

Queensland



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[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

THURSDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 1946

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Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. S. J. Brassington, Portitude Valley) took the chair at 11 a.m.

PRIVILEGE.

REPORTING IN "HANSARD."

Mr. SPEAKER: On Tuesday, 27 August, the hon. member for Windsor, claiming privilege, moved the following motion, which was seconded by the hon. member for Toowong:—

"That, in the opinion of this House, the alteration of the 'Hansard' proof text of Mr. Speaker's interpolation in my speech of the 22nd, and, further, the departure from the established practice by the Government Printing Office in failing to submit to me a proof of my speech, constitute a breach of privilege of members of this House."

Being ever jealous of preserving the privileges of members of this House, I, at the conclusion of the debate, assured members that I would investigate the complaints contained in the motion. This I have done, and I submit the following facts:—

The interpolation of the hon. member for Windsor's speech complained of was in my remarks from the Chair. I have ascertained from the chief of "Hansard" that reporters have great difficulty in taking the remarks of the Speaker or Chairman. This is a difficulty created by the acoustic properties of the Chamber. Therefore, it has been the practice of Mr. Wood to send down to me at the Chair what remarks were reported, and ask if I would be good enough to supply those necessary to complete the statement or ruling. This is exactly what happened on this occasion, and, at Mr. Wood's request, I merely wrote down what I believed I had said. I did not even glance at the transcript containing the hon. member for Windsor's remarks, let alone attempt to alter it. I might add that any erasures from my remarks were made by Mr. Wood, as his letter, which is rather lengthy and which I will lay on the table of the House for hon. members to read if they so desire, will show.

I have never, during my long term in this House, approached any member of "Hansard" staff to alter, erase or improperly change any of my speeches, rulings or statements.

I desire to add that, if I had deliberately altered the passage complained of by the hon. member for Windsor, I should have exercised my privilege and rights quite properly. I find, on this matter of correcting speeches, that the hon. members for Windsor, Toowong, and West Moreton, along with all hon. members, have freely exercised this right.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. SPEAKER: In connection with their speeches on the Address in Reply, these hon. members have exercised that right—and I state here definitely that it is their right—on the following occasions—15 times, 14 times and nine times respectively.

Therefore, what is a privilege of all hon. members cannot be taken away from me should I desire to exercise it, and I feel that the Chair on this occasion is entitled to some amends.

As to the failure of the Government Printing Office to supply to the hon. member for Windsor a copy of his proof, I desire to quote from the letter of the Chief of "Hansard" staff. I am not going to read all the letter—this is Private Members' Day and I want to be as brief as possible—but *inter alia* it states:—

"I have to report that yesterday, on learning that Mr. Pie had not received the proof, I made inquiries from the Government Printing Office and was informed by Mr. Chadwick, acting publisher, that it was an oversight on his part, that he had in the hurry to get proofs out taken Mr. Pie merely to move a motion and that he understood a motion was not sent down to members, and that the rest he thought was interjections."

I want to conclude my remarks by saying: there was absolutely no relationship between the two matters raised by the hon. member for Windsor; nor is there any evidence of any attempt to withdraw or whittle down the privileges enjoyed by members of this House. I want to say quite sincerely with all the feeling I can that no privilege will be taken away if any act of mine can prevent it.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING OF EX-SERVICE MEN.

Mr. MORRIS (Enoggera) asked the Secretary for Public Instruction—

"With further reference to my question of 20 August in relation to vocational training for Service men, how many Service men and ex-Service men have been selected to receive training from the Department of Public Instruction?"

Hon. J. LARCOMBE (Rockhampton—Treasurer), for Hon T. L. WILLIAMS (Port Curtis), replied—

"Numbers selected for training as at 30 June, 1946:—Full-time, 4,999; part-time, 10,712."

PAMPHLET ON PUBLIC HOSPITALS SERVICE.

Mr. MORRIS (Enoggera) asked the Secretary for Health and Home Affairs—

"With reference to the booklet on public hospitals published under the title of 'Round the Clock Service Free' and bearing the imprint of the Minister, will he inform the House—(1) Who compiled this booklet; (2) in what manner will it be distributed; (3) who will bear the cost of its compilation, publication, and distribution?"

Hon. T. A. FOLEY (Normanby) replied—

"1. The Department of Health and Home Affairs. (2) By post and hand delivery to citizens for their guidance and

information with the object of informing them of the treatment facilities available and encouraging them to seek early treatment, thus reducing the incidence of disease and educating them in the utilisation of the services available which have been provided for the mitigation of disease. I would appreciate the co-operation of the hon. member and all other hon. members in the distribution of the pamphlet in their respective electoral districts. (3) The Department of Health and Home Affairs to which department is assigned the health duties and responsibilities of the State."

SUBSIDIES FOR USEFUL WAR MEMORIALS.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba) asked the Premier—

"Will he inquire into the Tasmanian scheme of paying subsidies in respect of war memorials that are of utilitarian or cultural value, such as public parks, swimming pools, health clinics, community centres, &c., with a view to consideration of applying a similar scheme in this State?"

Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca) replied—

"Inquiries will be made. For the hon. member's information, I desire to point out that under the Queensland Government's approved subsidy scheme a subsidy of from 15 per cent. to 33½ per cent. is payable by the Government to local authorities towards the cost of approved facilities of this nature. In addition, a flat subsidy rate of 25 per cent. is payable for approved swimming bath construction. Recreational facilities of value for physical fitness are subsidised from 15 per cent. to 33½ per cent. Drainage and reclamation of land for playing areas which serve the purpose of mosquito eradication attracts a 50 per cent. subsidy, and C.W.A. hostels for school students and waiting mothers are eligible for 50 per cent. subsidy."

EX-SERVICE MALE NURSES.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) asked the Secretary for Health and Home Affairs—

"1. As he announced on 16 June last that Queensland hospitals lacked 545 nursing personnel, will he inform the House if a shortage of nurses still persists, and what it was at the time of the last survey?"

"2. Has he any figures on the number of male ex-Service personnel carrying out nursing duties in board hospitals and State institutions?"

Hon. T. A. FOLEY (Normanby) replied—

"1. The shortage at 30 June last, the date of the last survey, was 544. It is known that a number of males has been employed in various hospitals throughout the State to assist in relieving the shortage of nurses. For some time I, in common with others similarly placed, have been gravely concerned at the world-wide phenomenon of shortage of nurses and domestics in public and private hospitals. In an endeavour to improve the position in Queensland, efforts are being made by hospitals boards throughout the State

aided by the department, the Press, the film distributors and exhibitors, and the various nurses' organisations to build up the nursing and domestic strength of public and private hospitals to the normal requirements. I appreciate the response up to date, and particularly the large number of males who have volunteered and been accepted for service in varying capacities in hospitals. A typical illustration of the difficulties is the case of New Zealand, which made an appeal for 200 nurses in Great Britain. This number of nurses arrived in New Zealand recently. The total shortage of nurses in Great Britain is approximately 30,000. One angle of the existing problem in Queensland is shown by the fact that 10 years ago the total number of nurses in public hospitals was 1,936. At 30 June last 2,564 nurses were employed in public hospitals, and at that date 3,108 nurses were considered necessary to meet present-day requirements. The intake into the pool of female labour will not improve in the next 10 years, and may necessitate the training of male nurses and orderlies to meet the needs of the future.

"2. The information is being obtained and will be supplied at a later date."

TRAINING OF BREAD BAKERS.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) asked the Secretary for Health and Home Affairs—

"In the Government's drive to improve the quality of the city's bread supply have any plans been made for the provision of a trade school where apprentices and tradesmen could receive skilled technical and practical training in bread manufacturing?"

Hon. T. A. FOLEY (Normanby) replied—

"My professional and technical advisers have recommended the inclusion of bakers and pastrycooks in the ambit of the Apprentices and Minors Acts and the appointment of a trained specialist in the technology of bread. Owing to the exigencies and difficulties of the immediate post-war period, the implementation of the proposals is not possible at present."

SIR RAPHAEL CILENTO AND EUROPEAN REFUGEES.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) asked the Premier—

"1. Did any conversations take place between representatives of the Government and the World Director of Refugees (Sir Raphael Cilento) on the question of the admission of refugees to this State?"

"2. If so—(a) what were the nationalities of the refugees; (b) what is the attitude of the Government to the question?"

Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca) replied—

"1 and 2. Control of admission of foreign nationals is entirely a matter for the Commonwealth Government. I have no knowledge of any representations having been made by any responsible authority on this subject."

COAL PRODUCTION, COLLINSVILLE STATE MINE.

Mr. PATERSON (Bowen) asked the Secretary for Mines—

“What is the average annual production of coal per underground miner in the Collinsville State mine for each of the years 1936 to 1946?”

Hon. V. C. GAIR (South Brisbane) replied—

“Figures for the respective financial years are as follows:—

“STATE COAL MINE, COLLINSVILLE.		
“Financial Year.	Average Annual Production per Contract Miner Employed.	
	Tons.	
1935-1936	1,313-86	
1936-1937	1,455-05	
1937-1938	1,524-86	
1938-1939	1,309-19	
1939-1940	1,224-20	
1940-1941	1,430-83	
1941-1942	1,525-87	
1942-1943	1,603-69	
1943-1944	1,414-62	
1944-1945	1,453-13	
1945-1946	1,241-70”	

QUEENSLAND SECONDARY INDUSTRIES, POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION.

Mr. PATERSON (Bowen) asked the Treasurer—

“Referring to my question on 13 November last and his answer thereto, what progress has been made by the Bureau of Industry or the Secondary Industries Development Committee in their investigations into the establishment in North Queensland of (a) an iron and steel industry; (b) a cement industry; and (c) a fruit and vegetable canning industry?”

Hon. J. LARCOMBE (Rockhampton) replied—

“The Government engaged an expert from Leeton, New South Wales (Mr. H. J. Williams), who has compiled a report concerning the prospects of canning and processing tropical and sub-tropical fruits in Queensland, which will be presented to Parliament shortly. Investigations are still being carried out by the Bureau of Industry into the possibility of the economic establishment of industries in North Queensland. This work requires much attention and investigation, and the technical staff of the Bureau of Industry is at present limited.”

PAPER.

The following paper was laid on the table:—

Order in Council under the Stock Routes and Rural Lands Protection Acts, 1944 to 1946 (22 August, 1946).

PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

Mr. PIE (Windsor) (11.15 a.m.), by leave: I wish to make a personal explanation. Yesterday the Minister for Transport charged that whilst campaigning through the North recently I had said the political structure of this State was corrupt and full of graft. Indeed, the Secretary for Public Lands contended that he had heard me say at Townsville that the Government were corrupt and should be kicked out.

I took objection to that at the time, Mr. Speaker, but since then I have had the opportunity of checking back on the notes used on this occasion, and should like the House to know that these are the actual words I used, as my colleagues who were present will verify:—

“It is true there was once a Labour Party representing the broad base of working people—a party with high ideals and high principles. That party was consistently voted into power. But power corrupts. Over the years, Labour in Queensland has become arrogant and capricious.”

I think the House will agree, Mr. Speaker, that that is vastly different from charging the Government or any of its members with being corrupt or taking graft, in the sense suggested yesterday by the Ministers mentioned.

Mr. Jones: I repeat that you said, “corrupt.”

LAPSED MOTIONS.

The following motions standing in the name of Mr. J. F. Barnes (Bundaberg) were called by Mr. Speaker and lapsed, the hon. member not being present:—

“That this Assembly makes application to the Commonwealth Government for two hundred million pounds of national credit (debt and interest-free money issued by the Commonwealth Bank) for post-war reconstruction work in Queensland.”

“That this Assembly makes application to the Commonwealth Government for fifty million pounds of national credit (debt and interest-free money issued by the Commonwealth Bank) for a perpetual fund to finance, interest-free, workers’ homes completely furnished with every modern labour-saving device, including a refrigerator.”

“That every officer of the Police Force be compelled to submit to Parliament a balance-sheet of his complete financial affairs when called upon by two or more members of this Assembly to do so, and it shall not be printed except by a special motion of the House.”

“That any member of this Assembly shall be compelled to table a balance-sheet of his complete financial affairs when called on by two or more members to do so, and it shall not be printed except by a special motion of the House.”

“That the House take into consideration the question concerning the time allowed by the Standing Orders, particularly in regard to the Address in Reply and the

Financial Statement, so that members will be able to speak for more than one hour forty minutes a year on unorthodox finance."

"That this House consider the desirability of introducing a Bill to make all strikes illegal except by secret ballot."

"That every member of this Assembly shall pay 2s. a week to every one of his constituents who are registered out of work for more than three weeks, this money to be paid to the constituent through the Labour Bureau. These payments to cease when a member has paid out such moneys that will reduce him to a basic wage standard."

PRICE-FIXING.

Mr. POWER (Baroona) (11.20 a.m.): I move—

"1. That, in the opinion of this House, a well-regulated and enforced policy of price-fixing is in the best interests of the community, and to that end this House requests the Commonwealth Government to increase the number of prices inspectors in order to strictly enforce the control of prices in Queensland.

"2. That a copy of this resolution be conveyed to the Commonwealth Government for consideration."

I move this motion because I am of the opinion that it is necessary, in the first place, to have a proper method of price-control—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! May I have silence, please? The hon. member for Baroona!

Mr. POWER: Otherwise, we shall find ourselves in the position that the U.S.A. is in today, where when price-control was removed the prices of goods soared beyond the reach of many sections of the people. I maintain that price-control should be based on the cost of production, to allow a fair return to the producer.

Economists agree that the profits of business men increase during periods of rising prices, and in that respect R. G. Hawtrey—an English economist who was Assistant Secretary to His Majesty's Treasury under the Baldwin, Chamberlain and Churchill Governments—states in his book, "The Art of Central Banking" that, during a period of rising prices "profits are increased and traders stimulated to hold larger stocks in order to gain from a further rise in prices." That statement is borne out at present by the fact—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I should like to ask those hon. members who elect to carry on conversations in a loud tone of voice to be good enough to give the hon. member the opportunity of being heard. The hon. member for Baroona!

Mr. POWER: I was saying that that statement is borne out by the fact that at present there is a shortage of a number of commodities in this country. I venture to say that if a careful survey was made of the

stocks held in various warehouses it would be found that many of them are being held with a view to getting increased prices for the goods. Almost every day we read that some firm or other has made a record profit, and at a later stage I shall quote the balance-sheets of certain firms, without giving their names. Although employment is at a high level and stocks of commodities are still coming onto the market, we still have a shortage of certain goods that the public urgently need. We see behind the clamour for the removal of price-control a sinister move, a move in the direction of self-interest. The move is to conserve stocks of commodities and release them when prices have risen. That has been borne out in Queensland. We found during the war period that people who had plenty of money were able to buy certain goods that the average working person could not get because of the high prices obtaining and we find the same thing today. As a result of the excellent policy pursued by the Commonwealth and State Governments, the workers today have a fair amount of money but are unable to buy goods because they are not on the market. Every endeavour has been made by the Commonwealth Government to keep prices in Australia down and they went so far as to subsidise many industries so that increased costs and prices would not be charged to the consumers of this country.

Despite all that the Commonwealth Government have done, however, I say that officers of the Prices Branch are responsible today for a good deal of the overcharging that is taking place and the high prices that we are called upon to pay.

The cost of production should be investigated to see that businesses are conducted on proper lines so that waste will be eliminated and plant modernised. With this end in view it is important that a reasonable amount of profits should be reinvested in industry and that the people engaged in business should not be allowed to make large profits and pay huge dividends to shareholders without at the same time seeing that efficient and adequate machinery is installed in the factories with the object of bringing about greater output and reducing costs. An investigation should be conducted with that object. Private enterprise can find a place in this nation, as it can in any other nation. I am not one who believes that private enterprise cannot do any good in a country because I know that already it has done a great deal for this country and for other countries. I believe also that industry should be allowed a fair return from its efforts, but we must not overlook this important fact, that capital is of no value unless labour is applied to it and purchasing power is available to the people to buy the goods produced by industry. Many business people imagine that because they have invested several thousands of pounds in industry it is theirs by right, quite overlooking the fact that capital is of no value unless labour is applied to it. A railway and tramway system may be worth £50,000,000 as a going concern, but withdraw labour from it and you have not

an asset but a liability. It is only by the application of labour to capital that industry can produce the goods that are sold.

Mr. Pie: Labour and management combined.

Mr. POWER: I agree that there is something in that, too.

Today we have wage-pegging regulations whereby wages cannot be increased beyond the rate ruling at a certain date unless it is shown that an anomaly exists. If an approach is made to the State Industrial Court for an improvement or an alteration in wages no increase can be approved unless it is first submitted to the Chief Judge of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration and it has his approval. Wages have remained virtually at a standstill because of the wage-pegging regulations but prices have soared to enormous heights. Let us analyse for a moment some of the increases in costs that are seriously affecting the people today.

Much has been said in this House and by the anti-Labour Press about the cost of home-building. It has increased by about 33 per cent. during the war. Builders and contractors have been accused of increasing their charges for home construction but they are not wholly to blame for this increase. From the figures that I have I shall be able to show that the increase in the cost of building materials has been mainly responsible for it. Let us examine these figures, which I have tabulated, showing the increases that have taken place during the war—

	Increase. Per cent.
Concrete house blocks ..	75
External painting ..	181
Internal painting ..	80
Electrical installation ..	60 to 100
Fibrous plaster ceiling ..	50
Fibro plaster walls ..	69
Drainage ..	100
Plumbing ..	100
Tiles ..	25

In contrast with those increases in the cost of building operations wages for tradesmen have increased by only 17½ per cent. and for labourers by only 23½ per cent. since 1938.

At 11.30 a.m.,

The CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES (Mr. Mann, Brisbane) relieved Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Mr. POWER: I advise members of the Opposition, particularly the hon. member for Sandgate, who are continually complaining about increased costs of building workers' homes and dwellings, to whisper in the ears of some of their capitalistic friends engaged in the manufacture of materials that it is high time they lowered their prices and gave the workers an opportunity of building homes. We hear a good deal from the Opposition to the effect that ex-Service men cannot get homes, and we find they are not in a position to build them, because of the increased costs of materials. If the Opposition have the

interests of ex-Service men and other citizens at heart they might at least ask their friends engaged in the manufacture of building materials to make some substantial reduction in their costs. That would be a practical manner not only of giving their support but also of showing their interest in returned soldiers.

Another regulation is in operation today for which I want to give the Commonwealth Government full credit. We have heard complaints from the Opposition and through the Press on the control of sales of real property. Selling prices are now pegged. Before a property can be transferred from the vendor to the purchaser approval must be obtained from the Commonwealth Sub-Treasury. That is a very wise and necessary protection to home buyers. Before this provision operated properties were being sold at exorbitant prices. Persons who had plenty of money could outbid the workers and others with little capital, with the result that properties were being sold as much as 100 per cent. above their value. Is it right and proper that the workers should be exploited because of the shortage of material or of homes? So the Commonwealth Government decided to peg the prices of homes, with the result that before any home can be sold today approval must be obtained and the price submitted to the Commonwealth Sub-Treasury. If that department is not satisfied with that price it has the right to call for a check valuation. That provision of the Commonwealth Government affords much-needed protection to the home-buyer. There has been a plea for the removal of this restriction, but that plea is made not in the interests of people who want to buy homes but solely in the interests of the house and land agents, because the greater the price at which they can sell properties the greater will be their commission. That is why they and their supporters are so anxious for the removal of this provision.

I congratulate the Commonwealth Government on establishing this safeguard, and I hope that they will go even a little further. Today many small businesses are being sold to unsuspecting Service men at inflated values, but the prices are not subject to the control of the Commonwealth Sub-Treasury. Thousands of pounds are being paid for small businesses that are not worth anything like the price paid for them. In my own district such a business was offered for sale at £1,000. The weekly turnover was approximately £80. It was stated that there was £400 worth of stock in the business. When a check was made it was found that there was £400 worth of stock in it but it consisted of unsalable stuff that had been in stock for years. When we find that when there is an alleged shortage of foodstuffs one storekeeper can claim to have £400 worth in stock there is something radically wrong. I hope that the Commonwealth Government will extend the restrictions on the sale of real property to the vendors of these businesses as thereby protection will be afforded not only to the ex-Service man but to every citizen.

There has been a tremendous rise in the prices of goods, particularly wearing apparel. I have taken the time and trouble to obtain prices in 1939 and prices in 1946, and I propose to give a comparison of those figures. In 1939 a tailored suit to measure could be bought for £6 6s., and today the price of a man's suit has risen to from £8 8s. to £14 15s. 4d. Those figures have been obtained from the daily Press of 1939 and by means of a check at the shops in Brisbane at the present time and from information obtained as a result of interviews with various tailors by people seeking to buy suits.

Mr. Foley: That rise took place under the Menzies' price-control system from 1939 to 1942.

Mr. POWER: That is what I am coming to. I am glad of that interjection; that is quite so. These increases in prices took place between 1939 and 1942. As a matter of fact, Colin Clark's figures recently published show that since that period there has been little or no increase.

A Government Member: They have been pegged.

Mr. POWER: They have been pegged. The figures of Mr. Colin Clark show that since 1942 there has been virtually no increase whatever in the price of commodities. It was from 1939 to 1942 that the increases took place. Let us take singlets. In 1939 they were 1s. 3d., and today you pay 1s. 9½d.

Mr. Theodore: For rubbish.

Mr. POWER: That is another point. The singlet you bought in 1939 would last you some time and today, as the hon. member for Herbert interjected, you are buying rubbish that lasts no time. Fleecy pyjamas cost 5s. 3d. in 1939 and today they range from 17s. 9d. to £3 5s. 5d. It is no wonder many working men go to bed without pyjamas. Ladies' shoes for everyday wear cost 11s. 6d. in 1939 and today the price ranges from 28s. 6d. to 32s. 6d. Every woman knows it is impossible to obtain a good pair of stockings. The material in the stockings manufactured today is very poor and does not last any length of time. When the women-folk are pulling them up they find ladders come quickly and they have lost their money right away. In 1939 dull-sheer hose cost 4s. 11d., and today rayon, which is purely and simply rubbish, costs 6s. 11d. Fancy handkerchiefs were 2s. 11d. a dozen in 1939 and today they are 1s. 9d. each. In 1939 ripple-silk dress material cost 1s. a yard, and inferior lots today cost 7s. 11d. to 21s. Men's socks cost 1s. 9d. in 1939 and today they cost 3s. 6d. a pair.

A Government Member: Where?

Mr. POWER: Wherever you can get them. I am making a comparison of the prices appearing in the Press.

Mr. Wanstall: Keep going.

Mr. POWER: I can assure the hon. member I am going to keep going. I remind him that these increases in cost took place

between 1939 and 1942 when the Menzies Government were controlling the affairs of the nation. Here are further figures—

—	1939.	1946.
	s. d.	£ s. d.
Workers' shoes ..	11 9	1 2 9
Men's tourist shirts	4 11	1 1 4
Ladies' frocks ..	89 6	14 14 0
Toddler's suits ..	9 11	2 2 0
Boys' knickers ..	3 11	0 10 4
Breakfast table-cloth	1 4½	0 7 9 (breakfast cloths)
Bath towels ..	1 9½	0 4 7½
Sheets ..	10 11	1 16 11 per yard (white)

These are some of the increases in the prices that took place between 1939 and 1941, when the Menzies Government were controlling the nation.

I hold in my hand Exhibit 1 as regards the materials and goods sold to the people of this city. This is some tobacco being retailed, not in the Baroona electorate but in the city by a storekeeper in George street at 1s. 4½d. an ounce. Analyse it and you will find that the greatest part of it is charcoal. That is what is being sold to the workers today by certain unscrupulous shopkeepers in the city, and this was sold to an ex-Service man, a war pensioner. That is a shopkeeper, typical of the friends of the Opposition and supporters of the Queensland People's Party, the people who were written to and asked for a donation in order to defeat the Labour Party and to "make it big and handsome." That is the type of stuff being supplied to the public today, and I ask the Secretary for Health and Home Affairs to investigate it. This stuff comprises wood and charcoal and, as it looks to me, ash from a smoker's pipe—as if smokers had cleaned it out of their pipes and the ash were put in a jar and sold to ex-Service men. That is what is being put over the people today by supporters of the Queensland People's Party.

There have been tremendous increases in the price of fruit, and the following are some details of those increases—

—	Price, 1939.	Present Price.
	s. d.	s. d.
Custard Apples ..	1 6	12 0 half bush.
Grape Fruit ..	6 0	12 0
Oranges ..	5 0	10 0
Navel Oranges ..	7 0	16 0
Lemons ..	5 0	16 0
Mandarins ..	4 0	16 0
Pineapples ..	3 0	16 0 dozen

And we find today that pineapples are sold by the pound and buyers are compelled to pay for the top. Who wants to eat the top of a pineapple? I might ask the hon. member for Windsor to eat it. In addition the public have to pay for the tops of beetroot, carrots, and similar things, which they do not consume. These prices were brought about when the Menzies Government were in power. Despite the squeals from the Opposition I am asking for a full investigation.

Additional increases are—

—	Price, 1939.	Present Price.
	<i>s. d.</i>	<i>s. d.</i>
Papaws	1 6	8 0
Strawberries	4 6	21 0
Tomatoes	3 0	12 0
Passion Fruit	5 0	15 0
Apples (Granny Smith)	7 0	17 0

I now give the increases in the price of vegetables—

Cauliflowers	3 0	30 0
Cabbage	2 6	20 0
Beans	0 4	1 6 per lb.
Peas	0 6	1 8
Lettuce	1 0	4 0
Carrots	0 2	1 0 doz. bunch
Beetroot	1 0	2 6
Pumpkins	5 6	10 0 a bag
Chokos	0 9	3 0 dozen

It is interesting to note the enormous profits that have been made by people running sections in the markets today, simply by the selling of the goods of the producers. The Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing can do a wonderful amount of good by the elimination of the middleman.

It can, under the legislation passed by this Government, establish retail places throughout the length and breadth of the State. In its shops goods can be sold direct, and thus a number of those people who are making enormous profits today can be eliminated.

Let us examine the profits of some of these firms. I have no desire to mention their names, because what they have done has been legitimate—their business is a legitimate one. In 1936 one firm had a net profit of £1,586.

Mr. Pie: Price-control has been a god-send to the people.

Mr. POWER: And I might inform the hon. member that price-control was first introduced in Australia by the Labour Government of Queensland. In 1937 the profit of the firm to which I have referred had increased to £2,036. In 1943—during the war—it jumped to £11,125, and this was obtained purely and simply from selling the commodities of the producers of the nation. In 1944 this firm's profit had increased to £17,278. No wonder the working-class people of this country have not been able to obtain a reasonable supply of fruit and vegetables! This profit is made by commission agents, purely and simply out of selling the goods sent to small sections in the markets on which low rentals are paid, selling them under the hammer to the retailer, who has to make his profit before they pass to the consumer. These things should be eliminated. I know that the Co-operative Societies Bill that is about to be introduced will in a large measure help to eliminate the profits of a number of these concerns.

Another man who was in a small way made a profit of £250 in 1938, but by 1939 it had risen to £931. The profit of another firm in the markets in 1938, made purely from selling on commission, was £1,300. In

1943 it had risen to £4,700, and by 1944 to £5,864. While I have no objection to a person's making a reasonable profit, I do think the consumer is entitled to some protection in these matters.

I come now to the price of meat, and I wish to be fair to the retail butcher. It has been said that the butcher has been selling all types of beef to the consumer. I should like to point out that the price of beef has been fixed not on the cost of first- or second-grade meat but on general average costs, with the result that the retailer has not been in a position to sell first- or second-grade meat because he has had to average his price right through.

Here I commend the Premier of this State for the action taken by him at the last Premiers' Conference, when he raised the question of having beef graded throughout Australia. Certain members of the Prices Branch said that it would be impossible to do that because the prices were based on an average. However, as a result of the intervention of the Premier of this State, that matter is being investigated and a fairer system of fixing the price of beef will result. The butcher who has been condemned so much for his meat will be able to offer a choice of first- or second-grade beef to the public, and the people are entitled to choose what they want.

I wish to deal next with the price of furniture and home commodities. I find that not only has the quality of furniture deteriorated, but the price has increased out of all proportion to its value.

We wonder why our young people do not get married. Efforts are being made to provide homes and make advances to help young couples to get married, but let us compare some of the prices paid for furniture in 1939 and those ruling today. In 1939 you could buy a walnut bedroom suite, a rather well-built one and not the sort of rubbish you get today, for £32 15s. 4d., but today the price for that same walnut suite—in fact the material in it is not as good as it used to be and it is not as well made, having a good deal of three-ply in it—has risen to £68 17s. 6d. Not one word of protest do we hear from the Opposition with regard to that increase. In 1939 you could get a reasonably good dining-room suite for £15 6s. but what do you pay today? £37 12s. 4d. For lounge suites—and they were virtually unprocureable a short time ago—against the cost of £18 6s. in 1939 we have to pay £35 today. Kapok quilts have risen from 22s. 6d. and feather quilts from 25s. to £6 12s. 7d. No-one will tell me that the feathers on our fowls have got less in the meantime. Why, there is more material available today than ever before in the history of Australia. All the trouble was brought about during the 1939-42 period when Menzies & Co. were controlling the affairs of this country.

Let me continue by saying that linoleum that could be bought for 4s. 9d. a yard costs today—when you can get it—14s. a yard, and then it is of inferior quality. I cannot understand why the price-fixing authorities will

allow one firm in Queensland to make a suit of clothes at one price and another firm to charge a higher price for the same article, made the same way and of the same material. It is about time this system was reviewed. I know that a firm was recently prosecuted for selling a suit above the price set down; I know that another firm making the same class of suit from the same material is allowed to charge a higher price.

All that brings me back to what I said in the initial stages of this speech, namely, that the price to be charged for an article should be based on the cost of production. If one firm has installed a modern plant and is able to do the work cheaper than other firms, which are not prepared to put money back into the business but transfer it to reserves or divide the profits amongst shareholders, these other firms should be brought to the position of the firm giving the cheaper article. In Queensland the price of women's hats has risen from 25s. to 65s.; it is virtually impossible to buy a hat in Brisbane. I got a man's hat the other day from Edwards & Lambs—an Australian-made hat—and the retail price was 14s. 9d. This was an excellent hat and I hope that every assistance will be given to the firm manufacturing that hat.

Mr. Macdonald: How many shares have you?

Mr. POWER: I have none. It is apparent to me that the Menzies Government in 1939-41 made no attempt to control prices and the Prices Commissioner did not go about the job in the right way. I am of the opinion that he based his prices not on the cost of the goods but the quantity available. I say that a shortage of materials should not be any reason whatever for the higher prices of goods. Prices should be based on the cost of production and not on the quantity available. If that system is allowed to operate it will be an easy matter for a number of people to keep staff to the barest minimum, produce in limited amounts, and make greater profits by obtaining higher prices.

Prices should not be high simply because the goods are in short supply and thus available only to those who have enough money to pay high prices. The working people should be able to buy whatever goods they require. In the great majority of cases they help to make them but they find when they want to buy them that they are unable to do so because the price of them is too high. The working man's wife is entitled to some consideration and has every right to be dressed as well as anyone else. The working man is entitled to a home for himself, his wife and family equal with that of anyone else in the community. If it were not for the brain and the brawn of the working people, profits could not be made. Therefore I maintain very strongly that the price of goods should not be fixed according to the quantity available but solely on the cost of production.

More price-fixing inspectors should be appointed to see that the regulations relating to prices are strictly observed. There are not enough inspectors in Queensland to give this

service and so over-charging is rampant throughout the State. For instance, there is a shortage of cigarette papers in Brisbane but cigarette papers are being sold at 1s. a packet and tobacco much above the pegged price. An investigation should be made into these matters but that cannot be done adequately with the limited staff employed by the department today. People who go in for black-marketing, those who charge more than the correct prices, are purely and simply common thieves—they steal from the people—and rigid action should be taken against them. I do not think that a paltry fine should be imposed on the people who break the law in this respect, and who thus rob the people; their place is in gaol and they should remain there. If such strong action as this was taken quite a number of the black-marketeers and people who over-charge for the commodities sold to the people would cease to carry on their nefarious practices.

Mr. Pie: When they go to inspect their books, they have no books.

Mr. POWER: I can show the hon. member how to get round that. Some attention should be devoted to the suburban areas; you never see an inspector in a suburban area from one year's end to the other. Some time ago I complained to the Prices Branch that a certain shop was charging 1s. 3d. for a bottle of soft drink, but the reply I got was, "We cannot do it today, we are investigating the price of furniture." What an astounding confession to make—the whole staff engaged on checking the price of furniture! When a complaint is made that the law is being broken in this connection—and I had evidence of it too—a check should be taken immediately.

The law provides that the prices to be charged for goods must be displayed on them but it is found in practice that they are frequently displayed in places where it is impossible for people to read them, whereas they should be displayed in prominent places in all parts of the shop and the print or lettering should be large enough for the average person to read. Quite a number of mothers and wives getting on in years have not as good eyesight as they had in years gone by and cannot read small print and so make sure that they are not being over-charged. Furthermore, a docket, setting out the price, should be supplied by the store with every sale. If that was done it would be documentary proof of the price charged, it would disclose whether any overcharging had taken place and so overcharging would be avoided to a great extent. I have no desire, bear in mind, to have people brought before the court for offences if it can be avoided, and I am looking for preventive measures rather than having people gaoled for offences. The most important consideration is to prevent an offence from taking place. My suggestions will help to prevent some of the rackets existing today. Furthermore—and this is very important—I object to the method of prosecution that is adopted with regard to those who commit offences against the price-fixing regulations. There are two

methods under which a person can be charged. There is a law for the rich and a law for the poor.

Mr. Pie: Hear, hear!

Mr. POWER: We find that in some prosecutions that have taken place under the price-fixing regulations the magistrate may impose a fine but, when it suits the department, it will charge the offender under the black-marketing regulations, which provide for imprisonment without the option of a fine. A case came under my notice in which a prices inspector walked into a backyard and asked a youth, "How much do you want for that motor-car?" The man told him the price, which was 100 per cent. above the pegged price. He was subsequently prosecuted under the black-marketing regulations for having offered a motor-car for sale above the pegged price, and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment without the option of a fine.

(Time, on motion of Mr. Gunn, extended.)

Mr. POWER: I thank hon. members for this privilege.

Another man was prosecuted under the price-fixing regulations for having sold a motor-car at above the pegged price and he got away with a fine. I maintain that if any action is to be taken for breaches of the price-fixing regulations there should be no favouritism. I object to one person's being gaoled simply for offering an article for sale above the pegged price whereas another man, who actually sells an article above the pegged price, gets away with a fine. The time has arrived when rigid action should be taken by those in control of the Prices Branch.

There is just one other matter I desire to deal with, that is, the prices of meals in restaurants. They have been pegged, but a very snide method is adopted to get over that. There is a place in Brisbane today where one finds that the price of a supper is fixed but in addition one has to pay a cover charge of 12s. 6d. It is true that the firm charges you only the correct amount for the food consumed, but the charge of 12s. 6d. is for the privilege of sitting down and eating that food in the restaurant. That is another method adopted in an attempt to defeat the regulations. I am taking this matter up with the Federal Government and asking that some investigation be made to discover why this practice is allowed to defeat the regulations.

Mr. Macdonald: You can refuse to pay it.

Mr. POWER: You cannot; you have to pay.

The other matter I desire to deal with before concluding my speech is the price of board and lodging. In 1939 it is alleged that these prices were pegged. I have a letter from a lady who states that in 1939 she paid 33s. a week for full board and lodging and that in 1941 the arrangement was altered and she was charged 31s. 6d. for bed and breakfast. What is the Prices Commissioner doing? This boarding-house-keeper is operat-

ing in Tank Street. The lady who furnished me with the information added that she was unable to complain because somebody who at one time complained to the manager was politely put out on the street. I understand that under the regulations the proprietor can put a guest out on the street. Officers of the department should go round and investigate that matter. A proper survey must be made of the whole thing. Whatever is taking place today is taking place as a result of the inability and inefficiency of those controlling the Prices Branch. I think the matter is entirely due to them.

I congratulate the Commonwealth Government on their endeavour to keep prices down. As a matter of fact, I understand from inquiries and observation that a person who charged a certain amount in 1939 for a suit is not entitled to charge any more today, but if his costs have risen he can submit them to the Commonwealth Government and make application for a subsidy to meet that increased cost, and it will be given to him. That has been done by a number of people, who have nevertheless been charging the increased price as well. The Commonwealth Government have done everything they possibly could to prevent the exploitation of the people and increases in prices. Those who are in control of the Prices Branch, however, have fallen down on the job, and it is time an overhaul was made and there was a proper investigation of the whole system and more suitable men were appointed. I am sure the Premier will take this matter up at the next Premiers' Conference on behalf of the Government after this motion has been carried—and I am sure it will be—and forwarded to the Commonwealth Government.

Mr. MOORE (Merthyr) (12.7 p.m.): In rising to second the motion so ably moved by my colleague the hon. member for Baroona, I want to congratulate him on his desire to bring this very important matter of price-fixing before this House and the public. We are not surprised at the motive that actuated the hon. member for Baroona in moving this motion because he is a member of this Parliament who is always vitally interested in the questions which affect the majority of members of the community. He never fails to rise and publicly register his approval or disapproval of happenings that he contends affect the section of the community that he represents in this Parliament. His views are always very forceful and very practical. So it is in keeping with his general behaviour that he should initiate this debate on this important matter.

In my opinion if the Curtin Government had not forcefully grappled with this question of price-fixing very soon after they took charge of the Parliament of Australia all sections of the community labouring under the difficulty caused by limited incomes would not have had sufficient food and shelter for themselves and their families. We know the Curtin Government very early in their career pegged prices—they were pegged in April 1943 on the 1942 ceiling values fixed by the previous Government; and in most

cases these prices have remained reasonably stable. I contend that if you have dishonest business people who are determined to evade Government regulations by any means at their disposal it is very hard to pin them down unless you have an army of honest and conscientious inspectors. We of the Government Party know that one of the great difficulties of administration during the war period was the lack of staff. The Governments, both State and Federal, have been criticised by members of the Opposition, and listening to that criticism, one would imagine that there had not been a war that had sapped the Commonwealth of much man-power.

At 12.10 p.m.,

Mr. SPEAKER resumed the chair.

Mr. MOORE: They criticise shortages, regulations and bureaucrats, and one would perhaps forgive them if they were unaware that we had been in a war that had sapped our man-power, which in effect in many instances took away effective control. But the war is over, and many of our conditions are altering daily, and this and many other administrative machines should receive an overhaul.

Members of this Parliament know full well that one of the main reasons for the high prices of commodities was the purchasing power brought to this country by our allies, the most notable example being the American troops. To them money appeared to be no object. They were very generous in their spending, and everybody is aware how unscrupulous business people took advantage of their generosity. Prices soared, and business was done with these people in preference to the Australians with limited means. To ensure that justice was done would have required a Government supervisor to virtually stand in when the deals were being made. Under the circumstances this was impossible, and consequently there were many blatant breaches of the regulations and profiteering. But that time has gone. To some degree the exigencies of war have passed, and we have now reached the stage when this country can get back to normal and follow the practices obtaining prior to the war. That will give the Government the opportunity of overhauling and policing their machinery in many ways, and I know of no piece of Government machinery it is so necessary to overhaul and police as price-fixing.

We are aware that another reason for high prices of many commodities was the fact that the Government, in order to encourage production to enable them to carry on their war effort, had to ensure higher prices to the producers, and I congratulate the Federal Government on their system of subsidies, which in many instances allowed the producer a working margin and gave the consumer the benefit of a lower price than would perhaps have had to be charged had the consumer to pay the whole of the outlay brought about by the higher cost of production. However, as I say, the time has arrived when we should give these matters our consideration, and I am fairly certain that one of the first jobs

the Commonwealth Government will do when returned to power on 26 September will be to overhaul this very important machinery.

My duty in this Parliament is not to worry about the wealthy people and people in the community with high incomes; they are able to look after themselves. I do not envy them their position in life, but I would point out that it is my duty, as a supporter of a Labour Government, to give consideration to those questions that affect the welfare of the ordinary people, the wage-earners who have to live on limited incomes. Of course, in regard to the common household commodities and the necessaries of life it is essential to have price-fixing machinery.

We believe—and I stand for the principle—that the producer, whether he is a primary or secondary producer, is entitled to a full measure of compensation for the investment of his capital and the physical work he puts into his production, but at the same time it is our duty to see that the consumers are placed in such a position as will enable them to buy sufficient commodities for the welfare of themselves and their families.

I should say that one of the important matters in price-fixing is to see that the price to the consumer is such that not only does the producer get a sufficient return but the consumer is able to buy sufficient quantities of those things that are necessary for the welfare of himself and his family. We see some anomalies in this regard today and probably an overhaul of the machinery, with more effective policing, will do away with some of these anomalies. The hon. member for Barroona dealt in great detail with some of the anomalies that we see. One article that is today virtually beyond the reach of the ordinary householder is the common orange. It is very desirable that this should be a common article of food—in cases of sickness it is very necessary—but the fixed price of 3½d. each makes it impossible for the ordinary family to buy it in sufficient quantities. Whether the price-fixing is no longer applied to this article or the policing is at fault, is a matter for the authorities to consider.

With the changes in our economic set-up, we are reaching the stage today when I think some consideration should be given to the machinery that is used in handling some of our problems. I am inclined to believe that today we cannot separate price-fixing from the machinery that is brought into operation when the basic wage is being computed. I repeat that I am not so much concerned about those members of the community who are well endowed with this world's goods, but I am vitally concerned about the wage-earners, the people of limited incomes who are making a great attempt to raise their families and give them an adequate amount of the commodities that go with the raising of families. Basically, those requirements are housing, food and clothing. While a number of our wage-earners are on the basic wage and the wages of others are computed on the basic wage, I believe that the system of wage-fixing and the system of price-fixing must be very closely related; if they are not, one or the other must fail. I believe, therefore, that we might do better

if our Prices Branch was a sub-department of our Industrial Court, which fixes the basic wage, and in doing so takes into consideration the cost of certain basic requirements to the family. These facts are borne out by information we have had from time to time over a period from the learned judges who have sat on the Arbitration Courts throughout the Commonwealth.

In one of these judgments the learned judge referred to the minimum estimated to be sufficient to keep body and soul together for a man and his family. He went on to speak about relationship with industry, but that does not enter into this phase of the question. We learn from other authorities that they did take into consideration the cost of commodities when fixing the basic wage. That would suggest that it is necessary to have a check made as to prices. For that reason I think a better job would be made of price-fixing if the department was brought under the control of the Industrial Court. What is the good of fixing a basic wage if we have not sufficient machinery in good order to check on prices of commodities that were taken into consideration in fixing the wage?

There are many references to the cost of living in judgments of Arbitration Courts. About 1940 Chief Justice Beeby, at a basic wage inquiry, pointed out that the wage was not based on family requirements but on the health of the national economy. Surely national economy has something to do with the health of the individual because if the individual in industry is not of a high physical standard so that he may do justice to the industry he is in, that industry cannot be economical? Again, if the boy in industry is not getting a sufficient quantity of suitable foods he cannot measure up to the standard required of him. Furthermore, if a scientific system of price control is not introduced the individual on a limited income will not get sufficient food to make him an economic unit in the industry—of the standard we desire. Chief Judge Beeby declared "A wage sufficient to keep husband, wife and one child at a minimum standard." He further said that the needs of the family were only a guide and were not an absolute guide, and the court had not enunciated its own standards either as to the needs or the size of the family.

And taking into consideration the size of families and if you are going to compute what is necessary for a family you must take into consideration the amount of the ordinary commodities necessary for them, because the amount that goes into a home is based on the prices of the commodities.

We must have a very efficient system of price control to see that the ordinary family gets sufficient quantities of the basic needs in food and clothing. During the war, as I said before, there were some rather complicated methods of arriving at prices to be paid to the producers. In many cases the Government of the day very generously gave a subsidy to certain industries to enable

struggling producers to produce at a profit and make goods available to the consumers who required them. We have now reached the stage in this era of peace when many of these anomalies will be removed.

There is one matter that will have to be tackled by the Labour Government sooner or later, and that is the cost of distribution. I cannot see how we are to sell goods to the consumer if we encourage the system that allows goods to pass through the hands of so many middlemen before they reach the consumer as at present. I agree with the mover of the motion that this Government have laid the foundation of a system of distributing goods whereby the producer will get a better price and the consumer will get a greater quantity of his requirements at a better price than hitherto. It is very gratifying to me to know that already much success has been achieved by the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing in its attempt to deal with this gigantic problem, but, as I said before, it will take years to bring about complete success in this connection. It can be done if there is the desire to do it. Already we have the squealers in various parts of the State, the middlemen, in their opposition to the efforts of the C.O.D. in connection with fruit-marketing. I was in a northern town recently where a foreigner had been making a great deal of unwarranted profit and he boasted that he would break the C.O.D. I had an opportunity of addressing the people there, and I advised them to stick to the C.O.D., pointing out that the fact that a private middleman was squealing showed that his system of distribution by the C.O.D. was already doing some good. When we consider the number of hands through which the ordinary commodities pass and the rake-off obtained on them, we must of necessity condemn that system. There are many middlemen, as we describe them, in the community who have nothing whatever to do with the production of many of the articles in common use. These middlemen are not necessary. Of course, I know that squeals will come from such big concerns as Burns Philp & Co. Ltd. and Thos. Brown & Co. Ltd. who handle these goods and distribute them at huge profits, but who do little or nothing in connection with their production who will say, "What do we, the members of Parliament, know about it? It cannot be done. I believe it is the task of the manufacturer to distribute them." It can be done if we determine that it shall be done.

It is pleasing to know that during the present session the Government propose to bring down legislation providing for co-operative selling, as it will lay the first stone of a system designed to eliminate many of these middlemen who contribute very little, if anything, to production, but who get a rake-off for handling commodities that could be handled in another way. If a system of co-operative selling is adopted, we shall have an opportunity of getting commodities to the public at a much lesser price than prevails today and so reduce the need for the extra policing of price-fixing regulations by the officers concerned. Anyone who has any

knowledge of law, of Acts and regulations, knows also that if in many cases legislation is not effective it is because it is not being properly administered.

Again I repeat that during the war period it was very difficult to get suitable personnel for policing and inspectorial work. One can easily visualise that had the Government allowed members of the Police Force to enlist in the forces the Police Force would have been depleted and the protection of the community affected. Queensland in particular has been very free from crime because the Government in their wisdom refused to deplete their Police Force to numbers that were insufficient for them to do their duties adequately. But other departments were denuded of their man-power and makeshift arrangements had to be made to have the work done in those departments, with the result it was often a physical impossibility for the job to be done properly. With the thousands of small shops in the suburbs it would be a physical impossibility to get the necessary man-power during the war to police the prices regulations properly, but as more man-power is available the job will be done much more effectively.

I suggest that a greater number of female inspectors be appointed to help in policing our regulations. Our womenfolk did an excellent job during the war. They were compelled to queue-up to buy their household requirements, very often under adverse conditions and thus played a wonderful part in keeping up the morale of the people, although many of them undermined their health in doing so. There are many such women in our midst today who are available for this work and having had the experience of having to buy for their families and for other reasons are probably better equipped for this job than many men. Many of them had to queue-up and had to travel from one end of the town to the other in search of household commodities at prices within the range of the family purse. In these matters they showed splendid persistency and these characteristics would aid them in policing prices effectively. Moreover, certain unscrupulous persons who adopt a very wrong attitude to male inspectors would probably have a very different outlook if they knew they were subject to policing by suitable female inspectors.

There are many anomalies in the present system, particularly in the method of selling fruit and vegetables by weight, which leads to a good deal of confusion. If certain instructions were given to shopkeepers by our inspectorial staff in this respect many of the present difficulties would disappear. For argument's sake, many household commodities are sold by weight. The scales used are not always of the same type. We have the ordinary clock-face scales, which are rather easy to understand, and then we have modern scales on the Dayton principle, which have a cylindrical arrangement that not only weighs the commodity but assesses the cost, which is disclosed in a little window by a red line. Such scales are worked by an adjuster. It stands to reason that persons of different stature have difficulty in seeing the computa-

tions from the same angle. For argument's sake, if a short person weighing an article looks through the red line at the price, he sees a different result from one who is fairly tall. These things might not seem very important, but they are important to the person who sets out to buy a certain weight but does not get it. In many cases the minimum or maximum over the correct weight is against the buyer. We have other outstanding examples. Recently I saw in a shop in the Valley that 5 lb. of chops were being sold for 1s., yet if you go round to some of the smaller butcher shops in the suburbs you find meat of apparently the same quality selling for 5½d. and 6d. a pound. There is something radically wrong here. I will not accept the usual story one is told about the mysteries of price-fixing as an answer to the glaring anomalies that every housewife and every purchaser sees. The system should be tightened up. The only method of doing so that I can see is to engage more inspectors.

A very interesting matter was brought to my attention the other day, which goes to show that there is something wrong. Whether the methods are wrong or the policing I do not know, but I agree with the mover of the motion that something should be done. A constituent of mine told me the other day that she attempted to buy a woman's hat. Most women have to wear hats, but some of the younger women are not wearing them because they cannot afford the prices asked. My constituent and her friend—one of them was a dress-designer and the other a hat designer—went round the town and they could not see anything suitable under about £4. They had a look at a number of hats and they decided that they would make one. They bought the necessary material for 13s. 6d. and took it home and made it. There are of course other expenses in business than the cost of material—there are the rent of premises, taxation and other overhead costs. I appreciate all that, and I agree that there must be a margin of profit, and that people are not philanthropists, particularly people in business, and they are entitled to their reasonable margin the same as the worker in industry is entitled to a fair wage.

Mr. Decker: There is the time factor in manufacture.

Mr. MOORE: There is the time factor in manufacture, but you would not say that people manufacturing things in the home with their own hands could do it quicker than the high-power machinery and high organisation in the factory. There is no question that some people are getting away with too much.

Mr. Decker interjected.

Mr. MOORE: I say again that you cannot compare high-power organisation and machinery with the woman sitting in her home doing it with her own hands. That is a bad argument for the hon. member.

Mr. Decker: It is not an argument; it is just a point.

Mr. MOORE: It is a bad point. While we have not the figures of all these extra costs, there is an enormous jump from 13s. 6d.

to £4. The other day I saw a baby's garment, suitable for a child about 12 months old, and the cost was £4. That might be all right for a wealthy person—if he wants to buy that sort of thing that is O.K. with me—but my point is that the family relying on limited means must dress their children, and this sort of thing is out of all proportion to their means. I should say that to allow these things to go on is very bad for the morale of the people; they make the mass of the people irritable and cause them to lose faith in the Government. They should be attended to and I think the appointment of more female inspectors would do much to eliminate some of these anomalies.

The duties of a price-fixer today go a little further than going into shops and observing certain things. Admittedly price-fixing is fairly difficult to handle but it would be an excellent idea if some of the inspectors went into the homes occasionally and had a talk with the housewives on many of the anomalies existing. They would thereby gain a fund of information that could be relayed to their departments and thus the administrators would be made aware of many things and if they followed them to their sources much good would follow. The Taxation Department has a system of policing those who endeavour to evade taxation and although I believe in the liberty of the subject and not encroaching too far on that liberty I think some of the suggested methods, if put into operation, would be of great advantage to the consuming public.

I think some conflict exists in the administration of the law concerning the topping of fruit. It is a common occurrence today for a person to buy a dozen apples or other fruit and on opening the parcel at home to discover three or four are unfit for consumption. I think that comes within the ambit of price-fixation. For instance, if a consumer pays 2s. 6d. a dozen for apples he should have some guarantee that each of that dozen is fit for consumption. These are some of the things that cause concern to our people today. I repeat that the housewives particularly did a wonderful job during the war and carried on their duties under great difficulties. The average housewife believed that during the war she should do everything in her power to stand by the workers. These women were patriotic and in these days of peace their lot should be lightened as far as possible. There is no better way of doing so than by introducing a better system of the distribution of the necessities of life and policing prices strictly.

Mr. PIE (Windsor) (12.43 p.m.): Mr. Speaker, I feel that the question raised by the hon. member for Baroona is of great importance to the people of Queensland and Australia and as far as I am concerned it will be dealt with purely on a non-political basis. The hon. member suggested that it was in the best interests of the community that the Commonwealth Government increase the number of prices inspectors. I agree with that entirely, provided of course that they are efficient.

The hon. member made another important statement with which I agree—that price-control has been absolutely necessary during the war and is still necessary at present during the conversion from war to peace. He also made a statement with which again I agree entirely, that price-control as a principle is right. But in my opinion the administration of price-control is a disgrace to the Commonwealth of Australia.

Mr. Foley: How can you say that?

Mr. PIE: I am agreeing with the hon. member for Baroona and if I may crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, this a matter on which I should prefer not to have many interjections. The subject is very important and non-political.

The average Australian longs for the day when restrictions, regulations and shortages will have gone and when free competition between individual enterprises will again restore to them the necessary quantities and services of all the essentials of life. Some measure of price-control has been warranted during the war years, and in a smaller degree still is in peace. The regulations are being gradually eased. I can show the hon. member for Baroona cases in which price-control is being lifted because supplies are sufficient to cope with the demand of the market, but the pernicious system outlined by the hon. member for Baroona and as introduced by the Commonwealth Government, that of subsidising the inefficient and not subsidising the efficient within a particular industry, has been one of the major blunders of price-control during the war. The system that has grown up in Australia today is this; if you are inefficient you get a subsidy from the Government.

Mr. Foley: That is not right.

Mr. PIE: If you are efficient you carry it within the net-profit position of your business.

The Minister says that is not right. I have here a circular which is available to all hon. members. It is "Prices Circular No. 1607," which contains the following—

"Administrative Problems of Price Stabilisation.

"Apart from the general principles already agreed upon that subsidies should be confined to essential goods, that they be conditional upon efficiency and rationalisation, and that they should not leave the industry any better off than before the payment of subsidies, it is difficult to define precisely the rate of profit on which it will be considered that relief should be given. The rate will differ in different industries and will have regard to the risks involved, the nature of the capital, and the degree of profit normally earned. These are matters upon which judgments will have to be made in each case."

Let me give a case in point as it happened to me personally. We want to spin wool. We are putting in new plant and machinery, which we are bringing from Great Britain and will be here early in March. The price

for wool tops, from which you spin your wool, is fixed by the Commonwealth Government. You spin your wool, and the price fixed for sale to the manufacturer also is fixed by the Commonwealth Government, but if because of your efficiency you make a greater net profit than your competitor, who is selling at exactly the same price, on the same purchase price for wool tops, you are asked to give money back to the Commonwealth Government, not to the people of this State. It is indeed a pernicious system whereby the efficiency of industry, the efficiency of anyone in the community, is penalised for the inefficient. In this country today, in trade and commerce—I have no knowledge of how it applies to the countryside—inefficiency is being subsidised every time.

Mr. Foley: That is not correct.

Mr. PIE: It is correct. Let me quote the proof. I have a prices circular issued by the Commonwealth Government and I shall table it here. It says—

“As experience is gained, the subsidies will be subject to more and more careful scrutiny, but in the immediate future there would be much disturbance to trade if the payment of subsidies were deferred until all the investigations had been made.”

This is the point I want to make—

“In some cases, 6 per cent. on funds employed after taxation has been adopted. In other cases, 12½ per cent. on funds employed before taxation is the rule applied. In yet other cases the pre-war profit, or a variation of the 12½ per cent. rule under which two-thirds of the excess over 12½ per cent. is refunded to the Supply Department or other Government departments where heavy purchases of the products of the industry are made.”

But, sir, that does not go to the people. That goes back to the Government in the form of a “contra” as against the overall subsidy account. That is an important point that I want every hon. member in this House to realise. I want him to realise what the Commonwealth Government have done during the war in price-control.

This circular goes on to state—

“A trader might apply for relief from increasing costs for one section of his output. . . .”

If you are making cardigans or pullovers at a loss you might apply for that relief where the subsidy would be important.

“ . . . where a subsidy would ordinarily be refused because his general profit position was satisfactory.”

If you are conducting an efficient business and making profits on your other goods you would be forced to sell other lines at a loss whilst your competitor who was not efficient got a subsidy.

The circular goes on to say—and this is a terrible thing—

“Various pressures would be brought on him to persuade him to carry one, e.g., control of man-power and materials. . . .”

They would not give you man-power or material unless you would hand moneys back to them. That is what they tried to do with me.

It further states—

“Direction by War Organisation of Industry, re-arrangement of other prices.”

And listen to this—

“But in the last resort it might be necessary to grant him a subsidy on account of this particular section of his business.”

The hon. member for Barooka spoke about laws and regulations, but laws must apply to all people equally. There cannot be a law for the rich and one for the poor; there cannot be a law for the efficient and one for the inefficient. If we allow that state of affairs to come about, the whole economic structure of this country will break down.

During the war I have seen mushroom businesses grow up overnight—inefficient growths—that were allowed to sell 10 and 15 per cent. above the legitimate efficient manufacturer. They received the subsidy in order not to make a loss. I have proof of it.

A Government Member: You are not stating the case correctly.

Mr. PIE: I am. Let me deal with the case of goods imported from India, where a maximum selling price is fixed by the Government. One efficient firm brought goods in and to it the Government refused a subsidy, whilst its competitor next door, an inefficient man, was granted a subsidy.

A Government Member interjected.

Mr. PIE: Their position was disclosed by their balance sheets. The Prices Commissioner has the right to investigate every balance sheet. As a result one firm had £100,000 outstanding in subsidy, whilst its competitors received subsidies from the Commonwealth Government.

I have not long at my disposal this morning, but I wish to quote another instance, one that affects Queensland particularly. I know definitely that prices charged in Queensland are lower than in any other State of the Commonwealth from a manufacturing point of view, and to substantiate that statement let me give this instance. Fibre mattresses are urgently required in this State over the next six months, when the hot weather will be upon us, but what is happening? We find that New South Wales is being allowed by the Commonwealth Government to sell a 4 feet 6 inches fibre mattress at £3 13s. 4d. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, the price at which a fibre mattress is sold in Queensland? £2 10s. 6d. What is happening? I will tell you. You cannot make a fibre mattress, with the increased costs of today, at £2 10s. 6d. Queensland manufacturers have applied for a price of £2 16s. 4d. against the £3 13s. 4d. charged in New South Wales, and we cannot get a decision. Here is the proof. We have been trying to get permis-

sion to increase our price by 6s. bringing it to £2 16s. 4d., while New South Wales is selling at £3 13s. 4d.

Take another case—wire mattresses. We do not make them but I want to refer to them to show what is happening today. Newlands in Sydney—I have the price list—we are charging £3 10s. today for wire mattresses plus 12½ per cent. for sales tax, bringing it to £3 18s. 9d. plus freight from Sydney, £1 2s. 8d., making a total of £5 1s. 5d. Do you know that all that the Queensland manufacturer is allowed to charge is 32s.—as against £3 10s. for the same thing in Sydney?

A Government Member: And both only wire mattresses?

Mr. PIE: Yes. The Queensland manufacturer says, "I cannot make them at that price." They are coming up from New South Wales every day by rail to Queensland and the Queensland public are paying £8 for a wire mattress, not Queensland-manufactured goods but goods coming from New South Wales, where the people are made to pay higher prices. I took up with Mr. Lindsey all these differentiations in prices between Queensland and the southern States and all he said was, "Yes, I know that is operating, but there is nothing we can do about it." Do you know what is happening? The Queensland manufacturer is being put out of business. I am not saying that in any loose way. I can submit proof. The Sydney competitor is allowed to charge £3 10s. whereas the Queensland manufacturer is allowed to charge only 32s. He cannot get an increase in price, so that goods are coming up from New South Wales and are being sold to the people in Queensland for £8 when if they were made in Queensland they could be sold for £4 or £5.

The system of price-control is governed by National Security Regulation No. 666 which allows a profit margin established on the base year 1939-1940.

Mr. Aikens: And a monetary profit.

Mr. PIE: That is the same thing. The Queensland manufacturer is adhering to all these things but in the other States they are allowing them to submit further prices in order that they can get increased figures. The position is serious. I tell you that right now production is being held up in this State because of the delay in getting prices from Canberra. Here I write on 6 August, again on 23 August and I ring up again later. They promised to send someone down on Monday and they are now in my place verifying the increase of 6s. bringing the price to £2 16s. 4d. while southern competitors are allowed to sell the same line at £3 13s. 4d. Do you know that a wool-flock mattress 4 feet 6 inches wide is sold in Queensland at £1 18s. 6d. whereas southern competitors can charge £3 2s. 6d.? Then they say that there are rackets going on in Queensland. The rackets are in the South and the quicker they are investigated by some of our inspectors the better.

The subject of price-control must be gone into very thoroughly. I understand that a Bill is coming down and I am looking forward to the opportunity of debating it and offering what I think are constructive suggestions.

I should like to continue to debate this subject but in the short time available to me today I have dealt only cursorily with the subject. However, I hope next Thursday, when the debate is resumed, to have an opportunity of dealing with the matter free from any party-political thought whatever. We must not forget that the principle of law in this country is that any Act and/or regulation must apply equally to all the people. I went to the High Court on that principle and won my case. It is a principle that we must stand for in this country. Why should the inefficient get a subsidy and the efficient should not?

At 2.15 p.m.,

In accordance with sessional order, the House proceeded with Government business.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

Mr. L. J. BARNES (2.15 p.m.), by leave: I wish to make a personal explanation. In today's "Courier-Mail" under the caption of "Wants tax cut for five years," I am reported to have said—

"Part of the cause is the public attitude itself," said Mr. Barnes. "When the 'Courier-Mail' comes to Cairns at 10 o'clock in the morning we rush out with our three-pences to buy one. Soon 40 or 50 people in the 'Cairns Post' will be out of a job and they will have to come to Brisbane and work for the 'Courier-Mail.'"

Then in black print the report continues—

"I admit that the product is better, and we cannot blame the public for buying it. They buy it because the craftsmanship is better."

My proof this morning reads—

"You cannot stop people from buying Peters ice cream, because it is a better product than that of the local producer."

I have had a wire from Cairns, and I feel sure that the "Courier-Mail" will be good enough to clear me on the matter.

MOTION OF DISSENT FROM MR. SPEAKER'S RULING.

MOTION LAPSED.

The following motion, standing in the name of Mr. Pie, Windsor, having been called:—

"That Mr. Speaker's ruling given on Wednesday, 4 September, that my question without notice directed to the Premier was out of order be dissented from."

and the hon. member not moving the motion, the House proceeded with the next business.

MONEY LENDERS ACTS AMENDMENT
BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Mann,
Brisbane, in the chair.)

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—
Attorney-General) (2.18 p.m.): I move—

“That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend the Money Lenders Acts, 1916 to 1934, in certain particulars.”

This Bill seeks to amend certain sections of the Money Lenders Acts, 1916-1934. Some money-lenders operating in Queensland are in the habit, at the present time, of having a subsidiary company and when an applicant lodges an application for a loan of a certain sum of money, it is referred to this subsidiary company, which ostensibly makes inquiry into the character of the applicant to determine whether he is a fit and proper person to whom an advance should be granted. For this service a certain sum of money is charged which at times is a considerable sum. The report is forwarded to the firm or company to whom the application is made and the applicant is usually charged the maximum rate of interest allowed under the Act. The first thing he has to pay is the fee to the firm that investigated and made the recommendation; consequently instead of the money-lenders keeping within the Act, the borrower has to pay a considerable amount above what is provided for in the Act.

Mr. Aikens: They charge the borrower for finding out that the security is good.

Mr. GLEDSON: They charge the borrower for investigating. Suppose that I want to borrow money from the hon. member for Mundingburra and I made application for a loan of £20 for a certain period, and enter into an agreement and sign a contract that I will pay that amount over a certain period, plus the interest on the money, and instead of lending me the money the hon. member tells me to go to the hon. member for Windsor and submit my application to him and they will get word from him whether I am a fit person to lend money to.

Mr. Pie: Am I a fit person?

Mr. GLEDSON: The hon. member for Windsor is interested in the debate. He would take my application and he would then send word to the hon. member for Mundingburra to say, “Dave Gledson is a fit and proper person to borrow the money, and you will be safe in lending that money.” In addition to paying the interest and redemption I should have to pay out £4 or £5 to the hon. member for Windsor for investigating my suitability. This Bill is designed to prevent the imposition of what is called a procuration fee. I think that covers the amendment.

Mr. Decker: Was the procuration fee illegal previously?

Mr. GLEDSON: No.

There is a case of an old-age pensioner who wanted to borrow £20 for some purpose and they charged her £4 to find out whether she was a fit and proper person to lend money to. Her son took the matter up and sent in the books and we made inquiries and found there was nothing to stop them from doing so unless we amended the Act. We are taking the first opportunity to amend the Act to prevent that practice.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba—Leader of the Opposition) (2.24 p.m.): If the conditions are such as have been detailed by the Attorney-General I should say that this is a very necessary measure. After all, if a money-lender is going to accept a risk he should not charge the person borrowing from him the cost of ascertaining whether he is a good risk or not. I should say it is a legitimate charge on his own business and that he should pay any cost of any investigation that he may make, and not make it a charge on the person borrowing from him. I think all hon. members are against the principle of a procuration fee such as this practice brings into being. The amendment seems to be necessary to overcome this practice that seems to have grown up in this business of money-lending.

If it has been the practice of money-lenders to charge persons borrowing very small sums of money from them—as no doubt a pensioner would—for example, £4 to pay a subsidiary company for the investigation of the calibre of the borrower, the amount is certainly an exorbitant charge, even if the principle were right. But the principle is certainly not a right one and the amending Bill appears to be very desirable. However, we shall have the opportunity of examining it further when we receive our copies of the Bill.

Mr. HILEY (Logan) (2.26 p.m.): The purpose of the amending Bill, as indicated by the Attorney-General, is one that is both necessary and desirable. There appears to be no limit to the ingenuity of the user in finding some way of supplementing his already gross margin on the loans he makes. I hope the amending Bill will be sufficiently tightly drawn to stop what is virtually the practice of dummying and obtaining through some other organisation a benefit that is precluded from being obtained by the lender directly.

But I am rather disappointed that in 1946 the only amendment the Government bring forward to the Money Lenders Act is one designed to limit and correct this particular abuse. If we examine the whole trend of interest rates in Australia I think we can see the clearest evidence that our gilt-edged rate has moved substantially down from what it was in the 20's certainly, and even well below what it was in the middle 30's. And as the rate on gilt-edged securities has decreased, so has the rate of interest charged on most of the securities available to the commercial community. The rate charged by banks on overdrawn indebtedness is down. The rate charged by trustees for loans on mortgage is down, and the rate charged by

building societies and insurance companies is down. I suggest that the Attorney-General might very well examine the maximum rate permitted under the Money Lenders Act at present. I suggest the maximum rate it is still possible to charge within the law is something that it is almost inconceivable to imagine should ever be a proper charge. I have omitted to look up and make certain of the rate at present permissible, but the Attorney-General will correct me if I am wrong: it is still possible to charge the equivalent to 20 per cent. simple interest on loan money. A large amount of money is lent in the commercial community by people who are registered money-lenders under this Act, people who discount motor-car paper and paper on all kinds of time-payment purchases. Although these people impose charges that seem to me to be far from low they are still substantially within the maximum rate permitted under the Act and if we are to give some attention to the law governing the money-lenders under this Act we might very properly in 1946 lessen the maximum rates of interest permissible for money-lenders to charge. It is probably too late for this to form part of this measure as it may not be within the formal procedure that has already taken place in regard to this Bill but it is a matter of regret that that step has not been taken.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (2.29 p.m.): I am very glad this Bill has come forward. It is the duty of the Government to protect people against this sort of practice. As a matter of fact, I thought that some years ago we had taken precautions to prevent the charging of procuration fees. I am surprised to know that the power still exists to allow a third party to obtain a procuration fee in connection with certain loans.

I agree with the hon. member for Logan on the question of charging interest. In my opinion, this is more important than the procuration fee. I take it that the procuration fee on small loans would not be extortionate, but the interest payment must receive serious consideration.

I therefore have much pleasure in supporting a measure that will give some added protection to people who are seeking help in time of need.

Mr. LUCKINS (Maree) (2.31 p.m.): I support the Bill because I know that certain undesirable practices are being put into operation by money-lenders in this State. One of the most objectionable to my way of thinking is the pernicious system of the flat rate of interest in the purchase of motor-cars, for instance. If one borrows money to buy a motor-car, on condition that the repayments are completed over a period of 18 months, a flat rate of interest is charged. Repayments are usually made monthly, which means that the lender of the money really obtains considerably more than 8 per cent. interest.

I understand, too, that in lending money on furniture and similar chattels, the practice adopted is that if the borrower is seeking £100, the cheque is made out for that

amount, the borrower signs for the full amount, the cheque is sent to the bank, the money is brought back and the lender then hands over that money after deducting the interest in advance. These are all matters that should be looked into by the department with a view to protecting people who find it necessary to borrow money in that way and overcoming this very undesirable system of charging a flat rate of interest.

Mr. MACDONALD (Stanley) (2.33 p.m.): I listened attentively to what the Attorney-General said, but I think that he is making an entirely wrong approach to this question. I find myself at complete variance with my leader here. There is no gainsaying the fact that most of these loans are granted on personal security, and no matter what legislation is brought into this House there will be black-marketing in obtaining advances. I think that the approach that should have been made is one based on the system adopted in Great Britain. There the title to land is either feudal or udal. They have not the same Torrens title as we have in this country. There are people in Great Britain who follow the profession of searchers. These searchers are licensed, and the fees for making searches into the character of a person or the validity of a title are set down by statute, and I think that this Parliament could say, in fact, that certain charges could be made in the matter now before us. That would certainly preclude any possibility of a super-charge upon the borrower. No matter what legislation you bring in here, you will find that the man who is going to borrow money will, on the side, give a certain fee to get that money, for no person approaches money-lenders unless he is in dire financial straits. That is entirely wrong.

I certainly agree with the hon. member for Logan that when we are amending this Bill we should make a proper job of it. One of the most pernicious habits of the profession of money-lending is this charge of a flat rate of interest, and I think the Minister ought to take such facts into consideration before submitting the Bill. Time and time again Bills have been introduced this year to effect an amendment, and the next year we find it necessary to make further amendments because ill-considered thought has been given to these matters. I do think that this Bill should be withdrawn and reconsidered.

Mr. PATERSON (Bowen) (2.35 p.m.): I should like to say a few words on the bigger aspect of this question of loans. I feel not only that the amendment to the Act does not go far enough in the manner indicated by the hon. member for Logan, but also that it fails to get at the real root of the trouble. We should ask ourselves why people in need of money go to private money-lenders. And I think when we ask ourselves that question we get two answers—first of all because those in need of money are not receiving sufficient to keep clear of money-lenders and secondly because Government money-lending institutions such as the Commonwealth Bank and the Agricultural Bank have not extended their facilities to the people as a whole as they should have done.

I know of many cases in our cane-growing districts in which farmers are compelled to seek loans each year and to give crop liens as security. Frequently these men go to the banks to get a loan and banks say, "You had better see so-and-so," naming a particular money-lender in the town. The next step is that the farmer goes to the money-lender, who rings up the manager of the bank, and the manager of the bank arranges to lend the money-lender the sum required at a certain rate of interest. Then the money-lender lends the money to the farmer and charges him an extra rate of interest over and above that charged by the bank. That racket has been working for years in the cane areas of North Queensland.

Why is it being worked? It is not because the farmer wants to pay an extra rate for his money; it is mainly because under the present system the Agricultural Bank and the Commonwealth Bank have not extended their facilities for the lending of money sufficiently. And I have no doubt that this racket which is rampant in one area is also rampant in the rest of the State. Incidentally, one could hardly get better security than crop liens. They afford almost 100-per-cent. security.

Mr. Walsh: It might not be so this year.

Mr. PATERSON: Even so crop liens would offer a good security because they carry a fairly high priority in the proceeds of the crop that the mill has to pay to the farmer. I think, Mr. Mann, that the Government should tackle this question in that way. I know that the Government have not control over the Commonwealth Bank but they could extend the facilities of the Agricultural Bank.

Mr. Walsh: Eighty per cent. of the security value is a good loan.

Mr. PATERSON: I know that but at present we are not worrying about security because in most cases the security is good. I am at present referring only to the facilities for getting loans. Only recently a farmer in Bowen, as a result of flood disaster, wanted a loan and he approached me on the matter. The Agricultural Bank has no agency at Bowen. I made an investigation, was told to approach Townsville, and was eventually told to approach Brisbane.

Mr. L. J. Barnes: There is a branch in Townsville.

Mr. PATERSON: The administration of the bank is too centralised. If there were more decentralisation, facilities for farmers to obtain loans would be easier, and there would not be the occasion for so much recourse to private money-lenders or banks.

If the problem is tackled in that way the Government will have some control over money-lending, but until it is tackled in that way I am afraid that, notwithstanding all the laws that we may pass here, the Government's intentions will be defeated. When a person is up against it financially and needs money, he goes to the money-lender, and as the hon. member for Maree has pointed out, frequently the money-lender actually

hands him the amount that remains after he has deducted, in advance, the excessive interest over and above what he has the right to charge. It may be asked: why does not the borrower complain? But we must remember that if he were to complain that would be the end of all his chances of getting a loan from any private money-lender in his district in the future. Frequently these men have to ask for repeated loans from year to year, especially in the farming industry where they need the money each season to finance the harvesting of the crop, or to pay the men engaged in preparing the ground for the crop. In that case too great a responsibility is actually placed upon the borrower, and the only way to overcome it is, as I suggested, that the Government should extend its facilities for lending so that ultimately there will be no need for any private money-lenders or private banks. If that is done, the only problem is to fix the rate of interest, and the Government should fix the rate as low as possible. Then we shall not need to worry about the underhand attempts by private money-lenders to outwit the law.

At the same time, I want to express my agreement with the remarks of the hon. member for Logan. I too think it is high time that something was done to reduce the interest rates that may now be charged. I know that the Act gives the Government power to prescribe the rate of interest, but unfortunately it has not been fixed low enough yet to eliminate the practice mentioned by the hon. member for Logan of charging 20 per cent., which may be charged now in some instances.

Mr. MOORE (Merthyr) (2.43 p.m.): I desire to bring before the Committee a malpractice that is carried on in this State today and that I hope will be removed by the Bill. The hon. member for Bowen hoped that the time would soon arrive when all the lending facilities would be controlled by the Government. That would mean that all financial dealings would be open to scrutiny by Government auditors, and any malpractices could be traced to the offenders concerned. There are times when things are not normal, when those who usually borrow from Government sources are forced by the exigencies of their position to use private agencies to get financial accommodation. I have in mind a practice that is now carried out in connection with house-building. Prospective home-builders are encouraged to go to private institutions by the announcement by such institutions that they can help in obtaining materials and builders for the job. Such a case was brought under my notice the other day. The person concerned had agreed with a private financial house to pay an extra fee of £15 for certain services offered by the lending institution. If the borrower agreed to pay the extra £15, the lending house undertook to obtain the necessary building materials. Today building materials are in short supply, and iron and other roofing material are unavailable, but up to date this lending firm has offered no assistance whatever in procuring these materials.

I will not have it that a firm in a business of that kind in Brisbane today does not know the difficulty of procuring material. Neither will I have it that an honest firm will encourage a borrower to enter into such an agreement, knowing that those materials are so hard to get. My opinion is that this is just one more back-door method of getting extra money in the form of a pro-curation fee that the lenders are not honest enough to designate as such. That practice is going on today but I do not blame any young fellow for going to one of these firms to get financial assistance if it could give him help to procure building materials. If necessary I will give the Minister particulars of this case. I do not want them to be made public because the borrower feels that if that is done it might jeopardise his chance of getting his house completed. I mention it as being just one more instance of how the borrower is being mulcted by the big financial interests in the city. They are not making this charge because of any desire on their part to endeavour to help the borrower to get housing accommodation.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) (2.47 p.m.): I have been particularly interested in the comments made by hon. members who have had some experience of money-lending, particularly the hon. members for Stanley, Bowen and Logan. I always enjoy listening to the remarks of men who are conversant with their subject although I must admit that sometimes men deal with subjects with which they are not conversant.

I concur with the hon. member for Stanley and other hon. members who have stated that this is merely a patchwork piece of legislation. It is quite apparent from remarks that have been made that the money-lenders have been able to gnaw a rat-hole through the present law and as a result of their ability to gnaw that rat hole they are able to charge a pro-curation fee. However, I feel that once that particular rat hole is patched up by this legislation they will by similar methods gnaw some other rat hole in the law and make a charge for a consultation fee or collect some other fee. You can rest assured that the money-lenders will get round this amending legislation just as glibly and easily as they got round the original Act. I hope the Attorney-General even at this stage, will acquiesce in the requests made by hon. members and withdraw the Bill with a view to bringing down a Consolidated Money-Lenders Act in a completely remodelled form that will embody the suggestions that have been made and improve the condition of the borrowers.

I do happen to know something about one matter touched on by the hon. member for Logan, that is, the discounting of promissory notes given to various traders by people compelled to buy necessities on time payment. We had occasion in Townsville to open an electrical department in connection with the Townsville City Council's activities. And one of the reasons that actuated us was that it was brought under our notice that people who were compelled to go to the

various electrical traders in Townsville to buy electrical articles or gadgets for use in their homes had given the traders in all good faith 12 promissory notes if the money was to be paid over a period of 12 months, or 24 promissory notes if the money was to be paid in two years, and that the next notification they would receive would be not from the trader but from some money-lending firm with which the trader discounted these promissory notes.

They would find themselves then connected with a money-lending firm with which they would not have entered into any obligation or contract of their own volition. I believe the Money-Lenders Act should be so amended to prevent the discounting of these trading promissory-note obligations. I believe that once we stop that we shall stop the most pernicious form of money-lending in this State. A person might go to a firm in which he had considerable trust and confidence; very often it is the name of the firm that induces the buyer to buy from it; and one can imagine his dismay and astonishment when, a month after he has given that firm his promissory notes for 12 regular monthly payments of the principal and interest, to receive a demand notice from a money-lending institution with which the firm has discounted his promissory notes informing the borrower that in the future he must make his monthly payments to the money-lending firm.

I do hope that the Attorney-General even at this stage will consider the remodelling of the whole thing.

Mr. KERR (Oxley) (2.52 p.m.): I have pleasure in supporting the amendment; I think it is very necessary. This is something that was abused in the past. I wish to point out that there are plenty of opportunities for people to borrow money today. Most of the associated banks make provision for personal loans at a low rate of interest. The reason why money-lending institutions charged big rates in the past was that the security was a poor one. The banks are catering for this class of business today. It is something the general public should wake up to, and it is largely their own fault if they go to the money-lenders and borrow money at a higher rate of interest.

During the debate the field has been widened considerably. There is no doubt that during these times of price-control there are other fields that could be gone over with a view to restriction and bringing them into line with many other classes of business.

I hope the suggestion put forward by the hon. member for Logan and other hon. members will be adopted. It is time for the Attorney-General to cast his eye over some of these things with a view to remedying them.

Mr. POWER (Baroona) (2.53 p.m.): I do not agree with the hon. member for Oxley that the reason why a higher rate of interest was charged by money-lenders was that the security was not much good. I know there are no money-lenders in this State who will lend money without security or the personal

guarantee of somebody else. The first thing they ask the borrower to do is to get a guarantor, despite the fact that they obtained a procuracy fee to investigate whether the borrower was suitable. They find out about the suitability of the borrower, whether he has any security and a permanent job, and they charge him a procuracy fee, and in addition they make him disclose his business to a friend who has to go along and be a guarantor.

Mr. Edwards: How do you know all these things?

Mr. POWER: I happened to fall in on one occasion by guaranteeing money for a man and I know what methods are adopted. I do not go round Brisbane with my eyes shut; I am conversant with what is taking place.

Mr. Kerr: No security.

Mr. POWER: It is not a case where security is put up. They ring up the mercantile agents and find out whether this man has any judgments against him. There is no difficulty in doing that. I do not believe anybody should lend money without making an investigation to see whether he will get it back. Then there is the question of borrowing money on real property. The prospective lenders go to the Titles Office and pay 6d. for a search fee to see whether it is subject to mortgage.

Mr. Luckins: It is 1s. now.

Mr. POWER: It was 6d. when I used to go there. The money-lenders charge a percentage on the money they are lending. I agree with the hon. member for Mundingburra on this occasion—I do not often agree with him—in regard to discount. We find that a person can borrow money from a certain firm at a certain rate of interest, but later the promissory notes signed by the borrower are discounted with some other firm and the borrower finds himself then in the hands of another money-lender. The money-lenders get it both ways; they get the procuracy fee and the rate of interest paid when the loan is transferred to someone else.

Mr. Macdonald: The Agricultural Bank charges an inspection fee.

Mr. POWER: There is nothing wrong with that; so does the States Advances Corporation. Anyone would be entitled to do that. The inspection fee does not come into consideration on this occasion. If a man is borrowing money on security the lender is entitled to have a valuation of the security, but we find that in addition to that the lender asks for a procuracy fee for obtaining the money to be borrowed. As a matter of fact, the procuracy fee allowed in Queensland before the practice was stopped was at the rate of 2½ per cent. Legislation prevented that to a certain extent but lenders are now working along another channel, and any action this Government can take to prevent it should be taken.

I hope that later, when the Minister has the opportunity—and I know he will—he will go into the general question of money-lending. I agree with other hon. members that the rate of interest is too high. Meanwhile, we are doing right in closing this gate.

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (2.57 p.m.): The hon. member for Stanley said that we should withdraw the Bill and go into the whole subject of money-lending, instead, as he says, of passing amending legislation and then coming down almost next day with further amending legislation. I am going to explain the position, and I ask the hon. member for Stanley to listen carefully and if he is able to convince me that anything is wrong we may be able to take notice of his request to withdraw the Bill. The provision reads—

“Subject as hereinafter provided, it shall not be lawful for any person to charge, recover, or receive directly or indirectly, or as a partner with any other person or persons any moneys for or in respect of the making, procuring, negotiating or obtaining any loan, or for or in respect of the collection of repayments thereof:”

One would have thought that was perfectly watertight, and that no-one would be able to get round it. But it was got round and that is the reason why we are bringing down this amending Bill, and preventing any other person or firm from being brought in.

I gave some particulars of a certain loan of £20. The fee charged for making inquiries as to the suitability of the borrower by this firm was £4. The interest on the loan was £2. The fee of £4 was ostensibly charged for investigating the suitability of the person as a borrower, but they merely took his name. No-one came near that person at all. The borrower signed a promissory note for £26, made up as follows—£20 loan, £2 interest and £4 for the second firm, which was a subsidiary firm to the lender for determining whether the borrower was a fit and proper person to lend money to. Those sums and the first two fortnightly payments of 10s. each were deducted from the amount handed to the person borrowing and he got £19 in all.

Mr. Aikens: In some instances the third person is purely an imaginary person.

Mr. GLEDSON: In most instances he is.

The hon. member for Bowen suggested that in these cases provision should be made for advancing loans through a Government institution to people who need them. The Premier has that matter in hand at the present time.

Mr. Macdonald: Are you going to hang up three brass balls?

Mr. GLEDSON: The hon. member for Stanley knows that there is no better method of lending money than through a Government institution. He has proved that in his own work because he has many people who seek his aid in obtaining money to carry out their work. He has been successful in getting them accommodated, and he has always come

to a Government institution because he knows that that is the best place. That matter will not come within the ambit of this Bill, but the Premier has it in hand and probably before very long this Assembly will have the opportunity of providing a means of advancing money to people through a Government institution.

Some hon. members have mentioned the fact that most of the loans carry virtually no security. A number of them are for only £5, £10 and sometimes £20. When it comes to borrowing larger sums people will not pay the high rates charged in those instances. The question of the high rates of interest mentioned by the hon. member for Logan will be looked into, but that matter can be rectified without bringing down an amending Bill.

Mr. Pie: Under the regulations?

Mr. GLEDSON: Yes. A maximum rate of interest is prescribed under the Act now. We will look into that provision with a view to reducing the present prescribed rate. The proposed Bill covers the difficulties we have experienced and closes the loophole in the present legislation in connection with the procurator fee.

Motion (Mr. Gledson) agreed to.

Resolution reported.

FIRST READING.

Bill presented and, on motion of Mr. Gledson, read a first time.

SUPREME COURT (COMMONWEALTH PAYMENT TO JUDGES) VALIDATION ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Mann, Brisbane, in the chair.)

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (3.5 p.m.): I move—

“That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend the Supreme Court (Commonwealth Payment to Judges) Validation Act of 1930 in certain particulars.”

This Bill deals with one principle. In 1930 an arrangement was entered into with the Commonwealth Government as to the payment of a certain lump sum which was to go towards paying judges of the Supreme Court of Queensland for carrying out work in bankruptcy which had been taken over by the Commonwealth Government. That Government control all bankruptcy work in Australia, and the judges of the Supreme Court adjudicate in bankruptcy cases. In 1930 the Commonwealth Government agreed to pay a certain sum of money towards payment for this work, and the division of it was left to the State, but since then the question has arisen whether an acting judge of the Supreme Court was entitled to receive a share of this money. The Government, in their

wisdom, decided that the money should be divided amongst the judges of the Supreme Court, whether they are acting or full-time judges.

Mr. Aikens: Perfectly fair and equitable.

Mr. GLEDSON: We divided the money with the judges and acting judges. If a judge went away on holiday for, say, six months and an acting judge was appointed in his place, we thought that acting judge was entitled to his share of the money provided by the Commonwealth when doing the work. That was decided by the Governor in Council, and was carried out for a number of years. The question was raised later whether it was legal to pay acting judges in this way. One opinion said that it could be done and another said it could not be done. We are bringing down this amendment so that an acting judge will be on the same basis as a judge of the court when doing any of the work. This question arose in 1938, and I think at that time the late Mr. P. L. Hart and the late Mr. A. D. Graham were acting judges of the court.

That is all the Bill contains. It simply validates what has been done, and provides that in future the money provided shall be divided amongst the judges of the court, whether they are full-time or acting judges.

Mr. HILEY (Logan) (3.10 p.m.): I am very glad to see this measure brought forward because it impinges on a fairly important principle in our judicial concept. We must remember that we have endeavoured always to uphold the principle that payment to our judges should never be at the will of the Executive, in other words, that a judge appointed to his high judicial office should command a remuneration provided for him by this Assembly and that no Government or no Minister should ever be in the position of influencing, either by increasing or reducing, the remuneration of any occupant of the bench. One of the difficulties and one of the adverse comments that have been attached by the legal profession and many quarters of this State is that with the bankruptcy allowance a sum of money comes by way of additional remuneration to the judiciary in distinction from the main remuneration of the judges, which is fixed and voted by this Assembly—that this additional remuneration comes to the judges at the will of the Executive, the Governor in Council, and is allocated by the Governor in Council. The information that the Attorney-General has placed before us rebuts the suggestion, if ever there had been any, that there had been any impropriety or any favouritism in the distribution of this sum. He has told us in the clearest language that whatever allowance comes from the Commonwealth Government has as a set practice been divided equally between all the judges. That, I think, must rebut any suggestion that favouritism has been shown to any of them. The bringing forward of this Bill to validate the practice will bring us back to the correct approach, the idealistic approach to the remuneration of judges. If I understand the

introductory speech of the Attorney-General no longer will this extra bankruptcy money be allocated at the will of the Executive, rather I understand him to say it will be income distributable as a legislative act not as an Executive decision amongst all occupants of the Supreme Court bench who may be called upon to discharge bankruptcy duties.

I think we might remind ourselves that we are getting back closer to the purest conception of judicial occupancy of office and its remuneration. The Attorney-General will remember that during the last two years considerable attention was devoted to the method employed for providing for the accrued leave due to judges—the question being whether payment in lieu of accrued leave should go to judges as an Executive act or whether it should reach them as a clear vote of this Chamber. That, if my recollection serves me rightly, was corrected. Here in this other direction in which the highest ideal of judicial remuneration may have been open to doubt any suggestion to the contrary is being corrected. I welcome the measure in accordance with the outline of it given to us.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) (3.14 p.m.): I welcome this amending Bill because it gives to the judges of the Supreme Court and the acting judges as well the basic principle of justice that has been embodied in many awards throughout the State affecting various workers. The fundamental principle involved is that the payment of any salary—and this principle has been fought for by industrial advocates for years—attaches to the position, not to the person. Consequently any man occupying the position of acting judge should be entitled to the remuneration and all the other perquisites attached to that position just the same as those who are actually classified as judges.

The Railway Award, which I am particularly conversant with, contains this wise, this just and this equitable provision. It provides that a man who acts in a higher capacity shall be paid at the rate attached to that higher grade or capacity. It is well known that firemen in the railway service who are not classified drivers are paid while so acting at the first-class driver's rate if they have worked themselves up as acting drivers from the fourth-class through the third and through the second to the first class. While still firemen they are, if employed acting as drivers, paid at the rate attached to such work because they have served the requisite hours in the fourth-, third-, and second-class grades. So also with guards and so also with various other sections of the railway service. I congratulate the Attorney-General not only on recognising this principle—apparently it was recognised by the Governor in Council in 1938—but in making it fool-proof against all future reactionary Governors in Council by placing this measure on the statute-book so that this principle will be mandatorily applied by legislative enactment. I understand that at present, while the Governor in Council is agreeable to this wise, just and

equitable provision in respect of acting judges' remuneration and perquisites, there is a danger that some future Governor in Council may reverse it. The Government and Attorney-General are wise in bringing down this amending Bill to make the payments mandatory according to legislation.

Mr. PIE (Windsor) (3.18 p.m.): There is just one question I want to ask the Attorney-General. Can he give us any idea of the money available for distribution?

Mr. Gledson: £700 a year.

Mr. PIE: To be divided up among all the judges?

Mr. Gledson: To be divided up amongst the seven judges.

Motion (Mr. Gledson) agreed to.

Resolution reported.

FIRST READING.

Bill presented and, on motion of Mr. Gledson, read a first time.

MATRIMONIAL CAUSES ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Mann, Brisbane, in the chair.)

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (2.20 p.m.): I move—

“That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend The Matrimonial Causes Acts, 1864 to 1945, in certain particulars.”

This Bill, which is an amendment of the Matrimonial Causes Act, is to tighten up some anomalies that we have found to exist under the Act. At present the court, instead of ordering the husband to secure the wife a gross or annual sum in respect of a decree, may make an order on the husband for the payment to the wife during their joint lives of such monthly or weekly sums for her maintenance and support as the court thinks reasonable. That is the present law.

It also provides that if the husband afterwards from any cause becomes unable to make such payments the court may discharge or modify the order or temporarily suspend it in whole or part and again revive the order wholly or in part as the court sees fit.

It goes on to enact that if the wife marries again or if there is any other just cause for so doing, the court shall discharge the order, or if there are infant children in her custody may vary it, having regard to the welfare of the children only.

Where the court has made any such order and the court is satisfied that the means of the husband have increased, the court may increase the amount payable under the order.

Recently in a case before the court a motion was made on behalf of a wife to enable an increase to be made in the amount of maintenance payable to a wife in the event of a decrease in her earnings. The court held that it had no power under the present law to do this. I understand that the wife's alimony was fixed and the order of the court was made at a time when the wife was drawing certain sums on account of children in the services. They came back and got married and that income was wiped out altogether. An application was made to increase her allotment, but it was found that there was no power under the Act to do so. The amendment is introduced to remedy that defect so that the court shall have freedom to deal with the matter.

The Bill will provide that the court may, if it thinks fit, increase the amount payable under the order if the court is satisfied that the means of the husband have increased or that the means of the wife have decreased, or that by reason of material change in the circumstances of the wife it is just that such amount shall be decreased.

Similarly it can order a decrease in the amount payable under the order if it is satisfied that the means of the wife have increased or that by reason of material change in the circumstances of the wife it is just that such amount should be increased.

It cuts both ways. The Bill will make the position fair and equitable as regards both the husband and the wife.

Mr. PIE (Windsor) (3.25 p.m.): The amendment explained by the Attorney-General seems quite logical. There is just one question: is there any standard basis on which alimony is made, or is it made in relation to the circumstances existing at the time?

Mr. Gledson: It is made in relation to the evidence placed before the judge.

Mr. PIE: There is no standard basis in relation to alimony payments, but I take it that a wife's earning capacity would be gone into when the question of alimony was raised, but if, for instance, a wife was earning when the amount of alimony was determined and she subsequently met with sickness or something of that kind that reduced her earning capacity, am I to take it that under this Bill she would be able to make application to the court for increased alimony?

Mr. Gledson: That is so.

Mr. PIE: That is rather important. For instance, say her alimony was based on her earning capacity at that time of £3 a week and eventually it increased to £5 a week. How would her husband know of this? Is she under an obligation to report any increase in her earning capacity; if not, how in the world is anyone to know the increased earnings of either wife or husband? I have in mind a case that has come under my notice. A man is paying a certain amount of alimony but over the last few years his earning capacity has risen considerably. His

wife would not be aware of that increase. How in the world can a wife ascertain whether she is entitled to additional alimony? Is there any duty or obligation on a husband or wife to report to the court that the earning capacity is increased or decreased, as the case might be? If not, a husband earning £15 a week may make arrangement to pay his wife £3 a week. He then has an increase to £20 a week. On that basis the wife might be entitled to receive £4 a week. How is the wife to know whether he receives that increase? Has she to find out by someone's saying to her by chance, "I see your husband got an increase"? She may be living in another State and may not be aware that her husband received an increase in wages that would entitle her to increased alimony. That position might arise. I know it has actually happened that a man's earning capacity has increased.

Mr. Macdonald interjected.

Mr. PIE: For instance, if the Attorney-General had been in trouble and his salary was increased—we know it was last year, that he got £400 or £500 a year increase—would he have to pay his wife increased alimony?

Mr. Gledson: No fear of that.

Mr. PIE: Of course she would find that out because of the publicity given to it by the Queensland People's Party.

Mr. Power: Who are they?

Mr. PIE: The hon. member knows we are here. That is an issue that must be gone into sooner or later—the obligation to report increases or decreases in earning capacity.

Mr. L. J. BARNES (Cairns) (3.29 p.m.): I agree with Alexis Carrel when he says that you can impress legality on the people but you cannot enforce morality on them. Since we last amended the Matrimonial Causes Act statistics show that there were 900 divorces in Queensland last year. The previous year there were approximately 800 divorces. We are getting to the stage where we shall not have a sufficient number of justices to deal with divorces. Every fourth person in America has been divorced and we are getting to the stage that in Queensland every ninth person has been divorced.

I appreciate the honesty of purpose of the Attorney-General in bringing down this amending Bill to remove anomalies, as he terms it, but the greatest anomaly under the Matrimonial Causes Act is that adulterers are not treated as criminals.

I believe that there should be some punishment for an adulterer. Today he seems to be looked upon as someone who should be treated kindly, and he is freed and allowed to take unto himself another wife, another blonde or another brunette. In my opinion, the sooner this and other Governments realise that they will have to lock the gates of divorce, just as they have done in Russia, the sooner shall we have a better nation. A

few years ago a pressman was married and divorced in five minutes in Russia just for the experience of saying he was married and divorced. Now, Russia is tightening up her divorce laws because she has found them a failure. We seem to be acting the other way, and we shall find that it will be a failure. According to Mr. Colin Clark's statistics, we had approximately 900 divorces last year.

I quite agree with the Attorney-General that these anomalies in connection with alimony have to be adjusted while we have divorce, but I do hope that the Government realise and appreciate fully that one day when we make divorce harder for the people of Queensland we shall have a better nation.

Mr. HILEY (Logan) (3.32 p.m.): When I saw that a Matrimonial Causes Bill was coming forward, I had anticipated that we should have the opportunity of ventilating generally several useful reforms that could be made in our divorce laws, but unfortunately the lightning rapidity with which we are going through our business sheet—and I blame no-one for that—has caught me unbriefed. One point that does stick in my memory, however, is that at the present time we shall probably find that when divorce proceedings come before the court there will be cross-petitions, a petition by the husband against the wife and a cross-petition by the wife against the husband. At present there is considerable doubt in the minds of our judiciary as to whether divorce cases involving cross-petitions should be consolidated. We find that if such cases come before some judges of our Supreme Court, they say that in the interests of the parties, and the public and in order to keep costs down to the lowest possible level, the cases should be consolidated and heard as one, while other judges say they do not think that the law as it stands gives them power to consolidate two petitions, and consequently they insist upon their being heard separately. I do not doubt for one moment that every hon. member will agree that if it is possible to simplify our judicial processes and, above all, to cheapen them, it is our clear duty to do so. I am informed that the amendment necessary to remove the element of doubt that does linger in the minds of our judges would be an exceedingly brief one, and I ask the Attorney-General to look into the position and see whether, by including a short clause, it is possible to resolve that doubt, which is at least adding to the cost of divorce proceedings at present.

Motion (Mr. Gledson) agreed to.

Resolution reported.

FIRST READING.

Bill presented and, on motion of Mr. Gledson, read a first time.

The House adjourned at 3.36 p.m.