Queensland

# Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

## Legislative Assembly

### WEDNESDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 1879

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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

*Wednesday, 3 September, 1879.*

Question.—Motion for Adjournment.—Petition.—Toowoomba Chapel Lands Sale Bill—third reading.—Divisional Boards Bill—committee.

The SPEAKER took the chair at half-past 3 o'clock.

### QUESTION.

Mr. ARCHER asked the Colonial Secretary—

If he will lay upon the table the recent Correspondence between the Government and the Acclimatisation Society, upon the subject of the withdrawal of the Grant in aid of the Society?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Mr. Palmer) replied—

There is no objection, if moved for.

### MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT.

Mr. BAILEY moved the adjournment of the House to make a personal explanation. Last night he had, during the debate on the Divisional Boards Bill, stated that the present Government, at the last general election, were returned on two pledges—one, that they would advocate a large loan, and the other that there should be no increase of taxation. The Minister for Works, who followed him, said—

"As the hon. member for Wide Bay had expressed his intention to obstruct the Bill, and given a reason for doing so which was not true, he thought it better to state what the policy of the Government was at the last election."

He (Mr. Bailey) had since inspected numerous newspapers, and he invited particular attention to the following report which appeared in the *Bundaberg and Mount Perry Mail* of November 22, according to which the Premier said, in addressing his constituents:—

"He then explained his views on financial reform and deficit; he considered additional taxation unnecessary, showing the relative taxation of the different colonies, and that Queensland was already taxed at the rate of £6 0s. 4d. per head—the heaviest taxed of all the colonies. Road expenditure he fully explained, and was in favour that moneys be expended in proportion to the population of the various districts."

Those remarks fully bore out what he (Mr. Bailey) had said—namely, that the Government programme at the time of the election was not to increase taxation; but they had quite a different programme now.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY called attention to a serious mistake which appeared in *Hansard*. He was reported to have said "that while £65,000 had been spent in those districts (East and West Moreton), £105,000 had been spent in the rest of the colony." The last amount should have been £35,000, not £105,000. The mistake tended

to mislead entirely as to the purport of his speech, and as he spoke plainly enough he almost thought it had been wilfully done.

Question put and negatived.

## PETITION.

Mr. DICKSON presented a petition from residents of Zillman's Waterholes against the Divisional Boards Bill.

Petition read and received.

## TOOWOOMBA CHAPEL LANDS SALE BILL—THIRD READING.

On the motion of Mr. DICKSON, this Bill was read a third time, passed, and ordered to be transmitted to the Legislative Council by message in the usual form.

## DIVISIONAL BOARDS BILL—COMMITTEE.

The House went into Committee to further consider this Bill.

On clause 25—Ballot-papers sent by returning officer to every voter—Candidate may retire—

Mr. DICKSON said the clause introduced a new feature, and the Colonial Treasurer could not object to have it thoroughly discussed. In introducing the principle of voting by post they were introducing a feature which was contrary to the spirit of parliamentary and municipal elections, and which would interfere to a large extent with the secrecy of the ballot-box. He therefore thought the Committee would be justified in ascertaining whether any departure from the principle at present acted on would lead to beneficial results. He considered that electors, who if they chose to exercise their rights could do so with every facility under the present mode, should not be favoured by a system which was capable of grave abuses. The ballot-papers might, when posted, fall into other hands than those for which they were intended, and serious consequences would result. The succeeding clauses were all more or less connected, and should be read in connection with it, and their provisions were such as to imperil the secrecy of the ballot, if not destroy it. The principle of the ballot was one which had proved a great success, and it had been found in Great Britain, slow as she was to introduce it, that it was a decided improvement on the former system of open voting. The succeeding clauses to which he referred provided for the ballot-box being placed in charge of the postmaster, who was to be responsible for its safe custody; that on a ballot-paper being returned by post the elector should prepay the postage. He pointed out that while the returning officer was authorised to circulate the ballot-papers post free, the voter had to pay postage: if the principle was good in one case it ought to be so in the other. It seemed to him that, as the ballot-papers returned by the electors partook of the nature of Government documents, they ought to be transmitted free of postage. The next clause provided for duplicate ballot-papers in certain cases, and was a very dangerous one; but as it had no immediate relation to voting by post he would pass it now, but when it came on he should object to it as being very likely to materially alter the complexion of elections and the results. Clauses 30 and 31 were also important, and clause 32 affirmed that at 4 o'clock on the day of election the returning officer should demand the ballot-box from the postmaster. If the Premier were of opinion that open voting were preferable to voting by ballot, he (Mr. Dickson) would have admired his boldness for introducing it here; but in the system he proposed, of voting by post, the voters having to sign their names before a justice of the peace, with the subsequent custody of the papers by the country postmaster, there were opportunities for ballot-box stuffing—and which might or might not be made available—which could not fail to be very prejudicial to carrying out an election in its integrity. He could not regard this principle apart from the feeling that, if it were to be approved in this shape, it might extend in time to parliamentary elections. He was therefore constrained, unless the Colonial Treasurer could place the merits of the question before them in a more convincing manner than he had yet done, to enter his objection to the measure. He hoped hon. members on both sides of the House would, irrespective of party, give this very important principle their impartial consideration. So far as he could see, Government need not be wedded to this particular system; they should leave it to the intelligence of the House to decide whether this was a wise provision to introduce in their legislation concerning the electoral laws, and he trusted that hon. members, recognising this, would bestow on the matter an independent criticism, and show whether the principle was one which it would be desirable to accept and whether it was prudent to introduce it now.

The PREMIER (Mr. McIlwraith) said the hon. gentleman had not given them any reasons why the principle of voting by post should not be put into force, but had only invited Government to show reasons why they should introduce the system. The system was not a novel one; it had been tried before and found useful. The principle introduced into the Imperial Local Government Act of 1858 was, that the chairman should appoint some one to deliver voting papers to the voters, and he might adopt the same or any other means to collect them when filled up. The system now

sought to be introduced was an improvement upon that, because it secured what the hon. member seemed to think a *sine quâ non*—secrecy. The hon. gentleman's first objection, that voting papers might fall into improper hands, was quite inconsistent with his second—that it would violate the secrecy of the ballot, because the voter must not only sign his name, but have his signature witnessed; so that two people would have to perjure themselves. One objection, therefore, nullified the other. He (Mr. McIlwraith) did not attribute much value to the secrecy of the ballot, and believed the time would come when there would be sufficient independence among men to induce them to stand forth and give their votes in the face of the world. There was a sneaking principle about the ballot to which he could not reconcile himself. In Victoria, where voting by ballot was first used in Australia, the secrecy of the ballot had had to give way to accuracy in counting the votes; each ballot-paper was numbered, and it was quite possible by a scrutiny of the votes to ascertain how any individual elector voted. By that means false voting was prevented; and the secrecy of the ballot would be violated in this Bill for the same purpose by providing that the signature of the voter must be guaranteed by a J.P., or some other voter residing in the district. As to the application of the system to parliamentary elections, he failed to see why that should not ultimately come about, and it might result in a great success. To a certain extent the system was an experiment, but there was no reason why it should not be tried, for no other system had been suggested so inexpensive and so likely to arrive at the real verdict of a division. This Bill was intended to apply to sparsely-populated districts, and voting by post seemed to him the only system which would work cheaply and well. As to the objection that the voting papers ought to be returned to the returning officer free of postage, he would only say that if a voter chose to keep it back on that account he was very fairly disfranchised.

Mr. DICKSON said there might be some good in the system if divisional districts were to be of an extent equal in area to electoral districts; but after the Premier's statement last night that each electoral district might contain several divisional districts, he failed to see why such an innovation as voting by post should be introduced merely on account of extent of district. The only argument advanced in its favour was that it would save electors riding long distances to record their votes, and that was now cut away. Even admitting all that the Premier had urged, the system was still open to the objection that the returning officer and the district postmaster had between them the means, if they chose to exercise it, of stuffing the ballot-box.

Mr. ARCHER said, looking upon the clause without the slightest favour as coming from the Government which he supported, he agreed cordially with the system of voting by post, mainly because it would entirely prevent double voting; and even supposing there was a tendency in that direction, it would be counteracted by the obligation to sign the voting paper, and have the signature witnessed by a competent person. Under such a system it would be impossible to stuff the ballot-box. This provision would not be of much consequence to residents in settled districts; but as it would be mainly applied in outside and sparsely-populated districts, it was of great importance that people should be able to record their votes without having to ride 100 or 150 miles to do so. A new system of voting ought not to be rejected simply because it was new. Queenslanders were a new people, and were not obliged to stick to the old rules; and it was quite possible that this system might be an improvement on any hitherto introduced. As to the objection that the secrecy of the ballot-box might be violated by the returning officer and the postmaster, he would point out that they were both bound to secrecy under heavy penalties. But Parliament ought to try to educate people up to a certain amount of honour and honesty in public affairs; and he hoped it was not too much to say that they could find in every district returning officers and postmasters far above the meanness of communicating what they were bound in honour to conceal. If the system did not turn out a good one there would be no difficulty in altering it, and they might, at all events, give it a fair trial.

Mr. MCLEAN said it was essentially necessary that the people should be accurately acquainted with the part they would have to take in the working of the Bill, and for that reason he wished to obtain a few items of information. Did the words "The returning officer shall transmit the voting-papers by post or otherwise" imply that they would have to be sent as well as returned by post, or would the system prevailing at municipal elections apply? Another question—and it had reference to the 12th clause already passed—was, supposing a voter had property amounting to the rateable value of £100, which gave him three votes, would he be entitled to vote for three candidates, or plump for one, according as he felt disposed? Voters ought to be enlightened on those points before they could fill up their ballot-papers properly.

The PREMIER replied to the first question, that the returning officer might

deliver voting-papers, but that they must be returned by post; and to the second question, that a man possessing three votes could either distribute them among three candidates, or give them all to one candidate.

Mr. KINGSFORD said the object of voting by ballot was not so much to promote secrecy as to prevent intimidation, and the plan of voting by post might enable a large employer of labour to bring mischievous influence to bear on those employed by him. This could be very easily done if the employer happened to be at all unprincipled. He noticed one omission in the clause that ought to be supplied, and that was that no provision was made for voters who were unable to write.

Mr. MCLEAN said there was another matter on which he wanted information. According to an amendment to be proposed by the Premier, the signature of a voter might be guaranteed by any other voter. Would it not be a better plan to number the ballot-papers? Personation and double voting would then be impossible.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN: There would be no secrecy then.

Mr. MCLEAN said he merely suggested that, because it was said a similar plan was followed in Victoria. He respected highly the secrecy of the ballot-box, especially in the mother-country, where large employers of labour could so easily bring undue influence to bear upon their men. The danger was not so great here as yet.

Mr. HENDREN put the case of a voter who could neither read nor write, and asked how the secrecy of the ballot could be preserved when the person did not know for whom he was to vote, and when there might not be a justice of the peace within many miles?

The PREMIER said that clause 28 contained the information asked for by the hon. member for South Brisbane. If the voter could not write he would have to put his mark.

The Hon. S. W. GRIFFITH said it had not been shown how the ballot-papers would be delivered in sparsely-settled parts of the country where there were no postmen to deliver. They might be distributed at two or three stations in an outside district, and the station hands and people likely to vote properly would get papers. But if no better provision was to be made, they might just as well say at once that employers of labour would be allowed to elect the candidate. The system introduced by Mr. Walsh when Minister for Works was better: in that system it was open voting, but everyone had a chance. So little information had been given that the Committee did not know yet what sort of districts they had to deal with. For instance, in Oxley there were at the last election more polling-places than post offices; and this Bill would not facilitate polling there because it would make the number of polling-places fewer than under the present system. The difficulties of distributing the papers in the outside districts would be found insuperable. The returning officer might address a ballot-paper, "John Smith, Maranoa;" and it would be next heard of in the *Gazette* as an unclaimed letter—in fact, the dead-letter office would be the destination of most of the voting-papers. Taking Cunnamulla as an instance, how could a returning officer send papers to the voters so that they would be able to return them in three weeks—how many papers would be so returned? The proposal that it should be sufficient for any voter to vote in the presence of another voter was certainly personation made easy. When the paper was once in the post office all possibility of detection would be at an end. Every safeguard that had ever been devised in any system of election he had seen had been entirely thrown aside. There were no doubt cases in which voting by post was admissible; but there ought to be safeguards in such cases. It had been said that the expense was the great objection against allowing voting in the ordinary way, but the expense would not be much greater than in sending the papers out. If a messenger were sent out with them he would probably leave a dozen of them with the employer on a station for distribution. In the towns the difficulty would not arise—where the people were numerous they could go to the poll; but in sparsely-settled places the papers would not be delivered and there would be no votes. The Premier had said that the whole colony was already mapped out into districts; would he select one as an instance to show how the scheme would be practicable?

The PREMIER said the hon. gentleman suggested difficulties which did not exist, and he asked for an example of a district. The hon. gentleman had referred to Maranoa, and he (Mr. McIlwraith) would take Maranoa as an instance and suppose the whole district to be one division. There would not then be one place in that division where a freeholder or leaseholder could not be reached by post, and be enabled to return his ballot-paper to any central place, like Roma, in the time allowed by the Bill. That was a case presenting, perhaps, the greatest difficulties of any, and in the districts where there was a greater population to the square mile the difficulties would be very much less. He believed the expense of election would be very much reduced, and that would be one of the advantages of the system. The hon. gentleman said that most of the letters would not reach their destination, but would find their way to the dead-letter office. There was no

proof of that, however, and he (Mr. McIlwraith) assumed that every freeholder and leaseholder had an address by which he could be reached by the post office. The only question, therefore, was whether a sufficient length of time had been allowed to admit of papers reaching every part of the divisions. The hon. gentleman also said that the returning officer might send ballot-papers to whom he liked; and, in fact, elect the members. But if a returning officer dared to do such a thing he would soon be found out. Returning officers were supposed to be ordinarily honest, and to assume that they would do such a thing with the certainty of disgrace and punishment before them was to use an argument which was not worth answering.

Mr. McLEAN said the Premier was very sanguine of the ballot-papers reaching their destination; but, unless they were specially sent out by messenger, not one-tenth would ever be delivered. He should also like to know why the papers must be sent through the post. When a man had addressed and stamped his ballot-paper, and ridden down to the post office with it, why should he not be allowed to put it into the ballot-box? It would be better to have the duplicate principle, so that a man could send his paper to the post office or put it in the ballot-box, as he chose. The hon. member for Fassifern knew that the ballot-papers would not reach their destination in his district unless they were sent out by special messenger.

Mr. PERSSE said he saw no reason why the ballot-papers should not be delivered as well as ordinary letters. There were not more unclaimed letters in his district than in other parts.

Mr. ARCHER said the hon. member for the Logan had rather exaggerated the difficulties. No doubt some of the papers would miscarry, but probably not more than in the case of ordinary letters. Sometimes a mail was lost, but, as a rule, the letters were remarkably well delivered considering the difficulties to be contended with. The hon. member forgot the immense saving of time and trouble there would be in one man being able to ride into town with sixty letters in his pocket, instead of each of the sixty men having to make the journey.

Mr. McLEAN said the hon. member for Blackall bore out his argument. Why should not the man carrying the sixty letters put them in the ballot-box at the post office instead of into the post office? If the ballot-box was at the post office it was as easy to put them in one as the other.

The PREMIER said that uniformity was essential. The hon. member contemplated the possibility of only one post office in the division; but in most there would be a dozen. Why should the rule be broken for an exceptional case, where the ballot-box was at the only post office in the division?

Mr. McLEAN said it appeared that the Bill was being passed under misrepresentation. They had been told that the divisions might be divided into subdivisions. In the large districts there might be two or three post offices, but in the great majority of the subdivisions there would be only one. In subdivisions in Fassifern, Oxley, Logan, Bulimba, and others, there would be only one post office, and the Committee would do well to consider the clause with their eyes open.

Mr. BEOR did not see what the advantage would be of allowing people to put their ballot-papers straight into the ballot-boxes. The ballot-boxes must be in some one's care. He knew one place—the Dee River—where there was nobody but the postmaster to whom it would be advisable to hand the ballot-box, and it would have to be placed in his charge.

The Hon. J. DOUGLAS said the system was new and untried, but it might be desirable to try the experiment. The object in adopting a new form of voting was to simplify matters and enable a larger number of voters to vote, so that in a widely scattered district the sense of the ratepayers might be obtained. He was afraid that this system would have a directly contrary effect, because, though it might be effectively carried out in the suburban districts, the infrequency of postal communication in the back country district would retard its operation and render success impossible. With regard to clause 25, which provided the method of distribution, the returning officer would in many cases have no choice, as only by appointing someone to distribute the papers could their receipt by the voters be secured. Members conversant with the country districts knew that letters addressed to people in the country remained for days, sometimes weeks, before they were inquired for. In the Logan and West Moreton districts that would certainly be the case, and in the uncivilised districts people did not call at the post offices for weeks. The clause provided for that contingency by allowing the officer to take other means for delivering the papers. Even in the civilised districts voting through the post would be tedious and very often lead to delays. However meritorious the intention might be, that objection would be fatal. He was willing that the experiment should be tried, but it would demonstrate the failure most unmistakably. The principle might be applied in the vicinity of towns, but where people lived ten, twenty, and thirty miles from the post office, the failure of the system would be most apparent.

The PREMIER said the hon. gentleman under-estimated the efficiency of the post office. Nobody doubted that there were

plenty of people whose letters lay at the post office for a considerable time, but that was simply because they did not get letters oftener than once in six months. Such cases were exceptional and could not be legislated for. He would point out, however, that such parties would be more likely to get the letters containing the ballot-papers speedily, for the elections would be advertised thirty days before they came off, and they would know that at a certain date the papers would be posted for them.

Mr. DICKSON said that even in the thickly-populated district which he represented there were several localities to which a letter might be addressed without any certainty that it would reach its destination within a given time, and in the more sparsely-settled districts letters might lie for weeks and even months before being applied for. He was convinced great difficulty would be experienced in forwarding the ballot-papers to their destination, and he would point out that under the Bill no elector would be able to obtain his paper direct from the returning officer. It must come through the post; which would be likely to lead to a great deal of confusion, and to a large number of voters not receiving their ballot-papers in time for the election, as they might be left lying at the different post offices. The Colonial Treasurer had introduced an amendment, whereby scrutineers had to make a solemn declaration that they would keep secret all knowledge of the way in which electors had voted. Why was it not also made obligatory upon justices, who witnessed the signatures of voters, to observe secrecy?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Mr. Perkins) said, in reference to the objections made by Opposition members, that electors were not likely to get their voting papers through the post, he would like to ask the hon. member for Logan, by way of a homely illustration, whether he did not receive his tailor's bill when it was sent by post? He (Mr. Perkins) had never failed to get his tailor's bill or any other account that was posted to him, and he could say that in this colony, with its immense territory, the postal arrangements were as perfect as anywhere else. He had been in communication with persons in the remote parts of the colony, and had found that the delivery was as certain, barring such accidents as floods, as in the city of Brisbane. Persons who did not look out for their letters at the first election would possibly do so at the second. He considered the objections that had been raised mere idle talk.

Mr. MCLEAN said it appeared to him that in the opinion of the Government the Opposition were either to sit still and hold their tongues, or walk outside the House, for whenever a suggestion was offered it was all idle talk. The Opposition were as much interested in the Bill as the member for Aubigny.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN said he had not found many letters miscarry in the colony, and disagreed with the statement of the leader of the Opposition that the scheme would do very well in the populous districts but would be a failure in the outside ones. He believed, on the other hand, it would be harder to work in the populous localities, for in the sparsely-populated ones people knew one another intimately. Assuming that the scheme would work as badly as had been urged, would anyone venture to say that one-third of the ballot-papers would miscarry? Granting, however, that that number would not reach their destination, the result would be no worse than was usually the rule now in parliamentary elections: in any election that he had seen in the colony not more than two-thirds of the people on the roll voted. He was satisfied, though, that every man who had taxes to pay would take more interest in an election under this law than in a parliamentary election. As to what had been said by the hon. member (Mr. Dickson) in praise of the ballot, he had expected to hear from him some cure for the evils which existed in it. No one assisted more than he (Mr. O'Sullivan) to get the ballot introduced in this colony, but he would now assert that if they had prevented one mischief by it they had added a dozen: a more disgraceful mode of voting was never invented. The member for Rosewood had told them the other evening that one enterprising gentleman recorded a vote at every polling-place on one side of the Rosewood electorate, and he (Mr. O'Sullivan) knew a locality in an electorate where fifty-three votes were polled, although it was well known that only fifteen electors lived in it. Could not any hired villain disfranchise the best man in the district by such means?—men could be hired to poll votes in an electorate at so much per head. The ballot should prevent personation as well as intimidation; but, as a fact, the personation that could take place under it outweighed everything that could be said in its favour. Their first consideration should be what remedy can be provided for this state of things? The present scheme would be a great check, and if it tended to prevent personation a great benefit would be conferred upon the colony, and it could be extended. If any defects were discovered they could be cured.

Mr. GRIFFITH said a new system of legislation was being advocated. A complete change was to be made in their system of conducting elections, and yet it was said that it was a waste of time to discuss it. Things were coming to a pretty pass when a measure of this kind was not

to be debated. Had the Government better not pass a Standing Order that there should be no Opposition? The next thing to that would be that there would be no Parliament at all, because Ministers would think they could do without one. What was the object of Parliament except to discuss and arrive at what was best for the country? This was a very serious matter, and the objections to it had not been attempted to be answered? Under this scheme the electors would not get their voting-papers in time. The period allowed for the closing of the poll was fourteen or twenty-one days from the date of nomination, according to the discretion of the returning officer, who had first to get the names of the candidates, then to have the voting-papers printed, and next to address and post them. The mail might happen to go the next day, or three or four days after? How long would it take to deliver the papers? In the settled districts there might be a delivery two or three times a-week, but there voting by post was not required because polling-places could be got. What would take place where there was only a weekly delivery? Supposing the day of nomination were on a Monday, and that the mail did not go out until the following Saturday—when would the papers be delivered? The mail would be taken to some place, and if the elector chose to go for it he would get his voting-paper. It was not a question of certainty of delivery, but of time: even if the paper was delivered within fourteen days it was no use, as the elector must be allowed time to find a magistrate, obtain a stamp, and post his letter in time to reach the returning officer. In the sparsely-settled districts that would not happen, except occasionally. The only instance the Colonial Treasurer had given was the Maranoa; but, supposing it were all one district, he took the liberty of doubting whether the voting-papers could be sent to every leaseholder and received by the returning officer at Roma within a fortnight or three weeks. He was glad the hon. gentleman mentioned leaseholders or freeholders, because under those circumstances there would be remarkably few voters. It would be only leaseholders who would be entitled to vote. He was thinking about parliamentary elections when he referred to station hands being allowed to vote; but under the Bill nobody but the actual leaseholder would be allowed to vote. Clearly a station-manager was not the owner: he happened to occupy, but he was not even the occupier within the Bill. It was the master, and not the servant, who was the occupier. The hon. gentleman had answered part of the objection by showing that it would not take so long to distribute the voting-papers, there being so few voters; and at the same time he showed that there would be so few that, practically, there would be no election at all. The whole of his argument went to show that in the unsettled districts the Bill would not work. Could any solid reason be given why they should depart from the ordinary way of voting? The hon. gentleman said there would be several post offices in the electorate, but why could not there be several polling-places? The expense of polling-places would be small, and it would be better to incur that expense than the evils of a system of voting by post, under which there was no security whatever against personation, and which was simply bribery made easy. Hon. members were discussing the question as if such a thing as personation was never heard of; but they knew there was personation, and why should there be any greater purity of election under this Bill than in municipal or other elections? If a voting-paper were received by the returning officer purporting to be signed by "John Smith," attested by "John Doe," how was the returning officer to know that he was the man entitled to vote? Was the returning officer to be the judge? There was no means provided in the Bill to find it out; no provision for scrutiny or anything of the kind. If a system of local government was to be introduced he hoped it would be one that they would not be obliged to abolish in disgust because it would not work. He hoped at some future time to again have something to do with the Government of the country, and he wished to see a measure passed that would be workable. It had been stated that the returning officer would send the voting-papers by post or otherwise—that was by hand; so that while about three weeks ago they did away with the very same thing—the collection of the names of voters by persons appointed for that purpose—they now proposed to send the voting-papers round by hand, although there was every possibility that the distributor might be biassed, and if he did not want to find an elector he would not find him. Hon. members were entitled to the information they asked for. The Government should give an instance of how the Bill would work, and state where they proposed to enforce it.

The PREMIER said that if he were to speak till that time next year the hon. gentleman would offer the same opposition to the Bill that he did now. He had repeated the arguments in favour of the Bill over and over again, and he did not see anything new in the last speech of the hon. gentleman. He said that under this Bill personation would be made easy, but it would be much easier to prove who was the party to vote under this system than under any other electoral Act, because they would have the

man's hand-writing on the ballot-paper. Under this system the signature of almost every voter would be known to the returning officer, and if he had the slightest suspicion of anything being wrong he had the means of checking it. Instead of facilitating personation it would be much more difficult to personate under this system than any other. The hon. member said it would be impossible to carry out the Bill in the outside districts, but he (the Premier) would guarantee that in the Maranoa district a £10-note would deliver the ballot-papers from the returning officer to every elector within two days from the nomination day.

Mr. GRIFFITH said the Treasurer met one objection with another. What he (Mr. Griffith) pointed out was the objection to delivering the voting-papers by messenger, because it was open to all the evils that led them to abolish the collection of the electoral rolls. These papers would be sent round at the time of an election; the person appointed might be a partisan, and would not distribute them except to his friends. The hon. gentleman seemed impatient at objections being raised which were recognised everywhere else.

The PREMIER: I think the objections frivolous.

Mr. GRIFFITH said the hon. gentleman thought it was frivolous that the right to vote in a disputed election should be entrusted to a person who might be interested for one of the candidates. Supposing a contested election to take place between himself and the hon. gentleman, he thought it frivolous that any man hired at 10s. a-day should have a power placed in his hands which would enable him to veto the election. If the Bill was to apply only to pastoral tenants let it be confined to them, and there might not be so much objection to it.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN complained that the hon. member was only wasting time. He (Mr. O'Sullivan) did not object to fair discussion, but he saw no new light thrown on the matter by the hon. gentleman.

Mr. GRIFFITH said he had asked for information as to how the system was going to work, and what parts of the colony it was intended to apply it to, but that information the Government would not give. They were asked yesterday, over and over again, where they intended to apply the Local Government Act, and where they intended to apply this Bill, but they would give no information on these points; and when hon. members asked for that information they were told they were wasting time.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said the Treasurer distinctly stated last night where it was intended to apply the Bill, and he stated it before more than once, twice, or three times. Last night he stated most distinctly that it would not be put in force anywhere where the inhabitants were willing to accept the Local Government Act. What more information did the hon. gentleman want? He was astonished at the hon. member raising such paltry objections. He spoke about the Bill giving facilities for personation, but the 35th clause provided that every person who voted more than once, or should falsely sign his name as a ratepaper to any ballot-paper, should be liable to a year's imprisonment. Men were not very fond of subjecting themselves to such a penalty as that for the sake of voting for a member of a road board. It was making mountains out of mole-hills. There would not be such an immense desire to be a member of a road board that it would lead to any of the terrible things the hon. member imagined were going to happen. As a rule letters sent by post very rarely went astray. This was the trial of a new system, and if it was found that it would not work let something else be substituted for it. But if they were never to try anything new simply because it was new they might as well stop legislation altogether.

Mr. GRIFFITH said all the information given was, that the Bill would be put in force everywhere where the Local Government Act would not be accepted, but the Local Government Act could be put in force wherever the Government liked. Were they going to abandon the Local Government Act altogether, or where were they going to apply it, and where were the provisions of this Bill to be enforced? The idea of voting by post in towns was perfectly ridiculous. Was it to be applied to such places as Gympie, and other towns of the colony?

The PREMIER said that he had stated repeatedly where the Bill would be applied. The hon. member asked would it be applied to Gympie, and the answer was that it would not;—the Local Government Act would apply there.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that they had received this information from the hon. gentleman, that the Bill was not to apply to Gympie; and that was all the information they had received. As the case now stood, all the information members on his side of the House had obtained from the Government was that there was to be voting by post all over the colony whether required or not, except in existing municipalities, Gympie, and other places where the people might ask to be placed under the Local Government Act. All he could say was, that that was entirely different from what they had been told at the commencement of the session.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS said that the Local Government Act passed last year was, no doubt, compulsory; but the House was told at the beginning of the session that the Government did not think that

Act could be applied to all parts of the country, and they thought it would be unjust to force local government on any one part of the country without giving people in other parts the option of having it also. The present Bill was brought in to apply to sparsely-populated districts, but in no district would it be forced where the people preferred to be under the Local Government Act; but they must take one or the other. That was the answer which had been given to hon. members at the beginning of the session.

Mr. DICKSON asked whether it was the intention of the Government to bring the whole of the colony within the scope of either the Local Government Act, or this Bill? Also, whether it was the intention of the Government to give to every district the alternative of electing under which measure they would be brought?

The PREMIER said that the answer to both the questions of the hon. member was, yes.

Question—That clause 25, as read, stand part of the Bill—put.

The Committee divided :—

AYES, 23.

Messrs. Palmer, McIlwraith, Perkins, Persse, Norton, Low, Macrossan, Morehead, Sheaffe, Cooper, O'Sullivan, Hill, Stevenson, Baynes, Hamilton, Stevens, Lalor, Kellett, Amhurst, King, H. W. Palmer, Beor, and Archer.

NOES, 16.

Messrs. Griffith, Dickson, McLean, Meston, Rea, Beattie, Kates, Rutledge, Horwitz, Grimes, Macfarlane (Ipswich), Hendren, Douglas, Garrick, Groom, and Kingsford.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Clauses 26 and 27 passed as printed.

On clause 28—Ballot-paper returned to returning officer by post,

The PREMIER moved an amendment to the effect that a voter have power to sign a paper in the presence of some other voter for the same division, provided such other voter was not a candidate for election.

Mr. GRIFFITH thought the amendment would afford very little security against frauds, and suggested that it should not apply to marksmen.

The PREMIER said that, in cases where it might not be easy to find a justice of the peace, a voter who was a marksman might have some friend in whom he could confide.

Mr. GARRICK said that some guarantee should be given that the marksman had signed the paper. A man not being able to write his name was in itself a great objection; but he should be able to show on some authority, such as a justice of the peace, that he had signed the paper.

The PREMIER was of opinion that all marksmen should have facilities for voting the same as other people, and he could not see why a man should be forced to sign before a justice of the peace if he had more confidence in some other man whom he knew better.

Mr. GARRICK said a man's fellow-voters should have a voice in the matter as well as the man himself. In the case of a voter not being able to distinguish how he was giving his vote, the people in the district would be interested in seeing that the proper machinery existed for that person's vote being correctly taken.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN thought it was a great mistake to say that because a man could not read or write he did not know how to vote, or that because he could not sign his name he had no brains. He believed, with the exception of some old settlers, there were now very few persons who did not know how to read and write.

Mr. GARRICK said that he did not state that because a man could not read or write he had no brains, as it was well known that in the colonies there were many instances of persons who were shrewd business men and who had amassed fortunes who could not write their own names. At the same time, a man who could not read or write was unable to see whether his vote was given in the manner he wished to give it. It was usual in all electioneering machinery to provide that a returning officer should mark the voting paper for such persons, and some such provision should be made in the present case.

Mr. BEOR said he did not consider it would be wise to throw such an obstacle in the way of marksmen voters as to require them to sign the paper before a justice of the peace. A man might have to travel thirty or forty miles before he found a justice of the peace to attest his signature. He agreed with the Premier that the man whom a marksman trusted to attest his paper might be quite as trustworthy as a justice of the peace. It was not wise to put people to so much trouble merely to provide against a contingency which was not likely to arise.

Mr. KINGSFORD asked what would be the effect of a ballot-paper being posted without being stamped? Would it invalidate the vote?

The PREMIER said it would go to the Dead Letter Office.

Clause, as amended, put and passed; and clause 29 passed with a verbal amendment.

Clause 30 put and passed; and on clause 31—Duty of postmaster—

Mr. GRIFFITH pointed out that there might be cases arising under this clause which it would be better to provide against now. For instance, the 29th clause provided for the issue of duplicate ballot-papers in certain cases; those ballot-papers would, in all probability, not be applied for until the hour for closing the election

was approaching. The next clause provided that the returning officer, should not personally receive any vote except through the post; if then a duplicate ballot-paper were posted late on the last day for voting there was nothing to show that the postmaster would place it in the ballot-box before the close of the poll. If it was made clear that the postmaster had to put into the box all ballot-papers received by him up till 4 o'clock the clause would be more effective.

The PREMIER scarcely saw the necessity for doing as the hon. gentleman suggested; but to make the matter perfectly clear he would move an addition to the clause, by which the postmaster must deposit in the ballot-box every ballot-paper received at his post office between the day of nomination and the time appointed for the closing of the election.

Amendment put and passed; clause, as amended, passed; and clauses 32 and 33 passed as printed.

On clause 34—Informal and imperfect votes to be rejected—

Mr. GRIFFITH objected that it was placing too much power in the hands of the returning officer to provide that he should reject every ballot-paper which was "manifestly irregular, of which fact the returning officer shall be the sole judge." The meaning of the term "manifestly irregular" ought to be defined, and not left to the returning officer to define for himself; otherwise it would give him power to reject almost any ballot-paper he did not like.

The PREMIER said he did not think a returning officer would dare to throw out any vote unless it was manifestly irregular. He would move the omission of the words "of which fact the returning officer shall be the sole judge."

Amendment agreed to; and clause, with a further verbal amendment, passed.

On clause 35—Penalty for illegally voting—

Mr. GRIFFITH moved an amendment making any person who should forge the name of any person, or knowingly attest the signature of any person not entitled to vote, subject to the penalty provided.

Question put and passed; clause, as amended, adopted; and clauses 36 and 37 passed as printed.

On the motion of the PREMIER, a new clause was inserted providing that any returning officer, scrutineer, or clerk who should divulge how any person had voted, save in answer to some question which he was legally bound to answer, should be guilty of a misdemeanour.

Clauses 38, 39, and 40 passed as printed.

On clause 41—Elections for subdivisions—

The PREMIER, in reply to Mr. Griffith, said the elections of members for subdivisions would take place at head-quarters; there would be one polling-place for all, but only those in the subdivisions for which members were to be elected could vote.

Mr. GRIFFITH said there must be some provision as to how an election was to be conducted in a subdivision. As the Bill now stood, there was nothing in it making a subdivision a separate constituency for the purpose of an election. To meet the difficulty he would move the insertion of the words "an election shall be held for each subdivision," which would make the clause provide that an election should be held for each subdivision in any subdivided division, and that the preceding sections of the Bill relating to the election of the board should apply to the election of members for each subdivision instead of for the division at large.

These words being added, clause, as amended, passed.

On clause 42—Auditors—being moved,

Mr. MCLEAN said he did not see why auditors should not be elected in the same way as members of the board.

Mr. GRIFFITH asked was the voting for auditors to be openly or by ballot? If by ballot, there was no provision for ballot-papers or any means of recording votes. He also pointed out that, taking this clause in connection with clauses 15 and 20, there was some confusion as to the date of the election.

The PREMIER was understood to say that it was not considered necessary to provide for the election of auditors in the same way as members of the board.

Mr. MCLEAN said this was a very important clause, because on the report of the auditors the Government endowment would be granted or withheld.

Mr. KELLETT suggested that it would be better for the Government to appoint the auditors than to allow them to be nominated in the manner proposed.

The PREMIER pointed out that by the 70th clause the Bill provided for the annual examination of the accounts by the Auditor-General.

Mr. BEATTIE thought the clause might very well be omitted, as there would be no necessity for these auditors if the accounts were to be audited by the Auditor-General.

Clause eventually passed, with verbal amendments.

On clause 44—Exceptional vacancies—

Mr. GRIFFITH pointed out that some provision should be made here for filling the place of an auditor who might die shortly after election. It would be better to introduce the 119th clause of the Local Government Act, which provided for such cases.

Mr. BEOR said that, exceptional vacancies in boards being provided for in clause 18, clause 44 was unnecessary.

Clause, therefore, negatived.

The PREMIER moved a new clause to follow clause 43, providing that whenever any vacancy should arise in the office of auditor between one election day and the next it should be lawful for the Governor-in-Council to appoint any duly qualified person in his stead.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that the provisions of the 119th clause of the Local Government Act would be found more workable, but he did not press his objection.

Question—That the new clause stand part of the Bill—put and passed.

Clauses 45, 46, and 47 passed as printed.

Mr. KELLETT proposed a new clause to follow clause 47—to the effect that every member of the board should be entitled to a fee ot one guinea for attending each meeting, in addition to a sum of one shilling per mile towards defraying his travelling expenses thither, all such payments to be charged to the divisional fund. Without a clause of that kind the Act would be unworkable. In his own district, even if there were three or four divisional boards, members would have to travel thirty or forty miles to the place of meeting. The result would be that all the work would be done and the money spent in one corner of the district.

The PREMIER said he did not doubt that such payments would secure frequent meetings and full attendance of members; but after passing a clause making it optional with the board to grant its chairman a salary, it would be hardly fair to make it compulsory to give the members a guinea a-day and expenses and leave the chairman out in the cold. He did not believe in paying members, and felt certain there would be plenty of good men forthcoming for the office.

Mr. BEOR said that such a payment would swallow up a large portion of the divisional funds. He believed the members would gladly attend the meetings for the sake of having their roads looked after.

Mr. PATERSON also opposed the clause.

Mr. MACFARLANE (Ipswich) supported it, seeing that the previous clause passed enabled the chairman to receive an allowance from the fund. Meetings might be held at the chairman's house, and the members might have to travel long distances to get there. He believed that unless members were paid the Act would be unworkable.

Question put and negatived.

Clauses 48, 49, and 50, passed as printed.

On clause 51—Duties and responsibilities—

Mr. BEOR said the objects for which the board might expend funds should be more clearly defined. He would move the insertion of the words "in carrying out the objects and purposes of this Act." A similar clause in the South Australian District Councils Act contained those words.

Question put and passed.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the words "by proclamation" were inserted in the proviso that certain works might be removed from the control of the board by the Governor in Council.

Mr. GRIFFITH asked what the intention of the Government was with respect to this clause? The proviso stated that the Governor in Council might remove from the control of the board a number of works. If all the works enumerated were removed from the control of the board there would be nothing left for them to do. By the corresponding clause in the Local Government Act the main roads only might be excepted.

The PREMIER said it was the intention of the Government to except only the main roads the traffic of which was through traffic. That burden should not be thrown on the shoulders of the divisional board.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that pressure might be brought to bear on the Government to relieve the boards of local concerns, and the principal beneficial effect of the Act would be lost. In times of general election deputations might wait upon Ministers—introduced, perhaps, by the Government candidate—asking that the Government would take over a road, a ferry, a wharf, or a well.

The PREMIER said there were many cases in which the Government must, in the interests of the public, insist upon taking charge of roads, wharves, or ferries, and the power to do so by proclamation must be left to the Government.

Mr. DICKSON said this was a convenient opportunity to ask the Colonial Treasurer whether he would be prepared to lay before the Committee, when they went into Supply on the Works Estimates, a schedule showing what he considered main roads to be kept under the charge of the Government?

The PREMIER said he would not be prepared to lay such a schedule on the table. Hon. members must see that if they passed the Bill they must leave the Government the power of proclaiming what were main roads.

Clause, as amended, adopted; and clause 52 passed as printed.

On clause 53—May take charge of benevolent institutions, &c.—on the motion of the PREMIER, the words "hospital, orphanage, benevolent institution, school of arts" were omitted; and clause, as amended, adopted.

The PREMIER moved clause 54—Board may limit the number of public-houses—with a view to its being negatived.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that he expressed his disapproval of the clause on the motion

for the second reading, but some of his friends were in favour of it, and he wanted some better reason than had been given why the Premier would not proceed with it.

The PREMIER asked whether he could give a better reason than the hon. member himself had furnished. The Licensing Boards Bill had passed since.

Clause put and negatived.

Clause 55—Ordinary revenue—passed with the addition of a new paragraph providing that the revenue of every division shall be carried to account of a fund to be called the "Divisional Fund," which fund is to be applied towards the payment of all expenses necessarily incurred in carrying the Act into execution, and of performing all acts and things that the board are empowered or required to perform.

On clause 56—What shall be rateable property—

Mr. MESTON asked whether the meaning of the latter portion of the clause was that all minerals beneath the surface should be exempt from taxation?

The PREMIER: Yes.

Mr. MACFARLANE (Ipswich) said some of the West Moreton roads were the worst in the colony, and were at present impassable through having been cut up by the traffic from coal mines. If these mines were to be exempted from taxation he did not see how roads were to be made. There should be power given to tax miners or the drays employed in the coal trade, or something else in connection with coal mines, in order to raise funds to keep the roads in repair.

Mr. MESTON did not think coal mines should be exempted from taxation. There was one road going into Ipswich which had cost the country thousands of pounds simply through the traffic from coal mines.

The PREMIER said the clause was an exact transcript of the provision in the Local Government Act, which was taken from the Victorian Act, and was fully discussed last year before being passed. It was not quite correct to say that mines were exempt, for the same part of a mine was taxed as the property belonging to any other business. If they taxed coal under ground, they might just as well tax the loaves in a baker's shop, or the cloth made at a woollen factory and sold. It was against the principle of the Act that anything except land and buildings should be rated. If there was an exceptional traffic from the coal-mines, the boards would not require to be entirely dependent upon rates to keep the roads in repair.

Clause passed as printed.

The PREMIER moved the omission of the first twenty-two lines of clause 57—Valuation of rateable property—with a view to the insertion of the following amendment:—

57. The board shall from time to time make a valuation of all rateable property within the division and the rates made by the board for the purposes of this Act shall be made upon such valuation which shall remain in force until a fresh valuation shall have been made And in every such valuation the property rateable shall be computed at its net annual value that is to say—

In the case of houses buildings and other perishable property at an amount equal to and not exceeding two-thirds the rent at which the same might reasonably be expected to let them from year to year

In the case of land and other hereditaments at an amount equal to and not exceeding nine-tenths such rent

And in the case of Crown lands occupied for pastoral purposes only at an amount equal to and not exceeding the annual rent thereof

Except as aforesaid no rateable property shall be computed as of an annual value of less than five pounds per centum upon the fair capital value of the fee-simple thereof

Provided that no land held as a homestead or conditional selection shall be computed as of a capital value greater than the selection price thereof.

He said the clause, as it originally stood, provided

"That in every such valuation the property rateable shall be computed at its net annual value that is to say at the rent at which the same might reasonably be expected to let from year to year free of all usual tenants' rates and taxes and deducting therefrom the probable annual average cost of insurance and other expenses (if any) necessary to maintain such property in a state to command such rent."

Then there was this proviso—

"Provided that no rateable property shall be computed as of an annual value of less than eight pounds per centum upon the fair capital value of the fee-simple thereof."

Upon examining into that, although it was consistent with the Local Government Act, and probably in places where that Act could be applied, such as in towns, it would be a fair valuation, generally it was considered too high, and was therefore struck out. The second proviso in the original clause was—

"And provided that no homestead or conditional selection shall be computed as of greater annual value than eight per centum upon the capital value of the fee-simple thereof at the time of selection but this proviso shall not extend to buildings and other improvements upon such homestead or conditional selection."

In place of that he proposed—

Provided that no land held as a homestead or conditional selection shall be computed as of a capital value greater than the selection price thereof.

The rate at which Crown lands should be valued had also been altered. The alteration had been made so as to tax less houses, buildings, and other perishable property. As the clause stood before, they were rated in the same way as land, and that was considered by most of those who spoke on the second reading as unfair; and he noticed that in almost every other colony a distinction was drawn—that an allowance was made for perishable property. In South Australia the annual value of all property, both perishable property and land, was taken as the basis of taxation, the rate being the same on both kinds. In New Zealand, houses and other perishable property was rated at 20 per cent. less than the annual value, and land at 10 per cent. less, and the annual value must not be less than 5 per cent. of the capital value. In New South Wales the rateable value was nine-tenths the fair average rental of all buildings and cultivated lands, and 5 per cent. of the capital value of unimproved lands. In England the annual rent free of deductions necessary to maintain the property in a state to command such rent was the annual value, which was something like the clause as it originally stood. It would be seen, therefore, that the clause as amended was much more liberal to perishable property than in the other colonies.

Mr. DICKSON said he had listened attentively to learn from the Premier what he exactly meant by introducing this amendment. He presumed the hon. gentleman had already recognised that he did not congratulate him upon the Bill so far. He considered it a measure full of crudities, and one that would not be beneficial to the country or creditable to the Government; but he also admitted that they had now arrived at a principle which, if properly shaped, would greatly relieve the Bill from the character he had given it, and to a great extent meet the requirements of the colony in its financial condition—that was, to endeavour to obtain from property holders enlarged contributions towards the revenue of the colony. If the Premier had introduced this principle in such a shape that it would have been an equitable tax upon all persons holding the public estate or freehold in the colony, it would have considerably redeemed the Bill from the charges he (Mr. Dickson) had made against it, and have been justified by our financially embarrassed position. But the hon. gentleman had not shown in his amendment that he had any intention to depart from class legislation in connection with obtaining an increased revenue from our territorial estate which he (Mr. Dickson) hoped would have been the result of serious consideration of the question as submitted by several speakers on the second reading of the Bill. It was pointed out to him that the freehold property of agricultural settlers was to be much heavier assessed for the purposes of contribution under this Bill than the property held by the pastoral tenants of the Crown. It was shown under the provisions of the valuation clause, as it originally stood, that a farmer holding twenty or forty acres of land in fee-simple would be assessed upon the value of that land—the improvements on which, by his own industry, had contributed to enhance its value largely—that actually it would produce a larger pecuniary contribution towards the revenue than a pastoral tenant occupying 100 square miles of country.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Who showed it?

Mr. DICKSON said if it were necessary to demonstrate the position, he had not the slightest hesitation in going over the figures again. He stated on the second reading of the Bill that there were many farmers in East Moreton who had holdings extending from twenty to fifty acres, the capital value of which could not be estimated at under £500. They had paid large sums for the fee-simple, and had contributed largely to the value of the property by their own industry and the expenditure of their capital upon it. Now, the assessment as the Bill originally stood was 8 per cent. upon the capital value; and, taking the annual value at £500, that would give, at 8 per cent., £40, which, at 1s. in the £, would yield a direct contribution of 40s. He had also pointed out that there were several pastoral tenants of the Crown who occupied territory at something like £12 10s. for each block of twenty-five square miles, or, say £50 for 100 square miles. Under the Bill as it originally stood the maximum assessment which would be levied upon these pastoral tenants was 8 per cent. on the annual value thereof, which on £50 would be £4 per annum. Under the proposed amendment of the Treasurer the pastoral tenant would be only assessed at 5 per cent., which would give only 40s. on £50, so that the small farmer with thirty or forty acres, which was enhanced in value by the expenditure of his own labour and capital, actually contributed more towards the revenue than the immense extent of territory held by pastoral tenants. But the original Bill had this feature which the amendment could not lay claim to—that while the pastoral tenant was to be assessed upon the actual amount of his annual rent, there was an ambiguity in the clause which rendered it uncertain as to whether the improvements he had erected were not also to come in for a share of assessment. There was no ambiguity in the amendment of the Premier, as it distinctly stated that, in the case of Crown lands occupied for pastoral purposes, they should be assessed

only at an amount equal to and not exceeding the annual rent thereof. Thus the amendment in this case was actually more favourable to the pastoral tenants than the original clause. He should be glad if his remarks extracted from the Premier the explanation he desired. The present discussion would not be altogether fruitless if the hon. gentleman could show that he intended to deal with all classes of property-holders in the colony alike. If that could be shown the Bill would be greatly redeemed from the character he (Mr. Dickson) had given to it. He believed that the financial position of the colony was such that, notwithstanding the assertion of the Government during the late elections that they would levy no additional taxation, they would be quite justified in levying a tax on acreage. He believed the voice of the country would hail with satisfaction a measure, if proposed by the Government, which was based on such a principle. He had not the slightest doubt that hon. members opposite would say that that was a most monstrous proposition; but he could not understand why the Premier should deal so tenderly with one particular class, as they had arrived at a financial crisis in the colony, and if ever the duty devolved upon all classes to be assessed equally and fairly and in proportion to their means it certainly was the present period. It would be an advantage if the Premier would demonstrate to the country that his valuation was to be based on the principle that all property-holders should equally contribute under this Bill. He (Mr. Dickson) had specially alluded to the pastoral lessees as they had been specially exempted, and he would now point out to the hon. gentleman how farmers would be placed in a very unfair position by the Bill. He had lately had the honour to present to the House a petition from a certain section of his constituents, and he was at the time very much struck by one paragraph in it. It came from a number of farmers who, in stating their objections to the Bill, said that it was a measure that would tax the thrifty man who improved his property, to provide roads for the person who did not improve his land. That was a remark which to his mind was pregnant with suggestions, and which proved that the men who subscribed to that petition—which was drawn up entirely by themselves—had struck at the root of the principle of the Bill, and had pointed out where the whole kernel of the faultiness of the Bill lay. He could not better exemplify that statement, which was made by farmers resident a few miles outside of the city, than by stating a fact which had come under his own observation a few days ago. A block of land in the Oxley district, comprising 135 acres, was sold originally by the Crown and was afterwards sub-divided. One portion, consisting of thirty-five acres, fell into the hands of a farmer who employed it for growing sugar, and built upon and otherwise improved it. The other block of 100 acres was bought for speculation, and up to the present was allowed to remain fruitless. The farmer had to improve his land by his labour and by expending the accumulation of his profits on it, and had so acted that at present it was worth, per annum, at least £200. One of the clauses of the amendment of the Premier said that in the case of land and other hereditaments the assessment should be at the rate of nine-tenths of such rent; assuming, therefore, that the annual value of this land was £200, it would be assessed at £9 per annum in rates. But in the case of the 100 acres which had been allowed to remain unimproved, and which could not be let at more than £10 a-year, the assessment according to the amendment would be 9s. a-year. Thus, in one case the man who improved his thirty-five acres of land would have to pay £9 a-year, whilst in the other the man would only have to pay 9s. That was a case he could substantiate, and he would leave it to hon. members to say whether the basis of assessment contemplated by the Premier was an equitable one. He very much regretted that such a measure should have been introduced, as it would be a distinct tax on industry. He considered that the only way in which the Bill could be made equitable and just to all would be by imposing a tax on acreage; and he would suggest to the Premier that such a course would be decidedly more acceptable to the colony, would do more substantial good, and would be regarded as a statesmanlike measure, and one that was demanded by the present condition of financial affairs. When the hon. gentleman said that he had a new clause to submit, he (Mr. Dickson) had hopes that the hon. gentleman would have regarded the expressions of opinion from hon. members of the Opposition at the second reading of the Bill; but, instead of doing that, the amendment proposed did not in any way show why a new mode of assessment had been adopted. He had no doubt that hon. members who followed him would point out where the amendment was ambiguous, and would show that in no way could it be considered an improvement on the mode of assessment contemplated by the Bill originally. There were three classes of property enumerated in the amendment. First, there were houses, buildings, and what the Premier termed "other perishable property," and they were to be assessed at two-thirds of the rent at which they were let from year to year. In the practical operation of this clause it would be exceedingly difficult to determine

what properties in the country remote from towns might be expected to let at from year to year. It must be borne in mind that either this Bill or the Local Government Act were to be extended over the length and breadth of the colony, and therefore they must look at the difficulty of determining the value of the rental of some of the remote properties. Next, in the case of land and other hereditaments, the assessment was not to exceed nine-tenths of the rent; and thirdly, in the case of Crown lands occupied for pastoral purposes, the assessment was not to exceed the annual rent. Then the amendment stated that, except as aforesaid, no rateable property should be computed as of an annual value of less than 5 per cent. on the fair capital value of the fee-simple. He did not expect that anything he said would have the effect of altering a single vote; he regretted it should be so, and could not congratulate the Colonial Secretary if that hon. member thought that none on his side of the Committee were open to conviction. The Goverment might force the Bill on the country, but they might rest assured that before long the voice of the country would express itself on the merits of the question. Had the Premier at the present time introduced a measure by which a tax on acreage would be levied throughout the country, he would have relieved his own embarrassment, and would have introduced a measure which everyone would be forced to admit was equitable and fair in its character—a measure which, sooner or later, the country must have. A land-tax must be looked in the face, and so long as he had a seat in the House he should endeavour to affirm that a tax on acreage, or a tax in proportion to the revenue enjoyed by the person who was called to contribute to the needs of the State, should be enforced. As the valuation clauses were at present framed he should give them his strongest opposition. They were framed in the interests of one class alone—in the interests of those who were best able to bear their fair contribution of taxation in proportion to their means, while the man who had been struggling to become independent in the colony by many years of labour and thrift, and who by his application had at last surmounted the difficulties which beset him as a pioneer, was to be assessed out of all proportion to the holdings he possessed. He protested against the measure in this shape, and he hoped the Treasurer would feel disposed to provide amendments to relieve the burdens which, under this Bill, one class of the community would have unduly to bear.

The PREMIER said the hon. gentleman was perfectly right when he supposed that any advice he could give would not have the effect of influencing votes on that side of the House. They knew perfectly well the hon. gentleman was not sincere; he professed to have seen from a petition, presented to the House within the last few days, that the Bill taxed the thrifty man for the benefit of the man who did not improve his property. The petition seemed to have changed his mind completely. The hon. member was a party to the Bill of last session, and had spent the greater part of that session in trying to do work which he (Mr. McIlwraith) was now doing better; but then the hon. member, whether it was house property or what not, never said one word about taxation on acreage. Now the hon. member, with a show of sincerity which would take anybody in who did not know him as well as hon. members on the Government side, endeavoured to make the House believe he was sincere in advising the acreage system. He might just as well say that the municipal laws which regulated the rating in Brisbane should be repealed, and that instead of a rate on houses according to their annual value, they should commence something different and assess them at per square foot. Then the hon. gentleman referred to some story about a man who bought thirty-five acres of land and improved it, and who would have to pay £9 a-year for it, while his neighbour alongside, who had 100 acres of the same land unimproved, only paid 9s. He (Mr. McIlwraith) did not draw the same illogical conclusion as the hon. gentleman, for he did not see why the man who had improved his property should not pay. Nobody liked the corner-allotment men, but they must be rated, and while they were rated it must not be done unfairly. Take the case of a vacant allotment in Queen street. The annual value was not that which might be fixed for the allotments alongside which might have been built on by a man who had put his fortune into, say, a clothes store, and who paid his rates on the annual value of his improvements which his industry had built up. He was taxed on his industry. He (Mr. McIlwraith) could not see how any law could work that did not tax property. Bricks and mortar, stone and lime, were just as much property as land. The hon. gentleman said that they must not tax industry. What, then, were they to tax? If the hon. gentleman liked to go and live like a blackfellow he would escape all taxation; but would he be a better man, more industrious, or honest? He would be much wiser to come back and pay his taxes like a man upon industry. No doubt it would be a benefit to the country if everybody did as this typical man who had 35 acres did—the whole land would be cultivated. But there was a reason why he should pay more than the other typical man with his 100 acres—he had made his improvements,

and was therefore the only man who wanted the road. The other did not care about them. To tax the two men to the same extent was therefore absurd. To return to the acreage question, he had shown that to adopt the hon. gentleman's proposal would be the same thing as taxing street property in Brisbane at per square foot. Let it be assumed that the poor men in the colony were those who possessed poor land, and it was obvious that what the hon. gentleman wanted to do was to pounce upon the poor men. A selector might have 200 acres fifty miles from Brisbane not worth £50 a-year to him. Let him work it as he liked, yet he was to be taxed to the same amount as the man who had a very valuable property close to the metropolis. This would be taxing the poor man with a vengeance for the benefit of the rich man. There was plenty of land worth 5s. an acre, and no more. Would the hon. gentleman tax this the same as the more valuable land? The thing was too absurd to bear argument for a moment. The hon. gentleman tried to make out that the assessment clauses of the Bill were passed to screen the squatters and tax the selectors. There could be no charge more unfounded. The squatter was taxed in the same way as the selector. He was taxed on the fair annual value of his property, and a fair annual value of his property was the annual rent he paid *plus* the improvements made upon it. The hon. member, looking at the clause without understanding it, said the squatter paid only on his annual rent, taking no notice of the fact that he paid in addition on the improvements he had made. In the name of common-sense, upon what more should he pay? If the hon. gentleman wished to be fair he would have admitted that squatter and selector were rated in the same way. They did not propose to make fish of one and flesh of the other. The hon. gentleman would, in fact, have to talk a long while before he could convince half-a-dozen members in the House that property should escape taxation, but not land. All property was "industry." The land that was unimproved was of comparatively small value; and improvements ought to be taxed as much as the land itself.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that anybody who read these clauses would suppose that no improvements were to be taxed at all, because that was what the clause really said. The hon. member meant one thing but said another; the clause said one thing, and the hon. gentleman got up and said something else. He understood what the hon. gentleman meant—they valued the land on one principle and the improvements on another. That would be an intelligible principle to work out, but it was not worked out in these clauses, and if that was what the hon. gentleman meant it was a pity he did not take some means to express it. Still, if the Treasurer was enamoured of the wording of the clause he must abide by an unworkable Act. In the first place, in respect to the taxation of improvements, it was an actual discouragement to a man to improve. It was especially in the case of the conditional selector. They had a law compelling improvements to be made, and they had also a desire that he should pay up the purchase money; but while that was the object of one part of their legislation, the effect of the Bill was very obvious—to discourage the selector from improving, and also to discourage him from paying up. He was discouraged from paying up the balance because, as soon as he had paid for the land he would have to pay additional taxes, and discouraged from making improvements because he would also have to pay on the increased value which his industry gave. Whatever the Premier might call it, these clauses meant discouragement to settlement. His next objection was with regard to the pastoral lessees. Amongst the selecting classes there had been a great deal of agitation against the Bill, but the agitation against it amongst the pastoral classes had not been so public. The result was, that while the Government professed to have conceded a trifle to the selectors, they had taken 3 per cent. off the squatters absolutely. There was a nominal concession to the former, and an absolute reduction of 3 per cent. to the latter. There was no doubt the Government was a pastoral Government, and favoured the pastoral classes as much as they could. Would anyone tell him that the annual value of a run was the rent it paid to the Crown? Nobody in his senses would believe that the annual value of a run of twenty-five square miles was only £12 10s.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Yes, it is; and a great deal more, in many instances.

Mr. GRIFFITH said he did not think any man in his senses would believe it, although squatters might persuade themselves it was so, and think themselves a very ill-used set of men. The maximum amount of taxes payable on a run of twenty-five square miles was 12s. 6d., or 6d. per square mile. Was that what the Government called fair? In West Moreton, the few pastoral lessees would have to pay 4s. for two square miles in taxes, while the selector on the land adjoining, not a bit better, who had given £640 for a similar quantity, had to pay 32s. in taxes.

Mr. BAYNES said the land of the former was on six months' tenure, while that of the latter was freehold.

Mr. GRIFFITH asked how could difference in tenure affect the annual producing power of the land? Did it make any difference in the quantity of

grass it grew or the number of sheep it would carry? They had been told that the only way of assessing the annual value of land was the rent it paid to the Crown; and yet, in the instance he had given, there were two grazing paddocks side by side, and one paid eight times as much as the other. How could the difference in tenure affect the annual value of the grass? It would be worth more to sell, but its annual value—its producing power—was not influenced by a piece of parchment in the Registrar-General's Office. The absurdity of the system was shown by making the selector pay eight times as much in taxes as his neighbour, the pastoral lessee, solely because he had a better tenure.

Mr. ARCHER said the hon. member (Mr. Dickson) had hardly tried to be fair in the way in which he argued his case. While dwelling on the improvements on the selector's 50 acres, and comparing with it what the pastoral tenant would have to pay on 100 square miles, he had quite forgotten to mention that the squatters were also to be rated on their improvements.

Mr. DICKSON: It is not so stated in the clause.

Mr. ARCHER said he might, perhaps, be more than usually dull, but that was the way he read the clause; and the hon. gentleman might at least have mentioned it, for there were many squatters who had expended thousands and thousands of pounds in improvements on their runs, and compared with the rating on which the rating on the rental would be as nothing. Another statement of the hon. gentleman (Mr. Dickson) he felt bound to object to. He did not believe there was a farm in Australia of 35 acres which could be let for £200 a year. Until he heard it from the hon. member for Oxley, he was unaware that there were farms in the colony which let for £2 an acre; but those were exceptional, and there could not be more than a dozen such. To say that a 35-acre farm could let for £200 a year was so utterly preposterous that he was astounded to hear it in the House. No doubt the hon. member had been misinformed, or else his informant had counted in both rent, personal labour, use of implements, and produce, leaving the tenant to live upon nothing. One could buy 35 acres of the best agricultural land in the colony right out for £200. There must have been a slight misstatement, to say the least, made by the hon. gentleman's informant. If, after all, there were really some trick in it, all he could say was that it was the only case of the kind in Queensland. He had been surprised at the remarks of the hon. gentleman (Mr. Griffith) on the difference between freehold and leasehold tenure. The difference between them was that leasehold property was only rented for a few years, and must within a limited period revert to the Crown, with all the improvements upon it. The leases were only for five years, and the land might be selected long before that. Supposing it was not selected, all the improvement upon it, in the shape of roads, &c., went to make it more valuable, not to the leaseholder, but to the Government, who gained by those improvements. That was, surely, a different thing from improving one's own property; and the hon. gentleman, with his great legal acumen, must have known that he was not putting the matter fairly before the Committee. In speaking of the rents paid in the West the hon. gentleman mentioned £12 10s. for twenty-five square miles as the average; but in some cases as much as £1, £2, and £3 per square mile was paid. A great part of those blocks of country had been bought expensively; but, even if it were not so, the rating on the improvements of those blocks would come to more than the rental paid to the Government.

Mr. RUTLEDGE said he had not taken any part in the discussion on this Bill during its passage through Committee, nor should he have risen now had he not considered this clause of such importance that he should not be able to give a good account of himself to his constituents unless he were able to show that he had endeavoured to render it as little oppressive to them as possible. He would first point out respectfully to the Premier a confusion of terms in the clause that was likely to lead to a great deal of dissatisfaction, not to say litigation, by-and-by. In the second sub-section the word "hereditaments" occurred. According to the books, an hereditament was something capable of being inherited; but under the law of Queensland nothing was now capable of being inherited; there were no heirs-at-law; real property was distributed like personalty, and consequently there could be no such things as hereditaments, properly speaking, according to the law of England. The expression was therefore destitute of meaning in this colony. The hon. member for North Brisbane had referred to the proviso "no land held as a homestead or conditional selection shall be computed as of a capital value greater than the selection price thereof," and he showed that in a case of this sort the squatter would not be taxed for the amount of improvements upon his land. Land, in the legal sense of the word, carried all on the land, and land selected would by this clause only be taxed according to the selection price. The owner might have put £1,000 worth of improvements on the land just before exercising his pre-emptive right, but for ten years he would only be rated at the selection price of the land on which he had placed those improvements. A law which left a question of such importance open in that way was so imperfect that it should not be allowed to pass without

further consideration. With regard to the method proposed for arriving at the value of property, he did not think his colleague had overstated the case when he said that a particular thirty-five acres were worth £200 a-year. No uncultivated land would be worth that; but in the case of sugar plantations, where the crop did not require to be put in every year, such an area might be expected to let for £200, especially if there was a mill upon it, with other improvements for converting the raw material into a marketable commodity. The clause would work very inequitably. A man in the neighbourhood of Oxley, say, might have a property such as had been described which would let at £200 a year, and another man five miles away, who also had to contribute towards the roads of the district, might have thirty-five acres which he could not rent for 5s. per acre a year, because no one would rent ordinary land while so much was open for selection. It would be utterly impossible to arrive at anything like a correct estimate as to what such properties might reasonably be expected to let at. In the one case the improvements would command a certain rent, whereas in the other it would be difficult to get a tenant at all. The result would be a very great deal of arbitrary action on the part of the assessor—he would form his ideas, and his ideas might be altogether opposed to those of the proprietor and other inhabitants in the neighbourhood. In the case of valuing, very great dissatisfaction arose from the very loose method of calculating the basis upon which assessment should be levied. Everything depended upon the sagacity, skill, and knowledge of the man appointed, and people were often dissatisfied with the way he used the arbitrary powers with which he was invested. There was a great difference between land in a country district and in the city of Brisbane, for instance, and the same methods of rating could not fairly be adopted in the two cases, because there was no proportion between the respective values. Land in a city like Brisbane had a fictitious value, depending upon the position of the property with regard to trade, and proprietors were often able to obtain a rent altogether beyond the actual value. Seeing that the conditions were so essentially different in the two cases, a uniform system of taxation should not be employed. A piece of land in one part of Queen street might be worth £5,000, while the same area in another part of Queen street would be worth only £1,000; and it would therefore, as the Colonial Treasurer had said, be very unfair to rate the assessment at per foot. The same argument could not apply to the acreage in the country districts, because nothing was easier than to adopt a system of classification by which land near a river or railway, and valuable for agricultural purposes, should pay a higher rate per acre than land in a more inaccessible position and not so favourably circumstanced as regards producing power. For those reasons, as a member representing a district which included a large area of land held by small settlers, he would point out that the Colonial Treasurer would confer a great boon upon such districts, and not depart from his principles, if he would in regard to valuations employ a basis such as had been suggested. Supposing a man had several acres under grape cultivation, how would that be assessed? The land might be of great value to a man who had the means of converting the grapes into wine, and able to carry on the business of a wine maker; while to another who had not the facilities for making wine or sending the grapes to market it would be comparatively worthless. Would the grapes grown upon that land be included in the general term of "hereditaments," and increase the value of the land to be assessed at an amount not exceeding nine-tenths of the annual rent? In cases where no attempt had been made to let the land, the valuation would be mere guess-work, left solely to the arbitrary judgment of the assessor. If the assessor swore to a certain valuation, and the owner brought witnesses to prove that the valuation was excessive, who was to decide? The magistrates would not be able to do so; and heart-burnings, bad feeling, and litigation would be created through the indefiniteness of the law as to the method by which the rates should be levied.

Mr. Beor said he was not going to enter upon the general question raised by the hon. member for North Brisbane and the hon. members for Enoggera, as their arguments had all been met by the speech of the Premier. He would just say that it appeared a little singular—though he did not say the hon. members had endeavoured to mislead the Committee—that the representations those hon. members had made were to a great extent the representations which had led astray, beguiled and deceived a very large number of people, and which led to the House being inundated by a large number of petitions from persons who had clearly not had a very true view of the question brought before them. The hon. member for North Brisbane had endeavoured to make the Committee believe that under the clause selectors were less favourably treated than the pastoral tenants. He contended that lands included houses and other buildings, and therefore the pastoral tenants would under this clause be taxed only upon the annual rent of their holdings, and not upon the buildings which stood upon them. If that, however, were the case, it would apply equally to selectors and freeholders. The contention was that lands

included houses and other buildings. But the 2nd clause, which applied to selectors and freeholders, must include buildings equally as well as the 3rd clause, which applied to Crown lands occupied for pastoral purposes. If it was a fact that pastoral tenants could only be taxed upon land, it would be the same as regarded selectors and freeholders, no matter what improvements were upon the property. He would concede that to legal minds the clause was open to the interpretation which had been placed upon it, for it was not expressed in a way that would convey with certainty that the buildings were to be taxed separately from the land. In the first part of the section, however, an express distinction was drawn as regarded houses, buildings, and other perishable property; and then came two clauses providing for lands. The general rule was that land included houses and buildings; but no court would put such an interpretation upon this section, for it would be tantamount to saying that the first part of the section meant nothing. The court would go clearly by the intention of the Act. He believed the true interpretation of the Bill was that houses and buildings were to be rated separately from the land.

Mr. GRIFFITH: Neither the Government nor the clause mean that.

Mr. BEOR said his strong opinion, on the other hand, was that the Government meant to attach that meaning to the clause, and that the clause conveyed it. With regard to the 2nd section, he had himself suggested an amendment that after the words "lands and hereditaments" the words "other than houses buildings and other perishable property" should be added, and with regard to the 3rd clause he should presently move that it be altered so as to make it appear that houses, buildings, and other perishable property upon Crown lands occupied for pastoral purposes should be computed at an amount equal to and not exceeding two-thirds the rent at which the same might be reasonably expected to be let from year to year. If that suggestion were taken the section would be clearly in favour of the selector and freeholder, for they would be rated at nine-tenths the rent of their land, whilst the pastoral tenant would be taxed upon the whole of the annual rent of his. The arguments about values and assessments had already been dealt with; but he would add that in many cases the £12 10s. rent the pastoral lessee had to pay was often more than the true value of the land. He was sure that there were many men paying that rent who would be glad to give up the holdings for which it was paid. With respect to the matter of fixity of tenure, the leader of the Opposition was very much down upon them for questioning the assertion that fixity of tenure made no difference. It made an enormous difference; for who would be willing to spend as large a sum of money upon land which was only held for six months as upon land which was held for fifty years? The leader of the Opposition also considered and his friends thought a great point had been made, that fixity of tenure did not increase the producing power of the land; but, though it did not do that, it increased the annual value, and it was upon the annual value that the rate ought to be levied. Hon. members opposite had said, "Tax men according to their means;" but as to that he would say that many of these pastoral tenants, whom members opposite spoke of as persons to be bled to any extent, would rather be raising corn or arrowroot than breeding cattle, and that as to means many selectors were better able to bear taxation than they. To illustrate the contention which some members had held in opposition to the view of the hon. member (Mr. Griffith), that fixity of tenure had nothing to do with the value of land, he held in his hand the New Zealand Act for rating, in which it was provided that every person occupying waste lands for pastoral purposes shall be rated only in respect of the annual value, having regard to the tenure under which such lands were held. If they were going to do an injustice they were going to share it with other colonies; but, in point of fact, the Act now introduced was more favourable to the selectors as against the pastoral lessees than the New Zealand law, and he believed it was equally favourable when compared with the Acts of other countries.

Mr. REA said the hon. member had spoken of the deceit practised by hon. members on the Opposition side of the House; but, almost immediately after, he said the clause under discussion would puzzle the courts of law considerably. If that were so, how could they expect poor unlettered selectors to understand the Bill? Was there ever a greater imposition attempted to be forced upon those men than this hocus-pocus clause? If there was no intention of—as the hon. member termed it—deceit, where was the difficulty in stating in plain terms what was to be taxed—the land and the buildings on it? There were five words of plain English that would make it perfectly clear and distinct; but it was evident that if the reproach of deceit attached to either side, it was to hon. members who had drawn up the Bill and attempted to force it down the throats——

Mr. GRIMES called attention to the state of the Committee—quorum formed.

Mr. REA, continuing, said the clauses now presented made the Bill even more confused than it was originally, and he would ask the Premier if he would point out either in the Bill or the amendments where it stated

clearly that the improvements on pastoral lands were to be assessed? He maintained that this matter should be made perfectly clear. It was the duty of the Committee not to pass clauses in this doubtful state, or until they were made plain English, and he should divide the Committee until they were.

Mr. GARRICK, whose remarks were almost entirely inaudible in the gallery, was understood to agree that a classification of land might be carried out, and that it was important that improvements should not be taxed. The provisions of the Bill were certainly more favourable to the pastoral tenants than to any other sort of Crown tenants; but, of course, it was useless to attempt to impress that on hon. members opposite. He pointed out that the amendment was rather puzzling to understand, and said it should be clearly expressed that all improvements, no matter where they were—whether on freehold or conditional selection, or pastoral property—were intended to be rated two-thirds, and land nine-tenths, of the annual value.

Mr. GRIMES said exception had been taken to the statement of the hon. member for Enoggera, that thirty-five acres of land in the neighbourhood of Oxley was worth £200 a-year rental, but that statement might be perfectly correct. There were a great many acres of land in the neighbourhood of Oxley that would let at the present time for £6 and £7 per acre. Lucerne paddocks on the banks of the river fetched more than the sum mentioned by the hon. member for Enoggera. If argument would have any avail, surely cases of that kind would be listened to; but evidently argument was not listened to by hon. members opposite, and it was therefore useless to argue. He was glad to be able to corroborate the statement of the hon. member for Enoggera.

Mr. GRIFFITH said it was useless to deny that there was considerable confusion about this clause, which was the most important in the Bill, and he must confess that, although he had tried, he had not been able to shape it so as to express what was desired. The danger of drafting Bills on such important matters in Committee was well known, and he would suggest, considering the late hour and the great importance of the clause upon which the whole Bill turned, that the Premier should adopt the usual course and adjourn, so as to afford time to consider the matter. He could assure the hon. gentleman of his assistance in the meantime to enable him to make the clause convey what he (the Premier) understood it conveyed.

Mr. GROOM said he had not spoken on the Bill this evening; but, as this was the chief clause of it, he wished to enter a protest on behalf of a considerable number of his constituents who were deeply affected by the valuation put down here. There were persons in his electorate who had got, perhaps, not more than a few acres of land, but by their industry in cultivating it and planting the vine they had rendered it worth thousands of pounds, and under this Bill they would pay more, perhaps, than the great estate of Eton Vale with its 60,000 or 70,000 acres of purchased land. In regard to valuation, he believed the acreage system to be the best to adopt. As one who had occupied the position of mayor of a municipality, and of alderman for many years, and being thoroughly acquainted with the present Act, he could say that the present system was unfair in the highest degree as applied to improvements. If a person went into the outside municipalities and asked the reason why there were so many unoccupied allotments, the answer would be that when the system of assessment was altered the properties would be improved. Directly a man bought an allotment of land he had to pay 2s. 6d. rates on it, but as soon as he improved it by fencing it, or building upon it, he was charged £2, whilst his next neighbour would possibly only be paying 2s. 6d. He had often said that the very best system of rating in all towns would be to separate the streets into three classes, and to throw the buildings over altogether and assess the land only. That was for towns, but in the country the best assessment was a tax on acreage, and if they wished to reach the absentee proprietors of large runs who were living in England they could not do so better than adopt the acreage-tax system. The Bill was a distinct blow at the southern portion of the colony, and it would fall heavily on the settled portions of the country, where the largest number of farmers were congregated, and hence the money spent on the roads would have to come out of the pockets of the small farmers. That being the case, he was not surprised at a statement made last night that the Minister for Works had not put more money on the Estimates for roads in order that the Bill should be passed. He should not discuss any clauses of the Bill, but he knew that it was not regarded by his constituents with favour. They had discussed it at public meetings and had stated to him privately that they heartily detested it. No hon. member who voted for it need show his face on the Darling Downs, or seek to be returned by a Darling Downs constituency.

Mr. MACFARLANE (Ipswich) said that, like the hon. member for Toowoomba, he rose for the purpose of protesting against the passing of the Bill. As a member for a town district he was not so much interested in the Bill as some others were, but he knew that the people outside the town

would be seriously affected by it, and no one would think of improving his property, knowing that he would be additionally taxed for any improvements. Had the Premier adopted a tax on acreage it would have been an equitable and fair system to all the country, which the present measure would not be.

Mr. GRIFFITH hoped the Premier would accept the suggestion he had made in good part, and would consent to postpone the debate.

The PREMIER said he had given a great deal of attention to the clause since the hon. gentleman had last spoken, and he failed to see that it was unintelligible. He believed that it provided that homestead and conditional selectors and pastoral lessees should pay according to their annual rent; and that houses, buildings, and other perishable property should be assessed at two-thirds of their annual rent. That was plain enough, but he had no objection to make it clearer in a few words, and he had therefore prepared an amendment to that effect.

Mr. GRIFFITH said he was almost inclined to say that the more absurd the hon. gentleman made the Bill the better. The last proviso governed the whole clause, and yet it was inconsistent with all that went before it. The hon. member proposed that houses and buildings should be computed separately; but how could they be divided from the land? If he could see his way clear, at that late hour of the evening, to do so, he would endeavour to make the thing intelligible; but he was not prepared at such short notice to draft a new clause. The principle of the Bill was bad; but it was just as well, for the credit of the Parliament, that it should be at least intelligible.

Mr. DICKSON trusted the Premier would accede to the request made by the leader of the Opposition, and postpone the further consideration of the clause, which was in reality the most important part of the Bill.

The PREMIER said he had explained the amendment over and over again, and had also stated his willingness to move another amendment to make it more intelligible to the hon. member for North Brisbane. If it was found, on further consideration, that the clause had a meaning different to that he put upon it, he could re-commit the Bill; but that was no reason why they should not push on with it as much as possible that night.

Mr. GRIFFITH said the Opposition entirely dissented from the Bill, but although they could not prevent its passing they might at least prevent the Government passing a Bill which would be a disgrace to the country on account of its being unworkable. All he was asking for was for time to make the Bill workable and to put the clause into an intelligible form. Such a thing had never occurred in the House before as that they should be compelled to pass what was unintelligible and unworkable. He had endeavoured to explain the matter before, and would do so again. The clause did not express the intention of the Government, and because he (Mr. Griffith) said it did not, he was asked, late at night, why did he not put it in proper form? He was not then prepared to draw a rating clause, the most difficult of all clauses to draft, in a hurry, and would not do it. What the Government proposed was to separate the value of buildings from the land on which they stood. How could they be separated? If the Treasurer insisted on that unintelligible form for the clause he must have it, but it was not according him (Mr. Griffith) any encouragement, or other hon. members who were endeavouring to advise the Government and carry on business properly. The Government could obtain nothing by it; the Bill would have to be re-committed, and they would have all their argument over again.

The PREMIER said that the hon. gentleman would not let them know in which way he could express his ideas. He maintained that the clause was in an intelligible form, but, with the leave of the House, would withdraw his amendment with a view to moving it in another form which expressed the meaning of the clause before them, but did it more clearly.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that would be of no use. In the first place, houses and buildings were not "perishable property" in a legal sense—they were imperishable. The hon. gentleman was using legal terms in the very opposite way to what they meant. Perishable property was something different to houses and buildings. Then they were to be dealt with separately from the land on which they stood, as if they could be dealt with irrespective of that. Then the second sub-section dealt with the land, including the houses on it, which was to be assessed on another principle—so that the two parts he had referred to were totally inconsistent. As regarded Crown lands, he wished they had adopted the New Zealand Act and taken the annual value as their basis, but here they might or might not have improved the lands, and if improved they would pay on no improvement. He must decline the responsibility so late at night of amending the clause. There was another sub-section which had absolutely no meaning whatever, and the proviso covered the whole clause and exempted the improvements of the conditional selector. Nobody wanted to see a clause of this sort pass, but it would be proper to distinguish between land with buildings on it and land without buildings, and there might also be a modification of these rules in the case of selections and in the case of Crown lands.

Mr. RUTLEDGE had no doubt the Premier was sincere and meant what he said in up-

holding the clause as it stood, but it was not a question of what he or other hon. members on that side understood it to mean—it was a question of what the clause would mean in the eyes of a court of law. It must be remembered they had offered the leader of the Opposition a judgeship, and that, supposing he had accepted, he might have been called on at some future time to say what this clause meant. Hon. members should give the hon. gentleman credit for expressing an opinion now which he might have been called on to give as a decision in a court of law, of what the clause really did mean. They saw the utter inutility of attempting to resist the will of the Government; but they wished that the most important clause in the Bill should have that consideration which would prevent the whole measure being made inoperative.

The PREMIER said he was still as unsatisfied as ever that the hon. member (Mr. Griffith) was correct. He (Mr. McIlwraith) never said that houses and buildings were to be reckoned separately, but that portions of Crown leased land on which there were buildings would be taken separately under this clause. The first sub-section would take in all land on which there were buildings, houses, and other perishable property; and he next would take in all Crown land for pastoral purposes only. The whole thing was complete. But if the hon. gentleman thought it better, he did not mind substituting for this clause the corresponding clause in the hon. gentleman's own measure, the Local Government Act of 1878.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that would be, at all events, more intelligible; but what was wanted was more time to consider this important matter. It seemed as if the Government thought there would be an attempt made to block the Bill on Monday. He (Mr. Griffith) had no such intention, nor had he heard of any such intention on his side of the House.

Mr. DICKSON said he would advise his hon. friend (Mr. Griffith) to desist from tendering advice to the Government. That hon. gentleman had done all he could to assist the Premier to make the clause intelligible, and had even forced upon the Premier's understanding, for the first time, the full bearing of his own clause. The amendment had only been before hon. members twenty-four hours, and during that time their attention had been directed to previous sections of the Bill. He thought, therefore, the Government would do well to adjourn the further consideration of the measure till the next Government sitting day. At the same time, if the Premier was so enamoured of his clause as to refuse the advice of his hon. friend, he would strongly advise him (Mr. Griffith) to wash his hands of the whole affair.

The PREMIER said he had put the clause into a shape that must suit even the hon. member for North Brisbane; and if it had been passed without so much talking, they might have finished the remaining clauses of the Bill by this time. At this period of the session the business of the country must be got through.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that, considering the nature of the Bill, and the strong feeling that was against it, more progress had been made with it than with any other similar measure in his remembrance. The Government had been assisted, not obstructed, from this side. He did not wish to force his opinions on the Government. He had said what he had to say, and they might pass the clause in any shape they liked. Under the circumstances, an adjournment was necessary. If that was refused, he should decline to take any further responsibility in the matter. The conduct of the Government was simply disgraceful, and he had never seen or heard of anything like it before in any Parliament. There had never been anything like it in this colony before, and he trusted there would never be anything like it again.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said the hon. gentleman had spoken about disgraceful conduct. Was it not disgraceful conduct on the part of the hon. gentleman last night to obstruct, for obstruction's sake, the postponement of the preamble of the Bill till 11·35, and then to go away and leave the Committee to pass twenty-four clauses in his absence? Now the Government were threatened that they would not be assisted by the leader of the Opposition. Admitting that, when he chose, that hon. gentleman could and had given assistance as regarded the technical forms of Bills and amendments to them, the Government could get on very well without him. It was absolutely necessary that the Bill should pass through to-night. There were plenty of hon. members to pass it, and if, when the Bill got into print, they found anything that required correction, it was an easy matter to re-commit it. There need be no obstruction to the passing of this clause. It carried out the same purpose as a clause in an Act which had been working in New Zealand to very good purpose.

Mr. GRIFFITH: No.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said a good deal of it was taken from the New Zealand Act. The Government believed it would work, and the hon. gentleman, it appeared, believed it would not.

Mr. GRIFFITH said he had one word to say before he went. The Colonial Secretary said there was nothing to justify the obstruction of this clause. He (Mr. Griffith) was not to be allowed to point out that the clause did not carry out the intention of the Government, that it was not intelligible, that it was self-contradictory, and part of it bore no meaning at all—without being told that he was obstructing.

The Government were confounding the meanings of discussion and obstruction—it was discussion they objected to. They were told that the conduct last night was disgraceful. It was so—it was disgraceful for the Premier to say that because three hours had been unprofitably occupied, they should sit for another three hours, as though hon. members were to be punished like naughty boys. There was no obstruction last night—one or two hon. members during the evening wished to discuss the measure generally, because of the number of petitions against it since the second reading. The Government knew that there had been no obstruction, nor had there been any threatening. A great deal of the Bill had been passed, and they had now come to a place where hon. members were at sea. The Government would not admit it, and their supporters knew little about the measure, and cared less; but they would vote for it whatever it was. Under those circumstances he (Mr. Griffith) at midnight asked the Government to adjourn—and he had made the same request an hour and a-half ago—to give hon. members an opportunity of knowing what they were about. If the Government refused, let them pass the Bill in its present shape—they would either have to re-commit it or it would not be workable. The Colonial Secretary had attributed blame to him because he left the House last night. He then was ill, and he presumed he had a right to go home when he was ill. If the present tactics of the Government were continued they would soon drive all the professional members of the House out of it altogether. He could see in this Bill a magnificent harvest for the lawyers. He had done his best to alter it. Since he had been in the House he had always endeavoured to make Bills intelligible, and there had been very little litigation about laws in the making of which he had been concerned.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: What about the Insolvency Act?

Mr. GRIFFITH said litigation in connection with the insolvency laws had almost entirely disappeared. Actions which formerly cost £300 and £400 aside now did not cost £30 and £40. The law was so plain that there was hardly any litigation at all. He had done now. He did not know whether the Government had got a quorum of members—he hoped not; but if so they could know nothing at all about the matter. Let it be understood that the Government declined to make their own Bill intelligible—that their tactics were on the principle of blind brute-force. He would tell them, further, that he had intended to make the rest of the Bill as perfect as he could. There were, for example, a clause about by-laws which would be quite inoperative; the ballot-papers, and a number of other matters to be attended to to provide against fraud. He should not point out the defects until those clauses were reached. Hon. members on his own side of the House had expressed dissatisfaction with him for having taken so much trouble as he had, and if the Government still insisted upon continuing he should leave them to pass the clause in any form they liked.

Mr. BAILEY called attention to the state of the Committee—quorum formed.

Amendment agreed to, and clause, as amended, put and passed, and clause 58 passed as printed.

On clause 59—

Mr. BAILEY said he hoped it would be put on record that at midnight, when the Divisional Boards Bill was passing, there were on the Government side of the House six members sitting and three reclining on the benches, and only one member of the Opposition present. The leader of the Opposition had tried to get the clauses debated and altered, but the Government refused to listen, refused to alter or consider the clauses, refused to afford a future opportunity for discussion, and announced at midnight that the Bill should be passed through the Committee that night. The members of the Opposition had left after the announcement by the Colonial Secretary that it was determined without any discussion—because there was no opportunity for discussion—that the Bill by brute-force should be pushed through. The members of the Opposition were not able to talk to bare benches, and they had left. He hoped it would be placed on record how the curse of the country had been passed by the Government.

Clause, as read, adopted.

On clause 60—

Mr. BAILEY asked the Government, once more, whether they would adjourn, or whether they intended to carry the Bill through in that shameful way? They must be well aware that no attempt was now being made to amend the Bill or try to make it a good one. The Colonial Treasurer had stated that there were numerous amendments to be moved, and he (Mr. Bailey) asked whether, for very shame's sake, he intended to go on with the Bill?

The PREMIER moved an amendment that the minimum rate should be 4d. instead of 6d. in the pound.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. BAILEY asked whether the Government had no shame left in them, to force business in the way they were doing? It was a mere pretence at legislation — it was making a perfect farce of the whole Bill.

Clause, as amended, passed; and clauses 61 to 66 passed as printed.

On clause 67—Annual account transmitted to Colonial Treasurer—

Mr. BAILEY asked whether the Government intended to go through the whole of the Bill in that manner at the present sitting?

The PREMIER: Yes.

Mr. BAILEY said the Government were going to rush through at that hour of the morning, without any debate, deliberation, amendment, or advice, a Bill of the consequences of which they knew nothing, and which they had not been able to frame intelligibly. Could they not pass a few more Bills, and the Estimates afterwards? The present conduct of business was an insult to the country. Such a specimen of brute-force had never been seen before.

The PREMIER having moved a verbal amendment in the clause,

Mr. BAILEY said he would again ask whether it was intended to go through the whole of the Bill?—and, in order to give the Government an opportunity of considering the matter, he would move that the Chairman leave the chair, report progress, and obtain leave to sit again.

Question put, and the Committee divided; but, there being no tellers for the "Ayes," no division was taken.

Clause 67 passed, with verbal amendment.

Clause 68—Special appropriations—negatived.

Clauses 69, 70, and 71 passed as printed.

The PREMIER moved clause 72—Loans.

After further protest from Mr. BAILEY,

Clause 72 and the remaining clauses and portions of the Bill were then passed with verbal amendments.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the House resumed, the Bill was reported with amendments, and the third reading was made an order of the day for Monday next.

The House adjourned at a quarter to 1 o'clock.