Queensland

Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

THURSDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 1934

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Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. G. Pollock, *Gregory*) took the chair at 10.30 a.m.

QUESTIONS.

LOANS TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES AT 4 PER CENT. INTEREST.

Mr. KENNY (*Cook*) asked the Treasurer—

"1. Have any loans been granted to local authorities at 4 per cent. interest?

"2. If so, what amount, and to what authority?"

The TREASURER (Hon. W. Forgan Smith, *Mackay*) replied—

"Interest at the rate of 4 per cent. is charged on loans granted to local authorities prior to the 24th September, 1918. No loans bearing 4 per cent. have been granted to local authorities since that date."

DUTIES ON FIJIAN BANANAS.

Mr. WILLIAMS (*Port Curtis*) asked the Premier—

"1. In view of the fact that banana-growers in the Port Curtis electorate as well as elsewhere in the State will suffer,

has his attention been called to the proposal of the Federal Government to further reduce the protection on Australian-grown bananas by abolishing the primage duty and sales tax on Fijian-grown bananas?

"2. If so, does he consider this proposal another breach of the promise made by the Federal Government when it reduced the import duty on Fijian-grown bananas, on which occasion it was stated by the Prime Minister (Mr. Lyons) that no further reduction of any kind would be agreed to in respect to the protection then afforded the Australian-grown product?"

The PREMIER (Hon. W. Forgan Smith, *Mackay*) replied—

"1. The Queensland Government has received no official intimation of the Commonwealth Government's intentions in this matter; neither has the industry been consulted in any way. I have observed from press reports emanating from Canberra that the Federal Government is considering the granting of further concessions to banana importations from Fiji, and on Tuesday last, on behalf of the Queensland Government, I conveyed, by urgent telegram, a protest to the Prime Minister against the suggested proposals. I am informed that the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing, on behalf of banana-growers, has also forwarded by telegram a protest to the Commonwealth Government.

"2. Yes. I am supported in this by the public reference of Mr. J. Wilson, senior, chairman of the Banana Sectional Group Committee of the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing, as published in the press of 19th instant, who stated that 'if the proposal is carried out, it will be a distinct breach of faith by the Minister for Customs and other members of the Federal Cabinet.' Mr. H. L. Anthony, president of the Banana Growers' Federation of New South Wales, in the course of a statement published in the 'Courier-Mail' on Wednesday, the 21st instant, also described the proposal as 'this final desertion of the industry by the Federal Government.'"

EFFECT OF AUSTRALIAN-BELGIAN TRADE PACT ON QUEENSLAND BEEF INDUSTRY.

Mr. W. J. COPLEY (*Bulimba*), without notice, asked the Secretary for Agriculture—

"1. Has his attention been drawn to a reported trade agreement, concluded yesterday, between the Commonwealth of Australia and Belgium, under which it is provided that shipments of frozen beef and cereals shall have unrestricted access to the latter country?

"2. What effect, if any, will this treaty have on the Queensland beef industry, and will the agreement provide further employment for those engaged in the various phases of meat production and processing?

"3. Will this agreement offset the proposal of the Commonwealth Government in relation to the restriction of beef export?

"4. Should Australia agree to this beef restriction proposal, will the same restriction be imposed on the Argentine?"

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. F. W. Bulcock, *Barcoo*) replied—

"1. Yes.

"2. The effect that this treaty will have will be beneficial to the Queensland beef industry, and will certainly provide further employment for those engaged in the various phases of meat production and processing.

"3. Belgium would not take as much meat as Britain would take with restriction.

"4. No."

QUESTION DISALLOWED.

MR. SPEAKER'S RULING.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*), having given notice of the following question, which he proposed to ask the Secretary for Agriculture—

"1. Is he aware of the following statement relative to the grasshopper:—

Happy insect! What can be
In happiness compared to thee?
Fed with nourishment divine,
The dewy morning's gentle wine!
Nature waits upon thee still,
And thy verdant cup does fill;
'Tis filled wherever thou dost tread,
Nature self's thy Ganymede.
Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing;
Happier than the happiest king!
All the fields which thou dost see,
All the plants belong to thee;
All that summer hours produce;
Fertile made with early juice.
Man for thee dost sow and plough;
Farmer he, and landlord thou!

"2. Will he ascertain the author of this outrage, with a view to suitable action being taken?"

Mr. SPEAKER: The question may be amusing, but it will not be put on the business sheet.

PAPER.

The following paper was laid on the table:—

Proclamation and Regulation No. 55 under "The Diseases in Plants Acts, 1929 to 1930."

APPRENTICES AND MINORS ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*): I move—

"That the House will, at its present sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider of the desirableness of introducing a Bill to amend 'The Apprentices and Minors Act of 1929' in certain particulars."

Question put and passed.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Hanson, Buranda, in the chair.*)

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*) [10.41 a.m.]: I move—

"That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend 'The Apprentices and Minors Act of 1929' in certain particulars."

The principal Apprenticeship Act was passed in this State in 1924, and was repealed in 1929; but, although the whole of that Act was repealed, much of it was incorporated in the new Act passed in 1929. The present Act has therefore been in force since 1929, and has had a five years' trial. There was no rush to amend it on the change of Government in 1932, in order that the new features might be given a longer period than three years in which their fitness might be proved. It has now been considered desirable to amend the Act in certain particulars, the chief of which will be the removal of what are known as "the junior journeymen" provisions. It has been found, after five years, that those provisions do not tend to improve apprenticeship or help in any way. As a matter of fact, in many instances, they have been found rather to retard employment, and for that reason it is considered necessary that they be removed.

There are one or two other alterations, such as fixing the term for apprenticeship at not more than five years, unless the Executive otherwise desires. In addition, there are minor alterations, but, as I stated, the important amendment to be made in the Act is that of the removal of the junior journeymen provisions.

Question—"That the resolution (*Mr. Cooper's motion*) be agreed to"—put and passed.

The House resumed.

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

Resolution agreed to.

FIRST READING.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*) presented the Bill, and moved—

"That the Bill be now read a first time."

Question put and passed.

Second reading of the Bill made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

INSURANCE ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*): I move—

"That the House will, at its present sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider of the desirableness of introducing a Bill to amend 'The Life Assurance Companies Acts, 1901 to 1933,' and 'The Insurance Acts, 1916 to 1923,' in certain particulars."

Question put and passed.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Hanson, Buranda, in the chair.*)

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*) [10.46 a.m.]: I move—

"That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend 'The Life Assurance Companies Acts, 1901 to 1933,' and 'The Insurance Acts, 1916 to 1923,' in certain particulars."

The object of the Bill is to amend particularly the section of the principal Acts dealing with the extension of the operations of certain companies to this State. The Acts provide that companies may do business in this State that distribute the whole of their profits to policy-holders, and are therefore practically mutual companies. The Bill gives the Governor in Council power by Order in Council to permit companies that may not comply with that particular provision to operate in this State. The original Act was passed to prevent the admission into Queensland of many companies that were really not desirable companies to have in this State, but it is now felt that admission should be granted to some companies in the South that are doing business with Queensland, such as general and marine insurance business. We cannot prevent those companies from doing that business, and it is felt that it is desirable to give the Governor in Council power to admit them to Queensland after due scrutiny and thorough investigation.

Mr. MOORE: They will have to lodge a deposit of £10,000 with the Treasury.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: That may not be so. The Federal Act makes it necessary for deposits to be lodged with the Federal authorities.

The State Act empowers the Treasurer to pay not less than 4 per cent. on the deposits lodged with the Treasury by the insurance companies, but in view of the low rate of interest paid for money to-day the Act should be amended enabling the Treasurer to pay not less than 3 per cent. on these deposits. Those are the main features of the Bill.

Question—"That the resolution (*Mr. Cooper's motion*) be agreed to"—put and passed.

The House resumed.

The CHAIRMAN reported the Committee had come to a resolution.

Resolution agreed to.

FIRST READING.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*) presented the Bill, and moved—

"That the Bill be now read a first time."

Question put and passed.

Second reading of the Bill made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*): I move—

"That the House will, at its present sitting, resolve itself into a Committee

of the Whole to consider of the desirableness of introducing a Bill to amend 'The Workers' Compensation Acts, 1916 to 1929,' in certain particulars."

Question put and passed.

AUSTRALIAN MUTUAL PROVIDENT SOCIETY'S BILL.

INITIATION.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*): I move—

"That the House will, at its present sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider of the desirableness of introducing a Bill to repeal 'An Act to Incorporate the Australian Mutual Provident Society' and to further declare and define the rights and powers of the Australian Mutual Provident Society, and for other purposes; and that so much of the Standing Orders relating to private Bills be suspended so as to enable the said Bill to be introduced and dealt with in all its stages as if it were a public Bill."

Question put and passed.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Hanson, Buranda, in the chair.*)

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*) [10.55 a.m.]: I move—

"That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to repeal 'An Act to Incorporate the Australian Mutual Provident Society,' and to further declare and define the rights and powers of the Australian Mutual Provident Society, and for other purposes."

The original Act incorporating the Australian Mutual Provident Society in this State was passed when this State was part of the Colony of New South Wales away back in 1857. At the time of Separation that Act became part of the statutes of Queensland. Since 1857 the original Australian Mutual Provident Society Act has been amended in New South Wales on three occasions. No amendment of the Act has been made in Queensland. In 1910 a consolidated Act was passed in New South Wales. That was necessary because of the change of circumstances in world affairs from 1857 to 1910, and in order to give the society enlarged powers to allow it to do business in a way not contemplated when the original Act was passed in 1857. The Australian Mutual Provident Society has been operating in Queensland practically under two charters, the one given in 1910 to the Australian Mutual Provident Society in New South Wales, and the old original charter of 1857. To set at rest any doubt as to the standing of the society and to give it the same charter to operate under in Queensland as it possesses in New South Wales it has been considered advisable to introduce this legislation. This Bill merely proposes to incorporate in the Queensland statutes the Act passed in 1910 in New South Wales and thus give the society the same standing in Queensland as it has in New South Wales. It will assist the operations of the society in financial spheres, and make it necessary for it to register under the British Companies Act of 1886 and otherwise bring it into line and in accordance with its New South Wales charter.

Mr. MOORE: That is all that is in the Bill?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Yes, that is the main reason of the Bill—just to give the society the same standing in Queensland as it has in New South Wales.

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: Has the society asked for this Bill?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Yes, it is the Australian Mutual Provident Society's Bill. As a matter of fact, the House agreed to the Standing Orders being suspended to enable this Bill to be introduced as a public Bill. The necessary expense connected with this Bill is being borne by the Australian Mutual Provident Society, and it is at its express desire that it is being introduced.

Question—"That the resolution (*Mr. Cooper's motion*) be agreed to"—put and passed.

The House resumed.

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

Resolution agreed to.

FIRST READING.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*) presented the Bill, and moved—

"That the Bill be now read a first time."

Question put and passed.

Second reading of the Bill made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

BUREAU OF INDUSTRY ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Hanson, Buranda, in the chair.*)

The PREMIER (Hon. W. Forgan Smith, *Mackay*) [11.0 a.m.]: I move —

"That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced relating to Brisbane and Ipswich water supply and flood prevention, and to amend 'The Bureau of Industry Acts, 1932 to 1933," in certain particulars."

The object of this Bill is two-fold, the main portion relating to the Brisbane and Ipswich water supply and flood prevention scheme and the authorisation of the construction of a dam across the Stanley River, and the other portion dealing with various machinery provisions of the principal Act as to contracts, resumptions, and delegated authorities.

As to flood prevention, the Bill provides for the approval of the carrying out of works by the Bureau of Industry or delegated Crown instrumentality of the Stanley River dam. The constructing authority will be the Works Board, with representation thereon of the engineer of the Water Supply Departments of the Brisbane and Ipswich City Councils. The cost of the works in the first instance will be borne by the Government, and for every £1,000 of such cost, £566 will be contributed by the Brisbane City Council and £34 by the Ipswich City Council. Interest charges of the

councils during construction will be capitalised. No payments are to be made by municipalities until completion of the work, when a certificate will be issued as to the cost of the work, including capitalised interest, and the liabilities of the councils. Such liabilities of the councils will then be in the nature of a loan. When completed the works will vest in the bureau. For the operation of the works after completion a Flood Board will be constituted consisting of:—

(*a*) The engineer of the City of Brisbane for the time being in charge of water supply;

(*b*) The engineer for the time being of the city of Ipswich;

(*c*) The engineer for the time being of the Department of Harbours and Marine;

(*d*) An officer of the Department of Irrigation and Water Supply;

(*e*) The chairman for the time being of the Works Board;

(*f*) The Director of the Bureau of Industry.

The operating costs of the works, less any revenue earned therefrom, will be borne by the Treasurer, the Brisbane City Council, and the Ipswich City Council in the ratio of 40 per cent., 57 per cent., and 3 per cent. respectively.

The works may be utilised for irrigation and electric power, if those uses are not inconsistent with the purposes of adequate storage or flood prevention.

This Bill is very largely based on the reports presented to Parliament early this year in which hon. members who have read them will have found a very comprehensive survey of the whole proposition contained in this Bill.

Mr. RUSSELL: What will the cost be?

The PREMIER: £1,750,000 for the dam and £500,000 for river improvement. I shall give full details at the second reading stage.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [11.5 a.m.]: This is a very big proposition, entailing a probable expenditure of £1,750,000, spread over a period of four or five years. I suppose that this legislation is merely preliminary and that no detailed surveys, borings, and soundings have yet been made.

The PREMIER: Quite a lot of work has been done, and I shall give full details on the second reading. Borings and other work have been done.

Mr. MOORE: From what the Premier has stated the works may also be utilised for irrigation and electric power purposes if these are not inconsistent with the purposes of adequate storage or flood prevention. The difficulty is that the Bureau of Industry is being made a constructing authority over which Parliament will have no control as to costs. I do not even know whether the estimates of costs will come before Parliament.

The PREMIER: Oh, yes, they will.

Mr. MOORE: If the Bureau of Industry is to carry out this work in the way it is doing some other work at the present time it will mean that Parliament will be giving it practically a free hand. When it is finished a board will take it over, the Brisbane City Council will meet a portion of the liability and the Ipswich City Council will meet a small portion of the liability. I do not quite understand what the position will be. The Bureau of Industry appears to be a constructing authority that is outside Parliament, which has very little say in the amount of money it spends. The Bureau of Industry at present is entirely different from the bureau that was first established. It is now carrying out works with which Parliament has nothing to do and the cost of which nobody knows. This bureau is becoming a large constructing authority, and the building of the Kangaroo Point Bridge is to be taken over by it. Liabilities will be placed on the public of Queensland without an adequate knowledge and investigation of the estimates before Parliament passes the money. Parliament has handed over to the Bureau of Industry the right to construct these works. It is an outside authority, and it appears to me to be extraordinary that a board should be in such a position—unlike the Department of Public Works, whose estimates come before Parliament. It was created as an advisory body and has since been converted into a constructing authority. It appears to be in a different position from the Department of Public Works, and obviously Parliament has no control over its operations. I am not clear as to the position Parliament occupies as regards the bureau, and any undertaking it may engage in and the amount of liability it may incur, how far Parliament is going to be informed of the position, and what right it has to vote on the expenditure of works the bureau is carrying out. We have the bare statement that the bureau is to be a constructing authority and to be given permission to go ahead. We are told the estimated cost of the present works is £1,750,000, and that is as far as we get. This is one of those big schemes initiating expenditure over a period of years, and it is being controlled by a bureau over which we have remarkably little control. The bureau is thus engaged on work quite apart from the original conception of its duties. About a page of the Bill creating the bureau set out that its duties were to be the investigation of industrial conditions and ascertaining whether private industry might be assisted and so on, but now it has been converted into a constructing authority. It seems to me that Parliament is handing over to an outside authority power to borrow and expend enormous sums of money—because it has the right to borrow independently and possibly to expend large amounts of money over a period of years. Parliament will be placed in the position of ratifying the expenditure after it has been spent. The handing over of authority by Parliament to an outside body does not seem to me to be a very satisfactory method for carrying out of works involving an enormous amount of expenditure when there are so many avenues in which the Government could have full control in the carrying out of large works.

Two of the large projects to be undertaken by the Bureau of Industry are the Kangaroo Point Bridge and the flood prevention and water supply scheme for Brisbane and Ipswich. These are more or less municipal enterprises, but the whole of the State will be made liable for a great proportion of the cost. The whole position is unsatisfactory. Were the Government undertaking the work through the Department of Public Works, and tenders being

called, we should have full information placed before us However, with the Bureau of Industry it appears to me that Parliament is merely a ratifying body, without being acquainted with details or adequately informed as to particulars. We are to be asked to ratify the acts of the Bureau of Industry without exactly understanding the position or being in any way responsible for the amount of money expended. We know what the estimate is, but the expenditure may increase tremendously beyond that figure, and Parliament will have no voice in the matter. When the final position is reached, and the amount of expenditure is known, the matter will be sent here for ratification of the assessments made on the Brisbane City Council and Ipswich City Council. This does not appear to me to be a satisfactory method of carrying out this class of work. The expenditure will be spread over a period of years, and in the meantime a large burden will be placed upon the community.

Whether the project is a good one from the Queensland point of view is a moot point. Until we see the position exactly we cannot decide that. We recognise, of course, that flood prevention is of vital importance to Brisbane. At some future time we may have a recurrence of the disastrous effects of floods that occurred in 1893, when there was an enormous rainfall over the watershed of the Brisbane and Bremer Rivers, and tremendous damage was done on two occasions. The major question is how far we are justified in handing over to an outside authority the construction of very large works entailing the spending of a very considerable amount of money without having the right to closely scrutinise the items of expenditure.

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN (*Murilla*) [11.15 a.m.]: Until we receive full particulars from the Premier during the second reading stage, and see the Bill, we are not in a position to comment extensively on the measure, but at this stage we do know that the cost to the Government will be tremendous. The Government will obtain loans and tax the people of the whole of Queensland in order to provide the city of Brisbane with these works. In other words, the people of Central, Western, and Northern Queensland will have to contribute and have their properties mortgaged for the purpose of providing a water supply and flood prevention scheme for Brisbane.

The SECRETARY FOR MINES: What about the destruction of the prickly-pear?

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: I should like the hon. gentleman to know that the destruction of the prickly-pear was done by insects at a cost of practically nothing from the point of view of the State. I would point out that all the major works involving the expenditure of enormous sums of money are being confined to the large centres of population. Only trivial work is being done in the country, and it provides employment for very few people. Work involving the expenditure of sums amounting to millions of pounds is to be done in the metropolis and some other large centre.

This policy simply means that the people in the country will be forced to the cities in order to obtain employment. I already have had letters from a dozen young men in my own electorate asking me what chance they had of getting work on the Kangaroo Point Bridge. These young men would be more profitably employed in the country, but they are not satisfied to remain there. They want to obtain work in Brisbane. They desire to spend a period of their lives, at any rate, in the centres of population where the large works are being undertaken. This policy induces some of the very best of our young men in the country districts to leave, and this is not in the best interests of the State.

Mr. W. J. COPLEY: Brisbane will have to pay for the work.

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: That is the unfortunate part of the matter—Brisbane will not have to pay. So far as I can understand, either 40 per cent. or 50 per cent. of the cost of this work will be borne by the State in the form of grants. I should not have the same objection to the scheme if the cost was to be borne by the people who were to benefit. It is improper to call upon the people as a whole to bear the cost of a scheme that is designed to benefit only a portion of the State. The business people will be helped by the presence of a large number of workers in possession of an increased income, which eventually must find its way into the various business undertakings. The country people are being called upon to contribute towards the cost of providing a water scheme for Brisbane and Ipswich.

Mr. GLEDSON: Who provides the butter and wheat and other primary products?

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: The farmer, of course. Does the hon. member suggest that the mere transference of 5,000 men from the country to the city is going to increase the consumption of primary products in the State? A man would not eat any more butter or flour merely because he resided in Brisbane instead of Roma, Charleville, Cunnamulla, or any other place. It does not follow that because employment is provided for a greater number of workers in the city the consumption of primary products in the State as a whole will be increased. The hon. member for Ipswich must know perfectly well that the prices realised for surplus primary products are based on oversea parity and not on Australian parity. I have no serious objection to the proposed work being carried out, but I strongly object to the Government making a grant for the purpose, which means, in effect, that part of the cost of the work is to be borne by the people in the country who will receive no benefit at all. If the principle is a sound one then every local authority in the country is entitled to a subsidy from the Government to carry out schemes for the prevention of the flooding of country towns and the provision of water supplies. The Mackay outer harbour project will eventually prove to be a white elephant, and the whole of the cost of the undertaking will have to be borne by the State. As a country representative, I object to the country being compelled to pay interest and redemption on a large sum of money that is to be expended in a large centre of population for the definite purpose of providing a benefit for the people within that particular area.

The PREMIER (Hon. W. Forgan Smith, *Mackay*) [11.20 a.m.]: The Leader of the Opposition labours under an entire misapprehension when he assumes that the Bill sets up an authority outside the control of Parliament. Under this Bill the Bureau of Industry is to be the constructing authority. The bureau and any of its subsidiary authorities

are Crown instrumentalities, and Parliament will still exercise the same control over the bureau as it exercises to-day over the Railway Department, the Department of Public Works, the Main Roads Commission, or any other department of State. The Government have undertaken this scheme because it is of such great magnitude that it should not be left to any local authority to undertake. It affects more than one local authority, and the Government are naturally concerned, because Brisbane is the capital city and the major public buildings are within the city area. The responsibility as between the Brisbane City Council, the Ipswich City Council, and the Government has been properly allocated in the Bill, after consultation with the local authorities concerned. Representation on the authority to be set up is being given to the Brisbane City Council and the Ipswich City Council. The same principle is being adopted in this instance as in the erection of the central bridge. A bridge board was created composed of representatives of the component local authorities, and they administer its affairs. I repeat that the control of Parliament is the same as that exercised over the Commissioner of Main Roads and the Commissioner for Railways or any other Crown instrumentality.

Mr. MOORE: The Bureau of Industry has power to issue its own debentures?

The PREMIER: It has, but only subject to the authority of the Government.

Mr. MOORE: By Order in Council.

The PREMIER: Yes, but that has nothing to do with the subject under review. I am pointing out that this project could only be carried out by an authority representative of the three interests, the Crown, the Brisbane City Council, and the Ipswich City Council. The scheme has been thoroughly investigated and the report has been in the hands of hon. members since the beginning of June. Obviously, this is not the stage for me to give full details of the scheme, or the operations of the Bill, but they will be given at the second reading stage. I brought on the Bill this morning so that it could be printed and circulated amongst hon. members to enable them to read it, in conjunction with the report already in their hands, before the second reading debate. That has been done for the obvious reason of allowing hon. members an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the whole plan.

Mr. RUSSELL (*Hamilton*) [11.26 a.m.]: For once I do not condemn the Government for introducing this Bill, as I have done in connection with other Bills where the expenditure of large sums of money was involved. My complaint in the past, particularly in regard to large projects with which the Government intended to proceed, was that the Bureau of Industry was armed with such enormous powers that it was able to proceed with the construction of the Kangaroo Point Bridge without the introduction of any special Bill.

The PREMIER: That is nonsense. You passed the Bill last session.

Mr. RUSSELL: We passed no Bill whatever dealing with the Kangaroo Point Bridge. In this instance the Government have done the proper thing in asking for parliamentary sanction to construct certain works on the Brisbane River. That is the proper procedure, and we demand that the Kangaroo Point Bridge be handled in the same fashion. All that we know about the Kangaroo Point Bridge to-day is that certain provision has been made in the Estimates for the payment of the first moiety. This Bill gives authority to the bureau to proceed with the construction of a dam and other matters. That is the proper procedure, and I want similar procedure followed in regard to other projects that will be carried on by it. Nevertheless, the fact that this procedure is being adopted now does not destroy the force of the other point I have frequently made, that there is no necessity whatever for endowing the bureau with such enormous powers. The bureau was originally instituted as an advisory body only, and it was intended that certain citizens should be co-opted in order that their advice to the bureau might be available. This Government broadened the activities of the bureau that was created during the Moore Government regime. They have gone beyond their own original intention and have made the bureau a constructing authority. There is no necessity for that. There is no reason why the Department of Public Works should not be entrusted with the carrying on of all these projects, whether by day labour by the department itself or by contract. The sum of money involved is so vast that it is necessary that tenders should be called. We all know what happens when a blank cheque is given to any department; there is not the same rigorous inspection of any work or the same close scrutiny of costs as would be made if a private individual or corporation were entrusted with carrying it out. The competition that would ensue if tenders were called might save a good deal of money. That course should have been followed in regard to this scheme.

There can only be one opinion regarding the main objects of the Bill, which seeks to provide an adequate water supply and flood prevention scheme for Brisbane. It is wise at this juncture to make provision for the establishment of a water scheme that will carry Brisbane forward for a great number of years to come. We must be careful, of course, that the right scheme is adopted. According to all reports that have been tabled, the expense of a flood prevention scheme is enormous. It is doubtful whether we can accomplish very much except where the expenditure is spread over a long period of time. I have analysed the various costs set out in the report of the Bureau of Industry and other reports that have been furnished by competent authorities and I have found a great difficulty in reconciling the estimated cost indicated in the report furnished by the bureau and the costs furnished by competent authorities. That is why I think it is wise to call tenders for the carrying out of this scheme. Authorities differ—naturally.

Even in the commission appointed by the Government we have the dissenting voice of Mr. L. C. Morris, who is of opinion that sufficient attention is not paid to the Iddle Creek scheme. As a matter of fact, Mr. A. G. Gutteridge, who was appointed in 1927, and whose report was tabled in 1928, comes to an entirely different conclusion. Mr. Gutteridge advises that if we want only a water scheme we should fully develop the present storage facilities on the

Brisbane River, combined with the inauguration of a scheme on the Coomera River. He said, furthermore, that if we were desirous of having a flood prevention scheme the only feasible scheme was damming the river at two points—at Middle Creek and at the Stanley River, involving an enormous sum of money. If we are going to have flood prevention combined with a water scheme, let us do the thing properly. I am inclined to think that the provision made here is not adequate. At any rate, when the Premier makes his next speech he should try to reconcile the estimates provided by the bureau with the estimates provided by Mr. Gutteridge, which differ very much.

If we do start a scheme we do not want to have a fiasco made of it, because with the rapidly growing population of Brisbane and surrounding districts it is essential that all these sources of supply should be taken in hand and provision made not only for Brisbane and Ipswich but also for surrounding towns on the South Coast. I would advocate, therefore, that the other schemes mooted from time to time, such as the conservation of water in the Coomera River and Nerang Creek, should also be taken into consideration, because we anticipate that this part of Australia will carry a big population in the next twenty or thirty years, and we must make adequate provision so that when we are faced with a shortage of water—which must happen eventually unless we make provision now—we shall have various schemes in operation extending over a long period. In that way the burden on the taxpayers will not be as great as it would be if a large scheme were thrust upon them at once.

One advantage to the people of Brisbane in this scheme is that the Government are giving assistance. Provided we adopt the right scheme we should undertake the construction of the reservoir, which is far more important than any of the other projects mooted by the Government. This and schemes of a similar nature we can support, first because they provide a vast amount of work to wage-earners, and secondly because we shall be constructing a productive utility in regard of which the people will pay for services rendered. In that respect the burden will not be upon the Government, so that the scheme under review is dissimilar from many of the projects that the Government have in hand to-day. I would far sooner have schemes of this nature than schemes involving the building of palatial edifices to house Ministers and their staffs, which could wait until the country was more prosperous.

At any rate, we must await the Bill for further detail, because it is a most important measure requiring careful consideration. Do not let us make any mistakes about the scheme we finally adopt, so that in the years to come the people of Brisbane will commend us for our sagacity.

Question—"That the resolution (*Mr. Smith's motion*) be agreed to"—put and passed.

The House resumed.

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

Resolution agreed to.

FIRST READING.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) presented the Bill, and moved—

> "That the Bill be now read a first time."

Question put and passed.

Second reading of the Bill made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Hanson, Buranda, in the chair.*)

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A Cooper, *Bremer*) [11.37 a.m.]: I move—

> "That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend 'The Workers' Compensation Acts, 1916 to 1929,' in certain particulars."

According to the report of the Insurance Commissioner over the past years—for two years at any rate during the trough of the depression—an amount of money had to be drawn from reserves to meet calls upon the insurance fund. For the past year the position has much improved because of the increase in the amounts received for policies, which is due to increased employment. One or two amendments are to be made to the Acts that it is felt are desirable. Other amendments are equally desirable, but one can only meet the situation as the opportunity offers. It is proposed now to increase the benefits paid to dependants of workers who are killed in industry. At the present time the maximum amount payable is £600, and the minimum £300, and, according to the amount earned by the deceased worker over the three-year period preceding death, so is the compensation paid. Members of the Committee will readily see that under that system, if a man had been in employment for a full three years before his death, his dependants would get the full amount, but the dependants of the unfortunate worker who had not been in full work for three years would receive a much smaller amount. The main object of the amending Bill is to make payments to the dependants in the case of the death of a worker of the maximum amount of £600 in all cases.

The altered economic conditions have meant that at present many children are not independent of the father at the age of fourteen years. The Acts to-day say that dependent children up to the age of fourteen should be taken into consideration in assessing compensation to the injured worker. It is very desirable that children should be kept out of industry till a much later period because of the need for a wider education and various other reasons. It is proposed, therefore, that where children are entirely dependent upon the injured worker they shall be taken into consideration in the matter of the payment of compensation up to the age of sixteen.

Question—"That the resolution (*Mr. Cooper's motion*) be agreed to"—put and passed.

The House resumed.

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

Resolution agreed to.

FIRST READING.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. F. A. Cooper, *Bremer*) presented the Bill, and moved—

"That the Bill be now read a first time."

Question put and passed.

Second reading of the Bill made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

MAIN ROADS ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Hanson, Buranda, in the chair.*)

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Clause 3—"*Amendment of section 9—board to make surveys, etc.*"—

Mr. RUSSELL (*Hamilton*) [11.44 a.m.]: I have an amendment to move on subclause 3 of this clause, but before doing so I should like the Secretary for Public Works to make the position clearer in connection with national parks. I understand the object of this subclause is to allow the Commissioner to take a part of the land required for his purpose but not the whole of it. If it is the intention that he should take the whole, then it should be resented. We do not desire the Commissioner of Main Roads or anyone else to interfere with our national parks. We have gone to great pains to set aside in Queensland certain areas for this purpose and we must prevent any intrusion on them. We have not too many national parks and we must strongly object to the Commissioner taking control of them. It may be wise that we should allow him to have certain parts, but even then we are allowing him far too much power. If he desires any part of a national park he should obtain the consent of the Department of Public Lands. I should like the Minister to give the Committee an assurance that there is no intention to hand over to the Commissioner the control of our national parks or even to allow him to take any part of them unless consent is given by the department concerned, which, I take it, will be the Department of Public Lands.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [11.46 a.m.]: We have had numerous requests for the provision of tracks in our national parks, but there is no intention to give the Commissioner of Main Roads power to take the whole of the land. The idea is that certain sections will be reserved. On the second reading I made it clear that we were very anxious to protect the natural scenery where roads will be constructed. The flora is protected in the national parks and, in answer to an interjection by the hon. member for Cook, I pointed out that Lake Eacham is controlled by trustees. Unfortunately, they have not the necessary funds to make the necessary tracks. Our idea is that where tracks are constructed an area on each side should be reserved in order that the natural beauty of the country may be retained. People passing along them will thus have an opportunity of seeing the original flora of the country. There is no intention on our part to take the whole of the parks.

Mr. RUSSELL (*Hamilton*) [11.47 a.m.]: I will be satisfied with that assurance. The Commissioner is to be commended for his endeavours to retain, as far as possible, a strip of land on each side of his State highways and main roads. These roads will become more beautiful as the years go by and the trees grow up, but it is regrettable to notice in some places where roads have been built the absolute desecration that has taken place in connection with the trees and foliage on each side of the road. One has only to travel the Tambourine Mountain road to realise the futility and the total inadequacy of the strip of country reserved on each side of it. That is a beautiful road, but in my opinion sufficient area has not been retained for scenic purposes, and I trust that the same mistake will not be made in the future. If we reserve too narrow a strip there is just the danger that cyclones will destroy the whole of the timber. I should like to see adequate strips of timber reserved on each side of main roads or State highways. I know that the Bill deals with that particular matter in that it provides for the reservation of a strip of timber on each side 99 feet wide from the centre of the roadway, but I feel we could go even better than that. Recently I had an opportunity of travelling over some of the very fine highways in America, and it was wonderful to see the tremendous area of forest country reserved on either side of the highways, with its wealth of timber and foliage. It is a beautiful sight relished very much by tourists and sightseers. I hope that in Queensland we shall keep on with the good work and that the Commissioner will not be too niggardly in reserving sufficient area on each side of the road for scenic purposes, and that he will also prevent the possibility of these beautiful trees being destroyed by cyclones or high winds.

Mr. R. M. KING (*Logan*) [11.51 a.m.]: Under section 9 of the principal Act the Commissioner has power to acquire land for purposes of national parks and for other requirements, but this clause gives him power to acquire lands that are not adjacent to the road. It is right to give him power to acquire lands for the purposes of national parks, but why should he be given power to offer land for sale as perpetual town leases, perpetual suburban leases, or perpetual country leases in pursuance of section 121 of the Land Acts? I think that is going quite beyond the spirit of the principal Act. It was never intended that the Commissioner should be allowed to carry on a business of a speculative nature by acquiring land by resumption and then selling it as an investment. I am very sorry indeed that that power is to be given to him, but perhaps the Minister may be able to give a reasonable explanation for the clause.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [11.53 a.m.]: The object of the clause is to give the Commissioner power to resume land embracing a scenic resort discovered by the surveyors of the department where that scenic resort is not developed by private enterprise. The Commissioner will construct tourist tracks from the nearest main road, railway line, or town after the land has been resumed, and he should be given power to offer the land for sale as a perpetual lease to any private individual who desires to develop it. The object of the clause is to prevent the establishment of State enterprise, which some hon. members opposite feared was the intention of the Government,

and it will give the Commissioner power to lease the land to a private person who desires to invest his money in catering for public requirements. An amendment has been circulated by the hon. member for Murilla which specifically asks that the control of these scenic resorts should be by private enterprise in agreement with the Commissioner. This clause makes definite provision for that course to be followed.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [11.55 a.m.]: The Commissioner has power to resume land under this Bill, which provides that the amount of compensation shall be fixed by the Land Court. The Land Court, though, will not take into consideration the purpose for which the owner purchased the land. If the individual purchased the land for the purpose of creating a scenic resort, and constructing buildings and other conveniences necessary for the use of tourists or travellers, the Land Court should have power to take that reason into consideration and not be confined to the actual value of the land at the time it was resumed for "public purposes." It does not seem reasonable that when a piece of land containing scenic beauties has been purchased for the purpose of supplying the facilities the people need, and when that investment seems to be a profitable enterprise, the Commissioner should have power to resume it, and, after having the value for public purposes determined by the Land Court, be able to offer it for sale as a perpetual leasehold. If the individual from whom the land has been resumed had the initiative to purchase it and has paid rates on it for a number of years with the idea of making a tourist resort of it, there is no reason why these facts should not be taken into consideration by the court. In a time of depression, such as the present, an individual may decide that it is useless to spend money in opening up the resort until times improve, but under the clause that fact will not be taken into consideration, nor the amount of rates he may have paid over a number of years. This Bill gives the Commissioner tremendous powers and prevents a private individual from carrying out an object which the Commissioner had in view. It gives the Commissioner power to engage in a money-making venture. He may say, "That place is suitable for a scenic or tourist resort; I will take it over." He will then offer it for sale as a perpetual leasehold to individuals to carry on the very enterprise which the original owner intended to undertake.

Mr. G. C. TAYLOR: Don't you think the Commissioner would use a little discretion if the original owner wanted to do so?

Mr. MOORE: I do not know. This Bill does not say that he is to be consulted in any way, or whether an agreement is to be made with him.

Mr. G. C. TAYLOR: Don't you think the Commissioner is endowed with the spirit of reasonableness, which he would use in that case?

Mr. MOORE: This Bill goes right outside the province of a Commissioner of Main Roads. This function does not involve the construction of main roads, but a speculative enterprise of constructing a tourist resort. The whole object of this clause is very obscure. We all agree that the present Commissioner is a very fine officer. In fact, he is one of the best officers in the public service, and his ability in the construction of main roads is acknowledged, as well as his services on the Bureau of Industry and other bodies. We seem in Queensland to pass laws for the individual. If we happen to have a public official endowed with ability and trustworthiness, we pass laws to enable him to do practically what he desires, but no protection is given to the public in the event of another official succeeding him at some future time. The whole of our laws appear to be supported by the question, "Cannot you trust the individual who happens to be in the public service at the time?" We should pass laws for the benefit of the community generally and not trust administration to any individual who may be in a given office. In this Bill the Commissioner is given carte blanche powers irrespective of the rights of other people, or the overlapping of shire councils.

Mr. G. C. TAYLOR: Only subject to the Governor in Council.

Mr. MOORE: We all know what the Governor in Council is. The Commissioner will make a recommendation to the Governor in Council and without investigation it will be adopted. We are dealing with a very serious principle. We are considering a clause that will enable a constructing officer of a constructing department to take part in a sphere of action altogether outside his ordinary business. We are not suggesting that Mr. Kemp, as Commissioner of Main Roads, will do something unreasonable, but we must remember that this legislation is being passed not for this year only, but for many years, irrespective of whom the Commissioner will be in future. Thus, sufficient protection to public rights should be afforded against any undue interference by an officer who is really not concerned in this class of work but who has had it thrust upon him.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [12.1 p.m.]: So far as the present Commissioner of Main Roads is concerned, the question can be very easily disposed of by stating the acknowledged fact that Mr. Kemp is respected by every hon. member, and his ability is undoubted. Of course, we are dealing with legislation that may be operative for many years, and, perhaps, beyond the term of office of the present Commissioner, but at the outset I want to dispose of the idea in the minds of some hon. members opposite that any intention exists under this Bill to take over tourist facilities where they already exist. We desire to act more or less as pioneers of resorts that become known through the activities of road builders but are not to-day being exploited. I stressed the case mentioned by the hon. member for Cook, concerning Lake Barrine, in my own electorate, in respect of which Mr. Curry has leased the right of tourist facilities. We should not interfere in such a case. On the other hand, Lake Eacham tourist facilities are operated under a trust which has had difficulty in obtaining funds, and has repeatedly asked the Main Roads Commission to provide better facilities into the district in order that tourists to the Atherton Tableland could visit both places. Suppose we construct a road into the Lake Eacham district, and wished to call tenders from private persons to control the tourist facilities there. The authority to do so is contained

in the clause that has been criticised by the Leader of the Opposition.

On the question of land resumptions, surely no better authority could adjudicate on these questions than the Land Court! The very fact that we have made this provision shows that there is no desire on our part to be other than fair.

Clause 3, as read, agreed to.

Clause 4—"*Amendment of section 10—Board to prepare map of roads, etc.*"—agreed to.

Clause 5—"*Amendment of section 11—Commissioner to recommend what roads shall be State highways*"—

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN (*Murilla*) [12.5 p.m.]: I move the following amendment:—

> "On page 6, line 6, omit the word—
> 'Any,'
>
> and insert in lieu thereof the words—
> 'Subject to the approval of the local authority concerned, any'."

If after he has constructed State highways, main roads, tourist roads, etc., the Commissioner of Main Roads has money at his disposal to construct secondary roads—I do not know where he will get the money, but that is a matter for him or for the Government—I have no objection to his doing so. As a matter of fact, representing as I do a district where the bulk of the people use secondary roads rather than other roads, I approve of secondary roads being constructed under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Main Roads. My objection is that the Commissioner has power, with the consent of the Governor in Council, to do work on secondary roads notwithstanding the fact that the local authority concerned may object to the expenditure of money in that direction. It was proper to give the Main Roads Commission power to spend money on State highways or main roads, because such State highways or main roads generally run through several shires, and if one shire adopted a dog-in-the-manger attitude and objected to the Commissioner constructing a main road or State highway through its area, the whole of that work might be held up if the Commissioner had not the power to engage in the work without the consent of the local authority. It was found necessary to strengthen the hands of the Commissioner in order that he would have power to construct the State highway, main road, or tourist road through the different local authority areas without their consent; but I do not know of any instance where such a road has been constructed without the consent of the local authorities. During my term of office the local authorities were always asked if they agreed to a main road or State highway that was contemplated, and they always willingly did so. I do not know of any local authority that refused to agree to the building of such a road through its area. The construction of a State highway meant an expenditure of money on the road by the State, the local authorities concerned being called upon to pay only half the cost of the maintenance; whilst in the case of a main road the beneficial amendment introduced by the Moore Government reduced the contribution by the local authorities from seven-fourteenths to three-fourteenths. I do not know of any local authority that refused to agree to a main road being gazetted in its territory.

Secondary roads, however, are in quite a different category. As I stated yesterday, secondary roads may mean almost any road in a local authority area. Most of the main roads have their source in a town and anyone entering or leaving that town will travel on a main road for some distance, although it may be only two or three miles. Almost any secondary road will eventually reach that main road, tourist road, developmental road, or State highway, and the Commissioner, without the consent of the local authority, is to have power to do work on these secondary roads. The Minister may say that the Commissioner would not do anything against the wishes of the local authority concerned. I know that Mr. Kemp has not forced work upon any local authority and would not do so, but the Government could instruct the Commissioner to have certain work done on secondary roads in a local authority area which might cost £50,000, of which the local authority would be responsible for £25,000; and this could be done without its consent. That sum would become a loan to the local authority without its consent and without the ratepayers in that locality being afforded an opportunity of saying whether they were in favour of thus mortgaging their properties or not. By using that power the Government could instruct the Commissioner to commence secondary roads throughout the local authority areas in the State to an extent sufficient to absorb all the unemployed. It is a method by which the Government could compel property-owners to pay interest and redemption on loans in order to provide employment in a district whether the local authorities approved or otherwise. It places enormous powers in the hands of the Government, and also in the hands of the Commisioner of Main Roads, but I feel sure that the latter would not use such powers unless he were instructed so to do by the Government of the day. The latter could ruin the valuation of properties throughout Queensland. As hon. members are aware over-taxation decreases the value of property and people will not invest money by purchasing property in localities where there is a very high rate of local authority taxation. Intending investors make it their business to ascertain first of all the amount of taxation imposed by the local authorities. If this is heavy a considerable reduction takes place in the value of the land. When this Bill becomes law, as no doubt it will, the Government will obtain enormous powers that at the present time they do not possess. My amendment means that the Commissioner would not be prevented from constructing secondary roads, but before he did so the approval of the local authority must be obtained. I am not asking very much. It is a matter only of having protection. In the personnel of our local authorities throughout Queensland we have exceptionally fine men. They are men of whom we are proud and are doing exceptionally good work without any monetary payment.

Mr. O'KEEFE: Why don't you pay them?

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: It may be a good thing were we to do so, but I suppose it resolves itself into a question whether we could afford to do so. There is

also the question whether they would do as good work after they were paid.

Mr. W. T. KING: That is an argument in favour of your not being paid.

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: For that matter I do not know that members of Parliament at present do better work than those of the days gone by when there was no pay attached to the position.

The Government should not take from local authorities the privilege of deciding whether they favour the incurring of a debt, nor do I think the Government should take out of the hands of the taxpayers of the local authorities the right of saying whether they are in favour of their property being mortgaged in order to construct roads. Surely to goodness a man owning property has some rights! If he desires low taxation and inferior roads, surely he has the right to have those conditions. Some local authorities prefer——

Mr. G. C. TAYLOR: A man has a perfect right to go back to the horse, too, if he likes.

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: He has a perfect right to go back to the horse if he so desires, but he would be going back to the donkey if he went back to the hon. member. I, certainly, have no objection to going back to the horse; in fact, numbers of men find it more profitable to do so. The Government have no right to take away from the people the right of voting on a question as to whether their responsibilities shall be increased or otherwise, nor do I think the Government have any right to take from local authorities the responsibility of saying whether they desire the construction of roads.

Mr. WIENHOLT: The same principle is involved in the Kangaroo Point Bridge.

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: There is no doubt about that, but it is wrong, as I have already stated. It is a good thing for the Minister to introduce this innovation, enabling the Commissioner to construct secondary roads—that is one of the best principles of the Bill—but this power should not be given to him without the consent of the local authority concerned. I trust the Minister will accept my amendment.

Mr. SPARKES (*Dalby*) [12.18 p.m.]: Surely the Minister is prepared to accept the amendment in view of the fact that local authorities are now elected on the broad franchise and the representatives are thoroughly acquainted with local conditions! I am satisfied that the Commissioner would welcome the advice of the local authorities, who should have some voice in the matter of whether they are to have a road or not, especially as they are called upon to bear one-half of the cost. I thoroughly approve of the power given to the Commissioner to decide whether main roads or State highways are to be constructed, but I think that the people who represent specific districts are best able to decide what secondary roads are required. I hope the Minister will accept the amendment.

At 12.20 p.m.,

Mr. W. T. KING (*Maree*), one of the panel of Temporary Chairmen, relieved the Chairman in the chair.

Mr. KENNY (*Cook*) [12.20 p.m.]: I do not wish to prolong the debate on this clause, but it is a very vital question for the local authorities throughout the State. I approve of the scheme to construct secondary roads, but I want to retain for the local authorities the right to say whether these roads should be constructed or not. I am anxious to avoid complications, and particularly divided control. Is it not possible that difficulties may arise in the future and that the Main Roads Commission may insist upon a road being constructed whether the local authority approves or not? The local authority can be called upon to meet a percentage of the cost. I have no desire to debate this question at length, but if the Minister is not prepared to accept the amendment then at least he should give us some reason for not doing so.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [12.22 p.m.]: One would think that the local authorities were in fear and trembling lest the Commissioner should compel them to accept the construction of roads in their areas, lest he will continually say to them, "You must have roads." As a matter of fact, I am in fear and trembling lest the local authorities say to me, "Build roads, build roads, and keep building them." I should be very much relieved if some of the local authorities intimated that they did not want roads constructed within their area.

Mr. KENNY: That is not the point.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: It is very much to the point. It is assumed by hon. members opposite that the Commissioner is going to force roads on to the local authorities. The amendment is covered by clause 9 of the Bill. Under section 15 of the Main Roads Acts, as it will be amended by clause 9 of the Bill, before recommending to the Governor in Council the declaration of a secondary road the Commissioner will have to serve notice of his intention on the local authority concerned. The local authority has thirty days within which to object to the Minister, who may vary or disallow the recommendation. I am satisfied that there will be many intelligent councils that will not object but will make requests for these roads. Do hon. members opposite mean to suggest that the representatives of farmers in an electorate where it is impossible to transport produce to a main road or railway line in wet weather are likely to object to a proposal like this?

Mr. SPARKES: They might suggest a different route to the Commissioner.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: In that event I am definitely of opinion that the Commissioner is the right person to decide the route. His surveyor is able to furnish him with information concerning the grades and directions. Very often local men, who assume they know all that there is to be known about grades and directions, are shown when they meet the Commissioner on the spot that their knowledge is not as great as they think. Time after time I have accompanied the Commissioner on visits of inspection to districts where individuals, and bodies of men, have been met who desired the construction of a road along a certain route. Very often their proposal involved a detour of a few miles. They

forget that the cost of the road might be £5,000 or £6,000 a mile. The detour is usually based on some interest that they possess in the locality. The Commissioner is not interested in or impressed by individual claims. His purpose is to construct roads into lands to make them more easily available for settlement, or to give settlers readier access to markets. He is also imbued with the basic idea of keeping costs down as low as possible, consistent with giving the people an all-weather secondary road with a reasonable grade. Ample protection is afforded now. The Commissioner will not build a road in an arbitrary manner. He first places the proposal before the local authority concerned. No Commissioner of Main Roads will desire to force these roads on the people if they do not require them. We want a great deal more money than is available at the present time to meet demands for secondary roads. For these reasons I cannot accept the amendment.

Mr. KENNY (*Cook*) [12.27 p.m.]: The Minister loses sight of the point we are endeavouring to make. Under the present Bill the Commissioner has authority to submit a road proposal to the local authority, which has thirty days in which to object. But if it does object the Commissioner may go ahead with his proposal, because his decision is final. There is no appeal from it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: An appeal can be made to the Minister.

Mr. KENNY: The local authority can appeal to the Minister, and he, no doubt, can alter the decision. What we have to concern ourselves about is the law as it stands on the statute-book. Whilst the Commissioner and the Minister may pay attention to the wishes of a local authority, there will be nothing on the statute-book when this Bill is passed to say that the Minister or local authority shall have the final say. The Commissioner has the final say. This amendment is designed to put the matter beyond all doubt and preserve the rights of a local authority to object to a secondary road being forced upon it. If the Commissioner has plenty of work to do, the Minister will accept our suggestion and give local authorities an opportunity to lodge an objection if they wish to do so. The amendment places the matter beyond all doubt, and if accepted will enact the principle of consulting with local authorities.

Mr. GLEDSON (*Ipswich*) [12.29 p.m.]: The hon. member for Cook has raised a serious objection to his amendment. Quite a number of local authorities have boundary roads within their area on which not even a shovelful of gravel is placed from one year's end to the other.

Mr. SPARKES: Why?

Mr. GLEDSON: Because they happen to be adjacent to the boundary and there is a dearth of ratepayers in the locality. Take the property of the hon. member for Stanley as an instance. There is a boundary road up to his property which at times, especially wet weather, is in an awful condition. There are very few ratepayers in the locality, and therefore the local authority will not spend hundreds of pounds in making it trafficable in all weathers. That applies to almost every local authority in the State, especially shire councils. Take the electorate of the hon. member for Oxley. At one end of his electorate the Sherwood Shire Council neglected to attend to its boundary roads until the Commissioner of Main Roads took them over. That council would not dig a drain on the boundary of the shire of Moreton.

Mr. NIMMO: That was the fault of the Moreton Shire Council.

Mr. GLEDSON: No; the road was in the Sherwood Shire area and the Moreton Shire Council had no authority to go into another area. To accept the amendment might enable a local authority that objected to the construction of a necessary road to prevent a facility being given to people who were urgently in need of it.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) ([12.31 p.m.]: If ever a reason was needed for the necessity of this amendment, that reason has been supplied by the hon. member for Ipswich. Hon. members will see at page seventeen of the Bill a provision that the amount charged to a local authority on account of permanent works on main, secondary, and tourist roads shall be deemed to be a loan for a period of thirty years, advanced by the Treasurer to that local authority. In short, a liability is being placed upon a local authority which, as the hon. member for Ipswich himself said, might object. The local authority will be compelled to accept a liability in respect of a road that it may not consider worth while. The amendment, on the other hand, seeks to provide that local authorities shall be consulted. The Bill also makes provision whereby the Commissioner may determine the amounts to be charged to each local authority in respect of areas that are deemed to be benefited in accordance with the clause that appears on page thirteen of the Bill. The remarks of the hon. member for Ipswich would suggest that local government is out of date and that local governing bodies should be overridden on the question of the construction of a secondary road. That principle is wrong. If we do not believe in local government, wipe it out and place the control of road construction throughout Queensland under the Commissioner of Main Roads. On the other hand, if we do believe in local government and in the justice of people in local governing areas having a voice in the construction of works that will entail financial obligations upon them, it is not right that an outside authority should be able to construct a road half the cost of which will constitute a loan by the Treasurer to that local authority.

In the very extraordinary attitude that he has adopted the hon. member for Ipswich has supplied the reason for the amendment. We want co-ordination instead of duplication. We desire co-operation between the local authorities and the Commissioner of Main Roads instead of the divided control that the hon. member for Ipswich seems to anticipiate. The hon. member for Ipswich has referred to a case where a local authority may not desire certain work to be done; yet the ratepayers in that area will have no opportunity to express their opinion at a poll on the question whether the local authority should incur a loan liability extending over thirty years, for, notwithstanding the provisions of any other legislation, the amount will under this Bill be deemed to be a loan from the Treasurer to the local authority. I cannot see any objection to the amendment, which does not interfere with the opportunity to give work but merely provides that people in the area

concerned shall agree to accept the liability involved. In my own local government area we have had suggestions at various times to build main roads, but in every case we considered whether the estimated cost, as supplied by the Main Roads Commissioner, would be warranted having regard to the volume of traffic that would utilise the proposed road for the carriage of produce to the railway. The matter was viewed in the light of whether it would be better to save, say, 2d. or 3d. a bag on the carriage of maize to the railway and pay the extra rate that would be entailed if the road was provided, or whether it would be better to continue the existing arrangement. On occasions we found it was infinitely cheaper to pay the extra rate to take the produce to the railway than to have a main road constructed. The main road would have been a convenience to the people and would have been pleasant to travel on, but the cost to the people in such a scattered district did not warrant the expenditure. This measure provides that a secondary road may be constructed in an area and the amount of money expended is deemed to be a loan and a special loan rate has to be levied under the Local Authorities Acts to meet the instalments of principal and interest payable from time to time. Surely it is reasonable that any local governing body should have the right to say whether a road is warranted or not!

Amendment (*Mr. Morgan*) negatived.

Mr. ANNAND (*East Toowoomba*) [12.37 p.m.]: I should like the Minister to state whether "track" mentioned in clause 5 is a pedestrian track or whether it is one over which a horse or vehicular traffic may pass?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [12.38 p.m.]: The tracks may be suitable for both classes of traffic. In the case I cited at Lake Eacham there is a road, but just a road; there are many other places where they would be purely tracks for pedestrians to walk through in order to view the scenery. After all, people do not want to be in cars all the time.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [12.39 p.m.]: I move the following amendment:—

> "On page 7, after line 8, insert the following proviso:—
>
> > 'Provided, however, that no action taken under subsection one hereof shall increase the liability of any local authority to contribute towards the cost and/or maintenance of a road the designation of which is altered under the powers hereinbefore contained.' "

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [12.40 p.m.]: This amendment seems to be fair and reasonable. I quite agree that there should be no increase in the cost, and I accept the amendment.

Amendment (*Mr. Moore*) agreed to.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [12.41 p.m.]: I should like some information with regard to the following paragraph which it is proposed to add to subsection (4) of section 11 of the principal Act:—

> "Where an existing structure carrying any public utility of the kind herein described requires to be reconstructed either wholly or partially for the purposes of the Act the provisions of this subsection shall apply thereto, and the Commissioner shall not be compellable to replace such public utility where its removal has been necessary during such reconstruction."

Does that include the case of an electric light or tramway pole that has to be removed? Does this clause mean that when electric light poles, tramway poles, or pipes are interfered with by the construction of a road the Commissioner of Main Roads shall not be compelled to move them? It appears to me as being capable of being read both ways. I think it is intended to mean that where a public utility is affected by a road in course of construction the Commissioner should not be compelled to reinstate it, but I do not see why he should not. The authority that removes it surely should be the one to put it back, and if the Commissioner of Main Roads in the reconstruction of a road removes a structure it seems to me that he should be compelled to replace it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [12.43 p.m.]: I think that this provision applies very largely to electric poles, tramway poles, and other structures of that nature. The question arises very often whether these public utilities have not taken upon themselves certain obligations for which the Commissioner would not feel inclined to compensate them. Very often electric light poles have been placed in a position that is dangerous. I think the idea of the Commissioner is to render every assistance but not to undertake the actual re-erection.

Clause 5, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 6 to 12, both inclusive, agreed to.

At 12.46 p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

Clause 13—"*Amendment of section 19—Roads to new settlements*"—agreed to.

Clause 14—"*New section 20—Power of Commissioner, with approval of Governor in Council, to erect and maintain buildings, etc.*"—

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN (*Murilla*) [12.47 p.m.]: I move the following amendment:—

> "On page 10, lines 10 to 15, omit the words—
>
> > 'erect and maintain such buildings, conveniences, jetties, wharves, or landing stages as in the opinion of the Governor in Council are necessary or desirable for the purpose of developing any resort for tourists,'
>
> and insert in lieu thereof the words—
>
> > 'make an agreement with any person for the erection and maintenance of such buildings, conveniences, jetties, wharves, or landing stages as in the opinion of the Governor in Council are necessary or desirable for the purpose of developing any resort for tourists.' "

My motive in asking for this amendment is to ensure that we will not revert to State enterprises. The Premier has publicly announced that he is absolutely against Governmental State enterprises, and that the experience of the Labour Party over a number of years was so expensive and farcical that he would have nothing more to

do with them in any shape or form. Everyone recognises that that statement was sound. We know that in the inauguration of State enterprises we were doing experimental work, but it has cost the State many millions of pounds to demonstrate to the rest of the world that Governments could not successfully carry on State enterprises. We were the "mugs" while the rest of the world looked on. Even in Great Britain the authorities were interested to know whether our experiment would provide cheaper food for the people by the abolition of the middleman.

Mr. LLEWELYN: What has that got to do with the Bill?

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: Another attempt is being made to establish State enterprises. In the past the Labour Government hoped that by the abolition of the middleman the primary products would be conveyed direct from the farm to the place of the consumer, but that costly experiment, involving a loss to the State of £5,000,000 upon which interest has to be paid to-day, was a ghastly failure. It is now proposed to give the Commissioner power to spend the money of the taxpayers in the erection of accommodation houses, wharves, and many other things at a tourist resort. There is no limit to what he may do by the expenditure of public money, and he will then be at liberty to lease the property to a private individual. That means the establishment of another State enterprise. We believe that the Commissioner should call tenders for the erection of the necessary buildings at a tourist resort so that private persons may have an opportunity of constructing these facilities, and if the judgment of the Commissioner is correct then he will have no difficulty whatever in making profitable use of the buildings. A private individual has erected some very good buildings at Lake Barrine in North Queensland.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: He has a lease.

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: Yes. That is one of the most pleasant little places that I have ever visited in my life, and I do not think there is any place in any part of Australia that is more efficiently conducted. The proprietor, at my suggestion, imported fish of various types from the other States of Australia with a view to propagating them in the blue waters of Lake Barrine. That shows what can be done by private enterprise. There was no need for a Bill of this description to encourage a private individual to provide the attractions that are to be found at Lake Barrine. Would the service have been better provided if the buildings had been erected by the Commissioner of Main Roads? Of course it would not; in fact, it might have been worse.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: That is problematical.

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: Perhaps so. If the Commissioner locates a scenic spot eminently suitable as a tourist resort then he will have no difficulty in inducing private individuals to construct the necessary buildings without the use of public money. We are heartily sick and tired of State enterprises and the less we have to do with them the better. The Minister should accept the amendment and allow private individuals to have an opportunity to erect the buildings, and if private enterprise fails the Commissioner may then be able to do something for himself. I object to the Commissioner spending money on the erection of buildings of this kind. If private individuals invest the whole of their life savings in the development of a tourist resort similar to Lake Barrine then they will make every effort to make a success of their undertaking and much more will be achieved by this method than by allowing the Commissioner to spend thousands of pounds of Government money on such a project. If he makes a success of his undertaking well and good; if it fails the responsibility will not fall on the Government. It is preferable that the private individual should invest his money and take the responsibility. The tourist traffic will be better cared for by this means than if the tourist resort were controlled by the Government.

Mr. CLAYTON (*Wide Bay*) [12.55 p.m.]: I support the amendment to a certain extent. I favour private enterprise being given every assistance and encouragement to develop our tourist resorts. Before the Commissioner takes any action to assume the powers that he will possess under this clause he should exert every endeavour to get private individuals to develop our resorts. If he did not think that it was in the best interests of the State that this course be followed, however, then he might assume the responsibility. Since tourists have been moving as a result of the construction of main roads and the development of the motor traffic, much has been done to popularise tourist and scenic resorts and open new ones. Messrs. Warry and Millar, of Maryborough, have established a tourist resort on Fraser's Island. They have erected six up-to-date huts on the ocean beach at an expenditure of £1,700 and already a great many tourists have taken advantage of them. The Commissioner of Main Roads could lend some assistance in the further development of this resort by constructing a road from the eastern to the western side of the island. This would enable tourists to travel right across the island, a distance of about 12 miles. The road would pass through wonderful scrub country containing timber up to 100 feet in height, the foliage of which completely shuts out the sunlight. This scrub is a harbour of wonderful bird life. Assistance in this direction would result in much good. I trust that the Commissioner will concentrate his efforts on aiding private enterprise to develop our tourists resorts by lending assistance along these lines and not avail himself of the powers of this clause to re-establish another form of State enterprise. We know that enterprises controlled by the State will cost more than if they are controlled by private enterprise. As the hon. member for Murilla mentioned, an enormous amount of money would be required to develop this form of State enterprise.

Mr. KENNY (*Cook*) [2 p.m.]: I trust the Minister will accept the amendment, for it contains a good principle. I know that the Minister may argue the desirableness of the Main Roads Commission building facilities after roads have been constructed into national parks, but it occurs to me that if the roads were constructed the Commissioner could lease the rights of tourist traffic to some private individual on condition that improvements to a stipulated sum were effected. Governments frequently undertake work at the public expense that

in many instances is subsequently proved to be undesirable. In the Railway Department instances are known where a cottage built for, say, a railway station-master has not been used. In my own electorate one such cottage was built at a cost of between £500 and £600, but no one ever occupied it, and after nine years it was moved to another portion of the State.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: That has nothing to do with the Main Roads Commission.

Mr. KENNY: I am merely illustrating what Government administration lends itself to. Under this Bill the Commissioner of Main Roads may think that the scenic beauties of a tourist resort warrant the expenditure of, say, £2,000, and after that expenditure has been incurred private enterprise may be given the opportunity to carry on the tourist facilities. Now, it may subsequently appear that the expenditure of £2,000 should never have been incurred, and I think it is preferable that private enterprise should be allowed to lease the right to the tourist facilities, subject to the condition that certain improvements are effected. Let the Commission provide the access to the tourist resort and allow private enterprise to lease the right to the tourist facilities on condition that certain improvements are effected. The Minister would be well advised to accept this amendment and allow the function of the Commissioner of Main Roads to consist solely of building roads and tracks into the localities, thereafter allowing private enterprise to lease the right to the tourist facilities, subject to whatever conditions may be imposed.

Mr. R. M. KING (*Logan*) [2.5 p.m.]: I suggest that the Minister accept this amendment. First of all, let private enterprise have the chance of undertaking the work, in agreement with the Commissioner. If no such agreement can be made, then the Commissioner himself may, if he has a strong desire to do so, undertake the business. The principle of making agreements with private persons is recognised in the Bill in connection with dealings with persons owning jetties, wharves, etc., and that principle could very well be adopted in connection with land taken over under this clause. I do not think it was ever intended that the Main Roads Commission should embark on an enterprise of this kind; but if it is the desire of the Government that it should enter into this class of business they should first of all exhaust all avenues in an endeavour to make agreements with private people.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [2.7 p.m.]: I should be prepared to accept the amendment provided no words are omitted after line 10. Clause 14 says—

> "Notwithstanding any Act or law to the contrary, the Commissioner, with the approval of the Governor in Council, may—"

It does not say "shall."

> "(*a*) Upon any land taken for the purposes of this Act, or in or upon any river, lake, waterway, tidal lands, or tidal waters, near or adjacent to any tourist road or tourist track, erect and maintain such buildings, conveniences, jetties, wharves, or landing stages as in the opinion of the Governor in Council are necessary or desirable for the purpose of developing any resort for tourists."

I would agree to add to that the words it is proposed should be inserted. We are acting as pioneers in this work, and if we construct a road to a place and open it up, and give the Commissioner power to lease the land he should have power to put improvements on it. I am not anxious to establish any State enterprises, but I am anxious to have the tourist resorts available. I do not care how they are made available so long as they are made available.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [2.10 p.m.]: We are prepared to move the amendment the Minister suggested, that is, to add the words—

> "Or make an agreement with any person for the erection and/or maintenance, as aforesaid."

That would establish much the same principle as the amendment that was moved by the hon. member for Murilla. It provides the alternative the Minister said he was prepared to accept. I think the principle the Minister is adopting in the first place that an effort shall be made to get someone else to operate or conduct the conveniences in the way of buildings, or wharves, or jetties for tourists is a good one, because it would be more satisfactory to have these conveniences carried on by private people rather than the Main Roads Commission. I am a great admirer of the work that has been carried out by the Main Roads Commission in the sphere of constructing main and other roads; but I am a little doubtful as to the success of its work in the conducting of facilities, or employing managers to conduct them, at a tourist resort. I think it would be more satisfactory if an endeavour were made to get other people to do so.

Amendment (*Mr. Morgan*) negatived.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [2.12 p.m.]: I move the following amendment:—

> "On page 10, line 15, after the word—
> 'tourists'
> insert the words—
> 'and/or make an agreement with any person for the erection and maintenance of such buildings, conveniences, jetties, wharves, or landing stages as in the opinion of the Governor in Council are necessary or desirable for the purpose of developing any resort for tourists.'"

Mr. BARNES (*Warwick*) [2.14 p.m.]: The marginal note refers to the power of the Commissioner, with the approval of the Governor in Council, to erect and maintain buildings, etc., but there is far more than that to be considered in connection with a tourist resort. There is the constant watchfulness for the keeping of the place in order. There is a natural danger of damage, and consequently a ranger of some kind should be appointed in order to ensure the protection of the beauty spots. At Cunningham's Gap we have a fairly long strip of jungle that is worthy of the most careful preservation. What the ideas of the Minister may be in this connection I do not know, but it is

certainly of the utmost importance that consideration should be given to the preservation of what we already possess. Fortunately we have in the Commissioner a man who desires to see our natural beauties preserved, and if his attention is drawn to the matter I am sure he will give it his most earnest consideration. Meanwhile the Bill should provide for the necessary protection in that direction.

Amendment (*Mr. Bruce*) agreed to.

Clause 14, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 15 to 19, both inclusive, agreed to.

Clause 20—"*Repeal of and new section 33—Commissioner to determine amounts to be charged to each local authority*"—

Mr. MAHER (*West Moreton*) [2.18 p.m.]: I move the following amendment:—

> "On page 13, line 40, omit the word—
> 'one-half,'
> and insert in lieu thereof the word—
> 'one-fifth.'"

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The hon. member has not given me any notice of the amendment.

Mr. MAHER: It is a very simple amendment. The object is to allow local authorities to contribute towards the cost of secondary roads on the same basis as they contribute to-day towards the cost of main roads. It will be within the power of the Commissioner to determine what secondary roads shall be constructed. I realise that the Bill is an endeavour to liberalise the conditions of the Act, and whilst local authorities may be called upon to contribute one-half of the cost of secondary roads there is no doubt that in some local authority areas secondary roads can be constructed at a cost not exceeding £250 or £500 per mile. It would be much more difficult and much more costly to construct roads in black soil districts, and I therefore suggest that the Minister should accept the amendment and so place secondary roads in the same category as main roads so far as local authority contributions are concerned. This would give a great impetus to production, it would help farmers and graziers in many parts of the State, and it would be a notable advance in road construction legislation. The Minister need have no fear that more roads will be gazetted than can possibly be constructed with the money available, because, after all, the final decision rests with the Commissioner and no secondary road would be gazetted unless it were deemed by the Commissioner to be worthy of such action. I commend the amendment to the Minister for his acceptance.

The CHAIRMAN: On the second reading stage of the Bill the House approved of the principle of local authorities contributing one-half of the cost of constructing secondary roads and as the amendment will impose a greater charge on the Crown than that contemplated in the message from His Excellency the Governor it cannot be accepted.

Mr. FOLEY (*Normanby*) [2.22 p.m.]: I move the following amendment:—

> "On page 14, after line 47, insert the following proviso:—
> 'Provided that if the designation of a road be changed, no greater amount shall be charged to a local authority on account of permanent works or maintenance carried out on such road than would have been chargeable if the designation of such road had not been changed.'"

This is a consequential amendment rendered necessary by the acceptance of an amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition on clause 5.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [2.26 p.m.]: I desire some information regarding paragraph (*c*) of proposed new section 33 (3). It would be extraordinary if where no benefited area exists owners of properties not affected by any particular road should benefit by the reduction made by the Commissioner in the amount payable by the local authority. That would place them in an infinitely better position than any other ratepayer in the area. Clause 22 provides that where no benefited area exists the Commissioner may direct that the remission he makes be used in the reduction of rates on properties served by any particular road. A local authority cannot strike a differential general rate unless it has a benefited area, but I am dealing with cases where there is no benefited area. A local authority, without an amendment of the Local Authorities Acts, could not make a differential rate to comply with these subclauses. I am therefore at a loss to understand how the local authority under such circumstances will be able to carry out the directions of this clause. The whole thing is wrong. A road may be constructed through a portion of a local authority and no extra rate may be imposed on the properties affected. It may be imposed on the whole area. That would be the course followed unless a benefited area was proclaimed, or a special loan had been raised as provided for under another section. Yet the Bill provides that the rating on the properties affected by any particular road shall be reduced to the extent of the remission made by the Commissioner. The ratepayers furthest from the road will still pay the old rate notwithstanding that they may not be affected by the road at all. Exactly the same principle is set out in clause 21. What does it mean, and how is it proposed to carry out these provisions? Unless there is a provision made not for a benefited area, but for differential rating on properties that benefit by the construction of a road, it seems to me to upset the whole position as to equality of payment and benefit throughout the local authority area.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [2.28 p.m.]: Several cases in this connection have occurred since I have been Minister. What actually has happened is this: An area is declared a benefited area. Then the local authority approaches the Main Roads Commission for relief from portion of its contributions. In other words, it wants the whole State to shoulder the financial responsibilities of the relief asked for. Therefore, when a local authority obtains relief from the Main Roads Commissioner it actually obtains relief from the whole of the people of the State, who contribute to the funds of the Commission. I regret to say that many local authorities place financial imposts on their ratepayers in connection with road construction that they are unable

to bear. They then come to us for relief, the granting of which imposes a burden on the whole of the people of the State. There are cases where local authorities who got main roads built in the early days of the Commission, when road construction was to a great extent in its experimental and pioneering stage, have received a large amount of relief. They are entitled to it. Under this clause the Commissioner has power to say that where a benefited area has been declared and as a result those ratepayers have been highly taxed, if a remission is made to the local authority, the benefits of that remission should by a reduction in their rates be given to those ratepayers who have been highly taxed.

Mr. KENNY: The clause does not say that.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: It is obvious what the clause is for. This attitude of hon. members opposite that the Commissioner of Main Roads and myself are out to persecute the people of the State——

Mr. KENNY: We are not taking that stand.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Clause after clause has been questioned by hon. members opposite, but when an explanation has been given hon. members opposite have been satisfied. Hon. members who are in touch with local government work know perfectly well that where there are several divisions in a local authority area it is difficult to get the whole of the shire declared a benefited area, because it is difficult to say which part of the shire benefits and which part does not. For example, a road might be built in one direction that would benefit one portion, whilst another road running in another direction would benefit some other portion of the shire area. The operations of the Main Roads Commission in relation to local authorities are due for a complete review for many reasons. For instance, the secondary roads now being discussed will largely relieve shire councils of expenditure they would otherwise have to incur in the construction of roads to meet the requirements of their people. Moreover, such questions as sanitation and water supply are coming prominently under notice.

I can assure hon. members that where remission is given to a benefited area consideration will be given to additional rates that ratepayers may have had to pay.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [2.32 p.m.]: I understand the intention of the Minister; the only question is that this clause does not definitely provide for the position. We know what the clause definitely provides, and we know what clause 21 provides. This clause definitely sets out that where the Commissioner gives a remission the people who are benefited by the road must have a reduction in the amount they have paid. I am satisfied with the Minister's explanation of what he intends, but, unfortunately, the Bill does not make that provision. The Bill provides something different from what the Minister says will be done. If the Bill had set out that where there was a benefited area the reduction of rate would be in the benefited area, I could quite understand it. If it comes to a question of a reduction of rates and the Commissioner has the right to stop a remission unless certain things are done, a court that is called upon to adjudicate in the matter will not know what is in the Minister's mind.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Clause 20 in proposed new section 33 (3) (*d*) states the conditions on which reductions will be made.

Mr. MOORE: That has nothing to do with the benefited area or with a differential rate. The clause does not fully state the intention of the Minister.

Mr. R. M. KING (*Logan*) [2.35 p.m.]: The clause does not seem to be quite fair. For example, in the proposed new paragraph (*f*) of new section 33 (3) we have this provision—

> "(*f*) Where a local authority has completely repaid its liability to the Treasury before the expiration of the period over which payments are required to be made as hereinafter provided on account of such liability, it shall be competent for the Commissioner to continue to grant the relief as provided herein in the same manner and for the same period as if such complete repayment had not been made."

If the amount has been paid and the liability completely wiped out, I do not see why the relief should be continued unless it is to enable the local authority to carry out some works apart from the Main Roads Commission.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [2.37 p.m.]: That is in the case where the local authority has completely repaid its liabilities to the Treasurer. It may have got financial accommodation elsewhere, but it would still be entitled to the same measure of relief.

Clause 20, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 21—"*New section 33A—Amount charged to a Local Authority to be deemed a loan*"—agreed to.

Clause 22—"*New section 33B—Case of area of Local Authority divided into divisions*"—

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [2.38 p.m.]: The explanation the Minister gave on the previous clause cannot fit this provision on page 21:—

> "(*d*) Where no benefited area exists within the area the Commissioner may direct that any such reduction be extended by the Local Authority in reduction of the rates of properties served by any particular road."

That seems to me to be quite wrong. On page 17, in clause 21, it is provided—

> "[33A.] (*1.*) The amount charged to a Local Authority on account of permanent works on main, secondary, and tourist roads under this section shall, notwithstanding anything contained in any other Act, be and be deemed to be a loan for a period of thirty years advanced by the Treasurer to that Local Authority under and subject to the Local Authorities Acts and bearing interest at such rate per centum per annum as shall be fixed by the Treasurer (not exceeding the usual rate charged at the time to Local Authorities for ordinary loans), and shall be deemed to have been advanced on the first day of January next ensuing after the charging of such amount; and a Special Loan Rate shall from time to time be levied by the Local Authority accordingly under the Local Authorities Acts to meet the

instalments of principal and interest payable from time to time in respect thereof."

That is over the whole area. It cannot mean a benefited area if a benefited area has not been struck. In this clause it says, "Where no benefited area exists." It means that the rest of the area that has a specially rated road will get no reduction, and the portions receiving the benefits from the road will get a reduction. There seems to have been a mistake in the preparation of this clause, which cannot be operated without being unfair to a large number of the people in the shire area. It will be a tremendous advantage to those people who have the advantage of the road, but not the rest of them.

Mr. KENNY (*Cook*) [2.40 p.m.]: I should like a little information from the Minister on the question raised by the Leader of the Opposition. It appears to me that the idea may have been that where a road has been constructed through a locality and the unimproved value of the farms in that locality may have been increased by the local authority concerned, the Commissioner, in making a reduction in the charges to the local authority will enable it to reduce those valuations. I would like the Minister to make that point clear.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [2.41 p.m.]: The clause contains a number of provisions, and the whole of them are designed to give people the advantage of road facilities that the Commissioner may deem necessary. The method mentioned by the hon. member for Cook was probably one of the methods under consideration when the clause was drafted. The whole object of the clause is to protect those people who have been rated more highly or whose value has been increased because of the building of a road. They should get the benefit of any later reduction made by the Commissioner of Main Roads.

Clause 22, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 23 to 26, both inclusive, agreed to.

Clause 27—"*Amendments of schedule*"—

Mr. KENNY (*Cook*) [2.42 p.m.]: I move the following amendment:—

"On page 22, after line 41, insert the following proviso:—

'Provided that wherever a toll is levied on a State highway the local authority shall be absolved from all costs of maintenance in respect of such State highway.'"

I think it is necessary that that new paragraph be inserted, because to-day we have local authorities in whose areas State highways have been gazetted by the previous Administration. A toll has been imposed on such a road and the local authority is not getting the relief it should. If the Government, through the Main Roads Commission, are going in for a policy of trading with roads, making a road a business proposition, then they should not place on the local authority the responsibility for maintenance charges. If it is a business proposition the Government should take over the full responsibility. Allow me to refer to the Cook Highway, the road between Cairns and Mossman, which is gazetted as a State highway. I believe it was the first State highway gazetted in Queensland and the reason was that the Mossman district had no means of communication other than by sea. It could be termed the railway of that district. After the change of Government a toll was placed on that road, consequently the people are not only taxed for the maintenance of the road, but also each time they travel over it. I consider that is not a sound principle. Other communities of Queensland have their railways to serve them and they are not charged like that. We know well that the Railway Department did build guaranteed lines, but after a time the whole of the guarantees were cancelled and the responsibility for the debt in connection with those railways was placed on the whole of the people of Queensland. Under the provisions of this Bill, people in one section of the community that has a road substituted for a railway, are taxed not only for going on to that road—on the same basis as a train traveller who purchases a ticket, which pays for the construction of the railway—but they pay also for the cost by reason of the fees on their cars, they also pay maintenance charges to the Crown. They are thus trebly taxed. The idea underlying State highways in the first instance was that they would supply a means of access where one was not available. It was not the intention of the Government of the time so to penalise these people that they would have to pay added charges for the privilege they were so long denied. This Bill provides an opportunity for the rectification of that anomaly. I know it will meet with the Minister's approval inasmuch as he has a similar case in his own electorate on the Gillies Highway. For the upkeep of that road a charge is levied on the local authority. The amendment makes provision that the Commissioner of Main Roads shall pay the fees from people travelling over that road into a fund to defray the charges that the Commissioner is required to meet under existing legislation. The Minister might very well accept the amendment. I feel sure it is one that his own party will agree to, and will have the support of all those people in the country districts where State highways have been constructed, who at the present time are doubly taxed for its upkeep.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*) [2.48 p.m.]: I am afraid that the hon. member for Cook is over optimistic in his belief that I will accept the amendment. No doubt the Commissioner will later on be able to give some relief to the people in the district he mentions or to extend the facility, as they so much desire. For many years the people in this district were isolated and had to depend on an irregular shipping service as their only means of communication with the South. I know that they warmly appreciate the action of the Government in constructing the highway through their district, thereby giving them very acceptable egress to the South. The amendment will have a material effect upon the revenue of the State. Whilst £50 to £60 may be collected by the imposition of a fee in one direction it may amount to £500 or £600 in other directions.

Mr. KENNY: Why not allow the local authorities to have the proceeds of the toll?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The toll has been imposed to assist the local

authorities that are affected by the construction of the road. In view of all the circumstances I cannot accept the amendment.

Amendment (*Mr. Kenny*) negatived.

Clause 27, as read, agreed to.

The House resumed.

The CHAIRMAN reported the Bill with amendments.

THIRD READING.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, *The Tableland*): I move:—

"That the Bill be now read a third time."

Question put and passed.

RURAL ASSISTANCE BOARD AND AGRICULTURAL BANK ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. F. W. Bulcock, *Barcoo*) [2.52 p.m.]: I move—

"That the Bill be now read a second time."

I desire now to give fuller reasons for the passage of the Bill than I gave on the initiatory stage I then informed the Committee that it was designed to achieve a three-fold object, and the Leader of the Opposition in reply made certain remarks that I consider worthy of further comment. He suggested that the maximum advance, which was being increased from £1,700 to £1,800, was very rarely made available under the present law. I have had that question analysed, and I find that quite a number of people have required an amount in excess of £1,700; consequently, there is ample justification for increasing the total amount that may be made available.

Mr. KENNY: Can you tell us how many persons?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Quite a lot of people applied for amounts in excess of £1,700.

Mr. GODFREY MORGAN: How many got it?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Quite a large number would have secured it if we had had power to grant it, and that is the reason why we have broadened the basis in the Bill in order that we may, in a modest way, meet the requirements of the people.

A good deal of attention was directed to the fact that the bank has, during the last twelve months or two years, lost a considerable number of clients. I am not prepared to say that the bank has not lost clients, but it is obviously a tribute to the bank—when it is considered that it is essentially a developmental bank—that so good were its investments, and so wisely were the clients chosen, that private trading banks were, in many instances, prepared to take over liabilities held by it. That is not a matter for condemnation, but essentially a matter for congratulation of the management of the bank.

A third question raised was whether this bank should be an ordinary trading bank, or whether it should be a developmental bank. I am strongly inclined to the opinion, and endeavour to direct the policy of the bank in that direction, that it is essentially a pioneer bank and should handle those matters that an ordinary trading bank does not desire to handle. For ordinary legitimate rural purposes there is no difficulty at the present time in obtaining finance, but it is obvious that the people associated with the administration of the Agricultural Bank were always prepared, as the Leader of the Opposition said, to take risks that an ordinary trading bank would not take, and in spite of this the Agricultural Bank has retained its solvency and has made a material contribution to the agricultural wellbeing of this State. There is no doubt that had it not been for the functioning of the bank many people who to-day are in prosperous circumstances would not have got that financial support that they deserved.

The Leader of the Opposition also suggested that the solvency of the bank would be affected by the loss of its best clients to the ordinary trading banks. That will not stand analysis insomuch as every application for an advance is considered on its own individual merits. It is apparent that if some accounts are removed the solvency of the remaining accounts is at least equal to those that have been removed from the control of the institution.

As I indicated on the initiatory stage of this Bill, the most important innovation is the creation of a board to assist the bank in arriving at decisions on applications for advances. No matter how zealous a manager might be, the ultimate fate of an individual should not be reposed in the hands of one individual. The manager and office manager of the Agricultural Bank at present, Messrs. Quodling and Palmer, respectively, quite obviously must be included on such a board, but the Treasurer has some material interest in the wellbeing of this bank and accountancy problems are involved. An officer of the Audit Department has therefore been appointed to the board in the person of Mr. J. D. Ross. He is also a member of the Meat Industry Board and has been assisting in the operations of the bank during the last twelve months. In addition to these three gentlemen Mr. R. Wilson, the Assistant Under Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Stock, has been appointed as a member of the board to represent the agricultural activities of the bank. This board has been functioning more or less in an experimental way for the last twelve months. The result of that experiment has been to facilitate the operations of the bank, and the interests of its clients have been the subject-matter of very close investigation. I do think there is a better understanding as between clients and the bank insomuch as they now know that there is a board to which they may appeal in the event of a decision being arrived at by the bank that is not acceptable to them. It is true that many unsound and nebulous propositions come before the bank that could not be entertained under any circumstances, but there are a number of borderline cases that are always worthy of review and the most favourable consideration possible. The board acts in an advisory capacity and has authority to make recommendations in respect of advances. That, of course, involves the administration of the Agricultural Bank Act, the returned soldiers' settlement legislation, and loans made available by the Secretary for Labour and Industry from the Unemployment Relief Fund. Some criticism was directed against

this fund at the Committee stages of the Bill. I want to take this opportunity of explaining to hon. members just how this fund was created and how it is administered. Experience showed me that many people who were worthy of assistance and who needed assistance were not able to get it under the Agricultural Bank Acts, and even though they were able to get that assistance it is quite obvious that the expenses associated with getting it would have been out of all proportion to the assistance required. This is not a general scheme of agricultural finance, but does apply and does give very definite relief to people who are in urgent need of some small thing that might enable them to produce an income. For instance, during the past tobacco season there were many capable men who had the land and the facilities for producing tobacco, except the cash necessary to enable them to purchase fertilizer.

Mr. KENNY: They have not got it yet.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Despite what the hon. member may interject, the Rural Assistance Board distributed over £5,000 for the purpose of purchasing fertilizer and other necessities.

Mr. KENNY: You told me the information was not available.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The information is available in bulk, and the hon. member knows that the whole of the northern tobacco crop was made possible last season because the activities of the Rural Assistance Board made fertilizer and other agricultural commodities available to the people engaged in the production of tobacco. That is true, not only of the North, but also of many other parts of the State.

The whole function of this State activity is obviously a desire to keep those people on the land. I know instances where an advance equivalent to £10 has enabled a person who otherwise would have been compelled to walk off his place to plant a crop and remain there. In many instances we have records of a successful harvest having been achieved. Obviously, it is better to keep a man on his block and make some temporary short-dated advance to him than allow him to desert his block because no rural assistance is available. This fund very definitely takes the form of rural assistance in the shape of short-dated loans. I will admit with the Leader of the Opposition that perhaps it is not the soundest form of business, for the security that can be offered is in many instances an intangible security; but I have found—and, I think, everybody who has been associated with the Agricultural Bank has found also—that quite frequently an individual who can give all the security required is a less desirable client than a man who, perhaps, cannot give that security, but can give some assurance of personal integrity and personal work that is frequently worth more than all the assets that the more successful man may own. If we could devise a satisfactory policy—and a rural assistance fund is shaping itself in that direction—of paying more attention to the personal integrity and worth of the individual and less attention to the security that that individual could offer, the State, in the final analysis, would be the gainer and not the loser. The Rural Assistance Board has come to the assistance of men who ordinarily would have been compelled to walk off their blocks, and to that extent has achieved something worth while, insomuch as it has prevented a further denudation of rural population and a consequent flooding of a supersaturated labour market in the centres of population.

These financial functions will be discharged by the board, which will also deal with questions of forfeiture, foreclosures, sales, etc., of mortgaged property. These are very important questions, more particularly that of forfeiture. Many cases arise, particularly in times of stress, such as the rural population is passing through at the present time, when an individual has not been able to meet his obligation—and I use the words "not been able" advisedly. If a strict interpretation of the Acts were enforced there would be little alternative other than to dispossess that individual, and I think every hon. member is prepared to agree that an Agricultural Bank policy must be as sympathetic as possible. If an individual who through no fault of his own and who through force of economic circumstances, over which, unfortunately, he has absolutely no control, is prevented from meeting his obligations, the bank should give favourable consideration to the position that is disclosed when that individual's account is being examined. It is too great a responsbility for one individual to take. We recognise that Crown funds, which are public funds, are involved. We do not desire to inflict any hardship on any individual, and there is nothing I dislike more than having to agree to a forfeiture; and I think these things are worthy of the very closest analysis and scrutiny. We seek to find reasons why we should not enforce the Act rather than seek reasons why we should enforce it. There has to be some compromise and some reason, and, consequently, the board that has been functioning for twelve months will receive legal sanction under this Bill, and will be in a stronger position to conduct an examination and make recommendations on the merits of the case. I do not think we can go any further, and I think that offers a reasonable measure of protection to the man who has met hard luck in his farming operations.

The Agricultural Bank was established in 1902 by an Act that has been amended at intervals to enable it the better to fulfil the purpose for which it was called into being. The present amendments are the logical outcome of experience in administration, and there is no question that is involved in these proposed amendments that has not been very carefully considered by the board charged with the responsibility of giving full consideration to all matters affecting public finance.

The Act has been progressively amended. When the Labour Party assumed office the maximum advance was increased from £1,200 to £1,700, and the rate of advance was increased from 15s. in the £1 to 16s. in the £1 of the value of the security. During the period that the Labour Government continued in power the lessons that were learned in administration were embodied in successive amendments until it may reasonably be said the Agricultural Bank Acts operating in Queensland are the most liberal of their kind in any part of the Commonwealth. The administration of the bank has definitely been sympathetic and has been a reflection of the policy of the Government. The 1923 Act incorporated the provisions of existing

legislation for advances to incorporated companies and associations, and the bank then became a comprehensive pioneer bank.

During the previous debate the Leader of the Opposition referred to the operations of the bank and stated that its activities in the last year in regard to advances had shown a decline. The position is that during the last financial year, 1,879 applications were received for advances amounting to £575,921, as compared with 2,767 applications for £891,117 for the previous year, 1932-33. The percentage of approved applications to the number dealt with, however, rose from 62.96 in 1932-33 to 67.96 during 1933-34. The Leader of the Opposition also made a statement that the advances by the Agricultural Bank during his term of office averaged £386,964 per annum, that sum representing the amount available for assistance to primary producers through this institution. I have had those figures analysed and I find the facts do not bear out the contention of the Leader of the Opposition. The facts are that the advances actually paid through the Agricultural Bank during the regime of the Moore Government averaged only £307,025 per annum and not the £386,964 mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition. I give the details in order that the relative values of these comparisons might be seen. The following table will illustrate the position:—

Advances Actually Paid.	1929-30.	1930-31.	1931-32.
	£.	£.	£.
The Agricultural Bank Act	318,731	271,054	285,422
The Discharged Soldiers Settlement Acts	15,238	16,977	13,634
Total	333,969	288,051	299,056
Grand Total ..	£921,076		
Average per annum	£307,025		

Mr. NIMMO: Does that include amounts from the Unemployment Relief Fund.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: That does not include any amounts from that fund. Those are the banking transactions. In addition to that, it must be admitted that the Department of Public Lands, during the past two years, has made a very material contribution to rural finance. If my memory serves me rightly, £164,000 of cheap money was lent by the Department of Public Lands for the purposes of agricultural and other rural development.

Mr. SPARKES: There were many cases where the bank turned applicants down.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: That may be so, but had there been in existence machinery enabling the bank to help them, quite obviously the bank would have done so. The Department of Public Lands, because it is not trammelled in the same way as the bank, was able to make advances on a more liberal scale. Had that not been the case the Agricultural Bank most certainly would have administered those funds. More liberal terms were accorded to the people assisted through the Department of Public Lands than could have been accorded by the Agricultural Bank, with its limited charter, which is subject to the approval of this Parliament. There is really no machinery for that purpose. Of course, in addition to the figures I have quoted, the Department of Labour and Industry has made very substantial advances for the promotion of agricultural prosperity, and has helped to maintain very many people on the land. I have a table that is interesting in this connection, because it shows the amount of money—and, after all, sympathy is measured in terms of money—made available by the Labour Government during the last two years under the headings that have been discussed.

Summary of Advances Actually Paid during the First Two Complete Years of the Present Government under the Headings quoted below.

——	1932-1933.	1933-1934.
	£	£
Advances under—		
The Agricultural Bank Act	204,923	200,571
The Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act	8,913	6,385
Assistance to Rural Industries—		
The Agricultural Bank (Rural Assistance Board)	..	5,758
Land Administration Board (Rural and Country Development Fund)	176,627	96,228
Assistance to Primary Producers—(Department of Labour and Industry)		
Advances for Rural Development	30,870	27,653
Total .. .. £	521,333	336,595
Grand Total .. .. £	857,928	
Average per Annum .. .. .. £	428,964*	

* As compared with £307,025 averaged during the regime of the Moore Government.

I think these figures very largely discount the claim made by the Leader of the Opposition that there had been a diminishing rather than an increasing scale of rural disbursements during the time the present Government have been in power.

Mr. MAHER: What form do these advances from the Department of Labour and Industry take?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The hon. member is aware of the form they take as well as I am. They take the form of contributions to enable a person to stay on his land.

Some question has been raised concerning interest rates. Hon. members are aware that a reduction is being made from 5 per cent. to 4 per cent., or by 1 per cent., with

a minimum of 4 per cent., in all our securities, as from the 1st January next. This is a reduction in the incidence of the interest charges of 20 per cent.—a very liberal concession to the primary producers of our State. At 30th June, 1932, when the present Government took office, the average rate of interest, including exchange, that was payable on the State's public debt was 5.32 per cent. The average rate, including exchange, has since declined to—

5.16 per cent at 30th June, 1933.
4.96 per cent. at 30th June, 1934.

Thus the average interest rate has been reduced by .36 per cent., comparing the average rate at 30th June, 1934, with the rate at 30th June, 1932. This is only a reduction of 6.77 per cent. in the incidence of the interest charged on the State's indebtedness, whereas the reduction from 5 per cent. to 4 per cent. in the interest charged to agricultural bank clients is a reduction in the incidence of the interest charged of 20 per cent. Those figures indicate a very liberal agricultural policy, on the financial side, so far as this Government are concerned. It is obvious that it is a wise concession, and recognises that in spite of all the difficulties and all the doubts and the clouds surrounding agriculture at the present time we cannot afford to remain still, that we must develop our agricultural resources and that the State must make the most liberal contribution possible to that end. The Agricultural Bank is the logical instrument to do these things, and as time goes on and as we are able to make a broader survey of the whole incidence of agriculture, the Agricultural Bank will become the primary instrument for the development of agriculture within our State; and I believe that it should be developed along those lines. (Hear, hear!)

Some questions were raised in connection with the loans that the bank proposed to make to commodity boards. The Act provides that loans may be made to co-operative associations or companies; in fact, that loans may be made to practically every form of commercial agriculture with the exception of a commodity board. Why should a commodity board, which is in esssence co-operative, be debarred from participating in any financial assistance that the Agricultural Bank can give? I think most hon. members realise that a commodity board occupies an important position and must discharge a very important duty to the body agricultural, but nobody can argue that we should limit the responsibilities of those boards. They are clothed with very extensive powers at the present time and, personally, I can see no reason why they should not be permitted to borrow from the Agricultural Bank. I can see quite a number of reasons why they should, the principal being that the commodity board is charged for the time being with the conservation of the destinies of the people who are associated with the production of the commodity that is supplied to it. If we are going to regard agriculture in its economic sphere more closely in the future than in the past, then commodity boards will play a very prominent part in its development, and their economic importance will become more and more evident every day. There is no real reason why these boards should not be encouraged to accept that responsibility. I believe that as we unfold our economic plan the boards will become more and more important in agricultural economics and distribution.

The question was asked: Could they give a tangible security for the money advanced? That is a very important question. Hon. members will see that the Bill prescribes the security that shall be given, and unless that security is available then the loan cannot be made, but there are opportunities in many directions for co-operation between the Agricultural Bank and a commodity board that fully justify any financial policy that may be embarked upon. The board that is to be created under this Bill will make the necessary recommendations, but in the case of a considerable sum I myself should not care to give the final consent, and will take any loan of any magnitude to the Cabinet for discussion and decision. The terms and conditions of such advances to a commodity board may be fixed by agreement between the bank and the board concerned. I use the term "bank" to mean the whole bank, including the corporation, which is the Minister, the board and the officers of the bank.

I have already indicated that it is proposed to increase the maximum advance from £1,700 to £1,800. I believe that is essential and desirable. Special advances are available under the Act for farmers and others for the purchase of live stock, separators, and other dairying plant. Under the present Act the special advances are repayable over a short term, the maximum being seven years, exclusive of a one-year "interest only" period. My predecessor, the hon. member for Cooroora, included in the Act the limit of seven years. The man who required these things and who could give a better security got a loan for the full period prescribed by the Act, but the man who was less able to meet his obligations under the Act had more obligations to meet because the period was shorter. He obviously was disadvantaged to that degree. It is now proposed to wipe out that limit and leave the determination of the period to the board, so that the minimum amount of hardship will be inflicted on the borrower when it comes to a question of repayment.

The purchase of pineapples and banana suckers and/or other seeds and plants for approved purposes is now being included as an object for which a special advance may be made. That comes under section 20 (*a*) of the principal Act. The grant for the purchase of grass and fodder crop seed is being increased from £25 to £30.

One of the most extraordinary provisions that existed in the previous Act was that which provided that a special advance could be made to a person engaged in dairying who owned not more than thirty-five head of dairy cattle, the value of which did not exceed £250. Probably the intention was good, but it was not achieved in practice. Hon. members will realise that when I explain the case. A man might have thirty-five head of dairy stock. He could not get a loan if the value of that stock exceeded £250. Hon. members can visualise the position of a man who may have thirty-five head of dairy stock that may or may not be worth more than £250. They may not represent the maximum amount of his development. Many people applied for loans who should have received them, and would have received them, but for the fact that the bank

was limited by the operation of this provision. A genuine dairy farmer may have thirty-five head of dairy cattle. Possibly only half a dozen of those cattle may be yielding him any income at all. He may be holding thirty-five head of heifers until they come into profit. Yet such a man could not secure an advance. It was not the intention of this House to prevent a man under those circumstances from securing an advance under this provision; therefore, I am removing the maximum number of thirty-five but am allowing the maximum value to remain at £250. That will enable more equitable consideration to be given to any application that is made.

Another important amendment is an increase in the amount that may be made available to small farmers and graziers for the purchase of beef cattle. Under the old Act that advance is limited to £300, but this Bill provides for an increase to £500. The obvious intention is to provide finance for the purchase of chillers. We have successfully passed through the pioneering stage so far as chillers are concerned. We have demonstrated that we are capable of producing and shipping chillers to the Imperial market, but that market is asking us, "Can you give us a continuity of supply?" That is the real basis of success in so far as the chilled beef industry is concerned—our ability to supply the market not merely for four or five months of the year, but for twelve months of the year. One important factor is the seasons, but the other factor in the attainment of that end is the provision of finance to enable a man who may have a little surplus grass to buy stores and fatten them. Therefore, instead of cattle coming from the Gulf country and being sold for freezing purposes only, we are enabling a grazier, with the assistance we are providing, to make purchases to provide chillers. This will assist to a degree in providing beef for chilling purposes all the year round.

Mr. SPARKES: Will that money be available at the beginning of the year at 4 per cent. interest?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Yes. A further clause in this Bill prohibits the charging of procuration fees. It is most remarkable that although this Act has been operating since 1901 no prohibition against the payment of procuration fees has been enacted. Perhaps this clause would not have been in the Bill had it not been for an unpleasant incident that happened quite recently in connection with administrative matters. An individual made an application, through an agent, for a loan from the Agricultural Bank. We have plenty of officers distributed throughout Queensland and we have the co-operation of the Department of Public Lands under an agreement made with that department last year. No reason exists why an application should not be submitted directly through the officer associated with the bank, with the Department of Public Lands, or the clerk of petty sessions; but in this particular case an agent made the application on behalf of the individual. The application was successful. When the money was made available the man who became our client received an account from the agent who had "secured" the money for him. The agent had not really secured the money, the merits of the case secured it. The matter was referred to the Agricultural Bank and the bank resisted the claim, but finally our client was compelled to meet that claim because we had no prohibition against procuration fees being paid in regard to bank loans.

Mr. MAHER: What rate was charged?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: I could not tell the hon. member from memory, but the sum involved was, I think, £67. This Bill prohibits the entirely undesirable practice of procuration fees being charged. If an agent acts for a client in respect of an application to the Agricultural Bank, he will in future do so for love and affection and for no more tangible remuneration.

One of the most important amendments in the Bill is the provision affecting payments in seasonal industries. The whole point is that an individual who is engaged in a seasonal occupation cannot always meet his obligations half-yearly, as required under the Act. Take the case of a tobacco grower. In spite of what some hon. members may have said to the contrary, it is true that the greater bulk of land that is used for the production of tobacco will only produce tobacco, and on a large portion of our tobacco land no reliable income could be gained by any other enterprise. Thus, tobacco growing may be regarded as a seasonal industry. As the Act stands at present we compel a man who may be a client of the bank to make two half-yearly payments. He will make the first payment because it will probably succeed his harvest. Then he is required to make the second payment, and he is usually unfortunately faced with the alternative of meeting his obligation to the bank and neglecting something that is essential for the production of a crop, or failing to make his payment to the bank and being penalised because the fertilization and preparation of his land are regarded by him as of greater importance than the payment to the bank. I frankly say that I believe penalties under those circumstances were unjust. I frankly believe that we should not thus penalise a man or allow a man to penalise himself. A man very frequently did penalise himself by not performing essential operations on his plantation, farm, or orchard, in order to meet his commitment to the bank. When I was in the Carnarvon electorate recently this question was forcibly brought under my notice. I said to an individual, "You are rather late with your pruning?" "Well," he said, "I have not been able to prune the whole of my area, but I met my commitments to the Agricultural Bank, and in meeting those commitments I was not able to employ labour." That is probably true. The consequences, therefore, were that the capacity of this place to meet its liability in the final analysis was reduced because inefficient practice had been forced on this individual. The amendment I propose will allow a man to meet his commitments annually instead of half-yearly; that is to say, he will meet his commitments in ordinary circumstances out of the proceeds of his harvest. In those industries that will be declared seasonal industries such a policy will overcome a difficulty that has been unfair in its incidence so far as the seasonal producers of the State are concerned. The bank, of course, reserves to itself the right to transfer a man from an annual

payment to a half-yearly payment. Circumstances may arise that would warrant that course. For instance, a man may be engaged in a seasonal industry, and may decide to transfer to dairying, which cannot be regarded as a seasonal industry; his transference would cause the transference of his account from a yearly to a half-yearly basis. The amendment will relieve cases of undoubted hardship. The alternative would be to remove the penalty clauses, and we all know that the removal of the penalty clauses would inflict a very great hardship on the administration of the bank. The hon. member for Cunningham knows all about the case for the reimposition or re-enactment of penalties, having maintained that penalties were necessary when he handled certain land measures in a previous Parliament. I see no reason to depart from the very excellent principle laid down by the hon. member in that connection.

Nothing further is contained in the Bill. As I have said, it is the outcome of an intention to broaden the sphere of the Agricultural Bank. Its introduction is a clear demonstration that the Government are prepared to recognise their obligations to the primary producer and endeavour to make his lot as easy as is possible in these most difficult times. I believe that this Bill will make a very substantial contribution in that direction.

Mr. EDWARDS (*Nanango*) [3.42 p.m.]: I feel sure every hon. member in this Chamber will welcome a measure that will widen the scope of the Agricultural Bank in the interests of the primary producers. I think it is recognised, not merely in Queensland but by every body of responsible people, that Australia and other countries will have to depend on the primary producer to get them out of their difficulties.

I was pleased that the Minister mentioned a particular case in the electorate of Carnarvon, where a settler informed him that he was unable to prune the last of his fruit trees and therefore work his orchard efficiently because he had to meet his commitments to the Agricultural Bank. That statement would have been very appropriate yesterday when the Secretary for Public Lands had a Land Acts (Crown Dues) Amendment Bill before the House. The arguments used by hon. members on this side of the House indicated that very often people would place themselves in difficulties in order to meet commitments to the Agricultural Bank or the Department of Public Lands.

To my mind the comparisons made by the Minister in regard to the period the Moore Government were in power and the period for which the present Government have occupied office were quite unfair and uncalled for. It is unfortunate that no matter what legislation is being discussed an attempt is made to introduce party politics, and comparisons are made that hon. members must realise are unfair and unjust. During the time the Moore Government were in office the position was entirely different from what it is at the present time. One has only to look at the position of the associated banks to realise that. A few years ago, when the Moore Government were in power, one was lucky to raise £500 on a security of £3,000; now the position has completely altered. I feel sure the Minister will agree that that altered position is not due to the activities of the Agricultural Bank or the Government; it is due to good seasons, increased production, and cheap money being made available for primary production.

I am afraid that the hon. gentleman does not grasp the reason why the Agricultural Bank has lost so many clients to the associated banks since money has become plentiful. I have had a good deal to do with the Agricultural Bank and a fair amount with the associated banks, and, to my mind, there has always been something wrong with the former. So far as the officers of the bank are concerned, I have always been met with the greatest courtesy and every assistance, so far as I understand the position, that the bank was able to afford me under its policy. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that there was something very wrong with that policy, and, in my opinion, it is this: When one approaches an associated bank for a loan he is not told that he has to pay a certain amount in interest, and, in addition, a somewhat similar amount off the principal each year. That is the difference between the two banks and the reason why the Agricultural Bank has lost the large number of clients that it has. Of course, it must be admitted that the reduction in the rate of interest to 4 per cent. allowed by the associated banks has had something to do with the decrease in the clientele of the Agricultural Bank.

When a man is endeavouring to negotiate a loan from the Agricultural Bank, a valuation is made by an inspector, on which the bank board or the manager considers the proposition. It is on information supplied by the inspector that the loan is granted or refused. The bank may be justified by sound business principles in asking for payment of some portion of the principal during the first year or two until it ascertains the class of client it is dealing with and the doubtfulness or otherwise of the security. But how on earth the board can justify demanding repayment of amounts of principal each year until the loan is repaid I do not understand. There lies the trouble so far as the Agricultural Bank is concerned in keeping its best clients. I may be pardoned for giving an illustration. It would not pay me to pay to the bank each year £50 in interest and £50 off the principal, when I could put the second £50 to much better use in developing my holding, either by cultivating more crops or clearing more scrub. Nobody with practical knowledge of farming would sustain the argument that it were better to use that £50 in paying off the principal. The policy adopted may be all right when applied to buildings or security that deteriorates each year; but as regards farming, where a farmer and his family are carrying out improvements year after year and increasing the value of the property, the Agricultural Bank should be prepared to review its policy. It should be the policy of the bank to carry that client. Wherever a farmer can show that it is in the interests of the bank and himself to expend in improvements the amount payable on account of principal, he should be encouraged to do so. I know farmers who have been definitely ruined because they have been asked for both interest and principal and have not been able to pay. Probably the period of repayment is extended and a certain amount of interest capitalised, but the debt continues to increase and the interest becomes a still heavier burden. When the man eventually gets on his feet again he is deprived of any

reward, and so his difficulties continue. That is where the policy of the bank is wrong, and that is why it will experience some difficulty in retaining the best of its clients. After a settler has worked a property for two, three, four years and longer, it surely has a valuation in excess of the figure arrived at by the inspector when he first inspected it for the purpose of making an advance to the new settler. When the farm has reached that stage of development it should be possible for the bank to allow the client to continue to use the capital sum whilst paying only the interest. Of course, the Minister will probably reply that these advances are made only for the purpose of developing new areas, and that it is essential that the principal should be repaid so that it will be available to other new settlers, thereby increasing the clientele of the bank and encouraging further development. I have often stated in this House that it is far better to have half a dozen prosperous farmers confident of success than a dozen struggling farmers who are unable to meet their commitments or to provide the necessary means to harvest their crops.

It was stated in the press by the Premier some time ago and repeated by the Minister to-day that it was the intention of the bank to reduce its interest charge from 5 per cent. to 4 per cent. as from 1st January, 1935, but I should like to know from the Minister whether there is to be a general reduction in interest rates charged by the bank to 4 per cent. If that is not to be done then the position will not be a satisfactory one. For quite a number of years the bank has charged 6 per cent. on quite a large proportion of its advances to its clients, and as the business of the bank increases so does the number of clients who are called upon to pay the rate of 6 per cent. I should like to know definitely from the Minister whether he is going to reduce the interest charge on the overdrafts of all the clients of the bank to 4 per cent. If that is not to be done then a wrong will be done to these people that will not be in the interest either of the bank or its clients. If I were to apply to the bank for an advance and my application were approved the money would be available to me at 5 per cent.; but if I found it necessary to sell my property the purchaser who took over the mortgage from me, whether for one year or five years, would be called upon to pay 6 per cent. That is wrong, and I want to know why it should be so. Moreover, if the agricultural bank lifts a mortgage held by a private individual or another financial institution, an interest rate of 6 per cent. is charged also to the new client of the bank.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: We have merely followed the policy of the Moore Government.

Mr. EDWARDS: Is the Minister content to evade the issue in that way? He should consider the matter in a much more serious light. I gather from his interjection that it is not proposed to reduce the interest charged on all overdrafts to 4 per cent. I have previously asked the Premier and I now ask the Minister in charge of this Bill whether the rate of interest to be charged by the bank is to be 4 or 5 per cent. or a flat rate of 4 per cent. I hope that on reconsideration of the matter he will make provision for a flat rate of interest of 4 per cent. to be charged on all advances. If he does so the bank will become more popular in the country.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I can find no reference whatever in this Bill to any fixation of interest charges. About seven definite principles are laid down in it. It provides for the creation of a Rural Assistance Board, and includes a definition of that board, but there is no reference whatever to the general policy of the bank as regards interest.

Mr. EDWARDS: The Minister discussed interest rates for a considerable period.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The Minister mentioned the question of interest but he connected it with the principle contained in this Bill. The hon. member has not done that. He has merely discussed the question of interest without any relation whatsoever to the Bill itself. The hon. member may be able to connect his remarks with the Bill.

Mr. EDWARDS: I certainly intend to connect my remarks with the Bill. The Minister has referred to the increased assistance that this Bill will give to the clients of the bank. On more than one occasion he made reference to the interest rates charged by the bank, especially when referring to the reason why the bank had lost such a number of its clients. Surely when I am discussing the provisions of this Bill I can mention interest rates and link them up with the assistance provided by the bank! We are now discussing the principles of the amendments that the Minister has brought down, and whether, as the Minister says, these amendments are going to make the position of the bank's clients better than they were before. That is the reason why I am discussing it.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! It is very definite that there is no reference to interest in this Bill, and because the Minister made some reference to interest rates after connecting that reference with the Bill I allowed the hon. member for Nanango, in fairness, to proceed, but I am not going to allow a general discussion on interest rates to proceed on this Bill without the question being connected with the Bill itself.

Mr. EDWARDS: I am going to discuss the matter from another angle, and if you, Mr. Speaker, prevent me, then I will discontinue my speech. This Bill will not give the assistance to the producer that is desired unless the Government are prepared to make liberal advances for the conservation of fodder. This is a most important question. In fact, it is the most important question regarding financial assistance to the producer. The Minister will agree with me that the reason why many hundreds of clients have failed to meet their commitments is to be found in the difficulties they have experienced in dry periods through having no fodder conserved to feed their stock with. I am now advocating that the Minister will make provision in this Bill for more liberal assistance to be given in this direction. We should not pass this Bill without seeing that it contains some provision for assistance in the conservation of fodder and the storage of products grown by clients of the bank. Assistance along those lines will mean a great deal, not only to the primary producer himself, but also to the State, because it will go a long way to assist in stabilising primary production. As

an illustration, let me mention the plight of maize-growers who are compelled to sell their product at prices as low as 1s. 8d., 1s. 9d., and 1s. 10d. a bushel in order that they may discharge their obligations to the Agricultural Bank. I trust the utmost consideration will be given to this important aspect of the question.

Another important requirement is that applicants should obtain financial assistance soon after their application is lodged. Quite recently applicants for assistance to the bank could have saved £1 a head in the purchase of store cattle if the bank had made the money available when it was applied for. Most of the associated banks transact their business expeditiously, it being not uncommon for financial accommodation to be made available within an hour of application, so that in the case of the Agricultural Bank some means should be devised to expedite the granting of a loan once the application is made and a valuation determined upon. Action along those lines would obviate much of the difficulty at present encountered by prospective clients of this bank.

I trust that the Bill will achieve all that the Minister anticipates; for if it does it will be a step in the liberalisation of the policy of the bank that will be productive of much good. A policy of liberal treatment, not only of applicants but existing clients, will relieve the plight of many producers and assist them to a position where they will be better able to meet their obligations. The Minister will find that many of the best clients who have been lost to the bank have felt that an extended time for repayment of principal to the bank would have enabled them to develop their holdings more fully, and that the policy of the bank in that respect might with advantage have been more liberal. I appreciate the fact that the officials of the bank are doing their utmost to meet the position, but I do urge that earnest consideration be given to the various matters that I have raised.

Mr. BARNES (*Warwick*) [4.6 p.m.]: I heartily congratulate the Minister on the introduction of this measure. The first thought one had on taking up the Bill was one of disappointment that no reduction in the rate of interest charges was recorded; and then one was led to hope, by the intimation of the Minister, that such and such a rate would be chargeable. Consequently, one is left in a state of uncertainty. It will be readily understood that where farmers have to obtain finance from banks this is a matter of much concern to members of Parliament and business people; and therefore one would welcome a direct statement such as has been asked for by the hon. member for Nanango, as to what the real and bona fide intention of the Government is in this matter. There is no room at the present time for the continuance of the old exactions by the Government——

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. BARNES: I feel that I am a little out of order. Perhaps I may get over the difficulty if I refer to what appears later on in the Bill, with reference to procuration fees. Personally, I have never known or heard of anyone having to pay such a charge when obtaining a loan from the Agricultural Bank. I do know of charges that have been made in respect of other lenders. I can relate an instance that indicates the seriousness of the matter. A case was brought before me about two months ago in which an individual had paid off a debt and obtained an advance elsewhere. He came to me with the figures. He had borrowed £700, and repayments were to be made at the rate of £7 a month, which meant that the interest was really 10 per cent. I told this person that he was not in the position to pay £7 a month. Working it out on the ordinary principle that interest should be paid half-yearly it will be readily understood that he was being imposed upon to an alarming extent; at any rate to an extent beyond his ability to pay.

Perhaps I am entitled under this heading to make some reference to the remark of the Minister—and I do not name any particular rate—as to the "advances" that are to be considered by the board, which is the whole object of bringing down this Bill. There must be some reason why 1,877 farmers have transferred their business to other institutions. That indicates that they have been enabled to obtain advances at a very much lower rate elsewhere. Then, again, it should be remembered that the conditions laid down by the Agricultural Bank are very much harsher than the conditions laid down by many other financial institutions.

Cases have come under my notice where exactions have been made in order to make the security still more perfect than it was—and it covered everything that the farmer possessed. All the articles are enumerated, his plant, and his stock, etc. Then, of course, the farmer is advised by his storekeeper that he has no credit. If this Bill is carried out as we expect, it should give immense relief in that direction. Only a few weeks ago a man came to me with a notice that he was behind in his payments by £63 odd, He owed £700 on a property worth £900, according to the valuation of my company. We had valued it, as the man had become involved with my company. The notification was that the man was to give a lien on his crops. not only for the current year's crops, but for an indefinite period. I said to him, "You are not to sign that." I called at the bank and explained the case, told them of the general conditions, and that the man was prepared to give an order on the Wheat Board for the amount of £80 payable at the end of the year, and so on. The bank then adjusted the matter. The Agricultural Bank is more exacting than any other moneylender that has ever come under my notice. It has asked for every particle of security that the client was able to give, and when a farmer gives everything in that way, what credit has he left? He has no chance of enjoying credit from his storekeeper, and knowing as much as I do, being behind so many of these people, I know the cruelty of it. I do say that when the matter has been referred to the bank it has taken up the stand that it is for the man's general good and in order to enable him to work his way out. I have here the original mortgage that was sent to this particular man for signature, and have no hesitation in showing it to the Minister, but I do ask that a review should be made by the bank before it makes exactions that are too extreme. I therefore plead for a greater degree of

sympathy with such men. I should say this to the credit of the bank—that in this very case, when this man was in arrears, it was ready to compound the arrears of the past, and to make fresh terms and conditions in connection with payments. In the direction I have indicated, I assure hon. members there is room for very much more sympathetic treatment than has been given in the past. Otherwise satisfaction will not be created and very little further business will be done. It would be well were the bank to call upon its inspectors to make inquiries as to why business has been transferred to other institutions. The loss to the bank of clients during the last twelve months demonstrates the necessity for such inquiries.

I hope that the establishment of the Rural Assistance Board is not going to mean that there will be delay in considering applications to the bank and that the manager will have to wait beyond a reasonable time before appropriate action may be taken thereon. The position will be an unsatisfactory one if he is compelled to await the convenience of the board beyond a reasonable time. I dare say that expedition will be the order of the day in this respect—at least I hope that will be so. There is room for expedition in dealing with applications for advances. I know that there has been delay in some cases, but I must acknowledge the fact that perhaps the department in its wisdom has seen fit to do these things. If the underlying spirit of the Bill is faithfully observed then the Bill will be the salvation of many a man, provided, of course, that acceptable terms are laid down. In the case to which I have referred the client was called upon to pay an interest rate of 6 per cent., whereas the rate should have been reduced long ere this.

I compliment the Minister upon the enthusiasm that he has displayed in attending to the rural requirements of the State through the administration of his department, and I express the hope that sympathetic consideration will be given to every proposal to lay down acceptable terms and conditions for the rural population of Queensland.

Mr. KENNY (*Cook*) [4.20 p.m.]: I hope that this Bill will not be a Rural Assistance Bill in name only. The title of "Rural Assistance Board" is a very fascinating one, but much will depend upon Government policy and administration. No doubt the establishment of this board opens the way to co-operation between it and the rural credit department of the Commonwealth Bank and I am extremely hopeful that much will be done.

I hold the view that the Agricultural Bank has not functioned in the way that it should have done. It was established for the definite purpose of developing the primary industries of the State, and one would naturally conclude that as the primary producers in this State increased in number and primary production increased in volume the business activities of the bank would have increased; on the contrary the figures show a serious decline. Evidently the primary producers have not the same confidence in this bank as they have in the banks controlled by private enterprise. On turning to the report of the Agricultural Bank for the last financial year, I find that the aggregate amount of advance has gradually diminished since 1927-28. These are the figures—

	£
1927-28	2,589,935
1928-29	2,513,794
1929-30	2,457,279
1930-31	2,427,538
1931-32	2,375,839
1932-33	2,237,169
1933-34	1,888,055

Those figures give food for very serious thought, and I am justified in saying that I hope that this Bill is not going to be a Bill in name only. During the last financial year 1,322 clients of the bank transferred their accounts to other banks in this State. There must be some reason for that, and we should try to ascertain the reason why. The hon. member for Nanango has given one reason why the clients of the bank have transferred their business to other banks. The private banks allow their farmer clientele to pay their interest yearly or half-yearly, whilst the principal is to be repaid on a date to be arranged. Clients of the Agricultural Bank must make interest and redemption payments each half year. The full benefit of the advances made to farmers is denied them, because six months thereafter they are called upon to commence the repayment of the principal.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Very frequently clients have only an interest charge to meet.

Mr. KENNY: Taking the policy of the bank by and large, interest and redemption payments must be made at each half-yearly period. That policy is operating to the detriment of the bank. I am not levelling any criticism at the officials of the bank. I have received very sympathetic treatment in many cases from both the manager and assistant manager. I am trying to establish the fact that the activities of the bank are limited by the policy of the Government, which their officials must carry out. I shall be able to bring before hon. members proof of my statement that the business of this bank is declining each year. That proof is to be found in the annual report of the bank itself. From 1928-1929 to 1933-1934, a period of six years, £754,777 more has been repaid to the bank than has been actually advanced. I should like to get these figures into "Hansard"—they are interesting:—

	Advances.	Repayments.
	£	£
1928-1929 ...	313,584 ...	389,211
1929-1930 ...	318,731 ...	373,085
1930-1931 ...	271,054 ...	298,124
1931-1932 ...	285,422 ...	334,955
1932-1933 ...	304,923 ...	436,108
1933-1934 ...	200,570 ...	537,578
Total ...	1,614,284 ...	2,369,061

Mr. GLEDSON: Do those figures include principal and interest?

Mr. KENNY: They only include the principal; I am not dealing with the interest. The Agricultural Bank was established primarily to render assistance to our primary producers for the development of our primary industries. If it is functioning as it should, the amount of its advances should be greater than its repayments, and the total indebtedness of its clients should be greater each year instead of less. There

is a reason for this state of affairs, and Parliament should analyse the question with a view to applying the remedy.

We can proceed further with that argument by again quoting from the report of the Agricultural Bank in support of my contention. I find that when an applicant lodges an application for an advance he is unable to get the amount he requires to effect the improvements on his property that he has designed. If an application for an advance of £1,000 were made to a private financial institution the manager would not say, "All right, we can give you £400." We find that an officer who is asked to report on an application to the Agricultural Bank for an advance invariably deals with it from a conservative point of view. He writes down the valuations of the improvements, and then makes a recommendation as to the amount that should be advanced. When his report is considered by the bank they say, "We must be on the safe side," with the result that the amount is cut down still further. The result is that the applicant obtains about 60 per cent. of the amount he originally applied for. The Minister is making provision for advances up to £1,800. I cannot see where clients of the bank have got anywhere near that amount. Last year the average advance per client was £194. Yet we are asked to make provision for advances up to £1,800! If we are going to give advances up to £1,800 the average I have just quoted will be reduced still further, and some of the balances in the books will appear as 5s. In order to test the value of the statement of the Minister that advances will be made up to £1,800, and in order to arrive at the value of the concession, I have analysed the report of the Agricultural Bank as far back as 1925-26. I will show hon. members the average amount of the advance that has been approved to applicants from 1925-26 to 1933-34, a period of eight years.

With the exception of one year the average amount approved has been less each year, as the following figures will indicate:—

	Average amount approved. £
1925-26	478
1926-27	442
1927-28	402
1928-29	330
1929-30	309
1930-31	241
1931-32	249
1932-33	203
1933-34	194

Those figures indicate a tightening up by the bank, and probably afford the reason why so much money has been repaid and why the bank has less indebtedness to-day than ever before. But the figures also tell me that the rank and file of the farming community have lost confidence in the bank. We must regain that lost confidence, for we cannot afford to have 1,322 of our best customers going to private banks. Rather should we have 1,322 people coming from private banks to the Agricultural Bank, because a lower rate of interest should be operating in respect of loans granted by that bank and more lenient treatment should be extended to producers to assist them to improve their conditions.

At 4.32 p.m.,

Mr. GLEDSON (*Ipswich*), one of the panel of Temporary Chairmen, relieved Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Mr. KENNY: The Minister had much to say on how sympathetic the Labour Government were in comparison with the Moore Government, but his argument will not hold water, as I shall proceed to show. From the reports of the Agricultural Bank I have gleaned certain information and have been able to prepare the following comparative table showing the average percentage of loan approved to that applied for in the years shown —

	Average amount approved to average amount applied for. Per cent.
1929-30	65.8
1930-31	73.4
1931-32	71.7
1932-33	63
1933-34	63.4

These figures clearly indicate that a more conservative policy dominated the Labour Government so far as the Agricultural Bank is concerned than was the case under the Moore Government, for the years 1930-31 and 1931-32 show that the average percentage of advance approved to that applied for was greater in those years. The bank officials cannot be blamed for the tightening up policy, for it is a question of Government policy. The Minister cannot get away from the facts of the case.

Again, the Minister endeavoured to prove that the Moore Government were less sympathetic in that the total amount of advances approved was less during the period of the Moore Government than during the Labour regime. Let me analyse the position, and for the purpose I shall refer to the report of the Agricultural Bank, more particularly to the figures at page 23 thereof, which disclose the following position:—

ADVANCES UNDER AGRICULTURAL BANK ACTS.

Moore Govt.	£	Labour Govt.	£
1929-30 ...	400,650	1932-33 ...	354,425
1930-31 ...	328,006	1933-34 ...	247,632
1931-32 ...	432,237	1934-35 ...	150,000
	£1,160,893		£752,057
Average per annum	£386,964		£250,685

I have no information as to the amount approved for the current financial year, but have included the total amount stated by the Minister, namely £150,000.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Have you included the advances made by the Department of Public Lands, etc.?

Mr. KENNY: I would not be in order in debating the administration of the Department of Public Lands, but I am in order in dealing with the operations of the Agricultural Bank, where the figures disclose that the average amount advanced per annum by the Moore Government was £386,964 as against £250,635 in the three years of the

present Government. Where does the argument of the Minister stand in the light of these figures?

The Minister has definitely told us that the object of the Rural Assistance Board is to handle propositions that were not otherwise suitable to be handled by the Agricultural Bank. That being the case, we are reaching a stage where different authorities are making advances and taking security from the people who are getting the advances. At the present time we have the Agricultural Bank, the Rural Assistance Board, the Department of Public Lands under the rural development scheme, and the Department of Labour and Industry under the scheme of relief to farmers. Each is advancing money to different individuals and taking security and each is demanding a first mortgage or a lien on the first crop. This question cannot be effectively handled by four different bodies. If we wish to do a service to the farming community the sooner the matter of advances to settlers is put under one head or under one board the sooner will there be efficiency. On the one hand you have the Agricultural Bank refusing a man an advance, and on the other the Land Administration Board granting him an advance. Whilst the Agricultural Bank says that a man is not a suitable proposition for an advance at 6 per cent., the Department of Public Lands says he is suitable at 3 per cent!

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Department of Public Lands is not under discussion.

Mr. KENNY: The Rural Assistance Board is going to be asked to finance a farmer who the Agricultural Bank considers is not worthy of an advance. The Rural Assistance Board will finance a man to whom the Department of Labour and Industry say it is unable to give rations. Such a method does not suggest efficient administration, and the applicant for finance is penalised. The Government considers the tobacco industry is not a suitable industry to be financed by the Agricultural Bank, and passed that industry over to the Rural Assistance Board, or the Department of Public Lands, or the Department of Labour and Industry. Before a tobacco-grower can get rations he must give a first lien on his crop to the department, so that when he comes to the Rural Assistance Board he has no security to offer it because he has already given it to the Department of Labour and Industry. There are a number of tobacco-growers in the Mareeba district who were transferred from the Tolga settlement, and they got £300 each from the Agricultural Bank to stabilise them in the growing of tobacco. One grower went to the bank for a further advance because £300 was not sufficient, and the bank refused on the ground that he was not a suitable proposition. He then went to the Rural Assistance Board and obtained an advance of £2 in order to purchase fertilizer to grow seed plants. He had a pumping plant that he had purchased with money advanced by a private firm, which was pressing him for its money. It was going to take the plant, and he applied to the Rural Assistance Board and it advanced him £11 to pay the firm, which made £13 in all. The Agricultural Bank had the security in the shape of his farm, and when he wanted £13 it would not give it to him and said it must have a first-crop lien. It also had a bill of sale on his pumping plant. He grew the seed plants, and then went back to the Rural Assistance Board and told it he wanted an advance to enable him to buy fertilizer and two horses. The Rural Assistance Board decided he was not a suitable proposition and turned him down. He has been advanced a sum of £313 and helped to the stage where he has built up his seedling beds and grown seed plants, and then when he requires a few more pounds for fertilizer and horses to prepare the soil for the growing of the crop, he is turned down! The security is killed with the Agricultural Bank and the Rural Assistance Board. The man is metaphorically killed, his heart is broken, he has to walk off the farm.

An OPPOSITION MEMBER: He loses his block!

Mr. KENNY: He loses his block in both ways—the block of land and his own block. He loses heart as well. Day after day I am receiving letters from men in the tobacco-growing area asking me to interview the Rural Assistance Board and endeavour to get it to reconsider their applications for a bit of fertilizer with which to grow their crops. These men have put their all into their farms, and to-day, when they have seedlings ready to plant out, the department is refusing them even as little as £6 to plant their crops of tobacco and make the security to the bank greater. Surely there is something wrong! Surely it is time that the Minister said, "Tobacco-growing is a profitable industry in this State, and we will make advances from the Agricultural Bank and not saddle the man with a full mortgage on his farm, a first-crop lien on his crop, and a bill of sale on anything else he may have"! Nobody can tell me that that is rural assistance, and that is why I say I hope that this Bill will mean more than a name. I hope it will mean a system. I hope it will mean an alteration of Government policy, and that the Minister will put a policy into operation that will stabilise the tobacco industry—at least, in this State. We have heard enough condemnation and criticism of the Federal Government. The late election was fought and lost on that issue so far as the Labour Party in Queensland is concerned, but we can forget the political aspect. We should come down to bedrock and make the Rural Assistance Board a board that will grant assistance to the tobacco-growing areas. I maintain that it should never have been left to the Rural Assistance Board to handle the whole of the tobacco problem, but that it should have been handled by the Agricultural Bank. A sum of £100,000 at least should be available to stabilise the industry in Queensland. The experience of the past has been the result of Government policy, and we cannot blame the officers of the bank. The Government have been talking about increasing advances up to £1,800, but have been only advancing £194. I find in the report of the department there were 295 applications for rural assistance last year, and only 188 approved. The amount approved amounted to £12,443, or an average of £50 each. This sum is not going to put a man on a farm—in fact, it is going to drive him off it when he has no other assistance. In the past the policy has been to endeavour to starve a man down to the lowest level as regards finance, to make him skimp himself and his family in an endeavour to eke out an existence, when a further advance of £100, £200, or £300 would have enabled him to have greater

facilities at his disposal, meet the bank indebtedness, and keep himself and family. We have instances where dairy farmers have wanted loans to purchase cattle, but the bank has refused any further advances, although the farmers had the grass for the extra cattle, because the total indebtedness was too great. It would have been better policy to enable such a dairyman to increase the value of his security and obtain a greater return and thus meet his total indebtedness. That would have been a business proposition.

On page 96 of the Auditor-General's report the work of the Rural Assistance Board is dealt with, and we find that only £5,757 18s. 1d. was expended last year. The item includes fertilizers, £1,114; advances for unspecified purposes, £405; purchase of stallions, pigs, and cows, £242; and the balance in purchasing property. How can we expect the board to function when the administration is being complicated? Four different departments are concerned, and I consider it much better to put them under the one head, and allow the bank to forge ahead and formulate its own policy, rather than that a policy should be laid down that is unsound and have a Minister of the Crown coming into this House and in answer to questions stating that the amount advanced to tobacco-growers for fertilizer and other purposes is not available, and—when forced to reply to an interjection—saying that £5,000 was advanced for fertilizer, whereas the report of the Auditor-General shows the amount was £1,100.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: I was giving the figure for the full period.

Mr. KENNY: What is £5,000 for fertilizers over a three-year period?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The period was since the Rural Assistance Board began to operate.

Mr. KENNY: I know full well that when he instituted the practice last year of making advances to tobacco-growers for fertilizers he laid down the condition that no man should get fertilizers for over 5 acres. If a man had ploughed 15 acres and had the necessary labour to work it, what sense was there in limiting the area to be fertilized to 5 acres and allowing weeds to grow on the remaining portion of the cultivated land? The whole question was viewed in a narrow way. The Minister was so busily engaged in endeavouring to score politically off the Federal Government in connection with the tobacco industry that he allowed the industry to stagnate and the growers were compelled to walk off their farms. Now he proposes to place the responsibility on to a Rural Assistance Board, but I hold the view that very often a board is set up for the specific purpose of protecting a weak Minister. The Minister will now be able to say that he would have done certain things if the Rural Assistance Board had made a recommendation in favour of them. If I had my way there would be no boards within the Government service; the department would be controlled by one man and he would have to justify his official existence. I would not allow any Minister to shelter behind a board that was specifically set up to carry out Government policy. If he is going to insist that the board shall adhere rigidly to Government policy then he is merely tying its hands and sheltering behind it. That policy of weakness is no good to me, and it is one of the reasons why the business activities of the bank have declined. I am sorry that I am compelled to criticise the administration of the bank, but I have done it with the definite purpose of trying to alter Government policy and to awaken the people who are responsible to a realisation of the fact that the business of the bank is declining whereas it should be developing. If we were to decide to make an adequate supply of funds available to the bank and to allow the officials to follow prudent banking principles free from interference by Government policy with a view to providing an efficient service for the people, the bank would once more come into its own. It would then be able to give the service that it was intended to provide.

There are many highly desirable clauses in the Bill, and if they are sympathetically administered the bank will be able to provide the service that is expected of it. I must stress the fact that much will depend upon the sympathetic administration of the Bill. I hope that adequate funds will be made available for the bank and that the main object of the Minister in the future will not be to gain political kudos at the expense of the Federal Government. I hope that when the Federal Government make rural credits available to this State the Minister will not endeavour to make political capital out of the situation, for I am sure that any rural policy that will be enunciated by the Federal Government will be a sound, sensible policy and entirely in the interests of all the States of Australia.

Mr. PLUNKETT (*Albert*) [4.51 p.m.]: There is no doubt that the Rural Assistance Board will be of great assistance to the Minister, but I have felt for a considerable time that the small producers of the State have not received the sympathetic consideration that it was expected the Agricultural Bank would extend to them. I am satisfied that better financial accommodation could be secured elsewhere. A casual glance through the annual report by the bank will convince anyone that the small producers, men starting out new on the land, constitute the major portion of the clients of the bank. Why have not sufficient funds been made available to the Agricultural Bank, which is charged with the duty of developing the rural areas of this State? Queensland is essentially a primary producing country, and, instead of the aggregate advance to date being in the vicinity of £2,000,000 it should have reached many millions of pounds. The Government are able to provide millions of pounds for the construction of bridges and for other projects, but they are not prepared to assist the people on the land by providing advances amounting to millions of pounds. Apparently the Minister holds the view that by the creation of a Rural Assistance Board he is going to extend increased assistance to the primary producers, but too many boards have been created in this State and I am convinced that in most cases a board eventually becomes a buffer between a responsible head and someone else. Whilst I agree that it is very helpful at times to be able to obtain the advice of competent persons, I do know that divided control does not make for efficient administration.

The activities of the Agricultural Bank are very important. Many investigations have to be made by its officials, and in the

making of those investigations competent men should be secured. I observe that while it is proposed to create a board to assist the management it will be composed of officials taken from Government departments. This Bill contains powers for the payment of an annual management fee and the appointment of a secretary, indicating that there is more than a possibility of the creation of another Government sub-department. That is quite wrong and I hope that it will not take place. The very fact that a board is to be created composed wholly of State officials with provision for the payment of an annual management fee and a fee for the secretary means, in itself, additional governmental expense. There should be some person who is able to take the full responsibility if the bank is going to make advances to the extent that should be necessary to increase development in Queensland. Under those circumstances I should have no objection to this board being created, but the fact that the bank is losing clients is an indication that it has not been able to compete with private banks and financial institutions, because they have been able to get better accommodation elsewhere. No Government should allow that position to arise. The Agricultural Bank is not called upon to pay rates and taxes, which a private trading bank must bear. There should be some investigation as to the reason why the bank has lost so many clients. That is the only reason why I welcome this Bill.

I hope that another department will not be created with the passage of this Bill. I hope that the primary producers will be able to secure more facilities from the bank than they have had before. I am not seeking to criticise anyone, but the most important consideration of this State is the maintenance and increase of its production. While it is necessary to get new settlers to develop our lands, who naturally will be possessed of limited means, it is also necessary that the bank should be prepared to give more liberal assistance than in the past. The 10 per cent. penalty inflicted by the bank in cases where its clients cannot meet their commitments is altogether too high. I recognise that to force people to meet their commitments it is necessary to have some penalty.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The Agricultural Bank Act does not provide for a 10 per cent. penalty.

Mr. PLUNKETT: It has been that rate.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: It never has been.

Mr. PLUNKETT: What is the rate?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The penalty in the first instance is 2½ per cent., rising over the period of default.

Mr. PLUNKETT: I am glad to be corrected, because I have no desire to say anything that is not quite right. The mere fact that a penalty exists does not encourage some men on the land to make application for financial assistance. The people whom the bank assists are beset with many difficulties. Primary producers are, at all times, subject to the vagaries of the climatic conditions. They must contend with floods, droughts, and pests of all descriptions. Nearly every branch of primary production has its own particular enemy. When all is said and done producers working land in the tropics have many climatic disabilities to contend with. While I welcome some measure that will extend the activities of the bank, my whole contention is that we have never yet been liberal enough with our primary producers who are producing the wealth of this country. I hope that this Bill is but an initial step towards setting out to do something to develop primary products in a big way.

Mr. DEACON (*Cunningham*) [5 p.m.]: I am disappointed with this Bill. It establishes an advisory board for the bank. The bank officials as I know them are very capable officials, have discharged the administrative affairs of the bank satisfactorily, and have incurred no great losses. It is a bank taken over by a Labour Government and conducted on general banking lines, although a bank conducted by a Labour Government should follow a reverse policy. Not so long ago every member of the Government was speaking about nationalisation of banks and unlimited credit. I want them to practise their belief. Here is the opportunity. Here is a bank run by the Government. If it is a good Labour Government at all, it should make good any losses made by this bank. Any man who has security can go to any other bank and get a loan; he need not go to the Agricultural Bank at all. He may even go to a private individual. The Agricultural Bank is supposed to assist people who cannot get advances from other banks. What else is it for? Up to the present it has been tied a little tighter than the ordinary bank, and now an advisory board has been appointed to shackle it a little bit more. Certainly the Minister says that the bank will advance another £100 to an applicant—but only nominally. The question of security should not affect that bank from the Labour point of view; yet the question of security is still tied to that bank as hard as ever it was. I cannot understand why the Secretary for Agriculture, who has always posed as a sincere believer in the Labour platform, should in practice be such a hidebound Conservative. If anything, I should like to see this bank liberalised. If anything is to be done to it at all, it should undertake advances in cases on the doubtful side that will yet keep men on the land. If that is not its purpose, why have it at all? The other banks do all this business of advancing on sufficient security, and do so at the present time on better terms than the Agricultural Bank. The Agricultural Bank is being beaten because other banks are giving larger advances and more liberal terms. We have heard it admitted that the Agricultural Bank is losing clients. How will it improve the position to appoint a board that will look more closely into any application for advances and tighten up generally?

What is wrong with the Government that they are adopting this attitude—and just before an election, too! Only a few months hence we shall see the Minister and every other hon. member on the Government side advocating from the public platform the liberalisation of advances to men on the land. They will quote this legislation as an instance, but will not, of course, say exactly what they are doing. They will talk about the Rural Assistance Board—it is such a big-sounding title—but actual assistance is not in this Bill at all. Not as much assistance will be given as in the past,

and it is as plain as daylight, after listening to the Minister, that there is no intention of giving it.

It was impossible to get any encouragement from the Minister's speech that would lead one to believe that there was going to be any liberalisation of the policy of the bank, and that is what is needed. There has never been a time when rural industry needed more liberal consideration than at present, when prices are low and the difficulties of the man on the land are increasing.

There is a provision in the Bill to extend its operations to loans to graziers. The graziers can get a loan at the present time if they desire money to buy cattle. They can go to an agent or the banks without security and obtain money to buy cattle. It is not likely that this bank is going to do any further business as a result of this Bill. This Bill should be one that would encourage the bank to lend more and the Government should assure the manager if there are losses the Treasurer will make them good. If the bank does not do that it is not the Labour idea of a bank at all.

Mr. FOLEY: You are getting very sarcastic.

Mr. DEACON: It does make me wild when I hear men preaching what they are going to do, and as soon as they are returned to power to see that they are found wanting. Not one of the hon. members sitting on the Government benches has the courage of his convictions—or at least what he said were his convictions when he went before the electors. It is quite easy to understand now what the convictions of hon. members opposite are. They are not game to carry out their programme because they know it is a failure.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I hope the hon. member will confine his remarks to the Bill and desist from making an election speech.

Mr. DEACON: God forbid that I should make an election speech here! This is the last place I would do it! I expect hon. members on the Government side to endeavour to widen the scope of this bank and liberalise the conditions as far as the lending of money is concerned. At the present time it is losing business, and the Government bring in a Bill that they call a Rural Assistance Bill, which will place the bank in such a position that it will not be able to compete with other banks even to the extent that it is able to do at the present time.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. F. W. Bulcock, *Barcoo*) [5.10 p.m.], in reply: I cannot allow some of the remarks made by the hon. member who has just resumed his seat to pass unchallenged. He has made a refreshing contribution to the debate, but I am not sure whether he has been converted to the Douglas Social Credit outlook or whether he has joined a movement, the logical expression of which is Sovietism: but I am convinced that between the one and the other the hon. member's political philosophy lies. It is a remarkable admission from an hon. member who, during the time he was a Minister of the Crown, pursued a policy of tremendous conservatism in the Department of Public Lands. The hon. member objects to the creation of a board, and suggests that the board that it is proposed to create under this Bill is an excrescence; but I have a very lively recollection that the hon. member, in order to protect himself, and perhaps the more carefully to analyse the operations of the department of which he was in charge, created the Land Administration Board and gave it very great powers, so that the Minister ceased to be the Minister and became the cipher of the board.

The hon. member has said that I have repudiated some of my Labour allegiance. Let me suggest to the hon. member that the Bill we are discussing to-day is an expression of Labour principles definitely designed to make some adequate contribution to the wellbeing of the primary producers of this State. There is one phase of this question that is worth mentioning. The late Government consisted, in the main, of a Country Party. It was a Government with a majority of Country Party members capable, by virtue of the weight of their numbers, of doing those things that they believed should be done in regard to agricultural administration. The Minister in charge of the Department of Agriculture at that time brought before this House an Agricultural Bank Bill. He had every opportunity to do those things that have been advocated here to-day by hon. members opposite, all of them—the repayment of the obligation in a lump sum, the alteration of interest, and all the rest. But did he do these things? Were these things done? Were these things supported by the Government, with all their lip loyalty to the service of agriculture?

Allow me to take the instance quoted by the hon. member for Cook. He made some reference to the tobacco industry, and asked that £100,000 should be made available for the perpetuation of that industry. Everybody knows the position so far as the tobacco industry in Queensland is concerned, or at least should know the attitude taken by the Moore Government in this regard. They hastened into this industry without the ability to see clearly what the result would be. They unfortunately considered a few successful experiments as being indicative of the possibility of the successful establishment of a new industry. Having raised a wave of enthusiasm in this State for this new industry, they promptly proceeded to lay down the conditions under which one could obtain assistance from the Agricultural Bank. The first thing required by hon. members opposite was that the proposed tobacco-grower should have £300 before taking up a block for the purpose of growing tobacco. The second thing required was that he must have erected barns and done certain other things before he could obtain a loan from the bank, and even then that loan was limited to a period of four years.

Mr. NIMMO: A very wise provision, as things turned out.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: A fairly wise provision. I am not criticising the provisions made, but I would say, in passing, that I have found that the four-year period was so harsh in its operation and so unjust in its incidence that I have considerably increased that period.

Mr. NIMMO: Your experience enabled you to do that.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Yes, experience taught me; but I certainly do very definitely challenge the statement that we should make £100,000 annually

available for the industry and at the same time have to present to this House a report on the advances of the Agricultural Bank. I have too much respect for the officers associated with the bank to allow them to be associated with any hare-brained policy of shovelling money into an industry that has not up to the present, in certain instances and directions, justified its existence. I was checking up the other day the number of tobacco companies—good, bad, and indifferent, well managed and badly managed, snide, and otherwise—that had applied to me for assistance under the rule as to advances to co-operative associations laid down in the Agricultural Bank Acts. It is a remarkable thing that quite a number of companies have been floated with a fanfare of trumpets, convinced they were going to make a tremendous success of the tobacco-growing industry and came to me, buoyed up by the hopes that the previous Administration had inspired, and have asked me to make advances available for them. This was not done. Scrutinising the position to-day I find not one of these companies has been able to weather the blast; consequently, it is futile to suggest that we should shovel unlimited quantities of money into an industry that, generally speaking, has not yet justified its existence. There is no policy in the Agricultural Bank, so far as the tobacco industry is concerned, for the limitation of finance; but I do find this—and this is the main factor—that the men who were encouraged to go on the land and grow tobacco went on to land that has no other agricultural possibility except the doubtful possibility of consecutive crops of tobacco. The result has been that they can have no security and the land is of no value at all, not even 2s. 6d. an acre if tobacco fails. And I am being asked by hon. members opposite to shovel £100,000 of public money into an industry that can only give me that type of security! We have done all we can through the Agricultural Bank for the tobacco industry. We have made advances from the rural assistance funds—because we could not make them under the Agricultural Bank Acts. It was a matter of Government policy to help people who, unfortunately, were put on these blocks by the specious promises of a previous Government and by ill-directed propaganda, and could not give us the security that this Parliament demands shall be given under these Acts.

The alternatives were to find some other source of finance for them or to allow them to leave their blocks. I preferred to find some other source of finance for them, and I have persistently followed that policy. Quite a number of people were on the point of leaving their lands, but as a result of the policy that I adopted they were able to remain. I say quite definitely, and with a sense of responsibility, that we have no right to gamble with the finances of the State, that we must get an adequate security for the money we advance. I cannot believe that hon. members opposite would agree to a policy that meant the unlimited spending of public money without some definite assurances that an adequate return could be made. I reiterate that the policy of this Government in connection with the tobacco industry—we did inherit a legacy from the previous Government—has been more liberal than the real facts of the case would justify, and the hon. member who has addressed himself to this question knows that to be the case.

Mr. KENNY: I do not.

At 5.20 p.m.,

Mr. SPEAKER resumed the chair.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: If the hon. member would turn to a report issued by the Commonwealth Government on this question he would get some very illuminating information. It is my intention to persevere with this industry through the Agricultural Bank, and particularly the Rural Assistance Board, to find the amount of money that is necessary to try to develop the industry to a suitable degree of prosperity, but in no circumstances, not even to protect the hon. member for Cook, am I going to engage in any " wild cat " financial policy so far as tobacco is concerned. If one peruses carefully the whole history of tobacco cultivation in Queensland one will find a warning to go cautiously in this regard. My own experiences at Beerburrum, the experience of the hon. member for Cook in the North, and the experience of the seventeen companies that failed when they attempted to grow tobacco in Queensland all point a very grave finger along the road to be trodden—the road of caution. I propose to tread that road of caution, to do the things that I believe are justified, and not to engage in any " wild cat " policy of financial speculation.

Mr. EDWARDS: By Jove, you have improved!

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: I propose now to deal with one final question raised by the hon. member for Nanango, and I thank him for suggesting that I have improved in that direction, because there is always room for improvement, even in the hon. member himself.

Mr. EDWARDS: And you too!

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Quite so. I have no desire to claim perfection. The hon. member raised the question of the period that elapsed between the time an application was lodged and the time when it was finalised. It may please the hon. member to know that by a reorganisation of the bank I have practically succeeded in cutting the average time in half. When I took over control of the Agricultural Bank only one set of officers—the officers of the bank—were operating in connection with this work. I realised that one of the grave weaknesses of the administration of the bank was the period that elapsed between the time that the application was lodged and the time that it was actually finalised, and I entered into an agreement whereby the clerks of petty sessions and other officers of the Department of Justice and the Department of Public Lands throughout the State should co-operate with my department. To-day the clerks of petty sessions are doing much clerical work associated with the receipt of applications, and to that extent inspectors are free to make inspections. The office of Mr. Quodling, the general manager, is not now confined to Brisbane, but extends throughout the State. He is engaged, amongst other things, in supervising the field staff, bringing about expedition of action. By these means we have practically reduced the time between the lodgment of the application and the final decision by half.

This Bill does represent a very material contribution to agricultural financial practice.

Question—"That the Bill be now read a second time" (*Mr. Bulcock's motion*)—put and passed.

COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Hanson, Buranda, in the chair.*)

Clauses 1 to 14, both inclusive, agreed to.

Clause 15—"*New section 24B—Annual instalments by borrower in respect of certain seasonal industries*"—

Mr. NIMMO (*Oxley*) [5.27 p.m.]: Is it not possible to secure the insertion of a paragraph at the end of this clause prescribing the rate of interest to be charged by the bank? By way of interjection the Minister stated that the rate of interest charged by the bank would be reduced from 5 to 4 per cent. from the beginning of the year. As a matter of fact, the Commonwealth Government are going to do something in respect of advances in connection with rural industries.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: How do you know that?

Mr. NIMMO: It has been announced. We may see the rate of interest reduced to as low as 3 per cent. for rural industries. Some provision should be made before this Bill finally passes this Committee for the charging of a lower rate of interest than at present obtains. I was pleased to hear the interjection of the Minister that the rate of interest would be reduced from 5 to 4 per cent. A rate of 5 per cent. is out of all reason in respect, not only of city interests, but rural interests also.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. F. W. Bulcock, *Barcoo*) [5.29 p.m.]: It has not been the practice for many years to state the rate of interest that would be payable under any of the Agricultural Bank Acts that have passed this Legislature. The Acts provide that the rate of interest shall be determined from time to time, and as prescribed. That is much more satisfactory than making provision in a Bill to charge a mandatory rate. I prefer the power to enable us to reduce the rate of interest if circumstances render it necessary, if a crisis should arise, rather than wait until we can approach Parliament to do so.

Mr. NIMMO: We have your assurance that the rate of interest will be reduced from the 1st January next?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Hon. members have my assurance that the rate of interest will be reduced in accordance with the announcement made some three months ago.

Mr. KENNY: Will it be reduced by 1 per cent., or will it be a flat rate of 4 per cent.?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: A reduction of 1 per cent. will be made, but the rate charged will not be lower than 4 per cent.

Clause 15, as read, agreed to.

The House resumed.

The CHAIRMAN reported the Bill without amendment.

THIRD READING.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. F. W. Bulcock, *Barcoo*): I move

"That the Bill be now read a third time."

Question put and passed.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES ACTS AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) [5.31 p.m.]: I move—

"That the Bill be now read a second time."

This amending Bill is the sixteenth that has been introduced to amend "The Local Authorities Act of 1902." I quite agree with the hon. member for Logan as to the necessity of consolidating the Local Authorities Acts, for by the previous fifteen amending Acts 278 sections of the original Act have been amended and 76 new sections added, whilst the various schedules have been amended ten times. Hon. members can understand from that statement how difficult it is for members and officials of local authorities to interpret the law correctly. As the hon. member for Logan admitted, it is a difficult task even for a legal practitioner to interpret correctly local authority law as it stands to-day. In one particular case, which necessitated one of the amendments in this Bill, various legal opinions were obtained, and it was found that a conflict of opinion existed between Crown Law Office officials and leading legal practitioners as to the real meaning of the law. The necessity of consolidation is fully recognised and instructions have been issued to proceed with the work in order that a consolidated Act may be prepared.

The amendments included in this Bill are those that the Government consider of sufficient urgency to justify introduction in this session. Other amendments, which I do not regard as urgent, have been requested by the Local Authorities Conference, but in view of the fact that a consolidated Act will be dealt with next session I deemed it wise to allow these amendments to stand over.

Mr. SPARKES: Does that mean they are likely to be included in the consolidated Act?

The HOME SECRETARY: Provision can be made for a completely new Act, if necessary. The task ahead of the officers of the Home Department is not a hard and fast consolidation with a view to immediate amendment thereafter; the task ahead is a consolidation and general improvement of the Acts. Those provisions that we deem necessary to assist local authorities in their work and protect the rights of ratepayers can be included without waiting for a consolidation, and then immediately amending a consolidated Act. It must be remembered that even a consolidated Act is not likely to remain unaltered for a great length of time. Conditions vary so much in this country that it is difficult to frame local authority law in a way that will suit the requirements of local authorities of all parts of this great State. Frequently requests are received from a local authority, or group of local authorities, for the insertion of certain provisions in the existing law, but a consideration of

the position shows that such provisions would be unsuitable to other local authorities whose conditions are dissimilar. In a State where some shires with only a few hundred ratepayers have an area as big as the State of Victoria, where major towns outside of Brisbane, small country towns, thickly-populated agricultural shires, big grazing shires, mining areas, etc., have to be considered—in a State where such varying conditions prevail it is obvious that conditions that may be suitable to a town or closely-settled farming or agricultural area may not suit one of the western or northern areas where the people are few and the square miles of territory are many. So that one cannot blame local authority men for continually seeking reforms or improvements, and one cannot blame the Home Office officials for not being able to provide an Act that would be suitable over a period of years. As the State grows Labour conditions are altering and day by day we find need for provisions that were undreamed of a few years ago. The task of consolidation will be performed to the best of the ability of my officers. It will take a long time before such an Act will get into the same position it is in to-day, and when it does we hope that Parliament will, in its wisdom, again pass a new Act.

This is a Bill in which there are many principles, because every clause deals with a separate phase of local authority government.

There is provision for the validation of certain illegal acts. We have to understand that members of local authorities doing work for shire or town have an onerous and responsible task placed upon their shoulders. They have a certain responsibility under the Local Authorities Acts to the Government, and they are guided by a desire to serve the people in their own area. A case in which a valuation was not made in accordance with the Act arose out of a lack of clear understanding of its provisions by the local authority members, and a desire to save expense to their people. The Act provides there must be a valuation at least every three years in every town and every five years in every shire. With the confusion of amendments I suppose these lay members of the local authority should be forgiven for not having fully grasped the importance of doing that. What happened was that in a desire to save expense incurred by having a fresh valuation a resolution was moved and carried by the council declaring the previous valuation to be the valuation for that year. In their own minds the councillors thought they had satisfied the Act. That did not satisfy the Act, and when it was challenged in a succeeding council by a member of the council who was hostile to the previous council naturally it became a case of, "What is the law?"

An OPPOSITION MEMBER: That occurred at Roma?

The HOME SECRETARY: Yes, and it was done at Esk, too.

An OPPOSITION MEMBER: And at Kingaroy.

The HOME SECRETARY: It has been done by several shires. It was not a question in the Home Department of whether the members of the shire endeavoured to do the right thing or wilfully did the wrong thing; it became a question of: Was that valuation legal under the provisions of this Act? The answer was, "No." The question whether the members of that local authority acted in good faith or not never arose. I quite believe they acted in good faith and did what they considered was in the best interests of their people. The only honest thing to do is to validate their action and save any further loss of revenue to that shire. I think every hon. member will agree that is the right thing to do.

The same thing happened in the exceeding of the overdraft allowed under the provisions of the Act. Several councils did it. During a period of depression the amount of rates paid to local authorities fell in the same way as the amount paid to the State Treasurer in income tax fell. The capacity to pay had been lessened and the income of the council was also lessened. At the time these councils were losing revenue there was an evergrowing demand from the community for work to be provided for unemployed people. The council was placed in the position that if it did not exceed the limit of the overdraft allowed by the Act before the end of the year it would have to dispense with the whole of its staff. That would result in two hardships to the community. One would be that the work of maintenance, which should be carried on continuously, would be neglected; and the other would be that the employees would be thrown out of work. It may or may not have been bad judgment on the part of the council to do what it did; but there are precedents for it. It was frequently done before, but on previous occasions it had not been challenged by any disgruntled member of the council or ratepayer. I believe the members of that council acted in perfectly good faith.

Mr. MOORE: The banks generally give it.

The HOME SECRETARY: The banks have been pretty liberal in their interpretation of the Act. Had no one challenged the procedure, the next time rates began to come in the first money would be utilised to wipe off the illegal overdraft and bring it down to the amount required under the Act.

Mr. WIENHOLT: Only temporarily.

The HOME SECRETARY: For that year. Following on an election and before the revenue of the town came in an individual member of the council challenged the procedure. He had the right to do so. He raised the question and it was decided that instead of paying the revenue from the rates of that year into the town fund in the ordinary way—had they done so his grievance would have disappeared before he could have taken any legal action—the council would create a special fund and pay the revenue for the new year into that special fund. Consequently the old overdraft still stands with the bank and nothing has been paid off. In that case the individual members of that council would be responsible to the bank jointly and severally for the amount of that overdraft. Having satisfied ourselves that they acted in good faith, I do not think we should expect them, and no hon. member of this House should expect them to suffer. The amount that was used was expended for the purposes of the shire. There was nothing in any way sinister about the matter. The amount of money obtained from the bank was expended

in the ordinary weekly and daily maintenance work of the shire.

Mr. J. G. BAYLEY: It is rather a strange thing to create a special fund knowing they would be jointly and severally liable for the overdraft.

The HOME SECRETARY: There was a new council. An election had taken place between the time when the limit of the overdraft was exceeded and the time when the rates for the new year began to come in. We have all noticed that often after an election there is a difference in politics in elected bodies, and the newly-elected councillors decided to get even with the preceding council by taking this action. There was nothing sinister about it, but I do not think it was right that the bank should have to seek redress from those councillors when the money had been expended in the interests of the ratepayers of that area. We had to take action in that case, and when making inquiries we found that the overdraft had been exceeded in several places. Coolangatta is one of them. When the Roma case became public someone in the Coolangatta Shire Council, who knew nothing about it previously, suddenly raised the question and brought that council into the same position. So it has extended all over Queensland—not in many cases but in a number of shires that were in difficulties. We are validating what has been done, but we are not validating anything that will happen in the future in this respect. Instructions have been issued that all shire councils must be told that they are to adhere strictly to the legal limits of their overdrafts in future. In the cases mentioned, the legal procedure would have been to approach the Treasurer for some assistance during the difficult period. Had that been done there could have been no complaint by anyone. It is important to note that had they approached the Treasurer for assistance the rights of the ratepayers of saying whether a loan should be raised would have been protected. In exceeding the legal limits of their overdraft the local authorities have really raised a loan contrary to the provisions of the Act, which lays it down notice must be published of the intention to borrow so that the ratepayers may have the right to object if they desire to do so.

Mr. WIENHOLT: Ratepayer or elector?

The HOME SECRETARY: Ratepayer or elector. There is no prohibition in the Act against a ratepayer exercising his rights as a citizen. The present Act is framed to give every citizen his rights in local government as he has in State government.

Another provision which recent inquiries have made necessary is the prohibition of the use of the hire-purchase agreement or time-payment system in respect of work or material. Two instances have come before my notice. In one case a local authority purchased plant under a hire-purchase agreement, thus depriving the ratepayers of their right to say whether money should be borrowed, inasmuch as when a hire-purchase agreement is made the vendor of the article lends the money to purchase it. Naturally the vendor charges a higher rate of interest than that for which the local authority could borrow otherwise. Plant was purchased on hire-purchase agreement with payment over a period of years and the rate of interest was much higher than would have had to be paid had the requisite sum been borrowed in the proper way. Furthermore, there was no open competition for the supply of the article and quite possibly a higher price than was necessary was paid for it. Again the ratepayer was deprived of his rights under the Local Authorities Acts as regards the borrowing of money. This we are prohibiting. In another case a contract was made during the formation of road work, water channelling, and so on. The contract was made at a fixed sum, but the amount was to be paid over a period of years on time payment. Here, again, of course, a much higher rate of interest than otherwise would have to be paid. Again the ratepayers were deprived of their right under the Local Authorities Acts.

Mr. MOORE: The work was not to be paid for until some time after it was completed.

The HOME SECRETARY: That is so. The ordinary procedure would be to apply to the Treasury for the money, tenders would be called and the contractor paid on the completion of the job. Then annual instalments of interest and redemption would be paid to the Treasury carrying a reasonable rate of interest. If that procedure had been followed the people in the town would have had an opportunity to object to the loan. Under the time-payment arrangement there was no poll, no notice of intention to borrow and nothing was known until after the job was completed and the succeeding council found it had to make annual repayments carrying an exorbitant rate of interest. That is undesirable. It was really a plan to defeat the provisions of the Local Authorities Acts, which are designed to protect the people in town or shire, and this Bill renders any such contract in the future null and void, and makes the councillors personally liable if they enter into it. Instructions will be given to all the local authorities, and the local authority clerks will be put in a position to advise their council of the serious view that the Government take of that procedure.

One of the requests that I have had from every Local Authorities Conference since I have been in charge of the department has been to make some provision to compel people who subdivide land to register the subdivisions with the Titles Office. Many local authorities have had endless trouble in connection with this matter through being unable to ascertain the correct alignments. The practice has been to survey and subdivide an area and to refrain from registering until such time as the property was sold. No one had any knowledge of what the subdivisions were or where the plans were to be found. The ordinary citizen had no means of finding out anything about it. Provision is now made to the effect that the plans must be lodged with the Titles Office within six months after the subdivisions are made, but we are not insisting that separate deeds be taken out for the subdivisions. Whilst we are anxious to give the local authorities every assistance in finding out where the plans and subdivisions are, at the same time we do not want to inflict a hardship upon a person who may have subdivided an estate, but who is not in a position to take out the necessary deeds for the subdivisions. The new provision will enable anybody interested to find out exactly what the alignments are.

The Bill also reduces the minimum valuation of property in a local authority area.

At the present time the minimum valuation is £30 in a town and £15 in a shire, and it is proposed to reduce the amounts to £20 and £10 respectively. The local authorities have repeatedly asked for the repeal of the provision relating to minimum valuations with the object of giving the local authority a free hand in the matter, but after considering the matter the Government decided to reduce the amounts as stated above. This will give considerable satisfaction to the local authorities who have repeatedly pointed out that if a lower valuation were fixed in respect of unusable land in their areas they would have a much better chance of collecting some of the rates.

Provision is also made for the broadening of the conditions under which sewerage work can be undertaken by local authorities. The original provision in the Act did not suit the city of Toowoomba, and hon. members will remember that when the city of Toowoomba—which was the first town outside of Brisbane to undertake a sewerage scheme—commenced this task, it had to seek the aid of the Government and the Local Authorities Act was amended to suit its requirements. It is impossible for any city completely to sewer its area, because some parts are sparsely settled and the dwellings are so far apart that the cost would be prohibitive. We have been encouraging other cities in Queensland to carry out sewerage schemes, which we deem to be very desirable. A sewerage scheme is being carried out in the city of Mackay, and the cities of Rockhampton, Townsville, and Cairns have recently been considering sewerage schemes. I believe that sewerage schemes will shortly commence in some of the other cities in the State.

The PREMIER: The Rockhampton plans are almost ready.

The HOME SECRETARY: They were working on the plans when I was in Rockhampton, in June last, but one of the greatest obstacles that they had to overcome was an inadequate water supply. That has been overcome, and the additional reservoir, which will give it a water supply to enable it to carry on the sewerage system, is in use. We are leaving the clause wide enough to permit local authorities to embark on sewerage schemes on terms suitable to the conditions of their respective localities, subject to the approval of the Governor in Council. The protection will lie in the fact that the Governor in Council must agree to the proposal before he advances the necessary money. Some towns desire not only to provide the main sewer and reticulation sewers, but to also install the closets in houses in order that the scheme can be availed of and used immediately it is constructed. We have given those local authorities permission to do so. They have pointed out that by constructing the main sewer and doing the reticulation work at the same time many people who, owing to the present economic conditions, have not the ready money to pay for their own installation, will be connected with the system at once, which will enable it to be utilised to its full capacity immediately it has been constructed. If that course is not adopted probably only half of the premises in the town will be sewered and the other half will be served by offensive sanitary carts that parade around the town. The Mackay City Council desires to take power to pay for the whole of the job out of loan and fix its own terms for the service charge. We should not put any difficulty in the way of their doing so.

Mr. MOORE: Will the loan be repayable partly by a service charge and partly by a rate?

The HOME SECRETARY: Yes; that is the Toowoomba system. The Toowoomba City Council declared a benefited area for the sewerage system. The rate from that area, plus the whole of the dues received from the cleansing services, that is, for the removal of rubbish, and the sanitary rate received from the area outside the benefited area is put into one fund and used to pay the costs of the sewerage system. The Toowoomba scheme is a very sound and wise one, and is working very well indeed. That scheme might suit some other town. We are leaving the provisions of this Bill so wide that probably three of the Northern towns will shortly be embarking on schemes of a similar nature. We want to meet them in every possible way by enabling them to carry out the work to suit local conditions, and get the work under way as early as possible.

Provision is also being made for an alteration of the discount rates, as well as the rate of interest to be charged on overdue rates. The rate of interest to be charged on overdue rates must not exceed 5 per cent. at the present time. At present a discount is allowed for payment of rates within thirty days, and we now enable the council, by resolution, in addition to the present discount to allow a lesser discount for payment in sixty days. A large percentage of ratepayers have dropped behind in the payment of their rates. Once they fall behind and lose their discount there is not much encouragement for them to pay up. That is a reason why very often arrears of rates drag on till the end of the year, with the possibility of the ratepayer having to pay interest before the demand for the next year's rates is made. Local authorities desire to be given the right to offer a set discount for the payment of rates within thirty days of the issue of the notice and a lesser rate of discount for payment within sixty days. That is quite a sound proposal. There should be some little encouragement to people to meet their obligations as early as possible.

Provision is also being made in this Bill to add aerodromes to the list of works to be undertaken by joint boards of local authorities.

A provision is also being made whereby the Brisbane City Council will pay to the trustees of the city debt redemption fund the amount of 1 per cent. instead of 2 per cent. in respect of certain loans. That is merely a continuance of a previous arrangement. That can only continue while the bank is agreeable. There is no compulsion. This simply validates an action already taken, and if the bank allows it to continue the council can pay it.

We are also simplifying the discharge of the functions of the grazing district improvement boards by local authorities. Hon. members will agree as to the necessity for doing that. We are also providing for the

reallocation of the liabilities on the Jubilee Bridge, at Southport.

Mr. MOORE: Are you altering the basis of the funds of the grazing district improvement boards?

The HOME SECRETARY: We are leaving that to the local authority, which can raise the necessary funds either by the present system, through a levy on stock, or a special rate, or both. We are leaving the provision wide enough to enable local authorities to suit their own local conditions. That is the right thing to do, because the conditions in various parts of Queensland vary. The local authority in the district where the board operates will know what is best to suit its own people and district.

Mr. ANNAND (*East Toowoomba*) [7 p.m.]: In his second reading speech this afternoon the Home Secretary gave us an excellent idea of the nature of this Bill, in which the Local Authorities' Association of Queensland, of which I have the honour to be chairman, is particularly interested. Local authorities generally are disappointed that the Local Authorities Acts have not been consolidated, for we have been almost definitely promised—if I may put it that way—that a consolidated Act would have been available ere this. I can appreciate the reasons given by the Home Secretary for the non-consolidation of these Acts, and realise that the work will involve considerable labour on the part of the officers charged with the duty.

The HOME SECRETARY: It is really a Bill for the first session of Parliament, in order that plenty of time may be given to its consideration.

Mr. ANNAND: I can understand that view.

The Bill now before us is a sort of local authority "clean-up"—the sort of measure that is brought in the morning after the night before, for one portion of the Bill deals with a local authority that saw fit to have a bit of a financial jazz. That local authority over-spent itself, which, of course, is very wrong, and having done that which it should not have done, has now to face the consequences. I would remind the House that the Local Authorities' Association was not unaware of this omission from the existing law, as the matter had been before the association for some considerable time. As a matter of fact, at the Local Authorities' Conference in 1933, a resolution was passed that the Local Authorities Acts be amended with a view to prohibiting a local authority from increasing its liabilities in excess of its bank overdraft limit. To that resolution a reply was received from the Home Department that consideration would be given to the matter. The association believed that the matter was urgent, and is naturally pleased to see that attention is at last being given to a question that should appeal to all who believe in sound finance.

The Roma Town Council did something else or left undone something that it should have done, inasmuch as it did not declare a new rate over its area in accordance with the Acts. The two mistakes in respect of which legislative action is now necessary are serious, but the more serious one is the first, relating to over-spending. As a local authority man, I feel that local authorities can hardly be blamed for what they do in this direction, for a bad example is set in Australia generally in the matter of over-spending. I have frequently called the attention of local authorities to the over-spending mania in the country, and invariably I have been told that even the Government that I had the honour to support some time ago frequently transgressed and over-spent its revenue. Still, I believe that local authorities generally are learning sense, and that the big majority have decided to live within their revenue. That, of course, is very difficult; but I believe the only satisfactory way is to budget at the beginning of the year for all expenditure and rigidly adhere to that budget. This Bill validates the overdraft of the Roma Town Council and practically says, "Don't do it again"; but I want the matter dealt with more stringently, and I trust that when the Bill is being discussed in Committee a definitely water-tight provision will be made. I have referred to the over-spending on the part of local authorities in Queensland, and I feel that too much emphasis cannot be laid on that point. If a policy were followed whereby only the money available would be spent, the position of local authorities would be strengthened.

The following description of local authorities was given by a man named Lawrence Gomme some time ago in England, and I consider it is worth quoting:—

> "Local government may be described as that part of the whole government of a nation or State which is administered by authorities subordinate to the State authority, but elected independently of control by the State authority by qualified persons resident and having property in certain localities, which localities have been formed by communities having common interests and common history."

Councils are not elected by property owners only in Australia. Under the system adopted in this country of electing councils people who have no financial responsibility have a voice in the spending policy of the council. In my opinion—and I am sure many hon. members will agree with me—if the spending of the money were in the hands of those people who have to provide it, very frequently greater authority would be exercised in regard to the amount of expenditure the council was likely to contract for. Unlike the system in operation in other countries of electing councils, in Australia a person is eligible to vote at a council election even though he has no financial interest in the town or city.

Local authorities regard their work as very responsible. It has been referred to as the work of a domestic Parliament. I should like to remind hon. members that 95 per cent. of local authority men in Queensland do not receive any pay for that work.

The Home Secretary mentioned the fact that a large amount of legal work had to be done, and it was very difficult, not only for the members of the councils, but also for the shire clerks in the various towns to interpret the Local Authorities Acts as they are at present. In Queensland there are 144 local authorities, 135 of which are members of the Local Authorities' Association of Queensland. These local authorities are anxiously waiting for a consolidated Act which will, to a great extent, simplify their work.

To indicate the immensity of the work carried out by local authorities, I might mention the fact that the secretary of the Local Authorities' Association in Brisbane sends from 350 to 400 replies to questions asked by the different local authorities in the State each year. That entails a great amount of work and demonstrates to this House, and to the Home Secretary particularly, the urgent need for a consolidated Local Authorities Act.

At the 1932 Local Authorities' Conference nine resolutions were passed affecting local authorities in Queensland, and the reply received from the Home Department in regard to those resolutions was as follows:—

> "The amending Bill recently passed by Parliament had to be confined more to urgent matters, and the resolutions will receive consideration next year."

That would mean in 1933.

At the 1933 conference a resolution was moved by the representative of Ipswich, and amended at the instance of the representative of Toowoomba, regarding the half-yearly payment of rates. A clause embodying that provision is contained in this Bill. Five other resolutions that were passed at that conference in 1933 and brought to the Home Secretary received this reply, "Action will be taken to amend the Local Authorities Acts to accord with the proposal contained in the resolution." The reply of the Home Secretary in the two different years should be compared. First of all it was stated that we would definitely obtain a consolidated Local Authorities Act in 1933, but during that year he qualified to a great degree his previous reply by stating that action would be taken shortly to amend the Local Authorities Acts to have effect given to the resolutions.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member has not yet dealt with the Bill before the House.

Mr. ANNAND: One of the principal provisions of the Bill, as outlined by the Home Secretary, gives a certain amount of relief from the point of view of the local authorities, but it does not give all that was asked for. The point that I desire to stress is that the Home Secretary in his second reading speech and his speech prior thereto informed hon. members that the consolidated Act will be brought forward very shortly. I should like to say that this Bill itself will make the work of the authorities much lighter. An opportunity will be afforded us of discussing in detail the various clauses of the Bill, and I therefore refrain from doing so at the present time. I should like to stress the fact that the Local Authorities' Association and the local authorities of Queensland generally are particularly anxious to have a consolidated Act. However, we accept the present measure as affording some relief and congratulate the Home Secretary upon bringing it forward. It will help us very considerably in our work, and I trust the hon. gentleman will make it his business to bring forward a consolidated Bill early next year. In this connection, even though he is making a promise, I cannot see that he has appropriated in the Estimates for this year the amount of money requisite for its compilation.

The HOME SECRETARY: It will come within the next financial year when the Estimates are being drafted in the Home Office.

Mr. ANNAND: I thank the Home Secretary for what has been done and for the definite promise he has made regarding the bringing forward of a consolidated Bill next year.

Mr. SPARKES: The hon. gentleman may not be there.

Mr. ANNAND: Even if the hon. gentleman is not in his present position, from my experience of the Home Secretary I believe that the excellent work that he has done will remain a monument to his earnest efforts to do his best on behalf of local authorities. I congratulate him upon this Bill; my only regret is that it is not the consolidating Bill.

Mr. CONROY (*Maranoa*) [7.17 p.m.]: I also congratulate the Home Secretary upon his statement that local authorities will shortly have a consolidated Act. Members of local authorities have to devote a considerable amount of their time to local government work, which is all done voluntarily. The majority of the personnel of the various bodies are laymen and with little or no knowledge of legal matters. At times matters call for their attention and with their lack of legal experience they naturally fall into error.

There is a considerable difference of opinion as to the actual meaning of the section that provides that a local authority shall have periodical revaluations made. Clause 3 says—

> "Such valuation shall be the basis of all rates made by the local authority upon the land within the area, and every valuation of any land shall remain in force until a fresh valuation has been made."

Two different legal decisions have been given on this question. In the Esk case, where no valuation had been made by the local authority for eleven years, the local authority proceeded against a ratepayer for the payment of rates. He defended the case, and the police magistrate decided in favour of the local authority. The other case arose in connection with the Roma Town Council, where three ratepayers were sued and the police magistrate decided against the council. There we have a definite conflict of legal opinion, but the omission is to be validated by the Bill. The Local Authorities Acts provide that in the case of a town council a new valuation shall be carried out every three years, and in the case of a shire council every five years. I have always held the view that town councils should have the right to carry out a new valuation only every five years, because there is no material difference in the valuation of country and town properties over a period of five years, and why should these councils, who perhaps receive very little revenue, be called upon to incur an expense of approximately £100 every three years for the purpose of a new valuation? In the future, new valuations will have to be made every three years.

Dealing with the question of local authorities exceeding the legal limit of their overdrafts, I want to assure the hon. member for East Toowoomba that the Roma Town Council did not indulge in a financial jazz in connection with its business. It is largely because of the position at Roma that this provision has been included in the Bill, but I am satisfied that that condition does not apply only to the Roma Town Council. Every

local authority has experienced some difficulty in complying with the Local Authorities Acts during a period of financial stress. In 1932 the Roma Town Council sought an overdraft of £4,700, to which it was justly entitled in accordance with the Local Authorities Acts, which provides that a local authority may operate on an overdraft to the extent of its revenue for the preceding year, but in 1932, the revenue received by this council fell much below the amount received during the previous year. The overdraft was not increased because the council had used its funds in a careless manner, but because of reductions in wages, unemployment, and through several other factors.

Mr. MOORE: The crash of Roma oil?

Mr. CONROY: This was after the oil boom in Roma. The council was unable to carry on until it had received the amount in question, and if it had not exceeded its overdraft it would have meant that it would have had to discharge its employees, unless the bank was prepared to honour its cheques. Of the two evils naturally the action taken by the council was the lesser if we consider the interests of the ratepayers. It was the correct thing to do. The council went to the bank and sought accommodation until that year's rates came in. That has been done repeatedly by local authorities. Unfortunately, when the elections took place in April all the old members of the council were not re-elected. Three new members were elected to the council. Evidently they decided to take certain action immediately they were elected, for they wrote a letter to the town clerk intimating that they assumed no responsibility whatsoever in connection with the council's action in obtaining an overdraft from the bank above the legal limits, and that if the remaining members of the council operated on the account above that limit they did so on their own responsibility. That is how the position arose in Roma. There was only one way the matter could be clarified and that was by this action of the Home Secretary in introducing a Bill to validate the amount of the overdraft obtained. Personally, I do not believe in breaking the law or in doing anything that is wrong, but there are times when a little less common law and little more common sense enables one to make a good deal more progress than otherwise. In this case, had no action been taken by those three aldermen the overdraft would have been wiped out automatically, and the trouble that occurred in Roma would never have been heard of. The provisions of this Bill will overcome that difficulty. I think it was the Home Secretary who said that the correct method for the council to adopt would have been to obtain a loan. That probably would have been the correct course to follow, but supposing that the legal overdraft was £1,000, and the council decided to borrow to repay the excess, would it not have been necessary for the council to go through all the formula laid down in the Act with respect to applications for loans? That might have entailed considerable delay, for a poll might have been demanded. Any ratepayer, not necessarily an alderman, could have got a petition signed to demand a poll. That would have held up that application for a couple of months. In the meantime the business of the council would have been brought to a standstill. This amending legislation will act as a warning to local authorities in the future to keep their overdrafts within the legal limit. One cannot always foresee every trouble. The council could not foresee that its revenue would drop in one year as compared with the previous year. Any body of men elected to administer the affairs of a local authority offer their services in the first instance with the object of giving of their best for the advancement of the town and progress to the district generally. They do not administer its affairs with the object of bringing about a position such as occurred at Roma.

There are only one or two other small matters in the Bill in which I am interested. Many local authorities allow a discount of 10 per cent. if rates are paid within thirty days of the issue of the rate notice. This Bill provides that a local authority may allow one-half of that discount if the rates are paid within sixty days of the issue of the notice. This is wise and will be very acceptable to quite a number of ratepayers.

Another provision that will be acceptable, particularly to shire councils, is that in relation to stock routes. An unfenced stock route running through a holding is now used by the landholder as part of his run, but although he has the use of that land he takes no action to destroy noxious weeds. The provision in this Bill will make the lessee of an unfenced holding through which a stock route passes responsible for the destruction of noxious weeds on it. The shire council should not be required to assume that responsibility.

Local authorities generally will agree with the provisions of this Bill, and will welcome the consolidating Bill that the Home Secretary has promised.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [7.31 p.m.]: In introducing this Bill the Home Secretary stated that it contained several big principles. The first part of the Bill is concerned with a validation of an illegal act committed by various local authorities. That is an easy way out, but the principle of validating an illegal act by an Act of Parliament rather than that the responsibility for the illegal act should be accepted by the people who broke the law is not a sound one to establish. I recognise that there were excuses for the action that was taken in the cases quoted, and the hon. member for Maranoa has pointed out that it was not really intentional in that the revenue of the council declined and the bank overdraft asked for was found to be greater than the revenue collected in the succeeding year, which placed the local authority concerned in a very difficult position.

I do not know that very much is to be gained by making valuations every three or five years. Much expense will be involved. No one for one moment imagines that if a valuation were to take place in any town in Queensland to-day, it would be a correct valuation according to sales. The financial position of Brisbane would be untenable if a correct valuation were made. Many properties in the suburban areas are mortgaged in respect of rates, and it would be difficult to establish in any court the valuation that is placed upon them. As a matter of fact, if it came to a question of realising on many properties in the main streets of Brisbane, the valuation declared by the local authority in respect of these properties would be in excess by many thousands

of pounds of the realisable price. At a time like the present, we have to be more or less guided by rule of thumb methods in any valuations that are made. The method of valuation set down for local authority guidance cannot be accepted, for it is well known that although the method might be satisfactory in normal times, it is far from satisfactory in times of depression and in periods when commodity prices fall considerably. To stick rigidly to the law and accept values on the basis laid down would mean that in abnormal periods many valuations would crash to the ground. It is well known that in country townships fictitious values were placed upon land by valuers who had in mind the minimum valuation of £30, and, as a matter of fact, most of these valuations could not be upheld in any court. A township area may have been surveyed into twenty blocks, buildings may have been erected in the main streets or in another favourable position, or a hotel may have been built; values may have been worked out according to the distance from a selected block of land; but no one imagines that these valuations could be established. I know of several cases where landholders have offered to forfeit their land to the local authorities to dischrge their obligation in respect of arrears of rates. The Home Secretary knows that the results of many sales conducted by the Brisbane City Council reveal that in many cases the land is not worth the rates that are owing thereon, or even the rates levied annually upon it. So that this question of a valuation every three or five years has a great deal of "make believe" about it, and does not come down to a basis of true value, and it would be almost impossible to conduct the business of a local authority if that basis had to be followed.

If they were to rise when prices suddenly jumped and descend to the depths when the depression came along, the council would never know what revenue could be expected and would have to be altering its rates. The position would become untenable. It is definitely laid down that there should be a valuation after three or five years. That provision has always been in the law, but it has been more honoured in the breach than in the observance. A valuation is made when it is deemed necessary, and in the succeeding three years or five years, unless conditions have altered tremendously, not much alteration is necessary. The alterations are made by an official and ratified by the local authority, which saves a good deal of money and does not place the council in any worse position. The ratepayer has always the opportunity to appeal against the valuation. His rate notice says what the value placed on his property is, and he has the right of appeal, in which event the council has to be in a position to uphold the valuation. That method affords the necessary protection without incurring a great deal of expenditure at periods when there is no necessity to do so. As a rule, values, especially in country areas—unless there are some abnormal circumstances—do not fluctuate a great deal from year to year. They may fluctuate over a period of fifteen to twenty years as settlement increases or new industries start; but under ordinary conditions in grazing areas the valuations do not fluctuate to any extent. In those areas, if land was worth £2 an acre twenty years ago, it is worth, roughly, the same to-day. That is indicated by the decisions of the Land Court when dealing with the assessments of rents imposed by the Crown. It is only during a period of great prosperity that the rents go up; but that is only a flash in the pan, and they have to be brought down again.

There is one principle in the Bill I do not like. It operates in two or three clauses. I refer to the principle that a judgment obtained whether before or after this Bill comes into operation shall be null and void. I think it is a sound principle that, when an individual takes action against a council or anybody else, he should have the full right conferred by the judgment he obtains. It would be reasonable if the Bill stated that the judgment should be null and void if it were delivered in any action taken after the passing of the Act. In one portion of the Bill it even stipulates that any action taken prior to March shall stand. I cannot say whether any judgment has been given; but in two or three places the Bill provides that the judgment shall be null and void if it has been taken out before or after, and in one instance it particularly stipulates that March is to be the date. Presumably the Home Secretary knew that a judgment was given prior to March, and that is why March was inserted. Probably there has not been any judgment in the other cases where it is definitely stated that a judgment shall be null and void, whether it has been taken out before or after the passing of the Bill. If it has not been, I consider it would be better to leave that part out, because it is not wise to allow people to take action and then to nullify the judgment by a subsequent Act of Parliament.

The reason given by the Home Secretary for not allowing a hire-purchase agreement to be entered into in the way he described was quite sound. I do not know that it is sound policy to extend it as far as is provided for in this measure. I do not know whether it is justifiable to include all property. It may be that a shire council would desire to purchase land on terms, although I quite agree with the principle as regards the purchase of machinery, and similar things. It is rather remarkable that such care should be taken to guard the rights of electors as regards their voting on a loan poll as is provided for in a special clause in this Bill, when on the very same day a Bill has gone through this House containing a provision that a loan shall be forced on them without their having any opportunity of declaring for or against the proposed liability. A special clause is inserted in this measure preventing local authorities from taking away the rights of their electors. That was one of the chief reasons advanced by the Home Secretary for the inclusion of the clause concerning hire-purchase agreements or payment on long terms. In the other Bill I have mentioned the ratepayers can have a liability forced upon them by another governmental department without having any say on the matter. It is not a very consistent action on the part of the Government. Personally I consider it is quite right that the rights of the electors should be protected, but as to whether it is necessary to go so far as is done in this clause, of enumerating "material and property," I am not quite so sure.

The hon. member for Maranoa stated that he quite agreed with the action taken by the local authority at Roma, and had he been a member of that body and been placed in the same circumstances he would have done the same thing. The hon. member might have done so if he had been aware that the Government would bring forward a Bill validating the position. Had he seen that clause dealing with the joint and several liability of each man I doubt whether he would have been so keen to obtain an overdraft from the bank. It is one thing to know that the Government will validate your action and quite another thing to realise that one may be held to be jointly and severally liable for a guarantee. One does not know what the other fellow will do and such a guarantee needs very careful consideration on the part of any guarantor. I am glad to see that in the future members of local authorities will not be able to obtain a validating Bill if they act illegally when difficulties arise. When they break the law and allow the legal limit of the overdraft to be exceeded they are to be held jointly and severally liable for the wrong that has been done.

I quite agree with the provisions of the Bill regarding registration of plans. It occasionally happens that when no block is sold the plan is held in abeyance. There is often much difficulty in connection with plans because it often occurs that people purchase half a dozen blocks jointly, without anybody else knowing about it. It is done in a secretive kind of way.

As regards the reduction in the minimum valuation, no doubt where rates are high, in the vicinity of 10½d. in the £1, it may mean a certain amount, but I do not consider it is going to make very much difference in most country areas.

There is, of course, a great difference of opinion regarding the question of sewerage rates and charges. Personally I consider that for the local authority and for the ratepayer it is better to be charged on the service than on the unimproved value of the land. Because a person happens to have a large area of land it does not mean that he will have a greater use for the sewerage system than one who has a small area. It is much better that the charge should be made according to the service rendered than on the area of land. It may be necessary to base the charge on the unimproved value of the land where there are a number of vacant blocks, but, generally speaking, it would be much fairer to make a charge for services rendered.

The Bill also legalises a practice that has existed in local authority areas for years providing for discrimination in the rates charged to different people for sanitary services. Local authorities do not charge a church that has a sanitary service perhaps once a fortnight or once a month the same rate as is charged a householder in continuous occupation of his residence. In other local authority areas where two services were to be carried out at stated periods the council has not insisted on a charge being made for two services where an old-age pensioner is occupying a cottage and where two services are not required. The action of the various local authorities may not have been legal in the past, but those things were done under arrangement with the contractors in the various areas. I know that that was done in practically every town in the shire where I was chairman. These agreements were entered into so that no hardship would be inflicted upon people by calling upon them to pay for services that were not really required. If additional services were required then the people had to pay.

I do not think that much is to be gained by the provision that the council shall allow a discount to ratepayers who pay their rates after the expiration of thirty days and within sixty days. If the ratepayer feels that he should secure the benefit of a discount, then he will pay within thirty days and obtain the benefit of a discount of 5 per cent. He will not deliberately wait thirty days and then take advantage of a discount rate of 2½ per cent. Two and a-half per cent. is too much to pay for the privilege of waiting thirty days.

The Minister did not give us any explanation why the law was to be amended in connection with joint boards nor can I understand the reason for it. The Act provides that meetings of joint boards shall be held, that the time of the next meeting shall be fixed, and that in certain cases special meetings shall be called at the request of one member and the clerk of the joint board. Notices must be sent advising members of the meeting of the joint board just as notices are now sent advising members of a meeting of the council. This Bill repeals the provision relating to special meetings of joint boards and the requirement as to notices of meetings to be sent to its members. It may be suggested that the joint board should meet on a fixed day every month or six weeks, and that the members should remember the date of the meeting. It is the usual practice, and has been the usual practice for years, to send out notices to members of a joint board reminding them of the meeting, but why that requirement is now omitted, I am unable to say. It does not make very much difference, but a notice did serve as a reminder to the members that a meeting was to be held. I cannot understand why the provision referring to the calling of special meetings was also omitted. Special meetings are called only in the case of emergency, and why that is omitted is beyond my comprehension.

The Home Secretary has explained that if the Commonwealth Bank and the Brisbane City Council can come to an agreement regarding sinking fund payments an Order in Council will be issued to legalise the arrangement. There is no objection to that procedure, but the wording of the clause suggests that when an Order in Council is issued the bank must agree, whether it approves or not.

Part VI. of the Bill deals with amendments of the Local Authorities (Grazing Districts Improvement) Acts. I am not sure that this is to be a bad principle, but it is totally different from that which has been observed in the past, under which fees were collected in accordance with the number of stock depastured by an owner on his holding. The principal duty of a grazing district improvement board was to supervise stock routes—to eradicate noxious weeds, to provide water, to keep the stock routes open as much as possible, to prevent trespassing, and to impound trespassing stock.

They must see that those engaged in droving keep up their mileage per day and that they do not use these reserves as paddocks. It has been recognised in the past

that where the principal work of the board was to keep stock routes open for travelling stock, the people who should pay for that work were the stock owners, and the basis of payment was the number of stock that they possessed. This is getting right away from that principle altogether, and allows local authorities, who now are grazing district improvement boards, to take the expenses from their ordinary funds, that is, from the ordinary rates, without striking a special rate for the purpose, or to levy a rate on the stock, or on both the unimproved value of the land and the stock. In some districts where the local authorities deal with pests or marsupials that might be a fair and reasonable attitude to adopt. In areas where wallabies and similar marsupials become a nuisance to orchardists, to farmers' crops or gardens, the people who own no stock are exempted altogether from contributing to the cost of combating the pest. It might be a reasonable thing in such cases to utilise the ordinary rate to carry out the duties of the pest board or grazing district improvement board, or take the money out of the general fund, which will mean an increase in the rate. Where a grazing district improvement board—the local authority in the area—is carrying out the work associated with the reserves on stock routes, and eradicating noxious weeds, it will be found that there will be a good deal of opposition from owners of township allotments, who are really getting very little value for the work done, to being taxed on the unimproved value of their land for work that mainly concerns the interests of stock owners. I should not be surprised if a number of local authority elections in the future were not fought out on the issue as to whether the rate for the maintenance of stock routes and reserves was to be based on a rate on the unimproved value of the land, or a levy on the number of stock on the holding. It will become quite a controversy in a number of places. In some districts it will not matter very much, but in some districts the principle of making an assessment on the basis of the number of stock will be adhered to. It would be very unjust in those districts if the expense were met by a rate on the unimproved value of land, because the holders of land in townships get very little advantage from keeping stock routes and reserves open, if at the same time those who got a big advantage from that work escaped their liability. However, the Home Secretary has decided that the local authority must decide on what basis it will collect this money. In some areas it is a question whether the minority should be subjected to what is more or less an injustice, because they are the minority. They may never be able to get into the majority. Experience will show how this provision works and whether the basis of assessment will be fair to all sections of the community.

It may work out satisfactorily; but in the past a distinct injustice has been done in many cases by reason of the fact that the levy was made solely upon stock, for in cases where the revenue was applied to the destruction of marsupials and other pests a service was being rendered to, say, orchardists or mixed farmers who did not contribute, whilst in other cases stockowners contributed, although their stock did not travel to any great extent over the stock routes which were being kept in order by funds collected from stockowners generally. This Bill now gives the opportunity to the local authority to see that people contribute their fair share. I am not cavilling at that; I am merely looking at what might occur in the bigger areas, where some people might pay amounts out of all proportion to any benefits received. We can only wait to see how the provision works out in practice. If, later on, it is discovered to be unfair, then Parliament will have to establish an equitable basis. Of course, what is inequitable now in one way may be inequitable in another way later on; so that the main consideration will be to devise a method that will be equitable to all parties. As the Home Secretary has stated, it is difficult to devise methods that will be capable of general application in a State where geographical and other conditions influence local needs. All we can do is to make the provision sufficiently elastic to give local authorities a choice of two methods. For example, alternative methods are provided in respect of sewerage rates and charges, and also grazing district improvement boards. The Home Secretary referred to the method of the collection of sewerage rates at Toowoomba, which he said had been successful. If so, no reason exists why it should not be successful elsewhere. The main consideration is to ensure that the people who receive a service pay for it, for we do not desire that people should pay for services of which others receive the advantage.

Mr. R. M. KING (*Logan*) [8.5 p.m.]: I can quite appreciate the difficulty experienced by the Home Secretary in introducing a consolidated Bill, for, as the hon. gentleman has stated, this is the sixteenth amending Bill that has been introduced since the Local Authorities Act was passed in 1902, the previous fifteen amending Acts entailing the amendment of 278 sections of the original Act and adding seventy-two new sections thereto. Thus, a consolidated Act is a work of no mean order, and in ordinary circumstances it would be very difficult to introduce a measure that would make provision for the requirements of all local authorities. If any Government attempted to do that, it would take a very long time to give effect to what was intended; but, as I stated at the initiation of this Bill, an easier way could be adopted to overcome the difficulty. We recognise perfectly well that it is almost impossible to introduce legislation that will contain provisions applicable to every local authority in the State.

I suggest that the difficulty might be overcome if we gave the local authorities a general charter, similar to that conferred on the city of Brisbane, with wide powers, and then those local authorities could make ordinances that applied particularly to their own areas. I think that could be done quite easily and that there is no need to attempt to bring in a measure that would be applicable to the whole of the State. That aspect of the position may very well be considered by the Government that will be in power next year.

Having had many years' experience in local authority matters I realise how impossible it would be to bring in a Bill that would be uniformly satisfactory to the local authorities. A solution of the difficulty would be to give them a charter and thus allow them to control their own affairs and make

ordinances, with the approval of the Governor in Council, dealing with the requirements of their particular local authorities.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I would point out to the hon. member that at this stage he is not in order in dealing with any principle that does not appear in the Bill.

Mr. R. M. KING: The Home Secretary stated that he had some difficulty in connection with the matter and I was offering him some constructive advice on it.

The Bill deals with certain matters under the Local Authorities Acts, amendments of the City of Brisbane Acts, and an amendment of "The Nerang River Bridge and Southport-Burleigh Road Act of 1923." Dealing with the amendments under the Local Authorities Acts we find the Bill is, to a very large extent, occupied with certain irregularities that have occurred in connection with the Roma Town Council. First of all there is the question of the valuations, and the rates based on those valuations. It has been pointed out by the Home Secretary that valuations must be made every three years in the case of a town, and every five years in the case of a shire, and the Act specifically lays down that a valuer must be employed for that purpose. Members of a local authority cannot be valuers. According to the Home Secretary's recital of the contents of this Bill the Roma council passed a resolution to the effect that the valuations for 1932 be the same as those for the year 1931. It would appear that by this resolution they simply adopted the valuations of a previous year. If the council acted on its own volition that procedure was entirely wrong. If they desired to adopt the valuation of a previous year a recommendation to that effect should have come from the valuer, and then the council would have had the right to adopt his valuation, and when adopted, it would be the valuation for the local authority; but the local authority has no right to pass a resolution of its own volition adopting for the coming year a valuation of the previous year. There have been differences of opinion in regard to the validity of such a resolution, and in the case of the Widgee Shire Council v. McGhie Luya, which came before the Supreme Court of Queensland, the same question was involved, and in that case it was decided that the valuation of a previous year could be adopted as the valuation for the current year.

The HOME SECRETARY: There was a recent decision in Esk on the same question, which resulted in favour of the council.

Mr. R. M. KING: That was a decision of the Magistrates Court.

The HOME SECRETARY: Eminent counsel from Brisbane argued the case and both sides accepted the judgment.

Mr. R. M. KING: The question of the recovery of rates is generally a matter within the jurisdiction of the Magistrates Court, and where there is a conflict of opinion on this matter between police magistrates the local authorities do not know where they stand, and, under the circumstances, perhaps, it is desirable to put the matter beyond all doubt by passing the clauses in this Bill as it is.

Then comes the question of the validation of excessive overdrafts. Here, again, we have the Roma Town Council committing some irregularity, but I desire to point out that the section of the Act dealing with overdrafts is very clear and unambiguous in its language. It provides that no such overdraft or accommodation shall at any time or under any circumstances exceed the ordinary revenue as defined in the said section. There is no doubt that the language is clear, and if a bank allows a local authority illegally to overdraw its account, then I think the bank is in the position of itself being negligent to a large extent and having allowed money to be drawn on terms which import an illegal consideration. I very much doubt whether it would be able to recover from the individual or from the council. On the other hand the aldermen had no right to exceed their statutory limitation. The Home Secretary has stated that the reason why they exceeded the limit was their desire to retain the services of a number of employees, but if they did desire to exceed the limit there was ample power in the Act to overcome the difficulty by striking a new general rate. The Act gives full power to strike one or more general rates, inasmuch as section 232 (2) provides that a local authority may from time to time make and levy a general or special rate of such amount as it thinks fit. I know perfectly well that that would not be a popular method, because the burden falls sooner or later on the ratepayers, but that would have been the proper course to follow.

The HOME SECRETARY: They attempted to do that, but they found they could not collect any rates at all.

Mr. R. M. KING: The power is there, and they should have been able to collect the rates. The machinery they have at their disposal to compel payment should surely have been sufficient for the collection of the rates without forcing them into an untenable position from a legal point of view.

The HOME SECRETARY: It would be a double rate.

Mr. R. M. KING: Possibly it would be a double rate, but it must be borne in mind that the ratepayers presumably had had the benefit of the money expended. The council had the benefit of the money and one cannot help thinking that there is more or less carelessness on the part of the council in allowing these things to happen. I am afraid that when we have validating Acts passed condoning an irregularity—because this Bill is condoning as well as validating—then other local authorities may consider that it is only a matter of persuading the Government to bring forward a validating Bill to validate something they had no right to do. I do not know how they will fare in view of the action that has now been taken. Certainly this should be a warning to local authorities generally.

Regarding hire-purchase agreements or time-payment agreements, where the property in the goods does or does not pass, I quite recognise that when goods are purchased under such conditions those articles are merely purchased with borrowed money, and I consider it necessary to include this clause in the Bill.

The provision with regard to survey plans is also a very necessary provision. I look upon it not only from the point of view of the public generally or the person who owns

the land, but also from the point of view of the surveyor who prepares the plans.

It is hardly fair to ask a surveyor to produce his field notes, say, ten, twelve, or twenty years afterwards, and he can be called upon to produce his field notes when the plan comes to be registered at the Real Property Office. Perhaps some advantages have been gained in connection with the subdivision of the land, after approval by the local authority, if no plan is lodged and certain rights are gone. I can mention a case in connection with Government property where a piece of land was acquired from an adjoining owner for the purpose of an additional area for a school. This owner said that he would subdivide the land, and if the department bought a certain piece of land he would give access to that land by way of a lane on one side. There was a road of full width on the frontage. That land was purchased some years ago, and the plan showed a lane access on one side of the property, but the plan of the subdivision has not yet been lodged at the Real Property Office, and the benefit of the second road may now be lost. There is nothing in the world to stop that owner from altering his plan of subdivision and depriving the school ground of the additional laneway access. Where plans are noted by the local authorities there should be a limitation of time in which the plans are lodged for registration. The clause dealing with the registration of plans is a very good one.

The Bill also repeals certain sections of the Acts dealing with residential areas, but Orders in Council passed under the repealed sections are to remain in force until the local authorities avail themselves of the provisions of the City of Mackay and Other Town Planning Schemes Approval Act. Now that local authorities have the opportunity of availing themselves of town planning provisions, I express the hope that they will get to work as soon as possible to make better provision for the layout and improvement of their areas generally.

The provision relating to the reduction in minimum valuations is also a very wise one. There are local authorities with areas of practically worthless land in their districts, and it seems ridiculous to place a valuation of £20 on a block of land that is probably not worth more than 5s. The present section certainly assists to build up arrears of rates, but if a lower minimum valuation may be fixed for practically worthless allotments, the local authority may have some chance of increasing its revenue in that respect.

I am also pleased that the provisions relating to sewerage have been broadened because they will certainly encourage local authorities to carry out such schemes. We want to see local authorities make their areas as up-to-date as possible and they should be encouraged to embark on sewerage and water schemes. The new provision will help them to a very large extent.

The provision relating to discount for the payment of rates is also a very wise one. At the present time a discount is allowed if the rates are paid within thirty days, but a lower discount will now be allowed if the rates are paid after thirty days and within sixty days. That is a wise provision, but I should like the Home Secretary to consider the advisableness of not insisting on local authorities passing a by-law to give effect to this provision.

The HOME SECRETARY: It is optional.

Mr. R. M. KING: I know that, but if the law is to be altered, then the local authority should be allowed to pass a resolution when the valuations are adopted extending the benefit of a further discount rate. It should not be put to the expense of passing a by-law for the purpose.

It will be more elastic and more in keeping with local authorities practice generally. I commend that suggestion to the Minister for his consideration. I hope he will see his way clear to bring in an amendment to meet the suggestions I have made. I certainly think they will be greatly appreciated because many local authorities do not care about going to the expense attached to passing by-laws. Perhaps also the method is a little cumbersome. It would be far easier to set out a provision to enable local authorities to grant discounts for the prompt payment of rates merely by passing a general resolution.

The question of levying rates arises out of the provision which brings the work of grazing district improvement boards within the sphere of local authorities. At the present time the revenue necessary to keep stock routes and reserves open and provide for travelling stock is met by an assessment on stock. This Bill provides the alternative of making a levy by way of a special rate. I acknowledge that the method of rating is left to the discretion of local authorities generally, and I have sufficient confidence in them generally to know that they will not do anything harsh. Any revenue that is necessary to keep stock routes and reserves open should be obtained on the present basis.

Many of the amendments that the Minister has brought down are very necessary, and have been asked for by the Local Authorities Association. I regret that many of the other recommendations that have been made from time to time at the annual conferences have not been included, but there again I recognise the difficulty of the Minister in trying to meet the wishes of every local authority. If the Minister gave general application to many of those recommendations I am quite certain that they would not have met with the approval of all local authorities. I believe that this Bill will be welcomed by local authorities generally.

Question—"That the Bill be now read a second time" (*Mr. Hanlon's motion*)—put and passed.

COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Hanson, Buranda, in the chair.*)

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Clause 3—"*Preamble as to rates*"—

Mr. WIENHOLT (*Fassifern*) [8.27 p.m.]: Will the Minister inform this Committee why the Roma Town Council has been specially referred to on two occasions in this clause, and there is only general reference to all other local authorities who are in exactly the same position?

The HOME SECRETARY: They were the sinners who were caught.

Mr. WIENHOLT: Thank you very much.

Clause 3, as read, agreed to.

Clause 4—"*Validation of rates*"—

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [8.29 p.m.]: This clause, inter alia, provides—

"Provided that nothing in this section shall prejudice or affect the rights of any party to any judgment of any court of competent jurisdiction in any case where such judgment was given prior to the first day of March, one thousand nine hundred and thirty-four, nor prejudice or affect the rights of any party upon appeal from such judgment:

"Provided always that any decision, judgment, or order pronounced or made after such date shall be absolutely null and void and vacated accordingly."

It was my intention to move an amendment to substitute the words—"the passing of this Act" for the words "the first day of March, one thousand nine hundred and thirty-four."

The HOME SECRETARY: You could make it the 20th November.

Mr. MOORE: That would be quite suitable, and I accordingly move the following amendment:—

"On page 3, line 55, omit the words—
'first day of March'
and insert in lieu thereof the words—
'twentieth day of November.'"

That will make the position clear, and will get away from the objectionable practice of allowing a person to take action that is perfectly illegal and later on seek validating legislation to make it legal.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) [8.32 p.m.]: The amendment is quite acceptable. It was thought that when it was known that validating legislation of this nature was being introduced, people who wished to escape their obligations in regard to rates might attempt to take such action, but I have heard of no such cases.

Amendment (*Mr. Moore*) agreed to.

Clause 4, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 5—"*Application to other local authorities*"—agreed to.

Clause 6—"*Validation of overdrafts*"—

Mr. KENNY (*Cook*) [8.34 p.m.]: I was pleased to hear the remarks of the Minister that local authorities throughout Queensland had been circularised to the effect that in future they must keep within the limits of their overdrafts. It is a bad principle to encourage any local authority to break the law by increasing its overdraft and then come before Parliament with a Bill to validate its action. Once this Bill is enacted, we may have a local authority saying, "We can go ahead spending beyond our means and increasing our overdraft, although it is against the law, for we can ask Parliament to validate the action we have taken." That is wrong, and although local authorities have been circularised, I should prefer that the clause provided for a penalty to be imposed on any local authority that offended in future.

The HOME SECRETARY: Its members will be jointly and severally liable.

Mr. KENNY: They were before.

[*Mr. Moore.*

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [8.35 p.m.]: I move the following amendment:—

"On page 5, lines 34 and 35, after the word—
'obtained'
omit the words—
'whether before, on, or.'"

I do not know whether the Minister would be prepared to accept that amendment.

The HOME SECRETARY: Yes.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 7—"*Application to other local authorities*"—

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*): I move the following amendment:—

"On page 6, line 9, omit the words—
'whether before, on, or.'"

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 7, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 8—"*Savings re overdraft.*"—

Mr. WIENHOLT (*Fassifern*) [8.39 p.m.]: I highly commend the Minister for putting the screw on. If he is not careful, however, and does not make them start to balance their budgets at once, they will go just as the Premiers' Plan has gone as regards the same principle.

The HOME SECRETARY: They are only given two years to work it out.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [8.40 p.m.]: I understand this is a temporary overdraft. Surely when the rates come in they would reduce the temporary overdraft below the amount allowed!

The HOME SECRETARY: They would be in in the same position then for the next year.

Mr. MOORE: The hon. gentleman does not know what they would do. This clause is allowing them three years to reduce it, and to get it within the legal limit. It will be within the legal limit when the rates come in, but it may get up again.

The HOME SECRETARY: It may get up again when they start to spend.

Clause 8, as read, agreed to.

Clause 9—"*Amendments of 'The Local Authorities Acts, 1902 to 1932'*"—agreed to.

Clause 10—"*New section 53A—Restriction as to hire-purchase and time-payment contracts*"—

Mr. WIENHOLT (*Fassifern*) [8.41 p.m.]: I can again very highly commend the Minister for putting on the screw and stopping this borrowing. I begin to think he would make a very fine Treasurer. I entirely agree with him in regard to this time-payment business. When the Minister looks at the paper and sees that a new £15,000,000 loan is going to be raised he will come to the conclusion that the Commonwealth is going in for time-payment itself. I entirely agree with the Minister in protecting the ratepayers' right to have a poll before they have any debt placed on their shoulders. The hon. gentleman thinks as I do, that the principle is sound. What about the people of the State? It seems to be a case of "What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," and therefore the citizens of the State should

certainly have the right to a poll before we ourselves go in for more borrowing.

Clause 10, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 11 to 18, both inclusive, agreed to.

Clause 19—"*Amendment of section 372—Meetings of joint boards*"—

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [8.44 p.m.]: I desire to know the object of this alteration. Under the Act as it was before it was repealed they could call a special meeting at any time, and they also gave notice. The two subsections dealing with the giving of notice and the calling of special meetings are being repealed. I desire to know the object of that. There will be no provision for calling a special meeting. In the Acts there was provision for giving notice of special meetings and also a provision that before an ordinary meeting took place notices should be sent to the members to attend. Although I do not see the reason for this provision being taken out, there must be some reason for it, either economy or otherwise.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) [8.46 p.m.]: The notice required for a meeting of a joint board was always fourteen days, but that was not convenient for the Barron Hydro-Electric Board, and it asks for this to be done. I understand the same conditions for calling meetings is provided for local authorities. The deletion of the three subsections of the section requiring fourteen days' notice of a meeting places it in the same position for holding special or ordinary meetings as the local authorities. The joint board must meet on the third day after the conclusion of every triennial election of members or on such other day as may be appointed by the by-laws. Once that meeting is held, it is under the same provision as local authorities, and can fix its regular meetings by by-laws.

Clause 19, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 20 to 25, both inclusive, agreed to.

Clause 26—"*Amendments of 'The Local Authorities (Grazing Districts Improvement) Acts,* 1930 *to* 1933'"—

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [8.49 p.m.]: The Act states that at the first meeting of the board it shall fix the rate to be paid for dingo scalps; but this clause repeals that provision, and, according to my interpretation, the board will not have any power in the future to fix the rate for scalps at all. Is it the intention of the Minister by Order in Council to fix a rate that will be applicable throughout the State? I know that in some districts the rate for dingo scalps is considerably higher than in other districts, and possibly the Government thought that the difficulty could be overcome by fixing a rate by Order in Council applicable to the whole State. I should like some explanation from the Minister of this alteration.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) [8.50 p.m.]: Section 42A is not being amended at all in the direction suggested by the Leader of the Opposition. It is correct that the words "at the first meeting" are being omitted, but the board will have power to fix in each year the rate of bonus payable in respect of the scalps of dingoes. The board will now have power to fix the rate at any meeting, so that the section is really made a little more flexible. In addition, the board will have power to fix the rate by resolution and not by the promulgation of by-laws, which again makes the task easier for the board.

Mr. NIMMO (*Oxley*) [8.51 p.m.]: The clause provides—

> "When any stock route, road, or reserve adjoins or is within the boundaries of a holding and is not fenced out of the holding, it shall be the duty of the owner or occupier of the holding to destroy all noxious weeds and vermin on such stock route, road, or reserve."

This clause will impose a great hardship on many people. It is quite possible that many stock routes not fenced out of the holdings are covered with galvanised burr, and it would be a very costly undertaking and well nigh impossible for any owner to clear that stock route. Many stock routes are really breeding grounds for the spread of noxious weeds, because they are liberally scattered with seed carried by travelling stock from far-off districts. Perhaps the Minister proposes to extend some relief to people who have stock routes within their properties covered with noxious weeds.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) [8.53 p.m.]: The reason for the clause should be obvious to the hon. member. If a grazier has the use of a stock route for grazing purposes, and it is not fenced out of his holding, it is surely his duty to keep it clean! It is part of the area on which he grazes his stock. Under the old Act he was compelled to keep the part he owned free of burr, but he could allow as many noxious weeds and vermin as he liked to grow on the part of the run he did not own but of which he had the use. If a grazier has the use of a stock route—and some of them have pretty fair pieces of country on stock routes enclosed in their runs—then with that privilege must go the duty of keeping it clean.

Mr. SPARKES (*Dalby*) [8.55 p.m.]: I hope that the Minister, or the local authority concerned, will use discretion in this matter. The land in some districts would not be worth clearing of burr. In some of the far western districts burr exists to such an extent that it would not pay to clear or fence the stock route. I quite agree with the Minister that this provision is embraced in the original Act in some other respects. It is often the case that a frontage of a stock route is on a river. If a selector were compelled to fence the only access to water that he has from his property, his run would be practically useless. Some hon. members like the hon. member for Warrego, who represent far western constituencies, are aware that some of the selectors would prefer to walk off their properties than undertake the expense of clearing them of burr. I do not advocate that policy, but I realise it would be quite impossible for them to clear them. To clear noogoora burr effectively a commencement would need to be made at the head of the watercourse. A selector whose run adjoins the watercourse further downstream would have no chance of clearing the burr, because in flood time that watercourse is 5 or 6 miles wide and the burr is carried down by the flood waters and spread over the whole of his country.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) [8.56 p.m.]: The administration of this clause will be in the hands of the local authorities concerned. This is but another instance illustrating the difficulty of framing a general law suitable for the whole State. Naturally, discretion must be used by the local authority. To-day they do not take proceedings against selectors who find it impossible to do the work laid down in the Act. The same would apply in the case of this clause. If the grazing rights were worth the cost of the clearing the council would insist on the work being done, but if on the other hand the grazing rights were not worth the cost of clearing the council would exercise its discretion in the other direction.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [8.57 p.m.]: This clause states that section 43 is amended by the repeal of paragraph (*a*) of subsection (1). Paragraph (*a*) provides that a grazing district improvement board or a local authority may make by-laws with respect to the amount of bonus payable for the scalp of any dingo, marsupial, or other vermin. I should like to know why that part has been deleted. That appears to me to be peculiar. The Minister said during the debate that local authorities had power to fix the rate for scalps under another section.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) [8.58 p.m.]: Section 28 of "The Local Authorities (Grazing Districts Improvement) Transfer of Powers Act of 1933" inserted in the principal Act a new section 42A, as follows:—

> "Subject to this Act and notwithstanding anything in any other Act contained, any district improvement board (being a prescribed local authority or joint local authority as the case may be) or where no board has been constituted any local authority or joint local authority, may pay such sums by way of bonus for the destruction of vermin at such rate as may from time to time be determined by such board or local authority, and the rates so determined shall be published in the 'Gazette' and in one or more newspapers circulating in the district or local authority area."

No by-law is necessary at all. The rate for dingo and marsupial scalps will be fixed under this section by resolution of the local authority. Then it goes on to say—

> "Every board and every local authority whose area is not wholly within a board's district shall fix at the first meeting in each year the rate of bonus payable in respect of scalps or dingoes."

All those provisions in s. 42A are left in. Now the rates payable will be fixed at any meeting of the local authority by simple resolution.

Mr. SPARKES: Won't you have a uniform rate?

The HOME SECRETARY: No; we have no uniform rate to-day. Each local authority fixes a rate suitable for the purpose of the area dealt with. All we lay down in the Bill is that the fee shall not be less than 5s. for a dingo scalp. In some areas as much as £2 is paid for a dingo scalp, but this Bill will allow the local authority to fix the rate it desires.

Mr. SPARKES (*Dalby*) [9 p.m.]: I would point out to the Minister that this position may arise: In a local authority area where sheep interests predominate the rate for dingo scalps may be so fixed as to encourage the destruction of dingoes, which are a greater menace to sheep men than to cattle men, whereas in an adjoining local authority, where cattle interests predominate, a different rate may be fixed for dingo scalps, so that the first local authority may experience a heavy call upon its resources by dingo scalpers who come from the cattle area.

Clause 26, as read, agreed to.

Clause 27—"*Amendments of 'The Nerang River Bridge and Southport-Burleigh Road Act of* 1923'"—agreed to.

Clause 28—"*Adjustments*"—

Mr. R. M. KING (*Logan*) [9.2 p.m.]: Would not section 11, subsection 2 of the Local Authorities Acts cover the position without incorporating this clause in the Bill? For example, it is provided that—

> "When . . . a portion is severed from one area and included in another area . . . the Governor in Council may, by Order in Council, declare and apportion the assets and liabilities of the respective Local Authorities, whether old or new, between them as appears to him just."

Is not that sufficient?

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) [9.3 p.m.]: It possibly is; still it was thought advisable to make certain. The Jubilee Bridge at Southport was built under "The Nerang River Bridge and Southport-Burleigh Road Act of 1923," which apportions the liabilities of the two shires. Some time ago the Surfers' Paradise area was included in the Southport district, and the assets and liabilities were reallocated under the Local Authorities Acts, but a doubt existed as to whether those Acts would cover the liabilities in respect of the bridge, which was built under a special Act of Parliament. This provision is included to remove any doubt in the matter.

Clause 28, as read, agreed to.

The House resumed.

The CHAIRMAN reported the Bill with amendments.

THIRD READING.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*): I move—

> "That the Bill be now read a third time."

Question put and passed.

LAW OF DISTRESS AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Hanson, Buranda, in the chair.*)

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. J. Mullan, *Carpentaria*) [9.6 p.m.]: I move—

> "That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend the law as regards distress for rent, and for other purposes."

The main object of the measure is to amend the law relating to distress. Requests have

been made from time to time by the Chamber of Commerce in Brisbane, by music and furniture warehouses in this city and in other places in the State for an amendment of this Act. The objections to the present law are that distress can now be levied without leave of court; and consequently that distress can be levied on the goods of a person other than the person by whom the rent is due.

In recent years, under the Mortgagors Relief Act, we have limited powers of execution and possession by the mortagee except after notice to the mortgagor, who has now an opportunity of going to the court to secure relief. It is intended to apply those principles in this Bill. The Bill will not abolish distress but will limit it in certain directions. It comes into operation by proclamation, but the rights of all parties are safeguarded by the provision that prevents anyone from taking an unfair advantage in anticipation of the passage of the Bill. Under this Act a landlord cannot distrain and levy for rent except on the goods and chattels of the tenant owing the rent. The procedure for distraint follows that in the Mortgagors Relief Act. The landlord must give fourteen days' notice of his intention to distrain, and if the tenant does not give notice of his intention to apply for relief within fourteen days the landlord can proceed with the distraint. If the tenant does apply to the court for relief the landlord cannot distrain until the court determines the case. The court may take into consideration the factors of unemployment, adverse economic conditions, and the hardship that might be inflicted on the landlord, and generally the factors in the Mortgagors Relief Act. The court, in its absolute discretion, may refuse or may grant relief. It may, subject to such conditions as it may see fit to impose, postpone distraint for a period of six weeks. Where a tenant has an equity in hire-purchase goods and it is necessary to sell such goods in order that the landlord may secure his rent, the proceeds from the sale shall be distributed as follows:—

In payment of the costs of the restraint.

Payment of the amount due to the owner of the goods.

And the balance will go in the payment of the rent.

Those are the main provisions of the measure; but in addition there is a small amendment of the Hire-purchase Agreement Act to prevent an evasion of the law that is now taking place. Hon. members will remember that under the Hire-purchase Agreement Act we gave for the first time an equity in the goods to the hirer in proportion to the amount he had paid for the goods.

Certain firms now are selling motor cars and other goods under such conditions that they evade the Act. They make it a condition of the contract that the purchaser continues to pay for the goods until the whole amount is paid and afterwards must pay 1s. per annum for the use of the goods when such sum is demanded. Of course, this sum is never demanded. The idea is to create a new system of contract (outside the hire-purchase agreement) by which the hirer never secures the equity. Several firms have adopted that plan and I have here copies of their agreements. They are evading the Act and we desire to stop them. We do not consider it right that one set of business people should have the opportunity of unfairly and unjustifiably evading what is regarded by business people—now that the provisions of the Act are working—as beneficial.

Mr. KENNY: They find a way out of it.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It is difficult to make an Act of Parliament watertight. When one closes one gate they appear to find another, and it is an eternal fight between the legislator on the one side and the evader of the law on the other.

There will be a small amendment in the Money Lenders Act in connection with procuration fees. When the amending Act was passing through the House last year we had a debate on the advisability or otherwise of allowing procuration fees at all. We went as far as we could to minimise extortion in that direction. Now we find that when a man comes for a loan of £20 to a money-lending firm he is informed that they have not the money on hand just at the time, but if the applicant goes to the office next door, which, in effect is really another room of their own office, the people next door will be able to make the necessary arrangements. The applicant proceeds as directed and pays the procuration fee of sometimes £3 and perhaps £5 in order to obtain a loan of £20. Then, of course, the rate of interest is added to that. It is thus that such people are evading the law and we propose in this Bill to make another endeavour to stop such evasion by the abolition altogether of procuration fees.

That is all that is contained in the Bill. At the second reading stage I shall be pleased to give the fullest information to those hon. members who desire ti.

Mr. MOORE (*Aubigny*) [9.16 p.m.]: I do not see any objection to the Bill, but the Attorney-General did not say what protection was to be given to the landlord. He did say that he was endeavouring to be fair to all sides. Undoubtedly there should be a certain amount of protection to the landlord in cases like this. A person buys a piano or some such article under a hire-purchase agreement and the landlord takes it for granted that the article is the property of the tenant. There is nothing to show that he is not the owner. The ostensible owner has not to register any mortgage, bill of sale, or hire-purchase agreement, and, consequently, no one is aware that he does not own the article. Some protection should be given to the landlord. Either the vendor should notify the landlord that the articles do not belong to the tenant or, in the alternative, the purchaser should be compelled to register the hire-purchase agreement. It is not right that the landlord should be entirely misled. I have heard of cases, not in Queensland but in New South Wales, where there were particularly difficult circumstances and no distraint could be made. Nobody could be put out of a house. A moratorium appeared to be declared. Some people invested their money in small house properties and found they could do nothing. In this case the Attorney-General is bringing forward a Bill entirely protecting the owner of the goods. Then, when it comes to costs no one is the owner of the goods. The Minister is optimistic if he thinks there will

be anything in it for the landlord after that. The hon. gentleman evidently differs entirely from me.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: If nothing was to be left over there would be no sale. There would be no use holding a sale unless there was something available to the landlord.

Mr. MOORE: This Bill is supposed to give protection to the landlord. The Minister stated that he was protecting the landlord by allowing him to obtain the equity of the tenant in the goods.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: He could not get that before.

Mr. MOORE: Under this Bill, when second-hand furniture is sold, the first item to be met is costs, then the debt to the owner of the goods, and then the debt to the landlord, if anything is left. Some notice should be given to the landlord by the owner of the goods—that is, the vendor—that the goods have been purchased on the hire-purchase system and that they do not belong to the tenant, or the tenant should be called upon to register an instrument. The landlord would then have some protection, and if he did not exercise it it would be his own lookout. Now, the landlord has no chance of protecting himself, but he should be given the opportunity.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It is not right that the landlord should get the goods of a third party.

Mr. MOORE: That is quite wrong. I know that in some cases a trader in musical instruments has been victimised because the landlord deliberately allowed the rent to accumulate and then seized the piano. The Government have previously recognised the need for protecting a creditor by prescribing that mortgages and bills of sale must be registered. If something similar were done in this case the landlord would have a measure of protection to which he is certainly entitled.

Mr. R. M. KING (*Logan*) [9.22 p.m.]: I understood from the Attorney-General that under this Bill the procedure in connection with distraint would be similar to the procedure under the Mortgagors Relief Act, in that a tenant must receive notice before the landlord can execute distraint. There is nothing in the world to stop a tenant from moving out of a house, and then the right of distraint is gone.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The right of suing for a debt remains.

Mr. R. M. KING: That is not worth very much. That is only an ordinary civil remedy, and can be executed only against the goods of a tenant, or any other asset he might have. If the goods are subject to a bill of sale, the landlord would not have any right whatever to execution for a debt to recover against the goods. There would be an interpleader summons from the mortgagee.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: He would have the same right as the butcher, baker, or tailor.

Mr. R. M. KING: Exactly. But the law recognises a difference in connection with a debt for rent and the ordinary necessaries of life. There may be no justification for it.

The PREMIER: You introduced a similar Bill but did not proceed with it.

Mr. R. M. KING: It became a "slaughtered innocent." That Bill provided a measure of protection in respect of the goods of a lodger or a stranger—tools of trade and goods purchased under the hire-purchase system. It was not proceeded with.

The PREMIER: It was a good measure, but it was slaughtered by a certain association.

Mr. R. M. KING: It was a good measure, and I do not know why it was not gone on with.

The PREMIER: You know all right.

Mr. R. M. KING: I do not. I introduced the Bill and delivered the second reading speech, but I was acting for the then Attorney-General. I was merely a substitute. It was his Bill.

Tenants have already received a certain amount of relief under the Mortgagors Relief Act, under which a tenant can apply for and be granted relief to the extent of a reduction in interest up to 4s. 6d. in the £1. That provision still exists. Therefore, he has received a good deal of consideration.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Where he was under a lease.

Mr. R. M. KING: Exactly. Any person suffering by reason of the depression could avail himself of the Act. I am not too sure on that point.

The PREMIER: You are wrong.

Mr. R. M. KING: I may be; I will not press the point. The relief extended beyond a weekly tenancy.

On the whole, according to what the Attorney-General has told us, I see no great objection to the Bill. There may be some differences of opinion in respect of goods obtained under the Hire-purchase Agreement Act. We are in accord with those provisions dealing with persons who are trying to get outside the Hire-purchase Agreement Act. We on this side of the Committee do not believe in countenancing in any shape or form any evasion of the law. We may not agree with a particular law, but as the law is on the statute-book we consider it should be observed. It is our duty to see that everything is done to observe it, and to that extent we must accept the amendment dealing with the Money Lenders Act.

Question—"That the resolution (*Mr. Mullan's motion*) be agreed to"—put and passed.

The House resumed.

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

Resolution agreed to.

FIRST READING.

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

> "That the Bill be now read a first time."

Question put and passed.

Second reading of the Bill made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

ABORIGINALS PROTECTION AND RESTRICTION OF THE SALE OF OPIUM ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca*) [9.23 p.m.]: I move—

"That the Bill be now read a second time."

I gave a very complete outline of this Bill on the introductory stage, and there is not much I can add to what I said then. Every hon. member recognises the duty we owe to our aboriginal people. We have a real responsibility to them, and it is our duty to do everything we can, not only to assist them but also to see that they have an opportunity of living in reasonable comfort. This Bill attempts to protect them from interference by unscrupulous white people. We are also going a step further in the direction of taking some care of the health of the aborigine. The most tragic part of the history of the aborigines in Australia has been the manner in which they have been killed off by the introduction of diseases, particularly by the white races, of which they had no knowledge at all. They were entirely ignorant of how to deal with the diseases that were imported into this country. The effect on the aboriginal population has been tragic. There is a general desire throughout the Commonwealth now to accept the duty that devolves on us and endeavour to preserve the balance of the race that is left. We in Queensland have undoubtedly done a good deal in that direction. There is no other part of the Commonwealth where the work has been so well done as in this State. We are in a position now to look forward at an early date to one section of the aborigines, that is, the islanders, being entirely self-supporting. They are living under very good conditions, their industry has been organised properly, and they bid fair to be a self-supporting group. At the present time their fleet of luggers and cutters is the largest fishing fleet in Northern waters, and is larger than the fleet of any individual fishing company in the North. In the islands the aborigines are still healthy and clean, and venereal disease is practically unknown. We are taking care to prevent the introduction of disease to the islands.

The other provisions of the Bill are designed to give the Chief Protector better control of half-castes. It is aimed particularly at taking control of all Asiatic and island people who are crossed with aborigines. To-day, although we exercise a certain amount of control, legally we have not much power to do so. We are taking full power in this Bill to protect them, not only from white people but also from themselves.

Whilst the Bill is not very imposing the amendments being sought will greatly assist the Chief Protector and his staff in making better provision for aborigines than we have been able to make in the past.

Mr. KENNY (*Cook*) [9.32 p.m.]: We can all agree with the Home Secretary that it is desirable to have a fair amount of protection for the aborigines in this State, so that they may live as clean and healthy a life as possible. Throughout the Torres Strait islands controlled by the Chief Protector, the aborigines are living under better conditions than a number of white people; indeed we are rapidly getting to the stage when a protector will be required for our own white people, many of whose liberties are being filched from them.

I am doubtful as to the value of this Bill, and I am afraid that it will be impossible to administer many of its provisions. From my experience of station life, I am satisfied that if some of the provisions are administered by the Chief Protector of Aboriginals or anyone else the gaols in the outlying portions of the State will be comfortably filled.

Apart from the drastic nature of the new provisions, it seems to me that the main purpose of this Bill is to increase the contributions to the Crown for the maintenance of the aboriginal community. The present Government have already taken interest from the banking account of aborigines to create greater revenue for the administration of the aboriginal settlements. That was unjust, but under this Bill the Government are going even further, for they are compelling the aborigine or half-caste, on an island, at a settlement, or on the mainland, to contribute an amount to be decided by the Minister or by the Chief Protector, such contribution to be used for the benefit of the aboriginal community as a whole.

The HOME SECRETARY: We have been doing that since 1919.

Mr. KENNY: If that is so, it has been illegal; hence the necessity of this Bill. It is well known that most aborigines have very good banking accounts, many of which amount to £500 or £600. The aborigines do not handle a shilling of their own money; they cannot even buy a handkerchief without the consent of the local protector.

Mr. W. T. KING: That is quite corect.

Mr. KENNY: It may be quite correct.

The HOME SECRETARY: It is necessary.

Mr. KENNY: It may be necessary.

A GOVERNMENT MEMBER: What about the storekeeper?

Mr. KENNY: I would just as soon trust the storekeeper as a number of the people who are controlling the banking accounts of aborigines and making purchases for them. It is well known that the aboriginal trade is a good trade in some towns and that only one business house gets that trade, due to the encouragement given to buy the goods at that business house.

The HOME SECRETARY: By whom?

Mr. KENNY: It may be by the business man. There is a definite complaint in many towns in Queensland at the present time in that regard. The aboriginal does not control his own banking account, and under this Bill the Minister or the Chief Protector of Aboriginals can decide how much contribution is to be made, and that amount will evidently be taken from the banking account. I do not think that is just. It may be desirable from the point of view of increasing the revenue to the State, and it may be argued that it is in the interests of the aborigine, but I do not think it is sound.

The schedule of the Bill provides for the financing of the Aboriginal Industries Board, and the schedule can be altered or replaced at any time by the Governor in Council.

I do not think that is desirable. If the schedule is to be altered Parliament is the authority that should alter it.

It appears to me that the whole of the penalties prescribed for breaches of the law by aborigines are money penalties, and range from fines of £2 to fines of £5. The average aborigine will not care a "continental" if he is fined £50; he does not know the value of money, because he has never handled it.

An OPPOSITION MEMBER: He has not got it.

Mr. KENNY: He has not got it. It is in his banking account. Crimes may be committed by an aboriginal every day in the week, and fines will not deter him, because he does not know the value of money. That fact is recognised by the department because it provides that the protector shall make the whole of his purchases for him. It appears to me that the only advantage that provision relating to fines will be is by way of bringing in extra revenue to the department; and it can only be described as a revenue clause.

Judging by the provisions of this Bill, it appears that we are adopting the bad principle that is in operation amongst the white races. We are going to make the thrifty and hard-working people suffer in order to keep the drones. The workers amongst the aborigines will be the ones who will have to pay for the drones. Their banking accounts will have a certain amount deducted from them for the upkeep of those who will not work and who cannot keep a job when they get one.

There are so many clauses in the Bill that it is not practicable to move amendments in Committee because it would necessitate the moving of an amendment on practically every clause.

I notice that the definition of "half-caste" has been widened. That may be desirable and it may not. I do not know what the intention of the Minister is in this regard, whether he has a desire to bring in a greater number of those half-caste aborigines who are not now controlled by the Act and thereby increase revenue. No doubt they will be brought under the control of the Protector by this Bill, and thereby increase the revenue to the department. There is a very desirable widening of the definition of half-caste in one direction, that is, the provision relating to any person of Pacific Island extraction living or in association with aborigines. I know to my sorrow that when the Labour Party were in power previously they brought in fifty-two half-castes to Torres Strait of Pacific extraction and gave them votes in an endeavour to hold that seat for the Labour Party. I should like the Home Secretary to inform members during the Committee stages or during the course of his reply if, by widening the definition of half-caste, those half-caste Torres Strait natives will be brought under the control of the Protector, and if they will not be eligible to vote. The term "associates" should be explained clearly, because we know that a number of these people who are to-day exempt from the Act are associating with the aborigines every day; yet when an election comes along they go to the polls and vote.

Power is taken under this Bill to grant half-castes or aborigines exemption from the control of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, but it does not exempt them from not having control of his own banking account. I think I am correct in saying that.

The HOME SECRETARY: That is one statement that could be.

Mr. KENNY: That is one that could be, and if we are freeing an aborigine or half-caste from the control of the Protector then, in effect, we say to him that although free he must not handle his own banking account. He is thus being "turned out on the road." He is to be allowed to vote for his representative in this Parliament, but not allowed to handle his own banking account. There is something wrong and the matter requires very serious consideration. I know quite well that the Home Secretary knows that an aborigine or half-caste can be talked round to think any way one likes to make him think.

A GOVERNMENT MEMBER: You have a "go" at it.

Mr. KENNY: I have had many a "go" at it.

Mr. WATERS: Is that how you got into Parliament?

Mr. KENNY: As a matter of fact, when fifty-two half-castes were placed on the roll at Thursday Island I had a meeting of them. A number of the aborigines stated they could not get a drink. I told them that as they were entitled to vote they were entitled to the same consideration as the whites and should go straight to the hotel and have a drink, and if the hotelkeeper would serve them with a drink I would pay for it.

A GOVERNMENT MEMBER: Bribery and corruption.

Mr. KENNY: They went down and could not get a drink. Naturally they were very incensed at being treated like that by the Labour Party and voted for me.

A GOVERNMENT MEMBER: Fifty-two half-castes.

Mr. KENNY: Fifty-two half-castes.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. KENNY: If the Minister desires to do his duty he may possibly see I do not get these votes.

The HOME SECRETARY: If they were exempt they would be entitled to drink with you all night.

Mr. KENNY: There were some as black as the ace of spades, and if they drank all night I am afraid would get into a sorry pass. Everybody knows that an aborigine is still an aborigine whether exempted or not, and when he gets liquor into him he is then in the some condition as the oldest native in the bush. With liquor in him he could commit all the crimes imaginable.

The whole Bill aims at revenue. The white man is to be fined up to £100 or six months' imprisonment, and, to a great extent, that fine will be inflicted on the "say so" of an aborigine.

There is also provision to remove half-castes to reserves and from one reserve to another. In the past that has been done, and I consider it desirable that the Government should have that power. But some practices in operation are undesirable and they include the taking of an aborigine away from his kith and kin—leaving his wife and children behind. That has happened. There are many cases and the Chief Protector will

know that that is undesirable, and I desire to see it does not happen in the case of half-castes.

The HOME SECRETARY: They often want to leave them behind.

Mr. KENNY: In the majority of cases they do not desire to leave their wives and children behind, but they are taken from them. One clause is included in the Bill that cannot, in my opinion, be amended, but any person who knows anything about the bush will know that the clause can never be administered. I am referring to clause 9. It is very dangerous and undesirable to give such power to any local protector. People having knowledge of the bush know that at many stations there is not a white woman about the place. The cook on the station is a black gin. Under this Bill the local protector can prosecute a man for cohabiting with an aborigine, and if the gin says the man has done so that man is then liable to a fine of £50 or imprisonment for six months, and his character is gone. People knowing station life as I do, and as you do, Mr. Speaker, and as the Minister should know it, know that in the administration of a clause such as this one is looking for trouble. However, the less I say about that clause the better. (Laughter.) The Minister may tell me that action can only be taken under this clause with the approval of the Chief Protector, but the recommendation comes from the local protector. I have had sufficient experience to know that very often a local protector gets a "set" on a particular station-owner, stockowner, prospector, or some one else in the locality, and the quickest way for him to deal with the person that he does not approve will be to deal with him under this clause. He could soon have him shifted out of the district if he desired to do so.

Another clause provides that if a female aborigine or half-caste who is classed as a prostitute solicits business she is to be fined £2. What does she care about a fine of £2? She has no banking account and she will not pay the fine; she will carry on with her occupation. But if a bushman falls to temptation he is to be fined £50!

Mr. W. T. KING: So he should.

Mr. KENNY: That argument may be sound: but if there is a female aborigine or half-caste prostitute running round the ridges, then her place is in Palm Island or some such similar place. What is the use of fining her £2? We could amend this clause to say that she should be removed to an isolation camp. A fine is set out in the Bill purely for the purposes of revenue. I am satisfied that the main object of the Bill is to secure revenue.

The Bill also provides that an aborigine may be called upon to subject himself to examination, and if he is found to be suffering from venereal disease he must submit to treatment. He may submit to treatment, but that is not going to stop him from spreading the disease. As soon as the treatment is over he will run around again and probably spread the disease still further. The only place for him is in an isolation hospital, and he should not be allowed to run round while receiving treatment from day to day. If he fails to come up for examination or to submit to treatment he is to be fined £5. The fine will be paid, because it will be deducted from his banking account, but that will not prevent the spreading of the disease. If we were to seek to amend the Bill to place him in an isolation hospital, we should have to amend the majority of the clauses of the Bill. The Bill has been framed with the object of securing revenue.

The local protector is to be given power to cancel an agreement entered into between an employer and a local protector concerning the employment of an aborigine. If the local protector has a disagreement with the employer, he can cancel the agreement. It is not desirable to give that power to a local protector, but it should be retained entirely for the Chief Protector. An amendment will be moved in Committee to achieve that end. If the employer is not satisfied that he has had a fair deal from the local protector and continues to employ the aborigine while still protesting to Brisbane he is liable to a fine of £50, and that on the "say-so" of the local protector. These powers should not be given to the local protector, but should be exercised only by the Chief Protector.

The Bill also provides that when an aborigine makes a will it shall not be valid until approved by the local protector or the Chief Protector. Many policemen have little experience before they are sent out as local protectors. It is well known that an aborigine can be made to do anything and to say anything.

The HOME SECRETARY: That is why this provision is contained in the Bill.

Mr. KENNY: The local protector is not the right person to tell the aborigine how he should make his will. If the power is to be given to anybody, it should be given to the police magistrate. Do not give it to the local protector.

Mr. W. T. KING: Do you not think that the local protector protects the aborigines?

Mr. KENNY: Very often the local protector does not protect the aborigines; he bleeds them. That has been done. There are good local protectors as well as bad ones. How many police officers have lost their jobs because they failed to do their duty as local protectors? Many of them have had big banking accounts, and a number of them have made money out of the aborigines. That is common knowledge, and I make that statement without any desire to reflect on the police force as a whole.

The HOME SECRETARY: You are casting a reflection on ninety-six of them.

Mr. KENNY: There are exceptions to the rule; but if it is found that local protectors abuse this power, then do not give them the opportunity to do so. It is desirable to retain power to protect the aborigine, but the police magistrate should be charged with the duty of seeing that the aborigine makes his will according to his own wishes.

Mr. BRASSINGTON: You would want a magistrate in every town.

Mr. KENNY: A magistrate visits practically every town. The Minister knows that a magistrate holds a court in all the outback places.

Mr. BRASSINGTON: If a man was dying, would he wait until a police magistrate arrived?

Mr. KENNY: The same provisions should apply to an aborigine as to a white man. We are taking power to say that the protector shall say how an aborigine should make his will, or to advise an aborigine how to make his will, but if a white man assists him to make a will—and it may be a perfectly valid one—he may be liable to a fine of £100. That is totally unnecessary.

Clause 21 breaks all the principles of British justice. The Minister is taking power unto himself to hold an aborigine or half-caste in gaol for the term of his natural life if he is considered to be uncontrollable. That is a precedent that is undesirable. The Minister claims that this provision is very desirable because one aboriginal has committed rape on three different white women. If the law of the bush were permitted to operate in such a case there would be no need to bring down this clause because he would not commit that offence a fourth time.

The HOME SECRETARY: You are not advocating that should be permitted?

Mr. KENNY: I am not. If I thought that sterilisation would meet the case I would advocate it and put it to a vote. I am quite prepared to assist the Minister to meet this situation without giving him general power to keep an aborigine or half-caste in gaol for the rest of his life. We should not allow any Government to take such powers unto themselves because of the offence of one man, and make every aborigine and half-caste in Queensland subject to this provision if he is considered uncontrollable, and put him in gaol for the rest of his life. The clause is very wide. It deals with an aborigine or half-caste who comes within the ordinary meaning of the word, and

> "is considered a menace to the peace, order, and proper control and management of an institution,"

or

> "has been convicted of the following crimes, whether committed upon another aboriginal or half-caste, or a white woman"——

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member will not be in order in reading the clause.

Mr. KENNY: I am not reading a clause of the Bill; I am reading from notes that I have prepared. An aborigine or half-caste committing any crime in Chapters 22 and 32 of the Criminal Code comes within the purview of the clause. In these two chapters of the Criminal Code we have altogether twenty-five different crimes. They include, in addition to rape and similar major crimes, an attempt to procure abortion—including such attempt by a woman with child—supplying drugs or instruments to procure abortion; indecent acts; obscene publications and exhibitions. Such crimes do not call for any punishment beyond that ordinarily inflicted by the court, and certainly not a life sentence. If the Minister wishes to take the power he desires then the furthest he can proceed is to take unto himself the powers of punishment that are provided in the Criminal Code for crimes committed against white women. This provision is going too far. It is a clause which is hard to amend. I will certainly move an amendment along the lines I have suggested, but I do think the Minister should between now and the Committee stages refer this clause back to the Chief Protector and the Parliamentary Draftsman with a view to framing a clause that will not break every tenet of British justice.

These are the main provisions in the Bill, a number of which are desirable. As I said earlier in my remarks, we shall not be able to administer the Bill. The only advantage it will have will be to increase the Crown revenue. I do not think that the penalties provided for the offences will do anything beyond bringing money into the coffers of the Home Department. I hope the Minister will take a note of clauses 9 and 21 with a view to redrafting them in simple language, because we do not desire to move an amendment on every clause of the Bill.

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. E. M. Hanlon, *Ithaca)* [10 p.m.], in reply: I do not intend to detain the House, but I must call attention to the immoderate language of the hon. member in regard to protectors of aboriginals. Outside of the main cities, protectors of aboriginals are policemen, and while it may be quite possible that some policeman has abused his office, I believe that the ninety-two policemen who are acting as protectors to-day—certainly so far as the Home Department, the Police Department, and the Aboriginals Sub-Department knows—are decent men who are doing their job fairly and honestly and endeavouring to look after the best interests of the aborigines.

Mr. KENNY: Ninety-nine per cent. of them may be.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

The HOME SECRETARY: The hon. member should be a little less immoderate in his conduct in casting charges of dishonesty——

Mr. KENNY: Ninety-nine per cent of them may be honest.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

The HOME SECRETARY: I am hoping and I believe that 100 per cent. are, because if we thought that anyone was dishonest we should not allow him to act as a protector of aboriginals or to remain in the police force.

Mr. KENNY: You have proved some of them in the past——

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I hope the hon. member will cease interjecting. He is making a habit of it.

The HOME SECRETARY: It is most unfair to make general charges which are apt to create a wrong impression in the public mind. When a statement of that kind is made in Parliament it tends to give the public the impression that, as that hon. member should know something of what he is speaking about, the honesty and integrity of the police is not what it should be. I recently made an extensive tour of the northern portion of the State, particularly on aboriginal matters, and the police officers I met who were acting as protectors struck me as being earnest and thorough and having a keen desire to do their duty honestly and thoroughly for the Government and for the unfortunate aborigines.

The hon. member has referred to the provision regarding the making of wills by aborigines. The provision that a protector must be a witness will mean that any will of which he is a beneficiary will be of no value. The fact that he is one of the witnesses to it will mean that he will not benefit from it. In the towns where the protector would act as a witness, I venture to say that the policeman acting as a protector would compare favourably with the average citizen in the district; indeed, no more reputable person could be secured to do the work.

On the matter of agreements, it will be apparent that the bulk of the agreements that have to be broken are in respect of cases where employers find aborigines unsatisfactory. The agreement is between two parties, and naturally if an employer finds an aborigine will not work the employer should not be compelled to keep him.

The old story told by the hon. member of the Government taking interest from the banking accounts of aborigines needs correction. If the hon. member were fair he would state that what is done is that an operating charge of 2½ per cent. is made. Aborigines with bank accounts are just as able to pay for their assistance as anybody else, and in a State where we do not give assistance to a white man with a banking account if he is out of work, I do not think it is fair to tax white men to give assistance free to aborigines who have banking accounts of more than £20. There is a limit to the account that can be touched. No deductions are ever made from the banking account of an aborigine below £20, but if, as the hon. member for Cook suggests, aborigines have as much as £500 in the bank, it is only fair that they should make some contribution to the cost of administering their fund. Charges have been made on the wages and accounts of the aborigines since 1919, when the Aboriginal Provident Fund was established. Ever since then we have deducted 5 per cent. from the earnings of aborigines on settlements, and 2½ per cent. of the earnings of other aborigines, for the purpose of making up that provident fund. The power to make regulations gives the Chief Protector the opportunity to extend it in other directions and to centralise the fund and to stipulate how the money shall be distributed. No aborigine with less than £20 in his banking account is ever asked to make a contribution from his savings, but aborigines who are earning good wages should be compelled to make some contribution towards keeping their poor and less fortunate relatives.

The Bill can be dealt with in detail in the Committee stage, and if there is any way in which I can meet hon. members I shall be only too happy to do so; but I would assure hon. members that work has been proceeding on this Bill for a considerable time, and that it has been carefully prepared in an endeavour to devise the best way of safeguarding the interests of aborigines generally.

Question—"That the Bill be now read a second time" (*Mr. Hanlon's motion*)—put and passed.

Consideration of the Bill in Committee made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

The House adjourned at 10.7 p.m.