

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 23 AUGUST 1950

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

BIRTH OF PRINCESS.

PRESENTATION OF ADDRESS TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING.

Mr. SPEAKER: I wish to notify the House that on Friday last I presented to His Excellency the Governor the Address adopted by the House on 16 August to His Majesty the King on the occasion of the birth of a daughter to Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, and His Excellency was pleased to inform me that he would be happy to forward the address to His Majesty as desired by the House.

QUESTIONS.

POISON BAITS FOR DINGOES.

Mr. NICKLIN (Landsborough—Leader of the Opposition) asked the Secretary for Public Lands and Irrigation—

“1. Does his department still supply dingo baits to landholders? If so, at what price?”

“2. In view of complaints I have received that at the present time poisons are so inefficient that dingoes are not killed or, at any rate, are able to travel long distances before dying, will he have inquiries made as to whether any periodic check is made as to the quality of poisons used for dingo destruction?”

Hon. T. A. FOLEY (Normanby) replied—

“1. Yes, but only to a limited degree. Poison baits are manufactured primarily for use in aerial poisoning campaigns against dingoes. Orders have been placed for 1,500,000 baits of which, it is expected, 1,462,500 will be used in the aerial poisoning campaign now in operation. All baits remaining on hand at the conclusion of the aerial campaign will be available for purchase by landholders in case lots of 250 baits at 12s. per case (slightly less than one-half of the cost of manufacture), free of railage to the nearest railway station.

“2. Only commercially pure strychnine alkaloid is purchased by this Department. Samples of powdered strychnine and strychnine tablets which are purchased by this Department for sale to landholders and supplied to bait manufacturers are submitted periodically to the Government Analyst for analysis.”

SPARK ARRESTERS ON RAIL LOCOMOTIVES.

Mr. NICKLIN (Landsborough—Leader of the Opposition) asked the Minister for Transport—

“In view of the abnormal risk this year of grass fires in Western areas and the tremendous losses they might cause, will he give favourable consideration to the fitting

of spark arresters on locomotives where the danger exists and issue instructions to railway employees to co-operate as much as possible with the local people in measures for prevention of grass fires in such areas?”

Hon. J. E. DUGGAN (Toowoomba) replied—

“Spark arresters are fitted to all locomotives in Queensland, and employees are being constantly reminded of the necessity for the exercise of the greatest care to eliminate fire risks. Such a reminder appeared on the front page of the Departments ‘Weekly Notice’ issued on 13 July, 1950, and a similar reminder appears on the front page of the ‘Weekly Notice’ for the current week.”

VARIATIONS IN SPECIFICATIONS, STATE HOUSES.

Mr. MORRIS (Mt. Coot-tha) asked the Secretary for Public Works, Housing and Local Government—

“1. With houses being built by the Queensland Housing Commission under the previous State advances scheme, is it obligatory for the builder to adhere to specifications, as agreed to and signed, as part of the contract?”

“2. Has any inspector or any higher authority, including the Minister, any authority to waive any of these conditions, particularly in relation to reducing the size or dimensions of any fundamental structure under any circumstances?”

“3. If so, is it necessary for these alterations to be agreed to by both parties, and must this final agreement be supported by signatures of both parties on specifications?”

Hon. P. J. R. HILTON (Carnarvon) replied—

“1. Any contract entered into is binding on the parties subscribing thereto.

“2. No variation can be made excepting as provided in the general conditions of such contract and the specifications relating thereto.

“3. See answer to No. 2.”

REPAIRS TO FENCES DAMAGED BY FLOODS.

Mr. ALLPASS (Condamine) asked the Premier—

“1. In view of the tremendous damage to the fences of holdings in Southern Queensland, caused by recent floods, has any action been taken or decided upon to ensure that supplies of wire and wire netting will be made available quickly for repairs to or renewals of such fences?”

“2. If so, to whom should landholders concerned make application for supplies?”

Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca) replied—

“1. Yes. At my direction following representations by the Honourable the Secretary for Public Works, Housing and Local Government and the Honourable Member for Balonne, an urgent survey is

being made at the present time by the Co-ordinator-General's Department in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Stock to ascertain the extent of the damage caused to buildings, fencing, &c., by the recent floods in the Southern and South-Western portions of Queensland. This survey will enable an accurate assessment to be made of the quantities of materials required to effect essential repairs.

"2. Land holders should place orders for wire and wire netting, &c., with their usual suppliers, such orders to be sponsored by the District Officer of the Department of Agriculture and Stock. At the same time, full particulars of orders should be forwarded by such land holders to the Co-ordinator-General who has been instructed to allot a suitable priority for the supply of materials required for flood damage repairs, from stocks of Australian material immediately available. Steps will be taken by the Co-ordinator-General to endeavour to obtain urgently a special allocation from the limited Australian production to meet the balance of materials required."

LUNCHEON TO RIGHT HON.
P. C. GORDON WALKER.

Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca—Premier)
(11.9 a.m.), by leave: I move—

"That in view of the visit of the Right Hon. P. C. Gordon Walker, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, to Parliament House this day, Mr. Speaker at 15 minutes before 1 o'clock p.m. shall declare the House adjourned to the next sitting day, and the business under consideration at that hour shall stand as an Order of the Day for tomorrow."

Motion agreed to.

ADDRESS IN REPLY.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE.

Debate resumed from 22 August (see page 149) on Mr. McCathie's motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply.

Hon. W. POWER (Baroona—Secretary for Mines and Immigration) (11.6 a.m.): Mr. Speaker, first of all I desire to congratulate the hon. members for Haughton and Windsor, the mover and seconder of the motion on the Address in Reply. I listened very intently to the remarks of both these hon. members, who in the past have been connected with local government, and their contributions have been very well worth while. They offered very constructive suggestions, which no doubt at a later stage will be of value to the State of Queensland. I had not intended to speak on this motion at all, preferring to leave that to the new members who have come into this Chamber, as it is my belief that new members of Parliament should be afforded every opportunity to make their maiden speeches on the Address in Reply. However, I am compelled to speak because of the statements

made by the hon. member for Mundingburra yesterday; statements that are entirely untrue and are of the type that can always be expected from that hon. member. No doubt the hon. member was very annoyed by the fact that the hon. member for Haughton was successful in defeating by a very large majority the candidate who ran under the name of the Aikens Party. He is smarting owing to the fact that his party has no representation in this Parliament although a lot of money was spent in organisation on behalf of that party in many parts of Queensland. It is well known that that money came from the funds of those who were opposed to the Labour Party. The suggestion that the Aikens Party was a Labour Party should not be considered at all. It is not true. That party is known throughout the length and breadth of Queensland as the Scab Party.

Mr. AIKENS: I rise to a point of order. We are more than accustomed to the gutter filth of the Minister when he is speaking—.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member must state his point of order.

Mr. AIKENS: The point is—

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member is not to make a speech.

Mr. AIKENS: You have repeatedly called me to order.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. AIKENS: You force me to refer to hon. members by their proper names.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member has left me no alternative: he has forced me to ask him to resume his seat.

Mr. AIKENS: It is on again.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. POWER: I was referring to the fact that the hon. member for Mundingburra came into this House very annoyed by the fact that the hon. member for Haughton had overwhelmingly defeated his party's candidate. The ability and knowledge of the hon. member for Haughton is well known in this State. He is a man of very high repute and the action of the hon. member for Mundingburra in endeavouring by inuendo here to suggest that while a member of the Townsville Regional Electricity Board the hon. member for Haughton was a party to something corrupt ill becomes the hon. member for Mundingburra.

Mr. Aikens: You did not have the guts to give an inquiry.

Mr. POWER: I will deal with the hon. member in my own way and time. I shall prove to this House today that the hon. member gets lower than the gutter and that the statements he makes here are entirely without the foundation of fact. I shall table my correspondence in connection with the matter.

The only charge that the hon. member for Mundingburra can lay against the Townsville Regional Electricity Board is that that board did not give the contract to his brother-in-law at 3d. a yard higher than the tender of somebody else.

Mr. AIKENS: I rise to a point of order. That statement is deliberately untrue. At no time did I ask that the tender be given to my brother-in-law. At all times I have pressed for a full and open inquiry and I ask the Minister to accept my denial.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! In accordance with parliamentary procedure the Minister must accept the denial of the hon. member for Mundingburra.

Mr. POWER: I accept the hon. member's denial, but as I proceed with my speech I shall produce evidence showing where the hon. member has made representations in connection with this matter.

Mr. Aikens: Read them.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. POWER: The hon. member for Haughton is a member of the Townsville Regional Electricity Board and he should be commended rather than criticised for protecting the finances of that board.

The hon. member for Mundingburra went further and said that he could not be responsible for the fact that one of the parties in the subject-matter of the debate was a relative of his; he also referred to the fact that a member of the Townsville Regional Board in the person of Mr. Kelly was a relative of the Premier. As a matter of fact, there is nothing wrong with being a relative of the Premier and I should much prefer to be a relative of the Premier than a relative of the hon. member for Mundingburra. I also want to say that during the time Mr. Kelly has been chairman of the Townsville Regional Electricity Board he has done an excellent job of work for the people in that area—

Mr. Aikens: And for himself.

Mr. POWER: And anything done by Mr. Kelly—and this applies also to the hon. member for Haughton—has been done in the interests of the people and not in the interests of an individual, as the hon. member for Mundingburra would like it to be. The statements made by that hon. member are the idle fermentations of a mind that has nothing more important to occupy itself with than attempts to vilify public men and public bodies that are doing a very good job for the people of this State.

Mr. Aikens: Who wrote that?

Mr. POWER: His wild and illogical statements should be ignored by all decent people, but out of respect for the hon. members of this Assembly I must reply to them, particularly in view of the fact that his statements have gone out to the people of Queensland through the Press. That being so, it is fit and proper that I should give the true picture and the true story of what has occurred.

The hon. member for Mundingburra referred to Mr. Forno, who happens to be a relative of his. That gentleman has been executing filling contracts for the Townsville Regional Electricity Board. The hon. member objects because Mr. Forno did not get a further contract for the supply of 20,000 cubic yards of filling for the board. He suggested that the board should have given Mr. Forno a contract at a higher price than the tender submitted by somebody else. This the Townsville Regional Electricity Board was not prepared to do; Mr. Forno did not get the contract because his tender was not the lowest.

Mr. Aikens: And the manager got the sack.

Mr. POWER: I will deal with the manager's dismissal later. I shall prove how untruthful the hon. member has been and I shall back up my statements by documentary evidence.

It is true, as the hon. member suggested, that he asked that I have an investigation made into this matter. He is quite within his rights in asking for that. In fact, I have had the facts investigated and I propose to give the House those facts. In this case I shall have to read from copious notes, because I have not had the time to absorb into my memory the whole of the facts of the case and I do not want to be accused of giving wrong information to hon. members. Therefore I hope that I shall be excused for quoting from copious notes. I might mention that this matter arose prior to my becoming the Secretary for Mines and Immigration, but I have investigated the facts, and I propose to give to the House all the relevant facts relating to the 20,000 cubic yards of filling about which the hon. member for Mundingburra has had such a lot to say.

In July, 1949, tenders were called by the Townsville Regional Electricity Board for the supply of 20,000 cubic yards of filling for the power-house site at Townsville.

The following tenders were received—

	Per cubic yard.	
	s.	d.
A. Sleight	3	3
A. E. Threuf	6	0
Miles Bros.	5	9
W. Arndt	6	4½

The lowest tender was that of A. Sleight, of Charters Towers, who quoted 3s. 3d. a cubic yard, and the board decided to accept the tender. The previous contract let by the board was to the relative of the hon. member for Mundingburra, Mr. Forno, at a price of 6s. a cubic yard. When the next lot of tenders were called, Forno was not a tenderer. Other tenders, ranging from 3s. 3d. a cubic yard to 6s. 4½d. a cubic yard, were received. Sleight subsequently withdrew from the contract and the board decided in November 1949 to call fresh tenders rather than accept the next-lowest tender for the 20,000 cubic yards. There was no suggestion on that occasion that the next-lowest tenderer should get the contract, and Forno was not a tenderer for the work. Forno knew the prices at which these people had tendered.

Fresh tenders were received as follows—

	Per cubic yard.
	s. d.
Wm. Arndt	6 6
Miles Bros.	5 6
Western Construction Com- pany	4 6
R. W. & F. G. Forno ..	4 9
A. E. Threuf	5 3

The board again decided to accept the lowest tender, that of the Western Construction Company. However, the Western Construction Company did not go on with the work. A member of this company came to see me yesterday about another matter and I asked him why he did not go on with this contract. He said it was because the company had purchased some new trucks in which there was some mechanical defect that the makers were rectifying. As the result, the company could not proceed with the contract. The company did not have sufficient time to make that fact known to the Townsville board, with the result that the contract was cancelled and their deposit of £50 forfeited.

The board decided to ask the next-lowest tenderers, R. W. & F. G. Forno, whether they would be prepared to enter into a contract at the price for which they had tendered so that the matter could be considered at the next meeting of the board, and they stated they were prepared to do so. The matter was considered at the March meeting of the board, and it was decided that there should be no departure from the procedure that had taken place on the previous occasion. As the result, fresh tenders were called. The board decided to do the same thing on this occasion as it did on the previous occasion, when Forno was not a tenderer.

Mr. Aikens: They did not. On this occasion they offered the contract to the next lowest tenderer before they called fresh tenders.

Mr. POWER: I have already stated the position. The board on this occasion adopted the same procedure as on the previous occasion, when Forno was not a tenderer. Messrs. R. W. & F. G. Forno knew the various prices submitted by the previous tenderers and submitted a tender that was lower than any other. The board decided on this occasion to follow the same procedure as it had followed previously. Is anything wrong with that? Can anybody suggest that the board did anything wrong in doing that? As a matter of fact, it paid the board to do so, as I shall show during the course of my speech.

The board decided at the same time to give Forno a contract for a further 5,000 yards at his tender price so that there would be no interruption in the continuity of the work. Approval for doing this was sought from the State Electricity Commission, and this was conveyed by telegram on 5 April, as follows—

“Commission approves contract with Forno Bros. for 5,000 cubic yards filling at four shillings and ninepence per cubic yard. In view of all circumstances suggest committee carefully re-examine on site need to let any further filling contracts before seeking commission’s approval to another contract.”

It will be understood that the board was not in any way committed to the acceptance of Forno’s tender. In fact, the board had the right to reject or accept any tender, subject to the approval of the State Electricity Commission, which, let me say for the benefit of new hon. members, has a representative on every regional electricity board.

It was after this decision of the board that a letter of protest was received from Mr. Aikens, M.L.A., dated 20 April to which the commission replied on 26 April. I shall read those letters later on and table them. I shall table the correspondence to show that the board had nothing to hide and that its actions were honourable and aboveboard.

At the board meeting on 27 April the result of the fresh tenders was very carefully considered. Tenders received were as follows:—

	s. d.	
Wm. Arndt.	4 6	per c. yd.
R. W. & F. G. Forno	4 9	” ” ”
Miles Bros.	5 0	” ” ”

The board decided unanimously that the letting of a further contract was essential to enable the erection of buildings on the power-station site to proceed, and activities to be transferred from a number of buildings for which rentals are now being paid, with commensurate economies to the board. The board also decided unanimously, in the light of its previous decision to call fresh tenders, that it had no option but to accept the lowest tender, that of Wm. Arndt, which, in fact, meant a saving of 3d. per cubic yard to the board as against the tendered price of R. W. & F. G. Forno. The hon. member for Mundingburra comes into this Chamber and says that it was not the unanimous decision of the board but I say it was the unanimous decision of the board and that the board’s action in the matter was right and proper.

In making this decision in an endeavour to save itself 3d. a cubic yard on the supply of filling, the board was reinforced by the opinion of its solicitors, who held that the board was in no way legally bound to Forno, and that, in fact, had the board when it cancelled the Western Construction Co.’s contract in February purported to accept Forno’s tender, such purported acceptance would have been a nullity.

I have that legal opinion here and I propose to read it. I am not going to allow the hon. member for Mundingburra to come into this Chamber and attack members of regional boards and the State Electricity Commission and suggest that they were dishonest and had done something illegal. I propose to read the legal opinion. It is from Messrs. A. E. Dean & Gillman, Solicitors, Box 407 Post Office, Townsville. It is addressed to the secretary of the Townsville Regional Electricity Board and is as follows—

“We have considered the question submitted for our opinion, viz.: whether these people’s contention in their letter of 21st instant is sound, that the contract for supply of 20,000 yards of filling has already been awarded to them.

"We consider it is not sound, and that the board is not in any way legally bound to them.

"When their tender of 23rd November was not accepted, but some other tenderer's was, the offer constituted by their tender lapsed in law, and was not thereafter open for the board to accept. Had the board, when it cancelled the Western Construction Co.'s contract in February, purported to accept Forno's tender, such purported acceptance would have been a nullity.

"Instead of making that false step, the board took the correct action in its letter of 28th February, of making what we regard as an inquiry whether they were willing to stand on their earlier tender, and enter into a contract in accordance therewith to supply the filling. They replied on 2nd March, that they were prepared to do so.

"It appears to us clear that this was no more than an intimation that the offer constituted by their earlier tender, was still open. Obviously, Forno's at this stage did not consider that it was any more than this for they say 'should this be acceptable to . . . the Board' certain steps were to be taken regarding deposit.

"The secretary's reply of 9 March did not purport to accept the tender, but asked Forno's to observe what some people would probably call a red-tape formality, of making out and furnishing a fresh tender form 'in order that your offer can be submitted to the next meeting of the board.' Nothing, in our opinion, could be plainer, that the whole matter was still open. The letter cannot, in our opinion, by any stretch of the imagination, be construed as implying an acceptance in advance, or that the tender when submitted, would be accepted.

"Forno's did as requested, lodged a fresh formal tender. We have not seen the new tender, or any covering letter there may have been, same having been submitted to the commission for approval, on 17th March, but whatever it contained, it could be no more than an offer, which the board would be free to accept or reject. It could not commit the board.

"Further, even if the secretary's letter had been capable of conveying an implied acceptance in advance of the tender when submitted, we consider the board would not be bound by a purported contract, not made in compliance with the requirements of the Act.

"Moreover, the condition of tendering and the general condition of contract both call for the execution of a formal contract document, embodying any bargain which might be arrived at by the acceptance of a tender. Both parties clearly contemplated that this would be done. And we are of the opinion that, in these circumstances, the business has never got beyond the negotiating stage, until the formal document has been duly executed.

"We return the file submitted to us.

"Yours faithfully,
A. E. Dean & Gillman."

That is the opinion of legal gentlemen. It would not have been permissible for the board to do as the hon. member suggested. That will show how careful the board was in this matter. The board's accounts are subject to Government audit. It submitted the whole matter to its legal advisers for opinion, which I have just read to the House. All of these facts were known to the hon. member for Mundingburra as they were set out to him very fully by the State Electricity Commission in correspondence at the time, together with a letter I sent to him on 22 May, 1950. I am going to table copies of that correspondence for the information of hon. members.

My investigations revealed that the board had conducted its business with absolute fairness and strictly in accordance with the regulations governing contracts. The hon. member for Mundingburra spoke of a trap, but it is the hon. member himself who has fallen into a trap. I will show where the hon. member made an ass of himself in a letter he wrote to me, and at a later stage in my correspondence with him, which shows that the whole object of the board was to get the work done at the lowest possible price.

The only charge that the hon. member can lay against the board is that it accepted a tender for 3d. a cubic yard less than the one his brother-in-law submitted. The whole of the information which I have submitted to the House shows conclusively that the price paid by it under its filling contracts has been reduced progressively. The first contract made by the board for similar work, that is, for filling-in material, was let to the brother-in-law of the hon. member at 6s. 0d. a yard, but as a result of the pertinacity of the board, and the business acumen displayed by it, that price today is 4s. 6d. On these facts the hon. member for Mundingburra must realise that a public inquiry into this matter, affecting as it would a relative of the hon. member for Mundingburra, would be of no value. The request is from an irresponsible hon. member.

Mr. AIKENS: I rise to a point of order. At no time did I ask for a public inquiry respecting a relative of mine. I at all times asked for a public inquiry into the Townsville Regional Electricity Board, and the Minister has not the guts to comply with it.

Mr. POWER: I want to assure the hon. member that I have more guts than he has. I never scabbed on the party that has looked after me.

Mr. Aikens: You scabbed on everything else.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr. Riordan): Order!

Mr. POWER: The hon. member for Mundingburra made a request for a public inquiry because his brother-in-law did not get the contract. I am not prepared to ask the Government of Queensland to waste their time and the time of highly-paid officers, or perhaps a judge of the Supreme Court, to inquire into a matter that has no merit in

it. The board has nothing to hide; neither have I as Minister; and neither has my predecessor.

Mr. Aikens: Give us the inquiry.

Mr. POWER: Because the hon. member wants it? The hon. member might be ordered out of the witness box as he was previously by Mr. Justice Mansfield.

Mr. Aikens: Put that stooge on the bench, too, if you like.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. POWER: I informed him then that further consideration would be given his request. I will read that letter, which I wrote to the hon. member on 31 May—

“Dear Mr. Aikens.

This is where he fell into the trap. This is where I put the acid on him and the acid ate into him and he could not stand it. He left the brown stain—the stain that he saw in Townsville; that is where I put the acid on him.

The letter continues—

“I desire to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 28 May in which you referred to my undated letter, which I regret was posted without being dated. The correct date should be 15th instant.

“I note the contents of your letter, and if you have any evidence of dishonest or corrupt practices by any member of the Townsville Regional Board, if you submit the evidence in writing to me further consideration will be given to your request for an investigation into such charges.”

Could I be fairer to the hon. member? In his reply he said, “Knowing me as you do, if I had any such evidence of corruption or dishonesty I would be broadcasting it all over Townsville.”

Mr. Aikens: I challenge you to read it.

Mr. POWER: I will read the letter in my own time. Knowing him as I did, he said, I should know that if he had any evidence he would tell the world about it. He did not have any, so he did not tell anybody. He reminds me of the song, “I tell them all about you.”

In the reply of the hon. member for Mundingburra, dated 5 June, 1950, he stated—

“... you, if I may use the vernacular, come to light with the crudest and corniest crack in a politician’s repertoire, and ask me to produce evidence of dishonesty and corruption, knowing, as you do me, that if I had any such evidence of such serious nature, that I would be telling it to the people from the public platform.”

That is the letter.

Mr. Aikens: That is only part of the letter.

Mr. POWER: That is the part I am going to deal with.

Mr. Aikens: Read the lot.

Mr. POWER: That is the part I will deal with. That is the crux of your charge.

Mr. Aikens: Read the letter.

Mr. POWER: That is the crux of your charge—dishonesty and corruption; that is the innuendo against the hon. member for Haughton and the Townsville regional board. I will read it again—you cannot quote a good thing too often—

“... and ask me to produce evidence of dishonesty and corruption, knowing, as you do me, that if I had any such evidence of such serious nature, that I would be telling it to the people from the public platform.”

On the hon. member’s own admission he admits he had no evidence.

Mr. Aikens: You did not hold an inquiry.

Mr. POWER: He admits he has no evidence.

Mr. Aikens: You sacked the manager.

Mr. Ewan: Let us hear the rest of it.

Mr. POWER: I am stating this case. I am not going to accept any direction from the hon. member who happened to fluke a seat in this Parliament.

That is the evidence the hon. member had; it amounts to nil, except for his own statement. I say also that the officers of the board should not have their time wasted by irresponsible demands upon them for facts, all of which had been fully set out to the hon. member by the Electricity Commissioner and by me, and which disclosed a perfectly proper state of affairs with respect to these contracts.

I again repeat: that the trouble with the hon. member is that the lowest tender did not happen to be that of his relative. Yesterday the hon. member said that I telegraphed the chairman of the Townsville Regional Electricity Board refusing him permission to see certain documents. That is not true.

Mr. Aikens: I have a letter to that effect from the manager.

Mr. POWER: That statement is not true. I will quote the telegram that was sent. The true position is that the chairman of the State Electricity Commission, at that time Mr. S. F. Cochran, discussed with me the question whether the hon. member for Mundingburra should be allowed to peruse certain files belonging to the electricity undertaking. I pointed out that the board was not a public board, and that Dick, Tom and Harry, or any half-baked Communist, should not have access to its files. As a matter of fact, as hon. members in the business world know, at times boards go into committee and the Press are excluded from such committee meetings. The representatives of the Press act decently and leave the meetings. Is it suggested that any person should be able to peruse the minutes of committee meetings of a board or any other public or semi-public authority?

Mr. Aikens: You can peruse the documents.

Mr. POWER: One cannot peruse all the documents; one can peruse only certain documents. The hon. member was a member of a local authority, just as I was, and he knows full well that when the meeting goes into committee the Press are excluded and afterwards the chairman or mayor gives certain information to the Press. The hon. member knows that as well as I but he wanted the right to peruse the documents. The matter was discussed with me, and as I have said, this man had no right to peruse the documents. Neither has anybody else. Cabinet holds meetings, and I think hon. members will agree with me that it would be highly improper to allow any person to peruse the documents it deals with, because certain documents are confidential, and even members of Parliament cannot see them. They are under the control of Cabinet and the Minister in charge of the department. It would be entirely wrong to allow an hon. member, or anybody else for that matter, to peruse such documents. The hon. member was not entitled to peruse these documents, and I do not make any apology for my attitude in connection with the matter.

The contract work of the board is of a very high order and I am sure hon. members, of course excepting the hon. member for Mundingburra, will resent the foul suggestion and imputation made by that hon. member against the members of the board without a scintilla of evidence to support his statement. His only complaint is that his brother-in-law did not get the contract.

Mr. Aikens: Pure piffle!

Mr. POWER: It is not piffle. Another serious statement made by the hon. member in this Chamber yesterday is a deliberate untruth. The hon. member made a statement here that I should say was a deliberate lie, but if I did so it would mean I should have to withdraw, in accordance with parliamentary procedure. So I say the hon. member handled the truth very carelessly. He has not stated the truth when he stated that an inquiry had to be held *sub rosa* or "under the cushion" by the Premier and that the manager of the board had been dismissed.

His statement is malicious and false. Of course, neither the Premier nor I had met the manager of the board and discussed this matter with him. The manager of the board is unknown to the Premier and in fairness to my leader I must say that when the Premier denied that he knew this man the hon. member for Mundingburra said, "Bunk," implying that the Premier was telling a lie to this House. The Premier has not told a lie to hon. members of this Assembly; the Premier had nothing to do with the matter. A letter was sent to the Premier, however, suggesting that I be relieved of my position and suspended because—and I again repeat this—the hon. member's relative never got the contract. It ill becomes an hon. member of this Assembly to make the statement that the Premier of this State is lying and gives the House wrong information. Such action as that adopted by the hon. member for Mundingburra is low,

mean, and contemptible and cowardly and it is what you could expect to come from a person of the calibre of the hon. member for Mundingburra.

The Premier at no time discussed the matter with Mr. Beynon; he does not know him. The only time I met the gentleman was an occasion at Lennox Hotel some little time ago when a dinner was being given to local authority representatives. I met Mr. Beynon in the foyer of the hotel and he told me that he was resigning. He is going to a position with the Snowy River project. I repeat: it is a deplorable state of affairs when we find an elected representative to this House wastes hours of time putting up a case that has no stability. He is prepared to adopt an attitude of trying to malign several honest, decent people who are doing a job in the Townsville board area. He also—and this again I repeat—made an attack on the Premier by innuendo to the effect that the Premier had an inquiry into the matter and as a result the manager of the board was asked to resign. I have in my hand a statement appearing in this morning's issue of "The Courier-Mail" made by Mr. Kelly, Chairman of the Board, and this is what it says—

"All Groundless" says Chairman.

"The Townsville Regional Electricity Board Chairman (Mr. J. L. Kelly, of Ingham) said tonight that the resignation of the manager, Mr. Beynon, was in no way connected with tenders.

"The recent inquiry referred to by Mr. Aikens concerned internal administration, and had nothing to do with the contracts," he said.

"Granting of tenders was fully investigated by the Board and the State Electricity Commission, and Mr. Aikens's complaints in that regard are groundless."

"Mr. Kelly said 'Mr. Beynon has been in ill-health for some time. His resignation on 10 August was on the grounds of ill-health, and to take up an appointment later in the South.'"

Only last night Mr. Beynon was tendered a send-off by members and employees of the board at Townsville and he informed those present that he was to take up a position with the Snowy River hydro-electric project. It is unfair that that gentleman should leave this State with a stigma on him as a result of statements made about him by the hon. member for Mundingburra. The manager of the Townsville Regional Electricity Board was not sacked and he was not asked to resign and the Premier at no time discussed the matter with him. I hope in fairness to Mr. Beynon that the Press will give this the widest publicity to prove how untruthful the hon. member for Mundingburra has been. His statements might do Mr. Beynon untold damage in his new position.

I regret that it has been necessary to waste time dealing with matters raised by the hon. member. It is equally untrue to say that the manager resigned under pressure and that he was called to Brisbane as a result of the complaint made by the hon. member. Nobody takes notice of that hon. member and I am

merely replying to him because of the wide publicity given to this matter. In fairness to Mr. Beynon, and to Mr. McCathie and Mr. Kelly and the members of the regional board and the State Electricity Commission, it is only right and proper that I should give the public the true facts of the matter so that they will be aware of them.

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

Mr. POWER: I thank the House for its courtesy.

I shall be as brief as possible, because I do not want to take up the time of the House unnecessarily.

To be fair to Mr. Beynon, I propose to read what he said in his letter of resignation. This is what he said—

“It is with regret that I have to notify you that I have accepted a more suitable appointment in New South Wales and I desire to terminate my services with the Board from 4th August, 1950.

“During my period with your Board I worked an average of three nights per week and on most Saturdays, which totals probably 3,000 hours of overtime, which overtime has largely been responsible for my present ill health. I bring the above to your notice as I feel the Board may desire to give some recognition of this devotion to duty which has, I consider, contributed in no small manner to the success and progress of the Townsville Regional Electricity Board.”

That letter shows how despicable is the hon. member for Mundingburra when he suggests that Beynon was dismissed.

In order to free our minds of any filth that may have been spattered by the falsehoods of the hon. member for Mundingburra, I shall set out the position as it really is. Anyone who has any appreciation of the factors governing the development of this State will know that regional development is the only way in which it can be accomplished. The hon. member for Mundingburra made an attack on the board; he said it was not functioning in the interests of the people; he said it was monstrous in many ways. I propose to show exactly what the board has done. I think these facts should be made public in fairness to Beynon and the people employed by the board.

Mr. Aikens: I called it an extravagant monstrosity.

Mr. POWER: The hon. member said many things he is sorry for.

The regional board scheme of electricity development was commenced in Queensland with the object of extending electricity over as wide an area and to as many people as possible. That the regional boards have done this is shown by the remarkable growth in the number of new consumers supplied and by the increase in consumption since they were established in 1946. Since the establishment of the Townsville regional board, the number of consumers has increased from 11,600 to 15,000. Many of the new

consumers are in rural areas, and the desire of the Government in the establishment of regional boards, of course, was to push electricity out into the rural areas in an effort to make the conditions under which people out there live more comfortable and to give them some of the amenities provided in the more closely-settled areas.

In the same period the consumption of electricity has increased from 25,000,000 units a year to 35,000,000. In addition, in the same period the board has built 220 miles of transmission line to supply consumers all over the area, and particularly in the rural areas. A total of only 250 miles of transmission line was in use when the board began operations, so that the actual mileage of line has been almost doubled during the short life of the regional board, which the hon. member for Mundingburra has seen so fit to criticise. In addition, the annual revenue of the board has increased from slightly less than £200,000 in the year the board commenced operations to over £300,000 in the last financial year, an increase of 50 per cent., while during the same period the average revenue per unit sold has increased from 1.9d. to approximately 2.1d., an increase of only approximately 10 per cent.

All those facts go to show that the Townsville Regional Electricity Board has done an excellent job of work on behalf of the people in that area. In addition, the board has under construction at Townsville at the present time a modern station to supply the whole of the needs of the region. It is estimated that this station will cost approximately £1,500,000. The construction of this station, which when completed will be a blessing to the whole of the region, will also be the means, by reclamation, of vastly improving mangrove swamp lands almost in the heart of Townsville.

If it were not for one fact we should not be discussing this subject.

The whole crux of the matter is that the hon. member's brother-in-law did not get the contract at 3d. a yard more than the successful tenderer. That is a tribute to the State Electricity Commission and the regional boards as a team. In spite of all the developmental work that the Townsville Regional Electricity Board has done and the large sums of money it is spending on central generating facilities, the electricity charges at Townsville and in other parts of the region have been increased by only 12½ per cent. since the board was established. Yet the hon. member has been critical of the board. Let us make a comparison with the position in Brisbane—an increase of 12½ per cent. by the Townsville Regional Board, but an increase of 40 per cent. in Brisbane and increases of the same order in other places in Queensland and in other States over the same period. Increases in tariffs in other regions also have been much less than throughout the industry as a whole. That shows the capable and businesslike manner in which the Townsville Regional Board carried out its work. This surely shows also how irresponsible

and ill-founded are the statements and accusations of the hon. member for Mundingburra, even when dealing with statistics, which are available to all.

The hon. member did not take the trouble to analyse the figures but condemned the board *holus bolus* with nothing to support his arguments.

The Townsville City Council, when it controlled the electricity undertaking at Townsville, no doubt did a reasonably good job, but the undertaking was not as efficient as the hon. member for Mundingburra would have you believe. There were blackouts then, just the same as are likely to happen in any electricity undertaking. If, as the hon. member suggests, the service now is less efficient than it was then—and all evidence is to the contrary—it is an inherited defect that the regional board is faced with and will have to overcome until the new power-station is commissioned. The figures I have disclose that there has been an increase of only 12½ per cent. in the case of the Townsville board against an increase of 40 per cent. in Brisbane, which speaks volumes for the efficiency of the Townsville board, the staff and the employees generally.

If the Townsville City Council had continued to run the undertaking it would have been faced with the same expenditure in the construction of a new power-house and the need to meet increased costs of wages and materials as the board is obliged to pay or, if it did not, it would not have been able to meet the demand for energy and pay its way. Despite all that, we have this criticism by the hon. member who sets out by fair means or foul to besmirch the names of the members of the board and all because of the fact that a relative of his did not get the contract.

Mr. Aikens: Try to grow up.

Mr. POWER: I have grown up and that is what hurts the hon. member very much.

There are other matters with which I should have liked to deal but in view of the kindness of the House in granting me an extension of time I do not propose to touch on them now. However, I intend to table the correspondence that has taken place between the Townsville regional board and the hon. member and myself, after I have read it, because it sets out the true position. If the hon. member had any sense of political decency about him he would not have raised the matter in the House at all, particularly in view of the evidence that was submitted to him setting out the true position.

On 20 April last the hon. member wrote along these lines to the chairman of the State Electricity Commission, Mr. Cochran—

“Fortunately, I am not a member of the legal profession so that I can only apply the mind of a layman to the problem which has arisen in connection with a tender for 20,000 yards of filling for the T.R.E.B., and can only express an opinion that the board has indulged in a particularly nasty bit of sharp practice.

“The circumstances are well known to you and need no recapitulation. This tender was originally given to Western Construction Ltd., who fell down on the job, and the enclosed Press cutting and letter dated 28 February, 1950, clearly show that the tender accepted was then offered to Forno and Son and they accepted it on the 2 March, 1950.”

The hon. member said in an earlier stage of the debate, and he repeated the statement today, that he had not made representations in regard to Forno and Sons, but here is his own evidence, where he says that a tender had been accepted from Forno and Sons. I have quoted from a copy of a letter written by him and again it proves how carelessly he handles the truth. The letter continues—

“To the astonishment of those concerned and the public in general the T.R.E.B. has now crawled out of its obligation and have called fresh tenders for this job.

“Before taking the action I contemplate on the matter, I would like to have your observations thereon.”

On 26 April last Mr. Cochran replied to the hon. member for Mundingburra—

“Replying to your letter of the 20th April, 1950, in connection with the letting of tenders for further filling for the power-house site at Townsville, I desire to advise that this matter was the subject to consideration at the February board meeting, when, in view of the withdrawal of the Western Construction Company, it was decided to ask Messrs. R. W. & F. G. Forno if they were prepared to supply the filling at the price tendered by them.

“Messrs. Forno agreed to this but at their March meeting, at which the commission was not represented, the board, apparently to ensure that there was no departure in procedure from what had been done on a previous occasion when fresh tenders had been called after the lowest tender had withdrawn, decided to again call tenders, and at the same time to allocate a further 5,000 cubic yards to Messrs. Forno at his tendered price so that there would be no interruption to the continuity of work pending final settlement of the matter.

“The commission’s approval was sought to this, and having due regard to the decision of the board was conveyed by telegram on 5 April as follows:—

“Commission approves contract with Forno Bros. for 5,000 cubic yards filling at four shillings and ninepence per cubic yard stop in view of all circumstances suggest committee carefully re-examine on site need to let any further filling contracts before seeking commission’s approval to another contract.”

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr. Riordan): Order! There is far too much noise in the House.

Mr. POWER: The letter proceeds—

“You will see that the necessity to let any further filling contracts at this stage has been queried and this aspect must be investigated by the board before any action is finalised.

“Our correspondence does not show that the board committed itself in any way to Messrs. Forno Bros. with respect to the amount of 20,000 cubic yards but that he was invited on 28 February to state whether he was prepared to enter into a contract for this amount at his tendered price, that he advised in the affirmative on 2 March, and that on 9 March he was advised that the matter would be submitted for consideration by the Board at its next meeting.

“As already indicated, the board at its March meeting decided not to accept Messrs. Forno's offer but to call fresh tenders.

“These are the facts as I know them at the moment. The commission's secretary (Mr. Neil Smith) will be attending the April meeting of the board and I have asked him to investigate the position further while there.

“I will communicate with you again on his return from the meeting.

“Yours faithfully,

“(Sgd.) S. F. COCHRAN,
“Commissioner.”

This is the wire I received from the hon. member for Mundingburra—

“Townsville, 28 April, 1950.

“Am advised that despite contents your letter to me on matter board yesterday accepted tender of Arndt subject your approval stop request you withhold until Minister considers my application public inquiry.”

Why did he want to hold up the acceptance of the tender? It was only because, as will be seen on his previous representation, that he contended his relative Forno had the contract. That is why he is squealing and whingeing. That is why he cannot take it.

Mr. Aikens: What a miserable dirty mind you have!

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr. Riordan): Order!

Mr. Aikens: What about Mr. Hanlon's nephew? Is he protecting him? Why don't you be decent, even if it is painful for you?

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member must obey my call to order.

Mr. POWER: I will read another letter—this is like castor oil, good for the patient, but hard to take, particularly by the hon. member for Mundingburra—

“The State Electricity Commission.

“19th May, 1950.

“Dear Mr. Aikens,

“I desire to acknowledge receipt of your telegram in connection with the tenders for filling on the power-station site and to advise that the matter of tenders is

primarily one for the regional board to decide, and the board has the right to reject or accept any tender, subject to the commission's approval of any tender it desires to accept.

“As advised in my previous letter on this subject our representative at the last board meeting raised all aspects in connection with the letting of this contract, and it was only after a very exhaustive examination of the circumstances including the necessity to proceed with further filling work at all, that the board unanimously decided to let a further contract to the lowest tenderer, and has now sought the commission's approval to this course of action.

“Some of the facts concerning this contract were set out in my previous letter to you, but I now propose to set out the full circumstances seriatim:—

(a) In July, 1949, tenders were called by the Regional Board for a further 20,000 c. yds. of filling for the power station site at Townsville.

(b) Tenders received were—

	s.	d.	
A. Sleight ..	3	3	per c. yd.
A. E. Theenf ..	6	0	” ” ”
Miles Bros. ..	5	9	” ” ”
W. Arndt ..	6	4½	” ” ”

(c) The lowest tender was from A. Sleight of Charters Towers who quoted 3s. 3d. per cubic yard and the board decided, with the commission's approval, to accept this tender, the previous contract let to R. W. & F. G. Forno having been at 6s. per cubic yard.

(d) However, Sleight subsequently withdrew from the contract and board decided in November 1949 to call tenders again.

(e) The fresh tenders resulted as follows:—

	Per cubic yard.
	s. d.
Wm. Arndt ..	6 6
Miles Bros. ..	5 6
Western Construction Company ..	4 6
R. W. & F. G. Forno ..	4 9
A. E. Threuf ..	5 3

(f) The board again decided to accept the lowest tender, that of Western Construction Company, and the Commission approved this course.

(g) However, this tenderer also did not proceed and at its February meeting the board decided to cancel the proposal and to estreat the tenderer's preliminary deposit of £50.

The board also decided to ask the next lowest tenderer, R. W. & F. G. Forno whether they would be prepared to enter into a contract at the price tendered by them so that the matter could be considered at the next board meeting. Forno agreed to this, and the Commission indicated to the board that it approved such a course.

(h) The matter was then submitted to the March meeting of the board, at which the Commission was not represented, and the board apparently to ensure that there was no departure in procedure from what had been done on a previous occasion when fresh tenders had been called after the lowest tenderer had withdrawn, decided to again call tenders, and at the same time to allocate a further 5,000 cubic yards to Messrs. Forno at their tendered price so that that there would be no interruption to the continuity of work pending final settlement of the matter.

(i) The Commission's approval was sought to this, and having due regard to the decision of the board was conveyed by telegram on 5 April as follows:—

'Commission approves contract with Forno Bros. for 5,000 cubic yards filling at four shillings and ninepence per cubic yard stop in view of all circumstances suggest Committee carefully re-examine on site need to let any further filling contracts before seeking Commission's approval to another contract.'

(j) It will be understood that the board was not in any way committed to accept Forno's tender and in fact has the right to reject or accept any tender, subject to the Commission's approval of any tender it decides to accept.

(k) At the board meeting on 27 April, attended by Mr. Neil Smith on my behalf the result of the fresh tenders was very carefully considered.

(l) Tenders received were as follows:—

	Per cubic yard.	
	s.	d.
Wm. Arndt	4	6
R. W. & F. G. Forno ..	4	9
Miles Bros.	5	0

The board decided unanimously, despite the statement made by the hon. member for Mundingburra, that the board was not unanimous.

Mr. AIKENS: I rise to a point of order. I did not make the statement that the board was not unanimous in accepting the tender, but I did state it was not unanimous in deciding to call tenders. Neither it was; the vote was three to two.

Mr. POWER: I continue—

"(m) The board decided unanimously that the letting of a further contract was essential to enable the erection of buildings on the power station site and transfer of activities from a number of buildings for which rentals are now being paid, with commensurate economies to the board.

The board also decided unanimously in the light of its previous decision to call fresh tenders, that it had no option but to accept the lowest tender, that of Wm. Arndt, which in fact meant a

saving of 3d. per cubic yard to the board as against the tendered price of R. W. & F. G. Forno.'

The brother-in-law of the hon. member.

Mr. AIKENS: I rise to another point of order. That is a typical example of foul distortion. The words "brother-in-law of the hon. member" does not appear in the letter he read. He read it as though they did appear. I ask him to read the letter as it was written.

Mr. POWER: I will make my speech in my own way. I added that it was the brother-in-law of the hon. member.

Mr. Aikens: You added that.

Mr. POWER: I added that. I will table them in a minute.

I continue—

"It is trusted this recital of facts will clarify the position for you, and will indicate that the board, in deciding to call fresh tenders, was following the precedent set in November last, with respect to the same lot of filling, and was acting quite within its rights.

"The board decisions at the March meeting to call fresh tenders, and at the April meeting to accept the lowest tender, were unanimous, and as the outcome of these decisions it has obtained a lower price for the contract."

That is the fact, despite the statement of the hon. member. The hon. member says that the decision to call fresh tenders was not unanimous.

Mr. Aikens: Neither it was.

Mr. POWER: According to my information—and I would believe my informant rather than the hon. member—the decision was unanimous.

That is the only charge that can be laid against him by the hon. member.

"The commission must obviously take full note of the considered decisions by a body such as the regional board comprising representatives of all local authorities in the region, with a considerable knowledge and experience of local affairs, and we can see no sound reason for withholding approval to the board's decision to award the present contract to Wm. Arndt at a price of 4s. 6d. per cubic yard.

"Our approval is therefore being conveyed to the board."

Then there is the letter written by the hon. member for Mundingburra to me—

"Further to my letter to Mr. Jones re a public inquiry into matters concerning the T.R.E.B., which I asked him by attached later letter to send on to you for your consideration and action, I would like to add that from observation it appears quite certain that Arndt, who previously tendered £6,000 for the job, but reduced that price to £4,500 when tenders were recalled, is merely a 'front' now for

Western Construction Ltd. the firm which first tendered such price (£4,500), and later fell down on the job.

"In the public interest, I urge you to completely investigate every aspect of the action of the T.R.E.B. in this regard before reaching a decision on my request, believing that if you do, you will grant it."

He makes the statement that a certain firm is a "front" for another firm that has fallen down on the job. There is no evidence whatever to substantiate it and when I put the acid on him and challenged him to put forward the evidence he said, "Knowing me as you do, you know that if I had the evidence I would be preaching it all over the city of Townsville."

Mr. Aikens: Will you read all that letter?

Mr. POWER: I am making my speech in my own way and will not be interrupted by the hon. member. On 15 May I wrote to the hon. member—

"Dear Mr. Aikens,

"I desire to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 15 May, 1950, and enclosures in connection with the contract recently let by the Townsville Regional Electricity Board for filling on the power station site, and to advise that on the information submitted by you, I see no reason to order a public inquiry into this transaction or into the general administration of the board."

I did have the matter investigated. In view of the correspondence I thought I would do so and have the matter cleaned up, and this is what I found—

"As far as the particular contract is concerned my investigations reveal the following:—

(a) This contract was originally awarded to A. Sleight of Charters Towers at a price of 3s. 3d. per cubic yard, but he subsequently withdrew and fresh tenders were called by the board. Messrs. R. W. & F. G. Forno were not tenderers on that occasion.

(b) As a result of the fresh tenders the board decided to award the contract to Western Construction Co., the lowest tenderer on that occasion, at a price of 4s. 6d. per cubic yard. This company also failed to proceed, and their preliminary deposit of £50 was estreated by the board."

Yesterday I happened to meet a member of the firm of the Western Construction Co. and he informed me that owing to a technical defect in his motor vehicles he was unable to go on with the job.

The letter continues—

"(c) Pending final consideration of the matter the board then decided to ask Messrs. R. W. & F. G. Forno, the second lowest tenderer at 4s. 9d. per cubic yard, whether if allotted to them, they would be prepared to do the job. The letter enclosed by you reveals that 1950—g.

this did not constitute an offer by the board, but was an enquiry as to the willingness of the Fornos if the board did decide to offer the work to them. The Press report was incorrect in suggesting that an offer was made.

(d) At their March meeting when the matter was being considered the board decided, having regard to the precedent on the previous occasion, to call fresh tenders again, but so that continuity of work would be maintained until the matter was finally decided, allocated a further 5,000 cubic yards of filling to Messrs. Forno at their tendered price.

(e) When the fresh tenders were opened that of Messrs. Wm. Arndt was the lowest at 4s. 6d. per cubic yard, and the board decided to accept this tender.

(f) Tenderers would naturally be aware of Forno's price as the regulations governing contract procedure, which are observed by the board, require that all tenders must be opened in public. This would have been the case on each occasion that fresh tenders were called.

(g) The procedure mentioned in the last paragraph must have had the effect of ensuring considerable savings to the board with their later works, as the earlier contract let to Messrs. Forno was at 6s. per cubic yard.

(h) The State Electricity Commission did not advise the board against accepting the lowest tender at the April meeting, but asked that the board's finance committee carefully examine on the spot the need to let any further tenders at all before seeking the commission's approval to another contract, and the commission's representative at the April meeting saw that this was done before the board's decision was made.

(i) The board's decisions at the March meeting to call fresh tenders and grant a further contract of 5,000 cubic yards to Messrs. Forno pending a final decision on the main contract, and at the April meeting to award the contract to the lowest tenderer, Messrs. Wm. Arndt, were unanimous amongst those present on both occasions, the only absentees being the commission's representative from the March meeting, and the chairman of the board (Mr. J. L. Kelly) from the April meeting.

"I understand that the State Electricity Commissioner has informed you of all details in connection with this matter and trust that the full recital of facts has clarified the position.

"With respect to the inquiry into the general administration of the board, I desire to advise that this was only recently the subject of investigation by the Commissioner of the commission and an officer of the Auditor-General's Department, and the recommendations arising from this investigation were made public in Townsville, and have for the most part been implemented by the board."

I have another letter from the hon. member dated 28 May reading—

“I wired you on Friday last as follows:—”

He said he did not ask for a public inquiry. This hon. member said he did not ask for a public inquiry but listen to his telegram—

“Consider contents your undated letter regarding public inquiry regional board pure quibbling and renew request full open inquiry stop wiring fully.”

He contradicts himself in this Chamber. Hon. members will see how he contradicts himself when we get down to the finer points of the subject.

His letter now goes on to say—

“This I now confirm.

“I had hoped to be able to write fully today setting out the full facts of the remarkable volte face of three members of the board in regard to the matter under discussion, and give you sufficient reason to grant my request for a full open inquiry. However when I called at the office of the T. R. E. Board today and asked to be allowed to peruse the minute book and relevant correspondence, I was told by the Manager, Mr. Beynon, that he would place my request before the Chairman, Mr. L. J. Kelly, and advise me later.

“If Mr. Kelly allows me to peruse the book and correspondence, I hope to be able to convince you that a public inquiry will be in the interests of the people.”

He had nothing beforehand but he says, “Let me have a look at the books and I hope I shall be able to find something.” That has been the attitude of the hon. member right through.

The letter continues in this strain—

“If Mr. Kelly refuses my reasonable request then I will supply you with the facts already in my possession, which I consider will be more than necessary to justify your ordering the inquiry.”

I have read the other letter and I do not propose to read it again.

Mr. Aikens: You are not game.

Mr. POWER: I will read it again, as the hon. member challenges me. I can assure the hon. member that he cannot intimidate me. This is the letter I wrote to the hon. member on 31 May, 1950—

“Dear Mr. Aikens,

“I desire to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 28th May in which you referred to my undated letter, which I regret was posted without being dated. The correct date should be 15th instant.

“I note the contents of your letter, and if you have any evidence of dishonest or corrupt practices by any member of the Townsville Regional Board, if you submit the evidence in writing to me further consideration will be given to your request for an investigation into such charges.”

That was when I put the acid on him and he did not respond.

The hon. member also made the statement that the Premier had called the manager to Brisbane and conducted an inquiry sub rosa —“under the cushion”—and as a result Mr. Beynon was asked to resign.

I want to make it quite clear that an inquiry was being held by the Townsville Regional Electricity Board into certain matters of domestic management that had nothing whatever to do with the subject now under discussion. A difference of opinion had existed between the manager and another officer of the board for some time and certain allegations were made, and the board quite properly decided to hold an inquiry into the whole matter. That was the nature of the inquiry held at Townsville by the Townsville Regional Electricity Board. This contract was not under consideration at any time. After the investigation that I have mentioned began, Mr. Beynon, who had been in ill-health, decided to resign. I should like to make it quite clear that there has never been any suggestion of dishonesty on the part of Mr. Beynon, and I do not want that officer, who has done an excellent job for the Townsville Regional Board, to leave this State with any stigma on his name. The board is prepared to say that Mr. Beynon gave excellent service and was a very capable engineer. The statement by the hon. member for Mundingburra that the Premier brought Mr. Beynon to Brisbane for a secret inquiry is cowardly, mean and dastardly, and is all that can be expected from a man of his calibre.

Mr. LLOYD ROBERTS (Whitsunday) (12.22 p.m.): It is with a certain amount of gratification that I enter this House as the representative of the newly-constituted seat of Whitsunday; not the usual gratification that one experiences in achieving one's objective, but the gratification that one feels when one has done a service to one's country. The service that I maintain I have done on this occasion was to have defeated the only really recognised and self-confessed Communist that has ever sat in a Parliament in Australia.

Opposition Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LLOYD ROBERTS: Like the Government, I have been elected by a minority (Opposition laughter), but I realise that even though I have been elected by a minority, I still have a job to do for all the people in my electorate. I intend to do that job, and I sincerely hope that the Government will do likewise for the people of Queensland as a whole. Unfortunately, to my way of thinking that has not been so in the past, but realising that there is good and bad in all of us, I am hopeful that with the infusion of new blood into the Government and the effluxion of time, the bad has been used up and nothing but good will emanate from this Government, at least during the next three years.

With that idea in mind, I feel that it is my duty to bring before the Government the very many evidences of the neglect by them of North Queensland, and of Whitsunday in particular. A present member of this Parliament, when speaking from the political platform in Proserpine, said in answer to an

interjection, "Of course you have had nothing, and you will continue to have nothing whilst you continue to return a Communist to Parliament." That position, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has now been corrected. The people in my electorate have seen the error of their ways and the Communist member is no longer in our midst. Therefore, I sincerely hope that the Government will take into consideration the fact that they have seen the error of their ways and will reimburse them now that they have put decent and respectable people into Parliament, and I think I can put myself in that class. I am hopeful that in the future they will receive equal consideration with other electors. I am not asking nor do my constituents ask for preferential treatment at the expense of other electorates. All that I desire and my constituents ask for is British justice, a fair and equal distribution of all public moneys. After all is said and done, public moneys are the gateway to the amenities of life and it is the right of each and every person in the State to get an equal share of public moneys. That is his right and such a distribution should not be regarded as perks, to be handed to a few selected areas. To put it into the true Australian, all we ask is a fair go and any Government worthy of the name will see that we get it.

The electorate of Whitsunday extends from the Pioneer River in Mackay up the North Coast through Proserpine to about six miles south of Bowen. From there it bellies out to the west and embraces Collinsville and Scottville. Speaking personally, I could very well have done without Collinsville and Scottville because of a total of about 1,000 votes I got only 82 there.

Mr. Sparkes: There are a few Commos there.

Mr. LLOYD ROBERTS: Not so many Commos either. Although I got only 82 votes that was an improvement by at least 100 per cent. on the effort of the candidate of my political colour at the previous elections. I realise that I have a job to do now and I am looking after the people of Collinsville in just the same way as I am looking after the areas where I got a bigger vote. I am satisfied that if I give attention to this area then instead of getting 83 votes there at the next elections I may possibly get 84 or 85.

That of course is by the way. Anyone who has had—I cannot say the pleasure—but the experience of travelling through my electorate knows that travelling there makes them weep tears of blood for the state of the roads. The hon. member for Cook and the hon. member for Roma spoke about the roads in their respective electorates but having regard to my own I say that they have not seen anything yet. On a population basis, considering the heavier population in the Whitsunday electorate compared with their electorates, I should say that the roads in the Whitsunday electorate are about the worst in the whole of Australia. But the North Coast from Mackay to Proserpine is not as bad as it used to be. I am not blaming the

local authorities in any way whatever. The Pioneer and Proserpine shire councils, with the finance at their disposal, are doing a very good job. For the 23 years I have been travelling these roads—I mean travelling them, because I worked for wages and lived on these roads—I have seen quite an improvement. Nevertheless, they have still a long way to go. So far as the Proserpine roads are concerned, there is only one way to describe them—they are abominable. In the 23 years I have been travelling off and on in and around Proserpine, I can see no improvement whatsoever. And Proserpine is not merely a small township. It is not many years ago when Mackay was recognised as a million-pound town and today Proserpine is a million-pound town. Proserpine has an annual income of approximately £1,000,000, mostly from sugar, but it has other industries. Yet within three miles of Proserpine—I can cut it down to 1½ miles—it is the simplest thing in the world to get bogged on the roads and the road from Proserpine to Bowen in particular has already gone down in history. There may be a reason why this road is not attended to. I believe the record travelling time by road between Proserpine and Bowen, a distance of 44 miles, is 4½ hours. That is an all-time record, or thereabouts. But perhaps I am wrong in referring to this matter as I have done because I remember after returning from overseas hearing something about a Brisbane line. Perhaps the idea behind the actions of the authorities was to form a Proserpine line. If that is so, I should like to congratulate the Government on their line of defence, because no enemy could traverse the road from Proserpine to Bowen.

Bowen and Collinsville are in a very similar class. The other day I happened to be in Collinsville and I paid a visit to the hospital. I will give one of the reasons why it is difficult to hold people in the country and why we cannot get nurses and medical practitioners to staff country hospitals. The doctor at Collinsville has not been there very long but he has had one day only off in several months, and the matron has had two days off in seven months. The doctor maintains that if a reasonable road existed between Collinsville and Bowen they could go from Collinsville to Bowen on Sunday, and be within call if an emergency case occurred, and return by motor-car, instead of waiting for a train, which takes from four to five hours to travel the distance of 50 or 60 miles. It is only fair and reasonable that better road conditions should be given to the people in such areas.

Why must these people pay their registration fees and other taxes year after year and have to tolerate these conditions? Are they not entitled to some consideration? They pay the same motor-registration fee out in those backblocks as do the people in Brisbane and, what is more, they have to pay higher petrol costs and, further still, their rate of depreciation on motor vehicles is greater. I know it from actual experience, because I spent a number of years in the motor business. The

average mileage of a car throughout Mackay and district was about 3,000 miles, and a car that had done 30,000 miles on the streets and roads of Brisbane was a new car compared with one that had done 5,000 or 6,000 miles in the North. This is hitting these people all the time.

Only the other day I heard of an increase in registration fees. I feel that this is right, too, owing to the high cost of everything—everything is going up. Why, the board at the Lodge has gone up 50 per cent (laughter). If that is so, it is only right that registration fees should be increased, but a method should be devised of varying them equitably. Zone the country. Do not hon. members think it would be fair and reasonable that these country areas, where the people are not getting the same roads and amenities as those in the more favoured areas and where it is costing so much more to live, should be zoned in the matter of registration fees? If it cost more to register a car in areas where there is plenty of concrete and bitumen, there should be no complaint. If these facilities are provided in certain areas, should not the people be prepared to pay for them? On the other hand, would it not be fair, where roads are bad, to fix a lower scale for road-users? But the motorist pays the same fee in any country area as he does in the metropolitan area. And what is more, the man outback is compelled to pay ever so much more for his petrol. I submit that the Government should take this matter into consideration and do everything possible to bring about a uniform petrol price throughout the State. No doubt there would certainly be a few squeals; you would get a lot in the Brisbane seats, but the people will have to take it. Take sugar, for example. It is grown in our area but the people of Brisbane are actually buying it cheaper than we can buy it. If that is fair and if sugar can be sold on that basis, it is only fair for an average price to be struck for petrol throughout Queensland, and for that matter, throughout Australia. Coupled with the petrol price there would be the price of oil.

The Whitsunday electorate is a wealthy one, and when I say that I do not mean that the individual residents there are wealthy, although on some rare occasions you will find some individuals really wealthy. The Mackay district as a whole is wealthy, and its wealth is in what it produces. For a start, we have in the Whitsunday electorate the Mackay harbour, which is recognised as the best harbour in Queensland, with a greater depth of water at low tide, 32 feet, than any other harbour in Queensland.

A Government Member: Thanks to the Forgan Smith Government.

Mr. LLOYD ROBERTS: No, not thanks to the Forgan Smith Government at all, but thanks to the guts of the people of Mackay. That is a matter I shall deal with again. If Forgan Smith had had his way, we should never have had the Mackay harbour. As a matter of fact, the Mackay harbour was brought into existence as the result of the actions of the Mackay Harbour Board, which

brought an engineer over from New Zealand, and brought Artie Fadden down from Townsville—he was not a politician at that time—to investigate the financial possibilities of a harbour. Artie Fadden and the late Mr. C. F. Bagley produced a case that was sufficiently good to warrant the building of a harbour, but the matter did not stop there; it went to a referendum of the people of the district, who had sufficient faith in their own district to go all out for a harbour. That is why we have the greatest harbour in Queensland today.

A Government Member: What subsidy did they get?

Mr. LLOYD ROBERTS: They received the same subsidy as was being paid for relief work. However, this was not work in the category of cleaning gutters, but was something that is there now as a monument, not to Forgan Smith or his Government, but to the guts of the people of Mackay.

Then we have Hodge's implement works, just over the Forgan Bridge. This implement factory commenced operations in the first place on Hodge's farm. It is quite a big establishment today, employing 55 men and feeding about 300 mouths. However, it has virtually closed down because of the shortage of steel. One or two weeks ago I attended a meeting in Mackay that was convened by the employees of the various engineering firms in the district because they were in jeopardy of losing their jobs as the result of the steel shortage. The losing of jobs is not particularly serious these days, because skilled workmen—or any workmen, for that matter—can get a job anywhere, but it would be a calamity for the Mackay district if the skilled tradesmen there went somewhere else. They would then be lost to us forever, because once they had experienced the amenities of the larger cities they would never go back to the neglected North.

Then we have Walkers Ltd., which has recently taken over a foundry in Mackay. The fact that that company is in my electorate, with the result that many more votes will be cast against me, does not matter, because the development of this foundry will be of advantage to the Mackay district in particular and to Queensland as a whole.

We have also the Proserpine sugar mill and Farleigh sugar mill. Proserpine mill has 358 growers and Farleigh mill has 332. Hon. members will not desire me to go any further into the matter, but there you have a total of approximately 700 growers in my electorate. Both mills are entirely co-operative.

Then there are the fruit-growers at Seaforth, Bowen and Andergrove, and in many other areas throughout the electorate. We also have dairying throughout the electorate, but particularly in the Rise and Shine area.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr. Mann): In accordance with the motion agreed to by the House this day I now declare the House adjourned until tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 12.45 p.m.