

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 1957

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to these crossings in relation to other crossings throughout the State. However, I would point out to the Honourable Member that it has not been the practice of previous Governments to provide booms for protection of single lines of track."

CLOSURE OF GATES, OAKHURST RAILWAY
CROSSING, MARYBOROUGH.

Mr. DAVIES (Maryborough) asked the Minister for Transport—

"During which hours of each day of the week are the gates at the Oakhurst railway crossing, Maryborough, closed, and people compelled to use the extremely dangerous alternative crossing situated in the middle of a narrow cutting?"

Hon. G. W. W. CHALK (Lockyer) replied—

"The level-crossing gates at Oakhurst are closed to road traffic from 12 midnight Saturday, to 6 a.m. Sunday, and from 10 p.m. Sunday to 6 a.m. Monday. At other times the level-crossing gates are normally open to road traffic but are closed against such traffic when trains are due. I have previously pointed out in reply to questions by the Honourable Member that while the Department recognises that the crossing referred to is not a good one, it has been reasonably free of accident, thereby indicating that it is not as 'extremely dangerous' as the Honourable Member would have this House believe."

TUESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER, 1957.

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. A. R. Fletcher, Cunningham) took the chair at 11 a.m.

CONSTITUTION ACTS AMENDMENT
BILL.

Assent reported by Mr. Speaker.

QUESTIONS.

BOOM GATES, JELlicoe STREET AND NORTH
STREET CROSSINGS, TOOWOOMBA.

Mr. WOOD (North Toowoomba—Leader of the Opposition) asked the Minister for Transport—

"In view of the great traffic improvement that has been effected by the installation of the boom gates at the Bridge Street railway crossing in Toowoomba, would he give consideration to installing gates of a similar type at the Jellicoe and North Street crossings?"

Hon. G. W. W. CHALK (Lockyer) replied—

"The matter as to what form of protection could be suitably provided for these crossings will receive consideration next financial year, having regard to the availability of funds for such projects and the order of priority which can be afforded

PAPERS.

The following paper was laid on the table, and ordered to be printed:—

Report of the Agricultural Bank for the year 1956-1957.

The following papers were laid on the table:—

Proclamation under the Public Works Land Resumption Acts, 1906 to 1955, and the State Development and Public Works Organisation Acts, 1938 to 1954, and the Abattoirs Acts, 1930 to 1949.

Order in Council under the Southern Electric Authority of Queensland Acts, 1952 to 1954.

Ordinance under the City of Brisbane Acts, 1924 to 1954.

LOCAL BODIES' LOANS GUARANTEE
ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Taylor, Clayfield, in the chair.)

Hon. T. A. HILEY (Coorparoo—Treasurer and Minister for Housing) (11.13 a.m.): I move—

"That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend the Local Bodies' Loans Guarantee Acts, 1923 to 1936, in certain particulars."

This is a Bill to amend the Local Bodies' Loans Guarantee Acts, 1923 to 1936, in certain particulars. Numerous bodies created by statute are given power to borrow money to enable them to carry out the objects and purposes of the Acts under which they are constituted. Many of these, by virtue of their borrowing powers, and either by specific mention in, or by the provisions of, the Local Bodies' Loans Guarantee Acts, 1923 to 1936, have repayment of loans, with interest, guaranteed by the Treasurer on behalf of the Government under these Acts. Examples are local authorities, hospitals boards, and commodity boards.

Other statutory bodies, harbour boards, State Electricity Commission, regional electricity boards, enjoy a similar provision by virtue of their status which declares them to be local bodies for the purposes of the Guarantee Acts and the provisions of these latter Acts are applied to their borrowings also. So that in this State in addition to the local authorities, hospital boards and commodity boards, we have harbour boards, State Electricity Commission, and regional electricity boards, all of which endeavour to have their public borrowings subject to the guarantee of the State Government to secure the repayment of the amount borrowed and the interest contracted to be paid in terms of the loan. The Local Bodies' Loans Guarantee Acts authorise the Treasurer, on behalf of the Government, in circumstances set out in the Act to guarantee to a lender the amount or any part of the amount borrowed by a local body with interest at the agreed rate.

Borrowing by these bodies generally must be authorised by an Order in Council which declares the amount that may be borrowed, the purposes for which it is borrowed, the currency of the loan, the amount of interest payable and the terms and conditions of repayment of the loan, and any other conditions that the Governor in Council chooses to attach to that particular borrowing.

These Orders in Council, having gone through the Executive Council, were then usually published in the Government Gazette.

In regard to the debentures, generally each Order in Council states that the interest and redemption payable by virtue of the debentures concerned shall be and is thereby guaranteed by the Treasurer on behalf of the Government of Queensland. It was never considered—it was never the law—that this statement in the Order in Council constituted in itself an effective guarantee. The result was that in addition to the Order in Council and the publication of that Order in Council in the "Gazette," there was still required a formal, written document of guarantee which required the signature of the Treasurer of the day.

In practice there were many cases where the guarantee appearing on a debenture was not signed by the Treasurer, but was signed by a Treasury official. That went on, not as

a general practice but as an occasional practice, for some years until in due course the Crown Law office drew attention to it and expressed doubt whether such a course constituted a really effective and enforceable guarantee. The practice is considered to be unsatisfactory and in order to place the matter on a better footing the Bill amends the Act to provide that, immediately upon the issue of the respective Order in Council, the relevant debentures shall be considered to be guaranteed by the Treasurer, thus obviating the need for the signing of a separate guarantee document for each borrowing. It is proposed to make the amendment retrospective to cover those guarantees on debentures which have been signed on behalf of the Treasurer. When the Local Bodies' Loans Guarantee Act of 1923 was passed, debentures requiring the Treasurer's signature were few, but now the number is really considerable. I think my predecessor will agree that the signing of guarantees is not an inconsiderable part of the duties of the Treasurer. The Bill overcomes the need for the Treasurer or for anyone on his behalf to sign this multitude of documents. It provides that the Order in Council, upon its publication in the "Gazette" shall be a fully effective instrument of guarantee.

In addition, provision is also made to cover Government guarantees given in connection with loans granted to local bodies for undertakings which are subsequently taken over by other such bodies in pursuance of any Act. Although the liabilities of the respective undertakings are transferred from one to the other, there is some doubt in law as to the validity of the guarantees previously given in respect of the loans.

For the information of the Committee, the instance that brought this sharply to the attention of the department was in Mackay, where the electricity undertaking which had been conducted by the local authority was taken over by the regional electricity board. Obviously, in such a case the regional board would take over the assets of the business of the electric authority of the Council and the existing liabilities many of which carried existing guarantees by the Crown to the lender.

By queer quirks of sheer propriety which attach to the law of governing guarantees there is considerable doubt when the liability was taken over, whether there was an effective continuance of the guarantee. Although it is the same lender, for the same purpose and the same amount of money there was some doubt that the guarantee that applied when the borrower was the Council applied when the regional electricity board took over. There was doubt as to whether there was an effective guarantee to protect the A.N.Z. Bank Ltd. now that the debt is owing by the regional board. It is a different body. On the face of things one would say that the easiest thing is to transfer the debt and the guarantee, but when one examines details

of the law it is easier to say these things than do them. Lawyers found that there was some doubt, and although the liabilities were transferred from one body to the other there was the doubt existing, and this amendment is to clarify the position and remove any doubt with regard to the guarantee.

It should be noted that this amendment will be made retrospective to cover past transactions. The only instance on the table is one in relation to Mackay, and if any hon. member desires to get closer details of the trouble that arises, how the question was interpreted and how the correction will work, the file is here and I shall make it available to him.

Mr. Coburn: You aim to make a moral right a legal right?

Mr. HILEY: The law relating to contracts lays down that certain contracts must be clearly impressed in writing before they are enforceable. Word of mouth is not sufficient. To give an example, if in his younger days the hon. member was contemplating marriage and the prospective father-in-law said that he was prepared to settle £50,000 on him on the marriage, the only thing to do would be to have it in writing, oral expression not being good enough. He would have to get it in writing otherwise he could not enforce it. That illustrates how the law is applied to certain contracts which must be in writing before they are enforceable. Because of these requirements and because we have run into difficulties on account of change of borrower the matter is being tidied up by this legislation. I am making sure that the Crown does not because of the automatic provision of the guarantee find itself saddled with liabilities it really never contemplated and never undertook. If that danger is present my advice is to keep on signing because the Crown must not lightly enter into obligations to guarantee a debt. I have told the Committee before that in all my years of private business I resolutely refused to guarantee anybody for one penny. I find in the realm of public finance, that without the guarantee of the State the amount of money available on the public loan market to help these various local bodies would not be a fraction of what it is. Councils, harbour boards, hospitals boards, and similar bodies, would not get a fraction of the money that they need for their important works without the guarantee of the State for the reduction of principal and the repayment of interest on the due date.

I made careful inquiry to ensure that administratively there is real control before the guarantee becomes effective. There is no automatic guarantee unless the loan is authorised by Order in Council, and unless the Order in Council is published in the Government Gazette. I am satisfied that that is a very effective safeguard for the State. If any guarantee is negotiated by the State and it is not in the form of an Order in

Council published in the Government Gazette, the legislation does not apply. The only way such a guarantee would be effective would be by a separate instrument, which would bring it sharply to the notice of the Treasurer of the day.

Mr. WOOD (North Toowoomba—Leader of the Opposition) (11.27 a.m.): The Bill is a very simple one, and the Opposition supports it. As the Treasurer says, it will not widen the scope of local bodies in their borrowing facilities. That was done by the Local Bodies' Loans Guarantee Acts, 1923 to 1936, under which all local bodies are given very wide scope in borrowings guaranteed by the Crown.

Naturally, the guarantee could not ensure that local bodies would be able to raise all the moneys that they required. At the present time, however, the scope for borrowing is very wide. It is at times unfortunate that all local authorities do not avail themselves to the full of the amount approved by Government guarantee. It is unfortunate also that some of them do not use their rating authority to the full. In some shires it is very noticeable that the worst roads are not the main roads, but those controlled by the shires themselves.

As I say, the Bill does not widen the borrowing scope of local bodies; it merely simplifies the machinery in the Treasury Department and legalises a practice that for convenience has been in operation for some time. The Treasurer has said that it has not always been the custom for the Treasurer personally to sign every guarantee or every debenture. Nobody is criticising that; as the number of debentures increased, it would be virtually impossible for him to do so. The Bill as outlined contains ample protection. The Order in Council must first be issued, and then it must be published in the Government Gazette. It is from that time that the guarantee becomes operative.

Briefly, that is all that the Bill contains. It is a simple administrative provision that does not vary the manner either of raising money or of issuing guarantees. It merely simplifies the procedure administratively, and the Opposition has no objection to it.

Mr. WALSH (Bundaberg) (11.30 a.m.): The Treasurer has explained that the principles of the Bill are certainly machinery ones to correct a few anomalies, or omissions as the case may be, in the relationships between bodies where guarantees have been signed on behalf of a local authority only for it to be found later that it had transferred some of its work or obligations to another authority created by statute. That may call for further attention later.

The Local Bodies' Loans Guarantee Act has been in force for many years. Since it came into effect, there have been many other forms of guarantee requiring the Treasurer's sanction, particularly with secondary industries. No doubt the Treasurer has already

received requests from many bodies claiming to be public bodies within the meaning of the Act now sought to be amended or some other Act giving authority to guarantee loans. His is not the only department in which a considerable amount of the Minister's time is taken up in signing documents. Last year I had to sign one contract something like 200 times because every blueprint had to be certified by the parties to the contract and by the Treasurer.

It must be remembered that Government guarantees have meant considerable assistance to local bodies including the Brisbane City Council, and the State Electricity Commission while it functioned as a separate entity. Previously the regional boards raised their own money. Since Parliament authorised the State Electricity Commission to undertake certain functions on behalf of the regional boards it has been much easier to deal with that phase of borrowing.

Apart from the protection the Treasurer has outlined, that is, that the Order in Council must be approved by the Governor-in-Council and published in the Government Gazette, there is an added protection and that is why I had some doubts about the wisdom of transferring the functions of local government to a department other than the Treasury. I have said before that local government finance constitutes a very considerable part of the activities of employment, financial and otherwise, in the State. The Treasurer realises that a local authority must advertise its intention to borrow under the Local Government Act unless a dispensing order is issued by the Minister in charge of local government. I hope that that liaison or co-ordination, which is so essential, will continue. I do not think that we should let a local authority go along blindly without some restraint. We should ensure that a dispensing order is not issued enabling it to borrow a considerable sum of money without first examining the case very closely. In some circumstances it must be done. At times local authorities can be lax in their administration, and I say this with due respect to the hon. member for Coorooora. When I was Treasurer many instances came under my notice where the local authority was very lax, and, having fallen down on its job, it sought to blame the Treasury officials or the Department of Local Government for failure to carry out the requirements of the Act.

Mr. Low: You know that is not right.

Mr. WALSH: It is foolish of the hon. member to say that because I can bring the evidence here. The hon. member for Barcoo wrote to me on one occasion and drew my attention to the fact that certain things had not been done in the area. As I thought there might be substance in the charge that Treasury officials had fallen down on the job I had a full investigation made, only to find that the fault lay with the local authority itself. I threatened to send the letter to the chairman to bring it

directly under his notice. That is only one of many cases I could instance. It is no use the hon. member for Coorooora trying to make apologies, it does not get him anywhere. If the Government fall down on their job or if a department falls down on its job the fault must be rectified just as much as if it were a local authority.

Mr. Low: Name one of them.

Mr. WALSH: I have named one already. I am astounded to find that a man on the executive of the local authority is not aware of these things. It has been brought to their notice and he should know. I believe that the Treasurer is fully aware of the necessity to keep some control over local authorities under the Local Government law, not under the Local Bodies' Loans Guarantee Act, to advertise their intention to borrow. I know that there has been an attempt to do away with that, to make it easier for local authorities to go over the heads of ratepayers and borrow without any reference to them. That is why I emphasise the necessity of ensuring that that phase of administration of loans and guarantees is not allowed to drift.

Mr. Coburn: Can the Minister order that a poll be taken?

Mr. WALSH: Yes, the Minister can order that a poll be taken in certain circumstances. In many instances the Minister gives very generous approval because of the circumstances put before him. I realise the difficulties mentioned by the Treasurer about the transfer of a set of functions from one body to another. In the future it may be necessary to create bodies similar to the State Electricity Commission. Perhaps a standard clause could be drafted to get over the difficulty. Nobody can foresee the nature of local bodies or authorities that will need to be created in the future by this Government or any other Government. A standard clause might obviate the necessity of an amending Bill each time. The present Bill is purely a machinery one and I support it.

Mr. COBURN (Burdekin) (11.38 a.m.): In his introductory remarks the Treasurer declared that the Bill will make legislatively correct any guarantees made to local bodies. Harbour boards are included as one of the bodies. The Bowen Harbour Board has taken advantage of loans in the past and from the Auditor-General's report I see that its total indebtedness at 30 June, 1956, was £358,197, but by the end of last financial year it had increased to £383,980. Advances totalling £34,865 and repayments amounting to £9,082 were made during the financial year. When the Treasurer guarantees loans to bodies it is particularly important that there should be a reasonable possibility of their repayment, whether they be Treasury loans or debentures. Unless something is done I can foresee difficulty for the

Bowen Harbour Board in repaying its indebtedness either to the Treasury or to the financial institutions that made the advances.

Mr. Walsh: There is no need to guarantee a Treasury loan.

Mr. COBURN: It is all indebtedness against this State. We are custodians of the public purse and we should see that the interests of the State are protected to the fullest extent. Eighty per cent. of all cargo handled at the port of Bowen is sugar. With the installation of bulk handling at Mackay and the proposed installation of bulk handling at Lucinda Point, Townsville, Cairns and Mourilyan, it will mean that a good deal of the sugar trade at Bowen will be lost. It seems almost certain that the sugar handled at Bowen from Proserpine will go to Mackay, and there is a distinct possibility that the sugar from the Inkerman mill will probably go to Townsville when bulk handling is completed there. That will mean that the fees payable to the Bowen Harbour Board will be considerably decreased and it will be very difficult for it to meet interest, let alone redemption. The position is that until the overseas ports install facilities for bulk handling there will be a good deal of bagged sugar handled. It is hoped by the Bowen people that it will be the port chosen for the purpose of handling this bagged sugar if it loses its sugar trade. It is claimed that Bowen does not have the conditions for the installation of bulk handling machinery. We have had to accept that as the decision of the experts. We still hope that the port can be kept alive and solvent by being able to handle bagged sugar. Cairns is in a similar position to Bowen. They do not know whether the bulk handling will be established there or at Mourilyan. They are similarly circumstanced to the port of Bowen. We are hopeful that bulk installation will be installed at Cairns, leaving Bowen the only port for bagged sugar, and thus make it possible for them to meet their indebtedness to the Treasury and the financial institutions that have advanced money to them. If this sugar trade is lost to Bowen it will be necessary to impose dues that will be so high that it is even feared the Borthwicks Meat Company at Merinda will not be able to use Bowen for that reason. It seems possible that because of the increased dues as a result of the lost sugar trade Bowen will lose the beef trade, too. I think, because of these fears, an early pronouncement by the Government of their intention in regard to the handling of bagged sugar when bulk handling facilities are established would allay a good deal of the fears of the Board, and permit it to proceed with the programme that it would not be able to proceed with otherwise.

Mr. Walsh: It is hardly a matter to be considered by the Government.

Mr. COBURN: The Government are one of the authorities who guaranteed the amount of money made available. My main object is to see that these loans guaranteed by the Government are so protected that they may be repaid. They will not be repaid unless plans are made to enable the port to retain its trade. You are shaking your head, Mr. Taylor. Is it an indication that I am not in order in discussing this matter on the introductory stage of this Bill?

The hon. member for Bundaberg, the ex-Treasurer, stated that the Minister could dispense with the necessity for a local authority to advertise its intention to borrow. I can mention an instance at Ayr. The expenditure of a large amount of money is contemplated for the installation of a water system preparatory to the installation of sewerage. That shire council wanted to dispense with the need to conduct a poll by advertising its intention and by getting signatures to a petition of 10 per cent. of the electors in the benefited area. I was informed by the Director of Local Government that the Minister has no power to order a poll in such an instance. The only cases in which he orders a poll are those in which he desires information of the particular area. With intention to borrow, it is not he who desires the information, but the council. The council must then go through the procedure of advertising its intention to borrow, 10 per cent of the electors being required to sign a petition, and the petition must be presented to the Minister for Local Government within 30 days of the appearance of the advertisement. A poll is then ordered by the Minister.

Mr. Walsh: The ratepayers must interest themselves in it. If they do not take an interest, it is hardly fair to ask the Minister to do so.

Mr. COBURN: They did take an interest in it to the extent that the council by a majority vote decided that it would apply for the loan but it was thought that a majority of the people of the area would not, because of peculiar circumstances, favour the installation of the water system. The council therefore wanted to dispense with the customary procedure, and hoped that the Minister would order a poll to be taken without the other prior formalities. My information is that the Minister has no power to order a poll under those circumstances.

Mr. KEYATTA (Townsville) (11.47 a.m.): The Bill is desirable and I commend the Treasurer for his initiative in introducing it. It will improve the procedure and facilities for local government loans.

The important factor that must be kept in mind when authorising public works is the effect of automation and scientific and technical improvements in industry on employment. Automation, while tending towards the progress of a country, may also cause great unemployment and detrimentally affect the economy of the State. Every unemployed

worker is a charge on the State. Our economy depends on the purchasing power of the people, and four-fifths of that power is in the wages of the workers. The public works that are undertaken in the potential of the area affected should be capable of absorbing those displaced by automation. Take the effect of automation in sugar-loading on the available employment. An alternate industry should be established to absorb the workers displaced by automation in the sugar-loading industry. We have the stark spectacle in other parts of the world of thousands of employees being thrown out of work through automation. I emphasise to the Treasurer the necessity of controlling loans to local authorities, hospital boards and harbour boards. We should co-ordinate all these activities with a view to replacing people displaced by automation. That is necessary to balance the economy of the State.

Hon. T. A. HILEY (Coo-paroo—Treasurer and Minister for Housing) (11.51 a.m.): I thank hon. members opposite for the manner in which they have received the Bill. It is true that it does not open any new power to guarantee and it does not add one whit to the scope of borrowing. It facilitates the method of Government guarantee and that is all it does.

Mr. Gair: It does not increase facilities for borrowing.

Mr. HILEY: No. There were, however, some observations that tempt me to make brief reference in reply. Some regret was expressed that some local authorities do not take advantage of existing borrowing privileges. That hardly comes within the scope of the Bill. I have already expressed concern over it and I hope to introduce a couple of Bills designed to add to the volume of money for local authority borrowing.

On the question of loans to secondary industries there is the channel of the Industries Assistance Board and the Treasury which applied in the case of the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing. It is preferable that the Government should have a competent advisory board to vet and police the operations of every one of the guarantees given for the assistance of industry no matter for what co-operative association or commodity board. That seems to me to be the more preferable way of handling this matter. We should use the machinery provided by the Industries Assistance Board.

Mr. Walsh: When you referred to the C.O.D., you referred to the northern cannery.

Mr. HILEY: That is another one. The Government gave a guarantee to the Committee of Direction and there is about £1,000,000 outstanding.

Some doubt was expressed concerning the separating of the Department of Local Government from the Treasury administratively, but I point out that the Treasury still exercises some administrative supervision

over much of local authority borrowing. I go so far as to say that virtually 90 per cent. of the applications for borrowing come to the Treasury for approval. Local authority borrowing has to run the gamut of the Department of Local Government and then get through the Department of the Co-ordinator-General and if any subsidy or Treasury loan is involved the application has to get across my table. I think the Committee can feel sure that such applications for subsidy or Treasury loans are looked at thoroughly, my main concern being that it may involve a delay of an extra week or two. If I could be certain that full protection could be achieved without the intermediate steps I should think of giving effect to it. However, hon. members can rest assured that the efforts of the department have not affected that control.

Mr. Lloyd: You have said that you are considering extending the avenues of borrowing by local bodies. Could you enlarge on that briefly?

Mr. HILEY: Two of the avenues involve legislation that is now in the course of preparation. I do not think it will be available before Christmas. A departmental committee is working on one of the bills. It involves a wider use of the State Public Service Superannuation Fund for public borrowings. The other involves the possibility of using the Common Fund technique, which is practised very successfully by the Public Curator's Office. It will enable the Public Curator and private trustee companies to make available their surplus funds for lending to public bodies. As I say, both those methods are being examined and they will require legislation. I doubt, however, whether the legislation will come forward before next year's early session.

The other matter raised related to the port of Bowen, and perhaps it is appropriate that I should say something about it. However, as it would take me beyond 12 noon to deal with it, Mr. Taylor, I suggest that you now report progress.

Progress reported.

SUPPLY.

RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE—ESTIMATES—
FOURTH AND FIFTH ALLOTTED DAYS.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Taylor,
Clayfield, in the chair.)

ESTIMATES-IN-CHIEF, 1957-1958.

DEPARTMENT OF RAILWAYS.

GENERAL ESTABLISHMENT.

Hon. G. W. W. CHALK (Lockyer—Minister for Transport) (11.58 a.m.): I move—

“That £1,053,170 be granted for ‘Department of Railways—General Establishment’.”

This amount is £28,290 greater than the appropriation for 1956-57 and £18,126 in excess of the actual expenditure for that year. So that hon. members will have some indication of where the increases and decreases have occurred, and to enable them to compare the expenditure, I point out in the first place that automatic and award wage increases amount to £3,955, increases in travelling expenses to £11,234, and increases in extended leave and retiring allowances to £2,251.

The overall increases in the Vote over the 1956-1957 figure amount to £22,440. During the year the payroll will decrease by £3,202, while "Staff Variation and Miscellaneous" will bring about a further decrease of £1,112. The total decreases will be £4,314, leaving a difference in actual expenditure for the year of £18,126.

Taking part in the debate on the Estimates of the Department of Railways is not entirely new to me, as most hon. members know, but to-day I am in the opposite corner to that which I occupied in previous years. Hon. members will therefore need no prompting from me to recall that as a member of the Opposition in the previous Parliament I was always a strong critic of certain aspects of railway administration. I advanced that criticism, not because I wanted to play the role as it has sometimes been termed, of a "knocker," but because I believed my observations to be constructive and I felt it my duty at all times to try to correct what I regarded as remediable deficiencies. There is therefore no need for me to stress that I will welcome constructive criticism from the Opposition. I assure hon. members that any matters raised by them will be fully probed and that, wherever practicable, their suggestions will be adopted. That was the attitude of my predecessor, though I often differed from his views. I believe Opposition members have the right to offer criticism of the department if they consider it to be justified. Moreover, I welcome constructive criticism because I think the department calls for some alterations and adjustments to put it on a more economic footing.

Naturally it is with a feeling of pride that, having become the Minister in charge of such an important undertaking and having faith in the future of the State, I for the first time present the Department's estimates and express my views on them. I propose largely to follow the pattern laid down by my predecessor. At this stage I shall make some general observations on the department, its activities and its future plans, and, later in the debate, I shall deal in greater detail with any phase of the workings of the railways that hon. members may see fit to raise.

Following the recent publication of the report of the Commissioner of Railways for the year ended 30 June, 1957, public attention was focussed on the railway deficit for the year, and prominent headlines were given to it in the **Brisbane Press**.

Mr. Walsh: Every railway system in Australia has had a deficit.

Mr. CHALK: I agree with the hon. member for Bundaberg when he says that every railway system in Australia has had a deficit—with the exception of the Commonwealth lines. I am not going to enter into a debate on the merits or demerits of the Commonwealth system. The point I was making was that a good deal of publicity was given to the deficit for the last financial year. It is only fair to point out that whilst the deficit was £4,351,433 and whilst it must be viewed with considerable alarm, when we analyse it we find that there was a reduction in the past 12 months. We hope we can make a further reduction in the ensuing 12 months.

Mr. Davies: The foundations have been laid for you.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Maryborough says that the foundations have been laid. We are not denying that the foundations have been laid but for years the present official Opposition had an opportunity to reduce the deficit further but the year before last there was one of the largest deficits every recorded in railway history. It cannot altogether be said that the foundations have been laid for us. If we followed the pattern of previous years and allowed the department to continue in the manner it has in many instances, we would find ourselves in exactly the same position as our predecessors. At the same time I am not going to deny that a foundation has been laid for considerable improvement by dieselisation.

Let us examine what happened during the last financial year. If we are to look to the future there must be an analysis of what took place in the past. Actually operations last financial year showed an improvement of £1,114,121. There was an increase of £5,306,098 in cash earnings, bringing the gross receipts to the record figure of £35,810,855. Unfortunately the increase was nullified to a great extent by increased operating expenses. Operating expenses last financial year increased by £3,879,941. I realise that there were award changes and variations in working conditions but at the same time the department received a record amount of business and at the same time incurred a record amount of expenses. That is something which the present Government, myself in particular, will have to analyse if we are to achieve the desirable objective of making railway revenue square with expenses.

Mr. Davies: Your aim is to balance the Budget.

Mr. CHALK: My aim for the financial year is at least to have revenue slightly in excess of expenditure. I believe that if we can the average citizen will be satisfied with the services of the railways. I am not going to debate interest charges on the Railway

Department. I have my own views on the matter, but there is a set practice, and we accept that as a basis.

Mr. Wood: Could you outline some of your own plans?

Mr. CHALK: Yes, I will do that. I have given the increase in operating expenses. Let us have a look at the source of the increased revenue last year. The returns from the heavier traffic in goods and livestock were exceptionally good, but at the same time unseasonable unfavourable conditions caused a decline in wheat and other grain traffic. If the season had been better there would have been an even greater increase in goods, livestock and grain traffic.

Mr. Donald: Had it been just normal.

Mr. CHALK: Just about normal. Basic wage increases and the higher costs of stores and fuel contributed considerably to the increase in expenditure. Those are things we cannot overcome. I shall not offer any criticism of increased expenditure on that score.

Mr. Hanlon: Was it not about £1,000,000?

Mr. CHALK: I am not prepared to guess at the figure. These things cannot be avoided; they could happen again this financial year. A basic wage rise naturally has to be met by the department.

Mr. Walsh: Are you getting the wool trade back?

Mr. CHALK: I believe we are. I heard many hon. members speak of the quantity of wool carted by road compared with the quantity carried by rail. I gave figures in this Chamber recently of the quantity of wool carted on the railways during the past 12 months. I deplore this loss of the wool trade from certain western areas to road transport during the shearing strike. It is very hard to convince some graziers that they should support the railways again. They argue that they gave the railways its opportunity to carry the wool during the shearing strike, and that the railways did not take it and the road hauliers came to their assistance. Unfortunately, they are continuing to support these hauliers who say that they operate within Section 92 of the Commonwealth Constitution. I know the Chairman will not allow me to discuss that point. These hauliers are not only taking the revenue away from the railways but they are also taking revenue away from the State because they pay no road tax and they tear our roads to pieces. My opinion has always been that the grazier or wool-grower should consider the overall position. He owes something to the State and, if the railways can handle his wool, he should send it by rail. I have digressed because of the interjection of the hon. member for Bundaberg.

Mr. Walsh: The bulk of the merchandise from Brisbane to Toowoomba goes by road, not by rail. That is another point.

Mr. CHALK: That can be raised later. The Government are endeavouring to win back business for the Railway Department. That is one of my endeavours, and I believe it is the honest endeavour of the Commissioner and every member of the Railway Department.

I make it clear that my ministerial efforts have been and will be directed to increasing operating efficiency to the maximum extent, and to effecting saving by the introduction of what I term justifiable economies. I am not attempting for a moment to detract from the past services rendered to the State by the Commissioner and his administrative officers.

Mr. Davies: Do you agree with the hon. member for Tablelands that the Commissioner is not capable?

Mr. CHALK: The hon. gentleman will have an opportunity of making that statement. I shall reply if he does so. The hon. member for Tablelands has the same opportunity. Although he is a member of the Government, I have no desire to suppress him. He has the right to voice his opinion in this Chamber.

Mr. Power: Do you agree with him?

Mr. CHALK: Let me go further.

Mr. Power: Do you agree with him?

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. CHALK: He is at liberty to express his opinion. If I consider that a reply is called for, I shall reply to his statements.

I believe certain economies can be made in the department. In saying that I am not reflecting on the ability of the Commissioner or his administrative officers, or on their past actions. They had to carry out the policy of the previous Government and the Minister.

Mr. Wood: Has there been any change in their work compared with three, four or five years ago?

Mr. CHALK: No. Since I became Minister the normal setup has continued.

Mr. Walsh: There might be a change in the attitude of certain union officials.

Mr. CHALK: I shall come to that later.

The administrative section carried out the policy of the previous Government. I believe the same public servants will be prepared to carry out the policy of this Government. That is all we expect of any public servant, irrespective of the department.

Mr. Power: They should do it.

Mr. CHALK: I said I believe they will.

Mr. Walsh: Surely the Government would not lay down administrative policy.

Mr. CHALK: Not administrative policy. The hon. member knows only too well what I mean when I refer to the policy of the Government. He knows I have been long enough in this Chamber not to fall into any traps he might attempt to set for me.

In attempting to effect justifiable economies I invite the co-operation of the railway unions and railwaymen generally. It is a campaign to get improvements in this most important public utility. Although many people outside do not realise it, hon. members know that the Railway Department represents an investment by the people of approximately £86,500,000.

That investment has been made in the railways of Queensland and the department must be in the forefront of the State's economy. We have to look at the overall position and decide the investment should return value for the money. No business man is prepared to continue to sink money into a firm or company unless he is satisfied he will get a fair return, not immediately but within a reasonable time. That is the desire of the Government.

Some hon. members opposite I think express the desire of a small section of the community to make a charge against the Government that we want to disturb the general set-up of employment in the department—

Mr. Lloyd: You agree that if you were able to declare a dividend on the railways you would be doing something that no other railway system has been able to do?

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member is saying that if we were to attempt to make the railways pay—

Mr. Lloyd: "Able to."

Mr. CHALK: That if we were able to pay dividends we would be doing something no other railway system has been able to do. Surely the hon. member will not say that we should continually pour money into the railways and take no action if there is not a fair return. As a Government we are mindful that railways in other parts of Australia and abroad are not paying their way. The Commonwealth railway system is paying its way. Hon. members may argue that it has a short length of line—but the Commonwealth are making the system pay. The railways of Queensland should be made to give at least a return of revenue greater than expenses. Let me go further and point out to hon. members and also to the public generally that the Government's aim, and mine as Minister, is to preserve and not disturb the employment of the railway staff.

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. CHALK: That is the attitude I adopted and it is the attitude I hope I can continue to adopt so long as I am Minister for Transport.

Mr. Lloyd: Very worthy.

Mr. CHALK: If the Committee wants any clear indication of the action taken by myself and Cabinet to prove the sincerity of what I have just said might I refer to the timely intervention of Cabinet which was responsible for the reallocation of certain loan money which prevented approximately 800 men from being dismissed.

Government Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. CHALK: Let me be perfectly clear on that point. When I took over the position of Minister there was a letter on the files stating that this number—it was 751 on that occasion—would have to be dismissed immediately.

Mr. Davies: Who recommended it?

Mr. CHALK: It was recommended by the previous Government. I heard the hon. member for Bundaberg and the hon. member for South Brisbane say that it did not have Cabinet approval. It did not require Cabinet approval. It was an instruction following the allocation of loan money. The Commissioner for Railways had to allocate the money and the Co-ordinator-General of Public Works asked him for full information about it.

On 2 August last, the day before the defeat of the Gair Government, the instruction was issued that the men were to be notified of their dismissal. When I came into office as Minister for Transport, one of the first documents laid before me was that instruction, and I inquired immediately where the men were to be dismissed. So that everyone associated with the Railway Department will realise the extent to which his job was in jeopardy on 2 August, I give the following details of the jobs from which men were to be dismissed—

	No. of Men.
Quadruplication between Eagle Junction and Whinstanes ..	115
Station yard rearrangements ..	85
Redbank bulk stores, new locomotive stores and station rearrangements	163
Northgate Depot and Banyo ..	254
Signal and Telegraph Branch ..	41
Works, South-Western Division ..	16
Cairns District	11

That was the position with which the present Government were faced when they took office.

Mr. Walsh: Are you suggesting that it was a political stunt?

Mr. CHALK: I am not suggesting anything. I am giving the facts. I have no desire to enter into any argument between the Australian Labour Party and the Queensland Labour Party, both of which formed the previous Government.

When the present Government took over, we had to decide whether the notices of dismissal should be issued. I inquired immediately from the Commissioner about the

amount of money that would be necessary to keep the men in employment. I knew that the Loan pool had already been allocated and absorbed and that we would have to endeavour to get from the Treasurer a further allotment of approximately £1,000,000. With the help of my Cabinet colleagues, I was able to ensure that the men who were threatened with dismissal were kept in employment. That is a clear indication that the Government desire to preserve rather than disturb the employment of men in the railway service.

Mr. Walsh: We will see how you are next March.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Bundaberg hopes that by next March the Government will be "broke." That has been his attitude ever since he has been in Opposition. He is hoping and praying that the Government will go down, and that Queensland will go down with them. He says, "We will see how you are next March." In other words, he is hoping that we will be "broke" and that these railway men will have to be dismissed. He wants to bring hardship and unhappiness into the workers' homes. However, the Government will resist that as long as they can.

Mr. Lloyd: This business of the dismissal of 700-odd men sounds a little vague to me because you say it will cost over £1,000,000 to keep them employed, yet you are saving only £300,000 on the new carriages.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Kedron seeks to draw a red herring across the issue. He does not know what he is talking about. The savings had nothing to do with the 128 steel carriages. The steel carriages concern a contract that was allegedly let. It was considered by the previous Cabinet and sent back to the then Treasurer for consideration and he said there was no money available for it. Whether it was an act of spite or whether it was done for some other reason I do not propose to enter into now but the former hon. member for Toowoomba, on the second last day that he held office, made the rather sensational announcement that the contract had been let. In other words, he misled the Commonwealth Engineering Company. In fact he led them right up the garden path for about 12 months by saying that the Government were going ahead with the proposal and then, to clear himself in the eyes of the company and probably in the eyes of others to whom he had made the statement, he declared that the contract was let and that that was to be his last act as Minister for Transport.

Mr. Walsh: And I publicly denied it.

Mr. CHALK: I know the then Treasurer publicly denied it. However, I will not enter into the argument between them; I am giving the facts. I shall return to the hon. member's point shortly. We realise the urgent need for carriages but, if there is no money

for them what is the use of telling a large organisation or engineering company that we will proceed with the matter? It will come up for consideration again and I believe my Cabinet colleagues will support me on it. I want to be able to say to the Commonwealth Engineering Company, "We asked you to submit tenders. Tenders were submitted, and at least we will authorise you to complete the design of the carriages so that when further money is available we will not have to spend another 12 or 18 months waiting and worrying about the designing."

Mr. Walsh: I hope you will allocate a few to the country districts, too.

Mr. CHALK: I will deal with that later. However, we believe the Government have a moral obligation to the Commonwealth Engineering Company for the amount of work they did while labouring under the misapprehension brought about by my predecessor, and it is my proposal that we honour it.

Let me return to the interjection of the hon. member for Kedron. He wanted to know how we were going to spend £1,000,000 more to keep men in employment if, as he said, we had saved only £300,000 on the carriages.

Mr. Lloyd: What I asked was: where are you going to get it? You have to rob Peter to pay Paul.

Mr. CHALK: Not necessarily. It will not come out of the sky, either. Under the project some stores have been purchased that will not be used for a considerable time. In these days materials normally required for building and development, such as cement and steel, are more readily available.

Mr. Walsh: You mean Stores Suspense?

Mr. CHALK: Yes. These materials can be purchased within a reasonable period now. Consequently instead of paying out large sums of money for stores items which may not be used for 12 or 18 months I prefer to keep men in employment and run the risk of not being able to procure all needed materials later on. In other words, we will see this year through. We will keep men in employment and endeavour to reduce the quantities of material held and the amount of money so tied up. We will get over the dry gully when we come to it.

Mr. Windsor: You will not have to rob Peter to pay Paul, or rob the workers either.

Mr. CHALK: That is the point I am making. We are endeavouring to conduct the department on the basis of keeping employees at work. I believe that the average railway employee today realises that there is a grave threat to his employment. He is conscious of the increasing inroads into his business—after all it is his business—by road transport. I say to all railway men that their most effective weapon to withstand the challenge is their giving of their most efficient service. I believe that the average

railway employee does give of his best. When I sat on the other side of the Chamber I was accused of getting information from Smith the Spy and various other people. Smith the Spy is still in the employ of the Railway Department but apparently he is now working for the other side. I believe that the average railway employee is conscious of what is happening and is prepared to play his part in assisting the Government—whether he likes our politics or not—to withstand any attacks made upon railway economy by road transport.

It is very pleasing to contrast the gloomy recital of circumstances surrounding the past year's deficit with the evidence of progress achieved over the last few months. I draw attention to the financial position of the department for the four months ended 31 October this year when operations were marked with what I have termed the birth of twins, or a twin achievement. In these four months we have had an increase in cash collections and a considerable decrease in expenditure.

Mr. Lloyd: Are the twins named Faith and Hope?

Mr. CHALK: This represents quite an achievement by the department. The cash collections have risen by £675,104.

Mr. Walsh: I would not be misled by that.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Bundaberg said that he would not be misled by that. No doubt the hon. member misled people for a long while. I am prepared to give the figures taken from the report of the department and submit them to this Chamber, and if the hon. member for Bundaberg cares to deny those figures he has the right to get up and do so. I invite the hon. member to do that.

Mr. Walsh: Quite easy.

Mr. CHALK: It was not quite easy while the hon. member was Minister for Transport. He knows what happened then. The cash collections for the past four months have risen by £675,104, to a total of £12,897,532. The cash receipts were £1,046,568 in excess of expenditure. Now the hon. member can interject if he likes. There is silence over there.

Mr. Walsh: The hon. gentleman is being funny now.

Mr. CHALK: For the corresponding period of last year the excess of collections over expenditure—and this is the point the hon. member is trying to make—was £200,811. For the first four months of this year compared with the first four months of last year we are £845,757 better off. We are over £750,000 better off at the end of this four months than at the end of the last four months last year.

Mr. Walsh: I am not denying the figures, but I would not be misled by them.

Mr. CHALK: All right. Let us analyse the position. There was a decrease of £170,653 in expenditure for the four months notwithstanding that we have had to meet award and basic wage increases amounting to £166,565, and the increased cost of stores and fuel amounted to £327,658.

Mr. Walsh: That is why the miners at Burrum have been sacked. The department is purchasing less coal.

Mr. CHALK: Does the hon. member for Bundaberg say that the department should purchase something it does not require?

Mr. Walsh: I am not advocating anything. I am telling you how it was brought about.

Mr. CHALK: Does the hon. member not think it would be wise? Answer that one.

Mr. Walsh: I am saying that I would not be misled by that figure.

Mr. CHALK: Do not sidestep the issue.

Mr. Walsh: I am not sidestepping the issue.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member made a challenge. The hon. member can have it one way or the other. If we want coal we buy coal, but if we do not want coal surely the hon. member does not say that we should put it at grass to satisfy somebody's whim.

Mr. Walsh: We did it to keep miners in employment.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member had his method of administering State affairs and he made a pretty horrible mess of it.

Mr. Davies: On what grounds are you claiming credit for this improvement?

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member is always impetuous. If he would wait for a while and not bob up and down like a yo-yo I shall give him the facts in good time. The two items that I mentioned cost virtually £500,000 but we were still able to reduce expenditure by £170,653.

An important feature of the four months' period—this will answer the hon. member for Maryborough—is the reduction of £264,927 in overtime. I do not apologise for that. The Government are justified in running the railways on the basis of the award. Surely the Labour Party is not in favour of working overtime if it can be avoided. The Government will continue to give employment under award conditions.

Other factors that have contributed to an improvement in no small way include the large number of diesel electric locomotives now in service.

Mr. Davies: You cannot take credit for that.

Mr. CHALK: I am not attempting to. The hon. member has a one-track mind; he is getting off the rails. The Government do not take credit for dieselisation, but they are endeavouring to improve the service.

Mr. Thackeray: Will you give a guarantee that you will not throw out the 40-hour week?

Mr. CHALK: Blind Freddy! Even Blind Freddy would know that the Government were elected on a certain policy. We are not going to commit political suicide. Both parties of the Opposition committed political suicide, but at least they should give Government members the credit of having more sense.

Mr. Power interjected.

Mr. CHALK: I advise you not to come in.

The CHAIRMAN: I ask the hon. gentleman to address his remarks to the chair.

Mr. CHALK: I certainly shall. I was led away by that by interjection.

Dieselisation has eliminated banking engines at many places on the sections between Brisbane and Toowoomba and Brisbane and Gympie. It is also responsible for faster train schedules, the haulage of increased loads by single locomotives, and a decrease in overtime by train crews and station staffs. It is the major factor in the economies that have been effected.

What happened in the past? The previous Minister spoke of putting these things into operation and it is proved by records of deputations. These points have been suggested by the administrative staff and the administrative staff has been prepared to implement them, but there was a cry from certain unions who pleaded with the Minister to override administrative decisions. Consequently many of the things that could and should have been implemented in the past were not implemented. The Government are prepared to find useful employment for every railway man on the basis of the award.

Mr. Thackeray: And in accordance with classifications?

Mr. CHALK: Yes, where possible.

Overtime and the number of staff at locomotive servicing depots have been reduced with dieselisation. The accelerated movement of traffic has reduced the amount of week-end work at penalty rates. With the 10 diesel electric locomotives from the Clyde Engineering to be received during the period November, 1957, to March, 1958, action is being taken to bring about virtually complete dieselisation of the section between Brisbane and Rockhampton and 60 per cent. dieselisation of the section between Rockhampton and Townsville. This increased use of diesel-electric traction will result in further economies in the directions I have

indicated. The department is now in a much better position regarding engine power than it has been for some years.

Mr. Graham: Thanks to the foresight of the previous Government.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member may chirp. We are not denying it at all. If he cares to make political capital out of it he can do so. I am showing what has been achieved and what will be achieved in the future through dieselisation. For the financial year 1956-1957 the average number of effective engines in service was 31.6 diesel-electric and 573.1 steam, making a total of 604.7. The relevant figures for 1955-56 were 19.8 and 574, a total of 593.8. For the financial year 1954-55 diesel-electric locomotives represented 16.4 and steam 586.8, a total of 603.2. I draw the attention of the Committee to the fact that in 1953-54 there was a higher percentage. The diesel-electric figure was 8.3 and the steam figure 617.4, making a total of 625.7. I point out that although there was greater numerical strength of engines shown in 1953-54, only 8.3 of the 625.7 were diesel-electric as against 31.6 for 1956-57. As the diesel-electric locomotive averages in round figures 10,000 engines miles a month as against 4,000 engine miles for the steam locomotives, and whilst the average tractive force per steam locomotive is 17,913 lb. compared with an average tractive force of 27,841 lb. for the diesel electric, the advantages of the diesel-electric are clearly indicated. It is expected that by April, 1958, the remaining three 710 h.p. diesel-electric locomotives for use on the Townsville-Mt. Isa railway will have been received, bringing the total in use to 12. These locomotives will considerably facilitate the working of traffic on that section of line and will allow of further economies being effected in overtime and fuel costs. These locomotives are fitted for multiple working which enables two of the locomotives to be attached and operated by only one set of men.

Mr. Thackeray: What type?

Mr. CHALK: The small 710 horse power. Is the hon. member criticising them? I shall have the opportunity of replying to him later. The introduction of diesel-electric locomotives has accelerated the transport of livestock, and, in addition to this improved service, has afforded a quick turn-round of livestock wagons, thus increasing the department's capacity to meet livestock orders. We hear charges being levelled all the time against the department because of its inability to supply railway trucks. I know that this has occurred on many occasions, but I point out—

Mr. Walsh: You were a party to it yourself.

Mr. CHALK: I have said that I know complaints were made. The position has considerably improved and will continue to improve when we can get a quicker turn round of trucks because of dieselisation.

Mr. Wood: With dieselisation, can you compete with road transport?

Mr. CHALK: I believe that in certain places we can. I am not permitted to discuss road transport on this vote, but I believe that in long distance hauling, the diesel, because of its power and speed, can compete with road transport. We have clear evidence of that in the tonnages that have been hauled. Later in the debate I hope to be able to point out what we desire to achieve in fast goods services, and what we have achieved recently by attaching goods vans to fast trains. Rockhampton has benefited considerably from that.

Mr. Graham: You yourself would not claim credit for that, would you?

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Mackay also has a one-track mind.

The diesel-electric locomotives received during the present financial year will enable the rate of improvement to be accelerated.

During the financial year ended 30th June last, a total of 222 wagons of various types, including 92 eight-wheeled, all steel-covered vehicles fitted with bogies suitable for running at passenger train speeds were added to the existing rolling stock. They have enabled the department to give an improved service by attaching the wagons to the 7.30 p.m. Brisbane-Rockhampton mail train. A three-fold benefit is conferred, namely, the quick delivery of goods, the taking of greater advantage of the available tractive power of the diesel-electrics and a saving calculated at one train each way a week. In addition, the people of Rockhampton have had a much better and a much faster service.

Mr. Wood: At a later stage, would you tell us something about the lag in engine repairs and how it has been overtaken?

Mr. CHALK: I shall deal with that later.

Vans of the type that I have mentioned are also to be attached to the Brisbane-Bundaberg mail train, and arrangements have been made to convey freight by passenger train to the South-west and the South Coast areas.

Freight from Toowoomba is dispatched daily to Roma by diesel-hauled fast freight trains, and then by special service to Charleville and Cunnamulla. This fast goods service by passenger train will be extended wherever practicable.

In the design of rollingstock the railways are making one or two improvements that are rather important departures from what might be regarded as standard practice. Recently it was decided to fit all rollingstock with rollerbearings in lieu of the old, plain bronze bearings with white-metal lining and wool-waste packing. Those familiar with the actual running of the railways will know the disadvantages of the old type. The move is a big step forward. It will greatly reduce maintenance costs and lessen the possibility of hot bearings, but

the most noticeable feature will be that because of lessened resistance locomotives will be able to haul greater loads.

Draw-gear has been the subject of debate in the Chamber for many years. It is proposed to fit new and stronger drawgear to new wagons, increasing the draw-bar strength from the present 26,000 lb. to about 40,000 lb., again enabling much greater loads to be hauled.

Coupled with the dieselisation of which I spoke this morning the two proposals will give a greatly improved performance.

Mr. Thackeray: Are you going to fit Timken bearings to all types of wagons?

Mr. CHALK: Eventually we hope to have roller bearings fitted to all wagons.

With the ultimate conversion to automatic bearings couplers an improved draw-bar providing in excess of 60,000 lb. will be available. This is greater than the tractive force of the largest diesel locomotive now in use by the railways.

That is an indication of what the designing department and the mechanical section have been working on for some time for the improvement of rollingstock. The department is mindful of the need for new and more modern carriages. For many years criticism has been levelled at the department for the type of carriage used on suburban and some country lines. Neither the Commissioner nor any other officer of the department is very pleased with some of the carriages that have to be used but lack of finance has delayed an improvement in carriages.

Recently the Commissioner submitted figures showing the age of some of the carriages still in use. There has been much criticism of the type of carriage used away from Brisbane, but let me give the Committee an indication of the type of carriage used on suburban lines. In use at the present time there are seven carriages over 70 years old, 24 over 60, 45 over 50, 154 over 40, and 234 over 30 years old. It gives some indication of the run-down condition of passenger carriages, a position we shall have to face up to very shortly. Because of lack of finance we have been unable to proceed to the complete finalisation of the contract discussed with the Commonwealth Engineering Company for 100-odd steel carriages. This year we hope to be able to proceed at least with the completion of the design. If we can find enough money to do that, next year we hope to be able to include at least a number of carriages in our programme, for use both on suburban lines and in country areas. I realise that improvement is necessary in many country areas. New carriages for use on suburban lines would release some of the better-class carriages for transfer to country areas.

When in Opposition I very often criticised the type of tin hare used as a rail motor in many parts of Queensland. I know the hon. member for Burdekin will justifiably criti-

cise the service from Ayr. The hon. member for Toowoomba will complain about the service into Mr. Speaker's area at Millmerran. Justifiable complaints could be made about areas on the North Coast. Although the department have a few modern-type rail motors operating from Cairns and Townsville, there is a growing need for an all-round improvement. Faster, more comfortable rail motors with full facilities for travelling will do much to win back to the department the passenger traffic that unfortunately has been lost.

I have already had discussions with the Commissioner and my colleagues in Cabinet. It is something to which we will give very serious consideration in the next Budget.

Mr. Thackeray: There are none under construction at the moment?

Mr. CHALK: No, none that we can expect during this financial year. We have to arrive at a fair basis of spending the money that becomes available from Loan Council allocations. If we spend too much at the one time ultimately our rate of spending will catch up with us. That is what has really happened during this financial year. Commitments were made in previous years for the supply of certain rolling-stock and for work in connection with quadruplication, and when we took over we found the amount allocated was £5,800,000. That was a reasonable allocation. It was not the amount the Commissioner had asked for; it was not the amount that probably the previous Government hoped to allocate to the railways, but the fact is it was finally reduced to £5,800,000. When I took office I had the position surveyed and I found that at least £1,000,000 of that amount had been contracted for, it had been spent in the purchase of certain things that were becoming available. I found also that approximately £2,500,000 had been allocated for the purchase of locomotives and various other materials that were becoming available.

Mr. Power: What is wrong with that?

Mr. CHALK: I do not criticise it. If the hon. member had been listening he would have heard me say that there is a time in our lives, whether in business or at home, when we must match our spending with our income. That is what happened during this financial year. That would happen irrespective of the Government in power. The sum of £3,500,000 of the £5,800,000 was already spent before we came into office. There was very little money left out of the loan allocation for any Government to spend on developments or improvements which are so highly desirable during this financial year. We believe that in the coming financial year the position will be much cleared because we have not the large commitments that apply this year. I do hope we will be able to introduce a number of new rail motors and to continue the previous development. I do not wish to take credit for what was done in the past. We shall continue that development,

and during the next financial year I hope to introduce changes that will win back passenger traffic.

I wish to digress slightly and make some pertinent reference to a feature of railway controversy that has had some prominence recently. It refers to passengers opening exit doors of air-conditioned trains at night. This matter has exercised the minds not only of members of the railway staff, but also of members of the public, because there is a feeling that perhaps greater safety precautions may have been adopted.

Mr. A. J. Smith: No matter how safe you endeavour to make it, certain people will do it.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member has taken the words out of my mouth. A study of the full reports on the accidents shows that there was no gross negligence on the part of the Commissioner or the staff, or indeed the unfortunate people who hurt themselves in falling out of the trains. It is rather difficult to provide facilities not subject to the human element. In an effort to overcome confusion between the side exit door of an air-conditioned carriage and an interior door, a four-inch-wide white band has been painted on the fixed window glass of all side doors to break any possible reflection of the toilet door opposite. That safeguard has not been 100 per cent. successful, because there have been further accidents. A secondary catch was also provided for the lock tongue on the side door. In addition, an "Exit" notice in white lettering on red perspex was placed on the inside of the exit door to prevent confusion. Even that added protection has not prevented accidents. The latest construction might cause a certain amount of inconvenience to the travelling public, but it has to be done for their safety. Conductors have now been told that exit doors must be kept locked between stations. In my opinion that will almost completely overcome the possibility of accident. When trains reach stations, however, there is always the person who wants to get out in a hurry and the other person who wants to be the last to get on to the train. Conductors have been given an added responsibility in seeing that the doors are locked.

I mention this because I should like the Press to explain to the public that, although from time to time people may step from air-conditioned trains, the percentage of accidents is small taking into account the number of passengers and train miles compared with road accidents and accidents in other places.

Mr. Aikens: Do you consider the accidents are due to the exit door being opposite the toilet door?

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Mundingburra has just entered the chamber. He did not hear some of my earlier statements.

The accidents are regrettable. I have indicated the steps that have been taken to overcome the possibility of further accidents.

There is something in the argument about the location of the door, but as the carriages have been designed and built with the door in that position they cannot now be altered. Other steps must be taken to avoid accidents.

Mr. Davies: Have you thought of frosting all of the glass?

Mr. CHALK: One engineer may support that, but another engineer may differ. I believe the locking of the door will overcome accidents. Conductors are given an added responsibility and accidents may still occur because of human error. Probably the latest precaution will be condemned if another accident occurs.

The huge expenditure on new and improved types of locomotives and rolling stock will not bring about the ultimate objective until there is an improvement in the track throughout Queensland. The report of the Commissioner gives some indication of the attention being given by the department to this important matter. The work is not as extensive as I should like to see. It is governed by the availability of funds. While it may not meet with complete approval, I mention two instances of track improvement, the first being the strengthening of the track west of Rockhampton to a distance of about 165 miles.

Improvements are now under way from Townsville so that light locomotives will be able to work as far as Hughenden. Those are indications of the development in the last 12 months. If we continue with them we will ultimately have a track which will enable us to use the heavier class of diesel-electrics in the greater portion of Queensland. The extended mileage over which the heavier class of diesel-electric works helps us to reduce the number of trains required over a section. This is a very important matter. The 15-ton axle load diesel-electric may be operated over lines from Wallangarra and Roma, as far as Cairns, Rockhampton inland and from Townsville to Hughenden. The department aims at providing a more complete service by encouraging business to use the facilities available for transport of goods by rail. A system of pick-up service has been introduced for parcels in Brisbane. Complaints have been made to me by several small parcel carriers in Brisbane that this entry into business has taken certain business away from them. On the one hand we get the potential customer who will tell you that if you pick up his goods from his door and deliver them by rail to a required destination and re-deliver them to the door of the consignee he will be prepared to pass his business over to you. He will not do so unless you give that service. The Commissioner gave this matter consideration and decided to give it a trial in Brisbane.

Already there is a very clear indication of considerable improvement in the parcel business available to the department. This parcel business is quite a paying proposition because there is a minimum charge and whilst there is a certain amount of mileage involved the small goods bring in quite an amount of revenue. We have established something which will prove of considerable benefit to the department. There is always criticism of any new venture and representations have been made to me in the hope that this system of parcel delivery might be wiped out. It is doing a good service and I am prepared to continue with its operation.

I have heard comments from various quarters that the railways should go after business. We have given consideration to the establishment of a commercial section within the department. The hon. member for Keppel said that railway men should be given a bonus for bringing business to the department. There is merit in his suggestion. I do not know how it would be operated. We have gone a little further in that we hope to be able to establish some basis of personal contact between the department and potential customers. We are looking within the Railway Department—not necessarily for a freight or clerical man—for somebody with the personality and ability to sell the railways to the public. If we do that and adopt that type of representative he will be able to create goodwill amongst our customers. He will have to carry a good deal of responsibility. Firstly, he will have to induce the customer to use the department's services, and then he will have to see that any obligation he undertakes is carried out. Because of the vastness of the Railway Department, it is quite impossible for the Commissioner, or a general manager, or any station master, to guarantee that an article that is delivered to the department will reach its destination at a fixed time. Many things can happen in transit. But with the co-operation of the average railway employee, we are trying to build up an improved service. I feel confident that we will get that co-operation. We are trying to create a feeling among the railway employees that we are not out to harm them. Our aim is to improve the department, which must ultimately improve every employee's chance of advancement.

Mr. Aikens: You have a job ahead of you if you are trying to improve relations between the top and the bottom of the railway service.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member says we have a job ahead of us. We realise that, but we are prepared to tackle the job. Whether it has been tackled in the past is not for me to say. The Government will try to get all railway employees to take an interest in their jobs, and impress upon them that by helping to improve the railway service they are helping to improve their own opportunities.

I should like now to mention one or two matters affecting the administration of the department. I shall then be quite happy to listen to constructive criticism. If any suggestions for improvement stand the test and will help to improve the department, I shall make every endeavour to implement them. A certain amount of criticism has been levelled at the Commissioner for Railways. My attitude is that the basis of administration adopted by the Commissioner prior to my taking office was a matter between him and the previous Government. I have no control over anything that happened prior to my taking office. During the period that I have been in charge of the Railway Department, however, the Commissioner has given me complete co-operation and loyalty in anything that I have asked him to do. That applies also to the other departmental officers. Mr. Lingard, the Secretary, has been very helpful. As I said before, it was rather strange for me to come into the battle from this side of the Chamber.

Mr. Aikens: I hope you have not forgotten what you said when you were on the other side.

Mr. CHALK: I am not like the hon. member for Mundingburra, who says something on one occasion and the opposite on the next. I am quite prepared to stand up to the criticisms that I made when I was in Opposition, and if possible I am prepared also to implement the suggestions that I offered.

As I say, I have received from the officers of the department the co-operation and loyalty that I expected of them. I do not accept many of the criticisms that have been made of them. Both the Chief Engineer and the Chief Mechanical Engineer have been very helpful, and so have all the other officers.

Mr. Aikens: Are you going to stop the racket of robbing the railwaymen of their long-service leave?

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Mundingburra can make a speech during the debate, as no doubt he will.

Mr. Aikens: If you sit down, someone will get a chance.

Mr. CHALK: I will sit down in time. The hon. member will have his opportunity.

I have taken as my private secretary, Mr. Alan Evans, who was associated with my predecessor in the department, and I have appointed as liaison officer Mr. Neeson, who was the private secretary to the former Minister.

Mr. Aikens: Two good men.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Mundingburra and I agree for once. Both officers are doing all they can to help me carry

out the policy of the Government. With co-operation all round we will achieve much of what we set out to do and I am confident that next year's Estimates will reflect a greatly improved financial outlook and that then we shall be able to forecast further development in the interests both of railwaymen and of the State.

Mr. DONALD (Bremer) (2.47 p.m.): It is refreshing to hear the Minister so vigorously defend railway administration because in Opposition he was one of its most severe critics. I sincerely congratulate him, first of all, on his appointment to Cabinet and, secondly, on being given such an important portfolio. The railways are the largest single enterprise in the State and the Minister has a great responsibility. The decision to divorce the Main Roads from the railways was a very wise one because each presents so many difficulties that it calls for the attention of a separate Minister. When I was younger I was told that if the Government wanted to get rid of a Minister they put him in charge of the railways. Now that they have made it the transport portfolio they have given the Minister two very arduous jobs.

As I have the biggest railway workshops in my electorate, or soon will, I shall probably see a great deal of him in the near future and I hope that our good relationship will be maintained. I have already introduced deputations to him and made representations on behalf of several railway employees and I extend to him my sincere thanks for the prompt and courteous way in which he handled their complaints.

Many people have pointed to the book-keeping deficit of the railways. Any unbiased hon. member will admit that the department is doing, and has done over the years, a splendid job for the development of Queensland. Those who criticise State enterprise as a form of nationalisation should not overlook the fact that the railways were first run by private enterprise and that private enterprise was unable to carry on with them. No-one can dispute that under Government administration they have given the State wonderful service and helped it develop. In spite of the very heavy interest burden which makes it almost impossible for the Railway Department to balance earnings and expenditure, the earnings for the year under review per train mile were £1 16s. 1½d. while expenses were £1 17s. 3½d. Therefore the loss per train mile was 1s. 1½d. As interest charges amounted to 3s. 3d. per train mile it is not difficult to realise what a great burden they are. While the critics of the department are saying, "You are losing 1s. 1½d. on every mile your train runs" they are very silent on the fact that the Railway Department has to carry the burden of 3s. 3d. interest on every mile the train runs. This is a matter that must be given consideration very quickly. If something is not done

to ease this ever-increasing encumbrance the railways will not be able to give the service to the country that they should.

It is only to be expected that the railways should continue to lose passengers to air transport. Air travel is more comfortable and time-saving. Expenses are cut down because of the time saved. People can fly to Sydney and back without losing a working day or incurring any unnecessary expense. Indeed it is not surprising that we should be losing passenger traffic to air services. At the same time let me point out that A.N.A., a private enterprise heavily subsidised by the Commonwealth Government, could not balance its budget nor could it give as good a service as the Queensland railways.

The judgment given by the Privy Council on the Bank Nationalisation case has enabled the road hauliers to successfully defy the State Government and to use and destroy our main roads without contributing one penny towards their maintenance or construction. I wish the Minister every success in his endeavours to correct this very grievous wrong.

I do not think any hon. member would be game to get to his feet to attempt to justify the attitude of the interstate hauliers or as the Minister properly described them, hauliers who were using snide tactics to deprive the State of its rightful revenue and escaping their rightful duty of contributing towards the maintenance of our roads.

Mr. Power: The oil companies paid all their legal costs.

Mr. DONALD: I believe that there is a definite tie-up between the hauliers and the oil companies. I believe it was because of the assistance from oil companies that they were able to defy the Commonwealth Government and the wishes of the people as a whole.

Goods and livestock traffic increased by 249,879 tons during the last financial year. While passenger traffic dropped, due to air travel, livestock and goods traffic have been able to more than hold their own against unfair competition from road hauliers. The Queensland railways have been able to increase business and give extra service in spite of unfavourable weather.

Some years ago the previous Government decided upon the modernisation and electrification of the lines between Ipswich and Sandgate and Brisbane to the South Coast. I sincerely hope that there will be no slackening in this work. Unfortunately it was held up for a time because of lack of finance but work has started again and it is progressing favourably, but not fast enough.

It is only when this work is completed that the position on the Ipswich-Brisbane suburban line will be relieved and passengers will no longer have to endure inconvenience and discomfort. I may be accused of taking a narrow view when I refer to what is happening between Ipswich and Brisbane, but it is an indication of what is happening elsewhere.

The inconvenience caused to the Ipswich passengers by long and frequent delays owing to the lateness of their trains at Ipswich is something that could be avoided. It is not the fault of the railway staff at Ipswich or anywhere else, but it is due to the fact that they have to bring the trains in on a single platform. The staff at Ipswich, with one platform and one main line, handle between 250 and 280 trains a day. In view of their difficulties hon. members can realise the great service that they give to the public. The inconvenience that is caused is not the fault of the Commissioner and his officers; they are doing all they can under great handicaps and difficulties.

The decision of the previous Government to shift the metal-work section of the Ipswich workshops and erect new shops at Redbank was a wise one. That is now plain to everyone. In the near future the Stores Section will be completed. Before the middle of next year many artisans working at Ipswich will be employed at Redbank under more congenial conditions. They will have more work and a more modern workshop to do it in, and the position will be much more satisfactory. While I am on this subject I draw the attention of the administration to the fact that for some years there has been discontent at the Ipswich railway workshops, particularly during the summer months, because of the inadequacy of the supply of cold drinking water. There is a clumsy apparatus at the workshops and I cannot see any reason why they should not have installed there cold-water facilities like we have here just outside the Chamber and other places in the building. It is beyond my comprehension why such facilities have not been established at the Ipswich railway workshops. I do not know what the cost of the installation would be, but it should be made without delay. Recently we were able to get improvements at the Booval railway station that had been the subject of representations for a long time. I refer to the construction of the subway. For many years we had to go over a footbridge. The job has now been completed. After coming through the subway from the north to the south side you have to walk 40 to 50 yards to get onto the down platform, and walk the same distance back if you are going to the first or second carriage. That could be overcome by the construction of steps on the northern side so that immediately you came to the exit of the subway you could turn round and walk up the platform. I hope that the Minister, to whom I have made representation, will give the matter favourable consideration.

Another improvement that is long overdue at Booval is a ticket office on the down platform. I have asked for this previously, and the then stationmaster at Booval, Mr. Mason, supported the request. On that occasion I was told that the traffic did not warrant it. If there was not sufficient traffic then, I am sure there is sufficient now. It would not mean an increase in costs. It could be closed when not required. The staff at Booval is adequate

and the extra service would be appreciated by the public. It would remove another cause of unwarranted criticism. Two splendid stations have already been erected at East Ipswich and Dimmore, but some urgent attention is needed at Bundamba.

I do not know when the station was painted last. It is certainly not a good advertisement for the Government and particularly the Railway Department. It is most unattractive and not pleasant for those who have to work in it. Something should be done in the very near future to brighten up the station.

Between Bundamba and Booval there is a traffic hazard that has caused a number of deaths and frequent accidents. It is still the cause of a great deal of anxiety to train crews on the Redbank-Bundamba loop line. I do not blame train crews for any accidents, because I have heard the train whistle for minutes before it crosses the road. It can be heard from Bundamba on the road out, and from Blackstone on the road in. The position must be rectified. On the Redbank end of the loop line a splendid job has been done. The road was built up and traffic now goes over the loop line. I do not know how it can be overcome at the Bundamba end but the time has arrived for some positive action to reduce if not remove this danger.

Mr. Keyatta: Go underground.

Mr. DONALD: That would create a drainage problem. It must be left to the engineers. I do not think the problem is insurmountable. It is not for me to suggest how it should be overcome.

Steam passenger train miles decreased by 239,150 compared with 1955-1956. It is satisfying to note that that goods train mileage has increased, diesel-electric train mileage has increased by 342,488 miles. Rail motor mileage decreased by 56,100 miles, while diesel motor train mileage increased by 43,654 miles.

The ever-increasing consumption of diesel oil by the railways should stimulate a more sympathetic and practical approach to the problem of winning oil from the coal we have in abundance. Practical steps must be taken if we are to solve this problem. It will not mean the spending of a few shillings. It will cost a great deal of money, but in the interests of defence and the economy of the nation positive steps are necessary. Extraction of oil from coal was attempted in New South Wales. Hon. members know the history of Newnes and Glen Davis, and I am not going to encroach on the generosity of the Chairman by mentioning those ventures at length. They did not receive sympathetic treatment, nor was sufficient money spent on them. In the interests of the national economy, sooner or later, and the sooner the better, a practical and sympathetic approach must be made to this important subject. What

would be the position if we faced the same difficulties as those we experienced in World War II.? What saved this nation in World War II.? What brought great praise to the Australian people from our American allies? It was the tremendous and valuable service we were able to give to them through our railway service. Everyone was loud in his praise of the service the railways gave. How could the railways give that service if we did not have the fuel to propel the diesel-electric locomotives? I do not know whether the Government are making any investigation into coal-fired gas turbines, but in the interest of the nation and on behalf of the mining community, something should be done about the extraction of oil from coal. When I first came into this Chamber I was told of the magnificent deposits of coal at Blair Athol. What is the position there? It is the same now as before. The valuable deposits have not been developed. There is a possibility of getting oil from oil shale and coal in Queensland. Let us investigate it. We cannot argue against success; nothing succeeds like success. Whilst the miners feel that their livelihood is being threatened because of the introduction of diesel engines, they are not asking for their removal. They do not want to stop progress, but society owes them the obligation to investigate the extraction of oil from coal.

The Commissioner's report shows in no uncertain manner the great advantage the diesel locomotive has over the steam locomotive, both in average train and engine-mile per locomotive and average gross ton-mile per locomotive. I will not weary the Committee by reading the Commissioner's report. The average gross ton-miles recorded by each diesel-electric locomotive were 46,157,991 and that of steam locomotives only 6,704,915 gross ton-miles per effective unit. During 1956-1957 diesel-electric locomotives ran 20.51 per cent. of the total train-miles and performed 27.5 per cent. of the total gross ton-miles though they represented only 5.23 per cent of the effective locomotive strength.

I was pleased that the Minister was loud in his praise of the foresight and administrative ability displayed by Mr. John Duggan whilst he occupied the portfolio of Minister for Transport. That was very pleasant coming from the hon. gentleman and it demonstrated that he is prepared to give credit where it is due. He repeated himself again and again and he did not take credit for many of the benefits now beginning to become apparent in the service. He was prepared to give the credit for them to Mr. Duggan. Officers of the department are generally adversely and wrongly criticised. Generally speaking, officers of the Railway Department compare more than favourably with officers of the Public Service. They go out of their way to oblige the travelling public. We might find an exception to the rule, one who acts in an unceiling or discourteous manner and thus brings bad repute to

the service generally. I repeat that generally speaking the officers of the department are courteous and efficient. I have not come in contact with the Commissioner very much but on the few occasions that I have met him I was received with courtesy. Mr. Lingard has helped me considerably in the many recommendations I have made to him and at all times he has received my representations in a sympathetic and courteous manner. In retaining the services of Mr. Evans and co-opting the services of Mr. Jack Neeson the Minister has done something worthwhile that will be of advantage to the department and the State.

I want to refer to the service given to the department by the lengthsmen; their occupation is not a glamorous one. It is they who make the operations of the railways possible. I remember speaking to a ganger in the early stages of dieselisation and asking him how the diesels affected the track. I asked him if it was true that they were damaging and spreading the lines. All he said in reply was, "The engine drivers have been given a better and an easier job with increased pay, but our job has been made harder and we get no increase." He did not comment beyond that.

I think the Minister can rest assured that he will receive every co-operation from the trade unions in the railway service. It is not the intention of trade unions to make the task of a Minister more difficult than it need be. If they are approached properly and courteously, the Minister will receive courtesy and co-operation in return.

I assure the Government that the Opposition do not want to see railwaymen dismissed. On the contrary, they want to see every worker in the State kept in gainful employment that will bring benefit not only to himself but to the State generally.

(Time expired.)

Mr. EWAN (Roma) (3.11 p.m.): At the outset, I should like to congratulate the Minister on his very comprehensive and lucid address in presenting his Estimates. He showed in no uncertain way that the Government have entrusted the administration of this very important department to a man who has brought full and careful study to his office. In carrying out the Government's policy, I feel sure that in addition to rendering a great service to the people of the State, he will reflect honour on himself and the Government.

I should like also, on behalf of Government members, to extend to the Minister sincere congratulations on his elevation to Cabinet rank, and to assure him of our complete loyalty and help in carrying out his onerous duties.

One of the greatest tributes that could be paid to a new Minister was paid to the Minister for Transport by the hon. member for Bremer. After claiming that he was in a position to be sure of what he was saying,

the hon. member said that the trade union movement would be behind the Minister in his efforts to further the interests of the railways, and coincidentally those of the people.

The Railway Department has developed over the years into a very large business. Its capital at present stands at £86,591,000, an increase of approximately £5,000,000 on last year's figure. The financial result for the year as disclosed in the annual report shows gross earnings of £35,810,000 and expenditure of approximately £31,000,000, or a deficit of £4,000,000. When considering the deficit, it must be remembered that the result was approximately £1,000,000 better than that for the previous year. That is a ray of sunshine, and when we take full stock of the Government's policy to bring about greater efficiency in all sections of the service, it would be extremely pessimistic not to expect a big improvement in the financial position of the Railway Department during the next 12 months.

Mr. Power: You will be the first to squeal if the freights go up.

Mr. EWAN: It might interest the hon. member for Baroona to know that if the action the Minister has outlined is taken, as I am sure it will be, with the full co-operation of all ranks in the railway service, it is quite possible that he will live to see the day when the department will reduce freights. That will be an extraordinary experience for him because he certainly never underwent it as long as he was on the Government side.

As my electorate is almost entirely a primary-producing area, I shall confine my attention to those aspects of the Estimates of interest to my constituents. The Report of the Commissioner sets out—

"The tonnage of livestock carried during the financial year ended 30 June, 1957, totalled 877,304 and exceeded the figure of 805,806 for the preceding year by 71,498 tons, to establish a new record for the tonnage of livestock conveyed in any one year.

"The number of cattle carried reached the alltime peak of 1,525,678 and the number of sheep (1,682,980) was 473,978 more than the corresponding figure for the previous year."

That is very gratifying.

The Report continues—

"The earnings derived from the carriage of livestock during 1956-1957, totalled £4,361,823. This was £1,003,581 more than the revenue received from this traffic during 1955-1956.

"There have been charges from time to time concerning the inability of the Department to meet the demands for the conveyance of cattle. The fact that last financial year a record number of cattle was carried is in itself an effective

answer to such charges. The improvement in the locomotive power position with the introduction of diesel electric locomotives has helped considerably to meet the growing demands for livestock transport, and at the meeting of the Australian Meat Board held in August, 1957, pleasure was expressed at the marked improvement which had been made in the conveyance of livestock during the current season.'

Mr. Davies: Do you agree with that?

Mr. EWAN: I like to answer sensible interjections, but I am asked if I agree with that. I do not know where the question came from and I would not embarrass the interjector by mentioning his name if I knew it. When the Australian Meat Board passes a comment like that it ill-behoves a member of the Opposition to question it. The Commissioner and his District Superintendents are faced with very grave problems in allotting available truck supplies for the conveyance of fat stock, particularly cattle, to Cannon Hill and the various other meatworks, especially because great numbers of stock must necessarily be transported in a limited period in accordance with the seasonal conditions prevailing from time to time. Although there has been a considerable time lag in the supply of trucks the majority of cattle-growers and sheep men have some appreciation of the difficulties confronting the Commissioner and his staff. It ill-behoves me to be too critical but as an observer from the side lines I suggest that it might be possible to give precedence to livestock trains over all trains other than mail trains.

Mr. Graham: Have they not got that preference now?

Mr. EWAN: If they have it does not always work out that way.

Mr. Graham: You show me one instance where any train other than a mail train gets preference over a livestock train.

Mr. EWAN: I could have quoted many instances when I was actually engaged in the transport of livestock. Sometimes trains were held up for long periods at various centres.

Mr. Graham: What for?

Mr. EWAN: Up to four hours waiting for other trains to come along. There may not have been enough staff stations or passing stations. I am not an expert but I am trying to put forward suggestions calmly for the consideration of those responsible for the administration of the department. Speaking as a layman, I say that the Government would be doing the great livestock industries of the State a signal service if assistance could be rendered along the lines I am suggesting.

Based on my own experience and views expressed to me by many men actively engaged in the industry I have a suggestion

to make which may help to prevent the bruising of cattle transported by rail. May be experiments have already been carried out, and if so I should like to know the result. Would it be possible to have a sliding door in K cattle wagons which would divide the wagons into two after loading? I realise that much of the bruising takes place during loading and unloading operations. At the same time most of the bruising that occurs in transit is caused by surge. When a train starts off the surge jams beasts at the back of the truck; when the train stops the surge forward jams them at the front of the truck.

Mr. Baxter: It does not matter how many times you partition, the same surge and the same jam is there.

Mr. EWAN: That interjection shows that the hon. member for Norman has had little experience in the transport of livestock. If he had had experience he would realise the fallacy of his interjection.

Mr. Baxter: There is no fallacy about my interjection. What I say is factual. A test was carried out to remedy that complaint—

Mr. EWAN: I shall ask for an extension of time for the interjector if it will help him. I am trying to offer helpful suggestions to the department. If experiments have already been carried out I should like an indication from a responsible person, preferably the Minister, of the result. On the other hand, if there have been no experiments could consideration be given to the practicability of carrying them out? I wish to refer to the need for raising the railway platform at Wandoan. There are probably many others like this one. Old ladies have to be helped from the train to the ground. Many trains arrive when it is dark and old people could easily fall and injure themselves if there is not someone there to assist them. This and similar platforms could be raised at a small cost, and old people would then be able to alight from trains without risk of accident.

Mr. Baxter: That is a very bad platform, I agree.

Mr. EWAN: There are probably others just as bad, but I do know that one.

It is interesting to compare the policy of this Government with that of the last one in regard to the conditions of railway employees. It gave me personal satisfaction to have a pledge from the Government that in due course the accommodation for railway workers will be brought into line with the provisions of the Workers' Accommodation Acts. In the western areas it is intensely cold in the winter and very warm in the summer, and in many instances the accommodation for railway employees in that area is such that no Government, whether Labour, Country Party or any other could be proud of it. I have no doubt that in accordance with Government policy remedial action will be taken at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Power: Were you ever prosecuted over workers' accommodation?

Mr. EWAN: The hon. member knows nothing about it. The hon. member has never been sufficiently responsible to employ anybody.

Mr. Power: Were you ever prosecuted over your accommodation? If you were not you were warned.

Mr. EWAN: I take grave exception to the remarks of the hon. member for Baroona. Never in his lifetime could the hon. member aspire to become an employer, yet he has the temerity to criticise me as an employer.

Mr. Power: If you were not proceeded against you were warned.

Mr. EWAN: That is untrue and it is the actions of such men as the hon. member for Baroona that made it possible for road transport to make inroads into railway revenue. I refer to the previous Government's sanction of the Railway Union's ill-advised refusal to carry wool during the illegal shearing strike. It was not their strike; they had nothing to do with it. The Government, of which the hon. member for Baroona was a member, sanctioned the refusal to carry wool and that enabled the road hauliers to do the business that should have been done by the railways. It is no use saying that the Commissioner or members of the staff were responsible. The action of the unions received the sanction of the Government to which the hon. member for Baroona belonged. The hon. member will say that it was the then Minister for Transport, Mr. Duggan, who was responsible. Mr. Duggan was only carrying out the policy of the Government of the day.

I wish to pay a tribute to some of the men employed by the department. The District Superintendent at Roma, Mr. Buchanan, is a man of culture and ability who is ready to assist in every way. If the Commissioner has many other district superintendents of his calibre he is very fortunate. In the Minister we have a man whose vision and capabilities are such that he will bring credit not only to the Government, but to the State and the people of Queensland who can now look forward with confidence to a new era in railway administration.

Mr. WOOD (North Toowoomba—Leader of the Opposition) (3.30 p.m.): As the Minister said when he introduced the Estimates, he is in an entirely unaccustomed role. He freely admits that from this side of the Chamber, year after year, he directed a barrage of criticism at the Government and the Minister, the administration and the Railway Department generally. The portfolio has never been regarded as one that leads along the road of popularity. The Minister will frankly admit that his present role is infinitely more difficult than the role he

previously discharged. He spoke of references to "Hansard" and previous statements made by him, and referred also to his vulnerability. Even a cursory examination of "Hansard" last year will reveal his extreme vulnerability.

I think all hon. members will concede that there has been no drastic change in railway policy. We have seen no drift for the worse and no radical change for the better. I think I can state fairly that the policy of the Government seems to be the same as that of the previous Government. If that policy was bad, the same evils exist; if the policy was good, the good points are being perpetuated. There has been no major change from the policy of the previous Government.

In any basic consideration of the problem it must be conceded that the days of construction of new lines by States from their own resources have passed. Although the need for new lines is recognised, the State with its limited resources cannot assume the burden of construction. The Minister recognises that new lines are necessary. This is the statement he made in 1952, "If we are to build new railways, those railways must run further into the North and further into the West." In view of the tremendous increase in costs of production, I think all hon. members will agree that a new line of 100, 200 or 300 miles would only be possible with considerable assistance from the Commonwealth Government. If the Government were committed to railway construction of, say, £100,000,000, its resources would be strained to the limit. We should concentrate on improving the standard of existing facilities. There are two great problems side by side. The first is to continue the programme of modernisation. In his remarks the Minister conceded the very valuable work done by dieselisation and the provision of air-conditioned trains by the previous Government. I know he would agree that we cannot afford to rest on that; we must continue with modernisation. We have a heavy responsibility on our shoulders in carrying on with the programme of modernisation but we want to make certain that we do not allow the older services to drift—those services running to many parts of the State using the older type of trains. I have in mind one in which I travelled when taking part in the Flinders by-election. It was called 19 Down and it was almost a nightmare to travel on that train. Whilst we continue with modernisation at the same time the maximum effort must be put into lifting the standard of the old-time trains.

Mr. Chalk: During the brief time you were absent from the Chamber I dealt with that.

Mr. WOOD: The Minister will agree that the task is a difficult one. We on this side appreciated the difficulty whilst we were in Government. The fact that we are now, for the time being, in Opposition does not lessen our appreciation of the great

difficulty. We will have a railway system for many years to come and those difficulties will not become easier.

One of the greatest problems facing the Government is that of steady improvement in the older services provided by the older-type wagons, carriages and engines other than the new diesels and B. 18½'s. These are gradually getting worse and worse. It would be a mistake to bend all effort towards improving air-conditioned trains and the existing diesel electrics at the same time causing a grave lag in the repair of the earlier model trains and engines. That is going to be one of the hardest problems the Minister has to solve. Each year it will become progressively more acute.

I remind the Minister of a remark by one of the railway experts on the Government side, the hon. member for Chermiside. He came to Toowoomba during the election campaign and gave some very good advice to the Minister. He hailed him as the new Minister for Transport. In that he was correct because his remarks have come true. The hon. member for Chermiside offered the Minister advice. He said that when Mr. Chalk became the Minister for Transport he should burn half of the derelict engines. I think that was his statement.

A Government Member: Do you believe it?

Mr. WOOD: It was reported in the Press and I always believe the Press. It was an extremely foolish statement. He said that the Minister should burn the derelict engines. It was unnecessary to say that the derelicts should be scrapped. I took his statement to mean that half the engines of this State were derelict and should be scrapped. Whether my interpretation is correct I do not know. I repeat that the hon. member for Chermiside said that half the engines of the State were derelict and should be scrapped. I ask the Minister to tell the Committee what steps have been taken to overcome the lag that has existed for some years in repairs to engines. I was absent from the Chamber, by necessity, for some minutes when he spoke and he might have made reference to it then.

In considering the programme of improvement in the railways several factors must be kept in mind.

We can never be satisfied with the railway system until certain standards have been attained. The first of those is faster travel consistent with safety. That applies throughout Australia. Generally speaking, compared with the better types of Continental and American trains, the railway speeds in this country are slow. The reasons for that in Queensland have been stressed very often. They are the narrow gauge, the light rails, and the condition of the tracks and bridges. Even to add a few miles an hour to the average speed of Queensland's trains would probably cost many millions of pounds in

the relaying of tracks, the strengthening of bridges, and so on.

Until we can get fast, safe traffic combined with clean and comfortable travel, we can never rest content. No-one could take exception to the standard of cleanliness and comfort provided on the air-conditioned trains, but I refer again to the train in which I travelled from Hughenden to Julia Creek, 19-Down. It would be hard to imagine anything slower, dirtier or more uncomfortable, and many residents of the area are forced to use it frequently. Apart from maintaining a high standard of comfort and cleanliness on the air-conditioned trains, we have the very real problem of improving the comfort and cleanliness of the older types of train. We must also aim at a better service for goods and livestock than has previously existed in Queensland.

Mr. Aikens: How can you have fast trains when they have to stop every seven miles at an unattended staff station to change the staff?

Mr. WOOD: It will be very difficult; it involves problems related to signals in addition to the other problems that I have outlined. But when we talk of improving the railways we must aim at faster travel. In very few places are there double tracks; most are single tracks. As I say, to improve the speed of the trains would involve the spending of many millions of pounds. The difficulties facing the Minister are not new; they have faced every Minister who has held the portfolio.

I refer hon. members now to the following remarks by the Minister in 1952—

“I believe very sincerely that the higher-ups are able to successfully cover up by their conferences many of the mistakes they have made and are continuing to make. I venture to prophesy that what will happen will be this: the rank and file will pay the penalty if there is any economy to be effected.”

It is a well-known fact that from year to year in his speeches in the Chamber, the Minister has repeatedly attacked what he calls the higher-ups in the administration of the Railway Department.

Mr. Aikens: And his attacks were most vitriolic.

Mr. WOOD: Of course they were. When he was speaking this morning I said by interjection, “Has there been any change in the way they have carried out the policy over the last two, three, four or five years?” He replied, “No, there has been no change.”

The Minister should give us his own opinions on the efficiency of the so-called higher-ups. I am prompted to ask because of the remarks of the hon. member for Tablelands, which I shall come to shortly.

Last year, when speaking on the Commissioner's report, the hon. member for Lockyer, now the Minister, had this to say—

“I have read the report and the only conclusion I can come to is that it is a slight review of the inglorious achievements of the department over the past 12 months. He (the Commissioner) made no endeavour to point out any basis on which this instrumentality should be run in the future. All that can be said of the Commissioner's comment is that he presented a defeatist report.”

Early in last year's Address-in-Reply debate he had this to say—

“I have always had a very high regard for the Commissioner of Railways as a soldier—but probably I have not had such a high regard for him for some of his actions in railway administration.”

In view of those opinions of the Commissioner expressed by the Minister when in Opposition last year, how does he propose to make a success of his job unless his opinions of his chief administrative officer have changed in the meantime?

However, it would be interesting to learn whether there is to be a radical change in departmental administration with, for instance, the Commissioner being superseded by a board. Speaking on the Railway Vote last year, the present Deputy Premier had something to say that would indicate the possibility of such a change. He said this—

“My final suggestion is positive. Trans-Australian Airlines is operated by a Commission of five people presumably chosen because they are experts in their own field. I believe the Minister would probably agree that the time has come to hand the administration of his department to a Commission of experienced people. I believe such a Commission would reduce our present losses tremendously. T.A.A. were losing money heavily, but the Commission has overcome that. I am sure that if the Government appointed a Commission of five or seven business men along the lines of the airlines commission it would be a sound step. I commend the idea to the Minister.”

That was supported in the debate by the present Minister for Justice.

As the Minister for Transport has in previous debates expressed his dissatisfaction with the present Commissioner for Railways and two of his ministerial colleagues have come out in favour of a board to run the railways, we may expect some radical changes in the future.

During the Address-in-Reply debate the hon. member for Tablelands suggested that the Commissioner for Railways should be sacked and replaced by an efficient business man. He urged the Government to review the appointment of the Commissioner, who, he said, had neglected his duty. We of the Opposition dissociate ourselves entirely from

those comments of the hon. member for Tablelands. It is all right and quite convenient for the Minister when asked if he agrees with that to say that the hon. member for Tablelands has the right to express his own views and that later, if necessary, the Minister will give his views. This is a more serious matter than simply whether or not he has the right to express his own views. I freely concede that he has that right. However, there is no more experienced public servant in Queensland than the Commissioner for Railways and he has been severely attacked by a member of the Government Party who suggests he should be sacked. He exercised the right to express his opinion and no-one on this side of the Chamber criticises him for having exercised it. But, in view of the criticisms by the Minister in previous years—and not with the idea of embarrassing any member of his party, for the matter is bigger than that—the onus rests on him to state freely to the Chamber and to the public whether the chief administrative officer of the Department of Railways still enjoys the confidence of the Government. I say quite frankly that until the Minister makes such a declaration the Commissioner for Railways is under a cloud. He has been attacked by a member of the Government Party—not a member of the Opposition—who says that he should be sacked. He repeated some of his statements in the form of a question last week. Indeed, he asked a series of questions about the tenure of his office and what provisions there were for sacking him, or terminating his appointment, as he so euphemistically put it.

There is a far bigger principle involved than the right of any hon. member to express his opinion. The principle involved is whether the Government should allow their senior public servants to be attacked if they believe the attacks are ill-founded. If the Government believe that what the hon. member for Tablelands says is correct they should say so. No hon. member on this side of the Chamber would expect any Government to retain in their employ a man who had proved himself to be inefficient and unable to run such a big service. At the same time, in fairness to the Commissioner, if these things are wrong the onus is on the Minister to say so in the Chamber. Let me say that I consider the Commissioner to be an extremely hard-working, trustworthy and efficient officer.

Reference was made to speeding up traffic. I doubt if I will be able to develop this matter fully but in his annual report for 1956-1957, the Commissioner said that the Inventions and Suggestions Board had received 340 suggestions during the year and bonuses ranging from 10s. 6d. to 25 guineas had been awarded. Let me instance a suggestion that was brought before the Board by a departmental officer. The terms of the reply were most disquieting. It would take 10 minutes to read the suggestion through but briefly the official submitted the suggestion that much of the livestock traffic

from Gympie and surrounding areas to Cannon Hill could be recaptured from road transport if a fast diesel service were instituted. In reply to an interjection of mine the Minister said that a diesel service could recapture much of the traffic, particularly on long runs. Admittedly Gympie to Cannon Hill is not a long run. The officer pointed out that previously whereas seven trucks a week had been run there were now only two. He referred to the loss of condition in beasts if they were too long in transit. He pointed out that if the traffic could be recaptured by fast diesel service it would mean an increase in railway freights of £18,000 a year. I am not criticising so much the reply that it could not be done but the defeatist attitude that characterised it. Listen to the reply—

“In view of the longer distance by rail, and consequently a longer travelling period, the Department would not be able to compete with the road transport for this business.”

That was the defeatist attitude towards an officer of the department who had examined the problem and submitted a suggestion which, if accepted, would bring to the department an extra £18,000 a year in income. The reply was that the railways could not hope to compete with road transport.

(Time expired.)

Mr. WATSON (Mulgrave) (3.56 p.m.): I wish to join with members of the Committee on both sides of the Chamber in extending sincere congratulations to the Minister. I had the privilege on a previous occasion of sitting on the Opposition benches when the Minister was a most constructive critic. Today we had the privilege of listening to such an interesting and instructive report from him that Opposition members will have difficulty in offering reasonable criticism of it.

Mr. Davies: Do you still believe that the railways are in a deplorable state as you said on the Address in Reply?

Mr. WATSON: Some gentlemen are always looking for information when I am addressing the Chamber. I am going to be like a solicitor and charge for my advice. The Minister is sincere in his efforts to give satisfaction not only to the Government but to the people generally. I wish to refer to an excellent service given to the people of the North by the Minister and the Commissioner. Owing to the severity of the drought the milk position was very acute in the Far North. After receiving information from our factories I made representation to the Railway Department for assistance in getting milk to the North. I approached the Minister and the Commissioner and put the position before them. They readily appreciated the position and said they were prepared to give a large freight concession for the transport of milk if it was procurable. I was able to arrange for 3,525 gallons of milk to be sent weekly to

North Queensland and I advised the people in the North of the railway concession and the availability of milk.

Mr. Graham: Did it go by rail?

Mr. WATSON: It went by rail. After learning of the position the people of Cairns said that if the railways were good enough to give a concession, the carters would cart the milk free to the factory and the factory would sell the milk at cost price. It was owing to the concession by the Railway Department that we were able to supply milk to the people of Cairns and south as far as Mt. Isa. The tendency in recent years has been to increase freight charges in an effort to offset losses. This will have to be considered by the Minister. It is gratifying to know that in the first three months of his term of office the Minister has been able to report a substantial improvement in railway finance. If that continues, by the end of the year the Government will be able to consider not increases as in the past but a reduction of freight charges. It is necessary and most urgent.

I have discussed the subject with hon. members interested in the sugar industry. Freight charges on cane in some instances amount to approximately £1 a ton. I am speaking particularly of the Invieta area. That is a tremendous burden. The Minister realises as I do that a reduction in cane freight charges is badly needed. It is an undue hardship, particularly on growers, and at the present time we are more interested in growers than in millers.

The Commissioner's report reveals that in 1955-1956 there were 5,738,049 passengers and that the figure dropped in 1956-1957 to 5,334,063, or in round figures by 403,000. As a result of the increase in fares in August, 1956, although there was a reduction of 403,000 in the number of passengers carried, the fare income climbed from £2,391,299 to £2,608,625. There we have the sorry spectacle of an increase in fares and a reduction of 400,000 in the number of passengers carried. Fewer passengers had to pay more in fares. That does not encourage the use of rail facilities. There is not too much competition from the shipping companies, but air travel provides serious competition. Despite the higher fares for air travel, the quicker service, cleanliness and other facilities attract many passengers.

Mr. Hanlon: Air travel can be obtained at short notice.

Mr. WATSON: That is another factor.

Mr. Davies: Passenger traffic has dropped 40 per cent. in nine years.

Mr. WATSON: That may be so, but it cannot be denied that an increase in fares has brought about a reduction in the number of passengers on the railways and an increase in the number travelling by air. Increased railway fares means stronger competition from airlines. The Minister said that he was

going to seek help from us; he asked for general observations. I understood him to mean suggestions of value to the public of Queensland generally.

Mr. Walsh: Do you still want that nurse on the train?

Mr. WATSON: I should like to reply to the hon. member for Bundaberg. I am sure the Minister will give me reasonable support for what I am about to put before him. We in the far North are endeavouring to create industries in competition with the South. I am given to understand that an article can be conveyed by rail from Brisbane to Cairns cheaper than the same article can be freighted back to Brisbane. There must be some answer to it. I instance the position of a bedding manufacturer. His goods can be brought from Brisbane to Cairns at a cheaper rate than they can be brought from the North to the South. If it is a matter of competition it is difficult for us to attract industries to the North, particularly when we find that more favoured treatment is given to the South against the North.

There is another matter that is causing my constituents and the whole of the North a great deal of concern and I am sure that my remarks will be confirmed by the hon. members for Cairns and Cook. I have been watching the method that the department adopts in regard to students travelling each year on vacation to the South. Probably the Minister will tell me that they travel on concession tickets and that it is not to be expected that they get priority of seating on the Sunlander. I dissociate myself with that statement. I do not like to see our students herded like cattle on a particular train. This is what happened during the previous Government's term. I give an example. On the last occasion when the students left Cairns, the department attached an old dog-box from which there was no means of access to the Sunlander itself. If the Minister has made the observations I have, he will find that from Cairns to Townsville there are several vacant seats on the Sunlander. The 23 children who were herded into the dog-box could have travelled to Townsville by the Sunlander and there joined the second division.

Mr. Adair: That is certainly right.

Mr. WATSON: I have a high regard for the students, the sons and daughters of working-class people. In this instance, 23 boys and one small lass travelled in this dog-box. I do not think that is right. I am again placing the matter before the Minister because I think he will take a realistic view of what this means to the parents of the children. They are up in arms about it. I promised to approach the Minister and I said I would raise the matter on the floor of this Chamber. I feel that while there are vacant seats on the Sunlander to Townsville, the children should travel by the Sunlander. They could then become passengers on the second division

from Townsville south. Why put on this dog-box when we can give them reasonable travel to Townsville?

Another matter was brought to my notice by a lengthman the other day and it calls for investigation. The department is always looking for ways and means of reducing costs. In the days of the horse and cow it was necessary for the railway from Brisbane to Cairns to be securely fenced. However, it has been brought to my notice by a railway employee that with the introduction of mechanisation in primary industries, particularly the sugar industry, rarely is a beast seen on the roads. To prove my case, almost every cane-grower whose farm abuts on a main highway is pulling down his fences. Yet in those areas, year after year, the Railway Department spends huge sums of money in maintaining fences along the railway lines. They could be removed. In addition to preventing the spread of grass seeds, it would result in better visibility at railway crossings. Although "Stop" signs are erected at most of them, it is difficult for a motorist to see the railway line because of the guinea grass, panicum grass, and so on.

I have always said that the railways should not be expected to make profits or pay dividends, an expression that one hon. member used the other day. They are a public utility and should be regarded as such. They must grant concessional freights where they have to meet competition from shipping; they must help certain industries by concessional freights, particularly those that have to overcome competition in selling goods for export; they must give concessional freights where there is competition from road transport; they must also give concessions in areas where they want to secure trade. The Minister and the Commissioner have a very responsible task. It is all very well to ask for concessional freights on this and that, but we must be realistic. The railways must be run economically.

Mr. Davies: Do you think that the Commissioner does a good job?

Mr. WATSON: The hon. member for Maryborough is trying to sidetrack me into a discussion on another matter. I shall answer him if I have the time. I have had some experience of the problems of administration, and I am fully aware of what faces the Commissioner. If I have the time, I shall answer the hon. member's question.

The main purpose of the railways is to give useful service to the public. They are there not to earn dividends but to help the State's industries, particularly those with an export trade. They must also grant concessional freights where they are faced with road competition.

The railing of milk from the Tableland has been mentioned in the Chamber. That is one industry that concessional freights have helped considerably.

Mr. Davies: Do you think that private enterprise could run the railways better than the Government can?

Mr. WATSON: That is a very pertinent question, and if I have the time to answer it I shall. In many parts of the world private enterprise has made a success of railways. I daresay it could make a profit from them, but they may not serve the very useful purpose that they do today.

I have asked the Minister to consider raising the level of the platforms at some stations. He says that at this stage it is economically impossible to give satisfaction to all the people who want that done. At the smaller stations one has to be almost an acrobat to board the Sunlander. If the station platform were raised perhaps 18 inches, there would be no need to alter the roof of the station. It would be a boon to elderly people in particular. It is a sorry spectacle to see someone standing behind a dear old lady pushing her up into the Sunlander.

Mr. Thackeray: What would be the difference in height between the steps of the Sunlander and the steps of the old Sunshine Express?

Mr. WATSON: It is not so much the difference in height as that on the old carriages the steps came out at an angle whereas the Sunlander steps come straight down. The passenger has to pull himself up or be pushed up. It is deplorable that elderly people should be put to so much trouble getting into the carriages.

Hon. members have spoken of competition. When a plane arrives at the Brisbane airport a beautiful staircase is pushed out to it so that passengers may alight in comfort. In America the railways have small staircases taken out to the carriages. Though Queensland's railway service is equal to anything in the world attention might be given to this simple matter and I commend the suggestion to the Minister.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) (4.16 p.m.): We have heard a good deal from new hon. members about the railways and how they should be run. It is well known that ever since the railways were established they have been used as a political instrument or, if I may use the cliché, a political football. In certain respects, that is as it should be. The railways were laid not so much as a business proposition as to develop the country. Today many branch lines are not paying but without them the areas that they serve would fall into desuetude and decay. Though members of the Government and perhaps some members of the Opposition talk of the need to improve the railways by running them as a business concern, I challenge them to give the Commissioner the full right to run the railways as such.

Mr. Low: As they should be, too.

Mr. AIKENS: There speaks an hon. member who represents people who are the first squealers and the biggest spongers on

the Railway Department in Queensland. When times are good, when seasons are lush, they do not want the railways. When there is no drought and they can afford to pay the exorbitant charges demanded by road transport for the haulage of their goods, the people whom the hon. member for Cooroora represents say, "To hell with the railways! Scrap them! Pull them up! Stack them on the sidelines!" But when a drought comes along they do not ask the road transport companies for freight concessions; they do not ask them to carry starving stock, or fodder for starving stock, or milk for the people in the outlying areas of the State at a cut rate. Not on your life, Mr. Taylor! They sponge on the Railway Department. They run along to the minister in charge of the railways, whoever he might be and of whatever political complexion he might be, and ask him for concessions to save the industry. Without the Railway Department there would be no cattle industry in Queensland today; without the Railway Department there would be practically no grazing industry or shearing industry in Australia today; and without the Railway Department there would be no sugar industry in Queensland today, as we at present know them. The Railway Department has carried many of these industries for years, and carried them at a great financial loss. It is right for the department to do it because it is right in my opinion for the Railway Department to be used as an instrument of development of the State. When these so-called businessmen talk about running the Railway Department on business lines they know that they speak with their tongues in their cheeks. They know that they are indulging in oleaginous sophistry; they know they are just playing to the gallery. When things are bad the first man they run to is the Minister for Transport to ask for various freight concessions.

I am not paying any particular regard to the present holders of the administrative positions in the department because they are probably no better or no worse than the administrative officers that the department has had over the years, but unfortunately many of the administrative officers of the department have not grasped the real problem confronting them when they have taken over their high administrative positions. They have been purely and simply railway-men in a groove. How often have we seen men appointed to the position of General Manager who have made no attempt to establish good public relations with the customers or to build up the department's trade and revenue? I have one case in mind, and I am quite sure that other railway men could tell of others. This General Manager busied himself every morning with the engine-men's Form 36, the daily running sheet. He would go through them with a magnifying glass to see if he could pin them down to five minutes lost here or five minutes lost there. After spending a couple of hours on Forms 36 he would have the guards' time and occurrence sheets brought

in and then spend another couple of hours on them. He was not concerned about building up trade and revenue for the department; he was purely and simply a railway-man in a groove. Unfortunately that type of administration has been the old man of the sea on the neck of the Railway Department for so many years. There has been for years, and still is, a crying need for railway administrative officers to get out to the public, to mix with the public to find out what the public want, and above all things to give the public what they want. I was a railway-man, I spent 27 years in the railway service, I am still a member of the Australian Railways Union, a paying member at that, and I know and the rank and file of the department also know, that if there is no custom for the railways, if there is no freight, if there are no passengers, then there are no trains; if there are no trains there is no work. While they do to the limit of their ability the best they possibly can to see that the railways continue as they should, unfortunately those at the top are not going out and getting the freight and passengers that should be got if the administrative officers would be administrative officers instead of merely railway-men in a groove. In many respects and in many divisions the Railway Department is not getting a fair go from the Transport Department inasmuch as many road hauliers today do not operate within the terms of their licenses but operate under Rafferty rules. They run anywhere they like, carry any goods they like, and pick the eyes out of the railway freight. Strangely enough, there are no prosecutions and no restrictions placed upon these Rafferty rules operators of road transport systems running parallel to the railways or in competition with the railways. Nobody could have any legal objection to a road transport operator acting within the limits of his licence. But I suggest to the Minister—and he is no fool—that he knows as well as I do of many road transport operators in Queensland who regard their licences purely and simply as licences to operate under Ned Kelly rules for any traffic they can get and to run in competition with the Railway Department under any circumstances.

I brought it up in the House last year. I put the case up to the last Minister in regard to a road transport company operating under Rafferty rules between Townsville and Ingham. He admitted he knew all about it and promised to do something about it. To the best of my knowledge and the knowledge of railway officers in the North who are vitally concerned nothing was done, not only with this road operator but other road operators in the North. I have suggested in this Chamber before that we should have three Commissioners, and that one should be a representative of the railway unions. I suggest to the Minister that he put into operation as quickly as practicable the election pledge that they would work in close co-operation and conformity with the railway union

leaders in an endeavour to solve the problems of the Railway Department. If the hon. gentleman takes the railway union leaders into his confidence and meets them in conference they will probably tell him of some of the things I have mentioned in this House from time to time, and probably tell him much more than that. Once they realise that the Minister is sincere in his desire to make the railways a place of permanent employment for railwaymen and to develop and expand the system in this State they will give him all the co-operation he needs. They will be certain to demand—and the hon. gentleman will realise they will be just in that demand—that the wages and conditions of the railwaymen be not sacrificed in order that the problems of the department might be solved.

The hon. member for Mulgrave touched, much too briefly—probably because he had no definite knowledge of the subject—on the way that the Railway Department has been used as an official instrument in regard to the lack of development in the North, or I might say, used as an official instrument to retard and arrest the development of the North. Pages of northern newspapers have been full of it from time to time. I have quoted the preferential freight rates granted by the Government in order to stifle and strangle industry in North Queensland. Even after industries in North Queensland had been established railway rates have been so juggled that northern industries were strangled and stifled and had to close down; and that was in the interests of southern business. The Minister need not believe me. If the hon. gentleman looks up "Hansard" he will see a particularly fine speech on this subject by the present Minister for Mines and Development, the hon. member for Mirani, who gave an instance at Mackay where an industry had been stifled by political juggling of freight rates against that industry. If new northern industries are to be established, if this Government are to do the things they promised to do, railway freight rates will play by far the biggest part. Railway freight rates should be arranged not to stifle northern industry or drive it out of business. If the Government are sincere in their policy of decentralisation, railway freight rates will be deliberately used as an incitement and encouragement to people to establish new industries and maintain industries that are already there.

Mr. Walsh: You are not going to mention tapering rates.

Mr. AIKENS: The ex-Minister for Transport, the hon. member for Bundaberg, said, "You are not going to mention tapering rates." On one occasion I asked the previous Minister how many northern cattle came to Cannon Hill in one year, and he gave me the astonishing information that in one year 68,000 head of northern cattle which could have been and would have been killed in North Queensland meatworks, were

sent to Cannon Hill. They came south only because of the way the preferential freight rates had been juggled to get them here. The hon. member for Bundaberg knows what these rates are called, tapering rail freights on cattle. On one occasion the hon. member for Bundaberg dealt with the specific case of cattle coming from Gilliat to Cannon Hill. Hon. members will be able to find his speech in "Hansard." He said, "On the latter portion of the journey we carry the cattle practically free." That was done in order to stifle the northern meatworks and so that the cattle would be sent to Cannon Hill.

Mr. Walsh: For the last 400 miles, compared with the rates in New South Wales they were carried virtually for nothing.

Mr. AIKENS: I am not concerned about the hon. member's qualification of his remark. I looked up his speech in "Hansard" at the time and I used it extensively in campaign advertisements. I think it was the 1953 campaign. That is an instance of action against the northern cattle industry. Thousands of northern cattle that could and should have been killed in the northern meatworks were brought to Cannon Hill. The previous Government deliberately juggled the rail freights to get the cattle down here and deprive North Queensland meat-workers and the people of the area of the benefits that would have accrued from the slaughtering of the cattle in the North.

Not only will it be necessary to readjust rail freights to give the North simple justice, but, if the Government honestly believe in decentralisation of industry, it will be necessary to readjust rail freights so that the industries in the North and potential industries that may consider going there will be granted protection against southern competitors in the same field.

I suggest that this is a matter the Minister should deal with on a high level. He should discuss the subject with members of the Cabinet, find out the industries in the North that need rail freight protection, and the preferential rail freights that are required by new industries. If the Government sincerely believe in decentralisation of industry and population and development for North Queensland, they will grant rail freight concessions that will enable the North to come into its own.

It is useless to talk of the Railway Department running an efficient service if inefficient conditions are allowed to continue. I interjected when the Leader of the Opposition said that we must have faster trains. The hon. members for Mackay and Norman and I were enginemen in the department and we know the simple truth that there cannot be fast trains if they have to stop every 7 miles at an unattended staff station to change the staff or ticket. The Railway Department, with its penny-wise-and-pound-foolish policy, is trying to effect economies at the wrong end. My rough estimate is that today there are hundreds of unattended staff

stations in Queensland where even the Sunlander, the crack mail train, has to stop. The fireman has to hold the points for a crossing if it is a down train. Incidentally, trains run down from Brisbane to Cairns and up from Cairns to Brisbane. The fireman or driver has to perform all the work necessary for crossing a train, if one has to be crossed. Passengers ask "What the hell is the delay for now?" Even if the train gets a through run, the driver or fireman has to get off the train, go into the office, ring Control and find out what Control wants, collect the staff or ticket, and then proceed.

Mr. Walsh: They may have to pick up a single passenger.

Mr. AIKENS: They may have to pick up a bale of goatskins or a billy-can of eggs. I am speaking of places where trains are not supposed to pick up passengers, and of the delay occasioned by unattended staff stations.

Mr. Chalk: Do you want staff at those stations?

Mr. AIKENS: If all the stations from here to Cairns were staffed and the scheme was given a trial for six months, the Minister would be astonished at the increased speed of the trains between various places. I put up a suggestion before, when I think the hon. member for Bundaberg was Minister for Transport, and he agreed with me. It has to be a pretty good case before he would agree with me. All the lost time is not with the actual stopping but the stopping and starting. When running into a station at 30 miles an hour the driver commences to shut off before he comes to the station and gradually brings the train to a standstill. The train might only stop a minute at the station, but when it is allowed to go it takes the driver another four or five minutes to run to a speed of 30 miles an hour again. To stop at a station for one minute means a loss of from seven to nine minutes.

Mr. Walsh: They have to slow down, stop, and then get momentum back.

Mr. AIKENS: In other words, deceleration and acceleration. But you cannot tell the ordinary railway official that. He seems to think that you can run along at 30 miles an hour, stop all of a sudden, and then open the regulator and just as suddenly jump into 30 miles an hour. If you told the ordinary railway official that you lost seven or eight minutes every time you stopped he would think you were "nuts" or a member of the Government.

Efficient gear is necessary, and we have not efficient gear. I suggest to the Minister that he take the first opportunity of going through the Townsville workshops to have a look at the shocking administration that has gone on and the degeneration and decay that has been allowed to take place in the Townsville iron workshop. I know that I have not the time to give all instances, but

I give this outstanding example of railway administration. The Government decided to erect a bogie shop in the south yard at Townsville and rushed steel and material up for the job. It was so urgent that they paid the men overtime to unload the material. Having paid overtime to unload it, they left it lying on the grass to rust for about three years before they started to erect the shop. That is only one example but scores of others could be quoted by any railwayman who knows what he is talking about. There must be co-operation with the men. There must be contented railwaymen and good gear for them to work with and good conditions under which to work. It is no use saying, "We will run the railways from the top office and don't care what the locomotives are like, what the workshops are like or what the road bed is like or what the permanent way is like." I hope that one of the first jobs of the Minister is to ensure that discontent does not exist in the railway service. He has to face legacies left him by the previous Government. One of them is the shocking racket of the robbery of railwaymen's long service leave. I will sum up by giving an instance. Assuming that the hon. member for Burdekin and I joined the Railway Department 20 years ago. At the end of 20 years the hon. member and I, if we retired from the Railway Department, would be entitled under railway regulations to 4½ months' long service leave. If I during that 20 years' service had occasion to take one week of long-service leave because of illness to myself or a member of the family or for any other reason, when the hon. member for Burdekin and I retired at the end of the 20 years the hon. member would get 4½ months' long service leave but I would get only 12 weeks. I would be robbed of five or six weeks' leave because I was unfortunate enough to have taken out one week's leave during my term of employment.

Dr. Noble: You would be entitled to sick leave during your service.

Mr. AIKENS: I am assuming I did not have any sick leave to take. Railwaymen often exhaust their sick leave and must have recourse to long service leave. If I took out one week I would cease to be a railway man for long-service leave purposes. I would come under the general provisions of the Long Service Leave Act and would be entitled not to 18 weeks' long-service leave for 20 years' service, but to 13 weeks less the week that I had taken, in other words, 12 weeks. I would be robbed of five weeks because I had been unfortunate enough to have taken one week's leave. That is a legacy from Mr. Duggan, yet some railway men consider that he was a good Minister. I do not. I have never had any illusions about Mr. Duggan as a railway administrative officer. Some of the things that he did to railway men would make you cry. I have not the time to tell hon. members how he robbed many railway men of sick leave that was due to them. One

man with about 48 weeks' sick leave due to him unfortunately broke his leg and was taken to hospital. Two days later when he was still only semi-conscious, the department sent a man to his bedside to sack him. In that way they "diddled" him out of his 48 weeks' sick leave. Although some of my union officials think that Duggan was a good railway administrator, I would not have him at any cost.

We hear a good deal about what is going on in the Railway Department. The other day a railway man in Hughenden was dismissed for being drunk on the job, and he appealed to the Railway Appeal Board. In passing, I hope that during the present session of Parliament I might have an opportunity of saying something about Mr. Mick Hickey, the Chairman of the Railway Appeal Board.

(Time expired.)

Mr. THACKERAY (Keppel) (4.42 p.m.): The Railway Department's loss from Consolidated Revenue for 1956-1957, is shown in the annual report as £4,579,378. A good deal of attention is given by the capitalist Press to losses on the Queensland railways, but we hear very little about the losses on the railway systems of the other States. These are the losses incurred by them for the last financial year—

	£ millions
New South Wales	9.3
Victoria	8.2
Queensland	4.2
South Australia	3.9
Western Australia	5.9
Tasmania	1.4

Those figures include debts written off, estimated depreciation and subsidies from various State funds—a total of £32,900,000.

I expected the hon. member for Mundingburra to elaborate on the figures for North Queensland. However, as he did not, I shall take the limelight from him. In 1956-1957 the net earnings for Central Queensland were £695,948. Only three divisions in the State showed a profit. The Commissioner should make a close examination of the southern division, where the Queen Street politicians live and where the greatest deficiency results.

Mr. Aikens: The northern division carries the whole of the railway service.

Mr. THACKERAY: Apart from the Innisfail-Mourilyan tramline, the northern and central divisions were the only ones that paid.

Mr. Coburn: Have a look at the figures for Mackay.

Mr. THACKERAY: For the hon. member's information, Mackay is in the Central Division.

Mr. Coburn: No, it is not. It is a separate division.

Mr. THACKERAY: That is what I said—Central Division.

Mr. Dewar: He said a separate division, not Central Division.

Mr. THACKERAY: Anyway, the Minister for Transport said today that he will do all that he can to make the railways pay. The six States of Australia have been unable to come anywhere near making them pay but if the Minister in Queensland can wipe out the deficit and make the railways pay, while maintaining full employment and present subsidies, we will recommend him for a knighthood next year.

Mr. Walsh: It looks like the hon. member is prepared to break with the A.L.P. platform to give the Minister a knighthood.

Mr. THACKERAY: With certain provisos. It will be nearly impossible for him to make them pay.

During the election campaign I said on the public platform that I was opposed to freight concessions. On reviewing the matter and studying the railway-men's point of view, I have learned that if concessions are not continued, for instance, to Mt. Isa Mines there will be retrenchment. Under Section 92 of the Commonwealth Constitution road transport could come in from Central Australia to take products from Mt. Isa. I should rather have the concessions than retrenchment.

Country Party members are to the fore only when rebates, freight concessions and consideration of starving stock are required. Until a fortnight ago when the drought broke, they were only too pleased to accept freight concessions and Government hand-outs for drought relief, yet they say the railways should pay.

Earlier I asked the Minister if it was his intention to retain the 40-hour week. In the next two or three months State revenues will decrease, more especially in the Central and Northern Divisions with the sugar season nearly over. Will the Minister give an assurance that certain guarantee time will have to be paid? He will not require men to take their long-service leave to offset the 40-hour week? Or will he give an assurance that an application will not be made to the Court to put the axe to the 40-hour week for railway-men? They are very concerned about it.

Railway-men are concerned, too, about the Government's irresponsible election promises, one of the most drastic of which was the extension of tax-free road transport limit for primary producers to 75 miles. In view of that many railway-men are worried about their future employment prospects. To them it is one of the bugbears of Government policy and I ask the Minister to study it and not be a party to it.

During the election campaign we heard much about railway workshops amenities.

Workshops come under the Shops and Factories Act, the Workers' Accommodation Act and other Acts but in Rockhampton at the moment I know of only two small bathrooms for all the workshop employees. There are no recreation rooms or other amenities for the workers. I can well remember the advertisements in the newspapers—'No more tents for men on the line. We shall provide you with bondwood huts. We shall give you all the necessary accommodation and lift your standards.' I am waiting to see that promise carried out. Everything reverts back to the availability of funds. I shall watch very closely over the next 12 months to see what the Minister does to implement his promises to railway workers in Central Queensland.

The hon. member for Mundingburra touched on a couple of matters I was going to deal with. I am concerned about the booking off of station masters over weekends and during the week after important trains have gone through. It all comes back to a matter of economy. Firemen are carrying out the stationmaster's work in addition to their own. Take for instance the crossing of trains under Rules 229 and 442. Say that the trains are to be crossed at Marlborough and the up train has not arrived. The down train shall stay at the home signal and the fireman shall walk into the station at Marlborough, put the up signal at danger, walk back to the points, unlock the points for the train to enter the yard and then walk down to the engine. All this takes approximately 15 minutes and sometimes nearly a mile has to be walked. The unions have made application to the Industrial Court for firemen to be issued with raincoats. They are expected to do all this work in pouring rain while control clerks are booked off between midday and 6 p.m. on Sunday. When the guards come in they have to ring up control, a man who controls three switchboards, to find out whether there is any alteration in the working. On Sunday a train might travel 100 miles on a set working and at every section he has to go in and check up because one man is trying to control three switchboards. It is an impossible task. In a previous debate I gave proof of how delays occurred. I know that a witch-hunt is on in Central Queensland to find out the employee who gave me my information. His head will be on the block.

Mr. Chalk: It is not a Labour Government in power.

Mr. THACKERAY: No, it is a Liberal Government. The Minister asked for constructive criticism. I will give him some more. I refer to the time of arrival of 241 Down in Rockhampton from Brisbane and the time of departure of 54 Up from Rockhampton to Winton. There is a delay of approximately five hours. People travelling from Brisbane to Rockhampton on a

Sunlander and out to Winton on the Midlander have to sit at the station for five hours waiting for a connection. I know that the train from the West arrives in Rockhampton somewhere about 10.40 a.m. I ask the Minister seriously to consider having the time of the departure of the train brought forward so that 54 Up will leave somewhere about 2.30 or 3 p.m. I realise that baggage has to be transferred. The introduction of Timken bearings is praiseworthy. I congratulate the Minister because I believe it is something that is warranted. I know the difficulties experienced during the years with grit getting into the boxes. It will ensure efficient running of the wagons and reduce the number of hot boxes.

I am interested in the new draw gear, but I am not sure what type the Minister intends to introduce. If it is to be similar to that on the air-conditioned trains going North it will cut out the surge, that the hon. member for Roma spoke about. In order to eliminate the surge the draw gears need shortening and the couplings tightening up. The suggestion of the hon. member for Mulgrave that a saving would be effected if railway fences were pulled down and stock allowed to graze along the railway line, is a ridiculous one. He said there were no stock along the northern line, but I have seen them there in as great numbers as they are in Central Queensland. The station master at Rockhampton is graded first class, and he should be able to carry out his duties from his office. Over the years this first-class station master has been going round telling junior officers—lad porters, shunters and train crews—what they should do. He should carry out his administrations from his office and with loud speakers he should be able to give instructions to his staff.

There is nothing in the Estimates about the new railway workshops at Parkhurst. All efforts appear to be centred on the new workshops at Banyo and Northgate. We are watching with interest the development of railway workshops in Central Queensland, which must be carried out for the benefit of the people in that area.

(Time expired.)

Mr. COBURN (Burdekin) (4.59 p.m.): At the outset I should like to congratulate the Minister for Transport on the honour conferred on him in his appointment to this important portfolio. It is a difficult one calling for all his energy and thought. I am sure the hon. gentleman will be equal to it. With other Ministers, I am sure every hon. member wishes him well, and hopes that his administration will be successful.

It is most interesting to read in the report of the Auditor-General that the book value of stores held by the Department of Railways at 30 June, 1957, had increased by £742,757 to £5,099,871.

The report also states—

“The amount of unproductive loan moneys required for stores held for use has considerably increased over the past seven years. At 30th June, 1950, the amount was £2,933,801, which rose to a peak figure of £7,483,076 at 30th June, 1953. Reductions totalling £1,712,122 had been made to 30th June, 1956, but in the past year there has been a considerable addition to the cost of stores held, and the reduction is now only £787,539. During the year, departments were requested to keep the holding of stores down to a minimum and guard against losses resulting from obsolescence and deterioration.”

The watch on stores should be very vigilant. The holding of stores much beyond the requirements of the department can cause considerable losses through obsolescence and deterioration. It is analogous with the position of a businessman who overstocks his shelves with goods that he cannot sell.

Mr. Windsor: And interest charges.

Mr. COBURN: That is so. The money used in building up unnecessary stocks could provide extra employment in the department. I understand that is one of the ways in which the Minister hopes to keep in constant employment the 800 men it was proposed to dismiss because of lack of funds. The instruction to keep down stores to a minimum is a wise one.

The report of Mr. Moriarty, the Commissioner for Railways, is very interesting. A perusal of the figures on pages 46 and 47 gives a good deal of material for thought. In the Southern Division for the financial year 1956-1957, the total loss was £2,254,565. That is the section based on Brisbane and includes Brisbane to Gympie, and Helidon branches, and also the South Coast line. In the Northern Division based on Townsville the profit of the Townsville section was £1,704,883. The revenue received in the Brisbane section was £8,029,377 and in the Townsville section it was £8,960,358, a difference in favour of the Townsville section of almost £1,000,000. The expenditure in the Brisbane section required to produce that revenue was £10,283,942, compared with £7,255,475 in the Townsville section, a difference of £3,000,000 in expenditure to produce almost £1,000,000 less revenue than that produced in the Townsville section. There must be some explanation for that.

Mr. Walsh: Obviously there would be considerably more freight in the North than in the Brisbane area.

Mr. COBURN: Then why should the expenditure in the Brisbane section be so much greater?

Mr. Hanlon: Because trains come into Brisbane from all over the State.

Mr. COBURN: Just as they come to Townsville from other parts, and so increase the revenue. In 1954-1955 a profit of

£380,536 was made at Toowoomba, but the Toowoomba section last year made a loss of £147,824. The difference over the period would amount to somewhere just over £4,000,000. In the Townsville section the profit for 1954-1955 was £1,222,869 and in 1956-1957 it had increased to £1,704,883.

Mr. Walsh: There is no Mt. Isa down this way.

Mr. COBURN: Why this increase in loss in the Toowoomba section? No-one could regard the Toowoomba section as an unprogressive area and one where there would not be a good deal of freight. There was an expenditure of almost £3,500,000.

Mr. Walsh: Road transport is taking bulk of freight to Toowoomba.

Mr. COBURN: Road transports are licensed by the Government to compete with the railways. If that is the case and the position is so bad in Toowoomba compared with the Townsville section, the sooner we give consideration to an alteration of the issue of transport licences the better for the finances of the Railway Department.

The Mackay section of the Central Division made £500,000 profit; the Rockhampton section made just over £500,000 profit and the Mourilyan-Innisfail tramway £21,286. Those are about the only ones in addition to the interstate railways where we can command a surplus on our workings. The southern losses based on the Brisbane section over the last five years have been almost £8,000,000; the profit in the northern section based on Townsville during the same period was £5,500,000. It would seem to me that either in the northern division we are paying freights higher than those which should be asked of us, or that the people in the South are not paying fares and freights commensurate with those charged in the North. One of the great bugbears amongst sugarcrowers of North Queensland has been the tremendous increase in freights on sugar and sugar-cane. The Invicta mill at Giru was probably hit the hardest in regard to freight increases which meant, I understand, an extra expenditure of about £40,000 on the sugar-cane transported from the Ingham Line to Invicta mill. The freight was equal to one-third of the value of the sugar-cane transported from the Ingham Line to that mill. It was a tremendous imposition not only on the directors of the mill but on the sugar-cane growers supplying that mill from the Ingham and Inkerman rail lines. There is such a big difference between the earning capacities in the Townsville and Brisbane sections, that there should be a concentration of thought on the Brisbane section to ascertain the cause or causes for this continuous substantial loss against the continuous substantial surpluses being obtained in the northern section. It must be carrying passengers and freight to get the revenue, and why that expenditure is so much higher than in the North to get the same revenue is something which calls for explanation

The Minister has admitted the necessity for an improvement in rail-motors. He has instanced some on the Downs that he considers outmoded, but I have not seen them. A very fine rail-motor runs daily between Home Hill and Townsville. The only fault with it, if fault can be found, is its ventilation. The windows cannot be opened to any extent, and in the hot northern climate conditions are very unpleasant when the rail-motor stops at a station. There are small fans in the corners, but they are so ineffectual that only those within a few yards of them can feel the benefit.

The rail-motor that runs daily from Proserpine to Townsville is something that any Railway Department should be heartily ashamed of. It is a bone-shaker and has been given all sorts of appropriate names that will not bear repeating here. The one from Bowen to Collinsville is worse. Requests have been made by organisations in those areas for the replacement of the rail-motors, and they are fully justified. They are very unpleasant to ride in; some of them shake so much that they make the passengers sick. I am sure that the Commissioner is fully seized of the necessity for new rail-motors on those lines. Shortage of money can be the only reason that has prevented him from providing them.

Another cause for complaint is the state of some railway platforms. The one at Ayr is surfaced with bitumen, and in the hot weather it becomes quite soft. When the iron-tired trolleys are loaded with cans of milk or cases of pineapples or mangoes, they bury themselves into the soft bitumen and large holes are made in it. Elderly ladies have fallen heavily from getting the heels of their shoes caught in the holes. When it rains those at the edge of the platform are filled with water, and it is difficult to alight from a carriage without stepping into them. When the Commissioner was in Ayr he examined the platform and asked the Ayr Shire Council to give him a quote for re-surfacing it with bitumen. I do not know whether the work has been done as I have not been in Ayr for a couple of months, but even if it has there will be a repetition of what happened previously. Apart from the fact that passengers may step into the holes and fall, the department may be liable for any injuries they sustain.

At Ayr I have seen a trolley laden with cans of milk stuck in a hole and all the milk has had to be unloaded to get the trolley moving and then reloaded. Bitumen is by no means a suitable surface for platforms where heavily-laden trolleys with iron wheels are used. The only suitable surface is concrete. Initially it is more costly and that is probably why it is not used, but over a period it would work out just as cheaply.

I strongly urge that septic systems be installed on the platforms at Bowen, Ayr, Home Hill and Proserpine in place of unhygienic and offensive earth closets, which are very often unavoidably unobnoxious. All hon.

members will agree with me that the excuse always given is lack of finance. The Minister says, "We cannot do it this financial year but we will do it next financial year if funds permit." The next financial year is a repetition of the previous financial year and the earth closets remain. I hope it will become the policy to instal septic systems wherever possible if sewerage is not available. I know that the Commissioner is anxious to do it but he cannot because he is not voted enough money. With a few economies and a little more efficiency, that may come about.

The department pays members of its staff for submitting suggestions for economies that are acceptable. It is a very good idea. I do not want payment for any suggestion I may make to bring business to the department or to save it money. However, just before the last State elections I was awaiting the arrival of my copies of the electoral rolls, which are sent to all hon. members by the Government Printer through one of the members of the staff here. I had received a letter telling me they had been sent. I went along to the railway station to collect them but the officer at the booking office said to me, "I do not think they will come through the railways, Mr. Coburn. They will probably come through the post office." I asked him, "Why?" He said, "They would cost 25s. by rail but they cost only 14s. by post." Incidentally, I was told that they had to be sent in three parcels because the post office would not accept a parcel over 11 lb. in weight. That meant that the post office had to handle them, send them to the railway station, collect them at the other end and handle them again. Despite all that extra handling the charge was 11s. less than the railway charge. The reason is obvious. Under the post office system the charges are the same irrespective of distance. If they had gone to Nambour or Cairns the postage would still have been only 14s.

An Opposition Member: How were they addressed, care of the railway station?

Mr. COBURN: They were sent by post.

Mr. Gair: Did you think they were coming by rail?

Mr. COBURN: Yes. That is how I found out the difference between the cost of railage and postage. I realised that we must be losing a great deal of goods traffic to the P.M.G.'s Department because of the more favourable postage rates.

Mr. Walsh: What transport was used by the post office to get them to you?

Mr. COBURN: The railway. If the Railway Department could introduce a similar system of uniform freights we could possibly take a good deal of the parcels traffic from the post office because parcels could be sent direct by rail instead of by rail for the post office.

Mr. Hanlon: Does not the post office pay the department for that?

Mr. COBURN: Yes, but nothing like the 14s. At the present time it would cost 25s. to send them by rail.

Last year the ex-Premier opened the great railway bridge across the Burdekin River. It was a historic moment for North Queensland. Everybody in the North realises the importance of this traffic link.

Mr. Walsh: A lasting monument to the Labour Government.

Mr. COBURN: It might be, too. The low railway bridge is still there. It will collect huge quantities of debris and act like a dam. Water will back up to a dangerous point at Lago's Bend, an area where a considerable amount of stone work has been done. When the river breaks its banks at this point it goes through the township of Home Hill near the post office. If the low-level bridge is not removed there is a fear of a break in the river bank at Lago's and consequent flooding. In the past railway employees have kept the bridge free of debris.

(Time expired.)

Hon. G. W. W. CHALK (Lockyer—Minister for Transport) (5.24 p.m.): There are a few matters that I think I should reply to at this stage. Firstly, I thank the hon. member for Bremer for his references to my appointment as a Minister of the Crown. In reply to him let me say that my only desire is to do my best to improve the Railway Department generally, to see that every railwayman is given an opportunity to engage in a worthwhile occupation and to see that there is sufficient work for him at all times. The hon. member said he believed that if I co-operated with the unions I could be assured of their absolute support. During the period that I have held office my relationship with the unions has been good. It is true that on many occasions representatives of unions have approached me with requests which, although highly desirable, could not be granted at the present time. As one hon. member mentioned previously, we can only spend the amount allocated to us. I think it was the hon. member for South Brisbane who interjected that no-one could do what he might desire to do unless the money was made available to him by the Treasurer. I have had to tell several union representatives, leaders of deputations to me, that while I was in sympathy with some of their requests it was impossible to accede to them at present. I believe that the average union representative who approached me was a reasonable considerate person. I pay them that tribute.

Mr. Hanlon: They have a sense of responsibility.

Mr. CHALK: I believe, as the hon. member for Ithaca rightly interjects, that they realise their responsibility, to point out

to their members sometimes that it is in their interests to carry on under present conditions, otherwise the granting of some of their requests would have an adverse effect on them, and others also would suffer. The hon. member for Bremer said the average union representative was prepared to play his part. That is how I found them. The hon. member for Bremer referred also to the advance made in the establishment of the Redbank workshops and hoped that very shortly a section of it would be in operation. I indicated some time ago that we hope to be able to transfer the Stores Section to Redbank within a few weeks. Next year other sections will be transferred from Ipswich to Redbank.

The new workshops will contain some very modern machinery and there will be considerable improvement in general repair work.

The hon. member also made reference to the Ipswich railway station. I know that that has been used as a political football over a number of years. If my memory serves me rightly, it was commenced in 1914 or 1915. For a long time during each election campaign promises have been made about the Ipswich railway station. The subject has been discussed at length in Ipswich since the return of the present Government. I have read discussions by the Ipswich City Council and about the formation of a body of representatives of the Council in an effort to get the new railway station to which Ipswich is justly entitled.

I was born close to Ipswich and for the greater part of my life that was my chief shopping centre. I am well aware of the urgent need for a new railway station there. I have been on the station during rainy weather and I have had to take shelter under an umbrella. I know that the previous Government spent money to repair the leaks in the covering of the platform. Ipswich's claim is just. All I can promise is that next year, when the Government are considering the allocation of money, the claim of several centres for new railway stations will be considered. Rockhampton is in a similar position.

The hon. member for Bremer referred to electrification. We are proceeding with the plan of the previous Government on quadruplication in the knowledge that is the basis of future electrification.

Mr. Walsh: Hon. members on your side of the Chamber criticised it when they were in Opposition.

Mr. CHALK: I do not think they were critical of quadruplication.

Mr. Walsh: They were.

Mr. CHALK: They were to some extent critical of the previous Government's policy on what was termed electrification. The hon. member knows as well as I do of the reports on electrification tabled by the previous Minister for Transport.

Mr. Walsh: How would you get electrification without quadruplication?

Mr. CHALK: Government members were perhaps critical to some extent of the previous Government's claim that they were proceeding with what was termed electrification. Government members realise that quadruplication is the basis for electrification. It will relieve traffic congestion and speed up the delivery of goods from the North and West. I do not think it is correct to say that the present Government were opposed to electrification.

I shall deal with some of the other points raised by the hon. member for Bremer. I cannot say that I will approve a new station at Ipswich in the next financial year. Until I know the requirements of the department and the appropriation for it I am not in a position to make rash promises. The hon. member also referred to conditions at the workshop and said he hoped that the relationship between himself and myself as private members would continue now that I have the responsibility of Minister for Transport. I believe that relationship will continue. I have always recognised the hon. member as being a moderate man prepared to advance his views and have it considered whether they could be carried out. He said that we should do something about cool drinking water at the Ipswich workshops. I will have a look into that. I would point out to him that electric boilers and water-softeners were installed for the workmen and that is an indication of the desire of the Government at least to see that reasonable conditions exist. I will consider his suggestion, and if it is practicable I will extend to the workmen there the same facilities as we expect private employers to provide for their employees.

The hon. member referred to the poor condition of the Bundamba railway station. It is true that it is in a dilapidated state and needs painting, but he should know that it is proposed to build a new station there. Because of that there has been an easing off, if I can put it that way, of expenditure on the station. Whether we can proceed with the building of the new station immediately is something I shall have to consider. If it is as dilapidated as the hon. member says we might be able to improve its appearance.

Mr. Gair: When does the new railway station at Laidley start?

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for South Brisbane got in ahead of me. I asked the former Minister for a new station at Laidley on several occasions and all I got was promises. Now that I am Minister the Laidley people are already on my back.

Mr. Gair: I reckon it will have first-class priority.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Bremer mentioned the relationship between

the department and the trade unions. My experience is that they have been reasonably good and I hope they will continue.

I thank the hon. member for Roma for his reference to me. All I am endeavouring to do is carry out the policy of the Government, which I think will bring quite an improvement in conditions generally. One of his main points was the bruising of cattle in K-wagons. A member of the Opposition interjected while he was speaking, and I believe there was something in the interjection. There are records in the Railway Department of experiments with a sliding door system inside K-wagons. The tests showed that it would not eliminate bruising. Experiments have also been carried out in coating the sides of K-wagons with rubber in the hope that that would eliminate bruising, but with the number of animals in the wagon and the continual jolting, bruising still took place.

Mr. A. J. Smith: It is worse in road transport.

Mr. CHALK: I have had no reports on road transport. Although the Railway Department has been endeavouring for years to solve the problem, not very much has been achieved. From the point of view of both the grazier and the consumer, everything possible should be done to avoid bruising.

The Leader of the Opposition raised several matters. Unfortunately he had to leave the Chamber for a few moments during the latter part of my earlier remarks so that he did not hear some of the points that I made. I do not disagree with his statement that very few changes in policy have taken place since we became the Government. It is not the desire of any Minister, immediately he takes charge of a department, to attempt to change existing arrangements. Any new company director or office bearer has to acquaint himself with the operations of the concern with which he is entrusted before he makes changes. However, each minister went into his office believing that there was a job of work to be done, with full confidence in the administrative staff to carry out Government policy. Of course, the time will eventually come when we can say what changes are to be made and how they are to be made. So far, however, we are prepared to follow existing policy, making minor alterations here and there.

Mr. Hanlon: You suggested that a commission of three should administer the railways.

Mr. CHALK: I shall deal with that later. On the whole, there is now a better feeling between the railway employees and the Government, and between the Railway Department and its clients, than there was before we took over.

Mr. Thackeray: You are kidding yourself.

Mr. CHALK: I will answer the hon. member in a few moments. We will learn who is doing the kidding.

Mr. Walsh: What would be the reason for that?

Mr. CHALK: I think there are two reasons. The first is that railway men for a long time believed they were being ruled by a Government that was sympathetic to them, but Labour men themselves have openly expressed dissatisfaction with many of the actions of the previous Government. They showed that by the votes they cast at the last election. Admittedly there was a split in the Party, but that dissatisfaction was evident from the votes in many centres, especially where railwaymen were employed.

Mr. Hanlon: How do you know they were railwaymen voting? It is impossible for you to know that.

Mr. CHALK: It is impossible to know how railway men vote; I quite agree.

Mr. Hanlon: Unless you have been looking at the ballot papers.

Mr. CHALK: I ask the hon. member not to tempt me to answer that question or I might buy into it. However there is clear evidence outside that the average railway man is quite pleased and satisfied with some of the things that the new Government have done since they took over. There is a better feeling among them than in the past, and there is a better feeling among clients, too. I can prove that by correspondence that has come my way, not one letter but several from various people who have had dealings with the department on a large scale.

Mr. Hanlon: They are only stooping to you.

Mr. CHALK: That is the hon. member's opinion, but I challenge him to prove me to be wrong and to prove that harmony does not exist between the Railway Department, its officers and the staff.

Mr. Hanlon: I am not saying that, but I say it existed before.

Mr. Walsh: They tell me even Jack Egerton is on your side.

Mr. CHALK: I do not claim that he is on my side but I know where he stands with the hon. member for Bundaberg.

The Leader of the Opposition said we must get money outside or from the Commonwealth to develop the railways. I agree. It has been proved over the years that it is almost impossible to extend railway lines or build the missing links unless outside money is available. We already have signs of help from the Commonwealth Government. We have had considerable support from them on other projects. While the improvement of the Mt. Isa line and the development of North Queensland were dealt with by the previous Government, we believe that our being in

charge of the affairs of the State and the development we are helping to bring about will induce, not the Commonwealth Government, but the World Bank to view favourably the proposals that have been laid down for the North. I hope that very shortly the report that has been promised will be made available to us and I believe it may stagger some of our critics who have said that we are not in a position to develop North Queensland. Indeed the report might help to overcome many of our problems relating mainly to employment in railway workshops and the curtailment of work in private undertakings. I refer now to the hon. member for Maryborough and what happened at Walkers Limited, Maryborough, and the Bundaberg area generally.

Mr. Walsh: At least you get a good job done there.

Mr. CHALK: I am not denying that you get a good job done there. Because of happenings in the Townsville area we hope to be able to rectify some of the things that probably did not appeal to private undertakings in various parts of the State.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to the lag in repairs to engines. I have not said that we have overcome the lag, but the more diesels we have in operation the less demand there will be for steam locomotives. It was the policy of the previous Government to spend anything from £12,000 to £20,000 a year to make 60- and 70-year-old locomotives serviceable for perhaps only two years, but I believe that we should dispose of some of the very old locomotives and repair only those not so urgently in need of repairs. The turn-around is much quicker. While we have not any greater engine strength on the rails to-day the locomotives in use are much more serviceable.

Mr. Davies: What would you say was the main reason for the lag in repairs?

Mr. CHALK: I have not gone into the matter fully; therefore I do not profess to be able to give the hon. member a complete answer.

Mr. Davies: Last year you said it was the slow repair rate.

Mr. CHALK: I believe that the repair rate is still slow. I do not deny anything I said last year. That brings me to the point that the Leader of the Opposition tried to make. He said that when the departmental estimates were before the Committee last year I was critical firstly of the Commissioner's report and secondly of some of the actions of the Commissioner. I do not retract those criticisms. In my opening remarks today I said that since I became Minister for Transport the Commissioner has carried out his duties in accordance with my wishes and in accordance with Government policy. If it was the policy of the previous Government that the Commissioner should do certain things, it is not for me to quibble

about it now. I quibbled about it previously. What I am concerned about now is the manner in which the administrative officers carry out my requirements.

Mr. Wood: You are quite satisfied with the way in which the Commissioner is performing his duty?

Mr. CHALK: I am quite satisfied that the Commissioner is carrying out the duties that I have requested of him. That is the point that the Leader of the Opposition tried to get me to clear up. What the hon. member for Tablelands has to say is a matter for himself. We as a party did not, I hope, in any way try to restrict the hon. member from expressing his own view. I make that clear to this Chamber—that the views the hon. member expressed were his own, according to his beliefs. If the Leader of the Opposition looks up the press report of an interview with me after the hon. member for Tablelands made his statement he will see what I said. The press rang me and asked me was it my opinion. I said that as far as I was concerned I had confidence in the Commissioner because he had carried out the duties I had asked him to do. I do not retract that. That is my view as Minister at the present time.

Mr. Wood: Has he always done so?

Mr. CHALK: I am not going to take it any further. I would not know what instructions were given to him by previous Governments. I do want to say this—and this matter was touched on by the hon. member for Roma—that since I have occupied the office of Minister for Transport I have formed the conclusion that the Commissioner was prepared to settle the last shearers' strike but he was not backed by certain members of the Government. That is the point. I am prepared to make that perfectly clear.

Mr. Aikens: How was he going to settle it?

Mr. CHALK: He was prepared to carry out his duties as Railway Commissioner.

Mr. Sparkes: And to carry the wool.

Mr. CHALK: He was prepared to do that. What the implications would be or the outcome of carrying it out would be another matter. The point is that he was prepared to fulfil his obligation but the Government of the day apparently were not prepared to allow him to do so. As long as I am Minister for Transport, I hope I shall not have to interfere in the same way to prevent an officer of the Railway Department from carrying out his duties as a common carrier.

Mr. Aikens: He only had to suspend one man and the whole railway service would have been out.

Mr. CHALK: I heard the hon. member make that statement several times during the shearers' strike, but whether it is right or

not has yet to be proved. I believe that if a public servant knows he has the backing of his Government, he will carry out his responsibilities and his duties. And it is up to the Government to back him on every occasion.

Mr. Aikens: Whether he is right or wrong?

Mr. CHALK: One person got into trouble for saying "wisely or unwisely, rightly or wrongly." The hon. member should not come into it too.

I have replied to all the major points raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

I shall now deal with one or two matters mentioned by the hon. member for Mulgrave. I thank him for his contribution and his expression of appreciation of the arrangements made by the Railway Department to transport milk from Caboolture to Cairns during the recent dry spell.

Mr. Lloyd: It is a pity more Government members did not speak. You could thank them, too.

Mr. CHALK: More Government members will speak. Do not worry about that.

Representations were made by the hon. member for Mulgrave, who pointed out the seriousness of the position in the North. All parties co-operated, and through the energetic efforts of the hon. member for Mulgrave milk was delivered to the North. The action was greatly appreciated. In "News Review", a radio programme covering activities in the State, one night last week the arrival of the milk train in North Queensland was broadcast. The event was given publicity throughout Australia as service greatly appreciated by the people. That publicity gave the department a boost.

Most of the points raised by the hon. member for Mulgrave were of a constructive nature, and they will be given very careful consideration.

He said that a bedding factory in North Queensland was hampered because the freight rate from Brisbane to Townsville and Cairns was less than the freight rate from those places to Brisbane. That probably is so. A port rate exists to enable the railways to compete with shipping. It is not new; it has been in operation for many years.

If the hon. member will submit full details of the case, I shall consider it. Special concession rates are given to encourage industry.

He also spoke of school students who travelled during their holidays. If his complaint is correct, that 23 boys and one young girl had to travel between Cairns and Townsville in a carriage that he described as a dog-box attached to a Sunshine train in which seating accommodation was available, someone should be asked for an explanation. The hon. member for Mulgrave should acquaint me fully with the date of the happening.

Mr. Jesson: They are "crooked" on you.

Mr. CHALK: What the hon. member for Hinchinbrook overlooks is that hon. members on this side have the right to express themselves and the wishes of their constituents. The hon. member for Mulgrave is doing the right thing in bringing it up in the Chamber so as to prevent a recurrence of it.

It is correct that because of the number of students who travel at vacation time it is not possible to give them concession rates on the Sunshine train because most people are endeavouring to take their holidays at that time. If we were to crowd the train with students there would be a considerable outcry from the public generally. However, I assure the hon. member that in future, if accommodation is available on the Sunshine train, between Cairns and Townsville, I shall consider making it available to the students. The second division is a first-class sleeping train and that normally follows the Sunshine train from Townsville to Brisbane. Similar circumstances apply in the west, but every effort will be made to prevent a recurrence at the next vacation period.

The hon. member also said that the railways should help industry, that they should encourage trade. I agree with him; that is our policy.

He spoke of the raising of platforms at a number of stations in his electorate. I am aware of the conditions. We should endeavour to do it but there is no good in my painting a rosy picture, saying that we are going to do the work immediately when I know it is not possible just now. The cost of lifting of some of the platforms would be in the vicinity of £6,000 to £10,000.

Mr. Coburn: You would have to lift the buildings too.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member is correct. I realise the difficulties of the travelling public and I also realise the difficulties of the department because of the cost involved.

Mr. Donald: They do not have them in America.

Mr. CHALK: I do not know the position in America. We will do all we can to overcome it. It might be possible to have some type of collapsible platform or movable platform to help people down from the train. We are aware of the difficulty and we will try to overcome it.

The hon. member for Mundingburra is not in the Chamber, but I shall reply to some of the points he raised. Firstly, he said he hoped that the Government would give the Commissioner power to run the railways in the same way as a private enterprise would. It is fortunate for him that the Commissioner did not have that power when he was employed by the department. If he had, I am certain the hon. member would

not now be able to boast of the things he did during that time. The Government want to run the railways in a normal business way. The Commissioner's duties will enable him to do that, and I want him to carry them out without political interference. If the railway employees and the general public have that assurance, that is the first step towards running the railways in a business-like manner.

The hon. member made reference also to the desire of the railway unions to collaborate with the Commissioner and me. I accept his assurance on that. However, as I said earlier, negotiations between the department and the unions cannot be on the basis of one-way traffic. There must be a certain amount of give and take, and if the unions are prepared to accept some responsibility in pointing out to the men how the Government are placed, I am prepared to place before Cabinet any suggestions advanced by them that I think are in the interests of the employees generally.

Mr. Lloyd: The unions can be very helpful.

Mr. CHALK: That is so.

Mr. Gair: You will find them more reasonable than we did. They usually are under a Tory Government.

Mr. CHALK: I do not know what association the previous Government had with union officials. I have had dealings with Mr. Irwin, Mr. Nolan and Mr. Edmonds, and their approaches to me were courteous and reasonable.

The hon. member for Mundingburra also spoke of political juggling in the granting of preferential freight rates to the detriment of North Queensland. I should hate to think that his charge could be substantiated. Concessional rates have been granted to enable some business undertakings to market their products in North Queensland, but surely a business that is located in South Queensland is entitled to try to dispose of its products in North Queensland.

Mr. Lloyd: A few weeks ago it was found that products such as pork sausages were being railed from Brisbane to Townsville at concessional rates.

Mr. CHALK: I do not know what type of business the hon. member for Mundingburra was referring to, but he made the charge that there had been political juggling to enable certain industries in South Queensland to sell their commodities in North Queensland. If the commodities are produced in Southern Queensland, we should encourage the expansion of business but if, on the other hand, there is a market justifying the establishment of an industry in North Queensland, the Government have some obligation to help that industry to compete with Southern Queensland.

Mr. Davies: You do assist the North on the return trip.

Mr. CHALK: We do to some extent. If the charges made by the hon. member for Mundingburra are correct—

Mr. Aikens: They are.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member is not always correct.

Mr. Gair: Are the concessions any greater now than they were before 3 August?

Mr. CHALK: No, they are not; they are the same.

I am big enough to believe that the previous Government would not knowingly have acted to the detriment of an industry in North Queensland.

Mr. Aikens: Why don't you ask the hon. member for Mirani?

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Mundingburra may shout as much as he likes. Let him name the industry or industries and I assure him we will examine the matter.

Let us go a little further with preferential freights.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! There is far too much conversation on my right. The Minister is not being given a fair hearing and I ask hon. members to give him more attention.

Mr. CHALK: The port rates, as we know them, were established in North Queensland not to hinder any industry, but to enable the railways to compete against shipping. In other words, the Government of the day were prepared to do what they could to protect the railways and provide work for their employees, of whom the hon. member for Mundingburra was one at one time.

Mr. Aikens: A most outstanding employee.

Mr. CHALK: I know at least his name appeared on the payroll of the department.

The concessions were given as a protection against shipping competition and they are being continued for that purpose.

The hon. member's only other contribution to the debate was what he described as unattended staff stations. He said that often firemen had to leave their trains and six or seven minutes were lost in changing the staff. I do not deny that there are unattended staff stations in some areas, but, taking the number of trains, using his time factor of six or seven minutes as the multiple and studying the general economics of the whole matter, it would cost the department much more to staff those stations than to carry on as at present. So the system is being continued.

The hon. member complained that certain railway employees were not being supplied with raincoats.

Opposition Members: That was the hon. member for Keppel.

Mr. CHALK: I will deal with that complaint when I reply to the hon. member for Keppel.

The hon. member for Mundingburra said that there was considerable discontent amongst railway employees over long-service leave.

Mr. Aikens: So there is.

Mr. CHALK: I do not deny that there is a feeling amongst railway men that something should be done about long-service leave. I have already received a deputation from the C.R.U. on the matter. I had the records turned up of approaches to the previous Minister on the matter. I told the deputation that from what I could see in the records, from the comments by the Commissioner, he thought that a case had been made out. He submitted his report to the Minister, the ex-member for Toowoomba, but unfortunately for railway employees the submissions made by the Commissioner never went beyond the ex-member for Toowoomba. I do not know the reasons but apparently the Commissioner's submissions never went to Cabinet.

Mr. Walsh: It is easy to blame Cabinet.

Mr. Lloyd: It is so easy to make statements.

Mr. CHALK: I am not going to enter into the political differences of the previous Cabinet.

Mr. Hanlon: When was that?

Mr. CHALK: In February this year. If my memory serves me correctly it was either on 2 or 12 February.

Mr. Hanlon: It was probably Mr. Moores's job to take it to Cabinet.

Mr. CHALK: As I said before, I have no desire to enter into the political argument that could occur. All I am trying to do tonight as I have endeavoured to do all day, is to be perfectly fair and state the facts as I found them when I took over my portfolio. Let me tell the hon. member for Mundingburra what I told the deputation: I am prepared to have a close look at the suggestion together with the submissions of the Commissioner. My views on the matter will be conveyed to the union in due course. The hon. member for Keppel, as far as I know, was a railway employee, and therefore he should have some idea of the operations of the Railway Department. He would be well advised to be certain of his facts before he comes into this Chamber to make charges against the present administration in relation to the railways. The hon. member said he had presented a factual case to this Chamber. During an earlier speech on the Financial Statement he made a promise that if I achieved certain things in the Railway Department that he would see that I received a knighthood. Apparently the hon. member

is out of step with his own party because I understand it does not approve of honours. I shall prove also that the hon. member is out of step in his assertions with the Railway Department at Rockhampton. I shall also prove that he is out of step with the outlook of a large number of the electors of Keppel portion of which embraces an agricultural area. He had the audacity this afternoon to say that he was completely opposed to the Government's proposal that the primary producer be given the right to cart his own goods in his own vehicle.

Mr. Thackeray: Yes, and I still believe in it, too.

Mr. CHALK: We have confirmation by the hon. member.

Mr. Thackeray: It will mean retrenchment in the Railway department. You are not game to bring it in.

Mr. CHALK: We will bring it in. Do not let that worry the hon. member. He is completely out of step with a large number of his constituents.

Let us look at some of the charges that the hon. member directed against the Commissioner and myself in relation to booking control clerks at Rockhampton off duty between the hours of 12 noon and 6 p.m. on Sundays. I have a copy of the hon. member's speech. He left the impression that the delays to a number of trains cited by him were due to the booking off of control clerks.

Mr. Thackeray: That is quite right.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member confirms it. Let us analyse his statement. At least Smith the Spy was always given credit for providing me with correct information but he has misled the hon. member.

Mr. Thackeray: You will not find an instance in which I was wrong.

Mr. CHALK: I am sorry that the hon. member did not take the precaution to check the accuracy of information apparently supplied to him before he made his charges. Thirteen trains were mentioned by the hon. member for Keppel as being delayed because of the booking off of control clerks. Does the hon. member deny that charge?

Mr. Thackeray: The delays would have been obviated if control clerks had not been booked off.

Mr. CHALK: Five of the instances quoted by the hon. member occurred while the control clerks were on duty. Four instances were due to the failure of the station staff or the officer on duty in the trains room at Rockhampton to do what was required of them. Three of the instances were due solely to the late running of the train, crossings having been arranged in correct sequence. The late running of another train was aggravated by the absence of the

staff from the station at Rosella. I point out to the hon. member that the arrangements were made because of the curtailment of Sunday trains. However, during the period that control clerks are booked off there is an officer on duty in the trains section at Rockhampton to deal with any matters connected with transport, in addition to attending to the telephone, both public and departmental, and in emergency, the train control line.

Those are the facts. The hon. member is completely off the rails in his charge.

Further, on his visit of inspection recently I am given to understand that the Commissioner interviewed a deputation at Rockhampton. He discussed with the officers their responsibilities under the present arrangement. My information is that the officers realise fully what is required of them and are satisfied.

The hon. member tried to stir up strife among railwaymen by making a charge that is not factual. He is a new member but he has a responsibility to his constituents, including the railwaymen, to place facts before the Committee.

Mr. Thackeray: That is one thing you never gave Duggan.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I inform the hon. member for Keppel that he has five minutes in which he can speak on this debate. In the meantime, I ask him to restrain himself and to discontinue interjecting.

Mr. CHALK: He said that the Government had promised during the election campaign to endeavour to provide bondwood huts instead of tents. That is so, and the Government will try to carry out that promise. The hon. member hopes that that promise will not be carried out. That is typical of his attitude since he entered Parliament—of holding the Government up to ridicule purely for political purposes. He gave a lot of information about trains such as 54 Up and 23 Down. He attempted to dazzle hon. members with science by referring to trains by the numbers in which they are known in the department. I did not try to follow him. I shall read the "Hansard" proof of his speech.

Mr. Walsh: He will never be a Herbert Yeates.

Mr. CHALK: The late Herbert Yeates made some very valuable contributions in this Chamber.

Mr. Hanlon: The Rockhampton and Winton complaint is genuine. I heard it while I was out there.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Ithaca heard many things while he was at Winton, but he did not bring back any fish. The things he heard were not of assistance. Let him not bring up the Winton business. From a railway point of view I am prepared to listen to any submission he makes, but he wants to get his facts right, otherwise he

will be in the same difficulty as he was in at Yeppoon when he made reference to hotels. He does not want me to repeat that.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. CHALK: There is no allocation in the vote for Parkhurst. It is something over which we as a Government have no control. We said in our policy speech that we believed in decentralisation of railway workshop activities. We are very sincere. Next year we are prepared to have a look at the position at Parkhurst. I know that there has been a valuable area of land acquired by my predecessors and that there were some plans. The previous Government were not able to provide the necessary funds and we as a Government do not claim to be supermen in being able to provide them also.

Mr. Aikens: They found money for Brisbane.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Mundingburra interjects and I cannot allow his interjection to go without reply. What is the hon. member advocating now? Is he advocating that we dismiss men?

Mr. Aikens: No.

Mr. CHALK: Then what does he want?

Mr. Aikens: Build a new workshop at Stuart; get on with your election promises of decentralising the railway system. Do not back and fill.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member has been backing and filling for years. The point is that the work was started by the previous Government and there are men employed on these jobs. Does the hon. member want us to rip up the homes of these people, immediately transfer all activities and leave in desolation what work has been done there? That is what he is advocating.

Mr. Aikens: You did it at Mt. Mulligan.

Mr. CHALK: Because we were overcoming a loss and the Minister for Mines is doing the right thing. We are proceeding with our policy of keeping men in employment and carrying on that work and it is in the best interests of the State. The hon. member should be the last one to make a lot of noise at the moment in regard to North Queensland. He was continually referring in his election speeches to what is regarded as Duggan's monument, a building started some three years ago in North Queensland. Having heard the hon. member on the stump and knowing that there was some justification in the argument he advanced one of the first things I did was to find out what Duggan's monument was. I found that it was a steel structure which was serving no useful purpose in its present position. It could be occupied if we continued promptly to complete the building.

Mr. Walsh: What was it, a gallows?

Mr. CHALK: No. The hon. member knows that the building is now proceeding.

Mr. Aikens: One feather in your cap.

Mr. CHALK: At least I have one feather. We are proceeding with the improvement and given the time and opportunity we will do quite a lot to assist North Queensland. The promised developments will be carried out when we have the funds.

Mr. LOW (Coorooora) (7.55 p.m.): At the outset, I wish to compliment the Minister on the very energetic approach that he is making towards solving the problems associated with the Railway Department. His portfolio is one of the most important in the Cabinet, and we are fortunate to have a young and virile man holding it. He has tackled the problems confronting him with sincerity of purpose, and although he has been in office for only a short time he gave us today a very comprehensive report of the department's activities.

Now that we have a new Minister in charge of the Railway Department, I hope that the railways will be made to pay their way. They can be, if properly administered. But drastic changes will have to be made. The railways cannot continue to be bolstered by Consolidated Revenue. From bitter experience, I know that that means fewer hospitals, fewer schools, fewer roads and other essential services.

Mr. Aikens: Do you think that all freight concessions should be abolished?

Mr. LOW: I shall deal later with the noisy interrupter from Mundingburra.

I feel certain that the drift in railway finances will be arrested. The Minister has told us that in the first four months of this financial year the department's finances have improved considerably.

During the Address-in-Reply debate I said that our chief aim should be to win back business for the railways. And I say it again. Despite dieselisation and other improvements in the service, the business side of the department has been seriously neglected. If we could win more business for the railways, they would show a handsome return.

Mr. Aikens: Not long ago you advocated the closing of the railways and the giving of all traffic to road transport.

Mr. LOW: That is not true.

The Railway Department should return to the old slogan, "Service with a Smile." The old-timers in the department were sincere in their efforts to win business for the railways. Unfortunately, that is not the case with the young men who are in the department today.

Mr. Davies: Do you suggest that the railway worker is not sincere in his approach to his job?

Mr. LOW: Very definitely many of them do not realise their responsibilities to the department and what winning more business can mean to their own future.

In the past I have noted with regret that the Minister for Transport has always travelled throughout the State by limousine. I urge the new Minister to use the railways. I hope he will find time to travel by train to every important town and workshop in Queensland to see the conditions for himself and how they affect John Citizen.

With the amount of passenger and freight traffic the railways are handling at present, they are over-staffed.

Mr. Davies: You say some should be sacked?

Mr. LOW: I am not sack-happy like the Opposition. Before the last election they were sack-happy. They sacked everybody—railway men, Forestry workers, Main Roads men. They even sacked themselves. I do not suggest sacking anybody, but the railways are definitely overstaffed and everything possible should be done to increase the volume of business to give full-time employment and security for all. With the Minister, I ask railway men to give of their best to win business back for the railways, for it will pay dividends.

Six very important sections of the department are: administrative, traffic, locomotive, maintenance, workshops, and railway refreshment rooms.

Mr. Aikens: What about the clerical?

Mr. LOW: They come under administrative in some sections and traffic in others.

I suggest that with the introduction of such systems as the train control system, which has been in operation for some years, perhaps the administrative side of the department is top-heavy. It may be worth while examining the retention of the General Manager's office in Brisbane where the office of the Commissioner for Railways is established. Duplication can cause top-heaviness. The railway control system has in many respects replaced the administrative side of the general manager's offices, the district superintendents' and so on, and I make this suggestion because I want to help the Minister balance the railway budget. Nobody will give the Minister more loyalty than I. I shall pass on all my experience in an effort to assist him in every possible manner to make this public utility pay its way and give service to the people.

We should introduce more co-ordinated rail-road services throughout the State. Door-to-door express delivery would effectively meet the competition of road transport. A co-ordinated rail-road service with door-to-door delivery would assist the department to gain a considerable amount of good business to which it is entitled. My main ambition

is to see the railways put on a sound financial footing so that they will not be a drain on Consolidated Revenue year after year.

I suggest that the Minister should streamline the transfer and promotion system, which at the present time is far too slow and expensive. Too much money is being spent on the transfer of railway employees from one locality to another; jobs take too long to fill. Relieving and other expenses must amount to a very tidy sum.

Mr. Power: Do not these transfers come about as a result of an award condition?

Mr. LOW: Not necessarily. It can be safely said that it takes about three or four months to fill a vacancy even if it is only for a fettle. All the time relieving expenses have to be paid.

Concessions and special freight rates should be reviewed annually.

Mr. Aikens: Why do you not be honest and say they should be abolished? That is what you are advocating.

Mr. LOW: It is nothing of the sort. Special concessions and special freight rates are granted for a special purpose. In 12 months circumstances could alter considerably. Instead of continuing them year after year, special concessions and special freight rates should be reviewed annually when new circumstances could be taken into account.

I urge the issue of return tickets at concession rates in country areas. For many years the Country Party has asked that return tickets at concession rates be issued on the Queensland railways. The previous Government approved of the issue of return tickets but on the ordinary single fare basis. We know of the concessions granted to people in Brisbane and other cities throughout the State, but I ask that return tickets at concession rates be granted in the country to put country people on the same footing as city dwellers.

Passenger services should be speeded up. The North coast service is the same as it was 50 years ago, indeed not a very great compliment to a Government that were in office for 25 years. The numbering of trains has been changed from time to time, but that is the only noticeable difference.

I am very pleased to learn that the Minister is contemplating the building of new carriages. Many of the carriages are in a dilapidated and dirty condition. There is no excuse for that.

Mr. Davies: Which carriages?

Mr. LOW: I have observed dirty and neglected carriages on many mail trains throughout the State. If we are to give a good service we must keep our carriages in the best possible condition. I am pleased that the Minister is arranging for the supply of new carriages and rail motor units. I was interested in the Minister's statement that new rail motor units were

required in various parts of the State. I wish to refer to the rattle trap—and I make no apology for giving it that name—that runs between Yandina and Gympie. The doors are tied up with rope, the windows are falling out, and it has no brakes. It should be replaced at the earliest possible date. I also wish to draw the Minister's attention to a bad habit on the North Coast. At various stations the passenger train pulls up with the van opposite the station for the convenience of the station staff to unload parcels and other freight. The carriages are past the platform and people have to get out the best way they can. That is not providing good service to the public.

I give the Minister credit for making special arrangements for funds to keep the men engaged on suburban electrification work in employment. I have observed these men working on the North Coast and on the Ipswich line and on the South side, and I warn the Minister that if there is not more supervision of their work the cost will be considerably above the estimate. The Minister has seen fit to provide funds to keep these men in employment, but I feel certain that they are not getting the supervision that they should and it is painful to watch some of them at work.

Mr. Davies: Are they deliberately loafing?

Mr. LOW: They are badly supervised. If you do not give these men supervision you will not get the best out of them.

Mr. Davies: You mean as soon as your back is turned they loaf.

Mr. LOW: I am saying, in view of the tremendous trouble to find money to keep them in employment I would like to see them more closely supervised, to see that we get value for our money.

I think it would be better if we let some of our painting and carpentering jobs throughout the State on contract. In country areas much time is taken up in travelling and it would be a saving if some of these jobs were let out on contract to local carpenters and painters and they would get the jobs done much quicker and certainly much cheaper. I am giving my personal views, whether they upset the Opposition or not, and I do not apologise for them.

I also suggest that consideration be given to handing over the running of the railway refreshment rooms to private enterprise. In that way the department would not have to pay a considerable amount of overtime, and the service would be cheaper and appreciated by train passengers and others.

In 1957-1958 the Railway Department will pay to the Commonwealth £652,000 in payroll tax. I strongly object to that.

Mr. Aikens: Why not tell that to Fadden?

Mr. LOW: It is an imposition. Payroll tax should not be levied on this public utility. I hope the Minister will make his usual forceful representation to the Commonwealth Government to have the department exempted from this tax. It would go a long way towards balancing finances.

Mr. Aikens: Why do you not resign from the Country Party as a protest against it?

Mr. LOW: I believe in working from within and not from without.

I disagree with the policy of the previous Government of making road transport fees the same as railway freight charges.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member cannot discuss road transport under this vote.

Mr. Davies: Do you agree with the extension to 75 miles?

Mr. LOW: Of course I do.

Mr. Hanlon: When is that going to be introduced?

Mr. LOW: That will be decided by Cabinet.

Mr. Aikens: Does not your Party run the show? Does Cabinet run it for you?

Mr. LOW: Government members have confidence in Cabinet, which is more than can be said of the Opposition members when they formed the Government.

In conclusion I wish to say that the Government will make an all-out effort to ensure that the Railway Department plays an important part in the transport field. I am sure the Minister will succeed in overcoming the various problems, although the Opposition hopes that he will fail. Better service will mean better support and patronage by the public, which will be of great benefit to the State.

Mr. GRAHAM (Mackay) (8.19 p.m.): I am tempted to say that it is fortunate for the people of Queensland, particularly railway-men, that the hon. member for Cooroora was not chosen as Minister for Transport. It will be a bad day for railway-men if he is ever given that portfolio. Bad and all as the present Minister might be I find it hard to accept his change of front, more particularly when we find him reflecting in the glory of the work of the previous Minister. The present Government have only been in office for four months but the Minister for Transport seems to be claiming all the credit for what was done in the department over the past 12 months. He is basking in the reflected glory of the work done by John Duggan.

The report presented by the Commissioner for Railways indicates the working of the department for 12 months and despite what may be said about the department, it is a good report as it shows without ambiguity what the previous Minister and his Government did. It is ridiculous to say that the Railway Department is inefficient, that the

Commissioner is an inefficient administrator. With members of my party I take the hon. member for Tablelands to task for his attack on the Commissioner. It is unfair to accuse a man without qualifying the accusation. If the hon. member for Tablelands thinks that the Commissioner should be dismissed from office because of some personal animosity he bears against him, or that he should be displaced because of his inefficiency he should be man enough to state his case.

Mr. Gilmore: Did you hear what I said?

Mr. GRAHAM: I heard every word the hon. member said. The report to which I have referred is indicative of the efficiency of the department. The policy laid down prior to the advent of the Nicklin-Morris Government for improvements in the department is reflected in this report. For many years the Labour Party endeavoured to improve the efficiency of that department. We have never been unmindful of the part it has played in the development of Queensland, nor have we been unmindful of the problems associated with it. Queensland is not the only State that finds difficulty in balancing the railway budget. An hon. member on my right spoke of the losses in the other States. A comparison of the position in the other States is made in the report. Despite all that has been said against the Queensland Railways, we have not done too badly, taking into account the length of line, the sparsity of population, and the contribution by the railway system during the war which was a big contributing factor to the deterioration of engine power and rolling stock. All in all, the Queensland railways have been run very efficiently over the years. Much could be done to bring about a better financial position but who would be the sufferers if the department was run for profit? The people on my left who support the Country Party. The primary industries have received the greatest help from the Government in freight concessions. If the Government want to make the railways pay, they will have to ignore requests for reductions in fares and freights by the people who support them.

It cannot be denied that over the years the Railway Department has made a valuable contribution to the economy of the State. In his annual report the Commissioner points out that compared with the previous year, there was an increase of 178,000 tons in the quantity of goods carried during 1956-1957. The earnings, at £25,000,000-odd, were approximately £3,000,000 more than the figure for the previous year.

Throughout the Commissioner's annual report there is evidence of progress in the department. As an ex-railway man I admit that there is room for improvement. I would not be so naive as to say that nothing could be done to improve it. As a member of this Assembly I think I should offer some suggestions to the Minister in the hope that they may help him in his administration.

Mention is made in the annual report of the improved goods service to the North by special deliveries in louvred freight cars attached to the Rockhampton mail. I was in Mackay recently. While I was there I visited the goods shed and was told of the greatly improved tonnages going through it.

These are the figures to 1955—

		Tons.
1953	70,000
1954	85,000
1955	100,000 (approx.)

Those figures, of course, do not include sugar.

I was told also that 11 louvred wagons had reached Mackay during the week-end. It is encouraging to know that the people who use the railway service, particularly the merchants, are finding it of value. That is one way in which the department can attract business. It is, of course, experiencing strong competition from other forms of transport. Road transport can give a very efficient service, and if the operators had their way they would take all the payable freight from the railways.

In criticising the department, the hon. member for Roma said that the graziers were getting a raw deal in the transport of livestock. As an ex-railway man, I question his statement. I say without fear of contradiction that except in the crossing of mail trains, livestock trains are never delayed. It is tommy-rot for the hon. member to suggest that livestock trains have been held up for four hours and that goods trains have gone ahead of them.

Mr. Nicholson: It is correct.

Mr. GRAHAM: I say it would not be.

Mr. Nicholson: It can be proved.

Mr. GRAHAM: I have had a lifetime of experience in the Railway Department and if it occurred it would be the first time to my knowledge.

Hon. members have spoken of the railway refreshment rooms and the report mentions the loss. The service they give could be greatly improved. The main reason for their failure to pay their way is that they charge too much for the service they give. People will not patronise them if they have to pay 1s. for a cup of tea. In many of the rooms it is just tea, too.

Mr. Davies: Most of them are let out on contract.

Mr. GRAHAM: Yes, some of them are on private contract, but the rooms at Rockhampton, Gladstone, Mackay and the other bigger centres are under the control of the railway refreshment rooms staff. If they want custom they must give cheaper and better service.

Mr. Gilmore: Isn't the service any good?

Mr. GRAHAM: In many cases it is not. Take St. Lawrence, for instance. I know the difficulties there, of course. The only reasonable service being given to the public is on the buffet car, where the prices are reasonable and the meals very appetising.

Mr. Chalk: Did you complain about this previously?

Mr. GRAHAM: Yes, on many occasions. The buffet-car service is very good and the charges reasonable. The charges in the refreshment rooms are out of all proportion to the service given.

Through the years we have seen efforts made by many to take business away from the Railway Department. Were it left to many hon. members opposite they would take all possible trade away from it and let the devil take the hindmost. They have no regard for the future of the railways and the hundreds of railwaymen who are dependent on it. I know that the Railway Department has done in the past and the people of Queensland know it, too. We know the department's contribution to the development of the country. I remember Mackay before the rail connections and I know how the city has developed over the years because of the railway line north and south. There has been, and will continue to be, agitation for railway extensions in the Mackay district. I think the hon. member for Mirani would agree about the advantages that could accrue from a railway line into the hinterland.

Mr. Evans: I agree but at what an enormous cost!

Mr. GRAHAM: I know it would cost money, but if we are to develop the State the Government must be prepared to spend money on railway construction. I do not think it would be possible to develop the Mackay hinterland without a railway line. It has been suggested that an A-class road would serve the purpose, but I do not think it would. In my opinion a railway line is the only solution. Admittedly construction charges are very high today. But what are a few million pounds if we can settle many more thousands of people in areas suitable for closer settlement? What are a few million pounds if we can develop one of the greatest coal deposits in the world? What are a few million pounds if we can develop the rich mineral fields in the hinterland? If we are to develop Queensland, provide employment for the thousands of migrants coming into the State, and have closer settlement the Government should be sufficiently progressive to make investigations into the hinterland's potential.

Mr. Sparkes: Why did you not get the Government to make an investigation when your Party were in power?

Mr. GRAHAM: I have made the appeal previously. I am making it today, and God willing I shall continue to make it. Apart from the development along the coast what

have we got? Were it not for the western line which provides work for hundreds of railway-men, where would the grazing industry be?

Mr. Sparkes: We wanted a line from Blackall to Charleville and you nearly went mad when you were in the Government.

Mr. GRAHAM: A little connecting link serving little purpose!

Mr. Dewar: Starving sheep.

Mr. GRAHAM: It might have reduced costs a little and provide a better service to the grazing interests. If hon. members opposite realised the great potential of the vast area of country to the west of Mackay they would acknowledge the need for a railway line to serve the area. I make that suggestion in the hope that an investigation will be made. The hon. members for Mirani and Whitsunday have a responsibility to the Mackay area.

Mr. Chalk: They live there anyway.

Mr. GRAHAM: I remember that the hon. member for Mirani bought a house at the Grange. I do not know whether he lives in it.

Mr. Chalk: Where do you want this line to run to? Mackay to where?

Mr. GRAHAM: That is not for me to say. I have asked the Government for an investigation into the area's potential in the hope that some day a railway line will be built.

Mr. Chalk: To where?

Mr. GRAHAM: The hon. gentleman would not build it out to St. Bees or Brampton Island.

Mr. Chalk: Tell me where.

Mr. GRAHAM: It is not for me to say where the line should go. It should probably go to the most valuable or the most central area where the most development could take place. Of course, if the Minister wants to be facetious—

Mr. Chalk: I am not being facetious but merely asking where you want it to go.

Mr. GRAHAM: We know what was the attitude of the hon. member for Lockyer when he was on this side of the Chamber. He tried to belittle the Minister for Transport. He was a carping critic of the administration of the Railway Department. If we adopt the same attitude as the hon. member adopted and discovered some spy within the department to hand out information to us the Minister will have to be prepared for what might be coming to him. We are not unmindful of the problems associated with railway administration. I am sure that the Minister is aware of them already and is convinced that the job is not as easy as he probably thought it was before he took over. The problems of the department are many and complex and it will need energy and

pertinacity to solve them. I think the Minister will find that he will have the co-operation of the railwaymen in general. My experience of railwaymen has convinced me that they are a very fine body of men. Of course in that group of over 20,000, as in every other group, there are perhaps one or two who may endeavour to avoid their responsibilities. The Commissioner must admit that they are a great body of men. The Minister will get much help if he takes the railwaymen into his confidence. The suggestion was made many years ago that a committee comprising representatives of the various trade unions be set up to discuss the problems of the department. The workers in industry can give valuable information to the administrators on working conditions on the job. If the Minister approaches the unions in the right way and takes the railwaymen into his confidence he will get that help and consideration that will perhaps enable him to overcome some of the difficulties of the department. Unless the Railway Department is run from the developmental angle it will lose much of its effectiveness as an instrument of development. The Railway Department could bring in more revenue if no freight concessions were granted. Freight concessions are granted to various industries, and in times of drought concessions are granted on fodder for starving stock. The hon. member for Mundingburra mentioned the big freight concessions on ore from Mt. Isa. Although Mt. Isa is now making huge profits it is helped by concessions from the Railway Department. Various sugar-mill interests are making huge profits and they are aided by cheap rail freights on sugar-cane. The Railway Department should assist industry to develop. I advise the Minister not to be unmindful of the contribution that the department has made to the development of the State and of the responsibility which railwaymen have accepted and discharged during the years. If the Minister seeks suggestions from railwaymen on improvements of conditions, he will get their complete co-operation. I am not ashamed of the part played by the department over the years in the development of Queensland. It is to be hoped that the present Government does not use the pruning knife too severely insofar as the Railway Department is concerned.

Mr. DEWAR (Chermside) (8.45 p.m.): I congratulate the Minister on the enthusiasm displayed since his appointment. He has my good wishes for success. His application to the duties of his office will be beneficial to the department and the State.

Some of the comments of Opposition members who have been in Parliament for years are humorous. The hon. member for Mackay suggested in a somewhat disparaging manner that the Government, having been in office for the considerable term of three months, should quickly institute surveys for the purpose of extending the railway system. He conveniently omits to mention that the only

alterations effected by the Government of which he was a member during the last 20 years were reductions in the length of line. Why did he not ask the previous Government to do something about it? Royal commissions were appointed in the 20's to report on the need of a railway line from Dajarra to Camooweal. That line could have been built for a few paltry millions, and would have meant tremendous increases in revenue. If a line from Blackall to Charleville had been built, thousands of sheep, the very life blood of the State, would have been saved. It was also the subject of a royal commission appointed by the Government of which the hon. member for Mackay was a member for 20 years.

Mr. Graham: Not exactly.

Mr. DEWAR: Approximately. Those royal commissions found that the extensions were essential for the industry and development of the State. The reports of those commissions are in the parliamentary library and in files of the public service departments. The policy of the previous Government was strangulation of development. They did not have the ability to act on the findings of royal commissions.

The hon. member for Mackay referred to the losses of the Railway Department. He asked why we should worry about losses in view of the sparse population in Queensland and the great service the Railway Department renders to this State. Does he suggest that the greatest losses occur in sparsely settled areas? The reverse is the case. The metropolitan area is not sparsely settled, but the losses in this section amounted to £2,250,000. The overall loss was approximately £2,500,000. The Maryborough section could be classed as fairly sparse, but it made a profit. The Toowoomba section is not sparsely populated but it made a loss. In the Warwick section, which is not fully developed, the loss was £500,000. Take the position in one of the most sparsely settled areas of the State, Roma to Injune and Cunnamulla. The loss in that section was only £250,000. One would not call the area between Mt. Isa and Townsville fully developed. Freight rates assist that area. The Townsville section made a profit of £1,750,000. You could call it a sparsely-settled area. The Innisfail-Mourilyan tramway made a profit of £20,000. To suggest that the sparsely-settled areas of the State are the causes of the losses in the department is a lot of nonsense. It is pulling the wool over the eyes of the people. I say again it is high time that the department took cognisance of the fact that the Brisbane section of the railways is strangling the system. Until that position is faced up to most of the efforts of the Minister and the Commissioner in trying to save money will be completely useless. It will be wasted because of the colossal drain on funds in the south-eastern corner of Queensland. We have lost in the last five years from

£1,100,000 to £2,200,000 each year. How can we look forward to balancing the budget when the Brisbane area is causing such colossal losses.

Mr. Power: What do you suggest?

Mr. DEWAR: Do what private enterprise does when costs go up. It applies for an increase in price. It generally got knocked back when the previous Minister was in office.

I want to refer briefly to what I think is the wrong attitude of mind on the part of railway employees and on the part of Australians generally. Let us remember the old quotation from Burns—"Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn." It is very true. Some four or five weeks after the last election I was asked by a social worker to see a woman in the housing camp at Kalinga. She had received a summons from the Clerk of Petty Sessions. I investigated the case and I shall relate the story she told me. Her husband is an invalid and she has three or four children and is forced to go to work. She is working in the cannery at Northgate. Running late one morning when going to work she boarded the train at Eagle Junction without buying a ticket. When she got off at her station at Bindha to go to work she was asked by the ticket collector for her ticket and she told him that she did not have time to buy one before boarding the train. She paid the fare of 9d. and the ticket collector asked for her name. She asked him what he wanted her name for and he said that he must report the incident, that it was purely a routine matter and that she would probably hear nothing about it. But she did hear something about it. She was asked to go to court. She was charged with travelling on the railways without paying her fare. She could not afford to take a day off from work to defend her case.

Mr. Gair interjected.

Mr. DEWAR: It is a serious matter because we are not far from the days of Judge Jeffreys when they used to hang a man for stealing a loaf of bread.

Mr. Power: Mind your blood pressure.

Mr. DEWAR: My blood pressure is good. As I said, this woman could not afford to take a day off to defend the case and she was subsequently charged and fined £1 10s. with 14s. costs, a total of £2 4s. That was the imposition on the woman who was working to keep an invalid husband and four children. Naturally she could not pay the fine and she subsequently received a letter in the days of the previous Government dated 26 July signed by the Secretary of the department which concluded by saying—

"I am desired to inform you that it is understood the above amounts are still outstanding, and you are hereby notified that unless payment thereof is made to

the Clerk of Petty Sessions, Brisbane, within seven days of the date hereof the question of issuing a warrant of commitment whereby you will be required to serve seven day's imprisonment will be considered."

As I say, we have not advanced very far from the days of the judge who used to hang a man for stealing a loaf of bread. Merely because a widow inadvertently failed to pay a 9d. fare it is quite probable that the time of several men was taken up in preparing a charge, presenting it to the court and taking the appropriate action after judgment had issued. Then a policeman had to go to the Housing Commission and tell the woman that she must pay the fine. Subsequently, on the day that I paid the fine for her, a man from the department went out to ascertain why she had not paid it. It would be very interesting to know how many man-hours were lost merely because a woman did not have time to buy a 9d. ticket. Incidents such as that leave us in no doubt as to why Queensland is in such a sorry financial position.

Mr. Graham: Did she try to evade the fare?

Mr. DEWAR: I do not know. I do not condone any offence against the law, but in this instance it should have been sufficient when the man at Bindha retrieved the fare. Surely it could have been fixed up on the spot, thus saving an enormous wastage of labour. If it has happened once, it is quite possible that it has happened on hundreds of occasions. Such an attitude of mind is one of the main reasons why the department has lost revenue over the years. I know from personal experience the attitude of mind that was created in people who sent goods to the Roma Street station and expected their trucks to return without undue delay. Many business organisations refused to send goods to Roma Street because their men would be tied up for hours. Things may have improved since then, but they were still pretty bad two or three years ago. If they have not improved, that is one of the first things that the Minister should look at.

I travelled to Melbourne on Sunday and returned to Brisbane this morning. It was obvious to me that the railways were losing millions of pounds in first-class traffic because of their failure to measure up to the requirements of the paying public. We have only to consider the traffic that the railways are losing right down to the lowest form of freight to realise the loss of revenue that they must be suffering because of the employees' approach to the job. They are frightening business away. Many large organisations in the city are using road transport to the limit because unless actually forced to they refuse to have anything to do with the Railway Department. That must have resulted in the loss of a great deal of revenue to the department.

Mr. Power: You are attacking employees who cannot defend themselves.

Mr. DEWAR: No man is defenceless.

I wish to refer now to the Stores Board of the Railway Department. I have in mind a man in the Nundah district who is the only manufacturer of cylinder liners in Queensland, and they are very good. They are accepted by the automotive trade. He cannot get contracts with the Railway Department for them because the department, with its red tape, insists on buying pistons in the cylinder liner. However, if any of the local depots run out of supplies and need one in a hurry, they call on him for one and then buy the piston to suit the liner. As a Queensland manufacturer he is entitled to preference from Government departments but he does not even get to first base. He does not get a chance to quote because he does not deal in pistons. It would be a simple matter for the stores section to ask for separate quotations for the liners and pistons. Thousands of men in the department are just as capable of putting a piston in a cylinder liner as merchants are of supplying the unit complete.

Some years ago a friend of mine in the Railway Department brought a matter to my notice because he was very enthusiastic about it just after I became a member of Parliament. The Minister may remember that I introduced the gentleman to him at the time. When I tell the story he may recall it. In 1947, through the normal suggestion box, he submitted an idea for setting up a salvage unit within the department. I believe it was considered at the time by the late Hon. E. M. Hanlon and the then Minister, John Duggan. Apparently nothing was done about it because I have not heard of a salvage unit. I think the scheme is still within the realms of possibility and much good could come from it. He envisaged the State-wide collection of every type of item one could think of that goes through the Railway Department, railway stations and the like—all brought to one receiving depot. He suggested that the depot be in the Pinkenba district, but I do not stress any particular place. The goods obviously could be brought in at little or no cost when trucks are returning to the city empty or partly empty. If it were done regularly there would never be big loads but continuous small loads. The disposal could be—

1. Goods that can be used to be re-issued through the Stores Department.
2. Items that could be economically repaired within the department with existing plant.
3. Items that could be repaired by outside firms and brought up to standard with the replacement of defective parts.
4. Disposal through public auction of any obsolete item or items that the Railway Department had no further use for.
5. Containers such as drums and acid jars that could obviously be sold to the original source of supply.

Not many men would be needed to carry out the scheme. It would call for one capable clerk and one or two men with engineering ability and the capacity to assess the value of the goods and determine whether it would be worth while bringing them into the depot or whether they should be dumped on the spot. It could mean the salvage of every type of item that goes through the Government departments, including paper to go to cardboard mills, scrap metal, containers, obsolete engines and parts.

The idea is not new. A similar scheme was introduced into the British railway system in 1914 by Lord Rowton. All the companies were encouraged to salvage anything of value. It was all delivered to one central place. There were a number of companies operating railway systems in the Old Country. The value of the salvage was assessed and individual companies were credited with the value of the salvage they had returned. Five per cent. of the total value of the scheme was allocated for the education of children of railway employees, with the immediate result that railway personnel got right behind the scheme. They saw that it was not only going to assist the companies to balance their books and keep down costs, but that their children were to benefit to a great degree. They co-operated. That is the basis of all success between employer and labour. Whether it be Government employers or private employers, Government employees or private employees, when they co-operate there can be nothing but success. We have not had that in Queensland because for various reasons the different sections will not pull together.

A similar scheme was introduced into the British Army in 1916. A percentage of the value of the salvage from each unit was credited back to the unit's canteen fund. Again there was co-operation. I suggest that the introduction of a similar scheme in Queensland could mean the saving of many hundreds of thousands of pounds to the Railway Department. The Minister is very interested in saving costs. Here is one way that costs could be saved. If a percentage of the value of the salvage were allocated for the benefit of railway employees, say a sinking fund for the further education of their children, the railwaymen would co-operate. Nothing but good could come from it.

Mr. ADAIR (Cook) (9.7 p.m.): I congratulate the Minister upon his elevation to Cabinet rank. I am convinced that he will give of his best as Minister for Transport. I sat in the Chamber for three years listening to his criticism of the department from this side. He appeared to have a fair knowledge of the department.

I compliment the Commissioner for Railways on the excellent job he has done and is still doing. On the many occasions I have

approached the Commissioner as he came through my area I found him very helpful. I feel confident that while he is Commissioner the Far North will receive its just rights.

I pay tribute to the Superintendent in Cairns, Mr. Moore, and his predecessor Mr. Hall. They have both done an excellent job. They have done all they could whenever I have made representations on behalf of people in the surrounding areas.

We are indeed proud of the new railway station at Cairns, one of the most modern railway stations in the Commonwealth. Sunlanders arrive in Cairns five days a week. Our only objection is that we still do not get enough of them. It is very difficult to get sleeping accommodation on these trains. I have known people to sit up all night waiting to get a sleeper. I realise the difficulties, but it would be a great convenience if the people could have sleepers. I have approached the Superintendent of Railways at Cairns but I have not been able to get a sleeper. I did not mind that because I know there are thousands of others who could not get them, either. I have heard hon. members say that the railways should be made to pay. I agree, if it is possible to do that, but that is not possible in the sparsely populated areas such as those that I and the hon. member for Tablelands represent. If railways that did not pay in those areas were closed down, the people living there would leave and move to the coast, therefore it is of the greatest importance to the development of this country that the lines should be left open. A rail motor runs once a week from Cooktown to Laura. This line does not pay, but it serves a good purpose and therefore should be continued. The hon. member for Mulgrave asked the Minister to arrange for the raising of platforms on the Sunlander route. I agree that that is very necessary. The Minister explained that the cost of raising these platforms would be very high. On many occasions I have seen old people being virtually lifted out of and into the train. The distance from the platform to the carriage step at Gordonvale and Edmonton is easily three feet. The raising of the platforms would certainly be a great help to passengers. The lavatory accommodation at the Edmonton and Redlynch stations is inadequate. Many tourists go from Cairns to Kuranda and there is a lack of septic systems at the stations. Even the station-masters' dwellings have no septic systems. It is important that this amenity should be provided at the earliest opportunity. Septic systems at these places would be greatly appreciated not only by tourists but also by station-masters.

I now mention a matter raised by me while a member of the previous Government, the provision of section cars on the Kuranda Range. No. 1 and No. 2 gangs have section cars, but two gangs have to use the old

pump trolley on this steep range. I ask the Minister to consider replacing hand pump trollies with section cars on this line and if possible at all other places. The work of lengthsmen is tedious enough without having to use pump trollies. Section cars would allow more time for maintenance of the line.

Railway workers on the line from Cooktown to Laura have asked that I raise with the Government the supply of requisitions for the journey from Cooktown to Cairns. A man on a small wage finds it hard to pay air fare or boat fare for himself and family to Cairns and return during his annual holidays.

Mr. Chalk: How many men would be there?

Mr. ADAIR: About 15. Mr. Gladwell who is in charge of the railway station at Cooktown could handle the issue of requisitions for plane and boat travel. The fare in each case is about the same. It would mean a great deal to these men and their families.

Great progress in rail service has been made in the last five years in the Cairns district. The previous Government are to be congratulated on the work they did during their period of office. I hope that progress will continue and that the area will receive sympathetic consideration when further improvement is possible.

The rail motor from Cairns to Kuranda continues to Ravenshoe. Many tourists use the service. I ask the Minister to consider the installation on that rail motor of a public address system so that passengers can be told of the various places through which they are passing. At the present time they are given no information. The trip from Cairns to Kuranda and the Atherton Tableland takes in some of the finest scenic spots in Australia. I had much to do with railway-men while I was for seven years a contract carrier for the Cairns Brewery. We have heard things said about railway-men but I can honestly say that during those seven years I found them to be good workmen. All the beer I carted had to be sent by train and I came in close contact with the men. In all sections of the department the employees are doing an excellent job. It is unfair to criticise their work. I heard an hon. member mention something about the goods sheds in the South. In the Cairns goods sheds the men have to wait until the truck numbers are taken before they can put commodities into the wagons. By the time the wagons are shunted into position it may be half past 8 or 9 o'clock and the goods shed men have to carry on with other work until the trucks are placed in position. Trucks are allotted to the different stations. I can assure hon. members that railway-men in the Cairns area are doing good work.

During the war years employees in the service in the Far North did an excellent job, working almost round the clock. During that

time of heavy traffic movement the rolling-stock and engines got a severe bashing. It is understandable that it has taken a long time for the workshops to build up the trucks and put the engines and rollingstock back into reasonable order.

Last year I went to Dalby and saw a foundry operated by Napier Bros. At that foundry I saw trucks marked "Mareeba" and "Cairns" being repaired. This firm is doing excellent work but it would be impossible for the Cairns workshops to do the same as they have not got the equipment. If the railway workshops were given the same material and machinery they could do the same job but as things are at present it is impossible for them to carry out maintenance work effectively.

The Government should provide improved accommodation and amenities for lengthsmen and bridge carpenters in remote areas. One has only to travel from Cairns to Forsayth and Einasleigh to realise the hard life that these men live, and they should receive some consideration from the department.

I request the Minister also to give special consideration to lengthsmen and bridge carpenters who have worked in remote areas for many years and are reaching the retiring age. It is hard work—they are out in all weathers—and they should be transferred into the workshops at Cairns or Mareeba. Since I have represented the area I have been able to get several men transferred from the lengths into the workshops, and any request from others for a transfer should be granted if they have given long and faithful service to the department.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to the matters I have raised.

Mr. THACKERAY (Keppel) (9.28 p.m.): The Minister seems to hold the opinion that if he is to run the railways efficiently, he must silence his critics. Before starting to do that, however, I ask him to take his mind back several years.

Mr. Sparkes: To 1929?

Mr. THACKERAY: To somewhere round 1949. I am referring now to the printing industry and to a royal commission when the present Minister was regarded as the big joke.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member must confine his remarks to the Vote under discussion.

Mr. THACKERAY: Criticism has been levelled at me concerning my remarks about control clerks. If they were allowed to work on Sunday afternoons they would be entitled to another week's annual leave.

Another wisecrack was thrown into the ring in what I said about the hotel at Yeppoon. I raised that matter in the first instance and referred to all hotels in Central

Queensland. It is up to the Government to see that hotels reach the standard laid down by the Licensing Commission.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Hotels are not covered by the Vote under discussion.

Mr. Sparkes interjected.

Mr. THACKERAY: I know more about trains than the hon. member for Aubigny knows about beef.

I referred to trains that are known locally as 241, and 54-Up. The departure of 54-Up should be advanced. The new member for Gregory will support me in this because the people of the West are directly interested in having a train leave Rockhampton earlier so that they can get out to their homes in due time.

Mr. Sparkes: The new member for Gregory does not know what you are talking about.

Mr. THACKERAY: He knows more about a buckjumper than about railways.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. THACKERAY: I shall reserve further comment till later.

Hon. G. W. W. CHALK (Lockyer—Minister for Transport) (9.31 p.m.): If the hon. member for Keppel enlightened me as to the real reason for his rising to speak I would be able to reply to him. First of all apparently he wanted to raise a matter that happened in 1949 and you, Mr. Taylor, rightly ruled him out of order for raising it in this debate. He will have an opportunity to raise it in some other debate and if he cares to do so I will be quite happy to answer him. From the contribution he made in the last few minutes it was impossible to gather whether he said anything or not. No doubt "Hansard" will be kind to him and at least prepare a few remarks. He claimed to know more about trains than the hon. member for Aubigny knew about bullocks. I challenge that. I think the hon. member for Aubigny knows a great deal about bullocks, but I doubt whether the hon. member for Keppel would really know whether a railway engine had a tender at the rear, or indeed just where it had it, judging from his speech.

This afternoon the hon. member for Burdekin mentioned what he claimed were conditions brought about by the erection of the new Burdekin bridge. I am sure no hon. member on either side of the Chamber, of the previous Government or of the present Government, would want the people of the area to be inconvenienced through the backing up of flood water. If the position is as he stated it, I ask him to submit details to me and I assure him that the matter will be investigated.

The hon. member for Cooroora said the rail motors in his area were dilapidated. I am not in a position to deny that. He said

further that they operated tied up with a rope and that they even travelled without brakes. I do not believe that is quite correct but if he is aware of such circumstances I think it is his duty to acquaint me of the facts. After all, the safety of train travellers is some responsibility of mine and of the Commissioner's.

The hon. member for Chermiside mentioned a suggestion for salvaging out-of-date material or items for which the Railway Department has no real use but which could be turned into ready cash. I do not know whether he has been reading the thoughts of the Commissioner and myself, but I compliment him for bringing the matter forward. Only this morning when discussing the departmental estimates with the Commissioner, reference was made to the possibility of turning into cash some of the dead stock and other material that might be salvaged. The Commissioner indicated that by a method such as that urged by the hon. member for Chermiside, it is possible that a considerable amount of dead stock and salvage material could be turned into ready cash for the development of the railway system. It could amount to a huge sum of money. I thank the hon. member for his suggestion. The latter part is particularly commendable. In an effort to interest railway men we might be able to do something similar to what has been done in other parts of the world.

Mr. Power: Are you going to tell us about the woman who was fined?

Mr. CHALK: I am not talking about the woman who was fined at all. The hon. member knows full well what I am talking about.

Mr. Power: Will you tell us the full story about that?

Mr. CHALK: I believe that we could introduce a salvage scheme into the railway department. I hope I shall be able to report on it at a later date.

I have no further information about the lady who apparently was fined. I have only seen the papers referred to by the hon. member. Probably some injustice was done. The lady did tender her fare. Probably a reprimand could have been given to her, but at the same time I know only the circumstances as the hon. member submitted them to me in correspondence.

Mr. Gair: An injustice was done to the taxpayer by wasting so much money trying to collect 9d.

Mr. CHALK: Yes. From his experience as Premier the hon. member for South Brisbane would know only too well that until you fully consult a file about a particular matter it is unfair to make comment. I do not know the lady. I have seen only the correspondence which the hon. member has shown me. If it was an isolated incident by her, I think that she was treated rather

unfairly. If that is so, I hope that my officers will take notice of the remarks made by the hon. member and the views I have expressed.

I realise that in the Cooktown-Laura area represented by the hon. member for Cook, there is a short length of railway line serving a very useful purpose. Only a small number of staff is employed. Under their policy of endeavouring to assist in the development of the North the Government will see that every consideration is given to any improvements that can possibly be made to the line. The hon. member's suggestion about giving the men in the locality a concession to enable them to connect up with the main line in Cairns warrants careful examination. I have the greatest admiration for men who are prepared to take their families into that locality to play their part as Queenslanders in helping to develop North Queensland. Again, without having all the facts before me, I am not prepared to give the hon. member any definite undertaking, but I will have a look at the circumstances and consider the matter.

Progress reported.

The House adjourned at 9.42 p.m.
