

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates  
[Hansard]

**Legislative Assembly**

**FRIDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 1923**

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FRIDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER, 1923.

The SPEAKER (Hon. W. Bertram, *Marcc*) took the chair at 3.30 p.m.

QUESTIONS.

GOONDOON-KALLIWA RAILWAY.

Mr. BRAND (*Burrum*) asked the Secretary for Railways—

“Will he supply the following particulars relating to the Goondoon-Kalliwa line passed by Parliament:—

1. What is the total length of the survey?

2. What is the mileage of line (a) completed, and (b) partly completed?

3. At what date did the construction of the line commence?

4. At what date did the work of construction cease?

5. What amount of money has been expended on the construction of—(a) completed section; (b) partly completed section?

6. What was the estimated cost of the construction of the line at its commencement?

7. What was the Government's reason for stopping the work?

8. What reason does he advance for not completing to the Perry River since the earthworks formation is practically completed to that point?

9. Is he aware that the completion of this line to the Perry River would bring many thousand acres of land under sugar cultivation, and would be the means of materially assisting the Government's interest in the Gin Gin Central Mill?

10. Will he again confer with his colleagues and urge the construction of this line?”

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS (Hon. J. Larcombe, *Kcpper*) replied—

“1. 39 miles 60 chains.

“2. (a) 12½ miles; (b) 5 miles.

“3. 3rd April, 1926.

“4. 20th December, 1920.

“5. (a) £113,405; (b) £9,933.

“6. £257,455.

“7 to 10. Cabinet decided not to continue the construction further at present.”

ADDITIONAL CANE SUPPLIES FOR GIN GIN CENTRAL SUGAR-MILL FROM RAILWAY TO PERRY RIVER.

Mr. BRAND asked the Treasurer—

“Is it the opinion of the Sugar Bureau that the construction of the railway line to a point near the Perry River would assist the Gin Gin Central Mill to provide a supply of cane equal to the mill requirements?”

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS (Hon. W. McCormack, *Cairns*) replied—

“Parliamentary procedure prevents the seeking of an expression of opinion by way of question.

HOLIDAY FOR REFERENDUM ON LIQUOR QUESTION.

Mr. BRAND, without notice, asked the Secretary for Public Lands—

“Is it the intention of the Govern-

ment to grant a holiday to their employees on 6th October, the polling day on the liquor question? If so, will those who are asked to work receive pay at the rate of time and a-half?”

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS replied—

“It is not intended to grant a holiday.”

PAPER.

The following paper was laid on the table:—

Reply to a question asked on the 26th instant by the hon. member for Aubigny regarding the Queensland Egg Board.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

Mr. HYNES (*Tounsville*): I desire to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House that the hon. member be allowed to make a personal explanation?

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. HYNES: In the “Brisbane Courier” of to-day's date I am incorrectly reported as to my speech on the Railway Estimates. The “Courier” reports me as follows:—

“Mr. Hynes admitted that he was getting tired of the carping criticism and perpetual whine about losses on the railways, and said the railways could easily be made pay by increasing freights and fares.”

What I actually did say—as can be borne out by the speech which will appear in “Hansard”—was—

“I am getting tired of listening to the carping criticism of the Opposition against the railway administration of the Government and their perpetual whining about the loss on the Queensland railways. Queensland is a State of very large distances. We have the largest mileage of railways of any of the States of the Commonwealth, and naturally the cost of running our railways would be greater than it would be in the States that have a larger population and a smaller mileage. One would think, judging by the remarks of members opposite, that the railways in the other States were paying, but it is rather a significant fact that the railways in the Tory-governed States are showing deficits also. A person does not need to be a genius like Karl Marx to conceive a method of making the railways pay. It is an easy thing to make the railways pay by increasing the rates and fares, but such a policy would retard land settlement, and therefore does not commend itself to this Government.”

SUPPLY.

RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE—SEVENTH ALLOTTED DAY.

Question stated—

“That £22,630 be granted for ‘Department of Public Works—Chief Office.’”

Mr. MAXWELL (*Toowong*): In 1912, the Premier, when he was in opposition, deplored the excessive expenditure of loan money, and prophesied that under a Labour Government even railways would be built out of revenue. Yesterday the hon. member

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for Enoggera, in discussing loan expenditure, only touched lightly upon the matter, and I now propose to give the figures relating to expenditure on buildings from the Consolidated Revenue and Loan Funds, respectively, from 1912-13—

Year.	Expenditure from—		Total.	Percentage from Loan Fund.
	Revenue.	Loan.		
	£	£	£	%
1912-13 ..	165,438	51,698	217,136	24
1913-14 ..	169,750	68,819	238,569	29
1914-15 ..	190,438	73,353	263,791	28

We now come to the time when a Labour Government came into power—

Year.	Expenditure from—		Total.	Percentage from Loan Fund.
	Revenue.	Loan.		
	£	£	£	%
1915-16 ..	135,145	127,924	263,069	49
1916-17 ..	122,693	135,764	258,457	53
1917-18 ..	98,122	105,259	203,381	52
1918-19 ..	101,410	113,669	215,079	53
1919-20 ..	89,547	168,583	258,130	65
1920-21 ..	99,817	220,935	320,752	69
1921-22 ..	79,991	161,120	241,111	64
1922-23 ..	96,008	164,794	260,802	64

It seems to me that, when some gentlemen on the other side were on this side of the Chamber, they pointed out to the Government of the day at that period what they were prepared to do in the event of their occupying the Treasury benches. They pointed out how they would handle the finances of this State, and how they would undertake the construction of the railways out of revenue. We find now proof positive that they are using money for these purposes from the Loan Fund.

The figures I have quoted prove conclusively the argument put forward by the hon. member for Enoggera that the Government are working on a false foundation. It was good enough to criticise the then Government and recommend certain things when they sat in opposition.

That brings me to a statement made by an hon. member sitting on the Treasury benches. He said that if his party were sitting on this side of the Chamber they could find fault with practically everything and anything and oppose it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I could find fault with a good many things, too.

Mr. MAXWELL: No doubt the hon. gentleman could find fault with his own political colleagues if he liked, quite apart from me—a member of the Opposition.

I do not feel disposed to let a vote such as this pass without entering my protest against the system that is in operation in the Works Department, notwithstanding the fact that it is the policy of the Government. I refer to the system of day labour as against contract.

A GOVERNMENT MEMBER: What about the sewerage works?

Mr. MAXWELL: I think the less said about sewerage works the better. I shall leave that to someone else who is used to

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getting into sewers. When you come to consider the position, it must be evident that a number of business people are actually finding the money for the Government to set aside for this department to compete against themselves. When the Minister boasts in his report of the amount of money spent by his department on Government buildings, there is one thing he must not lose sight of, and that is that he has entered into competition with a section of the people on whom the Government are levying taxation to be used for the purpose of killing them.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Do you suggest that we want to kill people?

Mr. MAXWELL: So far as his Labour principles are concerned, I believe the hon. gentleman would be quite prepared to wipe out any industry that happened to be politically adverse to his opinion. I do not believe for one moment that he would commit murder, but if it were necessary to remove from his sphere of activity or eliminate the unfortunate "boss," so that the hon. gentleman could have the whole of the work available, he would be prepared to carry out the principles of the Labour party and do so. One can quite understand that he would not be in his present position if he were not prepared to carry out the policy enunciated by his party.

I desire to draw attention to a statement made last night by the hon. member for Warwick. If it is a question of spending a greater amount of money in the country, with a view to providing better equipment and better housing, or of undertaking similar expenditure in the city, preference should be given to the country. I do not like the sentiments that are sometimes expressed in the House pitting the country against the city. If we are going to make Queensland the finest State in the Commonwealth—as I really believe it already is—if it is to be developed to the utmost, we must take a broadminded view of the position, and do what is best in the interests of the country. I realise at the same time that in the capital city of the State, where we have the seat of the Government, it is absolutely essential to have a certain amount of expenditure. But when the seat of Government has had its activities attended to, and has had its various offices placed in proper working order, there are other things to be attended to.

I find on analysing the expenditure from the Consolidated Revenue and the Loan Fund, that the country, and not the city, has received the greater amount of money.

The expenditure from the Consolidated Revenue and the Loan Fund in Brisbane, South Brisbane, and suburbs has been—

Public Buildings, furniture, and fittings	£
...	5,403
Erection, repairs, etc.	120,735
Schools	12,635

Making a grand total for the city of ... .. £135,250

Just let us have a look at what the country has received. I do not think it is necessary for me again to emphasise the fact that I am not objecting to this expenditure; if it is essential, by all means let it be made. I believe that we should spend more money

if it is necessary to make the people in the country contented and comfortable.

Expenditure from the Consolidated Revenue and the Loan Fund in the country has been—

	£
Public buildings, furniture, and fittings	2,437
Erection, repairs, etc.	84,175
Schools	84,173

Making a total for the country of ... £170,785

It will thus be seen that £170,785 has been expended in the country, as against £138,230 in the town.

I am quoting these figures so that there will be no disputing that the city is not receiving greater recognition than the country.

The Department of Public Works is now becoming a great spending department, and it is the duty of every member of this Committee to secure the greatest possible information in connection with the buildings that are going on—as to the anticipated cost of the buildings; and also as to what the buildings are actually costing. Irrespective of the policy of the Labour party, an opportunity should be given to some of the taxpayers of this State—the men who are finding the money for the Government to spend—to submit estimates in competition with the officers of the department. If the builders outside are not competent to compete with the officers of the department, I am not going to stand in the way. I say by all means let the officers of the department do the work; but let them all tender on the same plans and specification. If that is done, nobody can find fault, as a fair deal will be given, not only to the builders who employ a large number of men, but also to the public whom we represent.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS:** Men have to be employed on the job whether it is done by contract or by day labour.

**MR. MAXWELL:** We have heard a good deal of talk about the shortage of labour in Brisbane to-day. I say, and I emphasise it, that it is the duty of the Government to govern and not to trade. The Government have no right to enter into competition with a section of the taxpayers of this State. All one has to do is to analyse the departmental report to see the number of Acts that the Secretary for Public Works has to administer. According to page 5 of the report, he has to administer the Industrial Arbitration Acts, 1916 to 1923; the Unemployed Workers' Insurance Act of 1922; the Factories and Shops Acts, 1900-1922; the Inspection of Machinery Acts of 1915; the Inspection of Scaffolding Act of 1915; the Workers' Homes Acts, 1919 to 1922; the workers' dwellings section of the State Advances Act of 1916; the Labour Exchanges Act of 1915; the Workers' Accommodation Acts, 1915 to 1921; the Electric Light and Power Act of 1896; the Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Acts, 1909-1921; the Gas Act of 1916; the Trade Union Act of 1915; the Weights and Measures Acts, 1906 to 1912; the Cairns Hydro-Electric Power Investigation Board Act of 1922; and the Water Power Act of 1922. And the hon. gentleman is tabling more Bills with octopus tentacles to try and secure control of other things.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS:** You did not quote them all. There is the State Enterprises Act.

**MR. MAXWELL:** I know about that, but the Chairman would bring me up with a round turn if I dealt with that. It has been such a bungle that one does not need to mention it. One would imagine that with such a conglomeration of matters to attend to, the hon. gentleman would have had quite sufficient to do, without entering into competition with a section of the taxpayers. Notwithstanding all that, the hon. gentleman will not give an opportunity to the builders of this community to make estimates or submit tenders for work in connection with his department, owing to the principle that has been enunciated by his party that day labour must obtain. After an experience practically of a lifetime, I tell the hon. gentleman that day labour is a farce and a failure under Government or under municipal control.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS:** Tell us something about the Warrnambool break-water. That was a contract job.

**MR. MAXWELL:** There is no need to tell the hon. gentleman anything about that. We need not go to Warrnambool. There are any amount of bungles here, without going as far as Warrnambool, and the hon. gentleman ought to be the last man to talk about bungles.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS:** What about the tunnels on the Cairns railway?

**MR. MAXWELL:** I know nothing about the wrongs that have taken place there. I am dealing with the condition of affairs as they exist to-day. The hon. gentleman and his colleagues know full well that these mistakes are occurring repeatedly, but simply because it is the policy of the Government, they still perpetuate them. I want to emphasise that point.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS:** The Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board are not too sure about the contract system.

**MR. MAXWELL:** I would advise the hon. gentleman not to say anything about the Water and Sewerage Board and the work which has been done by them—I am not going to be drawn into that matter. The hon. gentleman knows that an expert was brought up from the South to advise as to the best means to adopt in regard to the sewerage system, and he recommended the contract system. If hon. members opposite want work done for themselves, we know that they let it out by contract, if they do not do it themselves. They are not going to allow this pernicious system of day labour to enter their own homes.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS:** Why is the Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board reverting to day labour on its works?

**MR. MAXWELL:** That matter has been exposed.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS:** It is not a Labour board.

**MR. MAXWELL:** I know it is not a Labour board.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS:** It is a Tory board.

**MR. MAXWELL:** I am aware of what the hon. gentleman refers to and also of a lot of other things, but I am not going to tell the hon. gentleman about them.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS:** Why keep them dark?

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Mr. MAXWELL: There is another matter to which I want to draw the attention of hon. members—that is in connection with the old Trades Hall in Brisbane, the estimated cost of the altering which was £2,637. When an application was made by the Trade Unions for the removal of the hall to another site, it was stated that, owing to the unsafe condition of the building, it was absolutely essential to get away to another site. My contention is that, if that building was unsafe for its then occupants—the Trade Unions—it is absolutely unsafe now. That savours of something very fishy, and is something which requires some inquiry. It is good enough for the Workers' Education Association, the Agricultural Council, and the Teachers' Training College, but it was not good enough for the Trade Unions.

Mr. PEASE: They are men of weight. (Laughter.)

Mr. MAXWELL: That is more than I can say of the hon. member—he is a feather-weight. (Laughter.) I want to know why these should be that much waste and extravagance upon a building such as that, after what we have heard on the floor of this Chamber and elsewhere to the effect that the building was in danger owing to the railway underneath, and would have to be removed for railway purposes. I would like to have some explanation on that point.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: You should have discussed that on the Railway Estimates.

Mr. MAXWELL: No; we have got it on this vote.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: It has nothing to do with this vote.

Mr. MAXWELL: I know that the hon. gentleman has no intention of side-tracking anything, and is willing to give all the information he possibly can; but if I cannot get the information here, I will get it in another place.

As touching the amount of money which is being spent in the cities as compared with the amount which is being expended in the country, I would draw attention [4 p.m.] to the erection of the Hamilton cold stores, which we know very well are going to be used by the primary producers of the State. Every opportunity and every facility should be offered to the primary producers to conduct their business under the most favourable conditions, but the question has been raised by experts as to whether a wrong was not done by the Minister in charge of the Department of Agriculture at the time in placing the stores in the position in which they are being built.

I should like also to refer to the deplorable condition of some of our public buildings. I have in mind, for instance, the Supreme Court building, which I mentioned on the Estimates last year. Unless the Minister takes that building in hand and repairs and paints it, he will have to scrap it. I also refer him to the Treasury Building, which badly requires attention. I think it was Wellington who said, "There is one thing above all others you need to do, and that is to look well to your front." There is no necessity to go inside the Treasury Buildings, or many other public buildings, to realise the necessity for some attention. Let the Government look well to the front

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of their buildings in the interest of their preservation and keeping them up to date.

Although I do not want to work the parish pump, I must deal with some of the schools in my electorate. I refer particularly to the Taringa school, which, as the Minister well knows, is as rough as an alligator's back. Something should be done for the painting of that school. Some work at the Toowong school also is necessary, and, although I notice that twenty-one new schools have been erected in and around Brisbane, I would take this opportunity of bringing under the notice of the hon. gentleman the need for a new school at Auchenflower.

The bell indicated that the hon. member's time had expired.

Mr. GLEDSON (*Upswich*): I would like the Minister, when replying, to give us some idea as to the reason for the reduction in the item for the Architectural Branch. I am aware of the good work that this branch has been able to do in the preparation of plans, and I should like to know whether the reduction in the vote means that the office will not be as efficient and as capable of carrying on the work as in the past. I think that we can say that the branch has been able to prepare plans to which nobody could take exception. I have no complaint to make about the work it has done for buildings in my electorate. In view of the time that it sometimes takes to get draftsmen on to a particular job one would think that it would be necessary to put on additional draftsmen rather than decrease the number.

Another matter to which I would like the hon. gentleman to give some attention when replying is whether it would not be possible to utilise the services of the building trade apprentices of his department in the drafting office for, say, six months of their apprenticeship, to give them a chance to learn something of the work that goes on there. Not only would such a practice teach them about the drafting work, but it would also make them better tradesmen.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: That is a very good idea. I will go into it.

Mr. GLEDSON: It would help the boys, and they would be able to read plans very much better and become very much better workmen than otherwise.

Another item on which I would like some information is the vote of £700 as a grant to the Cairns Hydro-Electric Power Investigation Board. Is that a private board, or is it under the direction of the Government?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: It is established under the Act passed last session, and is appointed by the local authorities.

Mr. GLEDSON: It was a matter I was not very sure about. The hon. member for Toowong certainly championed the cause of the master builders of the State this afternoon. He took up practically all his time in trying to say something for them. During the eight or nine years the Government have been in office nobody has been able to point the finger of scorn at any of the works which they have carried out, whether by day labour or contract. That cannot be said of the control by hon. members opposite and their friends. Pick up any paper you like and see what is going on under some of the Governments. Take, for instance, the inquiry which is going on into the War Service Homes! Look at the

Warrambool breakwater case, or the building of the Commonwealth ships, and compare any of them with the clean record of this Government under the day labour system! The most that can be said against that system is that the workmen engaged in the actual work may get too much—

Mr. VOWLES: Do you admit that?

Mr. GLEDSON: But it cannot be said that anybody engaged in the work is getting anything out of it. The members of the Government and the members of the Opposition do not get anything out of it, and the only ones who get anything out of it are the men actually engaged in the work. We could certainly let contracts for certain work, and I suppose it could be done more cheaply than by day labour; but you know that, when you came to examine it afterwards, you would find that you had not got the same class of work, quite independently of whether the specification was the same or not.

Mr. VOWLES: Is that not a commentary on the inspectors?

Mr. GLEDSON: It is not. An inspector cannot be on the job all the time. If so, you would need an army of inspectors to watch practically every job, and in that case what would the cost to the department be? It would include not only the time of the contractor himself but the expense of the other man watching him all the time. As the hon. member for Bowen reminds me, inspectors under previous Administrations winked their eye at certain work that was done. It was allowed to pass because the inspectors were controlled by politicians, I suppose—by men who were controlled by the contractors—practically speaking—and working in collusion with them.

What does the hon. member for Toowong say in connection with contract work with respect to his business? Someone will come along and say to him, "Look at the state this place is in." The reply is, "Oh, the wind blew the paint off." (Opposition laughter.) Under the contract system work can be turned out more cheaply, but the work is not as good as the work done under the day-labour system. I am not going to say that every job carried out under the day-labour system has been successfully and economically accomplished. In certain instances there may have been things which militated against the chance of the work being done economically. Just as you require good management in connection with the contract system, so you also require good management in connection with the day-labour system. The Labour Government have initiated the policy of day labour in Queensland, and I say without fear of contradiction, after thirty-five years' experience in Queensland under all systems of working—contract, day labour, and piecework—that work is carried out better under the day-labour system with proper supervision and proper management than under any other system.

The hon. member for Toowong also referred to the old Trades Hall, and said that there was something in connection with it that savoured of something very fishy in relation to the Department of Public Works. That building, as everyone knows, is erected over the railway line. The hon. gentleman knows that there is nothing fishy about the business. The action in connection with that building was made public. As the building was erected over the tunnel, the Railway

Department obtained a report on the matter, and as a result of that report it was deemed advisable to resume the land so that the building could be demolished and thus do away with such a weight on top of the tunnel.

Mr. MAXWELL: More money is being spent on the building.

Mr. GLEDSON: The hon. member knows that the whole matter was thrashed out in the Land Court, and reasons were given as to why the building was to be demolished. The whole of the proceedings were published in the Press. The hon. member for Toowong knows that, yet he comes into this Chamber and says that the matter of the Trades Hall Council being turned out of their building and having to go to the expense of erecting a new building savoured of something fishy. It is not that that concerns the hon. member at all. All that concerns the hon. member and his friends is that the Trades Hall Council were able to obtain a site in Brisbane for the erection of another Trades Hall.

Mr. VOWLES: They obtained a freehold, too.

Mr. GLEDSON: The hon. member for Toowong and his friends would have liked to drive the trade unions and the Trades Hall Council out of Brisbane altogether and put them somewhere where they would not have a place to meet in.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I hope the hon. gentleman will not pursue that line of argument.

Mr. GLEDSON: I am aware that the hon. member for Toowong was not in order, and I am not going to pursue that line of argument. Mr. Kirwan, now that you inform me that I am not in order in doing so. There are other matters that I would like to touch upon, but perhaps I shall deal with them on another vote.

Mr. MORGAN (*Murilla*): The hon. member for Ipswich knows perfectly well that even under the day-labour system the officers in charge of the men have not full power and authority. He knows that it is possible for a huge expenditure to be incurred under that system without an adequate benefit being received in return. It is just as possible for men employed under the day-labour system to rob the community as it is for those employed under the contract system. If you see a man in the course of his work wheeling only one barrow of muck when he should really be wheeling two, it is quite possible that that work will cost double the amount that it should if the men were giving a fair return for the wages they are receiving. The whole trouble is that men will loaf on the Government just the same as they will loaf on private contractors if they are allowed to do so. A great deal depends on the overseers or the men in charge of the different gangs. The trouble lies in the fact that perhaps in some instances those in charge of the different gangs are not supported by the Government or departmental heads in regard to the dismissal of that take place. An overseer may dismiss a man who is a loafer, and the rest of the men simply down tools and the overseer receives no consideration from the department. The overseer will say that his bread and butter depends upon retaining his position, in the same way as the worker's bread and butter depends upon retaining his job. Unfortunately, when the overseer or ganger in charge is not supported by the Minister

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or the official head of the department, he naturally says, "Why should I trouble? I am going to take the line of least resistance and let the men do just as they desire, because, if I do otherwise, I am not going to be backed up by the department and I may be removed to another job and the man whom I have dismissed because he did not give a fair return for the wages he received will be reinstated."

Mr. PEASE: That is a nice fairy tale.

Mr. MORGAN: It is not a fairy tale. I have conversed with men in charge of gangs in my own electorate and in other parts of Queensland in the same way as I would inquire of any other person as to how things are going on.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: How are huge industries run under the day-labour system?

Mr. VOWLES: Because there is sufficient supervision.

Mr. MORGAN: Under the contract system, if a man is dismissed because he is not giving a fair return for his wages, the person responsible for that dismissal is backed up by his employer. Unfortunately, in many cases under the day-labour system—the Minister knows that what I am saying is true—such is not always the case.

Mr. PEASE: You had better not say that to the Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board.

Mr. MORGAN: We know that, when a man is dismissed, other men will down tools and go on strike.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I have never reinstated a man who has been justly dismissed.

Mr. VOWLES: The matter never got that far.

Mr. MORGAN: If a man is sacked and is then reinstated, the men make the ganger's life miserable, and eventually that ganger has to consent to a transfer or is transferred, and it is stated that it is done because he cannot get on with the men employed under him. That is why the day-labour system carried on by the Government is not as satisfactory as it would be under other circumstances.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The workmen will not be exploited.

Mr. MORGAN: It is not a matter of exploitation.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It is exploitation of muscles and sinews.

Mr. MORGAN: The Secretary for Public Lands knows that often in a gang of ten men perhaps one will be found who will loaf on his companions. He wants his fellow workers to do his share of the work too.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They have to do that under our social system. What will that man have to do—starve?

Mr. MORGAN: I have known in gangs of five or six men who have combined to carry on ringbarking that where one of the number is not doing his fair share of the work the others insist upon him leaving, because he is loafing and compelling them to do some of the work that he should reasonably be expected to do.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What would you do with that class of man?

Mr. MORGAN: Would it not be better to give him a pension, if necessary, rather than allow him to cause disturbance amongst his

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work mates? The hon. gentleman, who has had experience among gangs of men, knows that one man can cause dissatisfaction among many good workers and have a gang always in a state of turmoil. It is that sort of thing that Government officials have to contend with in the employment of men under the day-labour system. I would like to read a short extract from the report of Mr. Smith, the officer in charge of the State Advances Corporation. This is only one of many examples that has managed to get into print in favour of the contract system, and possibly it has escaped the notice of the Government. Mr. Smith states—

"The difference between the total amount approved and the amount actually paid is accounted for by the contract price being less than draft estimates."

That is one of the points that Mr. Smith makes in his report.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: That is very easily explained.

Mr. MORGAN: It is very easily explained, but it shows that a certain amount of money had been approved of for the erection of certain dwellings, and that, when tenders were called for, the prices quoted were less than the estimates.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: In a good many cases they are more. The department approves of a certain fixed amount, and the price may be more or it may be less. I approve of them almost every day.

Mr. MORGAN: There is a difference between the estimates and the contract prices between 1910 and 1923 of over £500,000, and Mr. Smith, in explaining that, gave the reason that I have just quoted. That is one illustration from an officer of the department which, in that period, has spent over £2,000,000, and apparently saved over £500,000, because the contract prices were less than the estimates placed on the work by Government officials. The peculiar point is that this is claimed as a profit. Under the Government method of working they say, because of this fact, that from 1910 to 1923 there has been a saving by entering into contracts of over £500,000. Had the Government official estimated the cost of certain buildings at £2,000,000, and then afterwards it was found that the work was done for £500,000 less, the Government would have said, "Look at what we have saved by the day-labour system. We have saved £500,000 for the public." This report shows that the Government saved £500,000 for the people of Queensland. If that saving had been effected under day labour, the Government members would have had the fact emblazoned in big letters, and Government members would have asserted that day labour had been proved to be ever so much better than the contract system, as it had saved in that period £500,000 in building homes for the workers. We have endeavoured in the past to induce the Government, before proceeding with day-labour work under their own officers on estimates prepared by their own officials, to have the estimates checked by some person independent of the department. If the work was carried out at a cost below the estimate, then credit could be taken for effecting a saving. We know that Government officials do not want to put too low an estimate on works, and that they leave a margin; and if the work is completed for less than the estimated cost, they claim to have saved so much money. We have one huge illustration to

show what these estimates are worth. Hon. members opposite talk of what has happened at Warrnambool and in other parts of Victoria, but we need only refer to what has happened at the Inkerman irrigation works. Some day we may have a commission of inquiry into the expenditure connected with the Inkerman irrigation works. It may be absolutely necessary, but we know that those works are going to cost 200 per cent. more than the actual estimate of the Government officials. Is that not scandalous? If that had occurred in any other State, a commission of inquiry would have been appointed to fix the responsibility for the discrepancy. I believe that even the hon. member for Bowen, who represents that area, will in the future be among those who will demand an inquiry to find out who blundered, and someone has blundered miserably. Someone has proved definitely that he was not capable for the job he undertook. The people interested at Inkerman will probably be saddled with that expenditure. I could mention other instances if I desired, but it is no use wasting the time of the Committee. An hon. member has pointed out that there has been no scandal; but there has been no scandal because no commission of inquiry has been appointed. We shall discover eventually by whom the huge blunder there has been perpetrated. These officials are supposed to be experts, and to be able to give the Government the expert knowledge to enable them to proceed with the work of construction.

Mr. FOLEY: The blunderers may be out of the job altogether.

Mr. MORGAN: That may be so; but it just goes to show how the Government are dependent entirely on officials and on what they call expert advice. I do not think that expert advice always is altogether satisfactory. We have had a great number of their estimates in connection with the department, but I venture to say that, if some of those officials had to go out into the world and subsist on that expert advice, they would not be able to do so. We are spending hundreds of thousands of pounds based on information supposed to be supplied by experts. The result is that we are losing an enormous amount of money, and nothing is done in connection with the blunders occasioned by this so-called advice.

I want to complain about the dilapidated condition of public buildings in the country districts. These buildings badly need repairs and painting. In some cases repairs are necessary to prevent them from becoming dangerous. Schools in all parts of my electorate require attention, and a great number of them have not been painted for fourteen years, and day by day the exposure of the buildings to the weather is causing destruction. If they had been painted a year ago it would have saved money to the department and increased their life considerably. The Government, through lack of funds, so they say, are not able to paint these buildings or renew flooring boards where necessary, with the result that many of them are going to rack and ruin. Although the Government plead that they have no money for this work, they are constructing a huge building at the corner of Queen and George streets estimated to cost £230,000.

Perhaps we shall find before the work is completed that another huge blunder has been made: the Government will say that the work was undertaken during a boom period

when everything was dear; and that, owing to this fact, it will cost £50,000 or £100,000 more than was estimated. As a country representative I desire to enter my emphatic protest against the Government going on with the expenditure of over £250,000 in the centre of Brisbane on a building which could have been done without for another ten years. Part of that money could have been spent in the country districts in providing schools and other buildings. That building may enhance the value of property in and around Queen street. It may be very attractive, and, when people visit Brisbane, Labour supporters will say, "Look at the beautiful edifice that has been built by the Labour Government." It may be beautiful to look at and it may be useful from a certain point of view, but it is not going to add one shilling to the producing capacity of the State. Had the Government authorised the expenditure of the £230,000 on water conservation in different parts of our drought-stricken State, it would have added enormously to our revenue and to the productive qualities of the land. The Government are spending that £230,000 at a time when there is no necessity to do so because there is no unemployment in that class of trade. Work of that class is booming, and it is difficult to get employees. I understand that the Government cannot get sufficient men to go on with and complete the work. It means that the machinery, etc., appertaining to that building is not doing the amount of work it would be doing if a greater number of men were employed; and that is adding to the cost of the structure.

The Government are not giving the country people a fair deal in regard to the construction of schools and other buildings in the outlying portions of the State. I referred last session to the dilapidated condition of the Goondiwindi school. The fence was falling down, and one would have thought that it belonged to some institution or person who was insolvent. I said it was disgraceful. The Secretary for Public Works stated that the work had been approved of and would be gone on with. I informed him that I had received that sort of information for the the last three or four years, and I received this reply—

"Secretary for Public Works: The Minister in charge of this department is now telling you that the work has been approved of and will be done.

"Mr. MORGAN: Will it be done within the next five years?"

I asked that because I was suspicious and thought that it would not be gone on with.

"The Secretary for Public Works: It will be done this year.

"Mr. MORGAN: I am very pleased to know that. It is something definite."

I was quite overjoyed that the Minister had made the definite statement that the work would be gone on with within the next six months. Twelve months have passed, and it has not yet been gone on with.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Why do you not quote the reply that I gave to your question this year? You asked a question this session bearing upon that school, and I gave you a certain reply. You are quoting from "Hansard" of last year.

Mr. MORGAN: I quoted my question on this matter, and the hon. gentleman's reply to the question this year was that the work

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was to be gone on with, or something to that effect.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I will give it to you when I get up.

Mr. MORGAN: I hope you do. It is similar to the question I have quoted. I mentioned that the Goondiwindi school required painting and that the teacher's residence and fence were in a dilapidated condition, and the Minister said that it would be gone on with in six months.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: What "Hansard" are you quoting from?

Mr. MORGAN: "Hansard" of 1922. I received a letter to-day stating that the work will be undertaken by the Department of Public Works immediately. I am very pleased, although there has been a delay of twelve months, to have this reply from the department. I can honestly tell the Minister that the school at present is an absolute disgrace.

I wish again to emphasise the fact that I am a strong believer in local work being given to local workers. The Secretary for Public Works told me last year that he was adopting a system of that kind. I think that it is a crying shame to have timber sent out to Charleville or Roma when a sawmill within a few miles of the locality could supply the class of timber required. It is also a shame that men should be sent 100 or 200 miles to do a job when local men capable of doing the work are available. The adoption of my suggestion would save all the travelling expenses to and from the work. I think the local man is entitled to the job. If you are going to encourage carpenters, plumbers, and painters to live in our country towns they should get priority over city men when the Government require a job carried out in their locality.

Mr. W. COOPER: That is done.

Mr. MORGAN: It is not done generally, though I believe the position has been improved to some extent. I think there is room for still greater improvement. The Minister represents a country constituency, and he must acknowledge that the workers in the country should get any work going, provided they are capable of doing it and are prepared to carry it out as reasonably as the man in the city.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: So long as there are local men who are qualified to do the work, they get it.

Mr. MORGAN: I am very pleased to know that, but I do not think it is always done.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: If you can quote a case where a foreman has refused to employ a local man when he was qualified to do the job, I will deal with it.

Mr. MORGAN: It is not only a case of jobs upon which foremen are employed. It may be a case of a small expenditure of £10. There may not be any foremen, but the Department of Public Works may decide to send a man up from, say, Dalby, to some town in my electorate.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: They are not supposed to do that. In a small job such as that it is supposed to be given to a man in the locality.

Mr. MORGAN: I am very pleased to know that, and I hope that will always be done in the future.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. W. Forgan Smith, Mackay): I think

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it would not be inopportune if I were to voice a few remarks at this juncture. I have listened with a great deal of attention to the speeches that have been made since I first moved the vote. I intend to deal with one or two matters in connection with the criticism that has been levelled against the department in regard to requests that have been made by various hon. members.

Before going on to deal with the general vote, I wish to say a few words connected with the speech made by the hon. member for Murilla. He referred to the Goondiwindi school, and quoted the "Hansard" debates of last year. The quotation was perfectly correct, and I asked the hon. member to quote my reply to the question he asked a few weeks ago, which would have explained the whole position. He did not give the quotation, because he did not have it with him, and I now quote the reply which I gave then. On the 1st August, Mr. Morgan, pursuant to notice, asked the Secretary for Public Works—

"Will he explain why the work of repairing the fence around the State school at Goondiwindi has not been proceeded with, in view of the definite promise given to the House last session that the work would be gone on with immediately?"

"Answer: The fence was not mentioned either by the honourable member or myself. The question of additions and repairs was submitted to the Department of Public Instruction, who recommended as follows:—

(1) No action regarding additions.

(2) Expenditure upon fencing be further considered when funds are available."

Following on that minute, quite recently funds were made available and the work was approved of, and it went through the Executive Council to-day. The reason why the work was not done last year was due to the minute which I have quoted and which came from the Department of Public Instruction. Hon. members must understand that my department does not initiate work for other departments. That is to say, we only erect buildings, make additions, or carry on extensive repairs when asked to do so by the department concerned and when funds are available. It is quite true, of course, that the Works Department controls the vote, and when more jobs are approved, say, by the Department of Public Instruction than funds are available for, then I have to go into the matter and allocate the expenditure to the works which, according to the reports of my inspectors, are considered to be most urgent. That is done on the information supplied by both departments.

During the past year the operations of the department have been very extensive. The hon. member for Toowong quoted the number of Acts administered by the department, and he pointed out that they are very considerable. That is quite true. It is the Works Department; and a good deal of work has to be done in the department, so that its name is quite appropriate.

With regard to buildings, we carried out 4,703 works last year. That includes both major and minor operations. The aggregate estimates amounted to £139,683, and the actual cost was £128,819, showing an aggregate saving on the Estimates of £10,864. Nine hundred and six jobs showed an excess

cost on the estimate, and 1,303 jobs showed a saving on the estimate. It has been argued that these estimates are not based on actual costs. It has been suggested by various speakers that our system of estimating enables the officers of the department to fix any estimate they like, and following the natural human bent, they err, if at all, on the safe side. I challenge any member of this Committee to go to the Department of Public Works and go into the costing and estimating system that is carried out in the department, and then show any private firms in existence in Queensland which have better systems. The hon. member for Enoggera, when speaking last night, was fair enough to say that he took the opportunity Mr. Quinn afforded him of going into the costing system of the department, and he has nothing but praise for the system. The costing and estimating system of the department is most complete, and estimates are prepared on the basis of known cost.

Mr. MORGAN: As laymen we cannot tell whether the system is good or bad.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Bring anyone you like along with you—bring any master builder you like, and ask him to go into the matter. No fault can be found with our system of costing. A further suggestion has been made that the men who have been responsible for carrying out the work made the estimate. Nothing could be further from the truth. The estimating and costing branch is quite separate from the branch that actually carries out the work.

Mr. CORSER: Nobody suggested that it was not.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: There is, therefore, absolutely no truth in the suggestion made by hon. members opposite that estimates could in effect be "cooked" to suit the requirements of the individuals concerned.

Mr. CORSER: So they are.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: A man who makes an interjection of that kind can only be regarded as an irresponsible person who will make any kind of statement whatsoever, if by so doing he can throw a little dirt at the party to which he is politically opposed.

Mr. CORSER: You don't like the truth.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The hon. member may interject as much as he likes. It is well known that he makes the most irresponsible statements of any member of this House, and he can be correctly described as the corner man in the Country party Christy Minstrel show.

Mr. CORSER: It is so true that you don't like it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: His interjections and statements are quite out of keeping with the dignity of a man who occupies the position of deputy leader of any party. If any hon. member makes false statements in this House—

Mr. CORSER: They are not false statements.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: It is my duty to defend the honour of the officers of my department with every ounce of energy in my power.

Mr. CORSER: Every allowance is made so that the estimates shall not be exceeded.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The hon. member for Wynnum last night,

in addressing himself to this vote, did not indulge in the kind of wild statements made by the hon. member for Burnett. He asked for a good deal of information which he has a right to receive, and which, in the public interests, should be given, and I shall now deal with the inquiries made by that hon. member and several other hon. members who have applied themselves seriously to the question.

The first building mentioned was the Treasury Building. The approximate estimated cost of that building is £230,000. That is a building that should have been completed long ago, and it is rather a pity that it was not completed when building costs were less than they are at the present time. However, the Government requires more space for Government offices, and it is better business to have our own buildings than to pay rent to other people. That is the reason why the Treasury Building is being gone on with. When we come to the particular vote concerned, if so desired I will give the amount paid in rents and the buildings involved. The reason why the building is being proceeded with now is because of a request preferred on the part of the Commonwealth Government for additional space for the Savings Bank. They are tenants of the Department of Public Works in George street, and they preferred a request to the Queensland Government to give them additional premises, and decided to take the whole of the ground floor of the wing now under construction. Since then the policy of the Commonwealth Bank has been altered somewhat, and I understand they intend to build themselves, and some time ago they asked permission to withdraw from the contract for the renting of these premises. That, of course, we were prepared to grant, because we can use the building ourselves to full advantage, and no loss will be incurred by this Government. The Commonwealth Bank is advancing, under the terms of the original agreement, the cost of the building at a rate of interest we consider reasonable.

Mr. TAYLOR: Do they intend to remain where they are?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: That I cannot say at the present time, but they have definitely decided not to go into the new premises.

Mr. MORGAN: It is a pity they were not built before.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: There is no doubt about that. As I mentioned a little while ago, it is unfortunate that the most important corner of that very handsome building was not completed when costs were much less than they are to-day. The cost of building is very heavy; but can anyone say that building costs are likely to be less in the near future? They are not likely to be any less than they are to-day if Queensland in the future is to continue to progress. They have, of course, come down considerably since the end of the war. They have fluctuated considerably, and we have been able to construct our buildings much cheaper than we could three years ago, when they were very heavy.

It may be just as well to quote some of the increases which have taken place in the cost of building operations. I have here a statement showing the increase in cost of material from 1914 to 1923 in all classes of material used in building construction or

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repairs. I have also a table showing the increases in wages and also the costs of labour and building. I think it is so valuable

that, with the permission of the Committee, I shall have it published in "Hansard" for the information of hon. members—

BAROMETER OF PRICES FOR BUILDING MATERIALS RULING IN BRISBANE FROM 1911 TO JULY, 1923.

	1914.	1915.	1916.	1917.	1918.	1919.	1920.	1921.	1922.	1923.
Common bricks	2 15 0	3 0 0	3 0 0	3 5 0	3 10 0	3 15 0	4 15 0	5 15 0	5 15 0	5 10 0
Portland cement	0 5 0	0 5 0	0 6 0	0 6 0	0 6 0	0 6 0	0 6 0	0 8 0	0 7 0	0 7 0
Lime	0 6 6	0 6 6	0 7 0	0 7 6	0 8 6	0 10 0	0 12 6	0 12 6	0 11 0	0 11 0
Sand	0 9 6	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 11 0	0 12 6	0 13 0	0 14 0	0 14 6	0 13 0	0 13 0
Broken hardstone	0 18 6	0 18 6	1 7 6	1 15 0	2 5 0	2 5 0	2 5 0	2 5 0	3 5 0	3 10 0
Plaster of paris										
Timber—										
Sawn hardwood ..	1 2 6	1 4 6	1 6 6	1 8 6	1 10 6	1 15 0	2 2 6	2 19 0	3 17 0	3 17 0
Dressed hardwood ..	1 4 6	1 6 6	1 9 0	1 12 0	1 13 6	1 18 0	2 4 6	2 11 0	2 4 6	2 3 0
Sawn pine ..	1 0 0	1 2 6	1 4 0	1 5 6	1 7 6	1 6 6	1 8 6	2 2 8 0	2 3 0	2 3 0
Dressed pine ..	1 2 0	1 4 6	1 6 6	1 8 0	1 10 0	1 12 0	1 12 6	2 3 0	2 6 6	2 6 6
Pine flooring and lining	1 4 0	1 6 6	1 8 6	1 10 6	1 13 6	2 2 8 6	2 12 0	3 0 0	3 7 6	3 11 0
Hardwood flooring and lining	1 2 6	1 6 6	1 6 6	1 9 0	1 12 0	2 2 2	2 15 0	2 11 0	2 9 6	2 9 6
Hardwood weatherboards ..	1 3 6	1 4 6	1 8 0	1 11 0	1 13 0	1 17 0	2 2 6	2 3 0	2 3 0	2 3 0
Iron—										
26-gauge galvanised corrugated	18 0 0	25 0 0	45 0 0	55 0 0	65 0 0	66 0 0	67 0 0	46 0 0	20 0 0	30 0 0
24-gauge galvanised corrugated	17 0 0	28 0 0	45 0 0	51 0 0	61 0 0	65 0 0	65 0 0	44 0 0	27 10 0	38 5 0
Flat iron ..	14 0 0	19 0 0	21 0 0	23 6 0	28 0 0	29 0 0	30 0 0	35 0 0	32 10 0	38 0 0
Steel rolled joists ..	15 0 0	22 0 0	28 0 0	35 0 0	37 0 0	38 0 0	40 0 0	51 0 0	20 0 0	20 0 0
Paints (mixed)	0 13 6	0 14 3	0 15 6	0 17 0	1 2 0	1 3 6	1 4 6	1 13 0	1 5 0	0 15 0
White lead ..	0 2 0 0	0 17 0	0 32 0	0 35 0	1 12 0	1 18 0	1 10 0	4 3 0	3 8 0	3 3 0
White zinc ..	0 2 9 0	0 18 0	0 36 0	0 5 0 0	1 15 0	1 18 0	6 0 0	5 10 0	3 18 0	3 10 0
Oil—										
Raw linseed ..	0 3 8	0 4 3	0 5 1	0 6 6	0 8 3	0 8 3	0 17 0	0 6 6	0 6 5	0 6 8
Boiled linseed ..	0 3 10	0 4 6	0 5 6	0 6 9	0 8 5	0 8 6	0 17 3	0 6 8	0 6 9	0 6 8
Turpentine ..	0 3 6	0 4 0	0 4 9	0 6 0	0 7 6	0 8 0	0 12 0	0 8 6	0 8 0	0 11 0
Copal varnish ..	0 15 6	0 14 6	0 16 3	0 19 6	1 1 0	1 1 0	1 1 0	0 8 0	1 1 0	0 14 6
Sheet lead ..	1 7 0	1 9 10	1 19 0	2 5 0	2 5 0	2 5 0	3 5 0	3 5 0	5 1 0	5 3 0
Glass—										
16-oz. ..	0 0 34	0 0 34	0 0 7	0 0 7 1/2	0 0 9	0 0 10	0 0 10	0 1 1	0 0 10	0 0 10
21-oz. ..	0 0 42	0 0 42	0 0 9	0 0 10	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 1	0 1 6	0 1 0	0 0 11
1/4-inch plate ..	0 1 8	0 1 10	0 2 3	0 2 6	0 2 8	0 3 6	0 4 0	0 4 6	0 4 6	0 4 6
3/4-inch mill rolled ..	0 0 10	0 1 1	0 1 4	0 1 6	0 2 1	0 2 2	0 3 0	0 3 6	0 4 6	0 4 6

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## RATES OF WAGES IN BUILDING TRADES IN THE SOUTH-EASTERN DIVISION.

	1914.	1915.	1916.	1917.	1918.	1919.	1920.	1/12/21	1.3.21	31.3.22	25.7.23
Carpenter	£ s. d. 0 1 5	£ s. d. 0 1 5	£ s. d. 0 1 7½	£ s. d. 0 1 8½	£ s. d. 0 1 10½	£ s. d. 0 1 10½	£ s. d. 0 2 3	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 7½	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 6
31/5/14	£ s. d. 0 1 6½	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Bricklayer	£ s. d. 0 1 7½	£ s. d. 0 1 7½	£ s. d. 0 1 9	£ s. d. 0 1 9½	£ s. d. 0 1 11½	£ s. d. 0 1 11½	£ s. d. 0 2 3	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 7½	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 10
Plasterer	£ s. d. 0 1 5½	£ s. d. 0 1 7½	£ s. d. 0 1 9	£ s. d. 0 1 9	£ s. d. 0 1 11½	£ s. d. 0 1 11½	£ s. d. 0 2 3	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 7½	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 10
Plumber	£ s. d. 0 1 4½	£ s. d. 0 1 4½	£ s. d. 0 1 8	£ s. d. 0 1 8	£ s. d. 0 1 10½	£ s. d. 0 1 10½	£ s. d. 0 2 3	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 7½	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 6
Painter	£ s. d. 0 1 3	£ s. d. 0 1 6½	£ s. d. 0 1 7½	£ s. d. 0 1 7½	£ s. d. 0 1 8½	£ s. d. 0 1 9½	£ s. d. 0 2 3	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 7½	£ s. d. 0 2 6	£ s. d. 0 2 6
Labourer	£ s. d. 0 1 0	£ s. d. 0 1 3	£ s. d. 0 1 5½	£ s. d. 0 1 5½	£ s. d. 0 1 8	£ s. d. 0 1 8	£ s. d. 0 1 10½	£ s. d. 0 2 1½	£ s. d. 0 2 2½	£ s. d. 0 2 1	£ s. d. 0 2 1
											3/7/22

BAROMETER OF BUILDING COSTS.—BRISBANE DISTRICT.  
THE TOTAL COSTS IN ROWS, NOS. 3 AND 4 ARE FOR A BUILDING OF SIX ROOMS, EACH ROOM 14 FEET BY 12 FEET.

	1914.	1915.	1916.	1917.	1918.	1919.	1920.	1921.	1922.	1923.
1. Wood building, per 100 ft. super.	£ s. d. 40 0 0	£ s. d. 45 0 0	£ s. d. 47 10 0	£ s. d. 55 0 0	£ s. d. 62 10 0	£ s. d. 70 0 0	£ s. d. 65 0 0	£ s. d. 62 0 0	£ s. d. 60 0 0	£ s. d. 60 0 0
2. Brick building, per cubic ft. ..	£ s. d. 0 0 10	£ s. d. 0 1 0	£ s. d. 0 1 0	£ s. d. 0 1 1	£ s. d. 0 1 2	£ s. d. 0 1 3	£ s. d. 0 1 4	£ s. d. 0 1 5	£ s. d. 0 1 6	£ s. d. 0 1 6
3. Total for 6-room house, each room 14 ft. x 12 ft. in wood ..	£ s. d. 400 0 0	£ s. d. 450 0 0	£ s. d. 475 0 0	£ s. d. 550 0 0	£ s. d. 625 0 0	£ s. d. 700 0 0	£ s. d. 650 0 0	£ s. d. 620 0 0	£ s. d. 600 0 0	£ s. d. 600 0 0
4. Total for house as above in brick	£ s. d. 750 0 0	£ s. d. 900 0 0	£ s. d. 900 0 0	£ s. d. 975 0 0	£ s. d. 1,050 0 0	£ s. d. 1,125 0 0	£ s. d. 1,200 0 0	£ s. d. 1,275 0 0	£ s. d. 1,350 0 0	£ s. d. 1,350 0 0
5. Brick work, per rod ..	£ s. d. 22 12 0	£ s. d. 26 5 0	£ s. d. 26 10 0	£ s. d. 29 0 0	£ s. d. 30 10 0	£ s. d. 33 0 0	£ s. d. 38 10 0	£ s. d. 50 0 0	£ s. d. 52 10 0	£ s. d. 55 0 0

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Building materials are really double in cost what they used to be. Cement, stone, timber, iron and steel, and other things have increased considerably in price during that period. The labour costs also have increased, and because of that the cost of building in connection with the largest buildings in the State has gone up considerably. I believe that the Treasury Building is justified from every point of view. I can give the figures with regard to the rent now being paid by my department for various premises in Brisbane. The officials concerned will later on occupy the new building, and the amount which is now being paid in rent, and which is likely to increase, will probably pay interest on the cost of the building. As I said, no one will pay rent if he can avoid it. It pays an individual better to borrow money to build a house than to pay rent, and the same thing applies to the Government. It is very likely that the building will be completed at the approximate estimate, provided, of course, that costs do not fluctuate too much in the next three years. If costs remain in the vicinity of what they are to-day and unforeseen circumstances do not arise, this work will be carried out at the cost I have stated.

Reference has been made to the Hamilton Cold Stores. The hon. member for Toowong, in reply to an interjection of mine, said that there had been blunders in Queensland in building construction similar to what has taken place at Warnambool in connection with the breakerwater. Nothing can be further from the truth than that. No one can go to the Hamilton Cold Stores and point out any fault in the construction of that edifice. The building has been inspected by engineers who have been here on visits from other States, and they have placed in writing their commendation of the work of this department and expressed admiration for the excellence of the construction work carried out there. The building has taken much longer to complete than was estimated when it was first started. That is due to the fact that it was closed down for a considerable period because the Government had not the funds available to carry on the work. That was unfortunate. The Government had to close down works of this nature with a view to diverting the funds at their disposal into more urgent channels.

MR. TAYLOR: How long were they closed down?

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I could not say exactly, but it was for a considerable period. Since the work has been restarted it has proceeded uninterruptedly, but there has been a delay on account of lack of plasterers. We could employ about three times more plasterers than there are there. We are in the same position as anyone who erects a building of that nature. The building only proceeds at the pace which the men engaged in carrying out the work are capable of.

MR. TAYLOR: Will it go on to completion without interruption now?

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Yes, it will go right ahead. The first four chambers, I understand, will be ready for use about November. If the Department of Agriculture, which controls this enterprise, desires to have cold stores ready about the end of November they will be available for that purpose. The refrigerating rooms for

butter and cheese will be completed, but the grading rooms will not. However, they can use the alleyways as is done now at Birt's and elsewhere. The estimated cost of the cold stores was £238,194, of which we have expended to date £226,746, leaving an unexpended balance of £61,448.

The hon. member for Wynnum referred to the matter of cork board last night. I am satisfied that his information with regard to that matter is somewhat hazy. Probably he recollected a statement made by an hon. member who is no longer in this Chamber. A good deal of dispute took place about the Government's original purchase of cork board—239,000 superficial feet. Statements were made by that individual, who made no attempt to verify them, that the material was faulty in quality and would not be suitable for the purpose in view. Practically the whole of that cork board has been fixed and the work carried out very successfully. It has been quite satisfactory to the Government. The quality and price at the time it was purchased were satisfactory, and exhaustive tests made by experts were very favourable with regard to quality. An important point is that that cork board was made in Queensland. It was a Queensland enterprise newly started, and I make no apology for the Government's encouraging local industry of that kind.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: It is the policy of the Government that, where possible, when the material is of a satisfactory character, preference shall be given to local industry. I make no apology for having made that purchase. A further quantity has been purchased this year of a different size. The previous purchase was 239,000 superficial feet of 2-inch board, and this year another 14,000 superficial feet of 1-inch board for other classes of work has been purchased at a cost of £700.

[5 p.m.] Of course the cost has come down during the interval. The quality of the material is perfectly satisfactory. Most of it has been fixed in position and is giving good results.

Now we come to the general statement made by the hon. member for Enoggera, who lashed himself almost into a passion last night and said that he would not allow any Minister to accuse him of misleading the Committee. I am not aware of the exact words I used last year of which the hon. member complained, but it has never been my intention to hurt the feelings of any hon. member, although, if he makes a statement not in accordance with facts or voices opinions with which I do not agree, then I shall reply with all the resources and emphasis at my disposal.

MR. KELSO: You will "deal it out" to him?

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Yes, and I will "deal it out" to the hon. member whenever I feel it necessary, but it will be done in a perfectly fair manner. The contention of the hon. member for Enoggera last year—and he repeats it this year—is that the Government made a great mistake in expending money on public buildings from the Loan Fund, which he says was a legitimate charge against the Consolidated Revenue. In short, he contends that, instead of paying for schools and buildings of that kind out of Loan Funds, we should do it out

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of revenue. Let me put the position before the Committee clearly. It is the practice of my department to do new works and charge the cost to Loan Fund Account, but the cost of repairs and alterations and work of that nature is charged to Revenue Account. I consider that to be absolutely sound policy. If the idea voiced by the hon. member were carried out, the Government would not be able to do the works which it considers necessary. Hon. members must bear in mind that the life of these buildings, constructed as we construct them and with anything like decent maintenance, is anything from thirty to forty years. We have repaired buildings recently, and have been able, with slight additions, to use material which had been up for forty years.

Mr. KELSO: Do you provide a sinking fund?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: There is no sinking fund. The point I want to deal with is: Inasmuch as the life of these buildings can be reasonably put at forty years, it is a fair thing to charge a proportion of the cost each year to the people using them. Nobody can argue against that proposition. Why should the people of Queensland of the present day be called upon to bear the whole burden of public works which will be used for decades to come?

The hon. member for Nundah raises the question of the establishment of a sinking fund. That is a separate issue entirely, and should be dealt with when we come to the Treasurer's Estimates. I agree that there should be a sinking fund for all loan expenditure—it should not be confined to any one department or to any one class of work—where the financial conditions of the day permit it. But that has no bearing on the real point at issue here. If hon. members want to argue in favour of a sinking fund for loan expenditure, they should do it when Loan Bills are before the House. It is perfectly sound to make the cost of public buildings with an approximate life of forty years a charge on Loan Funds, because, as I say, they will be used by the people for at least four decades.

Now let me deal with the expenditure of my department from Loan and Revenue Accounts, taking school buildings as an example—

Year.	Loan.	Revenue.	Total.
	£	£	£
1915 .. ..	32,568	54,822	87,390
1922 .. ..	50,584	45,676	96,260
1923 (Estimated)	60,000	45,000	105,000

Those additional costs are due to causes with which I dealt earlier in my speech, but I contend that expenditure in that proportion is quite sound.

The hon. member for Enoggera dealt also with the question of the staff. He said that in 1914 the staff in the Chief Office connected with works carried on out of revenue was eighty-one, whereas to-day, when more work is being carried out, it had dwindled to sixty-nine. Those are the exact words he used. The hon. member really ought to take more pains to get at the facts before making statements of that kind. A cursory glance at the departmental report does not justify his

making such assertions. The facts are that in 1914 the total staff of the Chief Office was eighty-one. At present the total staff is 115, of whom sixty-nine are paid from revenue and forty-six from loan. It is anticipated that the ratio of expenditure during this financial year from loan and revenue will be 4 to 1, and it would be natural to assume that the salaries of the persons engaged in the work would be charged in the same proportion. The fact that the Government are charging the bulk of the salaries to revenue indicates a cautious and sound financial policy. The hon. member proceeded to show that in 1915 the salaries cost £3,000 more than in 1923. He has not observed that in 1915 watchmen, motor-garage employees, and others were included in the vote, whereas for the current year they are charged elsewhere—that is, under the votes for "Other buildings, works, and services" and "Watching (Metropolitan District)." In addition, in the current year the amount for salaries of officers of the Chief Office, including contingencies, totalled £22,509. The saving of £3,000 spoken of by the hon. member is, therefore, ridiculous. I do not think I need go any further in commenting on the statements of the hon. member. I have not worked out the percentages which the hon. member gave and cannot say whether they are accurate, but it will be quite easily seen that the expenditure from Loan Fund would be proportionately much greater than revenue, having regard to the total expenditure of the Government.

Mr. KERR: No; it is less.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: We have the expenditure on the Treasury Building block and on the Hamilton Cold Stores, and we have to pay an instalment on the State Insurance Building which, under the Commonwealth Bank agreement, became the property of the Commonwealth Bank. Later on they decided that they did not require it, and the Government are purchasing it at a cost of £150,000 by four annual instalments; so that the expansion of the loan expenditure justifies what I have said, and I have indicated clearly that the contentions of the hon. member for Enoggera are quite unsound and cannot be logically supported.

So long as Queensland remains with a small population it will be necessary to incur expenditure from Loan Funds for work of this kind. All that can be asked of a Government is that the loan expenditure be kept within the means of the people, that it be spent economically, and that full value is received for the amount of money expended.

Questions have also been asked about the quarry purchased by the Government at Helidon. That I consider to be one of the best purchases that has been made for a considerable time. I am satisfied that the quarry could be sold to-day for a much greater sum than we paid for it at the time. Having regard to the cost of cutting the stone and landing it on the job, we are able at the Treasury Buildings to show a substantial saving on the lowest tender given to us for the supply of this stone. The stone is of three different kinds. It has been tested by experts, and is found to be of very high quality. The quarry was opened up about thirty years ago, and some of the stone used is in perfect condition to-day, the

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sharp corners and edges not having fretted away in any manner whatever. The purchase price for that quarry was £2,500. It embraces 44 acres of land, with stone under practically the whole of it.

Mr. TAYLOR: How far is it from the railway station?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Only about a mile and a-half. The figure I have quoted includes the cost of a railway siding. We are carrying the stone from the quarry to the railway siding by motor truck, and it is loaded on to the train there. The cost is very small in that respect. We have expended £12,714—that includes the cost of the quarry itself—on machinery and buildings that have had to be erected at the quarry. Having regard to the actual cost of the stone landed at the Treasury buildings, I am quite satisfied that the purchase is one that is well warranted and will be a very profitable enterprise in the future. Having regard to the large quantity of stone available, we propose to sell the stone to anyone who requires it. In connection with the tenders being called for the new Brisbane Town Hall—and I understand for other buildings which it is contemplated will be built of this stone in the near future—my department is submitting quotations for the supplying of this stone. If those buildings are proceed with, there is every chance of my department securing orders for the stone required.

Mr. KELSO: A new State enterprise.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: You can call it a new State enterprise if you like. It is one that I am perfectly satisfied with. We are saving very considerably per cubic foot on the stone at the present time, and there is no reason why we should not continue to do so.

Questions have also been asked with regard to the operations of the Unemployed Workers Insurance Act and with regard to unemployment generally. The hon. member for Wynnum, speaking last night, would lead the Committee to believe that in Queensland there is more unemployment under a Labour Government than there is in any other State in the Commonwealth. These statements are made from time to time by hon. members opposite, and I have had an opportunity of contradicting them before this session. Some hon. members opposite do not care how often their statements are disproved. They continue in a gay irresponsible fashion to repeat them, thinking that, if they do so often enough, people will come ultimately to believe them. Unemployment is the most serious social problem existing in the world to-day. Every country in the world is faced with the unemployed problem, and it is a problem which is linked up with the problem of the economic basis of society itself. So long as society is carried on on the existing basis, there will be unemployment, and distress as the result of that unemployment. It is the purpose of this Government and the party of which I have the honour to be a member so to reorganise society as to prevent the distress caused by these recurring periods of unemployment and prevent the poverty that is caused thereby. I believe that a great deal can be done in the direction of the better organisation of society, which will be of benefit to mankind in general and relieve the community of many of the ills that exist to-day. It is because of this that we have passed the Unemployed Workers Insurance Act,

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which is intended to prevent people who are unemployed through no fault of their own from becoming destitute. Under that Act persons in Queensland are insured, and are able to obtain sustenance during periods of unemployment. I am satisfied that that will be an advantage to Queensland and will benefit the people who are intended to be benefited thereby.

Without relying on State official statistics regarding unemployment, it is interesting to compare a table appearing on page 1001 of the Commonwealth "Official Year Book" for 1914 with a table appearing on page 372 of the same publication for 1922. Those tables show the percentage of unemployment in the different States of the Commonwealth at the end of the years 1914 and 1921 respectively. In the former the Queensland percentage is shown as 17.7 per cent., New South Wales 6.9 per cent., and Victoria 14.1 per cent. That was in the last year in which the Denham Government, of which the hon. member for Wynnum was a member, was in office. In that year the figure in Queensland was the highest in Australia—amounting to the colossal figure of 17.7 per cent. The total number of registered unemployed persons in Queensland to-day is 2,131. The persons who obtain benefits under the Unemployed Workers Insurance Act must of necessity register at the nearest labour exchange, so that figure can be taken as a fairly accurate index of the number of unemployed in Queensland.

Mr. VOWLES: Does that include non-unionists?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: That is close on 1 per cent. of the number of employable persons in the State. According to the last census returns, the number of employable persons in Queensland is 216,000.

Mr. VOWLES: Does your figure include non-unionists? Why don't you answer the question?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Those figures show that the unemployed represent 1 per cent. of the employable population. Compare the figures regarding unemployment in Great Britain. The Ministry of Labour in the latest gazette gives the total number of registered unemployed persons in Great Britain and North Ireland as 1,234,000, which is estimated to be 10.9 per cent. of the number of work-people, whilst 60,000, or .5 per cent., are working systematic short time. It will be seen that there is a great difference between those figures. I use these comparisons because anti-Labour politicians, not only in Australia but throughout the world, have continued to trounce Queensland with regard to that subject. Only in yesterday's "Telegraph" there was published a cable containing a statement made in the North Ireland Parliament by Sir Montague Barlow that unemployment in Queensland is worse than in any part of the world. Yet only 1 per cent. of the employable population of Queensland is unemployed at the present time as against 10.9 per cent. in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. KELSO: Don't you think that a lot have not registered?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Anyone who travels throughout Australia to-day must realise that Queensland is in a better position than any other State in the

Commonwealth with regard to this matter. Queensland, as a matter of fact, is the only State that has attempted to register the unemployed, and attempted to get the accurate number of those who are unemployed and available for work. Everyone knows that in Newcastle and all the mining areas of New South Wales and in Sydney there is a vast amount of unemployment. One has only to look at the deputations that have waited upon the Premier of Victoria, Mr. Lawson, and in the other States of the Commonwealth to realise that this problem exists there also. I realise that there is unemployment in Queensland. I say definitely that it is due to economic causes over which the Government at the present time have no control. It is due to the economic factors which operate in every so-called civilised country in the world to-day to a greater or lesser extent. At the present time men are employed only when their services are required, and they are paid off immediately they are no longer required. It is my contention that industry should be so organised that work will be regularised and this social evil cured. That is the principle on which the Unemployed Workers' Insurance Act is based. Why should not men engaged in carrying on the necessary services of the community and necessary production be enabled to live under decent conditions? Why should those people in periods of dull trade, over which they have no control, be turned out on the street and be allowed to live in any way that they are able to do? Under the Unemployed Workers' Insurance Act, those men are at least provided for to a certain extent. I do not say the Act is a means of remedying the economic evils of society as they exist, but I do say that, under that measure, men who are unemployed through no fault of their own will not be allowed to become destitute, and will be able to receive sustenance from the fund which they have themselves helped to build up.

Mr. TAYLOR: You did not give the comparison with 1922.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I have been asked whether the amount of the assessment would be sufficient to pay the charge upon it. The Act was drawn in a very cautious way. I realised, when preparing the Bill, that it was desirable to proceed cautiously, so that, when the scheme was put into operation, it would have a reasonable chance of success, and, if necessary, could be improved upon from time to time. I realised that, if a Bill of a very ambitious character was introduced, if that Bill did not operate or was found to be financially unsound, great harm would not only be caused to the method of dealing with the unemployed in Queensland, but it would react against reform in other countries. Under that scheme the employer and the employee interested each pay 3d. per week. I was asked by the hon. member for Wynnum whether that amount is likely to be enough. I say unhesitatingly that it is. The income from the fund has realised more than was expected. It is rather interesting at this juncture to refer to statements which were made by members of the United party with regard to this matter during the recent general elections and during the Rockhampton by-election. Before I went to Rockhampton, hon. members opposite had been telling the people there that the assessment would amount to at least 2s. 6d. in the

£1 of wages paid. During the recent election, Tory candidates for Parliament on every possible occasion took the opportunity of suggesting that immediately after the election the assessment would have to be considerably increased. The assessments under the Act were prepared by an actuary very carefully, and the estimated revenue for the first year from the fund was set down at £130,000. On the expenditure that was estimated, it was considered that 9d. per week, or 3d. from each contributor, would be more than enough to meet the requirements. In addition to that, in drafting the Bill I provided that the sustenance allowed would not be payable until the fund had a reserve of six months' payments, so that there would always be six months' income in reserve. That provided for the financial stability of the fund. As a matter of fact, the actual receipts from the fund average at present about £18,000 per month. We have received contributions to the fund by employers and employees from 1st March to 30th June amounting to £41,952. The subsidy from the Government to the fund for the year ended 30th June, as provided by the statute, was £15,000. The anticipated revenue for the current year is £250,000. Expenditure from the fund for the year ended 30th June last amounted to £1,155. The number of persons drawing sustenance this week and the amount drawn are—

Day.	Number.	Payment.
		£ s. d.
Monday .. ..	26	42 15 0
Tuesday .. ..	24	29 11 0
Wednesday .. ..	36	54 3 0
Thursday .. ..	34	50 0 0
Friday .. ..	40	23 5 0
Total .. ..	160	£199 15 0

Those are the figures for the metropolitan area. The figures for the country districts are not available. It will be seen from the figures I have quoted that we have ample funds in reserve to meet all calls. I realise that the first three months of the year—January, February, and March—will be the period when the greatest drain will be on the fund. That is a time when men engaged in the seasonal industries have to encounter the worst forms of unemployment. I am satisfied, from the operations of the Act, that it was a wise thing for Parliament to pass it, and that it has been in the interests of the general community. It is interesting to know that one authority, Professor Gumm, of the Melbourne University, has spoken in the highest possible terms of the Act, and recommended that the Commonwealth Government should introduce a similar measure to apply to all the States of the Commonwealth.

Mr. TAYLOR: That is what is wanted.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I quite agree with the hon. member. I said in my second reading speech on the Bill that it ought to be a Commonwealth matter so that the industries of Queensland would be placed on the same footing as the industries of the other States. When the Labour party became the Government of the Commonwealth—

Mr. MAXWELL: I hope they never will. (Laughter.)

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**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS:** In the near future a sound measure of reform of this kind will be made statutory in the Commonwealth.

Statements have been made by various hon. members with regard to the day-labour question. This is a question which comes up every time the Estimates of the Works Department are under discussion. It is just as well that it is so, because it is a matter that affects the public interest, and the public are entitled to know whether or not they are getting value for the amount of money expended. The hon. member for Toowong said, in the course of his speech, that members opposite—and he also referred to Government members—when they require work done for themselves invariably let it on contract. That has nothing at all to do with the argument. I will show why

[5.30 p.m.] that argument has absolutely no bearing on the case. If you, Mr.

Chairman, desired to build a house for yourself, you would only require to build one house. You do not propose to build a house every month of the year and every year of your life. Consequently it would be foolish of you to go to the expense of getting together a staff of men in the various trades with all the plant and tools necessary to carry on the work of day labour. So, if a man only needs one house, he goes to the man who has the necessary plant—

Mr. MAXWELL: Or he does it himself.

**THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS:** If he does it himself, good luck to him. There is no reason why men should not do this work themselves if they have the time at their disposal. It would be a good thing if hon. members opposite worked a little more than they do. It would do them a lot of good. So far as I am concerned, I am not afraid of doing a little bit of work about my own house when I have the time at my disposal and I feel inclined to do so. With regard to a Government department the situation is entirely different. I have shown that the expenditure on buildings this year in my department will amount to something over £300,000. That is the average expenditure of the department each year, and it is allotted into available work divided into twelve monthly periods: as far as is possible, the same amount of work is carried out in each month of the year. It is a sound policy for a Government or for local authorities to employ their own men direct, to establish the necessary plant, and get all the labour-saving devices they can to carry on the work efficiently themselves. The position boils down to this—that the Department of Public Works can carry out work under a foreman in just the same way and just as efficiently as any firm of contractors can carry out work under a foreman. The whole thing depends upon good men having charge of the operations and seeing that the men engaged on the works are giving a fair deal. It was suggested by the hon. member for Murilla that men working together in gangs loafed on the job, and that, if one man was sacked, the rest would go on strike and the foreman would ultimately lose his job. That statement is a very far-fetched one, to say the least of it. Not only is it very far-fetched, but I contend that it is extremely unfair to the great mass of workers in Queensland. I agree that in trades and callings there are men who will loaf, just the same as some mem-

bers of Parliament will. Some members of Parliament are more lax in regard to their duties and attendance in the House than others, and that condition of things obtains through the whole strata of society. You find men who, if they get the opportunity, will, to use the term in common use, "go slow on the job." So far as the men in the Department of Public Works are concerned, we are getting an absolutely fair deal. The men in charge of the Construction Branch, from the Under Secretary down, are thoroughly equipped with the necessary knowledge in their particular line of business. All of those men could easily secure positions of equal importance in private enterprises. They are experts in their different lines, and they give loyal service to the department. When that loyal service is not given we deal with the persons concerned. If men do not give loyal service to the Department of Public Works and it is found out, they are dealt with drastically and are shot out of their jobs. That is as it should be. A good many loose statements are made from time to time about the "go slow" policy in Queensland and Australia generally. Visitors from America and elsewhere ask me questions about it when I happen to meet them, as I often do in my official capacity. I say that, working under reasonable conditions, the Australian workmen compare favourably with the workmen of any other country in the world. I have worked with tradesmen of different nationalities, and I say that, given reasonable conditions, the trained workmen of Australia can compare favourably with those of any other country in the world. It is extremely unjust to make suggestions such as have been made about the men connected with the Department of Public Works and other departments. Such statements are dishonest. After all is said and done, who is it that does the important work in the community? It is the great mass of the workers who build our railways, who put up our public buildings, who make our roads, who build our bridges, and do all the useful work in the community. It would be a better idea to encourage those men in their useful service to the community, to give them that meed of praise which is merited by all men who give good service. It would be more fitting to encourage the men engaged in public works than to throw innuendoes across the floor of the Chamber about them. I am prepared to admit that occasionally we come across a loafer or a man who is disloyal to the department. When found out, that man's services are dispensed with, and no man whose services have been dispensed with in any of my departments for loafing on the job or for wilful incompetence has ever been reinstated. That is my attitude.

Summed up, "Day Labour versus Contract" really means this—that in works carried on where you can secure the services of competent men, continue them in your service, and establish the necessary plant, day labour is the most satisfactory proposition. Contractors are not in the business for the good of their health. They have to employ the same class of men as the Government employ. They do not get any better men than those engaged on the Treasury Building or the Hamilton Cold Stores; consequently by our system of organisation we are able to save to the community the margin of profit that the contractor would look for. In

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addition, the standard of our work is of the very highest class. There is no incentive to scamp work under the day-labour system. One only needs to read of the various inquiries into War Service Homes to know how work carried on under that plan has been scamped. Almost every year for the past five years there have been commissions of inquiry into the class of houses built in the several States. I have inspected some of those houses myself. As a matter of fact, the last Nationalist Government of the Commonwealth before the last Federal election asked my department to take over those houses, but I had no intention of buying a gold brick from "Billy" Hughes or anyone else. I said that we would be prepared to take over the administration of the Commonwealth department on certain conditions—if all the homes that had been built were re-valued and the capitalisation fixed on what would be a fair thing for the soldier, and that the soldier should sign an agreement that he was perfectly satisfied with the financial conditions of his contract. I stated we would be prepared to take over those homes when that was done.

As a matter of fact, it is perfectly well known that, owing to bad management and other things, men were called upon to pay interest and redemption on a capitalisation that was beyond the reach of their incomes. Since then, however, I understand the Commonwealth Government have taken my advice and have appointed boards to fix the capitalisation at a reasonable amount. I have here a rather interesting quotation from the "Daily Standard" of the 12th of this month, which deals with the Royal Commission which is inquiring into the Warnambool breakwater. That is a contract, and a very important work. The "Standard" reports—

"Edward Ryan, labourer, Warnambool, said he worked on a mixing machine at the breakwater extension for two or three months. Several times he saw sand and blue metal going through the machine without cement. When he drew attention to this the man in charge (Burford) called out, 'Don't worry, let it go.'

"Witness said that some concrete blocks made contained only sand and metal in the middle. There was a heap of condemned cement at the works. He believed some of it went to the mixer. He had been told not to touch it. He had seen the end fall off some cement blocks, and only sand was inside. On a number of occasions he had seen Burford sneaking around the cement heaps putting bags from the stacks which had been counted on to stacks which had not been counted. He did not report this."

Then again you have this further statement on Wednesday—

"Mr. James Neville, inspector in the Public Works Department, said that on 21st November, 1914, his son, who had a large contract at Warnambool, showed him over the work on the extension. Witness saw dry concrete being poured loose from a hopper into the sea at the end of the extension.

"To Mr. Ellis: It seemed a mad thing to do. Neither sand nor cement would ever reach the bottom. The current was strong enough to bear the metal away.

"Witness said he had considerable experience with concrete.

"Mr. Piggott: Was there a gang of lunatics on the job, or what sort of men did you see at work?"

"Witness: Ordinary labourers. I said to one of them, 'What is the idea?' but he only laughed.

"You, an experienced man in concrete, knew that they might equally as well have poured vinegar and salt into the sea; why did you not report it to one of the supervising engineers?—I mentioned it to the temporary road engineer, who happened to be there. He took it very casually, so I simply said, 'Well, you engineers do some funny things,' and left it at that.

"Knowing it was sheer midsummer madness you did nothing about it?—It was not my business."

There you have an example of important breakwater works carried on in that fashion under the contract system. I am not suggesting for one moment that all contracts are carried out dishonestly. Many contracts are carried out very successfully, and the work is a credit to the men who are responsible for it. But my contention is that in large undertakings, particularly on Government works, the tendency is to scamp the work with a view to making greater profits.

Mr. VOWLES: What about your inspectors?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Anyone who knows anything at all about large works in building operations knows that you would have to employ an army of inspectors to inspect almost every tap of work done on the job to prevent scamping of work being done if the contractor made up his mind to scamp the work.

Mr. VOWLES: It applies both ways.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The Government policy is this: Instead of employing qualified men to watch a contractor, we employ those qualified men to carry out the work.

At 5.45 p.m.,

Mr. VOWLES (*Dalby*): Mr. Kirwan, I desire to call your attention to the state of the Committee.

Quorum formed.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I was referring to the fact that under the day labour system, instead of employing inspectors to watch contractors, we are employing these qualified men as foremen and so forth to carry out necessary works.

Wild statements have been made by various members that public works which cost a certain amount could be done by contract for considerably less. That is the kind of loose statement that can be made by anyone. The hon. member for Wide Bay referred to having been present at the official opening of a school somewhere, and that a contractor said to him, "I could build this school for considerably less than it cost the department."

Mr. CLAYTON: That is quite correct.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Anyone can make statements of that kind,

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but invariably, when they are put to the test, they do not stand up to them.

Mr. CLAYTON: Are you prepared to accept a contract for the same class of building?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The hon. member would guarantee nothing.

Mr. CORSER: We would take his guarantee when we would not take yours.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The hon. member for Wide Bay is one of those individuals who would make use of any irresponsible statement. It is quite possible he may believe it, but he probably knows so little about building construction that he would believe anything that his supporters tell him. But the fact is that, when these wild statements are put to the test, almost invariably they are found to be bluff.

Take the statement of the hon. member for Lockyer, who said that a contractor in his electorate would be prepared to do a certain job for a hospital for £380. That was less than the estimate of the Department of Public Works. We supplied him with the specifications on which our estimate was based, and his estimate was immediately increased to £523—a difference of £143 on one small job. Then we have another case as recently as the 19th of this month, in connection with the building of a school of arts at Morningside. A firm of contractors, Casey and Ryan, stated they could do certain work—taking out the foundations, I think—for £189. The people concerned in the matter immediately accepted the offer, but when that was done these people asked to be allowed to put in an amended tender, which amounted to £339 12s. 8d. These are actually cases where men casually made the statement, “I could do this job for so and so,” but immediately they are asked to do it and called on to give a tender which they know they must carry out, the position becomes entirely different. Those are the facts of the position, and many other instances could be given.

The hon. member for Ipswich raised the question of architectural draftsmen in the head office. It is quite true that the number provided for is less than in previous years, but I am not aware that there is any understaffing. The Under Secretary informs me that the staff is quite adequate to meet all requirements. A reorganisation of the department took place a little over two years ago, which has been found to be satisfactory. All works are standardised where possible, consequently it is no longer necessary to get new plans for every new job.

The hon. member also made the interesting suggestion that apprentices in the building trade—I presume he means carpenters, bricklayers, masons, and so on—might be brought into the drafting-room and given about six months' training there. That is a suggestion which I will look into very carefully, because I believe it is desirable to give the apprentices that form of instruction. Under the apprenticeship regulations, which have gone through the Executive Council to-day, provision is made that boys in skilled trades shall be sent to technical colleges and taught those subjects. It will be part of an apprentice's training to get all the training in building construction that is possible; so probably it is provided for in the regulations. However, I will go into the matter carefully

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and see whether the suggestion can be practically carried out.

I think that I have covered most of the points raised by hon. members. Various requests have been made for schools, and so on. I will look into the requests very carefully, and if the funds are available, those works will be carried out. It is my policy in the Department of Public Works not to proceed with work in a district unless it is very urgent when there is a large amount of work going on. That is to say, when the building trade is busy and men are required in that direction, I do not proceed with new works if they can be possibly deferred. Having regard to the large amount of buildings going on in the metropolitan area at the present time, it is scarcely likely that many more buildings will be approved of during the present financial year. I think that is a policy which should commend itself to hon. members. Public works, where possible, should be deferred during a boom in the building trade, and brought forward at a time when men in the industry and in other directions are unemployed. However, certain urgent works are necessary and must be gone on with, and they will be completed. The funds at our disposal do not provide for the carrying out of all the work asked for. Hon. members come to my office from time to time asking for schools to be built in their electorates. Most of those schools, no doubt, are very desirable, but I must point out to hon. members that I can only approve of the works, having due regard to the funds at my disposal. I do not propose to exceed the amount on the Estimates, and therefore those funds are spent on what are considered to be the most urgent works. Where no schools at all exist and they are urgently required, those are given preference. The next preference is given to schools where additions are required, due to overcrowding and so on; and every effort is made to spend the money with a view to giving the best possible results. If there is any further information which hon. members desire, I shall be pleased to give it.

Mr. CORSER (*Burnett*): After talking most hon. members out of the House—

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The “corner man” of the Country party will now give us an exhibition.

Mr. CORSER: The Minister might take a leaf out of the book of half a dozen of the senior Ministers when dealing with these Estimates. If he did so, he would probably be able to elevate himself and give us information of some value, instead of giving us a verbal diarrhoea of platitudes such as generally punctuate his statements here.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Verbal diarrhoea is a complaint you suffer from very frequently.

Mr. CORSER: We unfortunately know too much about it when the Works Estimates are on. We had three tirades last year, and we have had a pretty good exhibition of it to-day.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: You are a very good “corner man”—you are the “corner man” of the Country party.

Mr. CORSER: The Minister is intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity. (Opposition laughter.) The hon. gentleman

might even take a leaf out of the psychology of the Secretary for Railways and leave the "I" out of some of his remarks about "my department," remembering that we look at it from a governmental and administrative point of view. We look to the officers of the department, and we cannot give the whole of the credit for the good things to the Minister. We cannot believe that he, as an individual and with his personality, is responsible for all the good things he has claimed on behalf of the Department of Public Works to-day.

I do not believe in the policy of day labour against the contract system, and, if the Minister is so sure that the system is what he claims it to be, or half what he claims it to be, let him accept the challenge offered by hon. members on this side. When a building is about to be erected, let him call tenders from outsiders, and allow the department also to draw up estimates, and accept whichever is the lower, also allowing his own department to superintend the work of the contract. We shall then see whether or not his department is carrying out the day labour system in a fair way and in the interests of the State, and whether they are making the allowance which I claim they do so that they may be able at the end of the job to say that it has cost less than it would under contract.

A GOVERNMENT MEMBER: The Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board appear to think that day labour is the best.

Mr. CORSER: If the Minister had considered that matter important enough, surely in the long, dreary remarks with which he cleared the House he would have paid some attention to it. However, he is only a young junior Minister, and we trust that some day he will take an example from the senior Ministers and give the House something which is of value.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: There is no hope of you ever doing it.

Mr. CORSER: The Minister has claimed that there is not enough money available to erect schools and carry out repairs which are essential in the country districts, while in the city of Brisbane the Government are going to build a structure at a cost of £20,000 or £30,000. They will do that while they deny the necessary fencing and gates to schools in country districts on the ground that there are no funds. In cases where a teacher requires even a table the request is put aside because there is a shortage of funds. We find that the appropriation for last year was £205,909, but the actual expenditure was only £199,407; yet they say they have not the money to go on with country schools. There are unused plans which could have been utilised for many of the necessary works in the Burnett and other electorates. Why not make the money available to enable the improvements which are necessary for the schools and essential for the health of the teachers and scholars to be carried out? There is a schoolhouse in my district where the walls are eaten with white ants, and there are other buildings which inspectors have reported against as being in a bad state of repair. It is only within the last few weeks that an appropriation has been made to enable the work at the school in question to be carried out.

Mr. KELSO (*Nundah*): The Secretary for Public Works intimated during his speech that there is no objection to a debate each year on the respective merits of the forms of work known as day labour and contract. It is very good of the Minister to admit that, because sometimes the taunt is thrown

[? p.m.] at this side of the Committee that we have a perennial feeling that we must discuss that question. The Minister, of course, understands that hon. members on this side are not very much in favour of day labour, whilst he, being the head of a department which does a lot of work under that system, naturally has been at some pains to convince the Committee and the electors generally that it would be better for the State and for the people of the State if all work in his department, and, as a matter of fact, in other forms of activity, were done by day labour. I take it that the root difference between day labour and contract is simply a question of human nature. The question is: Under which form can you get the best value without unnecessarily speeding up a man to do work beyond his capacity? The Minister has stated definitely that his department has a very complete system of costing, and he invites hon. members to go and inspect it. He says that the hon. member for Enoggera has been and is satisfied that it is very good; but, after all, that does not cut much ice, because it is well known that the officers of the department know exactly the conditions under which the work which they are costing is to be done. That is to say, they know that it is to be done by day labour and not by contract, that it is not subject to any competition, and they naturally arrange their costing so that their estimates are based on what the work will cost by day labour. We claim that work done by day labour costs more than that done by contract.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: What do you suggest? Do you suggest that men on day labour go slow on a job?

Mr. KELSO: The incentive which men have in working for a private employer makes them do better work.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: What incentive? They are the same class of men.

Mr. KELSO: The incentive is that these men working for the Government know perfectly well that they are in a good steady position, and the hon. gentleman knows—

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I know that the men working for my department work as hard as they would for you or anybody else.

Mr. KELSO: The hon. gentleman knows that it is very hard to get rid of men on Government jobs unless for absolute incapacity, whereas it is known that in contract work the employer naturally picks those workmen who will do the best work for him. Unfortunately the Industrial Arbitration Act does not provide for the slow workman. Many private employers would be glad to keep on men who are doing good work but who are not capable of doing as much work as the average man, but the law does not permit them to do so. The consequence is that the slow worker in a Government position is kept on, with the result that many men who are willing to work in that employ come to the conclusion that there is no need to burst themselves if

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there are a number of slow workers there. It is no credit—

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: It is no credit to you to insult about 1,000 men.

MR. KELSO: I can give a case from my own knowledge in connection with the Railway Department of a man I knew very well, and who had been a ganger for some years.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS interjected.

MR. KELSO: During the whole of the time that the Minister was speaking he did not take notice of any interjections, and I do not propose to take any notice of his interjections, so he can save his voice. He refused to take notice of interjections from this side, and I propose to follow his example, and give him a dose of his own medicine.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Go ahead.

MR. KELSO: This man had been a railway ganger for a number of years, and he came to Brisbane one day and called on me. He was nicely dressed, and I complimented him on his improved spruce appearance. I said, "You are getting on in the world." He replied, "I am getting on, but I am not as comfortable as I used to be." I asked him what was the trouble, and he replied, "I am in charge of a gang of men on the Northern line. There are twenty men in that gang, and they are making my life a misery."

MR. MORGAN: That is just what I said.

MR. KELSO: I am not telling any fairy yarn. I am giving the experience of a man whose word I rely on. He said, "I am down on a mission on this occasion to see the Chief Engineer for Railways, and if he will not back me up, I am going to 'chuck' up my billet, because I cannot sleep at night through worrying." I asked him what was the matter, and he told me that there were two men in his gang who were professional agitators, and they stirred up the other men, and although the other men wanted to do a day's work, they came to him and said, "We are willing to do a fair day's work, but these two men are loafing on the job." He wired to the District Engineer and asked for instructions, and the District Engineer told him to use his own discretion.

MR. COLLINS: What was the local engineer doing?

MR. KELSO: He said, "I sacked those men, and before they went away they came and defied me, and said, 'Within two months we shall be back in our billets, and we will get you out of the job.'" Influence was brought to bear in Brisbane, and within two months those two men were back on the job.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Nonsense!

MR. KELSO: It is not nonsense.

MR. GLEDSON: Give us the name.

MR. KELSO: I am not going to give the names.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Ah! ah!

MR. COLLINS: What line was it on?

MR. KELSO: Does the hon. member for Ipswich think that I am soft enough to give

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the names? If he does not take my word, he will not get any more information. The hon. gentleman must accept my word, because I am telling the truth.

MR. GLEDSON: We are not compelled to accept your word.

MR. KELSO: Hon. members opposite do not like to hear the truth—that is the trouble—it is getting under their skins. This man said that, if he could not get some guarantee from the Chief Engineer that that gentleman would back him up in his position, he was determined to get out of the department.

MR. GLEDSON: Did he get out?

MR. KELSO: That is the position the men in charge are in.

MR. MORGAN: It is quite true.

MR. KELSO: That is the secret of the fault under the day-labour principle. There is no incentive on the part of the men to do any more than is necessary. I have been told by men who were anxious to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay that, because they happened to work a little harder than some of the other men, they got a polite hint that they must not work too hard, because the rest of the men did not want to work too hard.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Another general statement.

MR. KELSO: I have absolute proof of what I say. Hon. members opposite know in their own hearts that the day-labour system is not the best. The Minister spent a long time this afternoon in attempting to apologise for the day-labour system. When he kept on at such a great length, I could not help thinking of what Hamlet said—

"Methinks the lady doth protest too much."

I thought the Minister was protesting too much. He was devoting a tremendous lot of time to defending the department and the day-labour policy.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: You are making vague general statements which you cannot substantiate.

MR. KELSO: I am not making vague general statements.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I challenge you to produce the evidence.

MR. KELSO: Take some of the works that have been done. Take the work recently completed of concreting Queen and George streets. Mr. Carrick was the contractor. Large numbers of people used to stop and watch the men engaged upon the concreting work. They were not speeding up; they were simply doing their best. They were satisfied to do so, as they were working for a good boss and knew that, if they put in a fair day's work, the boss would keep them in work. A man asked me one day whether these men were on day labour or not. I said, "They are on day labour for a private boss." It would be quite a different thing if a Government institution had been doing the work. They would have got "go-slow" labour then.

MR. COLLINS: That is a libel on every worker in Queensland. They ought to dip you in the Brisbane River.

Mr. KELSO: If the Minister is wedded to the policy of day labour, and thinks it is such a wonderful thing, why does he not put it into operation in the building of workers' dwellings? Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent in erecting dwellings for the workers, but in almost every case the work has been done by private contract.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Not altogether. It is a matter of choice on the part of the worker himself.

Mr. KELSO: If the worker thinks that the work will not be done properly under day labour, then the hon. gentleman is condemning his own department, because he thinks the men are not fit to do the work. The whole of the work in the construction of workers' dwellings is inspected by Government inspectors, and he is casting a slur on the men who are supposed to inspect that work on behalf of the Government.

I have another instance. At one time I went through the Lake's Creek meatworks, where the butchers are practically on piecework. Hon. members opposite will say that, because they are on piecework, they will slum their work, but I understand the manager gets the men together in the morning and says, "We shall kill so many bullocks to-day," and they agree to kill so many bullocks, with the result that sometimes these men knock off at 2 o'clock and sometimes half-past 2 in the afternoon, but they put in pretty good work during the time they have worked. As soon as they have killed the number of bullocks agreed upon they get away. Is not that some incentive for the men?

Mr. MORGAN: The shearers do the same, because they get paid by results.

Mr. KELSO: There is something in human nature which spurs people to do their best when they are rewarded for doing so. When they get down to the level of the dull, mediocre individual, they do not care whether they do their best or not.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is not contract work.

Mr. LLOYD: If they paid you by results, you would be paid about £2 a week.

Mr. KELSO: Earlier in the session I was taken to task by an hon. member opposite for making a statement which he said I could not substantiate. I was referring to the contract for the basement of the building now occupied by the State Insurance Department. I made a certain statement, and I want to read an extract from "Hansard" of last session, page 1257. I find there that the hon. member for Toombul made certain statements when this vote was under discussion, and I propose to read what he said to corroborate my statement—

"The hon. member for Barnett referred to this matter and said that, if a trial were given, an office estimate could be made up and put into the tender box at the same time as other tenders, and all tenders could be opened in the presence of responsible officers, and, if the departmental estimate was below the contractors' prices, then there would be nothing more to say."

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Do you know that that was done in connection with the foundations of the State Insurance building?

Mr. KELSO:

"That was done in connection with the foundations of the present State Insurance Office buildings."

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The whole building.

Mr. KELSO:

"The hon. member for Bulimba was Secretary for Public Works at the time and a deputation waited on him, and he agreed to adopt that system. The result was that one contractor was below the office estimate, and he got the work."

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: As a matter of fact, the office estimate for day labour for the State Insurance building came to about £7,000 less than the contractor's price.

Mr. MAXWELL: The contractor lost about £3,000.

Mr. KELSO: What really happened was this: It was the policy, when the hon. member for Wynnum was Minister, to carry out certain contracts by day labour, and he was told by his departmental officers that it would be cheaper to do it by day labour.

Mr. GLEDSON: That is not true.

Mr. KELSO: I understand that the president of the Contractors' Association waited on Mr. Barnes, who had a long list prepared by the departmental officers, including the alleged saving on railway construction, and it was shown to the satisfaction of the department that there was a saving of some millions of pounds. The president of the Contractors' Association told Mr. Barnes that it would be a very simple thing for him to put the matter to the test if he would allow the Department of Public Works to consider itself as a tenderer, allowing private contractors to submit tenders, giving the contract to whichever made the lowest tender. Do not forget that the work had to be supervised by departmental officers. It is quite certain that, if the department lost that tender, the inspectors would be on their mettle and would allow the contractor no loophole.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The tender of the Department of Public Works was £7,000 below the lowest contractor.

Mr. KELSO: The lowest tender was from a gentleman named Baumber, and the tender of the Department of Public Works was higher than that of Mr. Baumber.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: You don't know what you are talking about.

Mr. KELSO: I realise that the Minister is in possession of all information.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Yes, and I will let the hon. member see all the papers if he likes.

Mr. KELSO: The same thing happened when the superstructure was to be built. A deputation waited on the present Government—

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The contract was let by the Denham Government.

Mr. KELSO: The present Premier told the deputation—and I do not blame him for doing so—that the policy of the Government was to erect this building by day labour and that he could not consider their request.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: You don't know what you are talking about.

*Mr. Kelso.]*

Mr. KELSO: The contract was therefore put up by day labour, even after it had been shown with regard to the foundations that a private contractor could do the work for less, and this with the Department of Public Works on their mettle.

I should also like to quote a question from "Votes and Proceedings" for this session, page 159—

"1. Is it a fact that the road which has recently been constructed from Roma street to the new Railway Goods Shed was originally laid with tarred metal, and that it has been dug up and relaid with concrete?"

"2. If so, what was the cost of the tarred metal road, and the cost of the concrete road?"

"3. What action does he propose to take in future to prevent such a waste of public money?"

"Answers—

"1. Yes, after twelve months' use."

"2. Tarred road £923, less £500 value of tarred metal used elsewhere. Concrete road £3,556, including cost of removing tarred metal.

"3. Departmental officers state that the difficulty could not be foreseen and was attributable to excessive loads, but I am prosecuting further inquiry."

It appears that the officers of the Works Department do not always carry out the best designs.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The Department of Public Works had nothing to do with that matter.

Mr. KELSO: That work was done by day labour by the Railway Department, and seeing that it was done by a railway official he ought to have known what sort of traffic was going over that road.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I have known a private company spend £50,000 in sinking a tank and have to fill it up again.

Mr. KELSO: I do not say private companies do not make mistakes, but the Minister is trying to make us believe that everything is done so perfectly by the Works Department that errors cannot be made. I notice that the salary set down for the Chief Architect is £550. I do not know the gentleman who occupies that position, but, considering the magnitude of some of the buildings that are being constructed at the present time—which no doubt were designed by the Chief Architect—it appears to me that that is hardly a sufficient salary for a man with his professional qualifications. I can assure the hon. gentleman I do not know the gentleman.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: He is a very decent man.

Mr. KELSO: I am quite disinterested in the matter, but I draw the hon. gentleman's attention to the fact that they call him the "Chief Architect," and I think the Chief Architect who has to design important buildings is really worth more than £550 a year.

The Minister referred to the question of whether the cost of school buildings should be charged to revenue or to loan. I am only responsible to myself so far as this is con-

[Mr. Kelso.

cerned, and I say the proper thing to do is to charge new buildings to loan and keep these buildings in repair out of revenue. I do not know whether the Government have any means by which a certain amount can be set aside to meet the wastage on these assets. I commend that to the attention of the Minister because the principle of building wooden schools out of capital is a good one, but the hon. gentleman himself has admitted that they were wasting assets, and he gave the term as forty years. My experience is that many of these buildings last considerably longer than forty years if they are kept in proper repair and painted. We know perfectly well there are wooden buildings in use in Brisbane to-day that were built over forty years ago. Even if the hon. gentleman fixes the period at fifty years, at the end of that time they may have some use, but, if he fixes that term, at the end of fifty years the loan for these buildings should be wiped out by a sinking fund. The hon. gentleman may argue that it is not much good building up a sinking fund when you have a series of deficits; but, quite independent of the fact that the Government may have a deficit, it is a good thing to have a sinking fund for any loan in connection with wasting assets.

It is a peculiar thing that, if anybody wants repairs to school buildings, they have to go first of all to the Secretary for Public Instruction. He goes into the question, and if he finds the work necessary he then tells you he will recommend it to the Secretary for Public Works. It seems to me to be a round-about method of procedure. I think it would be far better that, when money is to be spent, the Minister who recommends the work should have the largest say in the matter.

The bell indicated that the hon. member's time had expired.

At 7.26 p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN: By agreement, and under the provisions of Standing Order No. 307, I shall now leave the chair and make my report to the House.

The House resumed.

The CHAIRMAN reported progress.

The resumption of the Committee was made an Order of the Day for Tuesday next.

## INSURANCE BILL.

### INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(Mr. Kirwan, Brisbane, in the chair.)

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. J. Mullan, *Flinders*): I beg to move—

"That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend the Life Assurance Companies Act of 1901 and the Insurance Act of 1916 in certain particulars."

The Bill provides for the amendment of the Life Assurance Companies Act of 1901 and the Insurance Act of 1916, so as to secure more effective control of insurance companies than there is at present. The maximum deposit for life assurance companies in future will be £50,000 instead of the present maximum of £10,000. For the first £10,000 deposit the companies will have a right to cover insurance up to £200,000, and for every additional £5,000 deposit their insurance may run to £200,000, until they

have reached the maximum of £50,000 deposit.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: What class of insurance are you referring to?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I am speaking of life assurance.

Mr. TAYLOR: Are you limiting the amount when they have paid £50,000?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: There is no limit beyond £50,000. For marine and general insurance companies the maximum deposit will be £20,000. At present the maximum is £10,000. That is to say, when the premium income of a company does not exceed £10,000, the deposit is £5,000, and when it is in excess of that the deposit is £10,000. Under the proposed Bill, that scale will continue, according to the amount of premium income, up to a maximum of £20,000.

The Bill provides that after the passing of the Act no life assurance company shall commence or transact business in Queensland unless the net profits are exclusively divisible amongst the policy-holders.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: They must be strictly mutual?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Yes; and a license must first be obtained from the Treasurer. All existing companies, however, are entitled to that license as of right, so that all existing rights are fully preserved, subject, of course, later on to the right of the Treasurer to revoke the license if the company does not conform to certain conditions. As the liabilities increase many of them will immediately have to increase their deposits. Most of them are fully covered at present, like the Australian Mutual Provident Society.

The Bill provides that no insurance company, either life, general, or marine, formed after the passing of the Act shall have a license granted to it unless its prospectus has first been approved by the Auditor-General, and heavy penalties are provided for imposition upon companies which issue prospectuses before they have received that approval.

Mr. TAYLOR: Will that be necessary in the case of a company already formed elsewhere?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It will not be necessary. Where a company is already established, it will merely present its memorandum and articles of association and balance-sheet.

Mr. TAYLOR: After the passing of the Act, will such a company have to submit its prospectus?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It can come here provided it is strictly mutual if it is a life insurance company, or conforms to the prescribed conditions if it is a general or marine insurance company.

Another very important provision deals with the payment of interest on deposits. In future, instead of interest at the rate of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., as prescribed in the present Act, interest will be paid to general and marine insurance companies at a rate equivalent to the rate returnable by prescribed Government debentures for the six months preceding the 31st December in the period for which the interest is being paid—the rate, of course, being determined by the

quotations on the Brisbane Stock Exchange. That is regarded as more equitable than the present arrangement, although, as a matter of fact, we pay the companies more than the  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. stipulated in the Act. We can, however, argue that point on the second reading. What applies in the case of a general or marine insurance company will apply also to a life assurance company.

The Treasurer is now able to cancel the license of a general or marine insurance company under certain conditions, and in the future he will be able to cancel also the license of a life assurance company, subject to the right of appeal by the company to the Supreme Court and, if necessary, to the Full Court.

Provision is made in the Bill for certain returns to be forwarded to the Treasurer as well as to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, so that the Treasurer will be able to hold the necessary investigation into the affairs of the companies from time to time.

Another important departure is that fire insurance companies will be able to pay their deposits in cash or prescribed securities—which means Queensland Government debentures or stock—which is much fairer to the companies. At the present time the fire insurance companies must pay their deposits in cash.

Mr. KELSO: Will you accept Commonwealth debentures?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: No. Queensland debentures are good enough. There are other minor consequential amendments merely to give effect to the Bill. I have briefly outlined the principal proposals.

Mr. BRAND: When are the returns to be sent in?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: They will be sent in in accordance with the principal Act. There are various schedules now in the principal Act. There is no change in that respect.

Mr. KELSO: Will this Bill apply to the State Insurance Office?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: In what regard?

Mr. KELSO: In regard to deposits.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The State Insurance Office comes under the Insurance Act of 1916, and this Bill seeks to amend that Act.

Question put and passed.

The House resumed.

The CHAIRMAN reported that the Committee had come to a resolution.

The resolution was agreed to.

#### FIRST READING.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. J. Mullan, *Flinders*) presented the Bill, and moved—

“That the Bill be now read a first time.”

Question put and passed.

The second reading of the Bill was made an Order of the Day for Wednesday next.

The House adjourned at 7.40 p.m.

*Hon. J. Mullan.]*