The hon. member understands my meaning, and I ask how is the line to be affected or altered by throwing this Bill out or by accepting it? Before the line can be got through it will have to run the gauntlet of this House, and the gauntlet of another tribunal of a similar character which the hon. member entirely disapproves of. The leader of the Labour Opposition pointed out that practically the select committees of the House discharge the same functions as the public works committee, or the standing committee of the House. He says that the Government should have the courage of their opinions—that they should exercise energy, and force the House to accept any policy that they may bring forward; but I do not imagine for a moment that any Government would try to do anything of the sort. The decision, to a large extent, will be left to some other body to report as to the possibility, or otherwise, of constructing these lines of railway or not. That is the first course. Therefore the hon. member's criticism applies equally to the standing committee, as it does to the committee which would be appointed by the Upper House, so that under any circumstances this line to the border will have to run the gauntlet of this committee, however ridiculous the committee may seem, or however absurd the selection of experts may be. For my own part I do not see anything ridiculous in the matter of the committee; but under any circumstances the committee will have to approve or reject the hon. member's railway, and, moreover, the House will have to approve of it or reject it. The hon. gentleman's argument is apparently intended to apply to the Public Service Committee, but I venture to say that it does not apply in this way, and it will not affect this railway unless the hon. member imagines—and some other hon. members may imagine—that some degree of pressure may be brought to bear to induce some particular railway to be introduced. If the hon. member is to be at the head of the new party, no doubt he will go to the Premier and say, "The necessity for this railway to the border is most imperative; my constituents will frown if I don't succeed in getting that line, and I trust that my representing the premier constituency will be sufficient to induce you to bring forward this railway, otherwise I shall be reluctantly compelled to withdraw that support which you perhaps look forward to."

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: And no doubt every hon. member will say the same thing. The hon. member may think he will have a better chance of massing his forces and inducing the Government to bring forward his railway, than if an independent committee were appointed to report on it. The standing

committee will have one advantage, in that they will not only consider one railway, but a number of railways, so that they will be able to make comparisons between all the railways submitted to them. But I think the opposition that will be raised, and which will be availed of by many hon. members, will proceed in many cases from the belief that they will exercise more influence if an examining body is not interposed. But although that may be the interest of individual members, it is not at all the interest of the State. The interest of the State is diametrically opposite to that. It is to get the railways forward and constructed—not the railways which will propitiate hon. members because they have influence, but railways which in the long run will be the most profitable to construct. That, of course, is the reason why this particular scheme has been brought forward. Now, the hon. member who has spoken last has been very outspoken in his opinion of the feeling of the Victorians and the people of New South Wales. He took a long period in showing that the railways committees in those colonies consulted experts, in which case he said they were useless. He said, further, that the fees had been reduced in Victoria, and that the committee did not save the colony a great deal. I venture to say that the fact of the committees being still retained in Victoria and New South Wales shows pretty conclusively that, in the opinion of those persons who are far better able to give an opinion on the subject than a Queenslander, the advantages of these committees overbalance any possible disadvantages which may be pointed out. I venture to assert, too, that the people interested in the two colonies named are far better judges of the efficiency of the committees than the hon. member, and that if it was found that good work was not being done the lives of those committees would be very short indeed. Therefore, I say the criticism which he passed upon the Parliamentary Railways Committee Bill is largely discounted by the fact that he condemns and ridicules the institutions of New South Wales and Victoria, which are held by New South Wales and Victoria after many long years of experience to be worth preserving. The hon. member began by laying down three reasons why he opposed this Bill, and if the hon. member will allow me to say so I would remark that it is a very admirable way, in beginning an address in this House, to state precisely the grounds upon which you object to a particular measure. The hon. member said first of all that the committee was unnecessary. The reason he gave was in the main that we had a commissioner, although it was pointed out that the Commissioner is certainly fully employed. The hon. member did not seem to think that that was a good enough reason, but if the fact of having a commissioner makes this railway committee unnecessary then it should have made the public works committees of New South Wales and Victoria unnecessary, because those colonies also have commissioners. They have the same machinery which we have, which the hon. member says is ample; and it seems to me that the Parliaments of both those colonies have come to the conclusion, and remain in that conclusion after practical observation, that although they have Commissioners and the same machinery as we have, yet their public works committees are on the whole eminently useful and desirable. I think that is the very best reply to the hon. member's argument.

Mr. LEAHY: Eminently expedient.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It may be eminently expedient, but I am not concerned at the present time by showing that it is eminently expedient, nor do I think I should advance my position by doing so. It is very

likely to be useful, but it does not detract in the slightest degree from its usefulness by showing in addition that it is expedient. That is a stronger reason, I should say. The hon. member again said it was a waste of time. How does the hon. member expect that he is going to gain time? Is it by bringing down twenty-five or fifty railways which are asked for by the people, and dealing with them one after the other? Suppose a batch of five railways is brought down by the Government, does he suppose that the members who are interested in the other twenty or thirty are all going to be quiet when the five railways which have been picked out and selected are before the House? Time will have to be found somewhere to consider these matters, and I maintain that time will not be lost by having them inquired into by a competent committee—and I assume it will be competent—and the main facts in connection with them being laid before members of the House. So far from wasting time it seems to me it will be an economy of time, and I am quite sure that when there are so many competitors for railways to be dealt with by this House it is no use imagining, as the hon. member appears to imagine, that if his particular railway is brought forward all other members of the House will hold their voices and allow it to pass. That is a very Utopian idea, and I therefore cannot at all agree that it would be a waste of time to refer these matters to a standing committee. Then the hon. member asserts also that it will be a waste of money. And what is his argument? He says it will cost £10,000 a year. I am under the impression that the expenses of the New South Wales committee are limited to £5,000 a year—that there is a special regulation that they shall not exceed £5,000 a year. But the question of the expense of the committee is purely relative. If a person sells £10,000 worth of property and pays $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. that would amount to a certain sum. If he sells £50,000 worth that would amount to a different sum. The question is not what you must pay, but what on the whole are the advantages to be derived. If the country spends £10,000 or even £50,000 a year on this committee, and by that means economises the funds of the State to a far greater sum, I say the mere expense at the outset has little to do with it. It is a question of relativity. Now, the hon. member joins issue with those who say that a large amount of money has been saved by New South Wales and Victoria by the appointment of these committees, but he in no way succeeded in proving his contention.

MR. ANNEAR: He did not quote New South Wales.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS:

The statement has been made, at any rate, by persons in New South Wales who are thoroughly well competent to judge, that the committee does save money. As to whether the sum is computed by hundreds of thousands or by millions, if we succeed in saving hundreds of thousands, and only spend £10,000 a year, then I should say that, acting on behalf of others, it would be a very good thing to proceed to save all we can. That, I should imagine, is what a private individual would do. The hon. member argued, I think, that although the assertion had been made by the New South Wales committee in their report that a considerable sum had been saved, because he could assure the House that, in any case, one railway, that from North Shore to Sydney, which was estimated to cost £260,000, was not made. He said the committee reported that that sum was saved to the country, and it was not saved, because whether the committee had existed or not that sum would not have been expended. Assuming that to be the case with regard to one particular line, it is not likely to have been the case with regard to all the lines; and even if that

statement had been correct—and it was a statement, I venture to say, which was unsupported by evidence—the hon. member said it was ridiculous that a railway should go across the harbour. Honestly, I see nothing ridiculous at all in it. Bridges go across estuaries of far more importance than even Sydney Harbour, and Sydney is one of the greatest ports we know. But New York is a far larger port, and a bridge goes across the harbour at New York, on which are two lines and a tramway; and the bridge, I suppose, would constitute exactly the same disfigurement of the landscape as a bridge would across Sydney Harbour, though I doubt very much whether a bridge would disfigure it. At any rate, it is very harsh to imagine that the people of New South Wales would connect North Shore with Sydney by a bridge if they had not a reasonable expectation that the railway would pay, or that it was necessary. Before I proceed further, when the hon. member alleges that if the committee reports unfavourably upon the carrying out of a certain scheme that scheme is not gone on with, that proves nothing. The hon. member seems to have forgotten that every one of these railways—and I have a list here of a very great number, probably twenty-five or thereabouts—the hon. member seems to have put on one side the circumstance that every one of those railways was proposed by the Government; and if the Government of New South Wales felt disposed to carry out the plan which he recommends, not being the Premier himself—namely, that if the Premier thinks fit to propose a railway he should instantly make it a party question, then we may fairly assume that had it not been for this committee that railway—however absurd he may think it—must necessarily have been made. I may point out, too, in connection with that argument, that the hon. member seems to think that it would be a wise thing for the Premier to take up a position which by-gone Premiers have distinctly and deliberately relinquished, and relinquished with the approval of this House, who believed that the new policy was better than the old one—that is to say, that we have not had in this Parliament for some time any railways which have been treated as party measures. It has been the policy of this continuous Government for a very long time in bringing railway projects before this House, to deal with them on their merits, and to leave hon. members perfectly free to do what they individually deem best. That has been the policy of the past, but it is a policy which, if I may gather from the hon. member for Brisbane North—although it is a policy which has been approved of by this House, and by the country—yet it is a policy that the hon. member endeavours to overturn. Of course, the public works committee in New South Wales deals with public works as well as railways, but I desire hon. members to take note of the fact that by far the most important part of the functions of the committee is to deal with railways. The whole sum which the committee claims to have saved on public works is £9,400,000, while they claim to have saved in railway expenditure about £3,000,000, so that the principal function of the New South Wales committee is to deal with the various railway proposals which are submitted by the Government, and their functions have been discharged with so much satisfaction that the committee stands at the present day far more accredited than it did when it began. Certain hon. members have stated that while they consider the committee entirely unnecessary; that it could not discharge its functions, being composed of members of this House; that it was not expert, and so on; yet those very members, sitting on the opposite benches, who have pointed out that members

could not discharge their duties; that in some way they would be influenced by whatever remuneration they might get; yet those very members would approve of the committee taking upon itself the additional business of supervising public works, and was in that respect much more like the committee in New South Wales. I merely point out that it is wise to form a committee, or it is not. It is wise to form a committee for public works and railways if we are to take the experience of the other colonies, because, after all, in the other colonies the principal duties which they perform are duties which have reference to sifting the many railways which are brought before Parliament. The hon. member for Brisbane North has pointed out that in Victoria for some years past the public works committee have not had a great deal of business in connection with the examining into railways. For a very good reason—that there were very few railways brought forward. But the chief deduction I should draw from that is that after the year 1893—after the commercial crisis—the position of affairs in Victoria was exceedingly dull, and it is probable that until lately, when they have been evincing signs of recovery, very few railways have been brought forward. The same consideration would probably apply to the making of railways in Queensland for some years past. The hon. member said that the Government have brought forward no railways—that some years ago a railway was reported on, but, as has been pointed out by the Treasurer, there were some four or five alternative routes surveyed. The hon. member seemed to point out that the delay was in some way blamable to Parliament, or blamable to the Government—that if he had been Premier, for instance, he would have promptly submitted to Parliament the adoption of some one of those routes; but the real fact is that the same reasons which operated in Victoria to prevent speedy railway construction also operated in Queensland. For some years there has been a suspension of any great policy of railway construction, while the colony has been recovering from a very great disaster. But now that the colony shows indications of recovery—as exhibited by the highly satisfactory fiscal statements which have been submitted by the Treasurer this year and last year—now that the colony shows signs of recovery—all the people who believe that their districts will be benefited by the construction of railways, and all those who believe, in fact, that the colony is justified in going in for some scheme of railway construction, come forward with their respective claims; and when we know that some £25,000,000 would be required to carry out the various railways which are considered necessary by the electorates of the colony, it appears to be obvious that, if New South Wales and Victoria have considered it advisable to deal with the few railways, comparatively, which they have to construct by a public works committee, it cannot be unreasonable for the Government of Queensland to bring a measure for the creation of a similar committee before this House. Whatever necessity may exist in those colonies for such a committee, seeing the enormous number of railways which have been submitted here—seeing also the larger area of the country and the fact that there are several commercial centres in Queensland instead of one—then the advisability and the wisdom of bringing forward such a scheme seems to have a great deal in its favour. Personally, I am of opinion that this is the best way of dealing with what is felt to be a very great difficulty—the difficulty of alternate routes, and so on. I believe that this committee will have powers which a select committee of this House does not have at present. If you take a town in Queensland which everyone considers it

desirable to have a railway to, and there are several different ways of getting there, we have no means under our present system of submitting to a select committee the judgment as to which of the conflicting schemes it considers the most desirable. But under the standing committee in New

South Wales and Victoria we can [8.30 p.m.] submit not only the question as to whether a particular railway shall be made from point A to B, but whether there is any other point, whether C, D, or E would be a better or cheaper means of getting to it. I say there is an additional function which may be discharged by a committee such as this. Just as the hon. member for Brisbane North prefaced his remarks or concluded his remarks by the statement—as we might reasonably have expected—that he intended to oppose the Bill, I may reasonably be expected to support it. I believe that if it is passed the benefits it will confer on the colony as a whole will be considerable. I attach very much more weight to the fact that a scheme of this sort has been tried in our sister colonies and found to work satisfactorily, than I do to the apprehensions of any hon. member in this House who, without that same experience, seems to think that whatever may be the case in the other colonies, although they are able to work a scheme of this sort with honesty and efficiency, we shall be unable to do so. I venture to say that a scheme of this sort, as now being worked by the sister colonies with success, we are, at any rate, as competent to carry it out as efficiently and honestly as our neighbours.

Mr. TURLEY (*Brisbane South*): I sympathise with the hon. gentleman in his attempt to induce this House to pass the second reading of this Bill. The hon. gentleman made a very good attempt to convince this House; but he had an awfully bad case, and he made the best possible effort he could, considering the case he had to advocate. The experience of the other colonies is not borne out, as the hon. gentleman says. The evidence we have from some of them was accurately stated by the hon. member for Brisbane North. Let the hon. gentleman turn up the Victorian *Hansard*, and read there the opinions of Mr. Duncan Gillies and a number of other Victorians. They pointed out just what the hon. gentleman has pointed out in other words. They call it a sham. They said it had simply been put there with the object of enabling the Government to shelter themselves behind this committee when it had matters of railway construction to bring forward. The hon. gentleman says exactly the same thing. He says, "Members will come down. They will be bothering the Government to bring in this railway and that railway." And he said, "It would be far better to have this buffer erected between them and the interests of the country," or, in other words, between the importunate member who may want a railway in his district and the interests of the Government for the time being.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: And the country.

Mr. TURLEY: Not necessarily the country at all, because the position, as far as we can see in this Bill, is this—it is not imperative under this measure that any railway work whatever shall be submitted to the committee—and in the other colonies it is imperative that works above a certain value shall be submitted to the committee. This Bill does not provide for that.

Mr. LEAHY: There is no compulsory clause.

Mr. TURLEY: This Bill simply says it may be done. Either House of Parliament "may," by resolution, refer for consideration and report to the committee. The result is that if the Minister for Railways wants a railway that he does not want to be submitted to this committee,

and thinks he has a sufficient following behind him to carry it through, he has simply to submit it to the House and carry it.

The TREASURER: "May" means "shall" in this case.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It can be altered to "shall."

Mr. TURLEY: It is permissive, not compulsory at all. It is not imperative, as the hon. gentleman knows. It may be submitted or it may not.

Mr. LEAHY: It is not imperative. The House can pass anything it likes.

Mr. TURLEY: It is imperative in the New South Wales Public Works Committee Bill. It is imperative in the Standing Committee of Railways in Victoria. It is imperative that all railway or public works proposals in New South Wales shall be submitted to the committee for consideration and report.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Exactly the same here.

Mr. TURLEY: Not at all. The hon. gentleman knows that as well as I do. There is no provision in the Bill which makes it imperative that every work which goes beyond a certain magnitude or beyond a certain cost shall be submitted to this committee. This has been on the *tapis* for some time, and I will quote the opinion of the Premier and see whether that will satisfy the hon. gentleman.

Mr. DAWSON: He does not believe the Premier.

Mr. TURLEY: It is from the *Courier* of the 28th of February, 1899.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The Bill was not in existence then.

Mr. TURLEY: We understand what was in existence then.

Mr. LEAHY: That is six months ago.

Mr. TURLEY: That is all right. Being interviewed at Maryborough, and speaking of the Gayndah Railway to a deputation, the hon. gentleman said this—

There were some adverse circumstances which did not arise with the Government of the day. No railway could be constructed unless a report from the Commissioner for Railways was laid upon the table of Parliament, recommending the building of the line. It was an unfortunate circumstance that Mr. Gray had sent in an adverse report. He (Mr. Dickson) thought Mr. Gray could not have seen the district under the same circumstances that he saw it, and he had requested him to make another visit, in order to make himself more conversant with it, and especially the lands that he (Mr. Dickson) saw.

The PREMIER: That is correct.

Mr. TURLEY:

He certainly saw sufficient to justify the country being opened up. He might at once assure them that while he intended to propose to Parliament the formation of a works committee to deal with a great question of the many branch lines asked for, there were lines that had been before the country for years, and he was prepared to include the Gayndah line in the list, which need not go before the committee.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: Oh, oh!

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is six months ago.

Mr. TURLEY: This is an absolute, definite statement given at Maryborough that the hon. gentleman intended to pass this line through without having any reference whatever to the committee. Now the hon. gentleman says it must go through the committee.

The PREMIER: The money for that line was voted years ago.

Mr. TURLEY: If the hon. gentleman will look through the records of this House he will find that money has not only been voted for that line, but that money has been voted, or borrowed rather, for the purpose of building a dozen other lines. The hon. gentleman knows it.

Mr. ANNEAR: Parliament passed it in 1884.

Mr. JENKINSON: More shame it has not been built.

Mr. TURLEY: It does not make the slightest bit of difference whether it was passed in 1864 or 1884 as far as this question is concerned. I am pointing out that it is not necessary or imperative that the Government shall submit any line to the committee it is proposed to appoint. The Secretary for Lands says it must be so, and I quote the opinion of the Premier, who gave a distinct promise that the merits of this particular line should not be submitted to the committee.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The Bill was not in existence then.

Mr. TURLEY: Not only that—but there was another case in which the hon. gentleman had very much the same to say. This is referring to other railways. He was speaking in the Childers district. He said—

They were aware that lines which would cost in the aggregate £20,000,000 had been asked for, so it was out of the power of the Government to carry out all immediately. He intended, therefore, to appoint a parliamentary works committee to whom would be referred all the proposals, and who would decide what lines should be proceeded with. But in view of his opinion on agricultural lines, he would insist on a certain extent of them being proceeded with.

Here we have the whole thing. The hon. gentleman takes up this position—that he intends to make this railway committee act as a buffer between the Government and the members who are prepared to advocate and submit lines when they come down. It has been pointed out this afternoon that if this proposed committee brought up a report on any railway proposal, that report would have to be considered by the House, and an hon. member who is supporting the second reading of this Bill (Mr. Story) argued that we should then be in exactly the same position as we are when the Government propose a railway with the recommendation of the Railway Department and the sanction of the Commissioner. And that is exactly the position the House would be in, with this difference, that the Government would have the assistance of the members composing the committee to carry the railway through the House. It has also been pointed out that if this Bill is passed members of the House will canvass for votes for appointment on the committee. Here are the opinions of one or two members of the New South Wales Parliament on that question.

The HOME SECRETARY: Why do you give the opinions of one or two?

Mr. TURLEY: I cannot read the whole of them, unless the hon. gentleman is prepared to stay here for an indefinite period.

The PREMIER: Who are they? Are they in opposition?

Mr. TURLEY: The hon. member for Inverell, Mr. Cruickshank, is one, and he says—

It is a painful thing to have to go through what takes place here when we are electing the committee. We are practically followed about for days by members who say, "Give so-and-so a vote," as if it were a parliamentary general election. Hon. members pledge themselves and often vote for men whom they would not elect if it were not for the canvass that goes on.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You can say the same of members of Parliament.

Mr. TURLEY: I admit that there is a lot of that done at the time of a general election, but what I wish to point out now is that this is the opinion of members of the Parliament of New South Wales in regard to the appointment of members of the works committee in that colony.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The majority do not think so.

Mr. TURLEY: A very large number of them are of that opinion. The Act was amended in 1897, and the number of the committee reduced

from thirteen to seven, and the remuneration considerably reduced; and if the hon. gentleman will look up the New South Wales *Hansard* for the following year he will find that the matter was discussed on a motion for adjournment, and that during that discussion many members signified that they would vote for the abolition of the committee if the question were brought before the House in a concrete form. Here is another opinion, that of the hon. member for Murrumbidgee, Mr. Fitzpatrick, an opinion expressed at the time the amending Act was going through the New South Wales Assembly—

The present arrangements in connection with the committee make the appointments so many bribes to certain members of this House to follow the Ministry of the day. When a committee is about to be appointed, you will find men going about the House canvassing and touting to get members to vote for them. This is not right. An appointment to the committee is a sort of bribe to silence certain hon. members. Will you ever find those members voting against the Government while they hold their position? Not much.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is an argument against all committees.

MR. TURLEY: It is not an argument against all committees, and the hon. gentleman knows that as well as I do. It is not an argument against select committees, who do their work without pay, and do it efficiently. From what Ministers have said regarding this proposal it appears that there is going to be very little consideration given to the proposals that will be submitted to the committee. In September last a deputation waited on the Premier in reference to a work at Rockhampton, which it was said would involve an additional cost of £31,000, and urged that that extra cost should not be taken into consideration. And only last Tuesday, the 7th of November, the Secretary for Railways received at Rockhampton a deputation who asked that the Gladstone railway line should be made direct to the Rockhampton railway station, and the Minister, so the report says, "promised that the matter should be submitted to the proposed parliamentary committee, which would probably not delay matters more than two days." Here is a matter which has been agitated for in Rockhampton for some time, and which will involve a very large expenditure, and the hon. gentleman says in effect, "We have a sort of dummy committee to whom we will refer this matter, and they will be able to pass it through in two days."

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Its merits are so self-evident.

MR. TURLEY: It is not a question of the merits of the proposal to be submitted. The Secretary for Railways pointed out the other night that there would be no delay in dealing with railway proposals this session. Here we are in the middle of November, and yet the hon. gentleman states that it is necessary, in order to get on with the railway proposals of the session, that this Bill should be passed, a committee appointed, and the proposals of the Government for the session referred to that committee.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Not all the proposals.

MR. TURLEY: I do not say all the proposals; I say the proposals for the session. The hon. gentleman says practically that there is no necessity for the committee to get evidence, no necessity for them to go outside of Brisbane, but that it will be sufficient for them to get the evidence now at the railway office in Brisbane, and make their report on that evidence. What a huge farce the whole thing is!

MR. LEAHY: Can't we do the same thing?

MR. TURLEY: I consider that this House is better able to deal with that evidence than a committee. If ever there was an attempt made by a Government to evade their responsibilities,

this is a deliberate attempt in that direction by the present Government, because there are a number of requests at the present time for railways in different parts of the colony. If the plans, sections, and books of reference of these railways are ready now, why is not this House as well able to judge of them as it has been previously? As pointed out by the Secretary for Lands some time ago, the system of dealing with railway proposals in this House was altered. The time was when Governments used to submit a railway policy to the House, and say they were prepared to stand or fall by it. But a Government found themselves in this position: That they could not afford to fall by their railway policy, and the result was that they said they were prepared to come down with railways and make them non-party questions, and then if the House refused to pass them there would be no responsibility attaching to the Government, and there would be no danger of the Government being passed out.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: And that altered system was generally approved.

MR. TURLEY: Now they are not prepared to go even to that extent. They are not prepared to submit any railway policy at all even as a non-party matter, and allow hon. members to deal with it as they have done before. The hon. gentleman says now that it is necessary they should have this buffer erected between the Minister and the inopportune member advocating a particular line. I do not think a solitary argument has been brought forward yet why we should have this committee with the object of having it as a buffer between this House and the Minister. In spite of all that has been said by the Secretary for Railways with regard to the public works committee in New South Wales having saved the country millions, I do not think they have saved millions at all. We might just as well say—though I do not suppose the hon. gentleman would agree to it to anything like the same extent—we might just as well claim that the members who were here in Opposition in 1895 saved the country a very large sum of money because they would not sanction the Mirani to Cattle Creek railway.

MR. BROWNE: Hear, hear!

MR. TURLEY: Would hon. gentlemen give them credit for having saved the country a large sum of money in that connection?

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It was a loss.

MR. TURLEY: That is just the position. I remember that that was a line in the hon. gentleman's own electorate. We wanted to prevent what we considered a job being put upon the country, and the hon. gentleman says it was a great loss because that line was not carried out.

MR. LEAHY: You did not save the bridge?

MR. TURLEY: No, they got the bridge on that occasion, and in the long list furnished by the Secretary for Railways I think there are some eight or ten miles of that same railway included. Members on this side did not say they had saved a large sum of money to the country, but what they did say was that they had prevented the Government from putting up what was a very patent job upon the country.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You had to say something, you know.

MR. TURLEY: They did not claim they had saved a huge sum of money. If the Government come down here with a huge railway policy and say, "Here are a dozen railways we propose to go on with," it is not because the House does not approve of all those railways that they thus save a huge sum of money for the country.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They claim it invariably.

Mr. TURLEY: I do not know that they make any such claim. They simply say that according to the circumstances disclosed in connection with a certain railway they do not in their opinion consider it necessary at the present time, or they may oppose it simply because in the opinion of members of the House circumstances point to the fact that there are railways more urgently needed than the one submitted at the time by the Minister. I think it is far better that members of the House should have an opportunity of convincing themselves of the necessity for a line. In my opinion the best system that could be introduced in connection with proposals of this sort is that the proposals should come down to the House in the one session and be brought on for consideration in the next, so that members would in the meantime be able to go and find out on their own account, so far as they were able to justify themselves, as to the necessity for the lines and the probability of their paying after they were built. They would be able, in that way, in the next session, to deal with the lines better than they can possibly be when they are simply thrown down on the table before them, and they are asked to deal with them straight away. Not only have you got all the evidence practically that you will get by this committee that is to be appointed, but you have the opinion of the experts of the department, the men who are sent out to conduct the surveys, and who have been acquainted with railway construction for years past. You have also the opinion of officials of the Lands Department who are able to go out and report upon the class of country through which the line will probably run, the demand for land in the district, and what the land is fit for. Then you have information as to the probable amount of produce to be carried on the line after it is constructed. And the result is, I take it, that with all this evidence, and with a man at the head of affairs in the railway office who is prepared to do as the Railway Commissioner has done in the case of this Gayndah railway—report to Parliament that in his opinion the line should not be built—I think this House will be prepared to abide by his decision sooner than by the decision of a committee appointed in the way it is proposed this committee shall be appointed. As pointed out by the leader of the Opposition, we have here a proposal for the appointment of a committee altogether differently constituted from that in operation anywhere else. Why should the chairman of this committee be singled out to be appointed by the Governor in Council? Is it because there is some one particular person who is to be appointed chairman, and who is in that way to be satisfied in some way or another to secure his allegiance to the Government? Is that the reason the Government have kept in their hands the appointment of the chairman of a committee of this sort? Can any hon. gentleman on the other side tell us where in any of the other colonies there is a committee constituted in that way? Can they point to any of the other colonies where the Government have said it was advisable that they should put in their own man as chairman of such a committee? In all the other Acts I have been able to get hold of it is provided that after the appointment of members of the committee the members themselves elect their chairman and vice-chairman, and get on with the business. It seems to me that even in the event of this Bill going through—and I sincerely hope it won't, because I believe that instead of facilitating railway construction in Queensland it will be the means of blocking it. Hon. gentleman have said that they are not prepared to come down at the present time with railways concerning which they have

all the information in the railway office, and allow members to exercise their own opinion upon them; but they are prepared to do so if they are sure they will be able to get the support of the members of this committee. It was pointed out by the hon. member for Murrumbidgee, in the New South Wales Parliament, that the Minister thought he would be able to get, as mentioned by the hon. member for Balonne, a considerable amount of assistance and support from the members of this committee if it was appointed.

Mr. DAWSON: It was holding out bribes.

Mr. TURLEY: That is practically what it means. It was pointed out there that that was what was done in New South Wales—just a bribing of men to support the proposals of the Government which they would otherwise never have supported.

The TREASURER: The Opposition appointed the last New South Wales Public Works Committee.

Mr. TURLEY: Oh, no.

The TREASURER: Yes, they did.

Mr. TURLEY: The hon. gentleman knows when that committee was first appointed. He knows it was in 1888, and he knows exactly the reason why that committee was brought about—to act in the way it is considered it will act here in Queensland, simply as a buffer between the Government and the House in connection with their railway proposals. Just take

[9 p.m.] what we have seen during the last four months since the election. The Secretary for Railways has been going round the different parts of the colony, and deputations have waited on him and asked him for railways. He has been asked if he would have a survey made in one place and a railway built in another place, and the hon. gentleman has been using the buffer the whole time—"I don't know about this. There is a great deal to be said in favour of your railway. It would possibly be wise if we had a trial survey to see what can be done, but you know we are going to have a parliamentary railways committee, and if a proposal is submitted to the House it will be submitted to the railways committee, and you know we shall have to act on their recommendation." Now, it is nothing of the sort. The hon. gentleman has simply been using it for the object intended—the same object as the Government had in view when they introduced the guarantee principle into our railway legislation to protect Ministers from the importunities of electorates wanting railway communication.

Mr. BROWNE: Don't you think Ministers ought to be protected?

Mr. TURLEY: I don't think they should. I think, as was pointed out by the hon. member for Brisbane North, they should have sufficient backbone to bring down their own railway proposals and lay them on the table, and let members decide whether they are prepared to accept those railways or whether in their opinion there are railways more urgently needed in other parts of the colony.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: We have sufficient backbone for that.

Mr. TURLEY: The hon. gentleman says they are not going to bring them down unless they submit them to this particular committee. It has been pointed out that it would not do for Ministers to bring down their railways in the ordinary way because there would be a considerable amount of opposition by members who had little railways of their own which did not happen to be laid on the table and they would not vote for any railway that might be submitted for that reason. But I do not think that is so. My experience has taught me that when railways have

been submitted they have received fair consideration at the hands of members, and the only time they have been cast out has been when there has been sufficient evidence to show either by reference to a select committee or by reference to the report submitted by the responsible officers of the Railway Department that there was no use in going on with the railway, as it was not urgently needed, and if constructed it would be at a dead loss. As far as I can see, the Minister for Railways has given us practically no information on the second reading. He told us there were a very large number of railways to be built—some hundreds of miles—but that was told us some months ago. Then, the hon. gentleman simply says we require this because it has been of use in the other colonies. Because it has been to some extent effective in New South Wales, Victoria copied it from New South Wales; but, as the hon. member for Brisbane North pointed out, in Victoria they have gone a long way towards rubbing the committee out there, and I think the committee is better left alone. Let the Government come down with their railway proposals and lay them on the table this session, and let members have an opportunity of knowing where they are and what the cost is going to be. Let them make inquiries on their own if they wish, or refer the lines to select committees, to whom power can be given to obtain the same information as could be obtained by this proposed committee; and next session let members come here prepared to deal with those railway proposals on their merits, and not have any side influence brought in by which members may be unduly influenced to support a railway policy which they otherwise would be prepared to vote against.

* The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. J. F. G. Foxton, *Carnarvon*): I think the hon. gentleman who has just spoken has furnished as strong arguments in favour of the proposal as any hon. gentleman who has spoken on this side of the House.

Mr. LEAHY: That would not be saying much.

The HOME SECRETARY: I do not say it is saying much, but the hon. member has given stronger arguments perhaps than those which have been used by members on this side in favour of the Bill. The hon. member for Brisbane South, I think, and also the hon. member for Brisbane North have both implied that this is to be a buffer which is to relieve the Government of certain responsibilities. That I utterly deny, and the hon. gentleman who has just spoken has furnished the best argument to prove that such is not the case because he pointed out, and very properly, that the practice hitherto has been—of late years at all events—that railways submitted by the Government have not been regarded as party questions, that each railway has been submitted on its merits and so dealt with, and that it did not necessarily mean that because a railway was rejected by this House after having been submitted by the Government that therefore the Government must resign. If that is so—and I submit that this is the fact—where is the necessity for the buffer? There is no necessity for a buffer. That is so from the point of view taken by the hon. member who has just spoken. He implied by the use of the word “buffer” that this was for the purpose of relieving the Government of responsibility, and of saving its skin, so to speak—of preventing the risk of the Government coming down with any railway which might be rejected after they had submitted it to the House. If, as the hon. member says, the railway proposals, the individual proposal of any Government in this House are not party questions, then what has the Government

to fear from the rejection of any particular railway? None whatever. The hon. gentleman furnished the very best argument why this cannot be regarded in any sense as a buffer for the purpose of protecting the Government in the way he suggested.

Mr. TURLEY: You secure the support of the members of the committee.

The HOME SECRETARY: The hon. member referred to speeches delivered by my colleague, the Premier, as far back as February, and pointed out, probably with perfect correctness, that the Premier had at that time intimated that certain lines, or a certain line, would not be submitted to this committee. It is quite possible—surely the hon. member can perceive that it is possible—that one member of a Government might, before the Bill was drafted at all, have had views with regard to the particular construction and drafting of this Bill, which were not ultimately adopted after it had been submitted to the whole of his colleagues, and had received discussion and consideration at their hands. I may say that I thought at one time that there were certain lines in this colony which any Government might venture to submit to the House without their going through the ordeal of examination by a parliamentary committee and as is proposed. National lines they might be called—although most hon. members who have lines in their pockets are apt to regard their own particular line as a national line.

Mr. TURLEY: The Commissioner did not regard that line as a national line.

The HOME SECRETARY: I myself was of that opinion with regard to one particular line, and have so expressed myself in public. That particular line is the line from Gladstone to Rockhampton, a line which I suppose is the one which any impartial man, dissociated from the politics of the country, and yet having a full knowledge of the necessities and needs of the various districts, would say was a line which might be regarded as one which would go through this House almost without discussion. Yet I am thoroughly satisfied that if the Government were to come down to-morrow and submit that line by itself without referring it to this particular committee that is looming in the future, it would not pass this House.

Hon. E. B. FORREST: I should think not. Why should you except one particular line?

The HOME SECRETARY: The hon. member will vote for the second reading of the Bill if he goes on like this. He asks why should we except one line? For the very reason that most people would regard the Gladstone to Rockhampton line as one which might be selected for separate treatment.

Mr. GLASSEY: I am one of them.

The HOME SECRETARY: So am I; nevertheless I realise the fact that if it were submitted to the House at present it would not pass.

Mr. GLASSEY: I think it would.

The HOME SECRETARY: The hon. member for North Brisbane, who seems to speak for the House as well as for himself, says it would not. Of course, that is merely a matter of opinion; but I understand, from the best sources of information at the disposal of the Government, that if that line were submitted it would not succeed in going through. In February or before, I myself happened to be speaking on this question, and I expressed an opinion then that that line was one which the Government might so venture upon; and my own colleague, in exactly the same way, took exactly the same view with regard to the Gayndah line. He probably expressed himself in the way the hon. member for South Brisbane has mentioned. But when you come to analyse the feelings and the views of various hon. members, or of little groups of hon.

members, with regard to certain lines, you see that the majority of the House would absolutely reject them.

MR. TURLEY: Hence the necessity for the buffer.

THE HOME SECRETARY: But the committee will not be used as a buffer in the way implied by the hon. members for North and South Brisbane—a buffer to save the Government from defeat on matters which, as the hon. member for Brisbane South admits, are not party questions. Now, let us go back to the days of the £10,000,000 loan—

MR. TURLEY: That is ancient history.

THE HOME SECRETARY: But it is very valuable history, and it teaches us a very big lesson. The hon. member for Brisbane South has said that in the past we have done very well. I say that in the past we have made the most egregious blunders.

MR. TURLEY: I did not say we have done very well.

THE HOME SECRETARY: The hon. member said we had succeeded very well in the past without the assistance of the reports of any committee like the one proposed. In making that statement the hon. member is altogether mistaken. He can scarcely have studied the question of railway construction in the colony during the last fifteen years.

MR. TURLEY: I did not make that statement, because I know very well that blunders have been made.

THE HOME SECRETARY: We shall see that when *Hansard* appears. At all events, whether the hon. member said so or not, it is the case that we have made egregious blunders as a Parliament—blunders which I sincerely hope will never be repeated in the history of the colony—and we are endeavouring by the establishment of such a committee as this—such as has been established in the southern colonies—to avoid those errors, and to introduce a buffer, not in the way the hon. member implied, but as a means by which larger knowledge shall be afforded in the shape of evidence from all quarters with regard to the lines submitted to the House by the Government. The hon. member for South Brisbane mentioned the fact, and endeavoured to make capital out of it, that the word “may” is used with regard to the reference of those railways instead of “shall.” I am not going to argue the question whether this word “may” is imperative or not. It will be a very simple thing, in committee, to substitute “shall,” if the hon. member or anybody else is not satisfied with the word as it stands. But there came an interjection from another hon. member to the effect that the House might refuse to adopt any particular line on the report of the committee. Of course that is so. Parliament is supreme. With regard to any law, if both Houses of Parliament agree to set it aside, they can do so; but any line which the Government had the temerity to introduce without first submitting it to the committee would not be looked at by the House for a moment, and therefore it is perfectly immaterial whether you use “shall” or “may.” Returning to the point raised by the hon. member for Brisbane South—that the Premier had said with regard to a certain line—I do not know which it was, he was apparently quoting from some paper—

MR. TURLEY: The line to Childers.

THE HOME SECRETARY: That it would not take more than two days.

MR. TURLEY: No; that was the Secretary for Railways.

THE HOME SECRETARY: I thought he was referring to the line from Gladstone to Rockhampton. I do not see, from my point of view, or perhaps from the point of view of the

Secretary for Railways, or perhaps from the point of view of the majority of the members of the House, that the consideration of that line and the question of its utility and value to the country, would take any committee more than a week or a fortnight to consider. Of course the expression “two days” is a mere figure of speech. I say it would not take more than a week or a fortnight for the reason that it is so obvious that the line should be constructed. I have already stated my firm belief that even under these circumstances, if the line were submitted to this House at the present moment, and excepted from the operation of the Bill, it would not receive the assent of Parliament—the time required is so short, that it should receive the imprimatur of the committee. That appears to me, and apparently to the hon. member for South Brisbane, as quite obvious. There is no question about any alternative route. The only question that can arise is when the line shall be built. I submit, having regard to these considerations, that any hon. member who opposes this Bill is doing so—I will not say for the purpose of blocking railway construction—but the effect will be to delay railway construction.

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: Nonsense!

THE HOME SECRETARY: It is all very well for the hon. member to say “Nonsense,” but we know that in 1884, when the £10,000,000 loan was submitted, not one of the railways proposed at that time would have passed if they had not been bunched together.

MEMBERS on the Government side: Hear, hear!

THE HOME SECRETARY: Do hon. members desire that that should be repeated in this colony? Yet that is what will happen if this Bill is rejected.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear! Nonsense.

THE HOME SECRETARY: Yes, because if one or two railways are submitted alone, they will be rejected by the House, for the reason that every hon. member, or a majority of hon. members, are interested in other lines, to which they think precedence should be given. The consequence will be that hon. members will be compelled to advance reasons why a particular line should not be passed while their own particular line is neglected. We all know what the effect of that will be. All other lines will have to be submitted one by one, or else submitted in a bunch, and then there will be a repetition of the £10,000,000 loan business, or something worse.

MR. FISHER: There was no Labour party in 1884.

THE HOME SECRETARY: I know exactly what the Labour party will do. They oppose everything the Government submit, altogether apart from the merits of the case.

MEMBERS of the Opposition: No, no! What about the Elections Bill and federation?

THE HOME SECRETARY: Experience and facts speak stronger than these interjections. It has been said that the appointment of a select committee would be more advantageous, and more economical, and more effective than a standing committee. But it must be obvious to hon. members and to the country that this is not so, because we have had in the past a select committee in another Chamber sitting on every railway submitted, and that did not prevent the evils of the £10,000,000 loan. As pointed out by the Minister for Lands, that committee dealt with the particular line submitted to them without considering its bearings or merits in connection with any other lines. In that respect the duties of that committee have been carried out in what I would characterise as a most perfunctory way. No doubt they threw a

little light on a particular line, but the information did not save the country from the huge expenditure that might well have been saved. There is another serious objection to a select committee. Even if one select committee could take into consideration all the lines that could be connected together or associated with one another, the members comprising that committee could only sit during the session, while members are fully occupied with their legislative duties, not only by their attendance at the House, but owing to the fact that they have to prepare for the business coming before the House. With regard to the standing committees in the southern colonies, the larger part—the more valuable portion—of their work is carried out during the recess, when the members of that committee have leisure and opportunity to go into the matters submitted to them; they have time to gather information by travelling over different parts of the colony much more readily than when the House is sitting. Another suggestion is that we should have a permanent board appointed. That proposition presented itself to my mind when this standing committee was first mooted, but after some consideration I thought it was not desirable. The members of such a board would be at the beck and call of the Government, as Civil servants, or their positions would have to be assured to a large extent, as the positions of the members of the Public Service Board, or the members of the Land Court or the judges are. Let me point this out as far as administration is concerned—and this is purely a matter of administration—we have already had irresponsible boards; and if a long term of office were secured to members of a board like that at high salaries—as they would have to be—there would be the possibility that Parliament would find its duty very irksome indeed. Besides, the Land Court, which was quoted in this connection, performs functions of a totally different character. The Land Court would not have its status or independence secured to it if it did not perform judicial functions. That is the reason why the Land Court is clothed with absolute independence, and I do not think it is desirable to hand over these questions to any such board as the Land Board. Now, we have heard a good deal about the opinions expressed—both in New South Wales and Victoria—with regard to the inadvisability of continuing these standing committees in these colonies. The hon. member for Inverell, Mr. Cruickshank, was quoted as one who made some scathing remarks with regard to the canvassing that is carried on for appointments on those committees in New South Wales; but I ask hon. members whether that would be likely to influence the whole House. Possibly weak members might pledge themselves to give support to certain members, but surely the whole House acting as one body can be relied upon to counteract any such influence as that.

Mr. FISHER: It would have a demoralising effect.

The HOME SECRETARY: In what way? Supposing anybody did canvass for these positions, does it follow that the House would adopt their suggestions in this way. Not a bit of it. Not one bit more would it affect the [9.30 p.m.] final choice of the House than the mere canvassing with regard to the choice of the electors when they elect representatives to come into this House.

Mr. LEAHY: That is pretty rough on the men who are canvassing, and say they are promised by the Government.

The HOME SECRETARY: I know nothing about that.

Mr. JENKINSON: Oh don't you? We do.

The HOME SECRETARY: I understand that no promises have been made. I do not know what the hon. member knows. Has he been promised? If he has he can speak for himself.

Mr. JENKINSON: I know what I have been told.

The HOME SECRETARY: Exactly. The hon. member knows what he has been told. What does that mean? Does the hon. member know that everything he has been told is the truth? Does he believe everybody who crams yarns into his ears.

Mr. JENKINSON: I should take what you said with a grain of salt.

The HOME SECRETARY: Probably the hon. member would. I do not know that I am more untruthful than any other member of the House, and yet the hon. member is prepared to believe it because somebody has told him that promises have been made. He is prepared to believe it and assert it as a fact.

Mr. JENKINSON: I did nothing of the sort. You are misrepresenting me. You are constantly doing it.

The HOME SECRETARY: Let it rest at that. We will appeal to *Hansard* when it comes out as to whether what I say is correct.

Mr. JENKINSON: You should not accuse me of saying what I did not say.

The HOME SECRETARY: What I said was this, and I will say it again: I distinctly said that so far as my knowledge went no promise had been made, and the hon. member said I was wrong.

Mr. JENKINSON: I did nothing of the sort.

The HOME SECRETARY: Then what did the hon. member say?

Mr. JENKINSON: You have fallen into a hole, and I will not help you out.

The HOME SECRETARY: The hon. member is not game.

Mr. JENKINSON: I am game for you, anyway.

The HOME SECRETARY: When *Hansard* comes out it will be seen that the hon. member interjected and contradicted me when I said no promises had been made. He said something about "we know something about that," or "we can tell a different tale." What does the hon. member mean except that I am not telling what is true? The hon. member may interject, and quibble, and wriggle as much as he likes.

Mr. JENKINSON: I am not quibbling or wriggling.

The HOME SECRETARY: He said what I said was not true; that no promises were made. Let him tell me his informant.

Mr. STEPHENSON: They have been pulling his leg.

The HOME SECRETARY: Yes, somebody has been pulling his leg; but *Hansard* will prove what was said.

Mr. BROWNE: *Hansard* is the test.

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: Poor *Hansard*.

The HOME SECRETARY: Why, the Premier said exactly the same thing, and yet the hon. member had the temerity to say that he and his people knew better.

Mr. JENKINSON: I was not in the Chamber when he was speaking.

The HOME SECRETARY: Well, I have very little more to say, but I should like to ask hon. members, knowing what they do know, judging by their own experience, and knowing the scant courtesy which any railway which is brought forward purely as an individual line will receive at the hands of the Legislative Assembly, what is going to take the place of this standing committee if we are to have any railway construction at all? I say that the imprimatur of such a body must be acceptable to the House. The hon. member for Brisbane North, Mr.

Forrest, speaks of one line in which I am personally interested, perhaps more than he is—the border line. I do not know whether it is that he does not know the Legislative Assembly as well as I do, but I know that if that line were submitted to the Legislative Assembly to-morrow it would be thrown out by a large majority.

Hon. E. B. FORREST: How do you know?

The HOME SECRETARY: I am perfectly certain of it.

Mr. LEAHY: This House would have a right to do what it likes.

The HOME SECRETARY: Of course it would, and it would have a right to throw that line out. Then let us come to a line in which the hon. member for Bulloo is interested—the line from Cunnamulla to Thargomindah. What chance would that have?

Mr. LEAHY: I would never ask you for it.

The HOME SECRETARY: Does the hon. member say he does not want it?

Mr. LEAHY: I say let it go on its merits.

The HOME SECRETARY: Take any line which is dear to any member of the House. Take the Gayndah line. It is the opinion of many people that that line would go through valuable country.

Hon. E. B. FORREST: The committee is not going to determine all these.

The HOME SECRETARY: The committee will have so much to say on the various lines that the House will be able to deal with them far more effectively than it can do at present, and hon. members, I am certain, will be far more ready to accept the verdict of the committee than to accept the line without their verdict.

Hon. E. B. FORREST: That is your assumption.

The HOME SECRETARY: It may be my assumption, but it is based on the experience of the southern colonies.

Hon. E. B. FORREST: No.

The HOME SECRETARY: Yes.

Hon. E. B. FORREST: No.

The HOME SECRETARY: Yes. However, I differ from the hon. member. I am, at all events, very well satisfied that whether it is this Government, or any other Government that succeeds it, if this Government goes down upon the Bill, they will not be able to carry through any railway policy without some such committee as this—some committee that will throw light on the question as each particular line comes up—and, speaking for myself, setting aside mere matters of detail, such as the election of the committee and so forth, I cannot conceive of any more competent tribunal to which lines could be submitted than that which is now proposed and which has been eminently successful in the other colonies.

Mr. BROWNE (*Croydon*): When the Home Secretary got up to reply to the able speech of the hon. member for Brisbane South, Mr. Turley, I certainly thought we were going to have some fresh light thrown upon the subject—some arguments in favour of the proposal of the Government—something we had not heard before. But it seems to me that the hon. member has devoted himself to making the House look ridiculous, because his statements are distinctly in opposition to facts that happened during the last seven years since I have been in the House. In the first place the hon. member spoke of the committee dealing with certain lines of railway, and pointed out how, although everybody here knew that those lines were essential, nobody outside the House knew it, and if placed before the committee in two days, or at the outside, a week, they would pass them, but if not the House would reject them.

The HOME SECRETARY: I think you misunderstood me.

Mr. BROWNE: The hon. gentleman particularised and mentioned the line between Gladstone and Rockhampton. He pointed out how everybody was practically agreed that that line was necessary, and he exempted it from review by the committee; but to show how necessary the committee was, he said although it might not go through as quickly as the Secretary for Railways said—two days—he said at least in a week it would go through, and yet he said he was convinced from what he knew that if put before the House now it would be rejected.

The HOME SECRETARY: Ask the member for Brisbane North what he thinks.

Mr. BROWNE: What does that mean? It means that we have got to this pass—that seventy-two members of this House are not competent to deal with sixty miles of railway, but we must hand it over to six or seven men selected from the House by all sorts of means—good, bad, and indifferent; and they are to override the will of the present Parliament.

Mr. LEAHY: And they will very likely be the weakest men in the Chamber.

Mr. BROWNE: The chances are that they will, as the hon. member says, be the weakest men in the Chamber. I cannot help remembering some very strong words used on one occasion by the gentleman who was the political creator of the present Government—Sir Thomas McIlwraith—when he said, "What dirty tools you have sometimes to use in politics," and when you have to use tools it is a fact that you do not choose the ablest men.

The HOME SECRETARY: Do not forget that the House will select them.

Mr. BROWNE: I have a very good idea of what the House selecting means. I was rather surprised at the Home Secretary in regard to another matter. The hon. gentleman said that since 1893, as fast as railways were proposed to the House they were rejected, because hon. members wanted to get their own lines passed. Now, the most railways since 1893 were introduced in 1895, and I would not be certain, but I think that the Mirani Creek railway was the only one of the batch that was rejected—and that was the only one that happened to be submitted to a select committee.

The TREASURER: There were more rejected than that. There were the Esk and Redcliffe lines.

Mr. BROWNE: The Redcliffe line was a guarantee line.

The HOME SECRETARY: All the less reason for throwing it out.

Mr. BROWNE: I am speaking now of national lines that were submitted as a part of the Government policy, and that were to be built entirely by the State. I expected that the Home Secretary would have advanced as an argument for the Bill that the House was too ready to pass lines, but instead of that the hon. gentleman used the very opposite argument, and said that the House was too ready to reject them. There are lines that were passed years and years ago by this House, and the money has been voted for them, but which have not been built yet.

The TREASURER: What lines are those?

Mr. BROWNE: The Croydon-Georgetown line is one.

The TREASURER: That was rejected by the other House.

Mr. BROWNE: We are dealing with this Assembly. Then there is the Cloncurry line—one of those which syndicates are taking up now. Not only was that line passed, but very nearly £500,000 still stands on the Loan Estimates to its credit—part of the £10,000,000 loan, which the hon. gentleman alluded to.

The TREASURER: The plans have not been passed.

The HOME SECRETARY: The money was voted—that is all.

Mr. BROWNE: I only point out that the argument must have been very weak when the Home Secretary, in reply to the hon. member for Brisbane South, has not given one solid argument in favour of the Bill. In fact, it has been exactly the opposite, for about the only reason he has given is that, in several instances, this committee will be able to do in its wisdom what this House in its wisdom previously decided not to do.

Mr. LEAHY: This committee can do nothing. It can only beat the air.

Mr. BROWNE: That is quite correct—it can do nothing.

Mr. KEOGH: Let us go to a vote and be done with it. (Laughter.)

Mr. BROWNE: Going straight to the question, I may say that I am going to vote against the second reading of the Bill.

The HOME SECRETARY: Because the Government introduced it.

Mr. BROWNE: It is not because the Government introduced it. I have voted on several occasions for things that the Government have introduced. I remember on one occasion, when the hon. gentleman introduced a lot of amendments dealing with certain kinds of scrub, with unpronounceable Latin names, I supported him through half a sitting.

The HOME SECRETARY: There must have been something wrong there.

Mr. BROWNE: There may have been something wrong, because I did not understand Latin, and I trusted to the hon. gentleman as a good Latin scholar. I am not opposing the Bill because the Government introduced it. The New South Wales committee is also a public works committee; but this is only to deal with railways—and only with certain railways. If we are going to be so anxious about the expenditure of public money as to have a committee of this House, the members of which are to be paid certain salaries, why should they not also look after public works? On the Estimates this year—if we reckon up everything—it will be found that there are about £250,000 to be spent on unproductive public works—not railways at all—a very large portion of that sum is to be spent in Brisbane.

Mr. GIVENS: There is far more than £250,000.

Mr. BROWNE: I believe there is, but I put it at that. There is no select committee to inquire into that expenditure, and if the Government keep on spending money on account, they can spend several millions on such unproductive works—putting up palatial buildings of mortar and stone, which do no good to anyone, except to afford employment to a number of people, and shelter a lot of other people when they are completed.

Mr. ANNEAR: The city members say they are getting nothing.

Mr. BROWNE: Then why not have a public works committee to decide whether they are getting nothing, or whether they are getting everything? But this present proposal does not go so far as to include public works, and it does not even include all railways. The committee is only to consider certain lines which the Government like to throw upon them. It has been already pointed out that there are certain lines which are not to be submitted to this committee. The Premier himself admitted that in February last, just before the elections. Of course the hon. gentleman has a perfect right to change his opinion since then. As the Home Secretary said, one member of the Cabinet speaking does not bind the whole lot; but mostly in political history, when the Premier, just before a general election, is going round the country making

speeches, and indicating what is the Government policy, it looks, at the very least, playing it pretty low for his colleagues to be prepared to back down on it. It was stated by the Premier in February last that certain lines were to be exempted from this. The Premier may have been perfectly right in making that statement, but there are a lot of these lines that the Government consider they need not submit to this committee. In addition to that, there is another reason why I intend to vote against the Bill. At the very time when the Government are introducing this Bill, providing that a committee shall decide with regard to the construction of certain lines of railways, we know that there are at least two proposals coming down to hand over large tracts of country in North Queensland to syndicates to build railways. This committee is not to be asked to report on those lines. If there is one thing in this world that a committee should have been appointed to inquire into and report upon, it is whether it is advisable—in the present state of affairs in Australia, when State railways have been carried on so long, and so successfully in these colonies—for the Government of this colony to bring in a big system of syndicate railways in the North of Queensland. If this Bill is to be passed, why not leave all proposals for the construction of private lines to this committee, to collect evidence, not only in Queensland, but in all parts of Australia, where they have tried private railways, and where they have had to buy them back at huge expense? The committee should collect this evidence, and report to this House as to the advisability of Queensland going in tracks which other colonies have deserted long since. But we are not asked to do that. We are asked on the one hand—and this affects more especially the Northern members—to appoint certain members of this House to receive certain salaries to report on railways that the Government do not care about. And at the same time the Government is to be allowed to go outside this committee and hand over certain lines to syndicates in the North of Queensland! That is why I strongly object to the proposal, why I shall give my vote against the second reading, and in the hope that the Bill will be knocked out. There is another matter I should like to refer to, and which I may as well speak straight out about. I am not generally one who attaches much importance, or has very much to say, about political morality or anything of the kind; but what has happened in the New South Wales legislature has been happening here during the last month or so. Since there has been the talk about this committee, hon. members who have been looking forward to this little bit of a billet have been canvassing members on both sides. They have done it openly, and when that sort of thing is going on it is time hon. members spoke out and gave their opinions on it. I say that a man who will demean himself by going about and asking members to vote for him, for the sake of this, is not a man to whom we should entrust the destinies of the country. I would sooner leave them in the hands of the very worst Government that ever sat on the front Treasury benches. Members who will do that are not fit to be allowed to pass judgment on any railway in the smallest and most out of the way part of the colony. For these reasons I am going to vote against the motion.

* The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. A. Rutledge, *Maranoa*): I do not intend to take up much of the time of the House. I am rather surprised at the speech of the hon. the leader of the Labour Opposition this afternoon because while he is usually very logical in his arguments, on this particular occasion they were particularly weak and illogical. He said he would be disposed

to support a Bill of this sort if it were for the appointment of a public works committee, the public works to include, not only railways, but public works, public buildings included, involving the expenditure of public money. If the principle of a committee is good for all public works, it is good for some public works. If it is good at all, then it cannot be so bad as to justify all the strong arguments which have been adduced by hon. members opposite when expressing their disapprobation. As admitted by the Premier, it is possible for a majority of the House, when we get into committee, to decide that other public works than railways should be included; but as he also pointed out, this Bill was introduced for the purpose of appointing a committee to deal with railways only, and it was not proper that he should, on the motion for the second reading, alter the principle of the Bill so as to include other works. I am sorry, therefore, that some stronger argument has not been adduced by the hon. member than merely the fact that the Bill does not go far enough. He evidently does not disbelieve in the principle of a committee, and that knocks a lot of stuffing out of many of the arguments we have heard on the other side, that the committee is really no better for the purpose of deciding on matters of public expenditure than members of the House without the intervention of the committee.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: That is only his opinion.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: That is the opinion of an hon. gentleman who is entitled to be heard in this House, and whose opinions sway the opinions of a large number of members. If the hon. gentleman has no greater reason to urge for the rejection of the Bill than the fact that it does not include all public works of every conceivable kind, it is a very poor argument on which to take his stand, when he says, "I will vote against the second reading of the Bill." The hon. gentleman also said we had quite sufficient opportunity of getting all the information we require without the aid of a committee, and this sentiment was echoed by the hon. member for Brisbane North. Both hon. gentlemen agree that having a commissioner such as we have in Mr. Gray—and the colony is to be congratulated on having the services of a gentleman of such eminent abilities and qualifications for the position he holds—that if we are not able to get sufficient information from Mr. Gray and his officers the committee would not be able to get us any more. The hon. gentleman must remember that some of us have had an experience in this House before to-day, some of us remember when the recommendation of the Commissioners for the time being was overridden by a Government strong enough to disregard their recommendation on the one hand, and their protest against the construction of a railway on the other. That happened in 1889. At that time there was a strong Government in this House. I am not sure whether Sir Hugh Nelson or Mr. Morehead was Premier, but at all events, it was a very strong Government, with a very strong following. One of the proposals of the Government of that day was for the construction of a railway from Bundaberg, *via* Millaquin down to Burnett Heads, at the cost of a considerable sum of money. The Minister for Works—I think it was then the late Mr. Macrossan—brought down the proposal; but he could not avoid reading to the House the opinions of the Commissioners of that day upon it. Mr. Gray was very emphatic as to the impossibility of the line ever being reproductive. He said that not only was it not likely to return anything at present, but there was no future prospect of it being productive.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: Mr. Mathieson was a commissioner.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Mr. Gray was also a commissioner. I think there were three commissioners at the time, and two of them were against it. I will not say anything about Mr. Johnson; but I know that both the other gentlemen were emphatic. What was the argument of the Minister for Works? It was, "These commissioners are comparatively new to the colony. They do not know as much of the district and of the prospects of the future as those who have been long residents in the colony, as some of us have. We are, therefore, not entitled to attach as much importance to their opinions as we are able to attach to our own." I remember that the hon. member for Enoggera, Mr. Drake, joined with myself in the strongest denunciation of any attempt on the part of the Government to construct a railway in the face of the decision of the Commissioners. All the same, the thing was carried through by an overwhelming majority. Fortunately, owing to some circumstances, the reason of which I cannot recollect just now, the line has never been constructed. But there is an instance where a strong Government was able to carry a railway through the House in spite of the Commissioners.

Mr. HARDACRE: The same thing might occur under this Bill.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I do not think so, because in the case of the committee there will not only be the professional opinions of the engineers of the department to guide the committee, but there will be opportunities on the part of the committee to gather information from residents, not only interested residents, but disinterested residents. They will act the part of a jury in order to sift all the evidence and in order to be able to form an opinion as to who is giving evidence from biased motives and who is speaking in the public interest. We are constantly appointing these commissions for the purpose of getting evidence on a number of subjects, and they, on the evidence obtained as a result of their inquiries, make their recommendations to this House. We

[10 p.m.] have at the present time a Police Commission sitting, and not long ago we had a commission inquiring into the working of the Government Printing Office, and we are constantly having these commissions; and the House is accustomed to pay some deference to the findings of those commissions. What is a committee of this sort but a commission for the purpose of inquiring into the merits of the respective lines submitted to them, for taking all the evidence that is possibly procurable, and bringing down their recommendations to this House? I say we have not time in this House to make the necessary investigations to enable us to arrive at a proper conclusion with regard to any of these railways. As I interjected this afternoon, one advantage this committee would have would be that they would be able not only to take the interested evidence of persons who profess to know a great deal about a district in which a railway is proposed to be constructed, but who may simply want to get a railway constructed for the benefit of their own district, but they will be able to make a personal inspection of the country to be traversed. They will be able to travel over the whole ground, and there is nothing like personal observation and inspection to enable a body of intelligent men to come to an intelligent conclusion on the facts before them; they can apply what they have seen to what they have heard, and so come to an intelligent conclusion as to what is right and what is wrong in connection with the question. I have myself travelled over districts in which it has

been proposed to construct lines of railway, and the coachdriver has pointed out to me marks on trees which show the road to have been twenty feet under water in time of flood; and in cases where this committee obtained such information as that, it would be their duty to endeavour to ascertain if some other route could not be discovered. I was surprised to hear the remarks which fell from the hon. member for North Brisbane, Mr. Forrest, to whom I always listen with great pleasure, because I believe he really means what he says. I was, I say, a little surprised to hear him express himself in the way he did in regard to this committee, and to note the comparisons which he drew. The hon. member cannot see any good in this committee at all; he regards it simply in the light of a subterfuge, as a means of putting off railway construction to the indefinite future. He must have a very poor opinion indeed of the honesty of the Government if he comes to the conclusion that there is any such intention as that involved in this Bill. The Premier has pledged himself to railway construction, and, speaking for myself as one of his colleagues who has some little pretension to a decent share of honesty, I say, as far as I am concerned, I am desirous to see railway construction proceeded with, and I am sure there is not a member of the Government who is not sincerely anxious to promote railway construction, and to do it with no delay whatever, but as promptly as possible. But what does the hon. member for North Brisbane contend? He says in effect, "This Bill is only a fad; it is only a novelty. You say New South Wales has a committee, and that they have saved so many millions, and you are simply running after a novelty that is dangled before you by the people of New South Wales." In support of that argument he said that because New South Wales and Victoria had appointed three commissioners to manage their railways, we followed in their steps and also appointed three commissioners, but it was only a fad. I admit that we did a very foolish thing in incontinently following on the heels of other people, but the hon. member loses sight of the fact that at that time we seemed to be racing to see who should be the first to introduce a novel system. But that argument does not apply in the present case. Here we have a system which has been in operation in New South Wales for eleven years—I do not know how many years it has been in operation in Victoria—but it cannot be said that in adopting a system which has been tried for eleven years the House is going in for a novelty. These committees would not have lasted eleven years in New South Wales if they had not worked satisfactorily. The colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia did not retain their three railway commissioners long; the system was a novelty, and finding that it did not answer their expectations they abandoned it; but that has not been the case with the railway committees in Victoria or New South Wales. Therefore in crediting the Government with introducing a novelty, the success of which has not been proved, the hon. member is making a charge which falls to the ground. It is very easy to say that the Government should come down with their railway proposals, but hon. members should not lose sight of the fact that there are members in this House who have had a great many years' experience in it—I have had something like twenty-one years' experience of this House, though I have not been all the time in the House, and I have seen a great deal of the doings of the House in regard to railway construction. It was proved as long ago as 1878 that the only prospect the Government ever had of getting any railways, however desirable they might be, or however the public might

clamour for them, though the House was to bunch them with a number of other railways that everybody knew in their own consciences would not be likely to pay. We have not heard the last yet of what was called the £10,000,000 loan, and the £10,000,000 loan was an illustration of precisely the same thing. There can be no Government in this House, or in any other House, strong enough to carry its railway proposals through if they bring down only one line, or two or three lines, and say those are the only lines the colony demands, and those are the only lines we will construct. No Government is strong enough to be able to prevent the ill consequences that will follow the disappointment of a number of hon. members who think that the lines which they advocate for their own districts are the only lines that are needed in the interest of the country, and that are likely to pay from the start. Who, then, is to take the responsibility of saying which railways ought to be constructed? The appointment of the proposed committee will materially assist to a solution of that question. The hon. member for North Brisbane says the line to St. George is a line that must be built, and that all are agreed upon that. We have our individual opinions upon that subject. I have my opinion about it as well as the hon. member for North Brisbane, but because I think that that line ought to be constructed, and because the hon. member for North Brisbane holds the same opinion, that is no reason why the community generally should share exactly the same opinion. There are members of this House who know nothing whatever of the particular circumstances or facts connected with that country, and they want some information. A while ago, when the leader of the Opposition was speaking and referring to the line to Georgetown being a line which we were all agreed would pay and should be made, I interjected, "Who are the 'we' who are all agreed?" Those who know the country may be agreed upon it, but there may be some of us here who have never travelled over the country, and who are not in possession of the facts which are so strong in the estimation of the hon. gentleman as to justify the construction of the line in his opinion without any further delay. What we want is information, and information that has been thoroughly sifted and thoroughly ascertained.

Mr. LESINA: Of any kind at all.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: No, we want information that is reliable. In the same way that a case is established before a jury by all the facts that can be got in regard to it. They are all submitted to the jury who deal with the whole of the facts on the evidence submitted to them, and bring up their finding on those facts. That is just what this committee will do, though their decision will not be as binding as that of a jury. They will be a jury of this House for the purpose of hearing the evidence, forming their opinion upon it, and making their finding accordingly, and I say that the recommendations of a committee like that would be entitled to very great weight indeed. In saying this I do not disparage for a moment any finding that may be made by the Commissioner, but the Commissioner is only a mortal man, with a mortal man's limitations, and he cannot be expected to know all the country and all the facts. Although his engineers and surveyors, from their point of view, may say that this or that line can be most cheaply constructed, it may not be the line that is most desirable to construct for a great many reasons. We know that in the past important interests of settlers in this colony have been prejudiced by reason of surveyors who have had to survey roads not carrying them in directions likely to be suitable to future settlement, but according to the most scientific methods in vogue amongst sur-

veyors to the great detriment of the settlement of the future and of the public interests of the colony.

Mr. KIDSTON : Would not the committee be a mortal committee, too?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL : Although engineers may be more competent than anybody else to speak from their own scientific point of view with regard to the construction of a line, they would not be as well qualified as other persons, who would regard the subject from other points of view, would be to decide as to whether a particular line should be built. The whole of the evidence taken together would probably present an overwhelming case to any unprejudiced person, but to take one view without the other would be but to very partially investigate the merits of each proposal. The hon. member for Croydon, in speaking of some proposals—I do not know where he got his information—said some lines were going to be constructed by private enterprise, I do not find anything in the Governor's Speech with regard to the construction of lines in the Northern part of the colony by syndicates, and I do not think he was justified in using that as an argument one way or the other. But he said these are the railways that ought to be submitted to this committee. I say, why? Because he believed the committee would throw a great deal of light upon the question of the construction of those railways. But if he considers that the committee should have before them the question of the construction of a private line by a syndicate, what argument can be used for the purpose of suggesting that the committee should not have before them other lines of railway which it is proposed shall be constructed out of the public purse? I have said I do not intend to occupy the time of the House unnecessarily, but I did not care to remain silent without adding my small contribution to the elucidation of a question in which we are all interested, but upon the details of which all are not agreed.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS : Hear, hear !

* Mr. KENT : I shall not detain the House for long but I certainly must say that I am opposed to a works committee formed of members of the House.

MEMBERS of the Opposition : Hear, hear !

Mr. KENT : I am in favour of an independent board, such as our Land Board, to assist our Railway Commissioner, whose work is more than he has time to do. Nearly all our railways are built as developing agencies and it is not sufficient for the Commissioner or the works committee to travel over the proposed route only. To be able to estimate the value of the lines the whole of the country connected with them has to be thoroughly examined, and I fail myself to see how a committee composed of members of this House are going to do that. From my small experience of the House it seems probable we may be sitting nine months of the year, and that would leave the committee but three months in which to examine the lines. I cannot myself see how they could do it in the time. An independent committee I certainly should favour, and for that reason I shall vote for the second reading of the Bill, waiting until it gets into committee, to assist in amending the constitution of the committee, so as to introduce an independent board. I think members who have spoken before have said that such an independent board would carry no weight, but I may mention that a small independent board visited Nanango, and after travelling through that district for a short time they discovered country that was thoroughly unknown to Brisbane, with the result that while the district had in vain been agitating for a railway for years and years we now find Brisbane agitating to get railway communication with it.

Mr. ANNEAR : The city members want it all.

Hon. E. B. FORREST : They want as much as they can get.

Mr. KENT : They will not get it all though they may get some. An independent board could travel through the country and report, but as to the Commissioner travelling I know the Commissioner travelled over the Gayndah line himself, and the line might depend on the Commissioner's report; but at the same time I think that if the railway committee here proposed travelled over that line they would probably go over the same ground as the Commissioner and gain no more information. The whole value of that line is dependent on the country outside it. With so much time as I have seen wasted here, I do not see how a committee composed of members of this House is going to have time to properly examine the lines, and I am afraid the result would be that the whole of the lines would be shelved indefinitely. For the reasons I have given I intend to vote for the second reading of the Bill in the hope of securing an independent board when the Bill gets into committee.

Mr. McDONALD : You cannot under this Bill.

Mr. KENT : I understand the Committee can amend the Bill.

Mr. McDONALD : You cannot introduce an independent board into it.

Mr. MAXWELL : I do not intend to let this Bill go through without entering my protest against it. The hon. gentleman who has just sat down said he intended to support the Bill, but when it got into committee he intended to try and amend it, so as to provide for an independent board. But the hon. member will see, by the title of the Bill, that it is intended to provide for the appointment of a "Parliamentary" Standing Committee on Railway Works, and there is no getting beyond the fact that the Bill starts out with the purpose of making a parliamentary committee to report upon the construction of railways throughout Queensland. The Attorney-General, before he sat down, referred to the statement of my hon. colleague, the hon. member for Croydon, that if there was any good to be done by a standing parliamentary committee it would be in having their report upon railways proposed to be constructed by concessions to private syndicates. I think it would be a very good thing if inquiries were made into these railways. There is no getting away from the fact that the people who go in for these railways do so as a business matter. They are hard-headed business men, and they look for their 10 per cent. ; and seeing that they go in for them to make money, I think it is the duty of the State to make those railways, and thereby benefit the coffers of the State. The first thing that strikes me in the Bill is that one member of the committee is to be appointed by the Governor in Council, though there is no such provision in either the New South Wales Act or the Victorian Act. We have been asked to believe that the committees in those colonies have saved an immense amount of money, but I take it that saving money in railway construction is saving on what has actually been accomplished by the Government, and not on what the Government have been asked to build. In the Acts of New South Wales and Victoria it is provided that the chairman and the vice-chairman shall be elected by the committee, and I think it is a very curious idea for the Government to ask us to support a proposal that the Governor in Council shall appoint the chairman of this committee. I think the least they could do would be to allow the members of the committee to elect their own chairman. Though

no person has approached me in the matter I am confident that there has been a great amount of canvassing going on in connection with appointments as members of this committee. One thing that strikes me is a question that has been asked a good many times, and which the Premier took exception to not long ago, and that is whether there is any business in this Bill. If there is any business in it I contend that it is too late in the session to do it now and it ought to have been introduced as soon as the Address in Reply was through; but probably it is a contentious matter, and the Premier did not care to deal with it then. Like a good many more who have spoken to-night, the Minister for Lands said this Bill was to provide a buffer between the Government and those who are advocating the construction of railways in different parts of the colony, and I think it is a sort of pneumatic buffer which will allow the Government to land very easily, not with the good hard slump they used to get in the old days. I take it that no matter what party is in power they have the greatest say in the appointment of the railways committee. There are to be three members of the Upper House, and we must grant that they will be supporters of the Government; then there is the chairman, who is to be appointed by the Governor in Council, and he also will be a supporter of the Government; then divide the remainder up and you will find that as far as representation on the committee is concerned, this side of the House will have two members out of seven. And then we are asked to believe that this is a non-party question, and that this is to be done for the benefit of the whole of Queensland, that everything will be thrashed out by this committee, and the report will be handed to this House to give a verdict upon. Let me quote a measure that went through this House some time ago—that is, in the matter of the extension of the Croydon to Georgetown Railway. We find that it went through this House with one dissentient voice, and when it got to the Upper House it was thrown out by fourteen to nine.

The TREASURER: Because they had not sufficient information, they said.

Mr. MAXWELL: This House had the information at their command, or presumably they had the information at their command, when it was passed through this House unanimously almost.

The TREASURER: But the Upper House said they had not sufficient information.

Mr. MAXWELL: To come to later times we find in the report made by the Mining Commission that they reported in connection with the extension of the line towards the Etheridge from Croydon, as will be seen on page 197 of "Votes and Proceedings" for the year 1897, vol. IV.—

The undoubted resources of this field would probably receive a great impetus if the means of communication with it were better. A railway from Normanton to Croydon exists within 100 miles of Georgetown, and, if this line was extended, not only would the field be more easily approached, but the sending away of concentrates of the refractory ores might be made possible and profitable. We therefore strongly recommend the extension of the Croydon line to Georgetown or some other suitable centre of the Etheridge field.

The hon. member for Cook dissented from that finding. He thought that probably it would be better to make a connection with the eastern coast.

The SPEAKER (Hon. Arthur Morgan, Warwick): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. gentleman, but I entirely fail to see what connection the matter he is now discussing has with the subject before the House.

Mr. MAXWELL: I was only wishing to illustrate the fact that this House did not always agree with the reports sent in for consideration. Coming back to the appointments and

making a fresh start, I may say that the appointments seem to be a sort of promising affair. I may say that the present Government have been a very promising Government. There has been no railway brought forward that they have not promised in some way to consider; and when they have found that they could not conscientiously promise to consider it, they have said, "Well, when the railway committee is appointed we will leave this matter to them and they will consider it." There is no doubt it is very promising. Like the hon. member for Burnett, I believe that if this measure was brought in in such a manner as to provide for a committee that was not a parliamentary committee I could not say that I would vote against it. Previous to my election I promised my constituents that, if returned, I would [10:30 p.m.] do my best to see that a works committee was appointed to deal with all public works throughout the colony. But this committee is to be composed entirely of members of Parliament, and I agree with the hon. member for Flinders that if a member of Parliament is to honestly earn his £300 a year he will have quite enough to do without also being on the railways standing committee. Clause 9 of the Bill provides that—

The committee may from time to time obtain the assistance as assessors of persons possessing engineering or technical knowledge, or possessing special local knowledge or experience.

I hold that if we are to have a committee at all, in justice to the taxpayers of the colony it ought to consist of men with special knowledge of engineering and technical knowledge of railway work. I am well aware that many of our railways in the past have been nothing but political jobs, but I have no fear of anything of the kind occurring in the future. I have every confidence in the ability of the House and in its wisdom to prevent anything of that sort. If they believe that a proposed railway will be for the benefit of the country they will see that the money is voted for it. If, on the other hand, they think it is to be built for nothing but political jobbery, they will certainly vote against it. Like the hon. member for North Brisbane, I believe that the House as a whole is just as good a judge as to the suitability or otherwise of any particular railway as any standing committee selected from the members of the House would be. It will be almost impossible to get men who are not prejudiced one way or the other. Whatever railway is before the committee they will support it or condemn it on grounds of their own, whatever facts may be brought before them. Reading the papers previous to the general election, I noticed that the Premier promised various lines of railway. He now tells us that this committee will have to report upon them before they can be sanctioned. He places the committee as a buffer between himself and those who are agitating for railways. The 4th subsection of clause 8 of the Bill provides that if any person who has been summoned to attend as a witness before the committee, and who refuses to appear and to give evidence—

The SPEAKER: Order! I would remind the hon. member that it is contrary to the practice of the House to discuss the clauses of a Bill in detail on the motion for the second reading.

Mr. MAXWELL: I was merely going to refer—other speakers have referred to it—to the fact that the chairman of the committee is also to be a court of law, able to fine up to £50, or to sentence to a month's imprisonment—against which no appeal is provided in the Bill. If the chairman is to have this great power conferred upon him, I would suggest that some sort of

appeal ought to be allowed. I would also refer to the question of travelling expenses. A member of the committee may probably be living twenty miles outside Brisbane. He could get away from the House on Friday night, and get back on the Saturday morning, and besides getting the fee provided in the Bill he could claim a guinea a day for travelling expenses. When the Bill gets into committee—which I hope it will not do; I should like to see it defeated on its second reading—the clause ought to be amended in this particular. Of course I should like to see it amended in many ways, especially in the form suggested by the hon. member for Burnett; but as I know that will be impossible, I intend to vote against the second reading on that ground alone. I say that it would have been much better if the Government had come down and told us candidly about the appointments in connection with this committee. It seems to me that this Bill is brought in only to suit a lot of political discontents.

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: As a consolation stakes.

Mr. MAXWELL: I do not know that it is a consolation stakes. I think it is just like the maiden plate—to give them a start.

Mr. KERR: The fees will be a consolation.

Mr. MAXWELL: The fees will not be a consolation at all. They will then get only what is left; but this is like a maiden plate; it is only a beginning. Here we have the chairman of this committee getting £2 2s. a day and the other members getting £1 11s. 6d. a day. How long is this to last? The hon. gentleman should have come down and told us what the actual cost of this committee is going to be. If the cost is going to be £10,000, it will be £10,000 very badly spent.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: It may be only half.

Mr. MAXWELL: Well, if it is going to be half, it is just as bad.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: That is your opinion.

Mr. MAXWELL: Of course it is my opinion, and I think this Bill is not the opinion of the hon. gentleman who introduced it, but he has to calmly swallow it. I hold that if the Railway Commissioner is worth the amount of money we are spending on him, surely this House ought to rely on the information he supplies without also appointing a committee of members from this House to supply us with some more information at a higher cost, which information may not be reliable. If we cannot rely on the information supplied by the present head of the Railway Department, how are we going to rely on the information supplied by members of this House? We have a better chance of attacking the position of the Commissioner for Railways than we have of attacking the members of this House who occupy positions on this committee. I hold that the proper hold to have on an officer is to have the right of sacking him or of keeping him on; but in the case of a committee, composed of members of this House, how do we find ourselves? We shall have this committee appointed for a certain period, and we cannot interfere with the people who send their representatives into this House. But, on the other hand, at a moment's notice we can do away with the services of the Commissioner for Railways, or anyone else in the Railway Department, when we find they send in reports that cannot be relied on. So far we have found that the Commissioner has supplied us with the best up-to-date information

procurable. We also find that many lines have been proposed by the Government which he did not favour, and, if my information is correct, the Commissioner has actually refused to report in favour of them, although pressed to do so by the hon. gentleman at the head of that department. Therefore, I hold that it would be nothing more or less than an insinuation on the Commissioner by appointing this committee—an insinuation that he is not fit for his position. If this House thinks it is necessary to appoint a committee of this kind, then it behoves the Minister to do away with the services of Mr. Gray. I do not intend to say any more on this question, but I will certainly vote against the second reading of this Bill. I would also commend the heading of this Bill to the hon. member for Burnett, before he casts his vote.

The TREASURER: He is sure to take your advice.

Mr. MAXWELL: I give the advice gratis. He has been gulled into believing that the heading of the Bill can be altered, and I say again that I commend the heading to the hon. member.

Mr. FORSYTH: I beg to move the adjournment of the debate.

The PREMIER: I had hoped that hon. members on both sides of the House would have enabled us to come to a division on this second reading to-night. Considering the short time at our disposal this session, it is desirable that hon. members should curtail their speeches; but as I understand that hon. members on both sides of the House desire that the debate should be now adjourned, I have no objection to that. But in view of the arrangement made with the leader of the Opposition, it will be understood that a division will be taken on the second reading to-morrow evening.

Question put and passed.

The PREMIER: I beg to move that the resumption of this debate stand an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

Question put and passed.

The House adjourned at forty-eight minutes past 10 o'clock.