



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

QUESTION

BUDGET: ESTIMATES

SPEECH

Wednesday, 23 November 1910

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 23 November 1910</p> <p>Page 1</p> <p>Questioner</p> <p>Speaker MATHEWS, James</p>	<p>Source House</p> <p>Proof No</p> <p>Responder</p> <p>Question No.</p>
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Mr MATHEWS (Melbourne Ports—) (NaN.NaN pm) . - I am of the opinion that the projects we have in view will take a lot of financing before the end of the present financial year. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that we are making no provision in a good year for a surplus, but are spending all that we are receiving. The honorable member for North Sydney, however, was more optimistic, believing that there was plenty of money, and that a large surplus would be available. I hope his surmise is correct, and that the Ministry, although adopting penny postage, and other undertakings that will cause the loss of revenue, will not find that they have bitten off more than they can chew. I trust that they have made full provision for paying, especially the lower paid branches of the service, the increments that they have not given them in the past, and for giving them a real, and not an assumed, living wage. We must admit that, in certain walks of life, the more a man receives the more his expenditure grows. The conditions of modern civilization demand it of him, but the same conditions in Australia to-day demand that no man should be paid below a real living wage. No one in Australia, however thrifty he may be, can live under 8s. per day at his start in life, and there should be a chance for men who apply themselves to their work, and whose calling demands mechanical skill or study, to receive higher wages as they become fitted to earn them. Many honorable members ask, " Would you pay a man a wage that he was not worth?" I must admit that there is something in that contention, but there is no position in the Federal Public Service that is not worth 8s. a day, while men with mechanical skill who have to study for the positions they occupy ought to receive a minimum of 10s. a day. As a man reaches, and goes over the £200 per annum mark, I admit that I am not very much concerned about him, because I think that he can then look after himself, and fight to maintain his own position. Men in the Public Service who are receiving only 7s. 3d. a day should be considered more than as men receiving £200 a year. Those in the lower paid branches of the service have no hope of rearing a family, and making provision for the time when they will have to retire. I sincerely hope the Treasurer is saving enough money to insure that such men will receive an advance on what they have been paid in the past. While the heads and sub-heads of the different Departments are looking after

their own increments, and making their own positions fairly secure, many of them will not assist those who are lowly paid to get a better chance than they have had up to the present. Of course, I do not blame any man for trying to advance himself, and the heads and sub-heads of Departments are quite justified in taking any fair and legitimate means to improve their positions, but most of them decry the work done by those in the lower paid branches as not being worth any more, while maintaining that their own work is worth a lot more than they are getting for it. I admit that that is human, but it should not obtain in the Public Service, where the conditions are quite different from those outside. We pass laws insisting on the payment of fair wages outside, where employers are largely subject to the conditions of the money market, or bad seasons, or other conditions that affect their business, and, seeing that that is the case, we should insist on a better wage being paid to those in our own employment. The Public Service Commissioner is the biggest transgressor in this direction. I propose to give the Committee details of, at any rate, one case in which that gentleman has fought Government after Government who have recognised that certain work should be better paid. He, in his position of Czar, has taken up the stand that the work is not worth more than a certain amount. In 1907, during the *regime* of the Deakin Government, when **Mr. Mauger** was Postmaster-General, the men working in the pole yard claimed that the wage of 8s. a day that they were then getting was not sufficient, because they were really mechanics of a high order. The then Postmaster-General recognised the justice of their claim, and as they were only temporary employes, he, by regulation, assessed the value of their work at 10s. a day. The Commissioner, in order to outwit the Minister, immediately decided that the positions should be made permanent, and fixed the wage at 8s. 5d. a day. That is what those men are now paid. The Commissioner says that the work that they do is only labourers' work, and does not warrant the payment of more. I wish to exhibit to the Committee a model of a telegraph pole. I am sorry that I have had to resort to this method of ventilating the matter, but there was no other way open to me. I am not an expert in woodwork, but I think I am as good a judge of it as the Public Service Commissioner. He says it is labourers' work to construct this pole, and place on it the arms and all the mechanism necessary. This model

is for carrying double lines, with bars on each side, connected with bolts. Each crosspiece is pinned to the pole with bolts that go right through. Everything must be kept level, and yet this is work which the Public Service Commissioner says is only labourers' work.

Sir John Quick (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Is it carpenters' work ?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Most of it is really shipwrights' work.

Mr Higgs (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - It looks like the work of a skilled mechanic.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Undoubtedly, because in doing this work everything has to be kept absolutely level. When the pole is in the air the work is even harder to do, and the permanent men who do that work outside get only 7s. 3d. a day, while the men doing the work in the yards are getting 8s. sd. This matter has caused more trouble in the Department than anything else since I have been in Parliament. Men who were shipwrights were willing to take the work at 10s. a day. The stand which I have here is of an octagon shape, and this work has to be done with adzes; yet the Public Service Commissioner sets himself up as a judge, saying that any rough and handy man can do it for 8s. 5d. a day. It does not need a skilled woodworker to say that the work is not what the Public Service Commissioner says it is. A great deal of trouble has been occasioned in determining how the arms should be put on, how the posts should be cut at the top, what wood should be used, and other matters, and a Board has just finished an inquiry into the subject, though I fear that the public will be as badly off in the future as it has been in the past, because the officials are not practical men. When a practical man is employed, the work is described as that of a labourer, and paid accordingly. If the Public Service Commissioner is of opinion that this is labourers' work, he is not fitted for his position. Some time ago I met a gentleman who came here from the Old Country, who ridiculed the expensive practice of using copper wire where iron wire would do, the latter costing only 1 1/2 d per lb., and the former 10 1/2 d. The price of iron wire does not fluctuate much, but that of copper fluctuates a good deal. The year before last it was about nd. a lb.

Mr Thomas Brown (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Copper is used for greater efficiency.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - The practical men in the Department, not the theorists, think that nothing is gained by using copper wire for short lines. Some of the iron wire lines have been in use for thirty years, and give as good results now as copper wire lines. Last year an iron wire line, put up when I was a boy, to connect the Age office with **Mr. David** Syme's house on the Yarra, at Hawthorn, was

still giving satisfactory results, although for a good part of its length it ran parallel with the railway line, and was exposed to the smoke of locomotives, which was prejudicial to its life. There is an iron wire line to Bacchus Marsh, and those who have spoken over it know that its conductivity is better than that of many copper wire lines. I do not say that copper wire should not be used for long-distance lines like that from Sydney to Melbourne, but for short city lines iron wire is sufficiently good, and is much cheaper. When the honorable member for Bendigo was Postmaster-General, the instruction was given that iron wire must be used where suitable. At the time there was not a great quantity of iron wire in stock, but when a new supply was obtained, the onus of determining whether iron wire or copper wire should be used was thrown on the line foreman, who naturally did not care to run any risk. Why should responsibility of this kind be thrown on men receiving only £156 a year? It would not be allowed in a business office. No doubt it is done to shield the official "heads, who, if anything goes wrong, can blame their subordinates. When there was an outcry against the increase in the telephone rates, many persons stated in letters to the newspapers that they did not object to paying rates which would make the service profitable, but objected to making good losses due to extravagant or incompetent management, and demanded that a better system should be provided. The Postmaster-General has shown that the auditors appointed by the last Government were of opinion that the rates should be increased, and the Postal Commission recommended an increase, so that the action of the Postmaster-General has justification, but, at the same time, the subscribers are right in demanding efficiency and economy of administration. For some time I was trying to get the conduit system extended. Two years ago, I stated in this Chamber that the officials are too fond of seeing their work in the air. In up-to-date towns overhead lines will soon be abolished. The conduit system is not so expensive as the tunnel system. Tunnels would be necessary in busy parts of the city, but conduits connected with them would be used for the suburbs. The ratio of the cost of having wires overhead to that of having them in conduits is about as one to six, but the Department would do nothing in the way of getting rid of the overhead lines until an agitation for their abolition commenced. It is a pity that the officials are not more ready to accept suggestions for improvements. The Acting Prime Minister has promised that reforms shall be inaugurated, and that the Deputy Postmasters-General shall be brought together to discuss matters, but unless more notice is taken of the suggestions from outside, little improvement will be made. I desire the improvement of the service in the interests of those who are employed in it, because I do not wish to see their wages reduced. The service should

be run as economically as possible, consistent with efficiency, and with the payment of fair wages. The honorable member for Hindmarsh said that a private employer would never put a man who had been trained in one Department at the head of another, and, referred to the appointment of **Mr. Whitton** to the Customs Department. There is a good deal in what he said.

Sitting suspended from 6.30 to 8 p.m.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Whilst I think that there is a good deal in the remarks made by the honorable member for Hindmarsh, I feel that, so far as heads of Departments are concerned, the introduction of new blood is often advisable. We have had experience of the growth of cliques in Departments, and the introduction of new blood must be beneficial. Such a procedure must be purely experimental, but an officer trained in the Audit Department might more readily fit himself for a position in another Department than would an officer in some other branch of the service. The Federal services are increasing. We are taking over more and more services from the States, and whilst I do not wish to interfere with the promotion of Federal officers, I consider it only fair that when we take over a State Department we should take over at the same time the officers belonging to it. The Public Service Commissioner should not be allowed to exercise a discretion in such circumstances as to who shall be left stranded in the State service. If that system be allowed to continue, we shall breed in the State service a feeling of discontent, with the result that State officers will bring their grievances before the local Legislatures, and endeavour to place obstacles in the way of

Federal management. Let me draw attention to a case in point : Some time ago we took over the old-age pensions services of Victoria, Queensland, and New South Wales, and one would naturally think that since we had had no old-age pension system of our own, the officers of the Old-age Pensions Departments of the States would be considered the most suitable to carry on the Federal system. Those whom we took over naturally thought that, since with their transfer they would forego all chance of promotion in the State Departments, their rights would be conserved, and that they would be retained in the Federal Oldage Pensions office. That belief has not been justified. I know of an officer who, whilst in a State Treasury, was almost wholly associated with the payment of oldage pensions. He was brought over temporarily on four different occasions to the Federal office, and as soon as our old-age pensions system had been made fairly effective, he was told that he was wanted no longer, and was returned to the State service, where he will have to be employed in a Department in which he has not been trained. That is a practice that should be stopped. If the

Ministry are not strong enough to prevent the Public Service Commissioner doing an injustice of that kind, it is time that they made some attempt to do so. Since we are approaching the prorogation, and a long recess, the Public Service Commissioner's wings should be clipped so that he will not be able to ruin men's lives in the way I have described. This is a very glaring case, and I feel strongly upon it. I do not blame the Treasurer, nor the Treasury officials. The only man who can be blamed is the Public Service Commissioner, who took it upon himself to ruin this man's prospects. I hope that this system will not be continued. The Public Service Commissioner may say that Federal public servants object to the transfer of State officers, but since this officer had been employed in the payment of old-age pensions, and was temporarily transferred to the Federal service, surely there could be no objection to his permanent employment by the Commonwealth. Under the Public Service Act, a State public servant may be appointed to a position in the Commonwealth service when no Federal public servant suitable for the office is available.

Mr Thomas (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Resort must be had to the service before we go outside.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - The peculiarity of this case is that the man had been in the State service for ten years, but was not allowed to come over with his fellow oldage pension officers.

Mr G B EDWARDS (NORTH SYDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES—) (NaN.NaN pm) - In the consolidated office, room cannot be found for all the men who were employed under the State system.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - When I assure the honorable member that the position formerly occupied by this officer has been filled by another officer who was not previously engaged in old-age pension work he will recognise that an injustice has been perpetrated. The continuance of this practice will be to the signal discredit of the Commissioner. I wish now to refer to the Defence Department. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I have in my electorate a great many of the men employed in that Department, and, naturally, they look to me, as their representative, to secure redress of any grievance under which they suffer. Very often what are only assumed grievances are brought under my notice, and are easily disposed of, but I find it impossible to secure the redress of genuine grievances. I think that the office of Minister of Defence should be occupied by a member of this House. No man is more capable than is the Acting Prime Minister of taking charge of a Bill at short notice, but in dealing with defence measures he must be placed at a disadvantage. Every Minister looks upon a Bill relating to his own Department as one of his own special bantlings, and, naturally, objects to another

Minister, when in charge of it, allowing it to be cut up and amended out of recognition. The Acting Prime Minister must be at a disadvantage in taking charge of defence measures in this House, just as Ministers in another place are in taking charge of measures relating to Departments other than those over which they preside. I have a grievance against the Defence Department. I find it impossible to secure redress of any wrong ; and I know of no procedure to which I can resort to secure the remedying of anomalies. We all recognise that the main body of our Defence Force must take the form of Militia, but if we are to have an efficient army we must have a larger proportion of permanent men than we have to-day. The Permanent Naval Forces will also have to be increased with the growth of our navy. If we are to have an up-to-date artillery we must certainly have more artillerymen.

Every one must admit that the artilleryman is not what he was some years ago. The artillery and the artificers associated with that branch of our forces are practical mechanics or engineers of high order. They have to thoroughly understand what are really delicate pieces of machinery, rather than guns of a gas-pipe order, to which some of our old-time ordnance might well be compared. The men who are charged with the handling of these delicate pieces of mechanism must be paid a fair wage. It is reported that it is very difficult to secure recruits for the Royal Australian Artillery. I hope that that difficulty will continue, and that the manhood of Australia will refuse to enlist in the Royal Australian Artillery as long as the miserable pittance now paid is continued. The qualifying examination is as stringent as possible. An applicant to be successful must be of high moral character, and of really fine physique. Our artillerymen are superior to those of any other part of the world. I have seen many of the crack British regiments, and I do not hesitate to say that there is no finer body of men than is the Royal Australian Artillery. We have the audacity, however, to offer these men only 2s. 6d. per day, with rations and housing, and a certain quantity of clothing: Unless we pay a considerably higher wage the ranks must be depleted. If the men in the ranks had any hope of securing, after a few years of training, higher positions in the service, and were eligible for a pension on reaching the age at which they are no longer fit to be in the fighting line, it would be only reasonable to start them at fairly low rates. But that is not the position. I should not object so much to the wages paid to a man on entering the service provided that he could work up, but the position is that these men, after they have been years in force - after they have acquired expert knowledge and, perhaps, have married and have a family to keep - continue to receive the same beggarly pittance that was paid them on entering the service.

Mr McWilliams (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - And they have nothing to look forward to.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Absolutely nothing. We cannot have the Force all generals or sergeants ; there must be some men in the lower ranks. We know, however, that by the time a soldier is forty he is really " done " as a gunner or a private in the infantry, as is proved by the retiring age. But, after paying a man the magnificent wage of 2s. 6d. a day, we cast him on the world unfitted for any other avocation, following the example elsewhere in the world that we have condemned more than once. Similar conditions prevail in the Navy, for which men must be thoroughly fitted, physically and otherwise ; and yet, no matter how meritorious their conduct, or how long their service, the highest wage they can reach is 5s. a day. It is only very recently, after much agitation, that good-conduct badges were provided; but there seems considerable repugnance on the part of the officials to recommending recipients for these badges; and all that the men can look forward to is an old-age pension, with the difference that pensioners outside the service have had opportunities that those men inside, with their small pittance, could not avail themselves of. Seeing that a large present has been made to the merchants of Australia in the form of penny postage, I hope that something will be done to provide a living wage for those in the Defence Forces.

Mr Joseph Cook (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Will the honorable member tell me why his party turned right-about-face on a proposal to give these men a little work? Last year the Labour party were all in favour of this course; but last night they voted against it without a word of explanation.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - In the past, there have been positions into which these men could be drafted in the Pay Branch, the Stores Branch, and the Ordnance Branch. This was done at the instance of the honorable member for Parramatta, when he was Minister of Defence, and unanimously approved by the House ; and yet, without a trial, the system has been abolished at the behest of civil public servants, who are the head officials in the Defence Department.

Mr. Mc Williams. - Who abolished it ?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - I do not like to take advantage of my position here, and, therefore, I shall not mention names.

Mr McWilliams (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - But the Government must be responsible.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - No doubt the Minister is to blame; but this is done at the behest of civil servants who wish to keep their positions a close preserve. I think I am correct in that view, because,

in every other army in the world, those positions are offered as prizes to men in the ranks of good character and ability. I should like to give a little advice to some of the sub-heads in the Defence Department. I have no desire to name them, but I remind them that they are not there in their own interests, but in the interests of the people of Australia, and to do justice to all beneath them in position. When we find them failing signally in that duty, some method must be adopted to bring them to book ; and I warn them that if they continue either the pin-pricks or the bludgeoning to which they have resorted, I shall name them from the floor of the House, and make it so " hot " for them that they will wish they had been more careful.

Mr McWilliams (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Whynot blame those who are really responsible?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - I have already admitted that the fault lies with the Minister. I was born and reared in the Army, so that I know the conditions ; and it is impossible to change the old order of things until some one takes a firm stand. Any man in a position of authority has his difficulties ; but he is paid a big wage, and if he lacks tact, or ability, he only proves his unfitness.

Mr McWilliams (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - The Minister is paid a great deal larger salary !

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - The difficulties may be greater than the Minister imagined, or, perhaps, than I imagine. I may say that there seems a determination on the part of some of the officials to discourage the use of Australian manufactures ; and when they are forced by the Minister, by public clamour, or the newspapers, to take another view, they do so grudgingly, and in a manner calculated to discredit the local product.

Mr Atkinson (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Is that general?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - It is so in most of the Branches, but not in all.

Mr McWilliams (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Does not the Minister sign all the orders?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - I have already admitted that it is the Minister's fault; but those other gentry are to blame also. After years of agitation, it was decided to have ammunition waggons manufactured in Australia, and a contract was carried out two years ago, followed by another which has been let. The sub-heads of the Department would rather not have the work done here, because, when the articles are imported, they have to be inspected only when they arrive, whereas, when they are manufactured here, they have to be inspected periodically, and the officials are responsible for their quality. In the case of the axles, the

Iron Trades Council have raised an objection that those imported for the present contract are not so much in the rough as those for the former contract. It is calculated that about fourteen hours more work was required for the axles in the first contract than is required for the axles in the second contract. In the former case, four or five hours' work was provided for a blacksmith and his striker, and two or three hours' work for a fitter and his assistant; but in the second case, the axles sent out are, as I said, in a more finished condition, and, naturally, the men here, who are ready to do the work, object. Allowing for all official prejudice as to the quality of the steel and so forth, surely it is the duty of the departmental heads to give as much work as possible to the artisans of Australia. The Minister was brought to book, and there has been an exhibition in the vestibule of Parliament House of a finished axle and an unfinished axle for a second contract. The work, I am assured by men who know, is excellent ; but what was really required was an unfinished axle sent out for the first contract, and an unfinished axle sent out for the second, so that the difference might have been seen.

Mr Frazer (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - The Minister's advice is that five days and eight hours are required under present conditions to complete the axle, while, in the case of the first contract, four hours longer were required. The alteration was made for the purpose of obviating the re-tempering of the steel after it had once been tempered by the oil hardening process.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - If the Minister's advice is no more credible than other advice tendered to him, it is not worth much ; and I prefer to take the word of men outside the service, who are engaged in similar work, in preference to that of the Inspector of ordnance machinery. It seems petty to labour at this one question of the axles ; but, unless we take a stand, we shall find the officials importing more finished work. The officials may mean well, but they are not regardful enough of the welfare of other people who have to earn their living. I have had seven men come to me with regard to Public Service pensions to which they claimed they were entitled. They said they had been in the service since about 1878, but through some set of circumstances, the Department say that they are not entitled to pensions. I have brought five of the cases before the Departments, and the answer is to the same old effect, that the Commonwealth is not responsible for the whole of the pension. The State is responsible for a portion, and if the Commonwealth paid it without getting the sanction of the State concerned, the State would take the Commonwealth to the High Court, as has been done in other cases. Consequently, these men's pensions are not paid. I do not say that the Departments are treating the men unfairly, but as there are so many cases of this sort, and a lot of other men are now reaching the retiring age,

and will expect to receive pensions, only to find that they are refused, the least the Government can do is to appoint some kind of board to investigate the claims. The men claim that they were entitled to pensions in the State service, but the Departments say they were not. They are not educated men who can write out a brief that will carry their case through the whole of the Departments. They are hardworking men who have been sailors, watchmen, or firemen in their time. I have appealed on this matter to three Governments, but I have not been able to get satisfaction. I appeal to the present Government to appoint an officer in each State, and ask the State to appoint another man, and let these claimants go before them, and state their case.

Mr Frazer (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - I give the honorable member my word that if he presents a specific case, it will be fully investigated.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - And will these men have an opportunity to go before some one to state their case?

Mr Frazer (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - If the honorable member will give me a specific case, we shall see on the results of the investigation whether we are justified in making a comprehensive inquiry.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Will the Minister agree that whoever takes the matter in hand shall have the particular man of whose case I am thinking, before him, so that he can state his case?

Mr Frazer (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - If the honorable member will name a specific case, I shall bring the man before me, and investigate the case.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - That will satisfy me. The whole of these men who are suffering under an injustice will now, I hope, have an opportunity of stating their case. I am sorry to have to ventilate another grievance, but some twenty-two years ago, a petty officer named Critten, employed in our Defence Force, was in charge of a boat. A child was accidentally knocked into the water, and he placed himself, in order to save the child, in such a position that he was crushed. He was ill for some two years, and was physically unfit to take his place as a petty officer in the naval service. While convalescing, and after starting work again, he had to move nearer to the depot, and lost a house which he was buying, and on which he had paid some money. He spent over £100 for medical attendance and medicine. The Government of the time gave him £200, not for compensation, but to make up the loss that he had incurred on his house, and for medical attendance and medicine, and with regard to compensation, they said to him, "As you are not fit to pass a medical examination to be placed under the Discipline Act of the Navy, and cannot get promotion,

we shall put you in the stores, make you storekeeper, and you shall hold that position as long as you are physically fit." He is sixty years of age this year. Men who were subordinate to him, and no better in the service, are retiring to-day on pensions of from £120 to £160 per annum, but he, because of his injury, and the impossibility of securing advancement in the service for which he got no compensation, is retired on £52 a year. He claims that the Government of the time said he was to hold the position while he was physically fit.

Mr Joseph Cook (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Is he being retired?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - He has been retired. The Minister of Defence must take the blame for what is done in his Department.

Mr Carr (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Why not blame his predecessor?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Because the man was sacked during the time of the present Ministry. It is the fault of the present Minister, and of no one else. Some time ago the status of the storekeeper was increased. This man wanted the position of storekeeper, and applied for it, but the authorities would not give it to him. Being somewhat of a sailor or bush-lawyer, he stated his case so well, and made it so warm for those who stopped his getting the position, that he was given a Board to consider whether he should get the post or not. The Board decided that he was not entitled to it. After that, from sheer spite and nothing else, he was dismissed from the service. He was no longer allowed to continue as acting storekeeper on the miserable pittance of 7s. a day. When a man is discharged from the Army or Navy he gets his bit of parchment stating the reason for his discharge, and immediately receives his pension, but this man has been discharged now for three and a-half months, and has received no discharge paper, and no money by way of pension. How is he expected to live?

Mr Frazer (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Has the honorable member made any representations to the Minister about the case?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - I have had the man before the Minister myself, and have been reluctantly compelled, as a last resort, to bring the matter up in this Chamber in order to show what contemptible practices are followed by the Defence Department, for which the Minister is to blame.

Mr Frazer (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - What had the Minister to say?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - All the Minister said was that a Board had sat on the case and decided that the man was not to get the position; that if

he had been satisfied with the position he held he would have been allowed to remain, but as he was not, and his time was up, he had to go.

Mr McWilliams (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Why did he not get his discharge?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - That is what I want to know. I have persistently and consistently hammered away at the matter, and can get justice from nobody. I blame the naval officers for persecuting this man, and the Minister, for not being able to discern that they were not giving him justice.

Mr Atkinson (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Does the honorable member think that the Department are hoodwinking the Minister?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - The Minister has no right to be hoodwinked by them, and must take the whole of the blame for what has occurred. The man is now eating his heart out on account of the ill-treatment he has received. He is practically told by the Department, " You can starve. Although entitled to £1 a week, you shall get nothing until we choose to give it to you." I trust the Honorary Minister will take notice of this matter.

Mr Frazer (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - I have represented the Minister of Defence in this Chamber for six months, and the honorable member has said nothing to me about it before.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - I had to deal with the Minister of Defence in the matter, but I can get no redress from him or his officers.

Mr McWilliams (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - What explanation was given?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - The explanation is that the man made himself a nuisance in trying to get justice from the Department. I hope that officers of the Army, or Navy, or any other portion of the Public Service, will not be allowed in the future, as they have been in the past, to damn any man who happens to "look ugly " at them, or thwart them fairly and justly in some procedure which they want to carry through.

Mr McWilliams (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Who has the power to refuse a man his pension?

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - The Departments handle the case, and judge whether a man is entitled to a pension or not.

Mr Frazer (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - Only the law can prevent a man from getting his pension.

Mr MATHEWS (—) (NaN.NaN pm) - I hope something will be done through my bringing this

matter up. In conclusion, I wish to have another "smack" at the Public Service Commissioner. I hope .that in the future he will not be so biased in his judgment as to tell a practical man who wants fair pay for his work,, that it is labourer's work, when, oh the face of it, it is mechanic's work.