

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 19 OCTOBER 1943

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Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. E. J. Hanson, Buranda) took the chair at 11 a.m.

HAMILTON BY-ELECTION.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have to inform the House that, in accordance with the 10th section of the Legislative Assembly Act of 1867, I issued a writ on 14 September, 1943, for the election of a member to serve in the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Hamilton, in the room of Bruce Pie, Esquire, resigned; and that the said writ has been duly returned to me with a certificate endorsed thereon by the returning officer, of the election, on 9 October, of John Beals Chandler, Esquire, to serve as such member.

MEMBER SWORN.

Mr. J. B. CHANDLER.

Mr. John Beals Chandler, having taken the oath of allegiance and subscribed the roll, took his seat as member for the electoral district of Hamilton.

QUESTIONS.

PREMIUM FOR EARLY POTATOES.

Mr. TURNER (Kelvin Grove) asked the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock—

“1. Has his attention been drawn to the statement, as reported in the ‘Courier-Mail’ of Saturday, 9 October, 1943, by the Federal Potato Controller, Mr. A. C. Foster, ‘That because the next six or eight weeks were likely to be Queensland’s worst period for supplies, the Committee were giving a premium of £2 per ton over the contract price for early-harvested potatoes in Queensland to bridge the shortage of supplies before the main crop is dug?’

“2. Will he take action to prevent the growers from harvesting their crops before they are ready, thereby eliminating the tremendous waste that was caused last year when voluntary week-end labour was supplied for harvesting the potatoes?

“3. Will he see that sufficient of the crop is retained in Queensland for the State’s requirements until further supplies are available?”

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE AND STOCK (Hon. T. L. Williams, Port Curtis) replied—

“1. Yes.

“2. I am authoritatively informed that the steps taken by the Commonwealth Government to guarantee, through the Australian Potato Committee, to pay contract growers reasonable prices for good quality potatoes have resulted in the planting, in all States, of an acreage estimated to exceed the normal requirements of essential services and civilians. If the £2 per ton pre-

mium attracts an added flow of sound, early potatoes to augment the present lean supplies, rather than that they be held until the peak of the season, a good purpose will have been served. Growers will not risk forwarding undesirable, immature potatoes which would only result in loss to themselves.

“3. I am assured that it is intended to retain all the Queensland crop for Queensland requirements.”

SHORTAGE OF HORSESHOES.

Mr. MULLER (Fassifern) asked the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock—

“1. In reference to his answer, on 2 September last, to my question relative to the shortage of horseshoes in Queensland, is he aware that the position is now so acute that large numbers of horses cannot be shod, and that primary production is being detrimentally affected to a very serious extent on that account?

“2. Has he received any information on the matter which indicates that action is being taken to overcome the difficulty? If so, is there a possibility of supplies of horseshoes becoming available in the near future?”

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE AND STOCK (Hon. T. L. Williams, Port Curtis) replied—

“1. I am aware that the shortage of horseshoes in Queensland is still acute.

“2. In reply to my representations, the Minister for Commerce and Agriculture has advised that he is strongly advocating to his colleague, the Minister for Munitions, the need for a substantial improvement in the Queensland supply position. In response to a request from the Department of Commerce and Agriculture, my officers are at present engaged in the preparation of an estimate of Queensland’s requirements of various materials in short supply, including horseshoes, to enable the Commonwealth authorities to arrange for a better supply to Queensland.”

CHAIRMAN, STATE ELECTRICITY COMMISSION.

Mr. LUCKINS (Maree) asked the Premier—

“What positions are held by Mr. Cochran, Chairman of the Electricity Commission, and what salaries and allowances does he receive?”

The PREMIER (Hon. F. A. Cooper, Bremer) replied—

“In addition to his State appointment as Chairman and Executive Officer of the State Electricity Commission (salary, £1,250 per annum), Mr. S. F. Cochran holds Commonwealth appointments as Deputy Director of Rationing for Queensland (allowance £400 per annum), Regional Controller of Electricity for Queensland (no allowance), and Chairman of the Civilian Requirements Committee (no allowance). None of these Commonwealth appointments

was sought by Mr. Cochran, but in accordance with its policy of full co-operation with the Commonwealth Government, the Queensland Government agreed to the strong representations of the Commonwealth Government that Mr. Cochran should undertake these additional duties.’’

PAPERS.

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

Report of the manager, State Advances Corporation, for the year 1942-1943.

Report of the Commissioner for Railways for the year 1942-1943.

ELECTIONS ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INTIMATION.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. D. A. Gledson, Ipswich) I move—

“That the House will, at its next sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider of the desirableness of introducing a Bill to amend the Elections Acts, 1915-1942, in certain particulars, and for other purposes.’’

Motion agreed to.

SUPPLY.

RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE—ESTIMATES—ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH ALLOTTED DAYS.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Brassington, Fortitude Valley, in the chair.)

ESTIMATES IN CHIEF, 1943-1944.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT.
CHIEF OFFICE.

Debate resumed from 14 October (see p. 963) on the question—

“That £130,510 be granted for ‘Department of Labour and Employment—Chief Office.’’’

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (11.10 a.m.): When the debate was adjourned on Thursday last the hon. member for Wynnum had expressed very great concern at the fact that at 7½d. a lb. for mullet and corresponding ceiling prices for other lines of fish, fishermen supplying the metropolitan fish market were not getting an adequate price for their fish. May I point out that in August, 1942, when fish prices were spiralling upwards, making the price ruling at the market almost beyond the capacity of the ordinary worker, steps were taken to bring the matter under the notice of the Prices Commissioner. Before doing so in regard to mullet and tailer we went to the trouble of investigating the prices that had ruled for fish for three years, 1938, 1939, and 1940, and we discovered that the maximum price realised in that period in any one month—and it happened in only one month—was about 20s. 9d. a tray of 40 lb.

It was recommended to the Prices Commissioner that the ceiling price should give a margin above the highest ruling price for the previous three years so that the ceiling prices, wholesale, should be as follows:—

Mullet, over 12 in.		
long, excluding		
hard gut	23s. 0d.	a tray of 40 lb.
Mullet, excluding		
hard gut, 11 to		
12 in. long	20s. 6d.	a tray of 40 lb.
Tailer, over 14 in.		
long	22s. 6d.	a tray of 40 lb.
Tailer, under 14 in.		
long	21s. 6d.	a tray of 40 lb.

Those prices were considerably in excess of the highest price realised at any period during the previous three years, as I have mentioned. With prices round about that point the people would have been able to obtain cleaned mullet at 1s. a lb. retail, mixed mullet at 10½d. a lb. and the two grades of tailer at 10½d. and 10d. a lb. respectively. We contended that was a considerable improvement on any price previously realised.

Mr. Plunkett: In the meantime a number of fishermen were called up for military service.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I am aware of that. In fact, there has been a gradual call-up of fishermen, I think on the basis of one man from each boat. Usually a boat has four men working in it.

Since that time the system of organisation among fishermen has improved, and wherever possible they have combined operations. An officer of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research who arrived from the South recently informed me that fishermen were doing much better there on a properly organised basis.

Mr. Plunkett: That is absolute nonsense.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: He informed me that they were realising a higher percentage per catch than previously. I have not the figures but I am basing my statement on what he actually told me.

Notwithstanding that the ceiling prices fixed for mullet were 23s. for large mullet, 20s. 6d. for mixed mullet, and 22s. 6d. for tailer, supplies of mullet have not reached the market. According to a statement by Mr. Acworth, the representative of the fishermen on the Fish Board, the fishermen were letting their catches of mullet go and were refusing to send them to market. Later, as a result of further representations by the fishermen’s representative, the Prices Commissioner agreed to fix the ceiling price for mullet, including medium mullet, at 25s. a tray. This, as I mentioned earlier, is considerably in excess of any price that fishermen have realised previously. It is contended, and I think the Prices Commissioner is correct in saying so, that that rise in price more than compensates the fishermen for increased costs for petrol, kerosene and other items.

Mr. Dart: Fishermen do not say so.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: That is the fishermen's story. If we must maintain a market for fish we have at least to consider the consuming public. They are the great majority. In glut periods the fishermen look to the great mass of people to buy their catch in order to give them decent living conditions. To do so, we must supply fish to the consumer at a reasonable price, at the same time taking into consideration the return to the vendor. The position has developed from that point. Victoria was the first State to take action to fix a ceiling price for all fish. Later, New South Wales followed suit. The result was that representatives came from New South Wales to Brisbane to discuss the whole matter with the Fish Board and the Prices Commissioner. It was eventually agreed that ceiling prices be fixed for all varieties of fish, including net and line fish, and that is the basis on which the Fish Board has been working for a considerable time.

It is rather interesting to know the prices that are now ruling. For instance, the amended price for snapper fixed by the Prices Commissioner on 14 May, 1943, is 1s. 4d. a lb., the highest wholesale price a fisherman has ever received for snapper. The wholesale price of snapper in pre-war days was round about 9d. a lb. Squire brought approximately the same price.

At the present time they are receiving 1s. 2½d. a lb. cleaned for barramundi and previously, according to the investigations we have made into the figures during the past three years, the best price received was round about 10d. to 1s. a lb. Spanish mackerel ranged from 5½d. to 10d. a lb. and they are now receiving 1s. 2d. for it. With almost every line of fish coming into the market to-day that is the position. Those increases certainly give the fishermen an opportunity to combat the increased costs they have to contend with, while giving the consumer, under the improved conditions, the capacity to buy some now and again. Those wholesale prices I have quoted have to be increased by 50 per cent.—at least 40 per cent.—to compensate the distributor for the work entailed in supplying it to the public. But when that is done one finds that 1s. 4d. wholesale plus 40 per cent. on the whole of the snapper puts that fish almost out of reach of the average working man in the community. The only line of fish he can reasonably expect to buy is the mullet I referred to, the retail price of which stands at 1s. 1d. a lb.

The system has been working satisfactorily in each State for a considerable time. The prices are so adjusted that it would not pay the fisherman in Queensland to send his catch to the New South Wales market. The result is that fish from Queensland waters are now marketed in Queensland. Some from the Northern Rivers of New South Wales are going to the Sydney market. I think the effort of the Prices Commissioner in that respect has been a definite advantage, not only to the fishermen but to the consuming public. A happy balance has been struck to

enable the average man to get fish when supplies are available and at the same time give a decent return to the producer.

The hon. member for Wynnum was also very concerned about the fact that in this vote a certain sum of money is included for inspectors. I think he must have been looking a little ahead and thinking of the Labour Department, but the fact remains that we have to have a large staff of inspectors to police the 300-odd arbitration awards operating in Queensland and time to give some attention to the conditions of the workers in our factories and in other callings throughout the State. There is no need for the employer to fear the visit of any inspector if he is playing the game; that is the general position as we find it. The good employer realises that good wages and conditions for his employees pay him; they create contentment throughout the works and tend to bring about higher production. But you find in every community the avaricious individual who attempts to exploit and rob his employees whenever the opportunity offers. It is because men of that type exist that we have a staff of inspectors—and we have to pay them a reasonable salary under the Public Service Act—to reduce that exploitation as far as possible. I am aware of the many alterations that have taken place in the conditions of workers during my lifetime, and the trend of the future will be towards better conditions than those that obtain to-day. For instance, I remember going onto a cattle station when I was a lad to do stock work. The conditions in those days were such that one got up before daylight to get the horses in and finished as a rule after dark, and the ration during the whole of the period I was there was usually damper and corned beef; and as to accommodation, when I arrived I was sent down into the bunk-house—a lean-to shack that contained a broken-down bunk—and I had to do the best I could to make it as comfortable as possible.

Those conditions have gone for ever. To-day, under the Workers' Accommodation Act, every squatter has to provide decent accommodation, and under the awards of the Industrial Court has to give a decent ration and food to the employees.

Mr. Dart: Remember, we have been without potatoes and butter in Parliament House.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: One cannot grow potatoes out of season. The potato crop is not ready at the moment, and there is an increased population to consume them when they are ready. At the present time, a premium of £2 a ton is being paid to those who will dig their crop early so that some supplies will get to the market. The bulk of the supplies will be available later; nature will not speed up for the hon. member for Wynnum or anybody else.

Mr. Dart: What about butter?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The butter position has been kept remarkably good considering the tremendous increase in population and the tremendous quantities we have been sending

overseas. There has been increased production, and notwithstanding the rationing my family has never been short of butter. The allowance enabled us to carry on very well indeed, of course taking the ordinary precautions that should be taken under such conditions.

Looking back a few years to my early manhood in the canefields in Northern Queensland about Goondi and Innisfail, I remember the average wage was then 22s. 6d. a week for a 12-hour shift, and the food supplied by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company was not fit for the average kangaroo dog to eat. The result was that the average man in those days, out of his miserable 22s. 6d. a week, had to supplement his food ration by buying jam, butter, and other delicacies necessary at least to keep him up to working pitch. In the canefields in those days a ganger organised a gang of men, and each worker was forced under the conditions prevailing to compete with other men. The result was that Badila cane was cut for 3s. a ton. In order to get a decent cheque for their five and a-half months' work—the length of the season in those days—men had to work from six in the morning until six in the evening. (Opposition interjections.)

I worked under those conditions and I know what I am talking about. At the end of the season, the worker had to have two or three months for recuperation to build himself up again before taking on any other occupation.

Mr. Kerr: That is not the position to-day.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: As a result of the reforms that have taken place from 1915 to the present as regards industrial conditions and other things, and because from time to time our inspectors are policing industrial awards and the provisions of the Workers' Accommodation Act and the Factories and Shops Act, reasonable conditions prevail in the community to-day, but nevertheless we hear hon. members, such as the hon. member for Wynnum, saying that we should scrap the system and send our inspectors to do other work in the community.

Mr. Dart: I did not say that.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The hon. member should read his proof; I read it last night. The hon. member said that we should scrap our inspectors and put them to other work in the community—in other words, give freedom to the bad employer to exploit the workers as far as possible. I again emphasise that a good employer has nothing to fear from a visit by an inspector. He knows when he enters business just what he has to do. There is first of all the industrial award, secondly, the Factories and Shops Act, and thirdly, the Commonwealth regulations. If he does not abide by these, and an inspector finds that he is deliberately evading them, well, he must take all that comes to him, and it ill-becomes hon. members to take up the stand that the system should be departed from, that we should scrap our inspectors and put them on

to help in what hon. members think is more useful work just because we are in a war period. I contend they are doing very useful work. As I said previously, there are 300 awards to cover, and 4,000 factories. There is also workers' accommodation from one end of the State to the other. All credit is due to the few inspectors we have doing that job for the splendid results that have been obtained.

Mr. DART (Wynnum) (11.30 a.m.): The explanation of the hon. gentleman with regard to fish was very paltry. Fishermen are still receiving only 7½d. a lb. for mullet and 1s. 4d. a lb. for shark. The hon. gentleman did not even mention shark, but he should have given some explanation about the sales of shark for fish.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: Shark is not sold as fish.

Mr. DART: Here is what the report of the hon. gentleman's department has to say about the employers—

“Employers generally are desirous of providing proper accommodation for employees, but present conditions create many problems, and applications to extend the time in which to effect the proper accommodation are given consideration on their merits.”

According to this report there are 317 fewer factories and 891 fewer shops, yet all these inspectors are kept on. I do not say that the inspectors should be sacked; I suggest that they be transferred to more useful work. Why should we have a big band of inspectors employed when there is a big reduction in both shops and factories? I am informed on good authority, too, that these men get 80 gallons of petrol a month. Where do they use it?

Mr. Muller: The farmer gets three.

Mr. DART: The farmer gets very little, and the private man gets only three.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! We are not discussing matters connected with liquid fuel control.

Mr. DART: The Labour Government have had 10 years in which to find something better for the men who were on intermittent relief work. Instead of doing anything they continued these men on the relief, and it is only now that we find there is to be a reduction in social services, postage, stationery, printing, &c. The reduction amounts to £99,904.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: What is the number on relief?

Mr. DART: There are very few on relief. The amount to be voted is a little over £20,000, but what is that compared with the £200,000 that was included in the Estimates only two years ago?

There must be a great deal less work for these inspectors to do. On trams and in other places many of our men are being replaced with women. The same thing could be done

here. Women could be employed as inspectors and they could do the work as effectively and as efficiently as the men are doing it. The Civil Constructional Corps, the Women's Army, or some other such organisation could do this work effectively and as well as it is being done to-day.

The other night we were told that some other Government taxed the washerwomen. Hon. members on the Government side are always going back to the past. Why, both this and the Federal Government are taxing the washerwomen to-day. Any woman who earns over £2 a week is taxed by the Labour Government, yet we hear nothing about the present taxation of washerwomen.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I must ask the hon. member to confine his remarks to the question before the Committee.

Mr. DART: I merely mentioned that in reply to the hon. member for Baroona. He spoke about that the other night and it is only fair that I should reply to him. It may seem a little out of place, but if other hon. members can make such statements, I must reply to them.

I admit that there is much work to be done in administering the 300 awards under the control of this department, but I repeat that I have never suggested sacking the inspectors; I have merely suggested that they be transferred to other useful work. There are many points that could be remedied, and I suggest that less money is needed for inspectors because the inspectors have not got the work to do that they had. If there are fewer factories and shops it must mean that the inspectors have less work to do. Every employer to-day welcomes cleanliness and tidiness round his business premises because he knows that better results are obtained in that way.

Now, why should the Minister tell us about what happened when he was a boy? He must know that conditions at present are far different from what they were 40 or 50 years ago. I see no reason for making the comparison between now and 40 years ago. We on this side welcome any improvement in the workers' conditions. I do not want anyone to get away with the idea that we do not favour giving comforts to the men, but I say that there are too many inspectors employed in this class of work when they could be better used elsewhere. A few of them have gone over to defence work, but how few they are! Again, they may have been the cream of the inspecting staff.

Quite a number more could do useful defence work. There are fewer people for them to look after, especially now that the Commonwealth Government have given us so much help. I hope that the post-war reconstruction period will be attended to in such a way that we shall not have any unemployed. The Queensland Labour Government had an opportunity of dealing with unemployment many years ago. Everyone knows that they could have helped in the establishment of factories and foundries. In fact, we know that one man said that he would bring the necessary machinery from the Old Country if

the Government would give him some help in the establishment of a secondary industry. However, his proposal was not favoured, and very many people had to be out of work. We should never again tolerate a position that provides for the payment of a few shillings a week to men engaged on intermittent relief work. We should see that the affairs of the country are administered in such a way as to give justice to all.

Mr. JESSON (Kennedy) (11.38 a.m.): I am convinced that the hon. member for Wynnum has not even looked at the Estimates. It strikes me that he has a brief from somebody who has been pulling his leg. There are about 40 fewer employees in the department now as compared with 1942-43. I do not know how the hon. member for Wynnum can come to the conclusion that there are too many inspectors, when as a matter of fact the practice of certain employers clearly indicates that in connection with the enforcement of the conditions to workers' accommodation there are not enough inspectors. As a matter of fact, the hon. member has only a very small group of people in mind. He has not travelled the State, and so he can talk only of Brisbane.

Mr. Edwards: You are getting personal now.

Mr. JESSON: I am not getting personal at all. The hon. member for Wynnum adopts the Queen street attitude as all hon. members sitting in Opposition do. It is astounding what the inspectors have to put up with in going over the various farms and stations throughout the State to see that the Workers' Accommodation Act is complied with. I should like to remind hon. members opposite that the legislation that has been introduced by Labour Governments over the years providing for the observance of hygienic conditions has been responsible for the elimination of much disease and a consequent improvement in the health of the workers in industry, especially those in seasonal industries. It is not so many years ago that the employees engaged in the shearing industry had to accept whatever conditions were provided for them. I remember that as a boy on stations—and that is not so many years ago—when we had to make our own beds with bags and that sort of thing. The health of the employees has been improved by the employment of inspectors. There are a number of employers—thank God only a few—who are willing to sacrifice the health of their employees in the interests of profit especially in a time of depression when labour is easy to get.

I did not rise to speak specifically about that matter. My purpose was to discuss the subject of apprenticeship to skilled trades. It comes very largely under the votes for the Department of Public Instruction, but I think it should be taken over by the Department of Labour and Employment. During the war period, a large number of boys and girls have been attracted to remunerative jobs, in a number of vital industries that have been started, of which the people in

Queensland knew little about. I refer particularly to the surgical bootmaking trade because it was brought under my notice very forcibly about a week ago by a gentleman in my electorate who was unable to get a surgical boot made for his child in the whole of Queensland. He had been in touch with a surgical bootmaker in Brisbane almost for six months. At his written request I called on this bootmaker last week and he told me that the casting of the malformed foot and the old boot had not been touched because he had nobody to do the work. He pointed out that his workmen had been called up by the army and there were no boys to learn the trade. Unfortunately, we have quite a number of crippled children and adults in Queensland who have to have boots specially made for them, but no apprentices are coming along to learn this important trade. Consequently such articles are unprocurable.

I want also to refer to the clothing industry. In a few years it will be in a very difficult position because no girls are learning it, the reason being that in many cases such girls must register for employment at the National Service Office and the employer must apply to it for his apprentices, and mothers are reluctant to allow their daughters to register for fear that the National Service Office will send them to other trades. I suggest that the Minister take the matter up with the National Service Office with a view to the suspension of the regulations compelling girls under 16 years of age desirous of entering the clothing trade to register with the man-power authorities. This would allow these employers to advertise in the Press for girls, who could make application direct to them and thus be assured of entering the trade they want to learn. As a matter of fact, girls of 16 years of age and under are diverted by the National Service Office to other callings, and hence we get the same old trouble I have often spoken of; a square peg is fitted into a round hole.

One of these matters I have mentioned is certainly a Commonwealth one, but I hope the Minister will take it up with the proper authorities. As to the other, something certainly should be done to get apprentices for the surgical boot trade. Provision for these apprentices could be made by the Central Technical College and boys could be encouraged then to specialise in it. Otherwise in the very near future people suffering from deformed or crippled feet will be unable to get the necessary boots.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (11.44 p.m.): The Minister referred to industrial conditions that existed many years ago. I should like to refer to the conditions fishermen worked under only a couple of years ago, when I remember fish was imported from the North by the Fish Board at 5½d. a lb. and sold to the public at 1s. 6d., and during the first four weeks' operations of that scheme the board made a profit of £650. That profit was made at the expense of the fishermen and the public. The subject was raised from this side of the Chamber and the Minister announced that he had reviewed the matter and increased the wholesale price to

the fishermen and the retail price to the public.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I have allowed this discussion on the price of fish and the administration of the Fish Board but I would point out that it should take place on the vote, the Fish Supply Management Acts, 1935 to 1941, which appears in the Trust and Special Funds Estimates. I ask the hon. member to note that fact; there will be ample opportunity later to discuss the subject.

Mr. Walker: You allowed the Minister to refer to it.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The matter was first raised by an hon. member on Thursday night and I gave the Minister an opportunity to reply. No difficulty will be experienced by hon. members in discussing the matter fully in its right place.

Mr. DECKER: I will reserve my remarks on the subject until later.

Mr. LUCKINS (Maree) (11.46 a.m.): I should like the Minister to explain the reason for differential milk prices. I submitted a question to the Minister on this point but it was disallowed. Like many other hon. members, I am concerned at the position of the Deputy Prices Commissioner in Queensland. He is a State official holding a very responsible position and he should have some control of milk prices. The Minister should certainly have definite control of the Commissioner. In my opinion price-fixing to-day has got out of control, and I hope that the Minister will take some action, notwithstanding the fact that the Commonwealth Government always appear to enter into the subject.

The Secretary for Labour and Industry: It certainly is a Commonwealth matter.

Mr. LUCKINS: Who is to preserve the rights of the people of Queensland if we cannot get some control of prices? An unfortunate position has occurred to-day in price-fixing and it calls for public attention. If this Parliament cannot control it we should make a definite attempt to influence the Commonwealth Government in the matter.

Mr. L. J. Barnes: We should ask for our powers back again.

Mr. LUCKINS: We want to be in the position of being able to govern in the interests of the people of Queensland. We have instances of differentiation in prices of products in Queensland as compared with New South Wales. I refer to the fact that people are able to go from Queensland to New South Wales and buy commodities denied to Queenslanders who cannot do so. That is a very serious state of affairs, and calls for public attention and action and the only suitable method is action through representatives of the people in this Parliament. If they cannot rectify this unfortunate state of affairs there is something wrong with our system.

Mr. Collins: We were very effective recently in representations over the meat.

Mr. LUCKINS: If Parliament exists to act in the interests of the people there should be no necessity for calling attention to what is happening in other parts of Australia. I call attention to this matter from my sense of responsibility as a member of Parliament and I do it in the interests of the people to whom are denied commodities available to the people in New South Wales and Victoria. Are we to be on the same basis as other Australians, or are we to be denied the things available to them? That is a burning question, and one that should be answered as soon as possible, otherwise the difficulty will get beyond us. I know, and every hon. member in the Assembly knows, that what I say is true. One has only to go to Murwillumbah, in New South Wales, and one can buy commodities there—

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The supply of commodities is outside the scope of the debate.

Mr. LUCKINS: The Deputy Prices Commissioner is controlled by the Minister.

The CHAIRMAN: He does not control the supply of commodities.

Mr. LUCKINS: The control of price-fixing should be the concern of the Minister. I am going to pin the responsibility for his neglect in that regard on the Minister.

We have the spectacle in Brisbane of the different prices for the pint bottle of milk delivered in the metropolitan area, as fixed by the Commissioner. One is 4½d. and the other 4d., although both have the same quantity of the same milk in the same type of bottle. That calls for some action.

I draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that the Commonwealth controls the Apple and Pear Board, and the supply of fruit to this State is a serious reflection on that body.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The supply of commodities is entirely outside the scope of this discussion.

Mr. LUCKINS: The prices of commodities affects supplies to the people of this State. I should be glad to have an opportunity to speak on this matter because I believe it is a very serious one and calls for a debate. I feel it is time the Minister was in a position to make a statement here upon the whole question of prices. I do not want to delay the Committee by going into minor details, but I want to emphasise the seriousness of the matter.

In regard to the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act of 1941, the Minister went to a great deal of trouble—I think unnecessary trouble—in giving us a batch of figures showing the employment of people in Queensland in 1933 compared with now. Those figures were nothing more nor less than a compilation of statistics taken out of journals and records in the Parliamentary Library.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: Give me your copy and I can trace them.

Mr. LUCKINS: You can have my copy any time. Those figures convey nothing more to me than a mass of unnecessary propaganda. If the Government are desirous of finding employment for their people they can adopt other means than compiling a volume of figures, which is a mere waste of paper when paper is so scarce. Those statistics of 1933 do not apply to to-day. What has happened in the past is of no concern to me or the people of Queensland; it is what is going to happen in the future that concerns us. If the Government will lay down a policy so that apprentices are compulsorily put to trades rather than have the unions say how many apprentices may be employed to so many senior men in the trade we shall get somewhere. All we desire is to give the younger generation its right to learn a calling. That is one of the things that in the past have been denied to our young people—the right to go into professions and trades.

It is time the Government cleared the matter up in this State Parliament and made provision that every youngster attaining a certain age may be compulsorily put to some trade and the restrictions as we know them to-day shall not be permitted. The restrictions as to trades and professions are such that boys who want to enter trades are compelled to go away from their home towns on a very small wage and allowance not at all commensurate with the present high cost of living. Apprentices should be treated very liberally by the Government.

Then there is the education of apprentices, and the standard of the scholarship examination.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member will find that matter will be more in order under the votes for the Loan and Trust Funds of the Department of Public Instruction.

Mr. LUCKINS: I bow to your ruling, Mr. Brassington, and will deal with it then.

The supply of fish has a bearing on prices. I think the Minister has made an honest attempt to bring about desirable conditions in Queensland, but I respectfully suggest that the test of the value of a proposal is seen in the results it achieves.

We should like some explanation from the Minister on the Unemployment Insurance Act. There are no unemployed in Queensland to-day, but the Government are collecting contributions from the workers for that fund, which has a credit balance of £1,600,000. That is a large sum of money, and I can see no reason for accumulating deductions from wages for the purpose of relieving unemployment during the next two or three years, because the highest amount paid out by the Government in a year when unemployment was rife in Queensland was just over £500,000. Assuming that later we have to give relief to the unemployed, there is already a credit in the fund of £1,600,000, and that will be

sufficient for three years at the rate I have mentioned, even should no further moneys be forthcoming.

Mr. Devries: You would not like to see the fund smashed, would you?

Mr. LUCKINS: No, but I should like to see the right thing done in the interests of the community. Unfortunately, with these pin-pricking taxes the Government are taking all the time and giving nothing back. They should be abolished, and the people should be allowed to collect their rightful wages when there is no unemployment in the State. This question has agitated my mind for a long time and I should like the Minister to give some definite reason why the Government are still collecting these amounts when the fund is so much in credit, and when the money there, I take it, is bearing interest.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I draw the hon. member's attention to the fact that the operations of the Unemployment Insurance Fund must be discussed on the Loan and Trust Funds Estimates.

Mr. LUCKINS: Apparently all this administration comes under Loan and Trust Funds, and I hope the time allotted for a discussion on the Estimates will not expire before we have an opportunity of discussing them.

Mr. KERR (Oxley) (11.59 a.m.): I have no desire to say a great deal, but I wish to refer to a matter that has agitated hon. members. The control of ceiling prices to-day is a farce and has led to a fiasco. I realise that we are compelled to work under the National Security regulations, and some of these concern price control. The States have lost some of their sovereign rights, of course, purely on account of war conditions. There are those who hold that this is an advantage to the State in the general conduct of the war, but it has been proved that price control is seriously affecting the whole of the people of Queensland.

Mr. Collins: Lack of it would affect them a great deal more.

Mr. KERR: No. The point I wish to make is that the proper authority to control prices in Queensland is the Queensland State Government; they and nobody else should do that. I should say it would be in fairly good hands and certainly in much better hands than at present.

Mr. COLLINS (Cook) (12 noon): I was interested by the criticism of the hon. member for Oxley of the system of ceiling prices, which he says is a complete farce. I know that certain things go on, and they have to be corrected from time to time, but the Prices Commissioner is doing that, and to say that it is a farce suggests that we should be better off without any prices control.

Mr. Kerr: No. I qualified my remarks by saying that this State Government would handle it better.

Mr. COLLINS: This State Government were the pioneer of prices control in the Commonwealth, but when price control affects the whole of the Commonwealth there must be co-ordination on the matter between the States; otherwise chaos would result.

Mr. Kerr: Do you advocate the system as it is carried on now?

Mr. COLLINS: I am advocating nothing, except what I am saying. The hon. member knows very well that we cannot interfere with the transit of goods from other States; therefore, we must have control over the whole of the States.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. COLLINS: I was only trying to reply briefly to the hon. member for Oxley.

No-one seems to have given much consideration to the great reduction in the vote under discussion. The hon. member for Wynnum criticised it because he says there are still too many inspectors, but he did not say that last year 65 employees were covered by the principal vote and 161 by those of the sub-departments, as compared with 48 and 123 respectively this year. The number of employees has been reduced by approximately one-third.

Mr. Macdonald: That is what you would expect, is it not?

Mr. COLLINS: Yes, but we might as well admit that it has been done. I say the correct thing has been done, although an additional £25,000 worth of work has been imposed on us by the requirements of the Commonwealth Government under war-time conditions. Although we are doing a good deal of work for the Federal Government, the Minister has been able to effect a considerable reduction in the number of employees, and the vote has been reduced from £288,323 to £180,108—that is, by £108,215.

Mr. Macdonald: Do you argue that it was over-staffed before?

Mr. COLLINS: No. I am saying that as everyone is in employment, the Minister has done the right thing in reducing the employees required in his department as well as the money he is spending. The tone of the discussion has been that he is still spending approximately the same amount of money as he did before, and that is totally wrong.

Reference was made to the fact that the Unemployment Insurance Fund is in credit, but we all know that unemployment insurance has always been paid by those who are working.

The hon. member for Wynnum spoke about the reduced number of factories and shops. As it stands, his statement presupposes that, because there are not so many factories and shops, there are fewer employees; but that is entirely wrong. Although there are fewer factories and shops, the number of employees in Queensland has been increased by about 50 per cent. because of the great war industries, and everybody who is capable of working is in work. Consequently, more inspection work is required than previously.

The Minister is doing splendid work. He has much to do under the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act, which, in my opinion, is one of the more far-reaching pieces of legislation dealing with employment that have been brought down in any Parliament in Australia, and great credit is due to the Minister for the thought that has been put into it. So far we have not seen any very active operations under it, but as time goes on the Minister will require all the powers he has taken in order to cope with the position that will arise as soon as the war is over.

It will be necessary to get about 68 per cent. of the people of the Commonwealth back into normal employment and so anybody who thinks seriously of the situation—we should all do that—will realise that very great powers and very great administration qualifications will be necessary so that the people who have been displaced by war conditions will be able to return to normal work. The Act I have mentioned, with its very wide powers and wide range of control, will, we hope, go a long way towards helping, in conjunction with the Federal Government, to do the greatest work the States and the Commonwealth have ever been called upon to undertake—to return the people successfully to normal employment when the war with all its problems is over. Just when that will be we do not know, but let us hope it will be sooner than we expect. The Minister has shown enthusiasm, great consideration and tremendous industry in his ministerial position and I congratulate him on the excellent work he has done in the department that he so ably controls.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (12.9 p.m.): The hon. member for Maree asked a very pertinent question concerning price-fixation and suggested that possibly better results would have been achieved if the State had continued to control prices. It is a question of viewpoint. The Commonwealth Government realised that during the war period they had to endeavour to bring about some co-ordination throughout the Commonwealth and they decided to take control of prices themselves. Up to 26 February this year there had existed a system of dual control. I gave an explanation of that last Thursday but apparently the hon. member for Maree was away at the time.

Mr. Luckins: No, I was here and I heard what you said.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The whole position was altered in April, 1943, when all prices were pegged and the entire scheme brought under the control of the Commonwealth. The question who is to blame for the position that exists now in connection with meat, vegetables, or other products is beside the point. We must go back and discover who introduced price-fixing in Australia, and on investigation we find that prior to April, 1943, the system was one of price control and not price-fixation. It had been introduced by the Menzies Administration and it endeavoured,

under the administration of Professor Copland, to bring about a measure of control of prices in Australia. It provided that where there were any increased costs of production in industry all that the producer had to do was to submit documentary proof of the fact to Professor Copland and he was in duty bound under the Act to award an increased price for that commodity. No price-fixing authority could control prices under a scheme like that and the result was that prices went spiralling upwards until, just prior to the last Federal elections, they had increased by 25 per cent. compared with prices ruling at the beginning of the war. Just prior to the elections the Commonwealth Government decided that steps should be taken to alter the existing position and so the price-stabilising plan was put forward on top of the system of price control. That is the system that is being administered to-day and it has had the effect of reducing the cost of living generally. For instance, in July, 1943, the price index, weighted average for food and groceries, for five towns in Queensland, was 1008. In August, 1943, it stood at 958 points, a reduction of 50 points in the July-August period.

Mr. Nicklin: What brought that about?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The new stabilisation scheme.

Mr. Nicklin: The reductions in the prices of tea and potatoes.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: Those were some of the items.

Mr. Luckins: An election catch.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The result is that a definite reduction has been shown in the food prices index in this as well as other States of the Commonwealth. Certain anomalies have been created, it is true. As I pointed out, such anomalies existed in Great Britain, where they have a prices stabilisation scheme, so that adjustments had to be made there from time to time, and Canada met precisely the same problems as we are meeting in Australia to-day. There is evidence of a genuine desire by the Commonwealth authorities to adjust anomalies as they occur. Recently we had a visit from officers of the Australian Meat Industry Advisory Committee in regard to the prices of meat. Certain differential prices of meat exist throughout the Commonwealth, and immediately the matter to which I refer was brought under their notice these officials were on the spot. We have had an assurance from the Prime Minister that an adjustment in the prices will be made.

As time goes on we can expect that the prices stabilisation scheme will bring about definite results in the cost of living.

Mr. Muller: No doubt about that—at the expense of the grower.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: No, not at the expense of the grower.

Mr. Muller: My word, it is.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: As I understand the position, consideration is given the grower as well as the consumer.

Mr. Muller: Not much.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: It is being done by a unique method.

Mr. Macdonald: By the payment of subsidies.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: That is so, by the payment of subsidies. Instead of allowing the increased cost to be added to the price of the article the Commonwealth Government have adopted the system of subsidising industry, or the particular article affected. Consequently, the price level will be maintained at a reasonable point, which is preferable to the upward spiralling trend we observed prior to the last election. The gain to the community, no matter how we may look at it, is that money values are not depreciated, investments are not depreciated, and budgetary costs are not increased.

Increased budgetary costs were one of the greatest obstacles to the Commonwealth Government during the last financial year. I submitted a list of questions on the point I am discussing to the Director of the Bureau of Industry and Government Statistician, Mr. Colin Clark, to see what was the effect of the 16s. increase in the Commonwealth basic wage since the war to the employers throughout the Commonwealth. His reply was that the added cost to private employers and Governments was £55,000,000. There was no occasion for that increased cost. He also pointed out that the added cost to the Commonwealth Budget for the last financial year as a result of the increased wages then being paid, was £80,000,000. No-one can convince me that the subsidy system now being applied to hold the price level constant will run into £80,000,000. No matter what it runs into, it will be profitable to the Commonwealth Government and people.

Mr. Macdonald: Not the producers.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: Why not the producers? As Professor Copland pointed out in the course of his lecture in Brisbane, he has only to submit documentary evidence of price increases and the necessary adjustment will be made.

Mr. Macdonald: Do you believe that?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: Every effort is being made to accomplish that policy. Whether a sufficient price has been given for certain commodities is only a question of viewpoint. At least, an attempt is being made to give a fair deal to both producers and consumers; and no scheme will be successful unless that aspect is considered. Immediately a scheme has a demoralising effect on the producers of any commodity and tends to reduce it to an

uneconomic level, the producers will cease to produce that commodity.

Mr. Muller: That is happening.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: That is not happening.

Mr. Muller: It is happening.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The great difficulty we are up against in Australia to-day is not so much uneconomic price levels—it might be so in one or two cases—as the insufficiency of man-power in primary industries to enable production to be maintained. That also is being adjusted, according to Press statements, by the army's releasing men previously employed in primary industries, so that they might re-enter them.

Mr. Nicklin: But the release of man-power never gets past a Press statement.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: Possibly the Prime Minister finds himself faced with difficulties when he makes a move for the release of man-power from the army—if, for instance, he is told by those in authority that it would be dangerous to release them at the time. However, releases are being made of numbers that are thought sufficient to relieve the position for the time being.

I feel confident that as time goes on this new system of prices stabilisation will bring results. As I emphasised earlier, one must expect—and this has happened in other countries throughout the world where the system has been applied—an adjustment period. You have to get over that period and make adjustments accordingly. Somebody may be hurt during that transition period.

The publication of what is known as "Preliminary Economic Surveys of the 34 State Employment Exchange Districts" was undertaken principally to enable information to be supplied to the employment exchange boards that are now constituted throughout the State. It gives them an idea of the economic factors operating in their districts and their potentialities, from information supplied from the statistical records. A good deal of work was entailed in the compilation of that document, and it was felt that it would be useful to hon. members of this Assembly also. Consequently, a copy was sent to each of them. Since then it has been distributed to one or two other quarters, because we have had an unusual demand for copies of it. Those who have use for it realise that it is the only document of its kind in Queensland. No hon. member of this Assembly or any other body in the community could get the information contained in that compilation without doing a tremendous amount of work hunting up and correlating statistics. Sir Henry Tizard, a scientist visiting Australia on behalf of the British Government, saw a copy in the hands of the Governor and was so impressed with its value that he has written asking for a copy to be sent to him in London. There has been a great demand from university

students, and to meet it we sent a volume to the University library. The Geological Department was also supplied with a copy, and the Chief Government Geologist wrote in a complimentary strain thanking us for the volume he had received. These are typical of the reception it has received from other sources. The only adverse note that has been struck was by the hon. member for Maree.

The continuance of the unemployment insurance payments is a matter of Government policy. It is being done to make reasonable provision for the problems that will concern us in the post-war period. It is felt that with the moneys that are accumulating we can meet any difficulty that is likely to arise. I sincerely hope that if the organisation I am in charge of does its work thoroughly we shall be able to submit to the Government plans and recommendations that will enable them to submit to the Commonwealth National Works Council an adequate programme of works and at the same time ask for the necessary finance to enable them to carry out their programme. If we get the assistance that I think will be forthcoming from the Commonwealth Government, we shall be able to carry on here with very little unemployment at all.

At 12.23 p.m.,

Mr. FARRELL (Maryborough) relieved the Chairman in the chair.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: We shall be able to carry out one of the objectives of the Act—as near as possible to place every man who desires to work in employment—but should there be a slack period during which we have an unemployment problem to face, naturally the fund to which the hon. member refers will be useful.

We shall also be in the position under the Unemployed Workers Insurance Act to transfer certain of these moneys for the creation of employment, that is to say, we can borrow and apply them in conjunction with funds so raised to the creation of employment, just as we did during another period. But the main point is that there are no complaints from those paying this tax. It is only 6d. a week when all is said and done, and who misses the 6d. a week? The contributor knows that at some time or other he may be one of the victims who will require help, and it is rather interesting that although he may contribute at the rate of only 6d. a week, approximately £1 6s. in the year, should he become unemployed, he will probably draw the maximum amount allowed under the Act, which is three times his contributions. Any scheme that makes such a provision is certainly very wise and a good scheme. It is something of advantage to the worker. I emphasise that nobody but the hon. member for Maree has objected to the continuance of the collections.

Mr. Luckins: You had a deputation about it.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I have had no deputation.

The workers who are putting in the money are not complaining. A few employers who have to pay an additional 6d. a week may be grumbling, but the workers in the State generally are quite willing to make this contribution.

I think I have dealt with the main points raised by hon. members. Apprenticeship comes under another heading, that of the Department of Public Instruction, but for the benefit of the hon. member for Maree I might mention that already a move has been made by the Government to see whether it is possible to overhaul the whole of the system. Much will depend on the recommendations of the committee that will eventually be appointed. The fact remains, however, that irrespective of what is done and no matter what move is made we have to recognise union rights in this matter. These are soundly based and have been recognised for a number of years. The main principle always brought forward by union representatives is that one must be careful not to bring about such a position that the boy puts the father out of a job. Some employers would fill their shops with apprentices, thereby getting cheap labour, but the result would be that many tradesmen and adults working in these shops would be put out of a job eventually. As time goes on and it is found there is need for remodelling the system—one of the best in Australia—it will be done.

Mr. TURNER (Kelvin Grove) (12.28 p.m.): It is to be regretted that any hon. member in this Committee should make such a remark as that made by the hon. member for Wynnum this morning. He referred to departmental inspectors in the same way as he referred to them on Friday last. No section of officers in the Government service are doing a better job than these inspectors are doing and have been doing since the department was established. I have with me a list of the work these gentlemen have done in the collection of arrears of wages; for instance, when I spoke last on this vote I mentioned only one or two, but for the benefit of the Committee I will detail the arrears of wages these men have been responsible for recovering for employees who had been underpaid by unscrupulous employers over the past 10 years—

Year ended 30 June.	£
1933	6,853
1934	9,242
1935	11,999
1936	12,129
1937	11,913
1938	14,751
1939	16,225
1940	17,083
1941	17,930
1942	16,609
1943	9,370
Total	£144,104

At the present time, when almost everyone is able and willing to work in employment, there still remains the unscrupulous employer, who will, wherever possible, pay less than the award rate. The average over the 10 years

is approximately £14,400. The departmental inspectors are responsible for collecting these arrears of wages.

Mr. Macdonald: Not arrears of wages, under-payments.

Mr. TURNER: They are arrears of wages as well as under-payments, being less than the rates prescribed by the awards. If a person is entitled to a basic wage of £4 5s. a week and receives only £4 a week, then for every week that he is paid only the £4 his wages go into arrears to the extent of 5s. These are deliberate breaches of the award, and the unfortunate part of it is that under the Act the departmental officers have no right to claim more than six months' arrears of wages. Actually they can claim only 90 days, but may make application to the magistrates court and the magistrate can award the full amount if he so desires, but it has been the practice to grant only six months' arrears. Only last year the hon. member for Brisbane quoted a case in which persons set themselves out to defeat an award, with the result that the Act had to be amended. Not being satisfied to observe the Act in the spirit, these persons sought legal advice to evade it in the letter, and they succeeded. The Act had then to be amended to place a further check in their way.

Mr. Muller: Nobody would work for less than the award rate to-day.

Mr. TURNER: Then why is it that in the year ended 30 June last £9,370, was collected in arrears of wages? Most of those to whom the wages were due were young people who did not know what the award wage was. It is only when the inspector goes round that these things are discovered. The inspector does his job in a very decent way. When he finds breaches he approaches the employer properly and occasionally the arrears are made up by the decent employer without further ado. Quite often they are the result of oversight.

Mr. Nicklin: It is often misinterpretation of the award, is it not?

Mr. TURNER: Not very often. Occasionally it is, and when I say "occasionally" I mean that one in 100 would make a mistake, and the mistake is rectified immediately the inspector points it out.

(Time expired.)

Mr. MULLER (Fassifern) (12.33 p.m.): The Minister spent a great deal of time in endeavouring to justify the present system of price-fixation. I am not foolish enough to expect that in war-time you can carry on without some system of prices adjustment, and I see no reason why anybody should be permitted to exploit the community for his own personal advantage, but if ever there was an ill-conceived set of plans it is the present system operating throughout Queensland and Australia with relation to the fixation of prices. Recently we spent a good deal of time in discussing ceiling prices. One mistake the Queensland Prices Branch continues to make is that nothing is done for the

man who carries meat, for example, or any other foodstuff through a boom period and releases it during a lean period. This morning the Minister endeavoured to reply to the statement by the hon. member for Wynnum about potatoes. That is why there are no potatoes now. That is why there is no meat now. Unless someone will take care of the cattle and carry them into the lean periods there will continue to be a shortage of meat, and no-one will do that unless some provision is made for him. The man who fattens cattle in February, March, April, and May usually sells them off immediately afterwards. If no provision is made for encouraging him to carry them through until September, October, and November it is only common sense to expect that there will be a shortage at that time of the year.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: They have not got any fat cattle.

Mr. MULLER: Why? They sold them early. Neither the Minister nor I, if we had fat cattle in March, April, or May would carry them through until August, September, and October if we were going to get no more money for them.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: But your cattle fall off during the winter months.

Mr. MULLER: That is so every year at this time. Cattle would be withheld until this time of the year only if there was some inducement to do it. Some people will do it. They would either fatten their stock on feed they have cultivated or reduce the numbers to carry them through to this period, but they would do that only if they are compensated for it. In fact, some did do that and were compensated, but when these amateur Prices Commissioners began to exercise their powers they neglected to do anything for these people, with the result that cattle are not being carried through.

My first objection to the price was that there was no variation for the different periods of the year. If a grower is not to be compensated for carrying his produce through from a boom period to a lean period, he will not do so, and thus there will be no produce for the lean period. That is one reason why cattle have gone from Queensland to New South Wales in large numbers in the early part of the year. The owners knew that they could sell their cattle and get the ceiling price and that there was no need to carry them on until later in the year in order to earn a better price. The result is that there a shortage of meat to-day.

The same applies to every other product. The Minister said in reply to the hon. member for Wynnum that there were no potatoes to-day. Those of us who grow potatoes know that we can keep potatoes from the potato season until about September and October, if we are compensated for it. But that is the trouble. The potatoes lose weight, and some of them rot, and if the grower is not compensated for keeping them he will not do it. For instance, no-one would expect

me to hold my potatoes when I can get £16 a ton for them now, and only £16 a ton if I hold them until later, especially as in the meantime they are likely to lose weight. That is the weakness of the present arrangement, and it is the cause of the shortage, but no provision is made to guard against it. The Minister said that these things adjust themselves, that if the price was fixed too low the producer would cease to produce. That is actually what is happening.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: I said that it was a factor that would have to be recognised by the price-fixing authorities.

Mr. MULLER: The Minister may put whatever construction he likes on it, but unless greater consideration is given to this aspect of the problem there will be a shortage of produce. Only in this morning's paper the following report appeared:—

“Drop in Australia's Butter Yield.

“Canberra, Monday.—A decrease in Australia's butter production is revealed in the monthly dairy summary released to-day.

“Production from 1 July to the end of August amounted to 15,385 tons—a decrease of more than 600 tons compared with that for the corresponding period of last year, which amounted to 21,878 tons.

“Production for July this year was 7,150 tons compared with 10,302 tons in July last year. The figure for August this year was 8,235 tons, or more than 3,000 tons below the production for August last year.

“The total cheese production for the period from 1 July to the end of August amounted to 4,025 tons compared with 5,325 in the corresponding period of last year. Production for July was 1,746 tons compared with 2,346 in July last year. The August figures were 2,279 compared with 2,989 in August last year.

“Queensland's butter production for July and August was 3,882 tons, or 3,401 tons less than for the same period of 1942.”

(Time expired.)

Vote (Department of Labour and Employment—Chief Office) agreed to.

THE CO-ORDINATION OF EMPLOYMENT FACILITIES ACT OF 1941.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (12.39): I move—

“That £3,596 be granted for ‘The Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act of 1941.’”

This Act, which was passed in 1941, was not proclaimed until 1 October, 1942, and then only Parts I., II., and III. were proclaimed. The significance of the legislation should be apparent to everyone. For instance, under the Labour Exchanges Act of 1915, which is substantially changed by the

new legislation, the department was concerned only with placing men in employment following the receipt of an order for employment for Government departments, a constructing authority, or private employers, and so the men were sent to the various jobs in accordance with a priority established by the receipt of orders for such employment. The new duties are greatly enlarged by the new Act which requires that a plan shall be devised for the purpose of providing maximum employment for all workers—civilians, returned men, munition workers, and others.

In addition, there is provision for submission to the appropriate authorities of national works and other suitable projects, while with the approval of the Governor in Council the State Employment Council can collaborate with the Commonwealth Government in respect of works generally, particularly in matters of a war and post-war character. The Act also provides for the co-ordination of employment-placing agencies controlled by the State and the supervision of employment exchange boards. The Council will also consider recommendations from boards and committees for the encouragement of measures to obtain maximum work opportunities, for re-training where necessary of returned soldiers, sailors, and airmen, and workers generally, the consideration of matters relating to the spread of employment throughout the State, the organisation of the labour market, co-operation with the Juvenile Employment Bureau, the Apprenticeship Executive, and Department of Public Instruction respecting problems of youth employment. It also aims by disseminating information at improving industrial relationships between the workers and employers. It will also advise unemployed workers of the location of possible employment, and encourage the establishment of mutual welfare committees, &c. Other matters coming within the council's purview include industrial hygiene, the classification of occupations, industrial efficiency of the community, &c.

The Committee will see that the duties outlined in the measure are very extensive. Naturally, they will fully engage the State Employment Council, which is the central and pivotal organisation, together with the committees established by it. It will have a great deal to do in the future. For instance, Queensland boasts of a high industrial code as compared not only with other States, but some other countries. That code is of a very high standard. Naturally there is a relationship between it and the organisation under the Act, and therefore we can describe this new measure as a legislative complement to our industrial code, because good conditions of employment without employment itself are of little avail to the average man. The main object of the Act is as far as possible to improve the employment position in the community so that workers will be kept in continuous work. We know what conditions have prevailed in the past. From time to time we have witnessed men willing to work and youths leaving school also willing to work and

parents worried over what was going to happen to them, and nothing but relief work was forthcoming. We are endeavouring to change that position. Time alone will tell whether it will be possible to do so, but we are making a genuine attempt to do so.

The machinery for planning employment for the future has already been set up. Co-ordination is the keynote of the Act. That co-ordination will extend to works planning, employment agencies, employers and employees, and other instrumentalities. Our first step was to set up the necessary employment exchange boards throughout the State. They are doing some very fine work in endeavouring to implement the principle of the right to work. Only to-day I received a letter from a friend of mine who happens to be chairman of one of the boards. It is gratifying to read the many useful suggestions contained in the proposals that have already been submitted to the State Employment Council. The staff, consisting of the Director of Employment and one assistant only, are doing very effective work, in collaboration with the Bureau of Industry and other governmental departments in classifying these proposals under their proper headings. The works proposals will be brought before the chairman of the Works Committee.

Mr. Luckins: Are those Government works?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: Government works and local-authority works that will be created by these organisations.

Mr. Luckins: Will you control them?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: No. We have endeavoured throughout the measure to establish co-ordination between local authorities and the Government. When that information is compiled we shall be able at least to inform the municipal authorities throughout the State as to the extent of the employment that it is necessary to create in the community to place in employment those that are seeking it.

Mr. Macdonald: And you can force them to undertake that work, too.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I do not think we shall endeavour to do that. We can at least make a recommendation to a local authority that it carry out certain work in its locality in conjunction with governmental work or in conjunction with some big national work that may be going on in the State so that it may at least do its little bit towards realising the objective I have described—the right to work, which is the birthright of every man. It is the duty of the Government to endeavour by way of organisation to bring that about. Time will tell whether we do an effective job of planning and co-ordination between all the instrumentalities throughout the State; at least we can try.

Mr. Luckins: What if the Commonwealth Government conflict with your authority?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: There is provision in the

Act to refer national projects to the Commonwealth Government. I do not think there will be much conflict with the Commonwealth Government who realise if they are going to carry out an effective programme of employment for the enormous number of men who will be seeking work at the end of hostilities, they must have the fullest co-operation of the various States throughout the Commonwealth. If we have an efficient planning organisation in this State doing effective work through the various committees the Commonwealth will co-operate with us and we in turn will be useful to the Commonwealth in placing before it particulars as to the number of persons in this State who must be employed, and in regard to housing, public, municipal, and other works, and generally the various projects that could be carried out if the necessary finance is available. The Commonwealth Government will be in a position to help State Governments and municipalities considerably.

Mr. Luckins: And private enterprise.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: And private enterprise, yes. I have in mind that a few years ago during the depression period, when the Moore Government were in power in this State—

Mr. Luckins: Why bring that up? Can you not leave it out?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I am not mentioning it for propaganda purposes, but I refer to it to emphasise that in the last year of the Moore Government the Commonwealth Loan Council allowed them only £2,500,000 for public works. Whether they asked for more or not I do not know; but that was the total of the amounts allocated to them by the Commonwealth and the amount available from their own resources for expenditure on a public-works programme in this State.

Mr. Muller: The same thing applied throughout Australia.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I know that the policy during that period was to cut to the bone and to restrict purchasing power as far as possible.

The Minister for Transport: False economy.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: In the hope that they would be able to balance the budgets of the Commonwealth, which was false economy, as the Minister for Transport interjects. It was not till later when that policy was altered that we found a greater amount being expended not only in this State, but by every other State, and the Commonwealth, on public works designed to create and stimulate employment throughout the Commonwealth. If one studies the Commonwealth Year Book or the Queensland statistics, no matter what page one turns to, one finds that there was an upward trend generally in business and in the share-price index as a result of the new purchasing power that was placed in the hands of the workers

by way of wages. That policy is now being generally recognised by economists in Australia, whereas many previously supported the opposite policy.

For instance, the general manager of the Bank of New South Wales, when asked to deliver two of the John Murtagh Macrossan lectures, advocated practically the same policy as has been followed from 1932 to date. It has been a very successful one. From the announcements made by the Prime Minister, the Commonwealth Treasurer, and other Federal Ministers we can naturally expect that the Commonwealth Government will make moneys available in the coming peacetime for employment, just as they were in the period of war for the purpose of producing the munitions of war. If that is so and if we have the organisation necessary to submit our requirements to them, we can expect their co-operation in the carrying out of a programme that will place the maximum number of men in employment in this State. On the committees I have referred to there are some excellent gentlemen with the requisite background of experience. For instance, the Co-ordinator-General of Public Works, Mr. Kemp, is chairman of the Works Committee. Mr. Kemp has an excellent team with him and with their experience we naturally hope that he will be able to submit to the State Employment Council a programme that will at least meet the requirements of this State. Other gentlemen connected with State departments are in charge of other committees. Mr. McCracken, the Public Service Commissioner, is chairman of the committee to deal with re-employment of returned soldiers, sailors, munition workers, and others in the community. This committee is to deal with the re-training of workers also. Mr. Edwards, Director-General of Education, is in charge of the Youth Employment Committee. Mr. Colin Clark, of the Bureau of Industry, is in charge of the committee dealing with the development of industry, and Mr. Sorensen is chairman of the labour committee. With the combined experience of these committees I feel confident in predicting that they will render great service to the State. At the present time they have not reached the stage of making recommendations to the Government. Their present work is exploratory work and collection of data. I feel that in time this measure will result in much good to the people of this community and will be of great assistance to the Commonwealth Government in carrying out what is known as the rehabilitation programme in the post-war period.

At 2.15 p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

Mr. BRAND (Isis): The Minister's address this morning indicated quite clearly that it was the intention of the Government, through its employment exchange boards appointed under the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act, to endeavour to build up industries in this State in order to provide employment in the post-war years. He remarked that we had a high code of indus-

trial conditions here, but that high code was of little use if there was no employment for the people. I agree with him. It is the duty of Parliament to see to it that plans are prepared for finding employment for the people in the immediate post-war years, and so that the good conditions that we claim to have may be availed of by a happy and contented people.

Employment is vital if our people are to be happy and contented, but I have not heard one word from the Minister that would indicate how it is going to be possible to embark on the undertakings that have been submitted by the various employment exchange boards throughout the State. Where is the money coming from? He did say that plans have been prepared for submission to the Commonwealth Government. I should like to know if preparations have actually been made for undertaking certain works in the event of certain happenings. In this country, approximately 90 per cent. of the people who earn wages are employed by private enterprise, and I should say that one of the first steps towards attaining complete employment in the post-war years would be to encourage private enterprise to prepare plans for post-war undertakings.

Mr. Collins: They are co-opted under the Act.

The Attorney-General: Working in co-operation with the others.

Mr. BRAND: Now we are hearing something from two men behind the Minister, yet there is nothing on record to show that since its inception this department has called private industry together with a view to encouraging it to prepare post-war plans. That has not been done here or anywhere else in Australia. It has been done in Great Britain and in other British communities, and it is important that in post-war planning private enterprise should recognise its obligations to the community. I am wondering whether we are going to fool the people on this question of co-ordination of industrial employment. We may fool Parliament, but it is not right that we should fool the people. We have heard that plans for undertakings involving an expenditure of £15,000,000 have been prepared by another Minister's department, but we do not know how it is going to be made possible for these undertakings to be launched. I only hope that the Minister's earnest desire to have these works carried out is fulfilled. I understand that already he has received suggestions from the employment exchange boards in connection with many schemes, both large and small, by which employment could be created for those who will require it in post-war years. All I know is that in none of the Estimates of any of the departments do we find that any money is being made available under any heading that will indicate to the people that any useful schemes will be established to ensure continuity of employment.

The Secretary for Public Lands: You would not expect all those items to appear on the Estimates now?

Mr. BRAND: The hon. gentleman is quite right when he says that I should not expect to see all those items on the Estimates now, but I would remind him that apart from the salary of the Director and a few members of the staff, amounting to a few thousand pounds, there is nothing to indicate that the Government intend to carry out the many projects that have been suggested. There are two employment exchange boards covering a very large area, up to 5,000 square miles, in my electorate, and they have submitted many proposals to the Government.

Mr. Riordan: You are fortunate; I have only one in mine.

Mr. BRAND: I have two and they have submitted a number of proposals. I should like to have some information from the Minister that money will be found to carry out these works so as to ensure good employment for the people. There is no use in our expecting the Commonwealth Government to do the work when we, too, as a State Parliament, have a responsibility to the people. After all, the Commonwealth Government have many obligations to the country, but we have our responsibility and our obligations, and one of them is to see that every man who requires work has the opportunity to get it when the war is over. Many instrumentalities have been set up and they have provided employment in this war period because they are associated with the defence of this country, but when the war is over and the work that they are doing now is no longer necessary, the real problems will arise, and so I appeal to the Minister to endeavour to have proposals ready whereby these men will be assured of work under good conditions with good wages based upon Australian industrial standards. Sometimes I wonder whether our much-vaunted working conditions are really as good as we claim them to be. The Americans who are here do not think that they are better than their industrial conditions in the United States, but on the contrary say that theirs are better than ours.

Mr. Moore: Very few.

Mr. BRAND: They contend that their conditions are better than ours. This we do know, that the wages standard of the Americans is twice that in our own country. It is our duty as public men to try to lift the standard of employment and the conditions relating to employment. I sincerely hope that the new organisation that has been set up will fulfil the purpose for which it is intended.

Mr. Theodore: The most important thing will be to finance the organisation.

Mr. BRAND: That is so. As the hon. member for Herbert says, we shall require finance to carry out these projects. Finance will be essential. We cannot give employment unless we can obtain finance to carry out the necessary work. I want to say emphatically that the Director of Employment should at least try to urge upon private industry that it has an obligation, just as

the State has, to plan for the period of post-war reconstruction, so that private industry might expand its capacity and thereby provide even a greater measure of employment than hitherto. We know that a former member of this Parliament was eager to increase employment in his own factory and we know to what extent he was encouraged by the Federal authorities. We know that encouragement was withheld from him.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: He was out to make a lot of political propaganda.

Mr. BRAND: Does the hon. gentleman by that interjection mean that he supports the Federal Government in their action in denying that right?

The Secretary for Public Instruction: I say that Mr. Bruce Pie was out to make propaganda.

Mr. BRAND: I was wondering whether the hon. gentleman was, by his interjection, standing behind the action of the Federal Government.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. BRAND: I do not think any hon. member in this Chamber would endorse the treatment meted out to Mr. Bruce Pie, who was eager to give employment in Queensland to Queensland workers. We are a responsible Parliament and should be able to do certain things ourselves. When a certain measure reacted detrimentally to the State's interests recently this Parliament took action, with some result, I understand, from reading this morning's Press. That is excellent. We are a responsible Parliament, and if we take action we can obtain some relief for the people. We must not sit down and take what is coming to us. Can we in future expect the help we should have from a Federal Government who already have refused to co-operate with industries that have endeavoured to carry out excellent work for this State?

I urge the Minister to co-ordinate the efforts of private enterprise and State activities to create employment and thus endeavour to reach the goal of providing that measure of employment which will give us a contented people.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (2.28 p.m.): I want to point out to the hon. member for Isis that in my former remarks I purposely emphasised that Commonwealth assistance to the State was bound up with the scheme of the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act. Co-operation and collaboration with Commonwealth authorities are contemplated with the object of embarking on schemes to provide employment, particularly in this State. We are looking forward in the post-war era, when dealing with the Commonwealth Government, to obtaining sufficient funds from the Loan Council with which a programme of work can be undertaken for the employment of the man-

power of this State. That was the only link with the Commonwealth Government I referred to. I feel from the remarks already made by Commonwealth Ministers, including the Prime Minister, that the necessary funds will be made available to finance any proper programme of works in the post-war period.

The mere fact that we have representatives of the employers on the 34 employment exchange boards throughout the State and on the State Employment Council is sufficient evidence of our desire to co-operate with private industry in post-war planning. Naturally, we expect private industry to do its part in the creation of employment. I might mention that in the United States of America 48 States have already created work-planning departments. They began planning a little ahead of Queensland, and they have already reached a point at which they have adopted definite plans of work and finance for the post-war era. Private enterprise, including the General Electric Company and other big firms, have already contributed to that planning by seeing to it that certain commodities they already produce, in addition to new commodities, will be manufactured on an increasing scale in the post-war period, thus expanding the avenues of employment. I read recently that a big building corporation has already investigated designs for homes to meet the big building programme in the post-war period. It has incorporated many labour-saving devices in these designs with the object of bringing the cost within the reach of the ordinary man. There we have an example of private citizens taking their part in post-war planning. They realise that they have a duty by the people in addition to that of improving the revenue returns. I take it that private enterprise in this State will also adopt some system of planning to provide for the period that will follow the cessation of hostilities. If they do not and they lag behind their business will, because of their neglect, go to their competitors in other States.

As was pointed out by the hon. member for Isis, we have already received from the various employment exchange boards—including those in his district—some very fine proposals for the extension of existing industries, new settlement, irrigation, the damming of rivers, and increasing the population in their respective areas. They have submitted also projects from municipalities and other sources that could be undertaken in their areas. Some time ago we already had a public-works programme that could not possibly be completed in one year, and naturally the task of the works committee will be to collate these schemes under their proper headings and work out a system of priorities. For instance, it will be necessary to make up the first year's programme for submission to the Chief Secretary, and in doing so it will have to consider what works are the most urgent and what may be undertaken during the second year and so on. As a result of the efforts of members of the various committees in dealing with the matters that come under their jurisdiction I think we can confidently look for-

ward to having a programme ready for the people of this State when hostilities end.

The problems will be enormous. One has only to visualise the many hundreds of thousands of men who will be released from the employment they have been following for the past few years and who will have to be drafted into peace-time employment. It will need a tremendous programme. We have some knowledge already of what will be required to meet certain circumstances and we are not jibbing or holding back, we are really trying to solve some of the problems that we know will confront us. For instance, recently we had a submission from Mr. Colin Clark, through the Premier, that we should go into the question what we can do in the post-war period to supply tradesmen for the building programme that will confront us. Mr. Colin Clark pointed out that before the war there were arrears in repairs and building, although we thought we had sufficient tradesmen at that time. Four years of arrears have accumulated since the beginning of hostilities, and basing our calculations on the demand of previous years, we arrive at an estimate of what will be required to meet the demands for home-building when peace arrives. The arrears of repairs to existing buildings throughout the State will run into tremendous figures. Factory buildings generally, for instance, will need repairing or renewing. Summing it all up, it is expected that we shall require in the vicinity of at least 22,000 tradesmen—carpenters, painters, plumbers, electricians, and others. At the beginning of hostilities we had only about 13,000 to 15,000 tradesmen in this State. Where are we going to find the balance? We cannot at the present time because we have not got the youth available to improve the apprenticeship position or increase the number of apprentices in the building trade; and in any case, building is not being proceeded with. We have to see whether the industrial organisations of this State will co-operate, as they have co-operated during the war period with regard to a system of dilutees, to lift unskilled labour to a higher status to enable it to take part as tradesmen in the new building programme. We have to go into the question of what facilities we have at our technical colleges and in private industry for training men immediately hostilities end to bring them up to tradesmen's status so that the required number will be available. I feel that we shall be able to do something. There may be a lag for a while but I feel that the industrial organisations will co-operate with us in trying to solve the problem.

Eventually we shall be able to meet the position that will confront us. There are many other similar problems; for instance, the arrears of work in our transport system that have accumulated during the war period. One can point to similar conditions in almost every industry that will need some attention or, as it were, rejuvenation, to enable them to meet the demands that will be placed on them during the post-war period.

I feel that as time goes on the organisation that we have established will endeavour to cope with many of the problems hon. members

are aware must be dealt with. The committees and boards are settling down to their jobs. For instance, each committee knows exactly the field of exploration in which it has to work. A scheme of action was adopted at the first meeting of the State Employment Council—of course, based on the powers contained in the Act—and each committee knows what it has to do, and, as I said, is settling down to the task of doing it. Real enthusiasm has been displayed by hon. members of the House, particularly on this side, in a desire to take part in this big scheme. Efforts are being made to see to it that they have an opportunity to play their part in arranging the plans necessary to provide employment for our people in the future.

Mr. Massey: Are you giving that opportunity to members of both sides of the House?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: Up to the present, requests have come from members on this side only. If hon. members opposite feel that they want to take part in this work and make a request, the matter will receive consideration.

The hon. member for Isis can rest assured that this organisation will, with the powers conferred on it, do its best to meet all the difficulties that we are aware will confront us, and there is confidence that in the near future we shall have something tangible with which the Government will be ready to cope with the problems of the post-war period.

Mr. LUCKINS (Maree) (2.42 p.m.): I should like to ask the Minister what he proposes to do in the meantime with the item "Contingencies, £2,000." This is a rather large amount in comparison with the amount of £1,596 for salaries and wages. The hon. gentleman sang a great song about proposals and the interest of people in employment in the post-war period of Queensland, but I remind him that under an Act passed by the Parliament of this State, provision has already been made for industry. I refer to the Bureau of Industry Act. The Act the hon. gentleman has been talking about is merely taking from one department that has the necessary facilities to act and creating another, which I cannot see will serve any more useful purpose than was served by the Bureau of Industry. That was a wonderful institution in supporting private industry by financing operations in Queensland. It worked very successfully. It is time the Government catered more for private industry than by giving it the knock-backs it has been receiving by way of legislation over the past few years.

The Minister is also broadcasting what the Government are proposing to do in housing schemes. Many problems have to be solved in the housing of our community. Nothing is more acceptable to a worker than a reasonable home in which to rear his children under reasonable conditions. I spoke on this matter some time ago in the debate on the Address in Reply, and was told that there was a State department administering the building of workers' dwellings and workers' homes.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. LUCKINS: As the Minister mentioned the housing scheme, I should like to draw his attention to the departments that have been provided by law to provide these facilities at the present time, and the creation of this new department and loading it with a number of officials will mean an increased cost to the State. The department administering workers' dwellings could deal with the building of homes for the workers. I think this is just an instance of the thing about which the Minister and the Labour Party are chiefly concerned—the socialisation of this State. If the Minister is fair, he will tell us that this Government have the urge to socialise most things. We know private enterprise has built up this State, and the workers have received a fairly good deal from private enterprise. The Minister's sugar-coated proposal is nothing more nor less than a new form of State enterprises from which this State has suffered to the extent of losing £5,000,000.

I can see that the Labour Party have it in mind to "have another go" at this form of enterprise and show the public that they still maintain that socialisation is essential—and it is, of course, part of their platform. I counsel the Minister to go very carefully with this proposal and to take the leaders of industry in this State into his confidence, so that he may have the benefit of drawing from their vast storehouse of experience and so avoid a recurrence of what happened in State enterprises of earlier years when the taxpayers of Queensland were called upon to foot the bill after the disastrous ending of many unhappy ventures.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (2.46 p.m.): Answering the hon. member's question with respect to contingencies, I should like to say that although £2,000 was allocated for this purpose last year, only £378 was expended. The boards began operations late in the year. This year we expect to have a full year's operations, and we think that £2,000 will be adequate to meet any likely contingencies. For the hon. member's information, let me say that there are such things as car hire, Commonwealth pay-roll tax, equipment, incidentals, motor-car allowance, newspapers and journals, overtime, postages, printing and stationery, railway fares, special service allowances, telephones, tram fares, and travelling expenses. The only fees that are being paid to members of this huge organisation are travelling expenses. Last year only £23 was spent under this heading. At this stage we do not know exactly what the contingencies will be, but £2,000 is being made available for this purpose. I might say that under the regulations, travelling expenses and no other fees will be paid to members of the employment exchange boards or the State Employment Council.

Mr. Edwards: How many are in the organisation now?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: At present we have on

the staff an acting director of employment and his assistant, and it is intended to obtain a clerk and clerk-typist for this financial year. There are only two on the staff at the present time, and I can assure any hon. member who cares to make an inspection that he will find that a tremendous amount of work has been done by these two men. They know their jobs and they are enthusiastic.

So far as the hon. member's other remarks are concerned, he is merely endeavouring to find a nigger in the wood-pile. I assure him that there is no nigger in the wood-pile, but that this is a genuine attempt by the State to do the right thing and to be prepared for the post-war period, and at least he should give us credit for that. Later, after the committees have had time to deal with some of the works that come within their jurisdiction, we shall be able to say whether they have done their work faithfully and well or whether they have neglected their duty.

Mr. Luckins: What about the Bureau of Industry?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: It is carrying out very effective work at the present time, and is collaborating with this department to the fullest possible extent. Much of the work of compiling statistics and preparing the record that the hon. member said was such a waste of time was done by the Bureau of Industry.

The whole idea behind this legislation is the co-ordination of effort—the co-ordination of the various departments in preparing for the post-war period.

Mr. Luckins: Are you going to carry that out with the returned soldiers who are here now?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: We have not been called upon as yet to deal with the employment of returned soldiers. The Commonwealth Government have taken that task upon themselves, and up to date they have been able to place all returned men either in war industries or undertakings associated with war production, and they have been able to do that without any help. We are playing our part through the officers who have been seconded to the Commonwealth service from the State employment exchanges.

I feel confident that hon. members realise that it is too early to expect a cut and dried plan to be presented. These things take time, they take weeks. Many problems will have to be tackled calling for weeks and weeks of hard work and research by the various officers who will later have to collaborate with experts on the various questions before any permanent opinion can be formed as to what line of action is necessary. It is not to be expected that a cut and dried post-war plan can be presented to Parliament in a few months, and I am surprised that hon. members should suggest that it can be done.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba) (2.52 p.m.): The sum of £3,596, which we are asked to appropriate in this vote, is not a great amount of money but the work this sub-department is

undertaking, is supposed to undertake, and will undertake in the future according to the Minister, is very great, and no doubt we shall see considerably larger sums than the present one on the Estimates for this purpose in the future.

Hon. members conversing in loud tones—

The CHAIRMAN: Order! There is altogether too much noise in the Committee. I ask that the Leader of the Opposition be allowed to make his speech without interruption.

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. NICKLIN: It is two years since Parliament passed the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act, but judging by the flourish of trumpets with which it was introduced—

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: I was quite modest.

Mr. NICKLIN: I remember the hon. gentleman speaking here for goodness knows how many hours and on the least possible excuse he would get up and point out the virtues of the Act. Exactly what has happened since the Act was passed? Up to date, we have had the appointment of a number of committees, but not one of them has yet presented a report showing what it has done or what findings it has arrived at. If the committees are to be of any value, then they should present an annual report to Parliament so that Parliament can examine the work they are doing and judge of the merits of the projects which they suggest should be recommended to the Minister. If we cannot get those reports, what value will the committees be? The Act has a high-sounding title, but we have become used to the titles given to legislation introduced by the Minister. The Co-ordination of Employment Facilities is an appropriate name for the job I take it these committees are to undertake, but we do not want highfalutin names; we do not want secret committees; what we want is information and action, particularly action. The only action we have had up to date in connection with this Act has been the presentation to hon. members and to other people interested of a compilation of statistics for the areas in which the boards operate. These statistics are interesting to read, but I question their value very much. For instance, they are based on the 1933 census, ten years old, and are brought up to date by a process of reckoning that may or may not be correct. However, I am not a great deal concerned about that because they are to a certain extent a guide to the committees and boards in the various parts of the State, but they are of no real value up to date. The committees of the council are under the chairmanship of particularly capable men. For instance, the Works Committee is under the chairmanship of Mr. Kemp, and where could you get a better man for the job than Mr. Kemp? However, he has innumerable jobs to do at present; in fact, he is doing more work than one man should be expected to do, and I say without hesitation there is

no other public servant in the State who has the capacity to undertake the great amount of work Mr. Kemp is doing to-day. However, when he is relieved of his present war-time responsibilities, he will be able to give attention to the work of the important committee of which he is the chairman.

The Minister mentioned that these committees had made various investigations, but what can we see of their work up to date? If we examine the Financial Statement presented to Parliament by the Treasurer we find that the Government's outlook revolves entirely round a system of public works in the post-war reconstruction period. If that is the outlook of the Government it will not, I say definitely, bring about the development of this State as we should like. There is a definite place for private enterprise in post-war development of this State. Individual enterprise and effort will be required then, but unfortunately the Government have not taken that fact into account; if they have, they have kept it dark. The only thing they have brought to light so far is the policy of a system of public works. Public works are necessary, but they are not the be-all and end-all in post-war rehabilitation. They are subsidiary to the industry of the people. We should build our policy of post-war reconstruction round a properly planned and co-ordinated system of public works to help and encourage individual enterprise. After all, has the State through its efforts in constructing public works been responsible for the entire development of Queensland up to the present time? Emphatically no. Without individual effort and enterprise Queensland would not have been developed as it is at present. We have to recognise this fact if we are to bring about a properly planned and co-ordinated policy for reconstruction.

I am very disappointed to think that the Minister, in his many speeches—he has made three already and probably will make another three or four before the vote is passed—has made no mention about the part individual enterprise is to play in the post-war reconstruction period. A committee for the encouragement of industry has been established under the chairmanship of Mr. Colin Clark. What has that committee done up to date? What investigations has it made? No doubt it has made some investigations, but why keep them secret? Under the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act these committees have some responsibility not only to the Government but to this Parliament. Therefore, they should make public reports, reports available to this Parliament, to give hon. members an opportunity of examining the results of their work when the relevant vote is being considered. I emphasise again, and emphasise very strongly, that these committees should publish an annual report of their investigations for the benefit of Parliament.

We have also heard very little from the Minister as to what has been done up to the present for the rehabilitation of members of our fighting services in civilian life following the declaration of peace. As you know, Mr. Brassington, an amendment submitted by the

Opposition was included in this Act so that this might be duly taken into account. This is something that should be considered at the moment. Hon. members are entitled to know what progress is being made by the various sub-committees operating under this Act. During this session I asked the Minister a question to which he gave a negative reply. I should certainly like to know just what is being done by any sub-committee or by the Minister in accordance with the Act in connection with this particularly important question of the rehabilitation of our returned soldiers, sailors, airmen, and women.

The Government have appointed members of their own party to the various sub-committees acting under the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act. Do hon. members opposite claim to have all the knowledge necessary to deal with this important subject? Although the numerical strength of the Opposition is small there are nevertheless one or two of its members who are entitled to appointment on these committees.

A Government Member: You did not ask for representation.

Mr. NICKLIN: There is no provision in the Act that I could find that enables members of Parliament to be included in those committees; if there is, no doubt the Opposition will be well to the fore in asking for due recognition. But is this Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act going to be a political Act? That is what it looks like at the present time, because only one section of political thought appears on the sub-committees. If it is to be something for the benefit of the State, and if members of Parliament are to be included on those committees, all political sections should have equal rights and should be appointed on an equal basis to serve on these committees. Otherwise members of the Government will find it difficult to convince the people that this Act is for the benefit of the State rather than something introduced for their own political ends.

THE SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (3.5 p.m.): The attitude of the Opposition on this matter appears to be quite in keeping with the expressions of the hon. member for Hamilton as they were given to "Truth" newspaper during the week-end. In the course of his remarks about the ideal party, the hon. member for Hamilton had this to say—

"The Opposition, as it is constituted at present, does not move with the times. It opposes social welfare legislation automatically; it resists industrial welfare legislation out of hand, no matter what its merits may be. It has the anti-Labour complex so developed that it lacks perspective and proportion in its pre-conceived notions of what Labour should have. Its attitude to unemployment and relief legislation in the depression typifies its unprogressive outlook, its outmoded ideas."

There you have the impression of the hon. member for Hamilton before he entered Parliament at all, and here he is sitting on the

cross benches listening to the Opposition taking up exactly the attitude that he says they took up on most questions of social welfare or anything in the interests of the people. They adopt an attitude of pettifogging criticism of this legislation. They know it takes time—not merely a month, but many months—to investigate many of the problems that need investigation, to enable some practical plan to be evolved for the post-war period. Even Mr. Chifley, some time after he was appointed Minister for Post-war Reconstruction, pointed out that notwithstanding that a number of commissions and committees had been appointed to collect information, it would be many months before this information would be available to enable plans to be prepared. The same thing applies to the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act. Unfortunately, we delayed one year during which we could have done much useful work, and since the Act was proclaimed, much of the time has been taken up with the election of representatives and the laying down of the necessary machinery. As I have pointed out earlier, this preliminary work has been overtaken, and committees have been formed and are getting down to business to do the work entrusted to them. As time goes on, I can assure the hon. member there will be no secret in regard to the work that is being done; that information will be available to all hon. members.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (3.8 p.m.): I am of opinion that the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act has been transformed into a political Act. We remember that when the Bill was brought down hon. members opposite said it was an urgent measure to prepare for post-war reconstruction; but as the Minister said, it was allowed to rest for nearly a year; and now it is revived on the eve of an election. What worries the Committee more than anything else is that 10 members of the Government are placed on the committees.

We are just as keen as the Government on this matter, but the Opposition have been altogether ignored. If we had the opportunity of being represented on these committees, we should be able to give valuable help. It is time, too, that a report was presented showing what has been accomplished by the committees. There is, of course, a reason for not having members of the Opposition on that committee, and it is that if we were on it we should know exactly how far the work has advanced. Apparently they have not yet got beyond the talking stage. The Secretary for Public Lands put forward a programme the other day. We know that his department deals particularly with irrigation, land settlement, and reforestation, but the hon. gentleman was able to tell us only that plans were put forward as regards irrigation projects. We on this side have always made suggestions. When the Estimates for that department were under consideration we pointed out the value of reforestation in post-war reconstruction. We also dealt with land settlement and irrigation. As a matter of fact, we drew attention to the important role that this department would play in post-

war rehabilitation, but we now find that under this Act boards are established in all parts of the State to do exactly the same kind of work as is being done by local authorities and Government departments.

In all this work private enterprise is left out of consideration completely. No post-war planning that excludes private enterprise is complete. Private enterprise must be maintained in addition to public works, so that we can co-ordinate our efforts to bring into being something really worth while. When this Act was before the House it was pointed out forcibly that Queensland could not act alone, but Queensland has been determined to act alone. The Act has been put into effect in certain respects, particularly with regard to the committees, and this was not done with Commonwealth consent. The Commonwealth Government intervened, and as a result we find that certain persons are working for the Commonwealth in the work of post-war reconstruction, and in addition these little secret committees are at work, but so far nothing tangible has resulted. Apparently they are working in opposition to the Commonwealth, because if they were working in harmony schemes would have been brought forward by the Commonwealth. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that hon. members on this side are keenly interested in the welfare of the people of this State, particularly in regard to post-war reconstruction, but apparently the Government are implementing this scheme as pre-election propaganda and not for the interest of the State.

Mr. MULLER (Fassifern) (3.13 p.m.): I have listened to the post-war proposals outlined by the Minister. Although I concede that there may be some necessity to embark upon a vigorous policy of work for the days that will follow this war, this Parliament must remember after all that public works will not solve the problem. It may be necessary during the slack period immediately following the demobilisation of troops to embark on a policy of public works, but as far as I can gather the Government have not up to the present given any consideration to ways and means of expanding industry. We must remember, too, that public works must be paid for. They will be a charge on the community. In other words, they will be a charge on industry; and to enable industry to carry its responsibility, the Minister must realise that one cannot live by a policy of inflation for all time. One may be able to do these things by inflationary methods for a period. The Commonwealth Treasurer has promised that money will be found for post-war reconstruction, just as it has been for the prosecution of the war. It is not a bit of use being silly and pulling our own legs, thinking we can go on for all time with a policy of that kind. We certainly must raise the necessary money to prosecute the war, and in post-war days we might be obliged to find some money for reconstruction, too. Therefore, let us be honest with ourselves. After all, the only prosperity that can exist is that which will be created first of all by primary production, and secondly by the establishment and expansion of secondary industries.

The Minister has used many high-sounding phrases and words, such as "co-operation" and "co-ordination." After all, what do they mean? With whom will we co-operate, or what will we co-ordinate if we have not any industries? It will mean we shall co-operate and co-ordinate to starve for all time. Inflation is not going to get us over the difficulty.

I was sufficiently interested to look up a remark made by the Minister on 30 November, 1931:—

"Our objective is the socialisation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. That is the only objective that will achieve social justice for the people."

That statement is reported in "Hansard."

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: There is nothing wrong with that statement. It is a good statement.

Mr. MULLER: And it fits in with this co-operation and co-ordination policy we hear so much about to-day. What does "co-operation and co-ordination" mean? I believe that the Minister's interpretation of it is that it means socialisation, and there are many people throughout Australia who are taking advantage of the war situation for the purpose of carrying out a policy of socialisation.

Then we find that the responsibility is thrown on the local authorities. It has been stated here that no member of the Opposition has been appointed to take part in these investigations.

The Secretary for Public Lands: The Premier made the offer to you, you know.

Mr. MULLER: I am not worried about our not being on the committees. I can only assume that the reason why no hon. member on this side has been appointed is that in the election campaign we shall not be able to go out and join forces with the committee and say, "We advocated the expenditure of certain sums of money on this, that, or the other thing."

Much has been said about the proposals that have been submitted by the committees that have been appointed, but one cannot read the reports without being highly amused. The usual thing has happened. Committees are invited to submit proposals, they submit them, and in some cases they put forward the most ridiculous proposals in the world. And they are being encouraged to do that under such a system. The Minister stated, too, that the industries that supplied materials for post-war work will be required to compete for the business, otherwise the orders might go to the other States. In my opinion this system is so unsound that it cannot be carried out. It might fill the bill for a couple of weeks, a couple of months, or even a couple of years, but it must have something solid, some real wealth behind it, otherwise it will fail. It cannot live on the mere issue of notes from time to time. That will not get us out of our trouble, nor will it place in employment the boys who return from the fighting services. What is required is to expand private industry, but the Government are not pre-

pared to do that. This mere inviting of proposals that do not fit in or make for the stability of industry is economically unsound.

Mr. JESSON (Kennedy) (3.20 p.m.): The hon. member for Fassifern does not know what he is talking about. Evidently what the Lord Mayor said about the Opposition some time ago is correct. I can remember that last year or the year before, when the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Bill was brought down, the hon. member for Fassifern voted for it. The Minister has given a complete review of the position, and the statements made by hon. members opposite to-day prove conclusively that they are too lazy even to read the reports issued in connection with the matter. A special committee was set up to investigate industry with a view to the expansion, and decentralisation of industry, but evidently hon. members have not read this committee's report, which proves conclusively that what people have said about the Opposition is correct, that they are too lazy or too tired to do the job.

The Secretary for Public Lands: Who said that?

Mr. JESSON: The Lord Mayor.

Mr. Chandler: They are not the only ones, either.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I remind hon. members that the question before the Committee is the Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act.

Mr. JESSON: I realise that, and I am merely replying to the criticism by hon. members opposite of the Government's policy of co-ordination in preparing post-war plans. The hon. member for Fassifern tried deliberately to mislead the public and the new hon. member of this Committee into believing that this Government have done nothing for the expansion of industry.

There is a committee consisting of Mr. Kemp and Mr. McCracken, and including representatives of the business community to deal with the expansion of industry.

Mr. Nicklin: Who is the chairman?

Mr. JESSON: Mr. Kemp. It is certainly very important. I am not on the committee and so I do not know for certain who is the chairman, but this I do know, that the committee has been appointed. A voluminous report was prepared and the whole organisation has been established on a very sound basis and it will be the means of providing a greater measure of security than ever before contemplated for the people and for those who return from the war. Queensland was the first State in the Commonwealth to lay down a basis for post-war planning.

Mr. Muller: To talk about it.

Mr. JESSON: No, not talk about it. The work has gone on month after month. You, Mr. Brassington, are the secretary of the parliamentary committee set up to consider

this aspect of our national life and you know that committee has devoted hours and hours of hard work to the investigation of plans for the expansions of industry and for public works. When a member of a better board whose time is mostly occupied in other directions comes into this Chamber and tries to mislead the people and this Parliament on matters of vital concern to the Government he has very little to do.

Vote (The Co-ordination of Employment Facilities Act of 1941) agreed to.

INDUSTRIAL COURT.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (3.23 p.m.): I move—

“That £8,326 be granted for ‘Industrial Court.’”

After providing for automatic increases and increase in the basic wage the amount for salaries, £6,306, represents an increase of £91 over the amount voted last year of £6,215. Contingencies absorb £2,020, or £168 less than the amount voted last year. The travelling expenses show a small increase of £32, while railway fares and freights, printing and stationery, show a decrease of £200. Fees to witnesses remain at the same amount as last year, that is, £20. During the year there were 160 applications for new awards, variations, decisions or interpretations and 19 applications for compulsory conferences and references to disputes. Some particularly fine work has been carried out by the court in connection with these industrial conferences, especially when we know that their settlement saved the State a considerable amount of expense that would have been incurred by the dislocation of industry that might otherwise have followed.

There have been 16 appeals from the decisions of industrial magistrates under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act and 10 in connection with workers' compensation under the Workers' Compensation Act. There were six applications for injunctions and restraint orders and nine under the heading of miscellaneous applications. Forty-four industrial agreements were registered and there was one application for the registration of an industrial union.

Generally, it can be conceded that as the result of the splendid work of the Industrial Court during the last financial year that period has been one of the freest, recently, from industrial disputes. During 1942 there were only six industrial disputes resulting in a direct loss of work of 370 days with a total loss of wages amounting to only £2,145. When we compare that loss with the 552 disputes in New South Wales and the disputes in the other States we can pride ourselves on our industrial law for its very effective work in giving a great measure of industrial contentment to our working population.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba) (3.27 p.m.): I agree with the Minister that the Queensland Industrial Court is carrying out its duties well. That is particularly noticeable in the expedition with which it has dealt with appli-

cations made to it and the way in which it has handled some extremely difficult industrial situations.

Since March, 1942, the court has adopted the practice of making quarterly adjustments in the basic wage, as the Federal Court does on the cost-of-living figures of the previous quarter. This, of course, is the fairest way, as it considerably reduces the time lag between the declaration and a rise or fall in the cost of living. Nevertheless, it must entail a considerable amount of extra work, not only in adjusting the basic wage, but in adjusting all the awards based on it. I am doubtful whether our much-boasted judicial method is better than the more practical method adopted in other States. However, all political parties are committed to a policy of the impartial determination of wages and conditions of employment. The one thing that should be avoided is the creation of any impression that party politics enter into the matter. The idea is being fostered in the community, largely and regrettably, Mr. Brassington, by irresponsible members on the Government side of the Committee, that the maintenance of a high basic wage depends on having a Labour Government in power.

The Secretary for Public Lands: There is a good deal of truth in that statement, because the legislation passed by the Moore Government prohibited the court from giving a decent wage.

Mr. NICKLIN: I am surprised to hear the Minister make that statement, for after all in doing so he is passing a reflection on the court.

The Secretary for Public Lands: No; the court gives its interpretations in accordance with the law.

The Attorney-General: A prominent member of the Moore Government said his Government had ringbarked the court.

Mr. NICKLIN: Hon. members of this Chamber have been dealt with for making reflections on the court. I suggest that the Minister be careful, otherwise he might be dealt with for reflecting on the impartiality of the court.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. NICKLIN: This idea that Labour is entirely responsible for any rise in the basic wage is quite erroneous. If it were so, it would mean that the court was neither independent nor impartial, but was influenced by party-political considerations.

The Secretary for Public Lands: The court has to make its determinations according to the law.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: It is not restricted, as it was by the Moore Government.

Mr. NICKLIN: The hon. gentleman says that the court is not restricted. In 1922 some hon. gentlemen now sitting on the front Government benches were members of the Government party that passed the Salaries

Act, imposing a reduction of 5 per cent. on Government employees receiving £300 a year and over.

The Secretary for Public Lands: That was a decision of Parliament.

Mr. NICKLIN: Yet hon. members opposite have the temerity to say that the Moore Government interfered with the Industrial Court. In 1922 a specific percentage was taken from all Government employees earning over a specific amount by the Government of the day that was supported by a number of hon. members now sitting on the front Government benches. The reduction was restored in 1925, but only after there had been a railway strike and the passing of the Basic Wage Act. The members of the Government at the time then raised the salaries of members of Parliament from £500 to £750 per year. They evidently wanted a little bit to come their way, too, as well as to give a little to the workers.

Unfortunately the impression created in the community by some hon. members opposite that the Government were responsible for any wage increases was strengthened by the fact that two increases in the basic wage coincided with two elections in this State, namely, those of 1938 and 1941. In 1938 an increase of 3s. a week was made the day before the election, and in 1941 just after the election. It is strange that things like that happen. No doubt this idea, which some hon. members opposite endeavour to foster in the minds of the community, meets with some credence from the unthinking members of the community. Unfortunately, when in the ordinary course, the court was forced to reduce wages in accordance with the cost of living figures, the reduction was used for party-political purposes. Such epithets as "wage-slashers" and "baby-starvers," and others were flung across at members on this side of the Chamber.

The Secretary for Public Works: Ring-barkers.

Mr. NICKLIN: Ringbarking the Industrial Court, and things of that kind. What is the position of hon. members opposite to-day? Hon. members on this side were accused of wage-slashing at that time, but what is the position to-day? We find, as a result of the reduction in the cost of living the Federal Court of Conciliation and Arbitration yesterday reduced the Federal basic wage of this State by 1s., and if the State court follows the Federal court—as it has done during the last quarter or two—there will probably be a reduction in the basic wage of 1s. in this State. That is only correct, because the court is working on the cost-of-living figures and the procedure laid down in the Act. It is an impartial tribunal set up by this Parliament to deal with industrial matters. If it could be got at or influenced, it would not be fit to occupy the high position it does.

Mr. Power: You remember what Macgroarty said?

Mr. NICKLIN: I do not hold with that for one moment and I should not think of

accusing hon. members opposite of being wage-slashers or baby-starvers if a reduction was made by the Industrial Court on account of the cost of living. Actually, the facts of the case can never justify statements of that kind, because the court is set up to do a job impartially and according to the evidence submitted to it, the cost-of-living figures, and whatever other statistics it uses to arrive at a decision. In 1932, according to the facts placed before the court, it reduced the basic wage in this State, and the Government in power were accused of being wage-slasher and baby-starvers.

The Secretary for Public Works: They were, too.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: Of course they were.

Mr. NICKLIN: Two Ministers are reflecting on the integrity of the Queensland Industrial Court. That is what it means.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: We were lucky to win in 1932, because the people were so poor they could hardly get to the polls.

Mr. NICKLIN: We heard that before. Irrespective of that, hon. members opposite accused the Government of that day of being wage-slashers and baby-starvers when the Industrial Court made a reduction in the basic wage, but I did not expect Ministers of the Crown to make the allegation that they have made. If in the course of the next few days there is a reduction in the basic wage, brought about by the election promise of a reduction in the price of tea and potatoes, far be it for me or any other hon. member on this side of the Committee to accuse hon. members opposite of being wage-slashers or baby-starvers. If the court, carrying out its duty fairly and impartially, brings about a reduction of wages in this State we shall make no such accusation. What I have said proves conclusively how unfair it was of hon. members opposite to use the reduction in the basic wage for party-political reasons. It was an unwarranted reflection on the court, and I hope that in future no hon. member of this Assembly, irrespective of which side he supports, will make the accusation when the basic wage rises or falls that it was brought about by improper methods. We should not bring party politics into the Industrial Court, and as it is carrying out its duties fairly and impartially according to the statistics and other matters it works on, it should not be made the object of any complaint.

Mr. YEATES (East Toowoomba) (3.38 p.m.): I ask hon. members to take their memory back to 1941 when the hon. member for West Moreton was here one day calmly getting on with his work and he was sued and fined £20 plus costs—amounting to something like £44—for making a forecast as to when the elections might be held.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member is treading on dangerous ground.

Mr. YEATES: The court has the right to do what it likes in that connection. Why

was the moulders' union not called on to pay the fine of approximately £70 imposed on it for going on strike?

The Secretary for Public Lands: If you read "Hansard," you will get particulars.

Mr. YEATES: I understand the money has not yet been paid. That shows that this Government favour certain sections of the community, just as they did in the change of venue in connection with the Toomaroo Proprietary Limited at Eulo. It is a remarkable thing that nothing has been done yet. I do not want the moulders' union or its members to be running into trouble, but this other man was fined, and paid up like a man. Hon. members know him. He is honourable and straight about everything. Why, in the name of goodness, was not the moulders' union made pay? It is an extraordinary thing. I want to lay stress on the point that the Government evidently believe in making fish of one and fowl of another. I inquired at the Industrial Court whether that fine had been paid. I was not sure as to the proper place to inquire, so I began at that court. I was told that it knew nothing about it, that it was a stipendiary magistrate who had presided over the case. I then inquired at the office of the clerk of petty sessions in Brisbane, but was there referred to Ipswich; in fact, I was referred all over the place. The Secretary for Labour and Employment will tell me it is a matter for the Department of Justice. It is quite wrong that this matter should be allowed to go like this. What is there to hide? The Minister should be ashamed and should blush to be mixed up with a Ministry that will allow this thing to go on. We must have the power of the court altered by Act of Parliament or collect the fine on the union. Why has not the fine been collected in both instances?

The Secretary for Public Works: You are making a vicious attack on the moulders.

Mr. YEATES: I am saying definitely that the Government should take action to see everybody is treated alike. I should like to have the information I have asked for and I ask that my question be answered.

Mr. POWER (Baroona) (3.42 p.m.): The Industrial Court is an important institution and has very great responsibilities in the investigations it makes before arriving at a decision and in considering the amount that shall be the basic wage for the workers of this State. I am amazed at the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition in which he attacked the Government in connection with the policy of the Industrial Court. I remind hon. members opposite that a responsible Minister said of their Government that if the Industrial Court did not function to the liking of the Government, the Government would ringbark the court. Let us examine what that Government did. They abolished all rural-industry awards. They removed the Crown employees of Queensland from the Industrial Court so that they could not make application for an increase in their wages. As a matter of fact, they enacted legislation that made

for a reduction of 10 per cent. in wages of the workers of Queensland. I was a Crown employee during the term of the Moore Government and remember that my wages were reduced at that time. Once a Government start to interfere with the functions of an Industrial Court they are treading on very dangerous ground. We know the attitude the Opposition have adopted to the workers in this State. If they had their way to-morrow the Industrial Court would be abolished. A number of reductions in wages took place during the term of their Government owing to a set of conditions fostered by the then Government. I am particularly concerned with the remarks of Mr. N. Macgroarty, who was Attorney-General in the Moore Government. They can be found in "Hansard." He said if the court did not function to the liking of the Government then they will ringbark the court. Imagine a responsible Minister of the Crown making such a statement!

Mr. Muller: He had no authority in connection with it.

Mr. POWER: He may have had no authority to make it, but that Government endeavoured to ringbark the Industrial Court, and as a matter of fact no objection was raised by the then Government. He was not castigated by the members of his own party. These remarks were made in this Assembly, and if members of the then Government were not in accord with the statement, they could have objected.

Everyone knows the condition Queensland was in at the time. If the members of the Industrial Court had been weak and could have been intimidated by the then Government it would have been a very sorry day, indeed, for the workers of Queensland. The Industrial Court has done excellent work, and we are fortunate that as a result of the composition of that court and the sanity of the Queensland workers we have been very free from industrial trouble for a long time. As a matter of fact, the amount of industrial trouble in Queensland is far smaller than that in any other State in the Commonwealth, because we have the right machinery in operation. Under the present system, before an organisation goes on strike it must take a ballot and give 14 days' notice to the Industrial Court that it proposes to cease work. In the meantime the court intervenes, conferences take place, and if agreements cannot be arrived at in conference the court hears the facts and comes to a decision in accordance with the evidence before it.

Some time ago the tramway men of Brisbane threatened a hold-up because of the refusal to grant them war loading. I maintain that there were certain members of that service who were justly entitled to war loading because of the large volume of work they were doing and the enormously increased revenue the department was receiving. In fact, it is one of the best-paying departments that we have to-day. The men threatened to go on strike. Certain action was taken, the facts were placed before the court, and the men decided to take no action until the

court heard the case. The strike did not take place and we were free from the traffic problems that we should have had to meet had that strike occurred. Under the old system that operated in 1912, before a dispute could be heard by a court it had to extend to more than one State, with the result that the whole of Queensland was involved in industrial trouble. Fortunately, to-day, as a result of the sound legislation of this Government, the Industrial Court is so constituted that it can deal with industrial troubles before they actually take place and so long as the necessary action is taken by the unions and the required notice is given.

Let me remind hon. members further that unions have been fined by the Industrial Court. That tribunal has been fair and impartial in all matters. Not only employers but also unions have been fined by the Industrial Court because they did not observe the rules of the court. That court has done excellent work, and I regret that the Leader of the Opposition should attempt to belittle this Government and try to make out a case for his own party. He has no grounds on which he can build a case, and let us never forget the state of affairs that operated when Crown employees were outlawed from the court, when hours were increased because of that, when wages were reduced, and when an attempt was made to make things still worse for the workers, and when a member of the then Government—of which many hon. members of the present Opposition were members—stated, when the court refused to take any instructions concerning its decisions—

“If this court does not function to the liking of the Government, the Government will ringbark the Arbitration Court.”

At a later stage the people of Queensland ringbarked the then Government, with the result that to-day we are working under an excellent system of arbitration. No decent man could reasonably suggest to anyone that any attempt to bring political pressure to bear would be tolerated by the present members of the Industrial Court.

Mr. WALKER (Coorooora) (3.50 p.m.): I have listened attentively to the hon. member who has just resumed his seat and there is not the slightest doubt that the Attorney-General at that time made a statement that he ought to be ashamed of, but at the same time I remind the hon. member that there was a large party in Parliament then and he was the only one who held that opinion.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: That is not right. What about the Bill you introduced later?

Mr. WALKER: I will deal with this in my own way. I have been very patient with the Minister to-day. He has had a fair innings and the least he can do is to keep quiet for a moment and allow me to try to put a little fairness into the tone of the debate. I should also like the hon. member for Baroona to stay in the Chamber for a while. We did not agree with the then Attorney-General. First of all, it was a

wrong statement to make, and I am sure that it was made purely out of a misunderstanding of the position.

When was industrial arbitration first introduced into Queensland? It was done by the Kidston Government, of which I happened to be a supporter, but of course it was not called an Industrial Court. It was called the wages-board system. Does that not show clearly that the Government of those days had just as much sympathy for and were just as sincerely disposed towards the workers as the hon. members opposite are? That was the correct system to adopt in those days, and it was a long way ahead of anything else of its kind in Australia at the time. It was an eminently fair system. The Wages Board Act was passed in 1908 and amended in 1912. What did the Labour Party do when they were returned to power? They only altered the name of the system. I can recall that when Mr. Fihelly introduced legislation to set up the Industrial Court, he altered the name of the existing industrial system and he said that the previous legislation that another Government had passed served as a splendid foundation for the legislation he was then introducing. You do not want a better admission of the efficacy of industrial legislation than that, and does it not indicate conclusively that we were just as sympathetic and just as sincere in doing the right thing between the workers and their employers as are Government members to-day? The wages-board system was a very good one in its time. There is no Arbitration Court in Victoria. Perhaps that will astound hon. members opposite. They have their wages-board system, a system that we had many years ago, but it is the same in principle as our present industrial system, except that it has another name. Strange to say, the wages in many of the principal industries in Victoria are higher than the wages in the same industries in Queensland.

Hon. members may argue that the present industrial system in Queensland is better than than the others in Australia, because it has given the workers the highest wages, but the point that we have to consider to-day as legislators is: which is the fairest for all concerned? Then we must leave it to the judges of the court to do their duty. In Queensland we have been particularly fortunate in having Sir William Webb to preside over the Industrial Court for a number of years. He has with him Mr. Ferry and Mr. Riordan. Mr. Riordan I do not know, but I have been in close contact with the other two gentlemen on many occasions, and I want to say that two fairer gentlemen cannot be found. We, as an Opposition, do not attempt to interfere with an award. We did not attempt to interfere with the awards when we were in government.

The Secretary for Public Lands: You amended the Act.

Mr. WALKER: Of course we amended the Act, to meet the needs of the times, just as we have amended legislation to deal with various aspects of the sugar industry from

time to time. Not so very many years ago, we cut a man's head off for a certain offence, but we do not cut off heads to-day; we imprison men for that offence now. It is necessary to amend legislation in other directions from time to time. The basic wage in Victoria is 3s. higher than it is in Queensland. Will hon. members opposite now support the Federal Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, seeing that the Federal basic wage has been reduced by 1s. a week in some of the States? No, they will be right up against it now. An industrial system must be founded on a fair and equitable basis. It cannot be expected that industrial courts can go on increasing wages all the time. The wealth of this country is governed to a very large extent by our ability to export to other countries. How would the Secretary for Public Lands finance the sugar industry if he did not have a system something like that? Even at the present time, we are getting £4 a ton from Great Britain for every ton of sugar exported to Britain just to keep our sugar industry going, and the same thing applies to any other items produced in Australia for export.

Let me make a comparison between the wages paid in Queensland with those paid in Victoria. I have mentioned the basic wage, which is £4 18s. a week in Victoria and £4 15s. a week in Queensland. The next is the wage in wood and furniture factories which is 119s. 6d. in Victoria and 114s. 6d. in Queensland.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: That is a Federal award.

Mr. WALKER: I will quote them all if the hon. gentleman will only give me time. There is nothing special about the award. These rates apply to industries in Victoria. Here are a few others—

	Victoria.		Queensland.	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
Food, drink, &c. . .	114	6	109	6
Books, printing, &c. . .	131	4	122	3
Other manufacturing	116	1	111	0
Pastoral, agricultural, &c.	111	3	102	10

Do not those figures prove conclusively that the effectiveness of an industrial system does not depend upon its name, but upon the conditions prevailing, the cost of living, and similar factors?

Much criticism has been levelled at the Moore Government in connection with the reduction of the basic wage during their period in office. If my memory serves me right, I think the basic wage at that time was £3 14s. What did Sir William, then Mr. Justice Webb, have to say about it? He said it would have been "God Help Queensland!" if it had not been done. He knew that the action of the Moore Government was sound. I am unable to quote his exact words.

The Secretary for Public Lands: It is a pity you could not quote what he said.

Mr. Edwards: That is good enough; you know what he said.

The Secretary for Public Lands: You are simply putting a construction on what he said.

Mr. Maher: They sheltered behind everything the Moore Government did after they came into power.

Mr. WALKER: The Secretary for Public Lands questions the accuracy of my statement. I remember how he blushed the other day when he was shown proof of a statement, and I can see him blushing again. The president of the court, Sir William Webb, said at that time—

"One shudders to think what the position would have been if the basic wage had remained at £4 5s."

The Minister must admit that I was very modest in generalising his remarks. We know that was the condition of affairs existing at the time. We know, too, that the Moore Government were just as anxious that the workers should get a full return for their industry as hon. members opposite. That is only the correct and fair thing. Hon. members remember how the granting of increased wages affected operations at Mount Morgan. The company contended that it could not pay the rates demanded, but the rates were increased and the company was compelled to suspend operations.

We talk a lot about post-war conditions and of what we are going to do, but the Government must remember that they have been in office for 11 years. Immediately prior to the war there were 20,000 unemployed in this State; the Government could not find work for them. I remember Mr. McCormack coming to Gympie when the ruling rate of wage was £2 10s. a week for an eight-hour day. As everyone knows, living at that time was half as cheap as it is to-day. As a result of his visit wages were increased 10s. a week and the remaining mines operating, being unable to pay the increase, were compelled to close down. That illustrates the difference between a common-sense and an arbitrary arrangement. If work cannot be done at a profit it is not done.

I could go on dealing with this phase of the statement made by the hon. member for Baroona at much greater length, but I will not take up the time of the Committee. It is only fair that I should make the statements I have made. I like to forget the past and improve as we go along. After all is said and done, although the Moore Government's basic wage was £3 14s. it took this Government 54 months to increase it. What then is the good of talking about that basic wage? It was only after hon. members opposite had been in office for five years and had had £3,000,000 loan money every year, that the basic wage was increased. On the other hand, the Moore Government had virtually no loan money to spend. It is true, as hon. members opposite have pointed out, that when they came into power there was a balance of £5,000,000 in the Treasury.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: You lent the biggest part of it to the Southern States.

Mr. WALKER: I should like to correct the Minister's statement. Before the Moore Government were elected the Government represented by the hon. member's party lent South Australia £750,000 of that £5,000,000. How can he explain that away? Is it not inconsistent to accuse us of doing the same? I can give the hon. gentleman the date on which his Government lent that money.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: We had a surplus.

Mr. WALKER: That money was lent to the other States as a result of an arrangement with the Loan Council.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. WALKER: I realise that I am a little bit out of order, but I must correct the wild statements that have been circulated all over the State by hon. members opposite. The Secretary for Public Instruction definitely knows that what he is saying is not true.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. H. A. Bruce, The Tableland) (4.1 p.m.): The Kidston Government brought down what was known as the wages-board system to determine wages. The hon. member who has just resumed his seat knows that the powers of the boards were extremely limited. They may have improved the rotten conditions existing prior to their creation, but they meant very little to the working man. Later the Tory Government introduced the Industrial Peace Act which obviously attempted to handicap the worker. It provided that no representative of the union could appear in the court on behalf of the men; the representative had to be one of the workers in the industry. At the same time, it allowed an employer to be represented in court by a barrister or solicitor. Although it legislated for a form of arbitration it was antagonistic in principle to the worker. Its desire seemed to be to handicap him and see he did not get a chance. The worker paid the union organiser to look after his interests but the organiser was deprived of the right to represent his interests in the court. That shows how vindictive and vicious the Government of the day were against the worker.

The Labour Party got into power and founded the Industrial Court as it exists to-day. The point is the Moore-Barnes Government limited the activities of the court.

When the Leader of the Opposition said that certain hon. members of this side charged the Moore-Barnes Government with being baby-starvers, I said, "Certainly they were," and the Leader of the Opposition said that I was the second Minister to throw an aspersion on the Industrial Court. The point was this: there was no reference whatever to the Industrial Court. The Moore-Barnes Government did limit the Industrial Court; they did not allow the court to function as it had functioned under the Labour Government. We all know what the Attorney-General in the Moore Government said—and the hon. member for Cooroora now says that the rest of the party did not support the Attorney-General, Mr. Macgroarty,

when he made the statement—"If the Industrial Court does not function as the Government wish it to function, we will ringbark it." The hon. member was one of the Ministry who brought in legislation later on to carry out the threat made by Mr. Macgroarty on the Government benches.

Later on in his speech the hon. member for Cooroora said that because the men got 10s. a week more than they had been getting, the mines on Gympie had to close down. They were getting £2 10s. a week in Gympie and we know the conditions under which they were working—no ventilation to speak of and miner's phthisis was rampant.

At 4.5 p.m.,

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) relieved the Chairman in the chair.

Mr. Walker: You do not know what you are talking about.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The hon. member was an engine-driver. He never went down below. I say there were hundreds of men if not thousands who had miner's phthisis and died from miner's phthisis through working in the Gympie mines.

Mr. Walker: There was very little phthisis at Gympie.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: There was quite a lot of it. I will admit there was less than there was later on at Charters Towers and other places, because in those days they only used the single and double-headed hammer, whereas later on when big machines were put in operation the incidence of miner's phthisis was greater.

Mr. Walker: We never used a double-headed hammer up there.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The point is that the condition of the miners was not good. The mines were not up to date, yet the hon. member said the addition of 10s. a week in wages closed down the Gympie mines. Nothing could be more absurd, because if it was only a matter of 10s. a week to the men a little modernising would have kept the Gympie mines going.

The Industrial Court as it exists I repeat was established by the Labour Government in 1916, and it was attacked later on by the Moore-Barnes Government, who limited its activities and attempted to destroy the unions that had the right to represent the men at the court and abolished certain wages standards that had been established. The Industrial Court is doing good work within the limits of its power—I still think they are too limited; I believe more power should be given to it—and the system of arbitration is sound. It is the only logical method if we are to get along as a civilised people—an unbiased authority to which employer and employee can put their cases. When it is brought to a greater standard of perfection, I believe the time will come when we shall not have the strikes that occur to-day; but I believe the employer must realise—and I think many employers are beginning to realise—

that we must have a much higher standard of wages and particularly of conditions for the workers in the future compared with the past. In order to do that, I think it will be necessary to give still greater powers to the Industrial Court.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (4.9 p.m.): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the compliment he has paid the Government, particularly for having fostered the idea of high wages in industry.

We certainly have adopted that attitude and fostered that idea from the very inception of the Labour movement, and I am pleased that to-day we can take it for granted that virtually all those in the community, including those who have to work for wages, are agreed that a policy of high wages is sound inasmuch as it puts into circulation a high purchasing capacity. The result of that has, as a repercussion, if one might use that expression, created throughout industry a demand for products and brought about generally a greater degree of prosperity. Most of the economists of to-day agree with that policy.

I am sorry the Opposition has had to go on the defensive in endeavouring to cover up some of the occurrences of the past. I make reference to the attempt to disown a former Attorney-General, an hon. member for South Brisbane, Mr. N. Macgroarty, who was responsible for the statement that if the Arbitration Court would not do what the Government of the day, the Moore Government, required of it, they would certainly ringbark the court. I want to point out that notwithstanding their attempt to disown the then Attorney-General that Government did make a definite attempt to ringbark the court. After that statement was made that Government brought down to Parliament a Bill that had for its object the repeal of the existing Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act and the substitution of a new arbitration system with definite restrictions that prompted the Chief Justice, when making a basic-wage declaration, to refer pointedly to the fact that he was handicapped by the restrictions in the Act from doing what he might have liked to do.

Mr. Muller: You know that is a vague statement.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The Act of that time, instead of improving the position of those who had occasion to go to the court for the adjustment of wages and conditions in industry, deliberately set out to outlaw, as it were, to exclude from the protection of the court thousands and thousands of workers. Crown employees were expelled, as it were, from the operations of the court. Metalliferous mining employees, of whom there are thousands in this State, pastoral workers, hospital employees, and teachers in private secondary schools were outlawed from the operations of the Act. We had the spectacle at one period of many pastoral workers

working for less than aboriginals in Queensland. "Handsard," Volume CLIX., 1931, page 17, records the following question:—

"Pay of Aboriginal and White Station Hands.

"Mr. A. JONES (Burke) asked the Premier—

"1. Is he aware that the following are the minimum rates of pay, together with keep, laid down for aboriginal workers on stations in Queensland:—

Male cooks, £1 10s. to £2 a week;
Head stockmen, £2 per week;
Drover in charge, £2 per week;
Other drovers, £1 10s. per week;
Horse drivers, £1 10s. per week?

"2. Is he aware that the minimum rate which may be paid to aboriginal drovers in the Northern Territory is £3 per week and keep?

"3. In view of the fact that many white station hands in Queensland are working for £1 and £1 5s. per week, will he take steps to see that white station hands are given at least the same protection as that afforded to aboriginals?"

"The PREMIER (Hon. A. E. Moore, Aubigny) replied—

"1. The hon. member's figure are approximately correct.

"2. No.

"3. Inquiries are being made.' "

Those are actual facts of the conditions as they prevailed at that time.

Mr. Edwards: You really do not know what the conditions were.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: We knew the conditions and wages at that time were not a factor that had to do with the depression. There were other factors that brought about the depression that prevailed then. Apparently because of their economic outlook it was the desire of members of the then Government to reduce wages, to reduce the purchasing power in the community, and retrench in every governmental department because they thought this would eventually mitigate the effects of the depression.

Mr. Edwards: Every Government in Australia agreed to that, and three of them were Labour Governments.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: Almost every Government at that time were an anti-Labour Government, and all were of that outlook.

Mr. Edwards: You are wrong.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: And consequently they had that policy. The Scullin Government, for the period they were in power, did not advocate that policy.

Mr. Edwards: They did.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: They made proposals that were turned down, and the forces of the day—the financial forces in particular—pressed Jim Scullin and his team to their knees and forced them to do certain things, which eventually forced them out of power.

The Leader of the Opposition went on to point out that as a result of the recent reduction in the cost of living, the Commonwealth basic wage will be reduced by 1s. He seemed to adopt a pleading tone at that point, sincerely hoping that the State Industrial Court would follow suit and reduce the State basic wage accordingly.

Mr. Muller: That is wrong.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The Industrial Court of this State is unrestricted. It is free to do whatever it thinks best in the circumstances and according to the Act under which it operates. The Act contains provision for considering matters other than or in addition to the cost of living when the court is determining what wage shall be paid. Section 8, subsection (1) (b) provides—

“The court shall be entitled to consider the prosperity of the calling and the value of an employee’s labour to his employer in addition to the standard of living.”

That means that if, in the court’s opinion, the value of an employec’s labour in any industry is such that it is returning to the employer a fair profit on investment and that his reproductivity is of a high order, it can make a declaration awarding a wage that it considers adequate under the conditions then prevailing.

Section 9 (3) of the Act provides—

“Without limiting the generality of the power conferred by the two immediately preceding subsections, the court may from time to time make declarations as to—

- (a) The cost of living;
- (b) The standard of living;
- (c) The basic wage for males and females;
- (d) The standard hours.”

Then it goes on to provide by subsection (iv.)—

“The court shall, in the matter of making declarations in regard to the basic wage or standard hours, take into consideration the probable economic effect of such declaration in relation to the community in general and the probable economic effect thereof upon industry or any industry or industries concerned.”

The court has a very wide field upon which to work, and is permitted to decide according to the circumstances that may prevail. If it finds from the evidence adduced before it that an employee’s productivity is of a high order and warrants either an increase or no alteration to the basic wage, it can make a declaration accordingly. That being so, I think we can safely leave it to the court to do the best thing under the circumstances, irre-

spective of the pleadings of the Leader of the Opposition.

The hon. member for Cooroora referred to the old wages boards in an endeavour to lead the Committee into believing that it was an anti-Labour Government who established arbitration in this State. It is true that they adopted the principle of fixation of wages, but I point out to the hon. member that notwithstanding the wages-board system, then in operation, many anomalies existed. Let me point first to the sugar industry.

I happened to work in that industry as a cane-cutter but not as a mill worker. I remember that at that time, in 1911, the men working in the sugar industry got 22s. 6d. a week. As I pointed out earlier, the ration, or the “tucker” as it was called in those days, was not fit for a dog to eat. One could go from one end of Australia to the other, even go to America, anywhere at all, and one would find someone who would talk about the Goondi stew. That was the diet supplied to the mill workers at the Goondi mill under the control of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. The men worked for 12 hours a day, from 6 o’clock in the morning until 6 o’clock in the evening, for the magnificent rate of 22s. 6d. a week.

Mr. Macdonald: You are wrong. It was 25s. a week.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I know something about it.

Mr. Macdonald: So do I.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The wages were 22s. 6d. a week and tucker.

Mr. Macdonald: No, 25s. a week and tucker. I worked for 25s. there.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: It was 22s. 6d. a week and tucker. I know, because I humped my swag as the result of being defeated in a strike at Innisfail in support of the mill-hands who had struck for an increase of 2s. 6d. a week. I should know something about it, because I humped my swag as a result. Hon. members opposite contend that the wages-board system was a very effective one and the best that could have been offered to the workers in that industry, but I should like to point out that as a result of the 1911 strike the Fisher Federal Government, with Mr. Tudor as Minister for Customs, laid down by Order in Council that the award for the workers in the sugar industry should be 8s. a day. So much for the old wages-board system. That system had so many restrictions and so many strings that it was almost impossible for it to give a fair deal to the workers generally. If hon. members opposite want any further evidence of the inefficiency of the old wages-board system they should refer to the cost-of-living index at the time. Indeed, I invite them to take a copy of A.B.C. of Queensland Statistics, where they will find some interesting figures on the point. For instance, when the Labour

Party took over from the Denham Government in 1915, the standard-of-living index was 67.7. Following on the operation of the arbitration system introduced by the Labour Government in 1916 the figure stood at 105 just prior to the outbreak of the present war when the Forgan Smith Ministry was in power, and that figure was achieved despite the ups and downs disclosed by the figures and graphs. Now we have a clear comparison between the wages-board system and the arbitration system adopted by the Labour Government. Under the wages-board system the standard-of-living index stood at 67.7 and the wages at 22s. 6d. and tucker which was not fit for a blackfellow. Let me give the standard-of-living figures more precisely. They are—

1914-15	..	..	..	72.9
1915-16	..	..	..	67.7
1927-28	..	..	..	100.0
1928-29	..	..	..	95.9
1929-30	..	..	..	91.1
1931-32	..	..	..	85.4

It will be noted that under the Moore regime the index figure gradually fell. Then when the arbitration system was reintroduced and it was allowed to operate unfettered and without restrictions, so that the court was able to give justice to the workers as well as to the employers, the index figure gradually rose until in 1939-40 it stood at 105.4. I must repeat that here again we have a clear comparison of the two systems of arbitration. Despite the protestations by hon. members opposite and their defence of their system of arbitration, the fact clearly stands out that they as a Government were determined, as their Attorney-General pointed out, to ringbark the Industrial Court.

At their first opportunity they brought legislation down in this Chamber, the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act Amendment Bill of 1930, and outlawed all Crown employees, metalliferous mining workers, hospital employees, and teachers in secondary schools. That is a definite reply to the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition maintained that a policy of high wages had been fostered by this Government. I sincerely hope we shall go on fostering that idea until we reach a standard that will be second to none in any part of the world. Such a policy cannot lead any country into trouble. It is beneficial to industry, it attracts a better type of employee to industry, and it gives him the necessary nutrition, clothing, and shelter not only for himself but those he is responsible for. That enables him to become a better producer than if he were on a low standard. Consequently, every section of the community is improved by such a policy. It is true that the employer, as a result of his increased outgoings, may have to be content with less profits, and that he may not be in the same circumstances as his competitors in other countries where lower wages prevail.

We took over from the Moore Government when the business index reached its lowest point in the history of the State. When Labour took the reins of government in 1932 the index figure stood at 83.6, the lowest

known in Queensland, and as a result of this policy of high wages a new purchasing power was circulated throughout the community. As a result, the business index gradually rose from year to year until in 1939 it stood at 104.5. In July, 1943, it increased still further to 107.2. The share-price index increased in the same ratio. As a result of the application of the Moore Government's policy, the business index and share-price index dropped to the lowest possible points known in this State.

Mr. Yeates: This is pure election stuff.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I am giving facts. The hon. member for East Toowoomba must realise that we are not at the moment engaged in an election campaign. I am replying to a statement made by members of the Opposition that Labour fosters a policy of high wages. As I said, we have certainly fostered that idea, because we believe it to be a good one. Where it is applied prosperity follows in its train.

I was endeavouring to point out that during the depression period, the business and share-price indexes reached their lowest points in the history of the State, but as a result of the application of our policy of high wages, these figures gradually improved. The business index rose from 83.6 in 1932 to 107.2 in 1943. What better evidence does the Committees require of the virtue of our policy?

Mr. Yeates: "Alone I did it"—that is your policy.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: That is the policy—alone we did it. I give credit to no other party in the community for the application of that policy. When the Moore Government found business at the lowest possible level, instead of bridging the gap by introducing new spending power, what did they do? They kept on decreasing wages, passing a measure restricting the Industrial Court, and retrenching to the bone, even to the extent, as pointed out over and over again, of taking a "bob" a week off the orphans.

Mr. Yeates: I was not here then.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The party the hon. member belonged to did that. I am trying to drive home the fact that conditions grew worse and worse and the Moore Government instead of balancing their Budgets each year, showed deficits and increasing deficits. As a result we had to carry the baby when we got into power. Our position was made more difficult thereby. When we took the reins of government we adopted a different policy. In our first year's operations we expended £4,500,000 in a public-works policy.

We should have taken more, if we could have got it from the Loan Council, instead of the £2,500,000 that was spent by the Moore Government in the last year they were in power. What was the result? I ask hon. members to study the Queensland statistics, and I do not care what index they refer to,

from 1932 onwards they will see that a definite improvement was taking place.

Mr. Yeates: Was not that so all over Australia?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: Because the same policy was adopted all over Australia. In 1932 Mr. Forgan Smith was responsible, as hon. members opposite know, for having carried at that Loan Council meeting a resolution having to do with the provision of work and wages for our people. From that time onwards the Loan Council loosened the purse strings and that enabled us to obtain £4,500,000 of loan funds for expenditure; and that was £2,000,000 more new money circulating in Queensland than had been circulated previously, and the result was more employment. The building industry began to revive, there were more workers in the forests of the State and in the mills to produce the necessary materials for the building programme that gradually developed. One can trace the building permits from 1932 on and see that each year they increased. We did not stop at £4,500,000; as each year proceeded we began to increase our expenditure to £4,600,000 and to £6,000,000, gradually creeping up until we were infusing into circulation £7,500,000 from loan, revenue, and trust funds.

At 4.35 p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The business index showed a response by rising from 83.6 to 107.2. In my opinion, that should be sufficient evidence for hon. members that the policy of high wages is a sound one; and I sincerely hope it will continue in this State as well as throughout Australia, because it will be for the good of all concerned.

Mr. MACDONALD (Stanley) (4.36 p.m.): I had no intention of contributing to the debate, but I was surprised at the Minister's permitting his enthusiasm to run away with his judgment. One could see very clearly his absolute bias when dealing with the policy enunciated by his party. He spoke of the sugar industry; but, unfortunately for him, he did not deal entirely with facts. He went back to 1911, and he contended that at that time he was cutting cane at 22s. 6d. a week.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I rise to a point of order. I object to the hon. member's deliberately twisting what I said. I said that I worked cutting cane, not in the mills; the rate of 22s. 6d. applied to the mill.

Mr. Clayton: You would not earn 22s. 6d.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: I will stand up to you any time either with a pick and shovel, or fists.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I ask the hon. member for Stanley to accept the statement of the Minister.

Mr. MACDONALD: What I was going to say was this. The real wage in the mill was 25s. a week and tucker. The hours were 10 a day, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday was a short day of 10 hours.

Mr. Marriott: 22s. 6d.

Mr. MACDONALD: 22s. 6d. was paid to the mouse gang where the poor worker was employed. I was an engine-driver later on and received £2 a week. As far as cane-cutting was concerned 4s. was the price for cutting and loading cane per ton. It was not paid on a wage basis, and he was a poor man who could not earn £1 a day. Cane was £1 per ton then.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: It was as low as 3s. 9d. for 25-ton trucks.

Mr. MACDONALD: The award came under Mr. Justice Dickson and not the Labour Party. We had a commission appointed in 1912—headed by Mr. Justice Gordon from South Australia. References were submitted to the commission and an award was made, and we had a wage of 8s. Thereafter we had an award by Mr. Justice Macnaughton who brought up the farm labourers to 36s. a week and tucker.

I only rose to deal with these points, because I was in the industry from 1908, and I worked from one end of the mill to the other, and from one end of the paddock to the other; and what the Minister said was not in accordance with facts as I knew them; and his statement gave an entirely wrong impression to the Committee.

Mr. MULLER (Fassifern) (4.39 p.m.): The Minister rakes up the period between 1929 and 1932. It is time that period was forgotten, when one examines the difficulties that existed then. The Minister has endeavoured to paint a picture of what occurred following on a Premiers' Conference in which the difficulties had been adjusted. Those of us who moved about during the depression period know the conditions. I happened to travel in two of the other States, and what I am about to relate is what I actually saw, not what I read of. A great many people were actually starving. One of the most pathetic sights I have seen in my life was when I was in Newcastle in 1931 and saw people lying about the parks, like cattle, virtually starving. At that time the conditions were heartbreaking. It was not a question of increasing the wages of the people at all. To-day the Minister in this Chamber is trying to tell the people the conditions were caused because of the industrial laws that existed in Queensland at that time. We must put the theodolite on the position to see what actually occurred.

I will not accept any responsibility for anything said by Mr. Macgroarty. The Moore Government are not responsible for an irresponsible statement that might be made by one of their members in the heat of debate.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: There should not be any need for you to defend yourself.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. MULLER: The hon. gentleman did not advance an argument this afternoon to show that the statement made by Mr. Macgroarty was ever developed, or acted on, at any later time.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: By Act of Parliament.

Mr. MULLER: No important amendment was made to the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. At that time there was no money to pay the people, and consequently there was neither work nor wages for virtually anybody, whether the Government desired it or not. After all, none of us likes to reflect on the Industrial Court. I believe that court is an unbiased tribunal, and that is as it should be.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: It is now.

Mr. MULLER: It was all the time. The Leader of the Opposition said during the course of his speech that an attempt had been made to convey the impression that because of the present administration the Industrial Court is inspired or directed or influenced to fix a rate of pay that might be more acceptable to the wage-earners. That should not be so at any time, and it would be regrettable if we should ever have to admit it. If the Industrial Court is influenced by the political party that may be in power at any time, it has outlived its usefulness.

I will detail what happened in 1932. After all, the court fixed wages on the index figure ruling at any time, and in June, 1932, that figure was 772. The basic wage was £3 14s. a week. In March, 1943, the index figure was 1063 and the basic wage £4 15s. a week. In other words, if the basic wage had been fixed in March, 1943, on the same basis as in 1932, it would be £5 1s. 10½d. a week. It is 6s. 10½d. a week less than it would have been. So that, after all, £3 14s. a week in 1932 was considerably better than £4 15s. a week in March, 1943, and the Minister's contention that the Moore Government were wage-slashers is quite wrong, if one examines the index figures. I know of nothing else upon which an industrial court can act than the index figure at a particular time, and it is quite wrong to convey the impression that the present Government are the only Government who have any thought or regard for the wage-earners. The days referred to by the Minister when he was cutting cane and humping his swag have been gone for a long time, not only here, but everywhere else. I was wondering why the hon. gentleman stayed on at 22s. 6d. a week and such awful food. But conditions were similar in almost every other occupation. We all went through those times, not only the Minister. We all had to put up with those conditions then because there was nothing better. It is not a question of party politics at all, but altered conditions since those times.

We encountered the awful period of the depression. The Minister referred to what occurred in Queensland. He could just as well

have told us what happened in the other States. He then went on to say the position had adjusted itself because of the Premiers' Conference, but we must go somewhat further afield. Did the Premiers' Conference alter the conditions in New Zealand?

Did they alter them in Canada? Did they alter them in Great Britain? No, they did not. They had not the slightest bearing on the question at all. If the Premiers' Conference had that effect, then there is no reason why conditions should have improved in New Zealand, Canada, or anywhere else. Their argument does not hold water.

The Opposition do not stand for the annihilation of the worker. Those days are gone. It is quite wrong to try to convey the impression to the people that if we were returned the first thing we would do would be to reduce wages. Most members of the Opposition are wage-earners. In fact, we are all working men, and perhaps we work a good deal harder than some members of the Government. Our sympathies are with the people in general. Nobody can support a policy of reducing wages below a fair rate. After all, the law of supply and demand holds sway in these matters. If we are not going to give a man a fair wage for the work he does, he is not going to work for us for very long. We have had disputes between man and master since the world began and we think that this system of arbitration is the best we have had so far. If a Government can influence an industrial court then I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that the system is unsound. It will be a reflection on the Industrial Court for anyone to say that any Administration was able to influence or alter the court's views in any way.

I regret that this question should arise each year when this vote is being considered. I believe that the men are getting a fair spin to-day and we are providing the machinery to give them a fair spin. No political party that denied the working man a fair deal could live for very long.

Mr. YEATES (East Toowoomba) (4.47 p.m.): Some time ago mention was made of the fact that a rise in the basic wage coincided with the 1941 elections. I know that that was not the result of any arrangement with the court, and I also know that the Government, anticipating a rise in the basic wage, fixed the election date to coincide with that increase, and the election took place a couple of days earlier.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member is inclined to move towards the danger point. I do not know whether it is generally known to hon. members, but members of the Industrial Court are not subject to any charges or criticism concerning their actions. So far, the debate has been conducted on a reasonable plane, and I ask the hon. member for East Toowoomba to remember that.

Mr. YEATES: But, Sir, I realise that you can go near the Niagara Falls without falling over. Is there any harm in saying what I have said? I am blaming the Government for doing these things, which I call

political tricks. I am not saying one word about the Industrial Court. I am putting it on a high pedestal. I firmly believe that that was one of the political tricks played at that time.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment wandered all round the countryside in delivering what I call a magnificent election or gallery speech, a speech that could be handed round in certain places during the next election campaign, whether it be on 18 December or at the end of March. While he spoke I visualised him speaking at the hotel corner at Taroom in the Normanby electorate, handing out all that stuff. He was wide of the mark several times, too.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member is inclined to get a little wide of the mark himself.

Mr. YEATES: That is because of the example the Hon. the Minister set. Then, after all this talk, as if from a soap box at the hotel corner at Taroom, the Minister evaded my question. I charged both him and the Attorney-General. They have never answered my question. Why? Either they should have collected the money from the moulders' union when it was fined or refunded the £20 to the hon. member for West Moreton. I certainly want an answer.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: They did not have any funds to collect.

Mr. MAHER (West Moreton) (4.51 p.m.): I hope that the Government, in fixing the date for the forthcoming State elections, will not do anything to bring the Industrial Court into contumely as was the case in 1938 and again in 1941, when the Premier of the time exploited the Industrial Court for political purposes, cold-bloodedly and deliberately, by fixing the date of the elections within a few days after the Industrial Court's increase of the basic wage became effective. I do not think that was fair to the Industrial Court. After all, this court functions on a legal basis and no Government should do anything that is likely to scandalise, defame, or insult the court or demean its decisions in the eyes of the people, yet I have no hesitation in declaring here that the Industrial Court was placed in that invidious position by the action of the Forgan Smith Government in the two election years that I have mentioned, 1938 and 1941.

I should like to indicate to the Committee the way in which the Industrial Court was brought into contumely by quoting from the formula upon which I based my accurate forecast of the date of the State election of 1941. In 1938 the basic-wage hearing before the Industrial Court was held on Friday, 18 March, and the basic-wage judgment was delivered on Tuesday, March 22, the increase operating from the first Friday after the judgment, after a full working week became effective, as from Friday, 1 April, and the Forgan Smith Government fixed the polling-day in 1938 for Friday, 2 April. Hon. members will see very clearly that action of this kind by the Government could have no other effect than to bring the court into contumely.

1943—2 κ

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Do I understand the hon. member to say or suggest that the Government fixed the day of the election knowing the court's decision?

Mr. MAHER: I did not say that at all. I am afraid, Mr. Chairman, that you are putting those words into my mouth and I repudiate them. I did not say anything of the kind. I am giving the bare facts, and they are that the date of the poll was fixed by the Government in 1938 for Saturday, 2 April, which was only one day after the wage-earners of this State had received an increase in the basic wage, which had been granted by the Industrial Court. It was on that basis that I made my accurate forecast of the date of elections in 1941.

The Secretary for Public Lands: And you were fined £20.

Mr. MAHER: I worked it out in this way: accepting the 1938 formula as my guide, the basic-wage hearing in 1941 was held on Monday, 17 March, and the basic-wage judgment was delivered on Friday, 21 March. The basic-wage increase operated from the first Friday after the judgment, after a full working week, which occurred on Friday, 28 March, and the poll was held on Saturday, 29 March, exactly as I had forecast several weeks before the Premier announced the date of the election.

As the Secretary for Public Lands rightly interjected, I was charged before the Industrial Court with contempt for making that statement, which appeared in the "Courier-Mail." This is the statement that I made—

"I am not surprised at the selection of 29 March as the date of the election. I told the conference of the Country Party at Dalby early in January to be prepared for a March poll, and our speakers' notes, issued a fortnight ago, contained a stop-press forecast: 'Basic wage increase operative from 28 March; polling day 29 March.'"

That is exactly how it turned out. I do not think anybody could fairly regard that as a deliberate insult to or defamation of the Industrial Court. However, in terms of the law the court held it was and, as everybody knows, I was found guilty of contempt and fined £20 together with costs of court. What I want to submit, Mr. Brassington, is that the policy of the Government under Mr. Forgan Smith's leadership in 1938 and 1941 unquestionably was to fix the date of the election so as to obtain any political advantages derivable from the fact that the poll took place immediately after the first increase in the basic wage made by the Industrial Court.

The Secretary for Public Lands: The date of the election has nothing to do with the court.

Mr. MAHER: I am not suggesting it has and I exclude the court from any suggestion of the possibility whatever. I want to uphold the court. The Government undoubtedly have brought the court into contumely on those

two occasions. Had the whole position been fairly and justly dealt with at the time I was committed for contempt by the Industrial Court it should have been protected against those men who exploited the court in the way that was so evident.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The question of fixing the date of the election does not come under this vote. I wish to amplify my remarks and say that if the Government did not know the date of the basic-wage declaration it naturally follows that the fixation of the date of the election had no bearing on it.

Mr. MAHER: It brings the whole thing down to a farcial position when the Government exploit any such declaration by the fixation of the general election for the day after the worker receives an increase in the basic wage.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I again remind the hon. member that the fixation of the date of the election is a matter that comes under the Elections Act.

Mr. MAHER: What I am leading up to is that the Government by their actions in 1938 and 1941 brought the Industrial Court into far greater contumely than anything I said by indulging in a simple forecast, and I merely take the opportunity this afternoon to express the very strong hope that the Government led by the hon. member for Bremer do not intend to exploit the Industrial Court in the 1944 election in the way in which the Forgan Smith Government did in the two previous election years.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I have to rule that if the hon. member proceeds in that strain he is reflecting on the court. I have to rule, too, that the matter raised by the hon. member in regard to the fixing of the date of the election is one that comes under the Elections Act. I therefore consider that phase of the discussion closed.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (5.1 p.m.): I take exception to the attitude of the hon. member for West Moreton in attempting by insinuation to discredit the members of the Industrial Court.

Mr. Maher: Oh, no, no, the members of the Queensland Government.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I can quite understand his feelings. He has always shown a degree of pettiness as a result of the court's dealing with him, because of the rash statements he made on that occasion. He has displayed those feelings on more than one occasion since being penalised for that offence. I can assure every hon. member of the Committee that I am willing to allow the people to be the judges as to whether the court is influenced by the Government or any other body.

Mr. Maher: I did not suggest it was.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I would point out that

applications for the determination of the basic wage are usually heard by the court about March in each year. Evidence from all parties concerned is tendered at that hearing. The applications are usually filed by the unions round about Christmas, but because of various factors, such as the A.W.U. annual conference and the conferences of other unions, the hearing is not until about March. The evidence it is necessary to submit to the court takes the parties a long time to prepare. In certain instances the declaration of the basic wage has been made round about election time.

From my knowledge of members of the court, they are not likely to be influenced by any individual or individuals, whether the Leader of the Government or the Government. The fact that they have, after hearing the evidence on these two occasions quoted, in the usual period of the year—March—made their declaration about election time, shows they were prepared to stand up to public opinion. That is the point. The fact that they have done that shows they are prepared to stand up to criticism from hon. members opposite, or any others, and it shows they are at least not concerned with what people think, but they are concerned with making their declaration at the right time. I certainly take exception to the hon. member's suggestion, on behalf of Mr. Forgan Smith, who was leader of the Government during the period mentioned—a man of the highest integrity who would not stoop to using a declaration of the court and embarrassing the court in any way by fixing the elections at that time. Hon. members know him too well to think that. At least he has had the confidence of the people of this State since 1932, and that is sufficient evidence of his integrity and bona fides. I know him too well to believe that he would be guilty of such a practice. The facts are as I have described. The court usually hears the basic wage case in March of each year, and the elections were due at that period, and notwithstanding that the court in its wisdom made an award that drew the criticism such as we have heard here to-day—that probably it indicated that they were in collusion with the Government—

Mr. MAHER: I rise to a point of order. The remark by the Minister that anything I had to say reflected on the honour and integrity of the court is false, and it is offensive to me, and I desire that the Minister withdraw.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member for West Moreton says that the remarks made by the Secretary for Labour and Employment are offensive to him. I ask the Minister to withdraw.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: If the remarks are objectionable, I certainly withdraw those remarks; still, the facts remain. Although I have not a degree in English at the University of Queensland or any other university, at least I can understand plain language, and I can read good English twisted in such a way as to insinuate it. It gave me the impression I

had. I can assure hon. members that is the actual position.

Mr. Maher: I am not going to allow the Minister to put the position in that way. I made no reflection upon the Industrial Court at all, nor did I make any insinuation against it. Any suggestion that I made an insinuation against the Industrial Court is wrong; it is offensive to me and I demand a withdrawal from the Minister.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The Secretary for Labour and Employment has already given that withdrawal.

Mr. Maher: He has repeated the offence.

The CHAIRMAN: I followed the Minister closely, but I did not take his words to mean what the hon. member for West Moreton says. However, I ask the hon. member to accept the Minister's assurance that he did not mean to imply that.

Mr. Maher: I am not satisfied with that. The hon. gentleman said that I had insinuated that the court had acted in collusion with the Government. I made no such insinuation. My remarks were directed against the actions of the Government, not of the court; and the Minister's reference is offensive to me and I ask that it be withdrawn.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member drew my attention to the remark made by the Minister, and I am sure the Minister will accept the position as stated by the hon. member for West Moreton, and say that he had no wish to make an insinuation against the hon. member for West Moreton. I think every hon. member of the Committee accepts what the hon. member says in that regard.

Mr. Maher: It has not come from the Minister. That is your version of it, Mr. Brassington, and I ask that the Standing Orders be obeyed. The Minister cannot make statements that are not correct.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I draw the attention of the hon. member to the fact that the Minister, at my request, withdrew.

Mr. Maher: And then repeated the offence.

The CHAIRMAN: I did not hear the hon. gentleman repeat it.

Mr. Maher: The hon. gentleman said that by a distortion of English I had made an insinuation. I disclaim having made either a direct assertion or an insinuation.

The Secretary for Public Lands: I put the same construction on your remarks.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I have ruled that no further point of order is involved. The matter has already been satisfactorily dealt with.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I certainly do not wish to create any scene or hurt the feelings of the hon. member, but I certainly feel that my impressions were that he was making certain

insinuations, and whether he was or was not is for the Committee to determine.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: The practice of the court each year has been on the filing of applications to take the basic-wage case about March. It did that in the two years mentioned. It so happened that the elections were to take place round about the time the declarations were made. The court, in its wisdom, and in its desire to carry out its functions, gave a declaration irrespective of whether elections were to be held or not.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. D. A. Gledson, Ipswich) (5.11 p.m.): The hon. member for East Toowoomba made misstatements on two occasions to-day. He stated that the hon. member for West Moreton had been fined by the Industrial Court and forced to pay the fine, whereas the moulders' union, which had been fined by the court, had not been forced to pay the fine imposed on it. He then stated that he had asked questions that had not been answered. I draw his attention to "Hansard" No. 5 of 1942, and for his benefit will now read therefrom—

"Execution of the warrant was withheld under the following circumstances:—The prosecution was a private one by one Alexander McConechy Scott, of Ipswich, brass and iron founder, against the Federated Moulders' (Metals) Union of Employees of Australia (Queensland Branch), of Moorooka, Brisbane, as a result of industrial trouble existing between them. The magistrate found the union guilty of instigating a strike, and imposed the fine now in question. The warrant of execution was issued on 24 September, 1941, by the clerk of petty sessions, without any request by or reference to the complainant or his solicitor, Mr. FitzGerald, and sent to the inspector of police, South Coast. On 26 September, 1941, Mr. FitzGerald asked that the warrant of execution be withheld for a few days, as he anticipated a settlement of the dispute, and the clerk of petty sessions telephoned to the police to take no action under the warrant of execution until further advised. On 29 September, 1941, Mr. FitzGerald telephoned to the clerk of petty sessions asking for further withholding of the warrant of execution. The warrant of execution was returned to the clerk of petty sessions on 2 October, 1941. The industrial dispute was settled, and a strike which would have involved the Ipswich railway shops was averted. Such a strike might have had very serious consequences, considering the state of war then existing."

That is the answer to his question, but the hon. member wants to make out to this Committee that the Industrial Court fined the hon. member for West Moreton and forced him to pay the fine: that it also fined the moulders' union, but did not enforce the fine. It was not the Industrial Court that acted on the prosecution of the moulders'

union. I hope the hon. member will refrain from making such misstatements in future.

Vote (Industrial Court) agreed to.

COMMISSIONER OF PRICES.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (5.14 p.m.): I move—

“That £3,777 be granted for ‘Commissioner of Prices.’”

After providing an increase in respect of the Deputy Commissioner and automatic increases for the clerk-typist, the amount provided for salaries, £1,187, shows a small increase, of £81, over the amount appropriated the previous year.

Although the salary of the Commissioner is included in the vote it is repaid by the Commonwealth, which is using his services as the Deputy Prices Commissioner. This refund is not credited to the vote but remitted to the Treasury to be paid direct to consolidated revenue. Contingencies show an increase of £602 on the amount appropriated last year, namely, £1,898, primarily as a result of further arrangements between the State and Commonwealth Governments with respect to the costs of administration.

Mr. MAHER (West Moreton) (5.17 p.m.): I think hon. members generally know my attitude towards the whole principle of price-fixation. I have stated it on numerous occasions in this Assembly, and I have said that I have never been enamoured of the system. Under such a system, in normal times, the worker believes that he is being protected by the fixation of prices, but often the system of free enterprise and competition, which should apply, does not apply because the price is fixed to suit the vending interests concerned. I know that in times of war price-fixation is inevitable in order to correct steep increases in living costs and inflationary spirals, but, nevertheless, it is our function to draw attention to any evident weaknesses in the whole system.

One of the things that I should like to draw attention to this afternoon is the principle adopted by the Commissioner with relation to prosecutions launched against the consumers, the people who buy and pay for goods subject to price-fixation a price in excess of the fixed price. I had one or two cases in my electorate in which farmers have paid to merchants in Brisbane 6d. a dozen in excess of the price fixed by the Prices Commissioner for bags. The farmers concerned were quite ignorant of the fixed price for bags. They received an invoice from the vending merchants and paid the account as rendered. Subsequently the merchant concerned was prosecuted for selling bags at prices beyond those fixed. Then prosecutions were launched against these farmers. They were brought to Brisbane at expense. The train services did not fit in with the time listed for hearing by the court, and they had to hire motor cars to bring them down. They had to be away from their farms, and were fined sums aggregating about £3 each, but by the time all expenses were totalled up one would

say that they were each mulcted in fines and costs an amount approximating £10, including loss of time on their farms. Where is the fair play in launching proceedings against an innocent purchaser? After all, the farmer is not versed in price-fixation and the law relating to it. He has no means of studying the innumerable decrees and price-fixation regulations that issue from the Prices Commissioner's Office. He sows and reaps from day to day, he performs his daily tasks, going to work with the sun and stopping with the sun, yet men like that, the very salt of the earth, are brought down here and fined heavily for venial offences involving 6d. a dozen in excess of the price fixed for bags. There is no justice in that, and I protest against it.

I notice, too, in the Press that a number of fruit vendors in this city have been fined for selling fruit above fixed prices, and that consumers have been warned that they are equally guilty in paying the increased prices.

The Prices Commissioner fails to cause any signs or notifications to be posted up in fruit shops or in business houses where these price-fixing laws operate. Therefore, the consumer, the innocent housewife, or the purchaser generally, has no means of ascertaining the fixed price for, say, a dozen oranges, a dozen pears, or any other article subject to price-fixation. Nevertheless he is subject to the rigours of the law for paying an amount in excess of the price fixed. There is no justice in that. I object to it and I bring it up in this Chamber to show what can happen.

There is another more subtle aspect of the matter that I should like to bring under the notice of hon. members. In my opinion, whether deliberately or unintentionally, it leaves the door wide open for wholesale evasion of price-fixing laws by merchants. After all, if you make the purchaser of goods equally responsible with the vendor for any breach of the prices fixed then obviously you destroy your best source of tracking down those who charge excessive prices. It is obvious that when a farmer pays 6d. a dozen in excess of the price for bags he is afraid to divulge the fact to anybody or to complain because he realises that he is equally blamable with the vendor, and therefore if he made it known that he had paid a price in excess of the fixed price he would be subject to prosecution. The same thing applies to the consumer of the hundred and one articles that are subject to price-fixation throughout the land to-day. If he pays an excessive price he makes no complaint because it is now pretty widely known that both are equally blamable. Therefore such a system can have no other effect than to play into the hands of the profiteers, the black marketeers, and those who wish to dodge the effect of the prices fixed for the time in force. I object to such a principle. I feel that it is only fair to launch proceedings against the vendors of goods subject to price-fixation because they are the people who have the means of ascertaining what the various price-fixing decrees are in their particular class of business. If they charge an excessive price they should be subject to legal attack but not so the farmer and not so the consumer. To attack

the farmer or the consumer is a wrong principle in law in these circumstances, and I cannot see one scrap of justice in it whatsoever, yet that is what is happening to-day by the prices set-up that we have in Brisbane, which is directed from Canberra. I do not know who is responsible for that policy. I cannot say whether these regulations originated from the Prices Branch in Brisbane or from the Prices Branch in Canberra, or whether they are the direct policy of the Federal Labour Government; but whoever is responsible for the initiation and pursuit of such a policy is wrong. I hope some steps will be taken to correct those conditions under which the purchaser of the goods—who is innocent all the time—is made equally responsible with the vendor for paying an amount in excess of the price that is fixed.

I should like to make reference to an unjust principle the Prices Branch applies in the fixation of prices affecting farm products. Professor Copland laid the policy down in these words—

“In arriving at the grower’s price consideration has been given to the yield and average returns before and after the outbreak of the war.”

I hold that the Prices Branch which espouses a principle of that kind is in the wrong. Why should it take into consideration the average returns for farm products before and after the war? It is not fair to consider them as a price-fixing factor. Obviously under war-time conditions costs have risen to an extraordinarily high sum, completely changing the set of circumstances that applied to them before the war and in the early stages of the war. Therefore I want to suggest to hon. members that there is only one fair principle to apply, and that is present-day production costs plus a fair profit to the grower of the product concerned.

Very obviously the grower of vegetables—potatoes, onions, all the things so urgently required to-day for the needs of the services and civilian population—has to operate under the conditions as to cost that exist to-day. Why should we be governed by conditions as to cost that existed before the war? The scene is entirely altered. Therefore I feel that farmers are not being fairly dealt with by the Prices Commissioner in the principles of price-fixation that are being applied to-day. A classic example of that is what occurred this time last year when I drew the Chamber’s attention to the action of the Deputy Prices Commissioner, Mr. Lindsey, and his officers in Brisbane in making a recommendation to Professor Copland, Canberra, for a decrease in the market price of onions from £55 a ton to £13 10s. overnight. When questioned as to the basis of such a drastic reduction, Mr. Lindsey stated that he had consulted with the Roma street merchants and had accepted the average price that had been ruling for the previous five or six years. That is an absurd and wrong method, and one that is unjust to the man growing onions and potatoes. It is an inequitable method, and discloses no scientific or skilful handling of the situation at all, but just a rough and ready shoddy method of meeting the present situation instead of

applying the sensible rule of present-day production costs plus a fair profit to the grower.

What is the position with respect to price-fixing under war-time conditions? We find that the Press and radio, on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Commerce, Canberra, impressing upon all the necessity for growing more vegetables—growing more potatoes, and growing more onions. The farmers have responded very well to those appeals in a patriotic spirit, but the failure of the Prices Commissioner to fix a minimum price has resulted in a grave injustice to the men who have done the job the department urged them to do. The growers have grown the potatoes, onions, and vegetables, and sent them in in large quantities to the Roma street markets. These are typical market reports to-day:—“no demand,” “limited demand,” “not wanted,” “market weak.” Then, as stated recently in the Press by the spokesman of Roma street markets, large quantities of cabbages, parsnips, beetroot, and other vegetables would have to be dumped. That indicates that there is something seriously wrong with the principle of price-fixation. Apparently the Federal Government want to get the maximum production of potatoes, onions, and green vegetables of every kind for the army and the civilian population, and yet because of a pernicious price-fixing principle, no protection by way of a minimum price is given to the growers, with the result that when these vegetables are sent to market we have these reports I have just given. Where is there encouragement for the farmer to increase production of farm vegetables?

As a result of this glutted state of the Roma street markets, associated with the failure of the Prices Commissioner to fix a minimum price, I find that in the West Moreton electorate great numbers of beautiful cabbages with large white hearts are being fed to the dairy cattle in the Gatton district, because prices do not warrant their being sent in. I also find that swede turnips are again being ploughed into the ground. This is a wilful waste of effort and labour, yet what is the farmer to do? He must find the labour to dig the turnips and the cabbages and pay the freight and commission charges only to receive a price in return not commensurate with his labour, or to be told that his product is not wanted.

It is a sorry state of affairs. Surely the Department of Commerce and Agriculture at Canberra is not so bereft of common sense and intelligence that it is going to spend large sums of money urging the farmers to “Grow more vegetables,” to “Start digging now,” and to “Dig for victory,” unless they want these farmers’ products. If they are wanted, why are not minimum prices fixed so that the farmer will be assured that there will be a profitable outlet for the fruits of his toil and industry? That is a question I submit to the Minister and the members of the Government. Why is the farmer put in the sorry and desperate position that he does not know where he is in the matter? Wanting to help the country, he grows the vegetables that are needed and they are sent to the market, but he finds there is no provision

there to use at profitable prices what he has grown. The potato season is approaching and there is a fixed price for potatoes. If the farmers received the price that is fixed there would be nothing wrong at all, but there is a pernicious system of grading. I have the word of men who have been potato-growers for years, who assure me they sent to the market this year potatoes of prime quality and they have been divided into different grades and the average price they have received is less than half the price they would have got if the fixed price had been allowed to prevail.

Mr. Riordan: Who grades them?

Mr. MAHER: I understand the Potato Distribution Committee at Roma street grades them. Those are men representative of the Roma street merchants. There are many farmers to-day who believe that a racket is going on in the Roma street markets and there is an outlet—a definite outlet—for the cabbages, parsnips, beetroot, potatoes, and onions at top market prices; but there are others who have their own interests to serve. There are those operators there who find some satisfaction in the occurrence of gluts, who deliberately plan for gluts and buy in at cheap prices the glutted product of the farmer and who then behind the scenes are able to retail those vegetables to the army and other purchasers at something approaching the fixed market price. I say that with deliberation and after discussion with many men who are competent to form an opinion on the matter, and I challenge the Press to publish it. That is the position. I speak here on behalf of the men who are working hard to-day to fulfil the war requirements and to grow those vegetables, and I ask any reasonable-minded man in this Committee: when the farmers are urged over the air, in the Press, and by poster appeals to grow more vegetables, when the shire councils are being circularised asking them to increase vegetable production in their areas, why is it that when the vegetables go to the market there is no price for the man who grows them—unless there is some set-up that is depriving the man who grows them of what he is legitimately entitled to get? The whole system of price-fixing has failed in the sense that the door is wide open for this sort of business to operate. Why does the Department of Commerce and Agriculture not give a guarantee to the men who grow the vegetables that they will get a fair and reasonable price for the product they grow after it urges them to do so? That is the point.

A Government Member: Let them have nationalisation then.

Mr. MAHER: There is no nationalisation; it does not fit into the picture at all. What is wanted is the application of common sense and business understanding and appreciation of the position. What has happened to-day is that the farmer has been thrown to the wolves by Government commands, directions, admonitions, and injunctions. That is what is happening. The other day I quoted Press advertisements, I quoted the radio appeals, the illustrated posters up on the

hoardings in the city, urging that more vegetables be grown. When our farmers grow them they find their products are not wanted on the market.

They are obliged to feed to dairy cattle beautiful cabbages that surely people in some parts of Australia urgently need. I can only say that we have reached a sorry condition of affairs, and I attach a great deal of the responsibility, if not all of it, to the mismanagement of the Prices Branch. They should have some understanding of what is happening. Mr. Lindsey and his officers are on the spot; they know what is happening. Why is it that representations are not made to Canberra to see that this waste of farm products is stopped and that a fair price is fixed for the products?

What will happen now? When the potatoes and onions come in on the market there will be a glut; will the farmers receive a price much below that fixed by the Prices Branch because no minimum price is fixed for potatoes and onions? The same applies to other vegetables. For most green vegetables there are neither maximum nor minimum prices, and the farmer is left entirely to the vagaries of the market. This will lead to a greater degree of general confusion and difficulty. It is a very sorry spectacle, and Mr. Lindsey would be serving a good purpose if he took up this matter very actively with Professor Copland. The Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin, has administered a severe rebuff to the Prices Branch at Canberra and throughout Australia by his decision to act on the unanimous motion passed by the Queensland Parliament in respect of differential prices. That is the biggest rebuff and snub administered to the bureaucrats of the Prices Branch at Canberra and throughout Australia since this war began, and one they richly deserve. They are due for more. We should not mince words in the circumstances of the time. There is the extraordinary position in which shark can be bought on the market at 1s. 5½d. a lb., whereas the price of mullet is fixed at 7½d. a lb. The Prices Commissioner should investigate an anomaly of that kind.

And there are many more anomalies. The attitude to the milk business is one of the strangest episodes that I know of. Generally, they are deserving of some measure of censure from this Committee.

Mr. RIORDAN (Bowen) (5.42 p.m.): To a great degree I agree with many of the remarks of the hon. member for West Moreton. There is a great anomaly affecting a certain section of the community against whom there is always a great deal of discrimination. Take the present method of fixation of prices by the Prices Commissioner. I might say here that I appreciate the many difficulties that confront Mr. Lindsey, and one of the things I always felt sorry about was the taking of the control of price-fixation out of the hands of the State Commissioner of Prices

Mr. L. J. Barnes: You gave it away.

Mr. RIORDAN: We did nothing of the kind. When he makes such a statement the

hon. member does not know what he is talking about. Under National Security regulations price-fixation was taken out of the control of the State Government. The hon. member knows that his interjection is untrue.

The position in Queensland at present is due to the lack of orderly marketing and distribution of our farm products. This afternoon the hon. member for West Moreton made the statement that a racket is operating on the market that needs investigation. It is a serious allegation and warrants immediate investigation not only by the Prices Commissioner but by this Government. If the statement is true, imagine a gang of racketeers being allowed to get together and discriminate in prices as regards products sent on the market! I have believed for some time that operating on the markets of Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne is a gang working to the detriment of the farmers of this State. Queensland has always been classed as a primary-producing State. Most of our primary products produced in large quantities are marketed beyond the State. Recently the price fixed for tomatoes on the Sydney market was 9s. above that for the Brisbane market. Everybody knows that such a price was a false one, but to follow it to its logical conclusion one can arrive at only one decision, and that is that the price was definitely set for a circle of tomato farmers operating on that market at that particular time—those who are supplying the market with hot-house tomatoes.

The 9s. was definitely put on at that time to give these people an advantage over the people who were competing with them for the rest of the year from the other States of the Commonwealth. Anyone who knows the position knows that that is true.

Mr Sparkes: Who put the price on?

Mr. RIORDAN: Just as Mr. Lindsey of this State has to submit his price, before he can do anything within the State as to prices, to Professor Copland in Canberra, so it happens in every other State. These men are only acting in an advisory capacity. They are not Prices Commissioners in the true sense of the term at all. They merely submit to the Commissioner recommendations, suggestions, or evidence gathered, and he fixes the price. That is another anomaly that exists under the system. We hear about decentralisation, yet we have centralisation and control of prices always to the detriment of the primary-producing States of the Commonwealth.

Then, would it not be possible for us to have inspectors from this Government who would have the authority of the Federal Government to grade potatoes? Why should the farmers be in the hands of every little group who will determine what price they shall get for their potatoes? Does that set of circumstances apply at abattoirs where beef is examined by Commonwealth inspectors? Why can we not have Commonwealth inspectors grading potatoes? Why should it be left in the hands of a few of the private-enterprise exploiters who are operating on the market to-day?

We have heard much to-day about private enterprise, but God help the farmers if they have to rely on private enterprise and a gang of sharks—if what the hon. member for West Moreton said is true—are operating on the market. These charges have been made too often and over too long a period not to merit investigation. The time is ripe for an investigation of all the markets throughout the country. Inspectors should be appointed not only by the growers themselves, if the authority is given to them, but by this Government, and the Federal Government should co-operate.

One of the things that appeal to me most in relation to price-fixation is the racket that is going on in the city with respect to the price of clothes. If there is a racket anywhere it is attached to the age-old saying that there is profit in rags. Irrespective of where one may go in the city one sees this racketeering. Of course, many people worry more about buying a fancy dress shirt or hat than they would about buying tomatoes, potatoes, or something else to eat. So long as they could get the coupons they would continue paying the exorbitant prices that are charged, and there is no business in which people are being exploited more. You can go into any shop and examine the position from any angle at all. If you go in to buy a suit the price has risen 100 per cent. A suit that was sold for £8 8s. or £9 9s. just prior to and just after the beginning of the war costs £16 16s. or £17 17s. to-day. A shirt that cost 6s. 6d. or 8s. 6d. then costs 17s. or 18s. now. If you go to buy a hat the prices are almost double. If you go for a singlet you have to practise austerity always, both in price and size.

Mr. Taylor: And the quality is not there, either.

Mr. RIORDAN: The quality is inferior to anything that has ever been placed on the market previously. Here is a field in which the Prices Branch officers could operate. I urge that price-fixing inspectors be sent throughout the State under the guidance of Mr. Lindsey and that they give us a general review of the position. If they do not do their job, they can be replaced. I admit that Mr. Lindsey is attempting to do his job to-day under very trying and adverse circumstances.

Mr. Walker: And I believe that, too.

Mr. RIORDAN: I have made application for inspectors to go North to go into certain prices charged for groceries there, and I was informed that an inspector would be going North shortly. One inspector to do almost the whole of North Queensland!

If we want the Prices Commissioner to do his job properly we shall have to give him the necessary staff. There are plenty of places that can be combed for men capable of doing the work. The first place to which I would send them would be to what is commonly known as rag shops where the people are being shamelessly exploited to-day. At these places they will say, quite courteously, "You can have only one singlet; very sorry; that will be 5s. 6d. or 6s. 6d." They will sell you

one singlet in the very nicest of manners, just a nice execution, take the money from you, rob you and filch you of it and tell you that you cannot have any more.

We know for a positive fact that in the stores of Brisbane to-day heaps and heaps of crockery are hoarded. That applies throughout the State, too, and they are retailed to the people at extortionate prices. Most of the stock was made before the war. A cup and saucer that possibly cost 1s. or 1s. 3d. before the war is retailed to-day for 3s. 6d. And those shops will tell you that you can have only one or two at a time.

Mr. Taylor: They were indented before the war.

Mr. RIORDAN: Of course they were. These are cases that should be investigated by the Prices Commissioner, but how can he do it if he has not enough staff? He should investigate not only places that sell crockery, but also those that sell clothing and cutlery—all the things needed by the people. They are being handed out to the people to-day as a favour, and consequently the people are glad to get them.

These are the things that appeal to me. Before the war the farmer was subject to the ravages of flood, disease, famine, and everything else. Perhaps he had causes for plenty of grouches and a few growls at times, but he is the only person in the community to-day who is being retarded to any great extent. No-one expects that he should be allowed to rob the people or filch from them, but there should be an orderly system of marketing, and above all he is entitled to a minimum price for his products. After all, the farmer is only a worker like any other man in the community who produces, and he is entitled to a fair living, as any other worker in industry is. He should be allowed to strive towards that end. Of course, when I refer to workers I am not referring to the big beef barons who come down here and exploit the people.

Mr. Sparkes interjected.

Mr. RIORDAN: The hon. member has been away from Parliament for about three weeks and he just comes down to-day to make a show before the new hon. member for Hamilton. It is the duty of the Prices Commissioner to get on with his job by placing before his superior officer, Professor Copland, the fact that he needs more staff. Then let him go out amongst the racketeers in the clothing trade and in other places, and protect the rest of the community. If there are to be ceiling prices for products produced by the farmer than a minimum price should be fixed for his products, too. Only then shall we have a contented community.

Mr. L. J. BARNES (Cairns) (5.53 p.m.): I spoke at some length on this subject on Thursday last, and at the adjournment one hon. member opposite said that I had been grossly misleading in my reference to the powers of the Prices Commissioner. In my opinion the Prices Commissioner has more power than ever Solomon had in all his glory,

with his 16 wives. The Prices Commissioner has the power to say what we shall eat, wear, and sleep on. He has the power to limit wages when the Government increase them. He has that power and well we know it. He has the power to-day to say what food a child shall eat.

We know that it needs a certain quantity of vitamins to maintain the human body. The Prices Commissioner has the power to say what children may have in the way of the proteins, carbohydrates, minerals, and fats that are necessary for their young lives. In other words, he has power over life and death. The basic wage in Queensland to-day is approximately £4 17s. a week. As admitted by hon. members opposite, when the basic wage was £3 14s. a week under the Moore Government's regime, more could be bought with it than you can get to-day for £4 17s. Hon. members must realise that the Prices Commissioner has power to reduce the basic wage to £2 a week by inflating prices. He can inflate prices at will.

Hon. members on the Government benches wish to convey that Mr. Lindsey is not under the control of the State Government, but of the Commonwealth Government. In effect, they are trying to "pass the buck." We know that is important, particularly when we see vegetables dumped as we have seen them dumped during the last few weeks. Somebody must take the blame for that. Our primary producers are being sabotaged by the Prices Commissioner in that he did not fix both a minimum and maximum price twelve months ago and so help to avoid this glut. Why should the producer produce and throw his goods into the gutter because the market is glutted? That is where the Prices Commissioner is falling down on his job, and hon. members are well aware of it. I might mention at this juncture that it is not only the retail shop that is doing the exploiting; exploitation is taking place in organisations like the Committee of Direction. What is being done in reference to prosecutions for exploitation?

Mr. Nicklin: The C.O.D. was wrongly prosecuted.

Mr. L. J. BARNES: I am given to understand that it was wrongly proceeded against on the one occasion it was prosecuted. However, there is evidence that the C.O.D. has committed breaches. We want to know definitely who is doing the exploiting. There are hundreds of complaints of exploitation. In Cairns last week there was a conviction for an offence of exploitation that took place 14 months ago. Why should there not be more prosecutions? At the present time there are more convictions for breaches of the Liquor Act than convictions for selling food at inflated prices. The consumer of food is not protected at all. There should be at least 1,000 times more prosecutions for selling food at exorbitant prices; there should be more convictions for these breaches than for breaches of the liquor law. Unfortunately that is not so. That is where this Government are falling down on their job—they have not raised a

protest as to the Prices Commissioner's falling down on his job.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: That is not correct; you know it, too.

Mr. L. J. BARNES: Beyond the resolution that was carried in Parliament last Friday week, we have heard nothing from the Government on this question. The position to-day is that if we keep on sabotaging food production there will be a shortage of food. If there is a shortage of food after this war we shall have the much-talked-of revolution.

While the hon. member for West Moreton was speaking the hon. member for Barcoo blamed private enterprise for the dumping of cabbages. He does not want to blame the Prices Commissioner; he wants to blame private enterprise, the poor old farmer. The dumping of cabbages proves that private enterprise produced the goods, but, unfortunately, the Prices Commissioner failed to distribute them. By fooling farmers at certain times of the year with high prices, he treats the farmer rather like the donkey whose driver hangs a carrot in front of his nose that he never gets. We must put the blame where it rightly belongs. Private enterprise has always produced the goods, but hon. members opposite will talk about Socialism and nationalisation without any evidence in support of their case. We have proved, with 1,500,000 people out of industry, that we have the goods, but unfortunately the Prices Commissioner is falling down on his job. There are hon. members opposite who wish to put the blame where it does not belong; all I am interested in is that the blame is put on the person who is responsible; and if the Deputy Prices Commissioner, Mr. Lindsey, has not the power to do anything about this then it is up to the Government to move in the matter and protest to the Federal authorities. We know that while Mr. Lindsey had power he was certainly making a better job of it than is being made to-day—and I do not pay him a full compliment by any means because I know that during the time he had full power the job was not carried out as it should have been. The reason was lack of staff; as the hon. member for Bowen says, this department should have had 100 servants under this system.

A Government Member: Where could you get them now?

Mr. L. J. BARNES: They could have got them in peace-time, but unfortunately they did not. There are two in the office of the Deputy Prices Commissioner.

A Government Member: He has more than that now.

Mr. L. J. BARNES: The number is infinitesimal in comparison with the job he has to do.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment interjected.

Mr. L. J. BARNES: It should have been more. As one hon. member said, one inspector goes to North Queensland, and he still

has no power. If that is not so, why are there not more convictions? There is plenty of evidence. I mentioned that in Cairns there are approximately 100 complaints, but we hardly ever hear of a prosecution. So I say it is not that private enterprise has failed. The hon. member for Barcoo well knows there is no evidence to prove that it has so; on the contrary, private enterprise has produced the goods, but the Government have failed to distribute them, whether it be the Federal or State Government, and you have to get to work or the people will be using their franchise in the correct way at the next elections.

In reference to the power of the Prices Commissioner, we must remember the words of Rothschild:—

“Permit me to issue and control the nation's credit and I care not who makes its laws.”

Second to that power, I think the Prices Commissioner has power over governments if they allow him to use it. They can do what they like with wages; they can raise the basic wage to £30 a week, but the following day he can inflate prices. It is done steadily, as mentioned in the Protocols—‘We will so raise the rate of wages that it will be of no avail to the workers because we will so inflate prices, believing it comes through a shortage of agriculture.’ The Goyim will wake up, but it will be too late.

We have evidence. To-day £20 is being paid for a beast for which a grazier would get £3 10s. 20 years ago and survive. Where is the difference going? It is being paid to the plutocrat or whatever one may like to call him. The cost of administration is too great, and unfortunately that administration is sabotaging production. One would not object if the administration was increasing production, but the exact opposite is the fact. When wages were £4 19s. a week, meat was 7d. a lb. To-day a butcher's wage has increased to £5 9s. a week, approximately 10 per cent., but there is a 100 per cent. increase in the price of meat. Prices are four jumps ahead of his wages. Unfortunately the position is serious, and unless we do something about it, as I said a few days ago, our sons and daughters will curse us in our graves. Hon. members must know this is important. The old-age pensioner of to-day, by reason of price inflation, is receiving approximately 15s. a week from a Labour Government. The Labour Governments have to take the blame for price-fixing in this country. We talk of invalid pensioners in this Committee, but we do nothing for them. We merely give them lip service. We must stand and fight for the rights of the people, and unless we do there will be a shortage of production after this war. We know that the primary producer cannot create a breach, and as far as the Prices Commissioner is concerned it is virtually impossible. Prices are pegged. He sees to it the farmer cannot get too much. He sees that the farmer gets little enough to get him out of his industry and into some other enterprise that will pay him better. There is proof of that to-day. Man-power has 2 per cent. to do with hunting 33 per

cent. of our primary producers out of their industry. The remaining 28 per cent. have been hunted out by the Prices Commissioner. There is no control of marketing whatever, and well hon. members know it. I am speaking of the Prices Commissioner, the man who has sole power. There are illustrations about us to-day. In Beaudesert on Monday I saw roosters being sold for 10s. a head. What does it all mean? Are we trying to kill off all the pullets so that there will be no poultry, as we are doing with the milking cows. There is definite proof that there is no other motive behind it. High prices are ruling so that there will be no products.

Mr. Taylor: They were lucky to get paid for them. They were lucky they did not get the fowlhouse cleaned up.

Mr. L. J. BARNES: The hon. member is probably referring to the regulations under which a man is not allowed to have more than 20 fowls. That is another sabotaging of production.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. L. J. BARNES: At the present time we are receiving peace-time prices for our exports, but for our imports we are paying 75 per cent. higher than in peace-time, and nobody has raised any protest. There is lease-lend, but hon. members can believe me that we shall be on the wrong side of the ledger. There can be no doubt about that. The other day I think the hon. member for Kennedy spoke in reference to malnutrition and said that it did not exist. Imagine him making a statement such as that considering the pre-war evidence of the British Medical Association indicating that 52 per cent. of our infants were suffering from malnutrition. Fruit and vegetables are two important food-stuffs, and can anyone say that with an increase of 100 per cent. to 200 per cent. in prices there is no malnutrition? There is greater malnutrition in this country than ever, even during the term of the Moore Government. These facts must be faced. I am well aware of what the basic wage wage of to-day will buy, but with the maladministration in not teaching people what to eat and the prices asked for goods to-day, the basic wage will buy only £2 worth of goods, generally speaking. We have Menzies or somebody else telling us that the pound note has been deflated 25 per cent. I will be my own statistician and contend that it is deflated much more than that on account of prices only.

We have heard that the Queensland Commissioner of Prices has been seconded to the Federal Government. It is time this Government took some action about the control of prices in order to see to it that consumer and producer alike get a fair and just deal.

Mr. SPARKES (Aubigny) (7.27 p.m.): I am at a loss to know just who instructs the Deputy Prices Commissioner. I have watched and searched, but have not yet heard or read that the Government have ever suggested interference by the Prices Commissioner when prices for certain commodities were low. If

I am wrong, I shall be glad to be corrected by any hon. member here who can tell me otherwise.

Mr. Theodore: What do you want him to do, raise them to a high level?

Mr. SPARKES: What would anyone expect from a Government an hon. member of which sat there this afternoon and said that the farmers were nothing but whingers. That statement was made by the hon. member for Warrego.

Mr. Riordan: That is not true.

Mr. SPARKES: What can one expect? That statement was made when the hon. member for Bowen was speaking. I have never yet heard any hon. member get up in this Chamber and say, when prices were low, that the Prices Commissioner should intervene. It is only when the price of a thing gets high that they suggest any such action. Any hon. member must know that prices rise because the commodity concerned is in short supply, and it follows that only a few producers are reaping the benefit of the higher prices. When those few producers do get higher prices, all they can do is build up a reserve to carry them over the period when prices are low, and product is plentiful. Hon. members seem to lose sight of that fact. You, Mr. Brassington, know as well as I do the many difficulties confronting the primary producer. You know that he has to suffer the ravages of drought and of pests, and when he gets a little more than the average the price is brought down.

Mr. Devries: That is not true.

Mr. SPARKES: It is true. We have seen it happen recently. We had it with potatoes and onions; in fact, we have it with everything. I honestly believe that if the price of an article rises so many people decide to go in for producing it that before very long the production of the article automatically brings down the price. The man who is fortunate enough to get a little higher than the usual price is only being repaid for the many times when he has been obliged to sell his product at below cost of production.

Within the last few days men holding the highest positions in the Commonwealth so far as the price of meat is concerned have visited this State, and I have reason to believe that there is a feeling abroad—and I have no reason to doubt my authority for this—that there is a grave possibility that if prices continue at their present level at Cannon Hill the meat will be seized in the hall at 41s. 8d. a 100 lb. I want to tell hon. members opposite, the Premier in particular, that when I spoke in this Chamber some days ago on the question of meat prices, hon. members on the Government side said that I was mad—they bawled at me—yet a few days afterwards they voted unanimously for a motion that did exactly what I suggested. I said at the time that I was speaking from a practical knowledge of the industry. If this Government are going to allow meat to be seized in that meat hall at 41s. 8d. a 100 lb., after a man has bought a beast at

a little bit more than that, then I warn them that there will be no beef. I may be asked, "Are you going to hold it back?" I ask any hon. member here who has a practical knowledge of fat cattle to go to Cannon Hill on Thursday and he will see for himself that a very big proportion of the cattle comprise what we term good beef—a bullock that dresses perhaps at 650 lb.—but in two or three months that beast would probably weigh 900 lb.

If you are going to seize the carcasses in the meat hall at 41s. 8d. a 100 lb., then the people who have them on their properties will hold them back to put the extra condition on them, and in that way you will lose meat rather than gain it. I want to point that out very clearly to the Premier. I want him to make a note of the fact.

A Government Member: You are wrong.

Mr. SPARKES: I am not wrong. I know the position only too well, because it is my business, my living, and it means £ s. d. to me.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: Who is talking of seizing the beef?

Mr. SPARKES: The hon. gentleman knows only too well, and so would the Premier if he would only prompt someone to ask him the question. He knows that the beef could be seized at the abattoirs at 41s. 8d. a 100 lb.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member is discussing a matter outside the vote.

Mr. SPARKES: I was referring to the Prices Commissioner, and he is the person who would fix the price at 41s. 8d. If the beef is seized it will mean that there will be less meat instead of more on the market. Hon. members opposite may laugh, but they did the same thing when I made a previous suggestion, and I was invited to go to the border to shoot the cattle.

The Premier: Do you not see that if we had the power to seize the meat in the meat hall we could also seize it on your station, and see that the people did not starve?

Mr. SPARKES: Perhaps the hon. gentleman would fatten the cattle on my station, too, and perhaps he would seize the country with which to fatten them. His remark is so childish as to be hardly worth a reply.

The Premier: Your bullocks are no better than you are.

Mr. SPARKES: There would be no use in taking the bullocks unless they were fat. They are not any use if they are all skin and hide.

The Premier: We are eating skin and hide to-day to a certain extent.

Mr. SPARKES: Immediately I get up to speak on this subject I am met with all the abuse possible from hon. members opposite. They said I was wrong when I expressed opinions on a previous occasion, but later on

they carried a resolution unanimously embodying what I had suggested. I pointed out that the higher price ruling for beef in Sydney had the effect of taking cattle away from this State, and the Premier interjected, "We will go out to the border and shoot them."

The Premier: No. I said, "Will you come out to the border with me . . ."

Mr. SPARKES: I do not suppose that I was to do all the shooting. It seems to me that the Prices Commissioner has only one idea, and that is to fix prices when they are going up. Why does he not do something when prices come down?

Mr. Riordan: You denied my statement about the chillers weighing 650 lb.?

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: Why were you not here last Friday week when we debated the subject?

Mr. SPARKES: It appears to me that the Prices Commissioner sees only one side of the picture.

Mr. Theodore: How would you like to live on hairy goat all the time instead of beef?

Mr. SPARKES: I do not know what the hon. member has lived on, and I should not like to call him a hairy goat. However, I do not know how that is relevant to the question. Personally, I think that for all the good the Prices Commissioner is he might as well do away with his entire staff.

Mr. Riordan: And allow an open go for the bushrangers.

Mr. SPARKES: With all respect to the hon. member for Bowen, I want to say that the people who are producing these products are not bushrangers, and they are just as good as he is, and that the people who grow the products are entitled to a reasonable price for them. One of the main reasons for a shortage is that a fair price has not been paid. The high prices that are obtained occasionally only go to make up for the very low prices. Presumably it is the duty of the Prices Commissioner to pull down prices when they go up, and it is not his duty to raise prices when they fall. Not one hon. member opposite has ever risen in his place and suggested that prices should be increased.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: Where were you a week last Friday when the subject was discussed?

Mr. SPARKES: The hon. gentleman made a statement about wheat.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: You answer my question.

Mr. SPARKES: I will answer the question if the hon. gentleman will give me time. He said there was no regulation of wheat production in this State by the fixation of a price, but his statement only goes to display his ignorance of the wheat industry. The fixation of 2s. a bushel for wheat over the

first 3,000 bushels automatically regulates wheat production in Queensland. If the Minister would only go out into the wheat-growing areas on the Darling Downs he would find that what I say is right. Instead of having the harvest that we should have to-day it has been curtailed to the extent that it is back to about the 4s. a bushel basis. If the Prices Commissioner is required—hon. members opposite seem to think that he is—then for heaven's sake let him give some thought to the under-dog as well as to the man who eats the products. They in some way deny to the man who works on these farms the price he should obtain for his products.

I heard one hon. member say that the farmer was a worker. I agree with him. No-one in this Chamber works like him, either in number of hours or quantity of work accomplished, yet as soon as the price of his product goes up the axe is brought down on him, but as soon as the price falls, they let him go to blazes.

Mr. COLLINS (Cook) (7.40 p.m.): The hon. member for Aubigny is entirely off the track in his remarks about the Commissioner of Prices. He made many mistakes, particularly in his statement that the price of no primary product was fixed at a fair level, and that when the price of a primary product was reduced in value he was allowed to go to blazes, but as soon as it tended to increase the Prices Commissioner prevented it from increasing above its normal level. That is entirely wrong. It is entirely untrue of the industry that the hon. member is mainly concerned with, the meat industry. The fixed price of meat is 41s. 6d. for 100 lb. Will anyone, even the hon. member for Aubigny, say that is a bad price for fat stock?

Mr. Brand: No.

Mr. COLLINS: It is a good price for fat stock. Let us be fair and admit it is. What about the price of another primary product, wool? That was fixed at a fair price to the grazier.

Mr. Sparkes: It was fixed by the British Government.

Mr. COLLINS: It was fixed by the Federal Government on representations by the States, and it has recently been increased by 15 per cent. by the Federal Government.

Mr. Sparkes: By the British Government.

Mr. COLLINS: Not by the British Government, but by the Federal Government on representations by the State Governments that the original price was not fair. We cannot get away from that. Wool and cattle are two primary products at least that the hon. member ought to have some knowledge of. Yet he comes here and displays most deplorable ignorance or innocence; I will not say which. I do not think it is ignorance. He endeavours to put over misstatements that are entirely wrong in an endeavour to mislead the people. Take another primary industry, the butter industry. What aid has been given to the butter industry? No less than a sub-

sidy of £6,500,000, in order to bring the price up to a point that is payable to the primary producer.

Mr. Sparkes: How many are going out of butter production?

Mr. COLLINS: They are not going out of butter because of the price. Some may be going out of the industry because they are unable to obtain labour, but the Federal Government to-day are attending to that problem. They realise, as this Government always have, that the primary producers are entitled to a fair and reasonable price for their products, and in most cases we are obtaining justice. Take another big primary industry, the wheat industry. The price for wheat has been stabilised at a fair and reasonable level to both producers and consumers.

Mr. Sparkes: What—2s. a bushel?

The Attorney-General: Four shillings.

Mr. COLLINS: What does the hon. member for Aubigny know about primary producers?

Mr. Sparkes: I know about them and I can take you among wheat men who know the position, too.

Mr. COLLINS: The price of wheat was fixed at 4s. a bushel.

Mr. Sparkes: That was only for a small quantity.

Mr. COLLINS: No, not a small quantity.

Mr. Sparkes: It is.

Mr. COLLINS: It was fixed for the bulk of the wheat produced. Wheat that has deteriorated and is not fit for flour is sold at a less price, but the great bulk of the wheat crop is fixed at a fair, reasonable and just price. It is peculiar that not one representative of the wheat-growing districts has complained about the price. Take another primary product, pig-meats. The price of pig-meats has been fixed at 9d. a lb.

Mr. Muller: After much trouble.

Mr. COLLINS: The pig producer has never had a better price fixed in the history of the industry. Not only has the price been fixed at 9d. a lb., but that price has been guaranteed for two years, while a year's notice must be given before any alteration can be made in that price. Let us be a little fair and reasonable in all these things. The price of peanuts also has been fixed at a fair and reasonable level. In fact, nearly every commodity the growers of which have themselves taken an intelligent interest in the industry, and organised it under the legislation formulated by the present Government many years ago, are to-day receiving a fair and reasonable price for their product. I am not saying they are having a particularly good time because circumstances are affecting every member of this community, such as the shortage of labour and materials, including machinery, benzine, and similar goods.

But do not let us blame the Prices Commissioner for all those things. He probably has made many mistakes. Our Commissioner of Prices is the Deputy Prices Commissioner for the Commonwealth, but we must again admit that prices in this country have been kept at more reasonable levels perhaps than in any other country in the world to-day. For instance, in England their prices have gone entirely out of hand and they are nearly double what they were in pre-war times. That has not happened in this country. Here we have a rise generally of about 25 per cent.; and in order to stop any further rise the Federal Government have pegged prices; and that is a tribute to the interest taken by our Federal Government and the Prices Commissioner. Our Prices Commissioner has done a good job for this country.

I was rather interested in the statement made by the hon. member for Aubigny that his efforts were responsible for the Queensland Government's making representations to the Federal Government in order to stop cattle from going to New South Wales. It was very surprising how silent that hon. member was about six months ago when I brought this same matter up in the last session of Parliament and complained that the system was entirely wrong. It has taken at least six months for that action to be taken, and it was not the hon. member for Aubigny who drew the country's attention to it; yet he is now doing all he can to claim all the credit for it. He was more interested at that time in getting cheap cattle from the Gulf country so that he could fatten them down here and get the good prices ruling in New South Wales. Now he sees it is hitting against him he poses as a big, kind man trying to get more justice for the people. The person he is most interested in is himself; if it is affecting his pocket it is time for him to squeal, but unless it is affecting his pocket everything is all right. I think the hon. member exposed himself in his true colours when he said "Let us do away with the Prices Commissioner altogether and have an open slather; when things are in short demand we will collar the market and get double the prices, but if prices happen to go down"—which he knows they probably will not do during the war-time—"we will take the risk," knowing there is no risk at all.

The Prices Commissioner is the man standing as the judge between the consuming public and those who are producing the necessary commodities. He is holding the scales of justice fairly. Mistakes are made—I am not going to deny it—but in nearly every case where mistakes are made at the beginning they are eventually corrected. It is far better than having prices rising higher and higher as they were when wages were going higher and higher; it prevents the inflation that is often quoted by hon. members opposite from taking place. The Prices Commissioner occupies one of the most responsible positions in the Commonwealth in order to prevent that inflation, which would be disastrous to all sections of the community. I am not an advocate of inflation any more than the hon. member is, and I recognise that the powers that

be are preventing inflation from taking place; and in that respect the Prices Commissioner is doing one of the most responsible jobs in a very fair and equitable way.

I think I have dealt with most phases of the primary industries complained about by the hon. member for Aubigny. The hon. member for Cairns spoke in the opposite strain. He said the Prices Commissioner was allowing prices to go far too high. So there we have two hon. members belonging to the one party in opposition advocating two entirely opposite policies; and it would appear from that at least that the Prices Commissioner is preserving an even balance of justice as between those who want to exploit the public and those who want to exploit the producer.

The tobacco industry is another one with which a fair price has been fixed. I do not say the tobacco-growers are making profits, but I do say it is not the price of tobacco that is preventing them from making a reasonable living; it is the difficulty of obtaining supplies of materials. Taking the whole thing by and large the Federal Government have done a better job in this country than I believe has been done in any other country engaged in the war, and I think the Committee should take due notice of the efforts that have been made and give due credit to the Prices Commissioner for the work he has done.

Mr. KERR (Oxley) (7.51 p.m.): I do not think it can be denied that price-fixing generally in Queensland cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called satisfactory.

Mr. Brand: It is bungling.

Mr. KERR: It is absolute bungling, and I do not propose to say on whom we should fix the responsibility. The fact remains that the control of prices for our commodities in Queensland would appear to be in the hands of the Prices Commissioner, Professor Copland, a Federal authority. Whether he does or does not know the position here, the control is out of the hands of our Commissioner of Prices. He appears to be at the mercy entirely of Professor Copland, and as a State Government we should not tolerate that state of affairs. In the case of meat, this Government had to take a stand and Parliament had to pass a resolution, which was passed on to the Commonwealth Government with good results. But is this sort of thing to continue with each commodity? Must this Government have a motion passed whenever something has to be rectified? Is this to be done with one commodity after another dealt with by the Federal authority? It is time the system was altered, or in fact abolished, and the work put under the control of the Commissioner of Prices in Queensland. For the life of me I cannot see why some arrangement of that kind is not made.

In the main, the fixation of ceiling prices has my personal approval, subject to one condition, and that is, that if ceiling prices have to be fixed when commodities are scarce, it should be good enough to control prices also when there is a glut.

Mr. Maher: Fix a minimum price.

Mr. KERR: I will not call it a minimum price. When there is a scarcity of a commodity the authorities come into the picture and fix a ceiling price, thereby doing away with the old law of supply and demand; but when there is a glut of a commodity they allow the law of supply and demand to operate. In the law of supply and demand there are, first of all, the producer, then the middleman, then the retailer, and, last of all, the consumer. The consumer cannot be blamed for high prices, and neither can the producer, inasmuch as he gets little if any of the high price. One must look then at the intermediate sections handling these commodities. It is usually they who get the rake-off. There must be a thorough investigation into the whole position. Whether it is a Federal or State responsibility nobody has placed his finger on the spot in this matter, and somebody must do this quickly, because discontent is rampant as regards prices throughout Queensland.

In conclusion, I would point out that in view of the facts I have just related I cannot see that there is any necessity for this vote. There is no Commissioner of Prices in Queensland. The Government do not pay him a salary, or if they do it is recouped. There is, therefore, no necessity for this vote at all.

Mr. BRAND (Isis) (7.56 p.m.): Amidst all this welter of criticism of the Prices Commissioner, it is well to state on behalf of the producer that he has never looked for an extravagant price for his products. However, he has not been satisfied with the way in which the Prices Commissioner has dealt with them. It is remarkable that when a brilliant man in a high position deals with the prices of foodstuffs, he makes a bungle of it. There is not one of his decisions in regard to the prices of foodstuffs that has been satisfactory, either to the producer or the consumer. There is something wrong.

Mr. Collins: That is not right.

Mr. BRAND: What of the bungle in all the foodstuffs coming from our primary industries over the past two years? Surely, in the name of Queensland, our Queensland Commissioner of Prices should have some influence on the Commonwealth Commissioner on the question of prices.

The Secretary for Mines: How do you control the price of sugar?

Mr. BRAND: Our primary products should have an orderly marketing system, yet the very party that says we should have orderly marketing cannot fix the price of one foodstuff when a glut occurs.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: What about orderly production of sugar?

Mr. BRAND: The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock interjects, yet in the wheat-growing industry Queensland is being sacrificed to the Southern interests.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I point out to the hon. member that the question of the fixation of the wheat price is not controlled by the Queensland Commissioner of Prices.

Mr. BRAND: I realise that it is a Federal matter, but I was quoting that as an example of the type of price-fixing we have. In this State, on the general question of price-fixing, we have not evolved one sensible method. Surely every hon. member will admit that if we are going to fix the ceiling price for commodities we should at least also fix a minimum price so that the producer will be assured of a reasonable return for his product? We have the spectacle of responsible Ministers urging the people to grow certain commodities and assuring them that they will get reasonable prices, yet year after year we see potatoes, onions, cabbages, in fact vegetables of all kinds, ploughed in because the authorities have failed to evolve a scheme that will make for orderly marketing and give the assurance of a reasonable price. All this happens because the price-fixing authorities have not fixed a minimum price that will give a reasonable return to the growers.

Mr. Dunstan: How would a minimum price cure that?

Mr. BRAND: I am afraid that the hon. member for Gympie is like his administration, unable to find a basis upon which we can be sure that man-power is not being wasted in the production of our commodities and that commodities will be produced at a reasonable price for the consumer.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: Would minimum prices prevent gluts?

Mr. BRAND: That is a question that the Minister himself has not been able to answer. This is not a new matter.

The Secretary for Mines: Then solve it.

Mr. BRAND: It is solved in other countries of the world. It is solved in all the belligerent countries to-day.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: You are trying to evade answering my question.

Mr. BRAND: I am not evading the question.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: Would a minimum price prevent gluts?

Mr. BRAND: I suppose the Minister can make his own speech. All I say is that if the Minister is going to fix a ceiling price for commodities, then at least he should fix a minimum price that would, in effect, automatically control production.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: Answer my question first.

Mr. BRAND: I repeat that in all the belligerent countries in the world to-day they have fixed it.

The Secretary for Mines: What is your authority for saying that?

Mr. BRAND: Because every country that is at war to-day has fixed the prices of commodities. Nothing is wasted, reasonable prices are paid, whether in Britain, in the Axis countries, or in America.

The Secretary for Mines: They have not fixed it.

Mr. BRAND: They have. They are not having the difficulty that we are experiencing because inexperienced men are fixing prices.

I repeat that the producers are not asking for extravagant prices. They ask only for reasonable prices. Surely we can find some means by which we can organise production and marketing so that the prices received by the primary producer will cover the cost of production and allow him a reasonable standard of living. It is not in the interests of the country, its people, or its war effort that men should produce commodities for which no market can be found.

If it is not the duty of the Government to find a market in a time of war, then whose duty is it? Surely that is part of the administration in the fixation of prices, but if the Government do not want to assume that responsibility then let them cease fixing prices on the present methods and allow the law of supply and demand to operate so that matters will be better for the consumer and for the producer. If marketing schemes are to be the order of the day let them be properly organised. Many of the industries that are producing the foodstuffs for the nation to-day are not organised at all. The producer is called upon to supply the foodstuffs, but his markets are not properly organised for his benefit and the benefit of the people.

The hon. member for Cook almost convinced hon. members that the statement by the hon. member for Aubigny was true. I realise that 41s. 8d. a 100 lb. is a reasonable price for prime beef, yet it is true that prices above that figure are being paid. However, when there is a glut there is no Prices Commissioner or Government who will come to the rescue of the producer by saying that prices have fallen to an unpayable level. In view of the many conditions that face the producer in the economic and financial field, especially in connection with increased taxation, the primary producers are anxious to obtain only a reasonable price to enable their businesses to continue. May I ask the Minister in charge of the vote to follow the example and experience of the sugar industry where there has been a system of orderly marketing over a number of years in relation to the product sold in Australia, the price of which has been maintained at such a level as to give a reasonable price to the consumer in pre-war days? That industry has received a reasonable price, thereby giving a fair return to the producer.

These factors should be taken into consideration by the Prices Commissioner in all matters relating to price-fixation. There has been, and no doubt will continue to be, a great deal of official bungling in price-fixation because the people who have controlled it have not had any experience of the problems

of rural life. Whenever they have dealt with the subject they have bungled it. That is a great pity. I believe that a greater part should be played in these matters by those directly associated with the industry because it has been clearly demonstrated to this Parliament and the Federal Parliament that where the producers themselves have had the right to control their own prices, the results have been advantageous not only to the producers but to the consumers, too. The consumers are entitled to a fair deal, but the people of Queensland have not had that fair deal, and they have not had the benefits that they should have had. The official bungling has gone on, with the result that the consumers of Brisbane and of Queensland generally have had to pay very high prices at times, while at other times prices have been very low. Never has there been a regular and reasonable price for the commodities constantly required by the consumers of Queensland. I hope our Deputy Prices Commissioner will endeavour to use the influence he must possess with the Federal Prices Commissioner so that the people of Queensland will through their industries get a very much better deal than they have had in the past.

Mr. MULLER (Fassifern) (8.8 p.m.): When speaking on the Chief Office vote the Minister put forward a proposition with which I entirely agreed. When prices are fixed at an uneconomic level the effect has been to create a shortage. I then brought evidence to show that that is already taking place in the dairy produce industry. We have the spectacle, as reported in this morning's "Courier-Mail," of our dairy production throughout Australia being down something like 27 per cent. as compared with the corresponding period of last year.

The Secretary for Public Lands: You would not expect it to be up, would you?

Mr. MULLER: I will tell the hon. gentleman why Queensland production is down about 40 per cent. To be quite honest I should not expect production to be up in Queensland. I realise that some of the shortage is attributable to climatic conditions. New South Wales has had the best winter and early spring rains that have fallen for years, and South Australia and Western Australia—I know what I am talking about, as I am supplied with weekly production figures—have had a record season. Therefore, there is no excuse for the decline in the production of the Commonwealth so far as climatic conditions are concerned, yet production is slipping. The Minister has said that it would not have that effect. I disagree with him. It is having that effect. The "Courier-Mail" this morning shows that we shall be rather seriously affected.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: Did you say I said butter prices were at an economic level?

Mr. MULLER: The hon. gentleman used words to that effect.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: No, you are using that argument.

Mr. MULLER: I am using that argument now.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: You mean present prices?

Mr. MULLER: Yes, present prices. Even to-day's price of 1s. 6d. a lb. is not economic and people are leaving the industry in consequence. If the Minister likes to look up any country newspaper he will see a number of advertisements in which dairy herds are offered for sale.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: How does your share-farmer get on?

Mr. MULLER: If the hon. gentleman is referring to me personally then I wish to tell him my share-farmer gets on as well as any other share-farmer.

The Secretary for Labour and Employment: He is having a raw deal.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I hope the hon. member will connect his remarks with this vote.

Mr. MULLER: I was dealing with the price of butter when the Minister interjected. I am concerned because prices are fixed at a level that will not encourage production. During the past few weeks considerable discussion has taken place on the ceiling prices of meat. I was interested to-day to read the Prime Minister's statement that he had assured this Government that an adjustment of prices would be made. I can forecast that the adjustment that will be made will be on all-fours with what the hon. member for Aubigny forecast—it will not be a levelling up of prices but a levelling down. I can tell hon. members what will happen. Mr. Curtin will see that the New South Wales prices are brought back to the Brisbane prices. I am not complaining that 41s. 8d. a 100 lb. is not a sufficient price for beef, but you will find that the price of beef is brought back to the Brisbane rate. I have said previously, and I repeat that I do not believe for a moment that men like Mr. Lindsey and Professor Copland are fools. I believe that these gentlemen are capable of fixing prices on a fair and equitable basis if permitted to do so. One cannot help feeling that there are influences at work that prevent them from doing what they think is a fair thing.

This is happening not only in Queensland, but in the Commonwealth and New Zealand also. I want to give the Committee an idea of how prices adjustments are working in New Zealand. Here is a report taken from a newspaper I got a few days ago—

“It should be noted, however, that the labour problem still remains unsolved. Single men are unprocurable to-day, and dairy farmers are paying £5 weekly and a free house for a married man, where the wife takes no part in the farming operations. A wage of £6 to £7 weekly, plus a free house, is commonly being paid where the wife assists in the milking shed. This

is an anomalous position when we take into consideration that the dairy farmer himself, under the guaranteed price scheme, gets a net income of only £4 10s. a week, plus a free house—and only if he maintains the standards set out in the article published by you. As in Australia, so in New Zealand—the dairy farmer is the ‘forgotten man.’ Returns published in the New Zealand Press three months ago show that the earnings of 1,426 waterside workers in Auckland as furnished to the Commissioner of Taxes for the previous 12 months' figures averaged £746 for a working week of 59½ hours—”

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I hope the hon. member will connect his remarks with the subject-matter under discussion.

Mr. MULLER: If you allow me to finish the point I am making, Mr. Brassington, you will find that the prices adjustments are such that the men carrying on the industry are getting considerably less than they are paying others to help them. The comparison in New Zealand shows that the waterside worker showed in his income-tax return that for the past 12 months he received an average of £14 7s. for a week of 59½ hours. On the other hand, the dairy farmer received £5 a week for a week of 70 hours.

At 8.15 p.m.,

Mr. MANN (Brisbane) relieved the Chairman in the chair.

Mr. MULLER: Those are the anomalies that have been created and I feel that they will continue until some alteration is made. The Prices Commissioner has not the control that he should have. It is little use this Committee's criticising the Prices Commissioner personally or the system unless we are prepared to make a recommendation that might improve it.

It must be admitted, because of the experience we have gained during the last couple of years and because of the mistakes made under this system, that we must set up a system that will serve the community a good deal better than the present one. I believe it is essential to have on the independent tribunal that I recommend at least one representative who understands the commodity it is dealing with. This applies to almost any commodity. The conditions that operate during the production of a commodity vary so much that a professor of economics is not in a position to get down to actual production costs. Furthermore, such bodies are not permitted to control the whole of the marketing of the commodity.

I should like to examine two or three of the commodities that have been mentioned. The hon. member for Cook made a mouthful of the wheat industry and said that the price in Queensland was payable. I agree that some stability is required in the wheat industry, but I want hon. members of the Committee to realise we are fighting a war at the moment, and we cannot expect regulations that were justifiable or advisable in pre-war days to be appropriate now. The position of the industry under the present scheme is absolutely

absurd. Last year, we fell short of the Queensland minimum requirements by 2,500,000 bushels, the reason being the fixed price for the grower up to 3,000 bushels or 1,000 bags. That price might be reasonable as far as the 1,000 bags are concerned.

A Government Member: They represent 80 per cent. of the producers.

Mr. MULLER: The hon. member may say that, but when you get to the question of the total production it is another matter. If you are going to confine people to a production of 1,000 bags, you are going to be short for a long while. It is essential to remember that transport is one difficulty, and it is really foolish to be bringing wheat from the Southern States under the present transport difficulties. Remember what Mr. Bligh said last year, that with a shortage of 2,500,000 bushels you would require to bring to Queensland one trainload of 200 tons of wheat each day. Here we are up against it as far as transport is concerned, yet hon. members will not let our growers grow the required amount.

The Secretary for Public Lands: Eighty-five per cent. of them grow under 1,000 bags and they are engaged in dairying too.

Mr. MULLER: The hon. gentleman can talk from now until the cows come home. That is where we are in difficulties with the professors of economics; they do not understand the practical side. Many a grower who is growing 3,000 bushels could probably grow 10,000 bushels without needing any more equipment. The grower of wheat on an economic basis gets the machinery required, and to-day he is allowed to use that machinery to grow only 3,000 bushels a year.

Mr. Collins: That is not so.

Mr. MULLER: It is so, and the hon. member knows it to be so. The grower could produce three times as much without any additional plant.

The hon. member also mentioned pigs. I want to draw a comparison between the pig industry and the wheat industry, to show how important the former is to Queensland. Recently, the Commonwealth Government or the Prices Commissioner—I am not prepared to say which—agreed to an increase in the price of pig-meat, bringing it to 9d. a lb. Why has that been done? The people who knew what was coming advised the Meat Controller about two years ago that unless something was done about the pig position Queensland would find itself short of pig-meats as well as other meats. We saw Mr. Tonkin, and advised him that the convenient way of supplementing the meat supply was by increasing the pig population. After a good deal of agitation they agreed—but after the damage had been done—to increase the price; but in the meantime all of us have reduced the number of our pigs, and the pig population to-day is down considerably, even on pre-war days. The damage has been done. After that the Prices Commissioner was told that we required food for these pigs.

In order that the pig-raiser might produce pigs at 9d. a lb. to-day wheat for feed must be brought from New South Wales and in some instances from South Australia. One cannot get away from the fact that a serious economic waste is brought about by this kind of bungling. If it is not bungling then I have yet to know what bungling is. The Prices Commissioners do not understand the industry. They do not understand that the pig industry has been improved very definitely over the last couple of years. They do not understand the wheat industry. There one finds the crux of the trouble and that applies almost to any primary product that one likes to mention.

Mr. Maher: They do not understand potatoes.

Mr. MULLER: That is so. Let us examine the position with regard to the marketing of potatoes. First of all, the price is fixed, but many other matters also come into the picture.

The Attorney-General: £2 a ton extra for the marketing.

Mr. MULLER: The hon. gentleman would not know an English potato from a sweet potato. First of all, there is the Commonwealth Potato Controller who works in conjunction with the Prices Commissioner. Then there is the State Potato Controller. There is also the Distributing Agents' Committee. In addition there are inspectors. We have all these officials and it does not matter what the Prices Commissioner does or what price he fixes, these other people come into the picture in respect to the price. We will not argue about the Commonwealth man, who does not come into it as far as these agents' committees are concerned, but I will discuss the Queensland Potato Controller. Mr. Brabiner, who does not know a spud from a goose egg. He has never had anything to do with potatoes.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: He grew potatoes long, long ago.

Mr. MULLER: Why are these men selected? Why do the Government go out of their way, almost without exception, to get as controller of a commodity a man who does not understand that commodity?

The Secretary for Public Lands: He is a Commonwealth officer.

Mr. MULLER: It is all very fine to blame the Commonwealth. Then we have the Distributing Agents' Committee. Who compose this committee? They are the present agents in Roma street, the old produce agents, and provision is made under the regulations for these men to get a bigger rake-off from potatoes than ever before. If that is not a racket, I want to know what is. But it does not end with the Distributing Agents' Committee. There are then the inspectors who grade these potatoes, and if an inspector happens to degrade them the Distributing Agents' Committee comes into the picture and can sell these potatoes at any price. As an illustration I will give an instance of one of

the best growers in our Tarome district who has a recognised brand. Any agent at Roma street would buy on the brand. He sent in 84 bags of No. 2 potatoes from Aratula. All the inspector had to do was to put a No. 3 on these bags and they were sold for 4s. a cwt. That man lost everything because the Potato Controller, the Distributing Agents' Committee, and the grower have no check on them.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: Was the matter reported for investigation?

Mr. MULLER: Yes, but that is as far as we ever get. I am satisfied that so far as investigation is concerned one is only wasting one's time.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: To whom was the report made?

Mr. MULLER: I hope something will be disclosed. I have cited one instance to-night. I could mention several reliable people. I checked up on some of these potatoes, and the people who bought them informed me they were really choice, but the grower got virtually nothing for them. This is the sort of thing that has a demoralising effect on the growers. It will have the effect mentioned by the Minister inasmuch as they will not be growers much longer, even those who have their whole heart and soul in production for war effort. The Government must be responsible. After all, even if we throw the responsibility on the Prices Commissioner the Government do more than fix prices; they issue all these regulations that make the position of the Prices Commissioner almost impossible.

Then we have the example of the milk supply of Brisbane during the past few months. If ever there was a travesty and an imposition on the people of Brisbane and the producers, it was that. Deputations waited on the Prices Commissioner over and over again pointing out anomalies.

I know Mr. Lindsey was perfectly satisfied that the case submitted to him was sound, but his position was hopeless, he could not make any adjustments, with the result that the people of Brisbane went without milk. I am not boasting, but the organisation with which I am connected told Mr. Lindsey that we ourselves could have made up the shortage in the Brisbane milk supply if we were only permitted to do so, but the prevailing price at that time made it impossible. The Commonwealth said, "We will provide a subsidy," but whilst the price of 1s. 1d. was ruling in Brisbane the Sydney price was 1s. 4d., although weather conditions in New South Wales were very good and we were experiencing a drought. To show how stupid the whole subsidy was, we can take the way our organisation is operating in the West Moreton electorate. We bring milk from one side of the road and it is not subsidised. A competitor in the Brisbane area buys milk from the other side of the road, brings it to the Brisbane market, and because he is not paying the producer the same prices that we are the producer is subsidised. Has any-

one ever heard of anything so ridiculous? On one side of the road Bill Jones gets a subsidy while on the other side Bill Smith gets nothing. That ridiculous state of affairs is brought about by the present system of price-fixing. The dairy farmer would be happy and willing to supply the consumers of Brisbane with ample milk at a reasonable price—and I emphasise that they want not an extravagant but a fair and reasonable price. When we made the offer to supply the milk, Mr. Lindsey said, "So and so is the price, and we cannot give you any more." I wonder where this thing is going to end, or if it is ever going to end? We are out of trouble temporarily so far as the milk supply is concerned, and I suppose the Minister is happy, but I am going to tell him that by about April or May of next year he may find himself in the same predicament as he was this year. Unless this matter is taken out of the hands of the people who are controlling it to-day I am afraid the people of Brisbane will have no milk next winter if weather conditions are bad.

The hon. member for Aubigny is perfectly right when he says that they see the position out of one eye only and that these price adjustments that are supposed to be made are not price adjustments at all. The trouble is that these people who are directing the Prices Commissioner have no regard at all for the producer. I cited the case of New Zealand to-day because I know the position obtaining there was on all-fours with that in Queensland. There it was found that the people who were working in other industries were getting three times as much money as men on the dairy farms and it is only necessary to continue a policy such as that for a little while and supplies will be short. It is a serious matter for both State and Commonwealth. We are told, and perhaps rightly so, that it is our duty to stand behind Great Britain in her time of trouble and send her all the foodstuffs we can. When Senator Keane was announcing rationing some time ago he said that we were not short but that we must supply Great Britain. Those of us who are in the dairying industry estimate to-day that we are going to be 30,000 tons short of our commitments to Great Britain this year, and that is about half of what we undertook to supply. Surely that should give the Minister food for thought and convince him that 1s. 6d. is not a payable price under present conditions. With the present award rates and other costs of production 1s. 6d. will not encourage people to go dairying. The position to-day is such that instead of becoming more interested in primary production people are leaving the land. This cannot go on for ever, and I hope that at least this Government—if they cannot convince the Commonwealth that it should do so—will see fit to amend the Act in connection with the control of prices and set up an independent tribunal, representative of the producers as well as the consumers. Otherwise this bungling will continue.

Mr. L. J. BARNES (Cairns) (8.32 p.m.): I rise on this occasion to reply to the hon. member for Cook who said that the hon.

member for Cairns complained that prices were too high while the hon. member for Aubigny complained that they were too low, and who came to the conclusion, in the face of those facts, that the Prices Commissioner must be doing a good job.

The hon. member for Cook knows full well that my complaint was that there was no minimum price for primary products and so his reply to my statement was similar to the action of a person who hit Smith's dog because President Roosevelt supported the New Deal. My complaint against the Deputy Prices Commissioner is that in peace-time we had prices that were too high and prices that were too low, and we have proof of that even with minimum prices. The hon. member for Cook quoted four or five primary industries that were protected, but he did not mention the thousands of others that were not. It is all very well to select a few that are affected, such as pig-meat and meat generally, but the main food essentials are not protected.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock wanted to know how to get rid of gluts. I must agree that there is need for a certain amount of control. There are reasons for believing that in Queensland we have done nothing yet in connection of the establishment of dehydration plants and they are urgently required to deal with our surpluses. One thing is certain—that if the Federal authorities propose to set up a centralised department to tell people when to sow and when to reap you can rest assured that there will be no gluts and no surpluses. The bungling then will be ever so much greater than anything the farmer has seen hitherto. Even if there is a glut that is no reason why the farmer should not get a minimum price. In going home the other day I saw a farmer's yard that was full of cattle, eating good cabbage that were a few months ago 4s. a head. Unless some prompt action is taken the day will come when we shall not have human beings, let alone cattle, eating cabbage. It is time that the Government moved in connection with the establishment of dehydration plants, as other States have done. That is the only way to deal with surpluses. We cannot control the rain and therefore we shall have surpluses at times. It is utterly stupid to imagine that we shall not. All credit to the farmer who can produce the needs of the people, but let us take some action to see that the man who produces the foodstuffs is not allowed to starve. That is physically and financially possible, as hon. members opposite well know.

The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: Do you favour a little control of production so that the prices will be all right?

Mr. L. J. BARNES: I am aware that there must be a certain amount of protection, but I have no doubt that it is physically impossible for a centralised department of control to tell 150,000 farmers—or whatever the number is—when they shall sow and when they shall reap. That has been physically impossible in every country in the world where it has been tried. I said long ago that the

Minister should have control of Queensland like any other Minister of a State, but no. I am pleased to say that on that occasion the Barnes Brothers were unfortunately the only two who favoured the idea.

Mr. Collins: You believe in the control of marketing?

Mr. L. J. BARNES: I do believe in the control of marketing, but I do not believe in the control of production.

Mr. Collins: How can you have control of marketing without control of production?

Mr. L. J. BARNES: Is the hon. member not well aware that you can have control of marketing without control of production?

Mr. Collins: No.

Mr. L. J. BARNES: You cannot control production. I advise the hon. member to get that out of his head. The good God controls production. We can control prices, which will help to control production. The hon. member should not be so insane as to suggest that we can control production.

(Time expired.)

Mr. YEATES (East Toowoomba) (8.36 p.m.): If all Australians do their duty during the next decade or two to increase the population by about 10,000,000, with the aid of immigration and other means, there will not be all this trouble about marketing schemes and so forth—the law of supply and demand will operate. But, unfortunately, that time is not yet. Of course, we are in a period of war, too, when most businesses are upset. I notice that the vote provides for the sum of £982 for the Commissioner of Prices, and I presume, although I do not know, that the Commonwealth Government will reimburse the State some of that expenditure, because price-fixation is controlled by the Commonwealth. No doubt the Minister will be able to give me the information on this point. "Contingencies" need £2,590, which is about twice as much as the amount required for the Commissioner of Prices and his clerk-typist.

I do not know how that is going to be made up. We shall hear about it presently. The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock, quite properly, at periods asks the people to grow more vegetables and other products. He asks householders, too, to grow their own vegetables. I have been doing so for a good while, and if you, Mr. Mann, care to come to Toowoomba at my invitation—I ask all back benchers on the Government side, also—I will show you a very fine vegetable garden at 41 Hill street. I dare say that 80 per cent. of the people are growing vegetables on a similar scale. They are not growing for the markets or shops. The growers of Redland Bay and other districts spend a great deal of time growing vegetables, including cabbages. I have seen them spraying cabbages in the early morning before the sun is up. It frequently happens that after they have laboured in this way the market is glutted. That leads me to the point that we must have a minimum price if we desire to control prices at all. I look forward

with pleasure to the day when all these things will not be necessary, but that day is not yet. If people are asked to grow vegetables and other products, how can you allow a price to be fixed for cabbages, say, of 8s. a dozen, and then when a glut suddenly appears in a good season let the product be thrown away, so to speak, at 2s. a dozen? It is absurd. We must have a minimum price. I found this out when I was organising in an honorary capacity the firewood supply of Toowoomba. I have spent eight months in this work, often starting at 4 o'clock in the morning, and I have organised it successfully, despite forecasts to the contrary. I do not like chicken-hearted people. During the first few weeks I went round the country and organised dairymen to collect firewood on a part-time basis, say from 9 o'clock in the morning to 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I found that their pay was not sufficient. I communicated with the Commissioner of Prices and the price was raised from 30s. a ton to 33s., delivered in the yard. That was for firewood blocks, brigalow, belah, and boxwood. That was all right. The firewood merchants did not get any more. They received 8s. a ton for distributing it, but the man outside got an additional 3s. a ton. That helped him to make a living. A number of men were patriotic enough to do the job and so help the people. The price-fixing officials inquired into the whole matter and agreed to recommend that the loader's price be increased 3s. a ton. The process I had to follow to obtain that increase revealed itself as a round-about one.

At 8.44 p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

Mr. YEATES: The recommendation for the increase had to be sent to Canberra. It was going round in circles in Canberra, as it were, for weeks and weeks. I will say this for the local office: they said, "Go right ahead, we will give you a certain amount of permission, and, in fact, we will stand behind you." I appreciate their assistance. I would not let them down, no matter what happened in the Federal sphere. We had to wait a long time for the official document from Canberra, before the minds of the local officials were relieved.

Another matter I wish to refer to is the price of potatoes. A grower in the Goom-bungee district sent in a consignment of potatoes. The officer at Toowoomba classed them at about 2s. 6d. a bag—they said they were not very good—and the owner definitely swore that he saw the potatoes in the shop the following day at 30s. a bag. I take his word for it; I cannot prove it myself. These things must be inquired into. As the hon. member for West Moreton said, you start to inquire into a thing and there is correspondence and typists galore, and it goes round and round in circles for about two months, and before you hear anything more about it it ends in nothing. (Laughter.)

Now I come to the fish and chips—and meat prices. (Laughter.) To-day a sirloin roast is 1s. 0½d. a lb., chuck steak, 8d., rib roast 6½d. and 10½d. without the bone, topside 11d.,

brisket and corned beef 8d. The price of fish is as follows:—Garfish 1s. 4d., whiting 1s. 10d., bream 1s. 7d., mullet 1s. 1d., and snapper 1s. 10d. I point out to you, Mr. Chairman, and you know as a man who has been on the land—I remember you in Augathella in the wilderness on the local station years ago, away back in 1898, when we were small boys there, but knew a bit about what was going on—that bullocks take three years to four and half and five years to grow up, and during this time the cattle-grower is paying taxation and is facing the difficulties of drought, fire, and flood; yet these fish just lie in the sea waiting for somebody to come out and pick them up. Why is there such a great difference in the prices of the two commodities? I leave it at that.

THE SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (Hon. T. A. Foley, Normanby) (8.48 p.m.): The discussion of price-fixation has been considerable, notwithstanding the fact that hon. members had rather a long debate of the subject on the Chief Office vote. However, there has been some fair comment, and some comment tinged with propaganda by hon. members opposite, but summed up it is agreed, notwithstanding the fact that some members seem to believe we should be better without price control, that some control of prices—some system of price-fixation—is necessary, particularly during the period we are passing through. Had the runaway prices been allowed to continue as they were developing under the prices-control system set up by the Menzies Government who knows where we should have been? From the beginning of the war to just before the elections—

Mr. Edwards: There is no propaganda in this?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: No—prices had increased by 25 per cent. We had some experience during the last war period. In Great Britain prices spiralled up to just on 200 per cent., and some control was necessary. I think hon. members should at least give credit to the Commonwealth Labour Administration for attempting to get control of the position by means of the prices stabilisation scheme that they have put into operation. They are aiming at not only preventing a raw deal to the consumer, but also at bringing about some stability. Furthermore, if you allow every producer in the community to put his own prices upon what he produces and you are going to fix prices at that point, the consumer has to pay the piper when he buys those commodities. The next move that is made is by the mass of the people—the workers—for some improvement in their wages to enable them to maintain their position.

Mr. Edwards: They are not the only ones.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I want to trace what happens. They must get sufficient in the pay envelope to enable them to buy. As soon as the Prices Commissioner agrees to an increase

in the price of a commodity and the basic wage is adjusted to enable the worker to meet the increased cost, another factor comes into the cost of production—increased wages. One finds the same thing occurring when the producer has to appeal to the Prices Commissioner for a further increase to enable him to keep up with the increased cost thereby caused. And so it goes round in a circle. Unless something is done nothing but chaos will ensue. We have seen, for instance, an increase of 18s. in the Commonwealth basic wage since the outbreak of the war—18s. added to the cost of production throughout the Commonwealth. Nothing else can result but a further increase in the cost of living and a further increase in the basic wage. In an endeavour to prevent that the Commonwealth Government have adopted what is known as the prices stabilisation scheme based on a similar scheme in operation in Canada, where they have definitely controlled the level of prices and kept them at a stable figure. The Canadian Government have paid out 65,000,000 dollars to the producer to enable prices to be controlled but they have saved the consuming public of Canada 350,000,000 dollars in the same period. Had prices been allowed to run away the consuming public of Canada would have to have paid that much more. An additional factor has been a saving in the Budget of the Canadian Government, just as we shall have a saving in the Budget of the Australian Government immediately we get over what is known as the adjustment period of passing from one system to another.

It has been mentioned this evening that the average housewife when she enters a store has no guide as to the prices that are pegged by the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner. That is correct, but hon. members will have noticed in the Press recently that representatives of the Commonwealth Prices Branch and of the retail trade in Queensland and other States have been working on a long list of groceries with a view to drafting a definite price list. I understand it is a very long list and much time has been occupied in investigation and consideration to enable a list to be drawn up containing the least possible number of anomalies. With the adjustment that will be made from time to time when anomalies are found I think it will be found eventually that the organisation in operation will bring about a position that will rectify many of the anomalies.

Mr. Sparkes: Why not rectify them in other things besides primary products?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: It is not a lopsided arrangement. I have endeavoured to point out to the hon. member that if he as a primary producer insists on £2 10s. a 100 lb. for his bullocks and the pig producers want a similarly high price for their products the position will eventually be reached in which the people will want extra money in their pay envelope to enable them to buy these goods. That is the position he must face whether he likes it or not, and Professor Copland, the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner, has to take that into consideration. He has to

endeavour to strike the happy medium so that the price level will be at a point that is within reach of the consumer and at the same time give a fair deal to the producer. Where it is not possible to do that they have agreed, under this system, to fix a price that is within the reach of the consumer and to compensate the producer, manufacturer, or wholesaler by way of a subsidy. It will take time for that system to get into full operation, just as it did in Canada, New Zealand, and, to a limited extent, Great Britain.

Reference has been made to rackets in the community. In almost every section of society organisations that endeavour to exploit the community spring up. They devise ways of defeating the law and exploiting the public, and it is the duty of every member of the community who discovers any such racket to act as an inspector for the department and pass on the information to the Commissioner. We have only to look at what Donald Gordon did in Canada when Mackenzie King asked him to introduce a stabilisation scheme. The first thing he did after pegging prices was to appeal to the housewives of Canada, through picture shows, over the air, and through the Press, to act as inspectors. The community spirit was so strong among the housewives of Canada that almost every one of them responded. Where any shopkeeper charged a price above the pegged price a dispute developed in the shop and eventually public opinion became so strong against the profiteer that no shopkeeper in Canada dared to go outside the pegged prices. If we had the same spirit here, and each and every one of us acted as an inspector for the Prices Branch many of these racketeers would be run to earth. There are only five on the staff in the State Prices Branch and 100 in the Commonwealth Branch. Many of them are accountants. Approximately 45 of the 100 are inspectors, and branch inspectors are being appointed to operate in the principal towns of the State. It is almost impossible for 45 inspectors to cope with every move being made by the racketeer and profiteer to defeat the law, and consequently the co-operation of the community, by keeping dockets and presenting them to the Commissioner so that he may deal with these infringements, is essential.

Much has been said to the effect that the producers are not getting a fair deal. When we analyse the whole position we find that as a result of an arrangement with the wheat-growers' organisations in Australia a system is introduced that is costing the Commonwealth Government many millions of pounds. It assures the wheatgrower a certain price irrespective of conditions, and that price has been accepted with very few complaints by the growers. They get 4s. for the first 3,000 bushels, plus a certain price for any amount produced above that, and their average price over the season is such as will enable them to carry on economically.

Mr. Edwards: Do you not think it was very stupid to have that in Queensland when we do not grow enough wheat for our own consumption?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: I do not know whether it is. Time alone will tell that. Time alone will tell whether climatic conditions will solve our problems here eventually. We have co-operation throughout the Commonwealth now, and any little difference that may exist so far as production is concerned in this State is adjusted, the other States making up our supplies.

We come now to the question of the butter subsidy. The hon. member for Fassifern endeavoured to establish that butter prices were not at what might be called a fair economic level. Recently, I read comments by the president of the butter organisation of the Commonwealth. He pointed out that as a result of negotiations with the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Government they have obtained a better deal than they had received from any Government in the past. The price has now been raised to 1s. 6d. a lb.

I represent a district that is producing a considerable amount of butter, but I have not yet heard one complaint from there about the price of 1s. 6d. a lb. I remember the time, not so many years ago, when they produced butter at 6d. a lb., and that was when they were in what would be regarded as the pioneering stage. However, they battled along and reared their families, and now, naturally, they are in a much better position with the ruling higher price. To the hon. member for Fassifern I would point out that I suppose the share-farmer is working on the usual agreement that half the gross production of the farm shall be given to him for his efforts. If the farmer who owns a farm complains that he is getting a raw deal at 1s. 6d. a lb., what must the share-farmer think if he still has to carry on in accordance with such an agreement? I have a case in mind of a man who came from New Guinea and bought a farm in the Gympie district, on Pie Creek. The hon. member for Cooroora will know the district well. This man paid £7,000 for a 700-acre block, stock, equipment, and plant, an average of £10 an acre. His return for 10 months was £650 clear and another £650 went to the share-farmer. That is an illustration of what can be reaped from a decent farm with 1s. 6d. a lb. for butter.

Mr. L. J. Barnes: That is only one farm.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: It is the average well-stocked farm in that district. The point I want to make is what a splendid wicket the share-farmer would be on if he were the owner of the property and drew the entire proceeds from the farm. That is the position with the average farmer in this State to-day. First of all, a price was fixed at one figure, there were complaints, representations were made, and eventually the subsidy was increased to £6,500,000, the dairyman thereby getting a price of about 1s. 6d. a lb. I think the Commonwealth is working along sound lines in adopting that method, and I maintain that if it is possible by negotiation to come to an arrangement with the Commonwealth Government and the Prices Commissioner

concerning sugar, butter, wheat, beef, peanuts, pig-meats, and other products, then surely to goodness it should be possible to remedy by negotiation the anomalies that have been mentioned here. I maintain that the Commonwealth Government are out to give a fair deal to the producer and the consumer under their new scheme, but if they are going to preserve the investments in this State and keep money values at a reasonable level, they will have to take steps by means of organisation to keep the price level as stable and as normal as possible. I think they are working along the right lines, and I am satisfied that proper representations will eventually bring about the solution of many of the problems confronting them. My personal view is that a remedy can be found for the difficulties associated with the prices of many perishable goods such as vegetables, particularly tomatoes, by means of a guaranteed average price. It should be possible by means of research to get some idea of the prices that ruled over a period of years and thus strike an average. I think it can be taken for granted that the average price would represent the true economic level which would enable the producer to carry on. If not they would have gone out of business long ago.

They would have a guaranteed price in good and bad seasons; that price would be available to them in glut periods as well as in poor seasons. Of course, it would be necessary for the industry to be organised and provision to be made for canning surplus products.

Mr. Edwards: That is a dream.

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: It is not a dream. I have seen many changes during my lifetime in the organisation and marketing of produce. I have seen primary producers save millions of pounds as a result of the pooling system.

Mr. Edwards: Where are the millions?

The SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT: That money was saved because the producers co-operated and sold their products through organised pools. If it is possible to realise such a dream then it is possible to have an economic price to compensate the producer for his labours in good and bad seasons. Science has come to the aid of the producer in glut periods. It is now possible to dehydrate vegetables as well as other products. As a result, surpluses in glut seasons could be conserved and supplied to the public in the seasons when fresh fruit and vegetables were not available. Recently at Hamilton I tasted what is known as snap-frozen berries and other foods imported from the United States of America for our Allied troops. Since they can and do snap-freeze fish in Victoria as these foods are snap-frozen in America, surely by this method and by canning and dehydration we could overcome many of our present difficulties. In this way surpluses could be preserved for the off season. These things can be done if they are tackled in the right way.

The Commonwealth Government has endeavoured to give a fair deal to everyone concerned in the primary-producing industries. I cannot conceive of their being desirous of doing otherwise. I do not think that any hon. member opposite would suggest they have any other object. We must admit, however, that in any system we may adopt there will be a period when confusion and anomalies will be created. We have to go through what is known as the adjustment period before the organisation works smoothly. Recently we had an example of that. Representations were made to the Commonwealth Government respecting some anomalies in differential prices. These are being rectified. I am sure that from time to time other representations will be made to protect the producers in a similar way. Notwithstanding the outbursts and comments of hon. members opposite, I am sure that they will agree that the Commonwealth Government are making an honest endeavour to solve these problems and give a fair deal to all concerned.

Mr. YEATES (East Toowoomba) (9.13 p.m.): Some two years ago when Mr. Scully was appointed Minister for Commerce in the Federal Government I wrote to him as I was very interested to know what he was going to do about wheat prices. I strongly urged him not to restrict wheat-growing in Queensland. I looked ahead, as I believed there would be 2,000,000 extra people coming into Australia, most of them into Queensland, as this State was nearest to the enemy. The wheat crop of the Darling Downs is estimated to yield 3,500,000 bushels this year, subject, of course, to its not being affected by too much moisture. The home consumption is estimated at 7,000,000 bushels, approximately. What has been said in this Chamber about our railways transporting wheat from New South Wales night and day when we should be growing it here is perfectly right.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member is getting well away from the vote.

Mr. YEATES: I know well the New Guinea farmer the Minister mentioned as having settled in the Gympie district. He is a business man and knows all about the land and farming. He knows what sort of a farm to buy. He bought a very good farm.

The Minister said butter was 6d. a lb. when he was a young fellow. I know that, too. He was talking about the olden times and asking: What about the man who had to work for £1 a week? I point out that at that time—40 years ago—you could get good board in a hotel for £1 a week, and you could get a first-class meal for 1s. at Augathella. That is how it balanced up. These Labour Ministers come along here and talk about the hungry days when one got only £1 a week and keep, but things were different altogether then. They were merely indulging in political propaganda. They work 80 hours a week on the farms. I saw them at Redland Bay sorting out tomatoes with hurricane lamps at night-time. I saw them working at 9 o'clock at night in their sheds and out at starlight. I was walking round there at half-

past 5 in the morning, and I saw them spraying the cabbages. Then all of a sudden there is a slump and there is nothing to protect those hard workers.

In conclusion, I want to point out that the Moore Government guaranteed the price of wheat at 4s. a bushel, and there was no restriction whatever, and the growers ended up by getting 4s. 2d. a bushel.

Progress reported.

The House adjourned at 9.20 p.m.
