Queensland

Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

FRIDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 1881

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Friday, 23 *September*, 1881.

Colonial Sugar Refining Company's Bill—second reading.—Settled Districts Pastoral Leases Act of 1876 Amendment Bill—second reading.

The SPEAKER took the chair at half-past 10 o'clock.

COLONIAL SUGAR REFINING COMPANY'S BILL—SECOND READING.

Mr. DE POIX-TYREL said that, in moving the second reading of this Bill, he thought he need only point out to hon. members that there was one clause which, he believed, affected—and which did affect—the legislation that had been already carried in that House on account of the waste lands of the colony. That was clause 7. The other clauses simply referred to the usual course to enable a company to be established in this colony, but he would point out that clause 7 was the only clause that affected that House more particularly. In moving the second reading of the Bill he might say that he thought it was one that would commend itself to every hon. member. It was one that provided for the introduction of capital into the colony, and the cry had been for years and years, "Introduce capital." The Colonial Sugar Refining Company were prepared to bring capital into the colony, and they asked for certain privileges in return—namely, that they were to be allowed to take a transfer from the gentlemen whose names appeared in the schedule at the end of the Bill, for land amounting to some 9,305 acres. They asked for no other special privilege, and were prepared to take upon themselves all the responsibilities that had been incurred by the gentlemen who had already selected those lands. He would also point out that there could be no question of collusion between the company and the selectors. That was brought out in answer to question 14 in the evidence as given before the Select Committee, where it appeared that the first communication received on the subject by the gentleman who represented the company in the colony was on the 18th of December of last year, whilst those selections were taken up as far back as June, 1878. If hon. members would turn to question 14 they would see that the question of dummying—which was one that he had no doubt would be brought forward in this matter—was completely upset by the answer to that question. They had there a portion of a letter addressed by one of the proprietors of the company to their agent in Brisbane, asking him to take action in the matter. Those people had selected, some of them, three years before that. The committee had also examined Mr. Philp, a selector, the only witness available, who stated most distinctly that, so far as he was concerned, he knew nothing of the company, and he had taken the necessary steps to fulfil the conditions on one of the selections, but on another the selection had not been confirmed. He (Mr. De Poix-Tyrel) thought that, taking all these circumstances into consideration, the House would be quite justified in allowing the second reading of this Bill to be carried. He should not detain the House by dilating upon the matter, because he knew very well that other matters, of more importance probably, were to be considered. He moved that the Bill be now read a second time.

The PREMIER (Mr. McIlwraith) said he had examined the Bill, and believed that it would be found a good thing for the country if it was passed. Of course the objection that would be made to the matter woud be that it tended to the creation of large estates, but

that objection would not apply in this case, as sugar was an industry of that kind that, with the competition in other parts of the world, must be carried on on a very large scale, and here persons could not go into it to the extent they would like to do unless they had a large amount of land under their own control. There was no doubt that the introduction of quantities of machinery would be a very good thing for the district and for the colony. Then the question might be asked, why should this company be accorded a privilege that was not accorded to selectors? Why should selectors be forced to carry out the bargain that they had made with the Government? The answer to that was plain. Why should the selectors be made to carry out a bargain if it had been on unprofitable terms for the country? If it was a better thing for the country that they should not carry out their terms, the country ought to make that arrangement with them. Under the Bill the Government would get the actual value for the whole of the conditions performed on the selections. In addition to that, it would be of immense profit to the colony by the introduction of capital that would be required. The only guarantee in the Bill, that would be seen by hon. members, was the guarantee in words of the good faith of the company in putting up a certain amount of machinery and introducing a certain amount of capital. The good faith shown by the company in what they had done up to the present time was perfectly plain to the Government. The company might be prepared to give a further guarantee, but under the circumstances it was not really wanted. He should support the Bill, and he believed it would have the support of the Government, for the reason that it would be a good thing for the district and for the colony.

Mr. SCOTT said there was a serious innovation introduced into the Bill in this 42nd and following lines of the preamble, which read as follows:—

"And whereas it is expedient that provision should be made for enabling the said company to sue and be sued in this colony in the name of the said company, but without incorporating the same; and that the lands, tenements, hereditaments, securities, and property of the said company in this colony should be vested by operation of law in the trustees for the time being of the said company, without requiring the same to be assigned, transferred, or conveyed to the new trustee or trustees on every change of trustees."

As far as he knew that was quite new in the operation of the law here. There were certain companies that were in great straits now about holding land—especially companies belonging to the other colonies; and there were companies that were in such a position that they could not hold land here. It seemed to be a complete innovation and something altogether new, which would put this company in a position that no other company, as far as he was aware of, was in. The company was not incorporated in this colony, and it was proposed that it should not be. He did not profess to be well up in the law, but should like to hear the Attorney-General's opinion on the point.

The HON. S. W. GRIFFITH said he was sorry that the hon. member for Logan was not present, because he was a member of the Select Committee which sat to inquire into the Bill, and he had entered a formal protest against it. The protest was printed with the report of the Committee, and was as follows:—

"PROTEST.

"I cannot allow this Bill—The Colonial Sugar Refining Company's Bill—to pass from this Committee to the consideration of the Assembly without entering my emphatic protest against the manner in which it proposes to deal with the question of our land legislation. Clause 7 of this Bill is in entire opposition to clause 28 of the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1876, under which the selections enumerated in the schedule attached to this Bill have been taken up. In my opinion no private Bill dealing with the administration of the lands of the colony should be allowed to supersede our colonial legislation.

"PETER MCLEAN."

He (Mr. Griffith) was sorry the hon. member was not present, because he knew the hon. gentleman entertained very strong views on this Bill. He (Mr. Griffith) did not entertain very strong views on the subject one way or the other, but he did not believe in allowing selected land to be sold until the conditions had been complied with. It was a very dangerous precedent to allow the principle of our land laws to be departed from for the benefit of any particular person or company. On the other hand, it was stated by one of the witnesses representing the company that if they could get this land they would be prepared to spend from £350,000 to £500,000 upon it. Of course that was a temptation; it was an inducement offered to the Legislature to encourage the expenditure of so much money. It would be very desirable to get the company here as colonists, and induce them to spend that money, which would assist very materially in developing the district; but it seemed to him doubtful whether the company were not asking too much. Moreover, there was one serious omission in the Bill. There was not any real guarantee that the company would carry out their bargain. There was nothing to prevent the Sugar Company from buying the land from the selectors and selling it again as soon as the Bill had passed. The House was merely asked to accept the promise given by Mr. Forrest, one of the witnesses, and who represented the company in this colony. It was not the practice of Parliament, in making bargains, to take anybody's verbal promise. This Bill, if it was anything at all, was a contract between the Colonial Sugar Company and this colony—that in consideration of the company being offered certain facilities contrary to the scope of our law they would give something in return; but as the Bill stood at present the contract was all on one side. Parliament agreed to allow them to depart from the principles of the law, but it was a very serious omission in the Bill not to provide anything to make the contract binding on the company. They said they intended to expend from £350,000 to £500,000. They contemplated spending it, but perhaps they were looking forward to the remote future. When did they contemplate expending that money? Was it this year, next year, sometime, or never? They might contemplate spending it during next year, but the company ought to be prepared to say that they would proceed with the work on the selections at once. Of course they probably would do that, but when would they spend this money? They might spend £100,000 next year, or within the next twenty years: it was merely a vague statement of intention. If any person came to Parliament and asked for special facilities for carrying out any work, Parliament ought to say, "We are willing to grant you the facilities, but we want something in return. We do not want a statement of intention. We want a guarantee binding you to perform your part of the transaction." For his part he did not object to the departure from the principle of the law provided there was a distinct guarantee given that the company would carry out their part of the bargain. He apprehended that there would be no objection on the part of the company to have a condition of that sort inserted in the Bill. If there was he should be very much inclined to oppose the Bill altogether.

Mr. DE POIX-TYREL: There will be no objection.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that there ought to be some clause put in the Bill to the effect that the company should expend in improvements upon taking possession of the land—within, say, five years after the passing of the Act—not less than £200,000, and that if they failed to do that they should forfeit the land. That was the only way to have a binding contract, and he hoped there would be no objection to a clause of that kind being inserted. If there was he should be quite prepared to oppose this precedent, because it was a dangerous one.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Mr. Pope Cooper) said that, if it could not be shown that there was any intention on the part of the company to evade the provisions of the Land Act, he did not think there could be any objection to the Bill. Unless the company were trying to work some swindle he did not see that there could be any objection. The persons desiring the Bill agreed to fulfil all the conditions of selection; and, unless the Bill was intended to enable them to commit fraud by law, he did not see how the country was to be damaged by it. He saw no objection to the Bill at all.

Mr. LUMLEY HILL said he really did not quite follow the legal aspect of the matter as taken by the Attorney-General. He thought that the leader of the Opposition was perfectly right in his objection. They wanted security, but all the security that was offered was the evidence of the agent of the company that they were ready and prepared to do, and contemplated doing, certain work within a very short time. He presumed that if the agent of the company wished the Bill to go through he could have no possible objection to a clause being inserted in the Bill binding the company to do the work within a certain time, under the penalty of forfeiting their land. It was perfectly reasonable that such a clause should be inserted, and he should certainly uphold the proposition of the leader of the Opposition. According to the Attorney-General they were to be contented with the evidence of the agent, who, he dared say, was a very straightforward, trustworthy man. But that was not his (Mr. Hill's) opinion of a legal contract at all. Under the Bill they were to give the Colonial Sugar Refining Company great facilities, and they had a right to expect proper security in return.

Mr. BLACK said he thought there could be no objection to a clause guaranteeing the expenditure of a large sum of money being inserted in the Bill, and he quite agreed with the objections that might be raised otherwise. At the same time he could state, speaking from a personal knowledge, that the company had in a *bonâ fide* manner commenced operations at the present time. They would see by question 39 of the evidence that the hon. member, Mr. Perkins, asked—

"What time do you expect to be able to commence operations—to have your mills in working order?"

And the reply was—

"For the '83 season; the year after next. The contracts are to have effect from that time."

As he had said before, he could speak from his personal knowledge that the company had already commenced certain operations upon freehold lands they had secured, and they had already something like 100 Europeans engaged, and had transferred what was originally a large waste of unoccupied lands into a large hive of industry at once, and some of their mills were already ordered. He was perfectly certain from the success of their vast operations on and about the Clarence River that they had come into the north of Queensland for the purpose of entering upon the sugar industry on a large scale, and on a scale which would be for the benefit of the colony. They did not ask for the freehold of these lands, but they agreed to carry out the conditions of selection with which the original selectors had to comply. Unless they fulfilled those conditions they could get no title to the land, so that hon. members must not think that the Bill was introduced to give them the freehold of those lands at once. So far as he could see, the colony must undoubtedly be benefited by an arrangement of this sort; no one could lose anything by it, and they had everything to gain by encouraging the expenditure on the large scale contemplated by the company. They contemplated spending half-a-million of money, and that necessitated the employment of a large amount of labour both European and coloured. There was not only an advantage to be gained by the Government from that arrangement, and by the selectors from whom the company intended to purchase the lands, but a very great advantage would be conferred upon the adjoining selectors. The company had already entered into large contracts with the farmers around them, and contemplated crushing their cane for them in 1883. They intended entering upon business on a scale never contemplated in the North before, and intended to lay down railways and tramways for the carriage of cane to their mills; and he had no hesitation in saying that their operations would confer an immense amount of benefit upon the colony at large. He thought that, if the House thought fit to insert a clause in the Bill calling upon the company to give some sort of guarantee—though he could say from his own knowledge that such a clause was not really necessary—the Bill would meet with the support of the House. He was sure that, if they could induce other capitalists to come and invest their money on the same principle, they would be doing a very great amount of good to the whole colony.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Mr. Perkins) said no doubt, from a strictly legal point of view, there was a good deal of force in the remarks of the hon. leader of the Opposition. He dared say that if he tried to pass a Bill like this through Parliament, it was more than probable that he would be asked to give some better guarantee than his status and position. The House would, no doubt, take care that the conditions should be fulfilled. He would draw their attention to what was the position of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. Hon. members would find, on referring to page 9, question 43, in answer to a question put by himself, that the agent of the company admitted that they were going to give a sum of £25,000 to these selectors for the privilege of being allowed to take their places; and when they added to that the balance to be paid up by way of rent and the fulfilling of the conditions, it would be a matter of £50,000 before they would be in a position to have any title to the land. He happened to know, as the hon. member for Mackay had told the House, that the company had commenced practical operations already, and he regarded it as a good omen for the country that the company should have been induced to take up land in this colony. They had been very successful elsewhere, and he had no doubt that their operations would prove conclusively—what had been denied by many persons—the suitability of the soil of this colony for sugar-growing, and would cause the advent of capitalists from other colonies and from other parts of the world. He had no doubt whatever of the *bonâ fide* intentions of the company, because in self-defence, and to recover the capital which they must invest in order to get a title to the land,

they would have to carry on operations on a gigantic scale. He had no doubt, either, that if the agent of the company had had his attention drawn to the matter, he would have been quite prepared to give the guarantee suggested by the hon. leader of the Opposition.

Mr. RUTLEDGE said he had a very strong objection to the principle embodied in the Bill. The efforts of Governments had been directed for many years past to the solution of the problem how to settle a large population on the lands of the colony, and at the same time how to avoid any individual or corporation becoming possessed of large properties through the agency of smaller individuals who had found it necessary to take the land for the purpose of selling it subsequently to those who were richer than themselves. That kind of thing had been done in the past without the assistance of the legislation proposed by means of the Bill before the House, and they knew that most mischievous results had followed from the facilities afforded to persons for acquiring large estates by the agency of dummiers. If the Bill was carried, and the principle it contained adopted, the next thing they would find would be that a few squatters would incorporate themselves into a land company of some kind, and they would then come down to the House with a Bill legalising their purchase of the selections taken up by others. If they agreed that it was the legal right of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company to come down to that House and ask that the laws of the land should be set aside for their especial benefit, there was no earthly reason why any other company for any other purpose should not come down and do the same thing. He did not think it was for the good of the country that they should be asked to set aside laws enacted after the most mature consideration, and after the experience gained from the commencement of this colony, and he had seen no sufficient reason for it. All he had been told was that this company proposed to expend half-a-million of money, and he thought that it was not right that the most important principle of their land legislation should be overridden in the way proposed. He ventured to say that if any other company less influential than the Colonial Sugar Company were to ask for a Bill of this sort, they would be scouted out of the House and would not be listened to for a single moment. The fact that the company occupied a sound financial position, and were prosperous, was no reason why they should make any exception in their favour and pass a Bill of this sort. He had heard reference made that morning to the success which had attended the efforts of the Colonial Sugar Company in other places, more particularly on the Clarence River, which had been instanced as the place where they were most successful. He was happy to bear testimony to the fact that there, and in other places, the company had achieved the most marked success; but he would point out that it was not by means of such a principle as was proposed to be legalised if this Bill passed into law. The principle which the company sought to adopt by the passage of that Bill was entirely at variance with the traditions of the company. What had they done on the Clarence? Why, it was their boast in New South Wales that they did not own a single acre of land for the purpose of sugar cultivation, and they had recognised the fact that the sugar industry would always attain greater success and more colossal proportions when the manufacture and cultivation were kept apart as two distinct branches. In New South Wales the principle adopted was that the farmers must be encouraged by every possible means to go into the cultivation of sugar on a higher and more scientific scale, and that the company would devote itself, when the sugar had been cultivated in that way, to bringing in all such appliances as would turn it into sugar as a marketable commodity and at the least possible cost. In that way high-class farming had sprung up, assisted by bonuses given by the company to the farmer who produced the best article in the shape of raw material, and the company were amassing a large fortune. While on the Clarence the company were able to declare enormous dividends as the result of their operations in that place, the farmers all around were growing rich; they had been elevated out of bankruptcy to affluence by the principle adopted by the Colonial Sugar Company, of confining their operations exclusively to the manufacture of sugar. He saw beneath the surface of this Bill what was the intention of the Colonial Sugar Company. They saw there was a system springing up here which was not approved of in any other of the Australian colonies. They saw that we had adopted a principle by which the labour market might be inundated by kanakas, and now by coolies; they saw that under those circumstances they could safely depart from the principle which they had hitherto adopted, of manufacturing sugar from cane grown by the farmers, and now they also saw that the time had come for acquiring a large estate, which they would be able to work by the agency of the cheap labour which it was proposed to import from British India. That was what was intended by the Colonial Sugar Company. He might be told—he was not going into the question of coolie *versus* European labour—that if the company commenced operations up North they must have that cheap labour, and that it would be brought over to the country whether or not. He said that was quite beyond the question. On turning to the schedule, he found that the amount of land proposed to be acquired—going directly in the teeth of our land legislation—by ten or eleven Europeans was 10,000 acres. He found that those lands were taken up by selectors before they thought of a Colonial Sugar Company coming here. Their object was to get a living from the lands, and that was their object before the sugar company came up. Greater facilities would be given for this when the company was established there; but it was found that it was possible for those selectors to work these lands to advantage without the advantitious aid afforded by the establishment of the company. They would, therefore, be able to succeed in a greater degree under the new conditions. He found, by an answer given by Mr. Forrest, that the company had entered into large contracts for the supply of cane with the farmers of the neighbourhood. That meant that there were European colonists there who were prepared to assist in finding material upon which the company would operate; and he asked, if there were European farmers where the company proposed to establish their mills in the North, then why should it depart from the principle which it had adopted elsewhere? Why did they not say, as they had said before, "We will encourage the farmers to increase their productions and multiply their homesteads, and work in the manner which has been so advantageous to us and to the farmers elsewhere." If the climate was so inhospitable that they could not grow sugar-cane, then he would say that there would be some reason for giving some countenance to the principle contained in the Bill. But he maintained that there was no reason whatever. If the farmers had selected their land for the purpose of making a livelihood, and were prepared to supply sugar-cane grown by themselves to the company for the purpose of crushing, then where was the necessity for allowing this company to amass 10,000 acres of land, and to employ black

labour altogether independently of the settlement of the country by European farmers? The principle was one which had been contended for in times past; it was an important and a precious principle, and was indispensable to the future growth and development of the industries of this colony; and if they departed from that principle now by legalising a transaction by which 10,000 acres of land would, in violation of the principle of the land law, be transferred to a company, then, he said, they would open the door to a host of abuses that would become a heavy tax upon the country before long. He had no doubt that the arguments he had advanced might not be palatable to some who held different views. He had great respect for the Sugar Company, and was actuated by no antagonistic feeling towards it. Considered as a company, or as regarded the personal worth of those who sat on its board of directors, he said the company was deserving of all honour for the manner in which it had established the sugar industry of Australia; and since it had done so without the aid of anything of this kind, there was no reason why they should not continue to do so, and so secure those advantages which they had established elsewhere for the northern part of Queensland, and at the same time assist in that which all were earnestly striving for by one means or another—namely, the settling on the soil of an industrious and thriving population.

Mr. DE SATGE said he thought the hon. member for Enoggera had gone rather beyond the mark in his observations, which seemed a tirade against capital. After hearing the explanation of the hon. member for Mackay, he (Mr. De Satgé) should support the second reading of the Bill with a view of introducing a clause, if possible, to protect the colony by committing the company to the employment of a certain amount of capital. The schedule of prices tended to show the very small amount which the selectors had paid for their land. Of course that was now passed, but at the same time he thought they could gather a good lesson from the whole facts of the case. It appeared to him that those selectors held in all 11,470 acres of land, and that the earliest applications were made in June, 1878, only three or four years ago, and in 1880; and therefore the conditions which this company would have to fulfil were altogether independent of the selectors. The total amount which the colony had received for those lands was £3,435, and he saw from the printed evidence that the company was prepared to pay £25,000 for the rights which the selectors possessed. He saw from the evidence of Mr. Philp that a certain amount had been spent on the improvement of his selection, and it appeared to him that there was an enormous discrepancy between the amount received by the colony from the selectors and that which was to be paid to the selectors by the company. As far as he could see from the evidence, the amount spent on improvements appeared to be almost *nil*, and they could therefore see at once the enormous profit made by the selectors if this sum were paid to them. These appeared to be the bare facts of the case, and they showed very strikingly the wisdom of the step taken by the Government to re-value the sugar lands of the Johnstone River. As regarded the acquisition of a large property by a company, he could hardly believe there was any comparison between this drawback and the expenditure of nearly a quarter of a million. He thought the introduction of so large an amount of capital would compensate the colony for the acquisition o that land by the company, and that they would be acting wrongly to exclude a company which was bringing such an industry to the colony. The company seemed to have thriven elsewhere, and were prepared to confer advantages on the northern districts of this colony. But he thought something should be done during the committal of the Bill to bind the company to spend the sum of money which they said they were prepared to expend in the development of this industry. He took it for granted that the hon. member for Mackay, who was a large sugar-grower himself, looked to the benefits which would accrue from the introduction of capital into the country as much as he looked on the other benefits which would be conferred on the district and the colony generally, and of which an earnest had already been given in other colonies.

Mr. WELD-BLUNDELL said he thought the hon. member for Enoggera must be excused for many expressions which he had made use of, inasmuch as it was only very recently that he appeared in the Town Hall, on the great occasion of the coolie question. He had no doubt he was then carried away with enthusiasm, and committed as many errors and made use of as many fallacies in his arguments as he had done to-day. But the hon. gentleman should recollect that he was not now addressing a public meeting, but that he was talking to people who knew something of the main principles of such a question as capital and labour. As it was, he had given utterance to a greater number of fallacies and absurdities than any hon. member that he (Mr. Weld-Blundell) had ever heard yet in that House, and on almost every occasion on which the hon. gentleman got up he elicited roars of laughter from his hearers. To listen to the hon. member one would suppose that capital was one of the worst and most undesirable things to introduce into the country. If he was not mistaken, the hon. gentleman was a protectionist, and a strong one too. But what was the very essence of the principle of protection?

Mr. RUTLEDGE: I studied the question of capital and labour before I saw you.

Mr. WELD-BLUNDELL said that the essence of protection was the encouragement of new industries and the introduction of capital. He would like to know what principle was broken by their encouraging by a slight concession the development of this industry in the colony. Besides, it would give employment to hundreds of people, a thing the hon. gentleman seemed to forget all about. Instead of that he introduced the same feeling he had done at the Town Hall, and made a tirade against the Government, capital, and everything else. The hon. gentleman talked about the reason why this company was induced to come into Queensland to start operations being that they had made so much money in the Clarence River district. Now, most people would suppose that if they were doing so they would not desire to transfer their operations to Queensland; but as a matter of fact he had been informed by those who knew a good deal about it that the company had not declared such large dividends from the Clarence River. Whilst doing no harm to anybody, the House had now an opportunity of encouraging an industry which promised to become of gigantic proportions in the colony. Nothing was now of such great promise as the sugar industry. They only required to encourage it very slightly to make it the means of bringing large amounts of capital into the colony, while, at the same time, it would give employment to thousands and thousands of people all along the eastern coast. He quite agreed with what had fallen from some hon. members that it was desirable to have as a matter of principle such a stipulation introduced in committee as would be a guarantee that the

capital would be spent in this work within a certain time. Without it a bad precedent would be established, and there might be an occasion hereafter when greater caution would require to be exercised, and when the excuse would be that the stipulation had not been required in this case. No doubt the company intended to—he had no doubt about it—expend a large amount of capital at Mackay, and therefore, they would have no objection to the introduction of the clause. He should support the second reading of the Bill.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN said he had gone to the House that morning with a kindly feeling towards this Bill and the hon. member who had introduced it. But after the remarks he had heard from hon. members he was entirely convinced that it was about the biggest swindle that it was ever contemplated perpetrating in Queensland. At the best of times—from the very beginning—their land laws were never intended for settlement. The Administration never really encouraged settlement. And now they had a proposal for the expenditure of half-a-million of money in the North, by which selectors were to be bought out. They were now going to pass a law to encourage dummying. They were to propagate dummying by this Bill, and spend half-a-million to clear the settlers out. He would advise that they should be put into the Marsupials Destruction Bill, and, by calling some of them marsupials, secure their extinction. In the course of two years he was sure there would not be a white man left there. What benefit was this capital to the colony of Queensland? Could anybody show him the benefit of it? The sugar industry, so far, had been a loss to Queensland, as the planters got the land for nothing. He would rather see a hundred farmers up there. He believed that there would be very little difficulty in demonstrating that a hundred farmers would be worth more to the State than the half-million of money. He was surprised—taking it altogether—at the speech of the hon the Premier. The whole reason the hon. gentleman gave for his support to the Bill was "because it introduced capital." That was all. What was the meaning of this Bill? Was it not to throw the whole of the colony of Queensland into big estates? They did not want capital. He said it advisedly—they did not want capital—in the sense, at any rate, some gentlemen would have it. They wanted capital in the shape of labour—population.

Mr. WELD-BLUNDELL: Paupers.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN: What was capital without labour? There would be some use if this £500,000 were utilised in bringing white labour to the colony. But this was a way in which it could not be. He was rather taken with the reason given by the Attorney-General. The hon. gentleman said it was not intended for a swindle, and so they were to let it pass. But even if it was so, and this Bill became law, would not the swindle come off afterwards? How did members know what guarantee they had that these people had not sent up selectors to dummy for them? He was very sorry, as only for that he would have voted for the second reading, because he had some suspicion that it was an honest transaction before that. Now he was determined to vote against the second reading of the Bill.

Mr. GARRICK said that there seemed to be an impression that the principles of the Bill were apparently not in accordance with the ordinary principles of their land legislation—that was, that they allowed a larger area to be acquired—and to be acquired at an earlier time. But he thought that the exception in this case was so exceedingly great as to justify even a departure from the ordinary principle; but the principle in the exception appeared to him to be the very principle that they had always aimed at as their rule. Their rule had been to secure settlement and cultivation. Now the exception in this instance carried out this rule to an extent which they had not hitherto known. It appeared to him to secure both settlement and cultivation. The hon. member for Enoggera had laid stress upon the large area of land which was to be acquired, but, after all, it was less than 10,000 acres, which, compared with many selections, was not very large. But, besides this being larger than usual—supposing it to be so—what had been their objection to having a larger area than usual allotted? The objection was not to the largeness of the area, but to the purpose to which it had been devoted. If it were but one lot which was devoted to the purposes they required they would have secured their end. This was the object of the residence, expenditure, and improvement clauses with reference to all agricultural land; and when they found large areas going into one hand, their only objection was that they were not securing their objects as they had intended to do. Even if there were 20,000 or 30,000 acres, there could be no objection to their being granted if they were used for beneficial purposes such as Parliament thought they should be. All this land was to be used in the most productive way in which it could be. It would afford the largest wage and a quicker turning round of money than ordinary capital which might be at rest. The result was always in this sort of industry that they got a larger wage, and the best division of capital they could have was secured by this Bill. The rule being to promote settlement, this exception carried out the principles of their rule stronger than in any other way. That was why he thought they would be right in departing from the rule. He did not look upon this Bill, or upon this scheme, until they were proved to the contrary, as anything but an honest Bill. They had no right to look upon them in any other way. The question of labour had been raised, and, in reference to that, he held himself entirely free. He could not see that by supporting this Bill he pledged himself in any way as to the question of labour. He should consider it altogether irrespective of this Bill, and the purposes for which this land was to be taken. Then by this Bill they not only secured the working of the land by the proprietors, but they did one other, and a very great good to the district—it would enable the land all about it to be used. Not only would these proprietors use the land in the way Parliament thought best, but it would enable other persons to use their land in the way that was thought best. He would show this by the evidence. On the first page he found the following:—

> "Can you inform the Committee what amount of capital the company are likely to employ in this colony on those selections referred to in the Bill? In the Mackay district and on the Herbert River, to which reference is made in the Bill, they contemplate expending about £350,000. I may state that they contemplate an extension to the Johnstone River; and their expenditure, altogether, between the Herbert, Mackay, and the Johnstone, may be estimated to reach about £500,000 sterling."

He thought that this would be of immense advantage. He was not going to say a single word about the use of capital. It was a truism, and required no explanation or support. It was stated that there was no provision in the Bill requiring this capital to be expended, but when they looked at the past operations of the company, what they had done up to the present time, they might have rested safely—on ordinary business principles—on the company carrying out their operations, and that this money, or at

any rate a very large part of it, would be expended. He had no doubt that, from the good faith which so pervaded this transaction, the company would have no objection to the insertion in committee of a clause—if it was thought necessary—by which some portion of the capital would have to be expended before the grant was issued for the land. In another part of the evidence he found the following :—

"6. Will the company, in the event of this Bill passing, be willing to buy cane from cane-growers in the neighbourhood of their mills or works? The company have contracted, through us, with a number of selectors to buy their cane from them; and these contracts extend over five years."

So that the colony would not only benefit by the operations of the company, but there would be the benefit accruing from the assistance given to other growers. The evidence went on :—

"19. And, in the event of this Bill passing, your company are prepared to extend operations considerably? The company have already purchased very largely on the Herbert. Their manager has already gone up there, and there is a large expenditure going on there; and they contemplate large operations both at Mackay and on the Johnstone River, as well as on the Herbert.

"20. And the principle on which the company contemplate carrying on operations is crushing for farmers? No. They wish to acquire freeholds, or to lease 10,000 or 12,000 acres in each district in their own right, and to work the land. They will also crush or work any cane that they can secure and that may be grown on the surrounding selections. As I have said before, they have already entered into contracts with ten or a dozen people to grow cane for the Homebush mill. Those contracts are made to run for five years; and are for the produce of farms—200, 300, 400, and 500 tons of cane per annum, for crushing.

"21. What is the probable capacity of the mill that the company propose working? That I cannot tell you. You can understand it must be on a considerable scale to crush cane from 10,000 or 12,000 acres, as well as that from the land round about."

And in question 31—

"Are those lands all adjoining? No. Homebush forms one homestead; Plane Creek the other.

"32. And do the company propose working all the property from the one mill? No; they propose to have two mills; one at Plane Creek, and the other at Homebush.

"33. And there will be two separate establishments? Yes. Two separate establishments. One will be worked from Mackay, and the other from Plane Creek."

By this the House would see that there were going to be two mills on the company's selections —the one at Homebush and the other at Plane Creek, so that other growers there would have the advantage of mills in both these localities. The hon. member for Darling Downs (Mr. Miles) who was sitting near him, had just said that these benefits would accrue even if this Bill did not pass. But the evidence said—

"40. Would you commence operations in case this Bill is not passed? We could not, in anything like the magnitude the company want to go on."

And further on :—

"45. *By the Chairman :* You have been asked several questions as to the capacity of the mills; I presume that in the event of this Bill passing, the company will put up mills of sufficient capacity to crush for sugar, not only the cane of their own land, but that of their neighbours, too; and, possibly, with a view to future arrangements, that also of growers who may come afterwards, on somewhat similar terms to those of their present neighbours? Certainly; that is their intention."

Now they had no reasons for thinking that the intention of the company was not a *bonâ fide* one. Their operations would, in his opinion, justify a departure from the ordinary principles of their legislation, because in regard to that departure, he contended that the intention of the House was not so much the making of smaller areas, but insisting upon the conditions.

Mr. MILES said he would be inclined to suppose, from the arguments used in favour of the Bill, that the 10,000 acres in question was the only land left in Queensland fit for the cultivation of sugar. If he was not misinformed, a large area of land well adapted for sugar cultivation would shortly be thrown open for selection. Why then should not the Government, which had already given facilities to the pastoral lessees to buy up large tracts of land by auction, deal with the Sugar Company in the same way, and let them obtain the land they wanted at auction? Why should they set aside their land laws for the sake of that paltry 10,000 acres? If that was all the available land in the colony suitable for sugar cultivation, there might be some reason in passing such a Bill; but he could not understand why, with the immense quantity of land there was in the North fit for sugar cultivation, those particular selections should be dealt with in the way proposed. He did not believe in the principle of the Bill, and should most decidedly vote against it. The intention of the Legislature, in framing its land laws, was to settle population on the land, and to prevent, as far as possible, the accumulation of large estates. In the face of that, a specious Bill was introduced to set aside their land laws in order to give facilities to some large company that the land laws did not allow. He was surprised to hear the arguments of the hon. member for Moreton. That hon. gentleman having been entrusted with the administration of the land laws, he should have been the last to advocate that those laws should be set aside to allow a wealthy company to step in and purchase the 10,000 acres in question. He fully agreed with what was said by the hon. member for Enoggera, that the proper operation of a sugar refining company was to refine sugar, and not to grow it. If that company got possession of the land, the consequence would be that the smaller planters in the neighbourhood would very soon be under their thumb. They would have to hand over their cane to the company at the company's own price, or else they would refuse to crush it. In fact, he believed, as the selectors were now situated, the refining company would be rather a curse to them than a benefit. It was no argument to say that the company were going to spend so much money; for even if they did they would monopolise a large tract of land, and compel the small growers to sell their cane to them at the company's own price.

Mr. MACFARLANE said the reason for supporting the Bill seemed to be that it would introduce capital into the colony. He believed thoroughly in the introduction of capital, for without it there could be no progress, and it was scarcely worth while to introduce a large number of white labourers unless there was capital to employ them when they arrived. On the other hand, if the company was to be established for the employment of black labour, it would be far better to go on as at present than introduce capital to the prejudice of the working classes of the colony. Surely such a wealthy company was in a position to find land in some other way than the way proposed, and without interfering with the principle of our land laws. They could surely take up land as it was open to all other persons to do in the colony. The Bill was so much opposed to the principle of the land legislation of the colony that he did not see how they could support it. One speaker on the other side had talked about the introduction of paupers into the colony; but they were not compelled to introduce paupers. There was in the country already a very superior class of persons who would be willing to take up those lands and work them; and, as had been observed by the hon. member for Stanley, that class of people would do more good to the colony by working individually

for themselves than by allowing capitalists to take up land for the employment of black labour. He was not opposed, as he had said before, to the introduction of capital, but he did believe that the employment of black labour would not tend to the progress of the colony. For those reasons he should oppose the second reading of the Bill.

Question—That the Bill be now read a second time—put.

The House divided :—

AYES, 23.

Sir Arthur Palmer, Messrs. McIlwraith, Pope Cooper, Perkins, Scott, Persse, Stevenson, Weld-Blundell, Black, Lalor, Hamilton, Macrossan, Sheaffe, Kingsford, Lumley Hill, Norton, Garrick, Archer, De Poix-Tyrel, H. Palmer, Wyndham Palmer, Price, and De Satgé.

NOES, 6.

Messrs. O'Sullivan, Miles, Macfarlane, Horwitz, Aland, and Rutledge.

Question, therefore, resolved in the affirmative.

On the motion of Mr. DE POIX-TYREL, the committal of the Bill was made an Order of the Day for Thursday next.

SETTLED DISTRICTS PASTORAL LEASES ACT OF 1876 AMENDMENT BILL—SECOND READING.

Mr. NORTON said that, in moving the second reading of this Bill, he might say that he still entertained the opinion he had always held, that it would be better that any measure of the kind should emanate from the Government. At the same time, he could not fail to recognise the fact that, if the Government introduced any Bill dealing with the land, more comprehensive alterations would be expected and more extensive than those which the present Bill proposed to deal with; and therefore, if the initiative was left with the Government, they would have to wait a very long time for a measure of the kind, and the very serious objection that existed would have to stand unremoved. As hon. members would notice, the object of the Bill was to alter the provision of the Settled Districts Pastoral Leases Act of 1876 with regard to the sale by auction of leases of runs every five years. That principle, he might say, had never before been adopted by any of the colonies; and, at the same time, it had not carried out the object intended. The intention was, he believed, to obtain a fair value for the runs; but for some time a large number of leaseholders had occupied their runs and paid no rent whatever—some who afterwards bought their runs; others got them at the upset price when they were first put up. At the same time there were cases where—he would not call them gentlemen, but men who, before the auction day, went up to the leaseholder, knowing that he was bound to buy his lease, and telling him that they would run him in the auction room if he did not pay over so much to them. Others besides himself knew that that had taken place. Unless the present Bill were passed the same thing would occur again, and would occur much more frequently than before. Without any logical reason an arbitrary line had been drawn between the settled and the unsettled districts, and the Acts in force on either side of that line were as diverse as they could possibly be. In the unsettled districts, by the Pastoral Leases Act of 1869, those who held leases under any former Act were allowed to bring them under that Act, which gave them a lease for twenty-one years. The rent which they were to pay for the first seven years was not to be less than they had paid before. For the next seven years it was not to exceed 10s. per square mile, nor for the next seven years 15s. per square mile. After the twenty-one years had expired, they were entitled to demand an additional fourteen years' lease, making in all a lease of thirty-five years. During the second lease, the rent was fixed for the first four years at 10 per cent. more than the sum previously paid, for the next five years 10 per cent. in addition, and 10 per cent. on that again for the remaining five years. So that in the outside districts extraordinary advantages had been given to leaseholders, while every possible disadvantage had been put upon those who held land in the settled districts. There were some so-called settled districts which were quite as unsettled as what were called the unsettled districts. Although his object in introducing the Bill was to place the leaseholders in the settled districts at a less disadvantage, he did not think any other class of the community would be in any way affected by it. The conditions as to selection would remain the same, and every run in the settled districts might be thrown open to selection at any moment. A great portion of every run in the settled districts was now, he believed, open for selection, and if more land was required the other parts of the run might also be thrown open. This Bill did not propose to interfere with that; it simply did away with the auction clause with regard to those leases which had already been sold by auction. In the settled districts the provisions with regard to leases which had been forfeited would remain the same, and the same terms would apply where they had to be put up to auction after forfeiture had taken place. The measure would apply only to leases which had been sold at auction. He had purposely refrained from carrying the Bill too far because he desired that it should be a measure which would commend itself to the common sense of every member of the House. It gave the Government power to give the lessee a lease for ten years, which the Government might cause to be valued at the commencement of the term and re-valued at the end of the first five years. In all other respects the runs would remain subject to the same conditions as now. The effect of the conditions under the Act of 1876 had been very injurious, not only to the lessees, but also to the people who depended upon the lessees for work. Lessees, having been placed in such a position as never to know the moment when they might be cleared out altogether, would not make any improvements or spend one shilling more than they could help on their runs. Before the Act came into operation it was customary for the leaseholders to spend large sums of money in fencing and other improvements, but the whole of that expenditure had ceased. He had received numerous letters from working men in his own district complaining that in consequence of the provisions of the Act work had entirely ceased in the district, and a large number of men had been obliged to clear out altogether. No one could question the truth of those facts, and he thought the remedy which he proposed would be only an act of common justice. It would do away with a provision which had never been adopted previous to the Act of 1876, and it would simply place the lessee in a position of knowing that he would be able to work the country for a reasonable time without being subjected to all sorts of annoyances, and the expenses which might be forced upon him if his land were put up to auction. Those who had lived in the bush, and were acquainted with lessees, would know how difficult it was to remove stock from a run within a limited time. The Act gave six months in order to remove stock, and, although that might at first sight appear to be sufficient, it was not so, and the mere removal entailed great loss. The lessee, in the first place, had to get another run, and as he would never think of taking up a second run in

the settled districts he would be driven back into the unsettled districts, where, owing partly to the working of this Act and partly to the increased demand for country, there was a much greater difficulty in getting land than there used to be. Great numbers of people had come up from the Southern colonies lately to invest capital in pastoral properties, but not one out of fifty would think for a moment of investing money in pastoral properties in the settled districts. They all went outside, where there was a prospect of carrying on for a time without being needlessly harassed by the conditions of this Act. The effect had been to drive up the price of runs there, and to deprive the present occupants of runs in the settled districts from being able to sell out of their runs and clear the costs they had incurred. Properties in the settled districts had, consequently, been very much decreased in value, and he could say with confidence that there was hardly a run in the settled districts which, during the last five years, had made a return of 5 per cent. on the money invested in it; a great majority had not returned over 3 per cent., and some had not made working expenses. The land was in many cases very much inferior to that in the unsettled districts, and yet the lessees had to pay a minimum price of £2 per square mile, which was more than double the rent of the runs in the outside districts. There was no doubt that, at the land sales which had taken place, much higher rates than the minimum had been obtained, but that was entirely in consequence of the greater desire that existed to obtain land in those districts where there was a chance of being able to carry on for some years and sell out eventually without sustaining a heavy loss. Had time permitted, he might have adduced other arguments, but he had said enough to show hon. members that he did not claim anything very unusual in asking that the Bill might be read a second time. He moved the second reading.

Mr. H. PALMER (Maryborough) said the hon. member who had moved the second reading had given such a full explanation of the measure that little remained to be said, and what little he had to say would be entirely in favour of the Bill. The measure had been very oppressive ever since it was introduced, and he had been at a loss to discover the reason for the introduction of such an arbitrary measure. It had been productive of great injustice and injury in the settled districts, and he hoped the Minister for Lands would see his way to consent to the proposal now made. Knowing the circumstances of many of the lessees in the settled districts, he was in a position to say that there had been a general complaint with regard to the working of this Act, and the principal complaint was about the shortness of the tenure and the oppressive and unjust action of the provision with regard to sales by auction. Lessees were placed at a great disadvantage in having to pay whatever price their runs might be run up to at auction, or else be prepared to remove their stock, and vacate a run which they had occupied at a considerable outlay and resided on for many years. He was therefore often compelled, at whatever loss to himself, to buy a lease for another five years. Besides that, he was subject to the annoyance of continual selection taking place on his run, by which the best land was picked out and the run broken up. What he (Mr. Palmer) complained of in common with other lessees was the way in which the land was allotted. The worthless and unavailable land was charged the same as the good and available land—in fact, there was no classification whatever, and it was classification that was required more than anything in Wide Bay. The extension of leases was also very important, as without that the lessees would not spend money or make improvements. Lessees would not spend money on a tenure of five years, and while they were subject to be removed at any time; and, therefore, since the introduction of that system no improvements had been made in the runs in the settled districts. The value of stations had fallen so much, and the advantage of being in the outside districts was so great, that nearly all the lessees in the settled districts who had the opportunity moved into the unsettled districts. It was most desirable that, if an extension of lease were granted, a proper system of classification should accompany it. The lessees would not complain of paying £2 per square mile for the good land, but they thought it a great hardship that they should have to pay the same price for land which was utterly worthless and useless for pastoral purposes. It was a well-known fact that some of the land in the settled districts had been deteriorating and becoming worse and worse every year, and yet the same amount of rent was charged for it. When a run was thrown open for selection the best land was at once picked out of it, and then the lessee, to protect himself, was bound to go to auction and buy his lease at a fictitious price. The case was one deserving the sympathy of the Government, and he hoped the Minister for Lands would consent to do something to ameliorate the condition of the pastoral lessees in the settled districts, and place them to some extent on as good a footing as the Crown lessees in the adjacent districts. The line drawn was a most arbitrary one. Immediately outside the settled districts the lands, which were in many cases much better, were let to the Crown tenants on much more favourable terms. They had longer leases, no competition, and pre-emptive rights—rights of every kind which were denied to the lessees in the settled districts.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS said he did not think since he had been in the House he had listened to a more lucid description than that given by the hon. member for Port Curtis. He believed the hon. member had given a very impartial and accurate account of what had been going on since the Pastoral Leases Act of 1876 came into operation. The House then in its wisdom thought fit to pass an Act to impose upon tenants in the settled districts a sum of not less than £2 per square mile for their runs. In doing that, however, the House forgot to provide for the possible failure to sell at auction, and hence all the mischief had arisen. Everything possible had been done by the Government to administer the Act and to induce the tenants to purchase their runs at auction, and wherever representations had been made that the tenant was paying for more country than was available inquiries had been made, and a reduction of area available made. Notwithstanding all their efforts, however, there was still a considerable area upon which no rent at all had been paid. At the present time there were 2,575 square miles upon which no rent was paid. The annual rents of the country leased amounted to £17,328 3s. 6d. So far as he had been able to ascertain, the reasons which prevented men from taking up the land were the shortness of tenure and the fact that the land was thrown open to selection. There was not sufficient inducement to cause persons to come up from the other colonies, owing to the uncertainty of affairs; and in the settled districts the tenants certainly did not find themselves settled. The fixed price of £2 per square mile also prevented many men from operating at the auction sales. The lessees who went there to buy were also subjected to the annoyances described by the hon. member for Port Curtis:

persons attended in order to make bargains before the runs were offered, and in some cases large sums of money had been paid to quiet those who only attended to harass buyers. The only important change he saw in the Bill was the extension of tenure. The hon. member did not propose to alter the minimum price fixed, but he proposed to have the country classified. In that the hon. member would have his support; he would give him all the support he could, and he believed his colleagues would do the same. The Act now in operation was passed by a former Government, but for some reasons they failed to put it into force, and during his (Mr. Perkins') absence in the country on business a deputation waited upon the Premier to try and induce him to alter the mode in which runs were then offered for sale. The complaint was that all the runs in the settled districts were offered at auction in one day. But he had reason to complain that while trying to administer the land laws impartially, and trying to ensure sales wherever they possibly could, obstacles should be thrown in the way by their predecessors. He did not forget that. He should have taken upon himself the duty of altering the law in the way proposed by the hon. member for Port Curtis, were it not for the fact that it was dangerous to be continually tampering with the land laws. They should get a fair trial. If this matter was undertaken by the Government, possibly they would have to go into the whole subject of the land laws of the colony. He had carefully watched the operation of both the Act of 1876 and that of 1868 since he had been in office, and he thought it might be desirable next session to bring in a more comprehensive measure. He could have wished that the hon. member for Port Curtis had proposed some alteration in case of failure to sell at auction, giving the Minister for the time being the discretionary power to determine the upset price of the land; otherwise he did not see that the measure would prejudice intending selectors.

Mr. GRIFFITH said this was a very extraordinary Bill to be brought in by a private member; and the manner in which the Government dealt with it was still more extraordinary. Here was a Bill dealing with the tenure of the whole of the settled districts brought in by a private member; and the Government, though not quite satisfied with it, would give it their support. They appeared prepared to support any land Bill brought in by a private member on their side, but had not the courage to bring one in themselves. This Bill proposed an extraordinary innovation: it recognised a vested right of the pastoral lessees, which had never yet been recognised in the colony. The Act of 1876 was passed in its present form expressly to put an end to the notion some lessees seemed to have, that they had a vested right to keep the lease for ever; and it was passed in that shape notwithstanding many reasons given for substituting assessment for auction.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The Act is a failure.

Mr. GRIFFITH said the Act might have been a failure in some particulars, but the principle laid down was sound; and if it was necessary to adopt the new principle of recognising the right of pastoral lessees to keep their leases for ever, the Government ought to undertake the responsibility of bringing in such a Bill. But what was the grievance at the present time? First, the lease was too short; then the rent was too high; and then the land was open to selection.

Mr. NORTON: The Bill does not interfere with the rent.

Mr. GRIFFITH: If the lease was too short, why not alter it, and make it ten years instead of five? As to the rent, he did not see anything very dreadful to complain of in three farthings an acre; and if the present lessees did not like to pay it, they might keep their money and let others take up the land. In the unsettled districts land was being let at auction at twice the price. Then the conditions were too hard—the land was open to selection. Of course, it was open to selection, and always would be in those parts of the colony. This Bill was a proposal to revise the contract made between the Crown and the lessee; and that was a sort of thing that should always be done by the Government. These gentlemen entered into the contract with their eyes open, and afterwards found that they did not like it; and now the House was asked to give them a more favourable contract. The lease, at the present time, was a five years' lease, and they were asked to make it fifteen. Hon. members were getting so used to suggestions of this kind that they did not see anything strange in them. The House was asked to assist in making the lease fifteen years instead of five—to give the lessees extensions of their leases without competition. They had a proposition before them the other day to remit half the purchase money to selectors; and they were now asked to give a lease of three times the length without competition—and for what reason? Had they a vested right? If the present system was undesirable, let it be revised by the Government; but a scheme should not be brought forward making people a present of rights which they did not possess. He did not understand this personal legislation; it was entirely wrong in principle. They should recognise no class or individual in legislation, but should determine what was a fair way of dealing with the lands, and give everybody an equal chance. He did not understand the meaning of the Bill; but it appeared to give the Minister for Lands the power to reduce the rent from £2 a mile to 5s., or less if he pleased.

Mr. NORTON: No!

Mr. GRIFFITH said there was an extraordinary provision in the 3rd clause:—

"The rent to be paid for such renewed lease shall be the same as that paid under the existing lease. Provided that the Secretary for Lands, for the purpose of more equitably determining the amount of rent to be paid, may cause a valuation to be made by the Commissioner for Lands."

What did that mean? Valuation of what?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Available country.

Mr. GRIFFITH said he always supposed that was the law now. He did not think rent was paid on unavailable country. First, he thought the clause meant that the Secretary for Lands might raise the rent; but on further consideration he thought that was not the meaning. Then he thought it meant that the Secretary for Lands might reduce the rent—that was suggested to him by the debate. In the 4th clause he found:—

"But in no case shall the rent so valued be less than two pounds per square mile per annum for the available country."

There would be something more reasonable in the measure if it was intended to increase the rent by appraisement. But there was good reason why this Bill should not be passed at the present time; in two and a-half years these leases would be out. The Act of 1876 was made to apply to the districts described in the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1868 as settled districts. The distinction existed now for no other purpose than the provisions of the Act of 1876; and although a sound distinction in 1868, it was not applicable to the present circumstances of the colony. Many of what were settled districts then might now be called, as com-

pared with theirs, unsettled districts; and many which were then unsettled districts might now properly be called settled districts. There could be no doubt that they must recognise by this time that the laws applicable to one part of the colony were not necessarily applicable to the whole colony, and that a distinction must be made between the classes of pastoral land in the colony. Many portions ought to be dealt with on entirely different principles from others. This matter must force itself on the attention of the country within the next year or two, as a matter to be dealt with by legislation. They had at the present time great schemes afloat—though they did not seem, somehow, to be floating this way very quickly—for the alienation of enormous blocks of pastoral land in the interior to companies. If those schemes became matured it was certain that the House would have to legislate on the subject, for they could not take millions of acres from the Crown lessees without legislation; and such legislation must be introduced by the Government. And if these schemes did not come to anything, still it would be necessary to legislate in regard to the pastoral land laws of the colony; because, whether they came to anything or not, something would have to be done in connection with the extension of the railways, and the extension of those railways involved a revision of the law relating to Crown lands in that part of the colony. When that question came forward—as it must in one of those two ways—it would be necessary to divide the colony into districts, whether they were called settled or unsettled, or by any other name. Then was it not absurd that a Bill should be brought in by a private member at the present time to make a special land law applicable to a purely artificial division of the colony, providing that the leases in that division should be unalterable for the next thirteen years? He thought a more inopportune time to bind Parliament by legislation which must be in force thirteen years in that way could not have been chosen. He had given sufficient reasons why this Bill should not be passed during the present session, and he thought he had also shown why it should not be passed at all. If a measure was brought forward at the proper time to give a ten years' lease instead of five, he could see no objection; but why should they have it without competition? What was the hardship in buying at auction? It was this—they had to pay more for the land. And why should they not pay more if the land was worth more? The land belonged to the country, and the country was entitled to get its full value; and, if they could do so by auction, why should they not? Of course, any man preferred getting land at his own price rather than the seller's price. But they in that House represented the seller, and no one else; and they were bound to see that the country got the best price. Knowing how well the sale of lands by auction worked in other cases, it would be foolish to give an extension of these leases, otherwise than by auction, in the settled districts. He thought he had given good reasons why the Bill should not pass. It was not introduced by the Government; it fixed the land laws, affecting a large portion of the colony, for the next thirteen years; and it should have been introduced under Ministerial responsibility.

Mr. GROOM said that last evening the Minister for Works informed the House that it would be interfering with the prerogative of the Government to allow a private member to bring in a motion for the construction of a railway; and on that ground alone it would be the duty of the Government to give this motion their strict opposition. He (Mr. Groom) did not suppose any hon. member would deny the right of the Secretary for Works, recognising his position as he did, to state that as his reason for opposing that motion. But if it was necessary to take up that ground in connection with a small branch line of railway, how much greater reason was there on the part of the Minister for Lands to say that it was an interference with the prerogative of the Government when a private member brought in such a Bill as this? Then let hon. members look at the time this measure was brought forward. Friday was looked upon as private members' day; it was not a day on which they were supposed to deal with questions exclusively affecting the general interests of the country, but one on which members brought forward questions affecting their constituents, and it was very seldom such an important matter as this was brought forward on private members' day. That day was the first time he had seen the Bill. It dealt with a matter in which large interests were involved—no one could doubt that—and it was unfortunate to call on them now to express an opinion either on one side or the other. The question involved the extension of the lease to fifteen years without its being subjected to auction. The hon. member (Mr. Norton) might have good grounds for bringing the measure forward, but such an important question should have been deferred for the consideration of a larger House, and members should have had more time to consider the Bill before being called on to discuss it. What the leader of the Opposition put before the House was worthy of serious attention. They would shortly be called upon to deal with the whole question of the outside tenures, as it affected the formation of railways. If his memory served him—he was open to correction if wrong—one of the chief reasons given by the Premier to the deputation introduced by the hon. member for Logan was, that the Government would take no steps in connection with any future railways until the House had determined the question of the land-grant system. That was a correct answer; but he could not see that it was a correct answer in connection with the formation of railways. He thought they ought to have more time to consider this question, and with that view he would move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr. NORTON did not see any reason for adjourning the debate, though he did not think that what could be said would influence one single vote. With regard to having time to consider the question, why could not hon. members consider Bills when they were placed in their hands, and not wait till they came into the House before doing so?

Mr. HORWITZ said it had not been his intention to take any part in the debate, but after having heard the remarks from both sides of the House he should like to say a few words. The hon. member for Darling Downs (Mr. Kates) a few days ago brought forward a motion for the repurchase of land on the Darling Downs; and what was the answer he got from the Premier? Why, that he would not allow a private member to bring a question of that kind before the House. The Minister for Works told them also that the Government could not allow a private member to deal with such an important question as railways. There was no doubt that the question now before the House was a very important one, because it was well known that it was the intention of the present Government to go on with railways. Before they entered on any new arrangement with the Crown lessees, it would be necessary to vote a certain sum to carry out surveys and resume lands. It was hardly right for a private member on either side of the House to bring forward a motion of this kind on a Friday, because Friday was always considered a

private members' day; and he was only surprised that the Minister for Lands had not taken the same stand as the Minister for Works. In considering the question, he was sure that hon. members would not go against any benefit to the squatters. The squatters had been very good colonists, and they could not do without them.

Mr. RUTLEDGE said that this Bill had been brought in by a gentleman who had always given evidence of a certain amount of independence in the House, because, although a loyal supporter of the party with which he was associated, yet on many occasions he had had the courage of his convictions, and had voted in opposition to the wishes of those with whom he ordinarily worked. It was, therefore, rather disagreeable to him (Mr. Rutledge) to be forced to oppose the motion. He should always be disposed to give a more generous consideration to any motion submitted by a member who had shown that he was possessed of a spirit of independence and a desire to conserve what might be supposed to be the public interests than he would to a motion brought forward by a gentleman whose vote was always given at the bidding of those whom he supported. The question of the position of the pastoral tenants had frequently engaged the consideration of Parliament, and he was quite satisfied that it was almost impossible, in a measure of such comparatively small dimensions as that submitted by the hon. member for Port Curtis, to deal satisfactorily with a question that had occasioned disagreement and so many heart-burnings. The hon. member had alleged, as a reason why this measure should be passed, that the land in the settled districts was very much inferior to that in the unsettled districts, and that the pastoral tenants in the settled districts were placed at a disadvantage as compared with the pastoral tenants in the unsettled districts. There might be a certain amount of force in the argument, but it must not be forgotten that those leases were put up for sale by auction, and it was known that the tenure would not be more than five years. He could not conceive that any intelligent person would not be actuated in bidding by the consideration that the tenure was only five years; because, had the tenure been fifteen years instead of five years, the land instead of bringing about £2 per mile would have brought £3 or £4.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: Yes, £20.

Mr. RUTLEDGE said he found that in the settled districts there were 159 runs, producing a revenue of £17,328—or an average of a little over £108 per annum. He did not think that £108 was a very exorbitant amount for any pastoral tenant to pay, considering the great privileges which it was admitted the tenants had. It was known that, as a rule, the man in possession of a run had always a great advantage over other people in bidding, and that in nine cases out of ten he was successful in having the run knocked down to him. In the unsettled districts there were 6,471 runs, which produced a total revenue of £159,825 this year—or a little over £24 per annum on the average. He thought that the argument, that because the lessees in the unsettled districts had such advantages over those in the settled districts, that therefore there should be exceptional legislation in favour of the tenants in the settled districts, was a very poor one indeed. It did not go to prove that the pastoral tenants in the settled districts should pay less, but it proved more conclusively that they should pay more; and he thought the time was not far distant when they would have to pay more.

Mr. LUMLEY HILL rose to a point of order. Was the hon. gentleman talking to the subject?

The SPEAKER ruled that the hon. member was in order.

Mr. RUTLEDGE thought it was about time that a little more was contributed to the revenue by gentlemen who held runs in the unsettled districts. Those gentlemen who had, like the hon. member for Gregory, sold out, had made large sums of money. They had a perfect right to sell out as much as they liked; but the fact that they did so proved conclusively what he had been contending. When he came to look at the Bill he found that there was a distinct provision made for the amount of £2 per acre being considerably reduced. He knew the hon. gentleman did not contemplate that; but that would be held to be the interpretation of clause 4. The entire subject had been referred to by previous speakers as one of great importance. It was one of such importance as to justify the Government in saying that the matter would be considered by the Cabinet, and that after it had been so considered they would come down to the House with a formal proposition. The hon. gentleman who introduced the subject had said that, in consequence of it being Friday, he had not an opportunity of expounding the principles of the Bill to the extent he should have liked to do——

The SPEAKER said that, it being now 1 o'clock, the House, in accordance with the Sessional Orders, stood adjourned until Monday next.