

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 1885

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Wednesday, 4 November, 1885.

Questions.—Pacific Island Labourers Act of 1880 Amendment Bill—consideration in committee of the Legislative Council's message.—Supply—resumption of committee.—Messages from the Legislative Council.—Adjournment.

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

QUESTIONS.

Mr. BEATTIE asked the Colonial Secretary—

Do the Government intend to take any action with reference to the introduction of Javanese coolies into this colony?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. S. W. Griffith) replied—

The Government are making inquiries on the subject, but have not yet received any definite information beyond what has appeared in the public Press. They will be prepared, if circumstances require it, to take such action as may appear to be necessary and within their power.

Mr. STEVENS asked the Minister for Lands—

When any portion of the Numinbah Reserve will be thrown open for selection?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. C. B. Dutton) replied—

It is not intended at present to open any part of the Numinbah Reserve for selection.

PACIFIC ISLAND LABOURERS ACT
OF 1880 AMENDMENT BILL—CON-
SIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF
THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL'S
MESSAGE.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the Speaker left the chair, and the House resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole, to consider the Legislative Council's message in reference to this Bill.

The PREMIER moved that the Committee do not insist on their disagreement to the amendment of the Legislative Council in clause 11, and said that although he thought the clause was a very valuable one, he was not disposed to imperil the passage of the Bill, which would otherwise be a useful one, on account of that provision.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said that if the hon. gentleman had made a short speech to the same effect, when he ought to have made it, it would have saved a great deal of trouble.

The PREMIER said that if the hon. gentleman chose to think so he was welcome to. He could not fight against a stone wall. The Legislative Council could not be compelled to pass the clause. If they did not pass it the Bill would still be a very good one.

Mr. MOREHEAD said he did not think the hon. Premier was in order, according to the Standing Orders, in referring to the other branch of the Legislature as a stone wall. That was the term the hon. gentleman used. He said he could not fight against a stone wall. His (Mr. Morehead's) opinion was that if he did he would get the best of it, because, possibly, his head was thicker.

Question put and passed.

The House resumed; the CHAIRMAN reported the resolution to the House, and the report was adopted.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the Bill was ordered to be returned to the Legislative Council by message in the usual form.

LICENSING BILL — CONSIDERATION
IN COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLA-
TIVE COUNCIL'S MESSAGE.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the Speaker left the chair, and the House went into Committee to consider the message of the Legislative Council in reference to this Bill.

The PREMIER said the only amendments now at issue between the two Houses were those in clauses 115 and 119. With respect to the first of those, he proposed that they should not insist upon their disagreement to the omission of the word "one-tenth," but should omit the word "one-fourth," and insert in its place the word "one-sixth." He had reason to hope that that compromise would be agreed to. He proposed not to insist upon their disagreement to the further amendments. He would therefore move—first, that the Committee do not insist upon their disagreement to the Legislative Council's amendment, omitting the word "one-tenth."

Mr. MOREHEAD said that the hon. Premier, if he was desirous that the Bill should become law at all, during the present session, should accept the amendment of "one-fourth" made by the Legislative Council. He had listened last night to the debate in that Chamber, and was perfectly certain that the compromise the hon. gentleman hoped to be accepted would not be. If hon. members of that Committee had read the arguments used in another place they would find them perfectly in favour of "one-fourth," and he thought that unless the Premier desired that the Bill should be laid aside he would let matters stand as they were, for the present session at any rate. If the hon. gentleman considered the passing of the measure a great step in the direction favoured by him—he (Mr. Morehead) did not favour it altogether—that of local option, and found that it worked well, but that the proportion should be reduced to one-sixth, the amendment could be then made. He was perfectly certain that if the compromise suggested by the hon. gentleman was sent to the other branch of the Legislature it would not be accepted, and the Bill would be shelved for, at any rate, the present session.

The PREMIER said he did not profess to be in the confidence of a large number of the members of the other House, but he had good reason for believing that the compromise would be accepted, and that there was no chance of the Bill being endangered by it.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said that was an intimation to the Council that if they insisted upon the amendment it would be accepted.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN said he did not understand the hon. Premier, when he said he was not in the confidence of many members in the other Chamber. What he understood the hon. member for Balonne to say was, that he had listened to the debate in the other Chamber last night. The Premier should not make insinuations in that kind of way. No one pretended to be in the confidence of hon. members of the other House. Everyone could go and listen to their debates the same as the hon. member for Balonne had. The Premier could have done the same also if he had liked.

Mr. MOREHEAD said that if it would ease the mind of the Premier he might tell him that he was not in the confidence of the other Chamber. He was simply expressing the views which he had arrived at, through listening to the discussion which took place with regard to the clause yesterday afternoon, and he listened to it very carefully. He saw that when a compromise to make the proportion one-seventh was

suggested it received no support whatever, except from the Postmaster-General, and was not acceded to. If they would not accept one-seventh they would not accept one-sixth. He was sure of that, from the discussion that took place in the other Chamber, when every argument *pro* and *con*. was brought forward. He had looked in upon those gentlemen, who arrived at the conclusion they did after full consideration, and it was for that reason and no other that he made the remark. He could afford to put on one side what was said by the hon. the Premier—that he (Mr. Morehead) was in the confidence of the Legislative Council.

Question put and passed.

The PREMIER moved that the Committee insist on their disagreement to the insertion of the word “one-fourth,” and propose to insert in lieu thereof the word “one-sixth.”

Question put and passed.

On the motion of the PREMIER, it was resolved that the Committee do not insist on their amendment of the Legislative Council's amendment in the 2nd subsection of the clause, nor on their disagreement to the amendment of the Legislative Council in clause 119.

The House resumed, and the CHAIRMAN reported that the Committee did not insist on their disagreement to the Council's amendment omitting the word “one-tenth” in line 11 of clause 115; insisted on their disagreement to the insertion of the word “one-fourth,” and proposed to insert in lieu thereof the word “one-sixth”; did not insist upon their amendment on the Council's amendment in subsection 2 of clause 115; and did not insist on their disagreement to the Council's amendment on clause 119.

On the motion of the PREMIER, the report was adopted, and a message ordered to be forwarded to the Legislative Council intimating the conclusion arrived at by the House.

SUPPLY—RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE.

On the motion of the COLONIAL TREASURER (Hon. J. R. Dickson), the House resolved itself into Committee of the Whole, to further consider the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

The PREMIER, in moving that there be granted the sum of £100,000 out of Special Supplementary Appropriation for the prevention of the incursion of rabbits, said he thought it was scarcely necessary for him to say much upon the subject, as, on a previous occasion during the session when the Government introduced a Bill to provide for the destruction of rabbits, the intentions of the Government were announced. The Government had at that time appointed Mr. Humphry Davy, who had had large experience of rabbits in New South Wales, to visit the northern parts of that colony and ascertain how near the rabbits were to the borders of Queensland. The result of his inquiries was to a certain extent encouraging. Contrary to the expectations of many persons, Mr. Davy found that there were no rabbits anywhere within 130 miles of the southern boundary of the colony. There was no doubt, however, that they were steadily advancing northward; still the Government thought they should ask the sanction of the Committee for that appropriation before accepting any tenders for wire fencing. Mr. Davy recommended fencing from Barrington westward, the distance to be fenced at the present time being about 400 miles. He forgot just now how much that would cost, but the £100,000 asked for would do all that was required.

Mr. DONALDSON: He did not supply an estimate of the cost.

The PREMIER said that was so, but he had made an estimate himself which, however, was only conjectural, because he could not know what might be the difficulties of carriage or whether there might not be a want of timber in many places. However, the amount asked for would be sufficient to give such security as could be effected in that way. With respect to the expenditure of it two questions arose—first as to whether fencing was the best way of keeping the rabbits out, and secondly whether the cost of keeping them out should be charged to general revenue. With respect to the first question, opinions differed; but the best opinions he had been able to get from various persons and from correspondence from persons in different parts of the colonies, who took an interest in the matter, were such that he for one came to the conclusion that fencing was the only hope they had of keeping them out. The distance was too long to be watched without some mechanical obstruction. Without it, in order to keep them from coming here, they would be obliged to have scouts all along the district through which they might come in—a tract of country 400 miles in length—and even then without some mechanical obstruction they could not prevent their incursion. As to destroying them after they got in, they found by sad experience, in New South Wales and Victoria, that that was an extremely difficult and, indeed, impossible task. The amount spent in New Zealand upon the destruction of rabbits was simply almost fabulous. The amount came to hundreds of thousands of pounds per annum, and the same was the case in Victoria and in New South Wales. From that he thought it was worth their while to incur an expenditure such as was proposed to make sure of preventing their incursion. If it should happen that no rabbits came up to the border they would be very glad, though they would have spent that money in vain; but the probability that they would come was so much greater, and if they did come they would be the cause of such serious injury to the whole community, that he thought they were quite justified in incurring that expenditure. As to the question of whether the expenditure should be paid from general revenue, he thought it should be, under the circumstances of the case. If the rabbits came into the colony they would of course immediately injure the owners of land upon which they first got, but they would spread from there, and the extent of their spreading could not really be known. It would be hard, under the circumstances, to put the tax upon the pastoral tenants alone, and call upon them to bear the expense of keeping the rabbits out or destroying them, because certainly a large majority of the pastoral tenants would not be affected by the curse for a good many years to come. On the other hand, were they to endeavour to select and limit the number it would be very hard to draw a line in the first instance; and if they asked only those who held land along the border they would be making the unfortunate persons who held that land bear the expense of what would really be the defence of all the rest of the colony. Their defence against that enemy was very much like the defence against a human enemy. The attack of an enemy would have to be made from outside the country, and if seaport towns were bombarded they would all have to share in the cost. The present question seemed to him to be an analogous one; for that reason the Government felt justified in asking the Committee, and indeed bound to ask the Committee, to assent to the appropriation of the sum of money stated. The vote was described as “Special supplementary

appropriation," and if authorised would be carried forward as a sum to be available like the Loan Fund, from time to time as found necessary.

The HON. J. M. MACROSSAN said the Premier had not given very good reasons why they should pass that vote. For his part he did not believe that the State was entitled to protect the pastoral interests in the way proposed. In the first place, they had given the pastoral interest a new Land Act, under which extremely long leases and very liberal terms were granted. They also gave the squatters all their improvements at the end of their leases. For those reasons alone he did not think the State had any right to bear, at least, the whole of the expense which might have to be incurred. There should be some subsidy from the pastoral lessees. They had had pests in the colony before, and the State was not called upon to keep them out at its sole expense. The pastoral lessees were required to pay a certain amount for the extirpation of marsupials; and what was the difference between marsupials and rabbits, except in size? The principle involved was exactly the same. And, as the leader of the Opposition had reminded him, there were plenty of small marsupials—plenty of rats, for instance. As he had said, the principle involved was the same, and he for one would oppose the vote. The Premier had put the case on the ground of insurance. Well, taking it in that light, and supposing that the State, as the landlord of the territory, wished to insure it against the rabbits, were the pastoral lessees not also interested in insuring their stock? Would the landlord of a house insure the goods or furniture in that house? Certainly not; the person occupying the house must insure for his own benefit. Therefore the State should not be called upon to bear the whole cost of keeping the rabbits out. The Premier also said that there would be 400 miles of fencing—he asked for £100,000 to keep the rabbits out of 400 miles of territory. The fence was therefore estimated to cost £250 per mile. But surely the fence would not cost that much! Even if it was their duty to vote a sum of money to keep the rabbits out of the colony they should not be called upon to vote £100,000. He believed £50,000 would be as much as would be required, and certainly not more than that if the pastoral lessees were called upon, as they ought to be, to pay their fair share of the expense. He hoped he should not stand alone in his opposition to the vote.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS said he maintained that the work for which the vote was asked was a thoroughly national one. There was not one interest in the colony that was not concerned in keeping the rabbits out of their territory. The hon. member for Townsville had used as an illustration the case of a man who rented a house from a landlord. Would that man be required to insure his furniture? No; but the landlord would have to insure his own house. It was not the tenant who would insure the house for the landlord. Now, what the Government proposed was that the State should insure the property of the State against the incursion of the rabbit pest, which would absolutely destroy the land. The hon. member had also said that there was no difference between rabbits and marsupials; but anyone who was acquainted with the matter knew that there was between them the greatest difference possible to imagine. The marsupial was localised in its habits, whilst the rabbits were not so, but spread gradually. When feed got scarce in one neighbourhood they spread to another.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH said that was what the marsupials did.

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The MINISTER FOR LANDS said the marsupials were entirely local all over the colony. There had been a nucleus for marsupial increases in every portion of the colony. No one place was ever free from them, and it was a fact that when they were destroyed in different parts they were allowed to gradually increase again. The marsupial pest was wholly due to that. Within the last few days he had heard from the Barcoo, where at one time one could drive about for a week without seeing half-a-dozen marsupials, that they were now worse there than the drought—more destructive in a portion of that district than was the drought on the sheep. It was not the duty of the Government to keep the marsupials down. There was an Act in force for keeping them under, and if those concerned neglected to carry out the provisions of that Act they had to suffer for it. Of course, a great deal would be made of the argument of the hon. member for Townsville, that the vote of £100,000 was entirely in the interests of the pastoral tenants. He (Mr. Dutton) did not think it was possible to take a narrower view of the subject than that. Hon. members knew that all the interests in the country were more or less dependent on each other. The pastoral interest was dependent on the mining and agricultural interests and *vice versa*, and if the rabbits got into the colony and got a firm hold on the pastoral lands it would not take a very great length of time before they attacked the agricultural interests as well. With regard to the question as to whether the fence proposed would be effectual, it was one that might be open to discussion. It was, he believed, the best means yet devised for checking the advance of the rabbits. Those who had made experiments in that direction had arrived at the conclusion that if a fence was properly erected it would be perfectly effectual. He had seen some men from Victoria who had spent thousands—he might say, hundreds of thousands—of pounds in endeavouring to destroy the rabbit pest, and who had given it up as a bad job, until they made use of marsupial netting in the method proposed by the Government for the making of the rabbit-proof fence, and they said that from that time forward they had nothing to do but to destroy the rabbits within the fencing, after which they had been perfectly free from the pest. The proposal was to appropriate £100,000 for 400 miles of fencing. They might not stop at 400 miles. Although that might suffice for the present, if they found the rabbits advancing faster than they were advancing during the last year or two they would have to extend the fence to 500 or 600 miles, or for greater security in the worst part of the district to put up a double fence. He therefore thought the Government were very wise in asking for £100,000 to meet the difficulty thoroughly. He had not the slightest doubt, from what he had learned from Victoria, that the method of keeping the rabbits out as proposed by the Government would be really effective if it was carried out properly. He hoped there was no hon. member, not even amongst those representing purely agricultural constituencies, who would be so short-sighted and selfish as to deny to the colony generally the protection asked for in the vote.

Mr. MACFARLANE said he might state at once that he intended to oppose the vote, not so much on the ground that it would benefit the pastoralists, but because he had no faith at all in the experiment. He looked upon it that in one way the money would be wasted. He had read all the correspondence on the subject, and the reports in the Victoria and New South Wales papers upon it, and there appeared to be a great diversity of opinion as to the efficacy of fencing in keeping out rabbits.

Rabbits were very much like rats. Neither brick nor wooden walls would keep rats out of a house; they would burrow beneath the walls and get into the premises. In the same way, a fence would not prevent rabbits from coming over the border when they arrived at the boundary of the colony; unless the fence was sunk at least one or two feet in the earth the rabbits would burrow under it and come out on the other side. A double fence had been suggested, but that would simply double the expense without increasing the efficacy of the so-called remedy. The only fault he had to find with the vote was that what was proposed to be done as an experiment would not answer the purpose. If he thought it would he should certainly not oppose it, but his opinion was that rabbits could not be kept from spreading over the country by means of such a fence as was proposed. Had they sufficient data from the experience of the other colonies to justify them in making so costly an experiment, there would be something to be said for it. But such was not the case. For his own part he would far rather see the £100,000 spent in securing water in those districts where rabbits were likely to make an incursion. They wanted water far more than they wanted to prevent the rabbits from coming in, and he intended to do his best to have water provided all over the colony. But with regard to the proposed vote he had no faith in it, and therefore could not support it.

Mr. HORWITZ said it was his intention also to oppose the vote. It was proposed to spend the £100,000 in erecting some 400 miles of rabbit-proof fencing. Suppose the fence went amongst trees, and the branches blew down and smashed it, as would very probably often be the case, who was to repair it? Was the State going to repair it, or the squatter? His experience of squatters led him to believe that they would do nothing of the sort. The result would be that the State would have to employ more public servants, of whom it had far too many. Indeed, he foresaw that the time would soon arrive in Queensland when the Colonial Treasurer would be compelled to follow the example set by Mr. Graham Berry in Victoria some years ago, and turn a lot of them out. Suppose the fence came to a creek, it would have to stop there, and how was it proposed to prevent the rabbits from getting in at those unguarded places? He would tell the Government the best thing to do under the circumstances. They had lately voted a lot of money for the volunteers, and the best thing the Government could do would be to call out those men, and send them to the threatened places to repel the invasion of the colony by rabbits. There was nothing else for them to do, and that would enable them to show some value for the money they cost the country. He could not see why the taxpayers of the colony should be called upon to provide the £100,000, and he should therefore support the hon. member for Townsville, being of the same opinion as that hon. gentleman in the matter.

The Hon. J. M. MACROSSAN said the Minister for Lands had tried to twist the argument he had used with regard to insurance; but he had not shown that the pastoral lessee was not interested in insuring his stock. The long lease which the hon. gentleman had given to squatters was such that it became almost a freehold at the end of the term. Seeing that under the Land Act of 1884 the lease of the pastoral lessee was practically a freehold, the proposition of the Government seemed absurd. The value of the improvements which the Government would be called upon to pay at the end of a lease would be so great that they would never think of taking

the land away from the leaseholder; no matter what the rent might be they would remain the occupiers. What had the Governments in the other colonies done in the matter of rabbit extermination? Were not the squatters and other occupiers of land in Victoria paying at least a portion of the expense?

Mr. DONALDSON: They are all freeholders there.

The Hon. J. M. MACROSSAN: So practically were the leaseholders of Queensland. He remembered how anxious the hon. member was to have the Act of 1884 passed, and so were many other pastoral lessees. With regard to New South Wales he saw a report, not many weeks since, of a meeting of squatters in the Darling district, where they actually agreed to pay the expense of keeping the rabbits out, and did not ask the Government to do so. But here in Queensland the Government came forward, without being asked to do so except by one or two occupiers of immense areas of land on the south-western border, and proposed to undertake the entire work without asking the squatters to put their hands into their pockets for a single penny. He hoped the Committee would not agree to such a monstrous proposition. The squatter was bound to insure his stock, as much as the State was bound to insure its land, against the rabbits, and in the case of Queensland the leaseholders were practically the freeholders too.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS said that not many squatters, at all events, took that view of the question. If the hon. member knew anything about squatters' properties he would understand that that was not a very serious matter, except in those cases where a run was absolutely valueless but for the improvements that were put upon it in the shape of the storage of water. Fifteen years would pretty nearly see the end of all other improvements in the shape of fencing or buildings. With regard to the other colonies compelling the people in the infested districts to pay for the extermination of rabbits, that was perfectly true; but what an utter failure it had been! To expect men who were suffering from the pest to exterminate it at their own cost was to ask them to do what was simply impossible. They could not afford the money; the entire value of their property would not suffice for the purpose. To ask the pastoral lessees to bear the entire cost of erecting a fence to keep out a pest which the whole country was equally interested in keeping out was, he maintained, a monstrous injustice. If that was put upon them the effect would be simply that five out of every six would rather abandon their runs than be compelled to pay it. He knew that if he had a run down there he should do so rather than pay for that fencing, because the whole country was interested in maintaining that part of the colony in such a condition as to make it worth something in the shape of rent. If the rabbits once got over the border they would not stop there; they would soon be all over Queensland, and he could tell the hon. member for Warwick that unless something was done they would soon have them in his district, and he would then take a very different view of the matter from what he did now—when the farmers were being ruined by having their crops eaten off by rabbits and could do nothing to remedy the evil except fence in their holdings with rabbit-proof netting. The hon. member for Ipswich said he did not believe that fencing would be effectual, but it would appear from the experience of people in Victoria that it had been absolutely effectual there. It was not as if the fencing were simply placed standing up on the surface. It was four feet high, bent at the bottom, and nine inches under the surface of the ground. When a rabbit met an obstruction he at once

commenced to burrow, and then he would be stopped by the portion of the fence in the ground. Again, there was another security even if that were not perfectly safe—namely, that the rabbits in the country intended to be fenced did not burrow. It was hard, stony soil, and instead of burrowing they took shelter under bushes and rocks, or whatever they could find. He was sure that fencing would be an effectual remedy.

Mr. STEVENS said the hon. member for Townsville did not state, or even argue, his case in a fair way. In order to gain his point, or to defeat the vote, he referred to portions of the Land Act, but that was going outside the question altogether. The question before the Committee was whether a certain sum should be voted for the construction of a fence to keep out the rabbits, and the hon. gentleman said that the pastoral lessees or squatters should pay for the fence. But which squatters should pay for it? Those living along the border of the colony? The rabbits were not there yet, and he thought it was highly probable—almost certain—that if those men had to bear the expense, which, it must be remembered, was for the benefit of the whole of the colony, they would sooner throw up their runs and would be quite justified in doing so. It was not as if only squatters would suffer by the pest. The farmers were suffering more than the squatters in Victoria at the present time. Only a few days ago he read in a Victorian newspaper an account stating that a fair-sized railway train was completely filled by farmers forming a deputation to wait upon the Government in that colony to ask for some protection against the rabbits. There was no doubt that, unless some measures for protection were taken to keep the rabbits back, before twelve months or two years had passed they would be over the border, and the first men to move in the matter would be the farmers in the Warwick district. Distance was a mere nothing to rabbits in a good season; and if they once crossed over the border into Queensland the farmers' representatives would then have a very different tale to tell. The hon. member for Ipswich, Mr. Macfarlane, stated that he had taken a great deal of trouble to read newspapers in which articles appeared having any reference to the rabbit pest, and he (Mr. Stevens) was sure that he could not have studied those articles with any other desire than to endeavour to defeat the vote. A few weeks ago he (Mr. Stevens) had in his possession over a hundred articles, taken from newspapers, and letters sent to himself and other people, concerning the rabbit nuisance, and they were almost unanimously in favour of fencing. There could be no doubt that without fencing rabbits could not be kept back. Some hon. members and people outside held the opinion that the proper course was for the rabbits to be destroyed in New South Wales, and that Queensland should assist in destroying them there. But it was utterly useless trying to destroy rabbits unless those who undertook to destroy them had a fence at their back. They could not put a cordon of men sufficiently thick and long to prevent rabbits passing through, because while they were destroying them in one part of the country in another they would be marching forward. On a previous occasion he stated some of the losses and the amount of money that had been spent in two or three of the colonies in the destruction of rabbits. In New South Wales it amounted to nearly £200,000; in South Australia it was more; in Victoria the Government were spending over £100,000 a year, and the loss was not known—it could not be estimated. In his own experience he had travelled over many miles of country that years

ago was under cultivation and was now nothing but ferns and kangaroos. The South Australian Government were so alive to the necessity of getting rid of the rabbits that they were actually coming forward and offering to assist the squatters in the work in any way they liked, even where the rabbits were on the run. One of the most celebrated freehold properties there was known as "Ned's Corner"; four years ago the owners divided £30,000 profits; last year there was a debit of £600 owing entirely to rabbits. From being able to carry an enormous number of sheep it had been reduced to supporting a few cattle. Another run, on which, a few years ago, the average shearing was 32,000 sheep, was reduced last year to less than 5,000. Instances of that kind could be multiplied by the hundred in the colonies he had mentioned. As to New Zealand, the money spent there was almost proverbial. By the last statistics submitted to Parliament this year it appeared that the losses there were estimated at actually more than £10,000,000. Last year alone it was £1,700,000, and there was no getting beyond the fact that similar losses would inevitably come upon Queensland in the near future unless steps were taken to stop the progress of the rabbits. And yet some hon. members contended that a few men living along the border line should supply the means of keeping that curse back.

Mr. LUMLEY HILL said he wished members of the Committee who were discussing the question had seen a little more of the damage that was wrought by the rabbit plague than some of them appeared to have seen, because then they would be capable of recognising what damage those animals could do to the colony. It was not merely a question of what harm they would do to the squatter by any manner of means; it was a question of what injury they would do to the farmer and to those engaged in every line of life. It would affect the prosperity of the whole of the colony. He had heard the picture so drawn that if the rabbits once got well established here, as soon as good seasons came they would drive the white men out of the country altogether. In a large territory like this, sparsely peopled by white men, he could easily understand it. They would prevent any stock at all being raised and would prevent any crops being raised, and there would be nothing for people to do. They would invade even the mines by depriving the miners of the beef and mutton that was grown for them, and there would soon be nothing left but Chinamen and rabbits. Chinamen could live upon rabbits, but white men could not; they very soon got tired of them. Some hon. gentlemen might think that was an exaggerated picture; but he could assure them that if they had been in New Zealand, as he had, and had seen the devastation they had wrought, they would not think so. Everybody knew that in New Zealand the land was much more valuable than Queensland land. The climate was better, and the grass was better, and the population was thicker. But if the people could not meet the rabbits and fight them there—how were they to expect to be able to do it in Queensland? How were the squatters to be expected to give all that expenditure for the sake of insuring their stock? They had better boil down their stock directly the first wave of rabbits appeared. It was like asking a man to make bricks without straw. The squatters in the interior could hardly afford to pay their working expenses, and yet they were to be asked to put their hands into their pockets to defray the whole expenditure in keeping out that most serious invasion, which would affect the whole welfare and industries of the colony. The hon. member for Townsville had very unfairly, as he considered, dragged in the

new Land Act and talked about freeholds. Surely he did not think that any pastoral tenants in that colony had freeholds, or would believe they had until they saw their deeds! They were too old birds to be caught with that kind of chaff. He was not affected in any way. He had been a pastoral tenant for years and years, but was not affected by the Act. Looking at that Act from a squatter's point of view he did not believe in it; their position was not improved, but rather the contrary. The hon. member had taken that opportunity—which was not a proper one—to drag a false trail across the scent. He could assure hon. gentlemen that if the sum that was asked for had the slightest moderating or delaying influence, it would be but a mere flea-bite in comparison with the damage that could be done. Hon. gentlemen opened their eyes when the hon. member for Warrego said that the rabbits had cost New Zealand £10,000,000, and apparently they did not believe it, and judging from their gestures and ejaculations they were, at all events, wonder-stricken.

Mr. FOOTE: Where is that to be found in the papers?

Mr. LUMLEY HILL: Could the hon. member read them? A very great proportion of that fair country was at the present time reduced to the condition of a wilderness, and was absolutely tenantless. The same was the case in Victoria, where some districts had been altogether given over to the rabbits. They had possession, and there was nothing but them and the dingoes, and they seemed to get along very well together. He intended to support the motion, not because he considered that it would be a benefit to any one class alone, but it would prevent what might be a national calamity—an invasion of rabbits. It would be worse almost than an invasion of Russians. They might get out of that, but they could not get out of the road of rabbits.

Mr. BLACK said it appeared to him that the colony was always drifting into some serious danger. They no sooner escaped one danger—the coolie invasion, which was expected to result in all the white people being driven out of the colony—than they were threatened with an invasion of rabbits. They had “scotched” the coolie tail, and now they were to have the rabbits, which were going to ruin the country. He did not believe that people of their race would be driven out of the colony by rabbits, and he was perfectly certain they would not be driven out by coolies. They had got out of one difficulty, only to be threatened with what, according to the hon. junior member for Cook, appeared to be a much more serious danger. According to that hon. gentleman, Queensland, unless they took immediate and expensive steps, would be handed over to Chinamen and rabbits. He really thought the hon. gentleman was drawing a little too much upon his imagination. He was, perhaps, following in the steps set for him by the leader of his party. He believed Queensland would exist notwithstanding the coolie and the rabbit; but, at the same time, he must say that he intended to vote for the money, because he really did believe that the question of keeping rabbits out of the colony was one of national importance. He believed that if their pastoral lands became infested with rabbits to the same extent that he knew lands in Victoria, South Australia, and New South Wales had become, a most serious injury would be done to the national prosperity. The value of their pastoral property would inevitably decrease in the same way that it had done in the other colonies. If the rabbits ever got into the pastoral country they would undoubtedly spread into the agricultural portions

of the colony. The outlying agricultural districts which were now occupied by wheat crops and others would be the first to suffer, and they would suffer to a very serious and alarming extent. The profits on that industry were so very small that at present the farmers would be unable, without State assistance, to cope with the very great damage that would be done to their property by rabbits. It would be many years ahead before the rabbits approached the coast; but if they obtained a firm footing in the colony, they on the coast would, later on, have to cope with the same difficulty that agriculturists in the other parts of Australia had to do. Whether they would ever be able to obtain a hold on sugar plantations—a matter in which he was chiefly interested—he doubted very much, for the reason that the planters had a large amount of labour available at the very shortest notice, and could exterminate the rabbits before the rabbits exterminated them. He thought the vote was a matter of national importance and deserved the support of the Committee much more than the Marsupial Bill did. When that Bill was going through the House he objected to it on the ground that it was not a matter of national importance. Those in the coast districts had to subscribe towards the destruction of marsupials, and that money was not expended for the purpose for which it was levied. However, the proposition before them he considered a very much better means of meeting what he maintained was a national difficulty, and what would be a national calamity if they did not take early steps to prevent it. He knew that in the other colonies for many years the rabbits were not sufficiently numerous to cause any great amount of damage. There were runs which he had lived on for years, where the idea of rabbits then would have been scouted, but they were now overrun to such an extent that as pastoral properties they were comparatively valueless. The question now was whether the State was to let what were originally valuable properties at a merely nominal rent in consequence of their depreciation in value from the spread of rabbits, or whether the pastoral lessees were to go to enormous expense in destroying rabbits while their neighbours were not compelled to do so. The amount they were asked to vote was a very large one, but he assumed the Government would adopt the best means of spending it. He thought it was the duty of the Government, having the example of the other colonies before them, and seeing the alarming loss of wealth sustained there by the depredations of the rabbits, to take time by the forelock and try to keep them out of this colony if possible. He was not prepared to say that the rabbit-proof fences, when once erected, were to be maintained by the State; but he thought the Government were taking the right step in the present emergency. He took it for granted that they would only spend as much of the money as was considered necessary, and he hoped that the Minister for Lands, when dividing the runs along the border, would consider the desirableness of resuming that half of the runs which would be benefited by the fence.

Mr. MOREHEAD said that whilst quite believing in the necessity for spending that money to keep the rabbits from crossing the border, he thought they should consider upon whom the interest on that expenditure was chargeable. In New South Wales it was proposed that a considerable proportion, at any rate, should be paid by the pastoral tenant, and it appeared to him not unreasonable to expect that the pastoral tenant should pay his quota. After all, supposing the money were borrowed at 4 per cent., half the interest even divided amongst those only who were to be immediately benefited would be a

very small charge, and the other half might fairly be charged against the State, as the question was a national one. The hon. member for Mackay saw the flaw which existed in the present proposition, and had harked back on the marsupial question, but if ever there was a question which might be considered a national question it was that of the destruction of marsupials. The State did not give any very great assistance in that matter. He would like to point out that it would not be much of a tax if a certain proportion of the assessments now paid on sheep and cattle were devoted to paying interest on the cost of the rabbit fence. It was well known that there was an immense amount of money wasted from the fund which was subscribed nominally to provide sheep and cattle inspectors and brand inspectors in the colony; and he believed there could be a sufficient amount conserved from that fund to pay the interest. He thought, with the hon. member for Townsville, that the increased tenure given under the Land Act of 1884 to the agriculturist and the squatter would well enable them to protect themselves against the rabbits, as they did, with a very much smaller tenure, against the marsupials; but at the same time he held that the question was to a certain extent a national one, and it was the duty of the State to do as much as possible to prevent the introduction of rabbits into the colony. The matter at present was in a very crude state; they did not know where the fence was to start from, or where it was to go. As far as he could see, the electorate he represented would not be benefited by the fence at all. He could quite understand that some members, even of those who represented squatting constituencies, might object to the vote on the score that there should be no general taxation for the benefit of those who were immediately in danger of an invasion by the rabbits. He would vote for the motion; and he hoped, if it were carried, the Government would see their way to fairly distribute the amount of taxation necessary to pay the interest on the expenditure.

Mr. FOOTE said he could not see his way to support the motion. He believed that if the rabbits were in the colony they would be a pest. From what some hon. members said, one would think that Victoria and New Zealand were all rabbits, but looking at the exports of produce from those countries it would seem that there was something else besides rabbits there. He had been to New South Wales and Victoria, and had seen some rabbits, but he had failed to see the devastation of the country that had been referred to by hon. members. He looked upon the vote as very excessive indeed. £100,000 was to be voted on account of the rabbit scare, at a time when they had to increase the taxation to meet a deficit in the Treasury, and in the face of the failure of the water supply, which was of very much more importance than the rabbit scare. They would be doing very well if a very moderate sum was voted to furnish a patrol on the border to keep a lookout for the rabbits and see that they were not getting too near. He was told that there were none within 100 miles of the border. Hon. gentlemen laughed. Perhaps they thought that nobody but themselves had ever seen a rabbit. There were plenty of people in England who kept rabbit warrens and made a considerable sum of money out of them. That would not, of course, apply here, where the rabbits increased in great numbers. He hardly conceived it possible that the amount of money expended upon the destruction of rabbits in the other colonies was as stated by hon. members; nevertheless, he was prepared to receive what they said, because he knew that if the rabbits got a hold in a country they would be a pest, and would, no doubt,

destroy the country where they were located to a great extent; but he thought that burden should not fall upon the country. The parties interested in those localities should bear the burden. It had been suggested to him, by a person who had had considerable experience, that parties engaged in the destruction of rabbits made as much as they could out of it, and it had even been found that rabbits were actually carried to certain districts in order that they might propagate. He was also told that in case of fencing the rabbits might possibly be put over the fence; so that there was no absolute certainty, even if the colony spent that large sum of money to keep out rabbits, that it would be effectual; and it would be equally necessary to appoint a patrol on the border to watch the fence and see that no trickery of the sort he referred to was being carried on. He thought the Committee should put off the vote for another year, and if they had £100,000 to spare it would be much better spent in water supply for the dry districts of the colony. He was somewhat surprised that the Government should have lent such a willing ear to the rabbit cry. There were many members continually bringing under the notice of the Government matters in connection with water supply for districts that were almost without water, and all that was done was to send a person to visit the spot occasionally, and twelve months after they found that nothing had been done. He would like to know how that money, if voted, would be spent? Did the Government contemplate spending the whole of the £100,000 in making the 400 miles of fencing, or was the money to be spent as required? Possibly 100 miles might be sufficient for the next five years or more, or the Government might take some other means of destroying the pest. He confessed that he was not affected with the rabbit scare, nor did he think that in any time coming the people of Queensland would be so unwise as to allow their borders to be invaded by that pest.

Mr. DONALDSON said there was an old proverb which said that prevention was better than cure, and that was the sad experience of the other colonies upon that question. In Victoria, only a few years ago, the rabbits were limited to a very small area indeed, and that area was made up entirely of freehold estates, where it was to the interest of the individuals holding the country for the sake of preserving the value of their property to do all they possibly could to exterminate the pest. They did all in their power to exterminate the pest, and yet they failed to succeed in doing so. What had been the result? The result was that the animals had spread now almost from one end of that colony to the other. The loss, not only by direct expenditure of money in keeping down those animals, but the indirect loss to the State, was something that could not be easily realised. They were not here prepared to give the amount that was expended annually in that colony to keep down the rabbits; but in that colony, where the population was very large, and where the facilities for making use of the means for exterminating the pest were very much greater than they would be here, they found that notwithstanding all the inducements for killing those animals they were rapidly on the increase. Every means of destruction had failed, and the people there had at last come to the determination that the use of rabbit-proof wire fencing, such as he understood the Government proposed to use here, was the only means they could take for safety. They were at present trying to localise the rabbits in such a way as to destroy them within those wire fences, and he believed that would be found to be the only means of exterminating

the pest in Victoria. With regard to South Australia, he was informed on good authority—his figures were certainly not official, but he was informed on the best of authority that the annual expenditure there, both on the part of the Government and private expenditure, amounted to £150,000 per annum. That was 50 per cent more than was asked for here to keep the rabbits out of the colony altogether. It should be mentioned also that that expenditure was in the past, and it was an expenditure that was bound to increase in the future. In South Australia they had resorted to rabbit-proof wire fences also, and they had found them a very good remedy there. The Committee had had reliable information as to the losses that had occurred in the other colonies through the presence of that pest. They had also had reliable information that the means adopted for localising the pest had succeeded; and surely to goodness they were quite justified in adopting the same means here to keep the rabbits out of the country altogether! There was at the present time in this colony no danger to be apprehended that was so great as the rabbit pest, because here, with a very large territory of country entirely suitable to the habits of the animals, and where the population would not be sufficient to keep them down, they would be a fearful scourge, and it was their duty as members of Parliament to do all they possibly could to prevent the country from being overrun by what would prove a very great pest to it. He had some knowledge of a good deal of the country where it was proposed to erect the fence. Some difficulties were pointed out by the hon. member for Warwick, such as trees falling on the fence; but they must exist a good deal in his imagination, because the timber there was low and stunted, easily cut down, and would not have to be cleared for a great distance on either side of the fence, so that a very small expenditure would reduce any danger in that respect. He did not think that now was the time for debating the details as to how the fence should be kept in order, but there was no doubt that the Government would provide proper supervision, not only to keep the fence in good condition, but also to see that the rabbits did not burrow underneath. In New South Wales the rabbits on the Murray did not appear to increase some time ago, but within the last seven years they had increased to an extraordinary extent; and as soon as they were deprived of the means of subsistence in one place they rapidly went afield, and the distance travelled over in two or three years was astonishing. He was informed on the best authority that stations which were highly profitable a few years ago were now almost worthless on account of the rabbit invasion; and notwithstanding the expenditure incurred in their destruction—to which the Government contributed a large proportion—there was no decrease in their numbers, but a considerable increase, and there was little possibility of exterminating them. Of late it had been suggested that a fence should be put up for the purpose of localising the rabbits there, and—if a fence were constructed along part of the border by Queensland—it was in contemplation to start a fence from Barrington to Bourke and along the railway line to Bathurst, so that one portion of the colony would be protected by the fence in New South Wales. There would be a certain amount of reciprocity in that. There had been another subject mentioned, to which he would make reference. It had been stated that the pastoral lessees should be more deeply interested than the people of the colony in keeping back the rabbits, and, while admitting that the pastoral lessees should do all in their power to prevent the scourge coming

over the border, he contended that it was one of the greatest national questions that had ever come before the Committee, because the lands of the interior were Crown lands and the property of the State, and it was their duty to try and preserve their value. By the Land Act of 1884 the Government tried to get from the lessees a rental based on the conditions of the country. It was fixed according to the quality of the land, the nearness to railway communication, and the supply of natural or artificial water; but there was no provision in the Act to the effect that if the land became infested with rabbits the rent should be reduced; and the inference was that the lessees would have to pay the highest possible rental without having to provide for such a calamity as an invasion of rabbits. The hon. member for Bundamba remarked that he would rather see the money expended in water supply; and when the time came to supply water for the interior he would be at one with the hon. member; but £100,000 would not be sufficient for that purpose. It was a matter of millions, and they would have to make it a great national question in the future. He hoped the day was not far distant when the lands of the interior would be fully developed by means of water supply; but that was beside the question just now. When the time for water supply arrived, however, he would go as far, and perhaps farther than the hon. gentleman in that direction. With regard to the question before the Committee, he might state that on returning after an absence of a couple of years to a district in which he formerly resided he found the place overrun with rabbits and the land valueless. It was not only the pastoral lessee who suffered from the presence of rabbits, but the farmer also; and during the present year he had visited districts where the selectors said they could not live on the ground unless some means were taken to stamp those animals out. Notwithstanding their exertions the rabbits had increased to such an extent that it was impossible to grow any crops; and surely, with such experience before them, the Committee ought to take every possible precaution to prevent rabbits from reaching Queensland. He believed that an invasion of rabbits was the greatest calamity that could befall the colony. In case of war there was some chance of conquering the enemy; or if the invaders should conquer it was quite possible that the lives and property of the people would be respected, and that they might even live happily under the government of another power; but a scourge of rabbits would reduce the producing power of the people to such an extent as to prove the greatest calamity that could befall the country, and he trusted that the Committee would look at the matter seriously, and pass the vote. It would be far better to keep rabbits out by means of an expenditure of £100,000 than to spend millions hereafter in keeping them down; for if once they got a hold he ventured to say that they would never be exterminated.

Mr. CHUBB said that if there was a common danger to be apprehended, that was to say—adopting the simile used by the hon. member for Warrego—if they were in danger of invasion by a foreign enemy, the danger being common, it became a common duty to resist that invasion, and the burden of bearing the cost should also be common. For his own part, he did not profess to have any personal knowledge of the subject under discussion, so that he had to take what he read and heard on trust. The Government asked the Committee to vote £100,000 to prevent a threatened invasion of rabbits, and in connection with that several questions arose. Were they in possession of sufficient information on the subject as to the cost per mile of the proposed

fence, the number of miles the money would erect, and the effect of it when erected? He took it that if the money was spent they would expect to derive some benefit from its expenditure. If it was merely an experiment it would be unwise to expend £100,000 for that purpose. They had some evidence from the statements of hon. members that fencing was effective. It had recently been tried in New South Wales and Victoria, and had been found to be the best remedy yet discovered in those colonies; so that the arguments in favour of fencing seemed to be better than those against the scheme. If the remedy was likely to effect the object desired there was no reason why it should not be tried, but then came another question—namely, whether all the money asked for would be required—whether the proposed vote was not too large? If the whole of the money would not be spent during the next few months it was in his opinion unwise for the Government to ask the Committee to vote so large a sum as £100,000 for that object, particularly as the Committee had been asked earlier in the session to put increased taxation on the country for the purpose of making up a possible deficit in the revenue. The Colonial Treasurer had told them some time ago that there was a surplus in the Treasury of £167,000. The Government now proposed to devote £150,000 of that amount to the two votes on the paper—for the prevention of the increase of rabbits, and for loans in aid of the establishment of central sugar-mills. Was it wise to spend so much money for those purposes at the present time? He thought that if the Government asked for half the amount on the estimate it would be enough for present circumstances. It had been suggested by some hon. members that the burden of that expenditure should be borne by the run-holders. If it was a national danger they had to apprehend, that would not be fair in principle. The cost should be borne by the State, because, if they allowed the enemy to come in and depreciate the value of their property, he doubted whether, if the squatters who leased the runs let the rabbits alone, that property would not be so diminished in value that it would possibly be worth nothing. It was a question for the country to consider whether it was not worth their while to insure their property against that danger. The matter had been dealt with in that way in the other colonies. He also recollected that some years ago a good many of the vines in Victoria were destroyed by order of the Government, and compensation was paid to the owners of the vineyards. In that case the danger arising from the existence of diseased vines in the country was regarded as a national matter, and the burden was borne by the State. The hon. member for Bundanba had made one remark with which he could not agree—namely, that rabbits were not looked upon as an evil in Great Britain. When he (Mr. Chubb) was a boy, farmers in the old country were not allowed to destroy rabbits, as they were valued very highly by the lord of the manor; but all that had changed since then, and at the present day no farmer would take a lease of land unless he was allowed to destroy all rabbits found on it. He did not know that he had any more to say on the subject. He was inclined to vote in favour of one-half the proposed sum being granted, but not for the whole amount of £100,000. There was another question which ought to be considered in connection with the matter. The cost of erecting the fence might not be the whole expense. It would probably be necessary to maintain a patrol to keep the fence in repair. Whether the country should share the cost with the Crown tenant was a matter for consideration. He did not think it should. They had passed a law

lately which defined the conditions under which the lands of the colony should be held for the next fifteen years, and he did not think they could fairly put on the pastoral tenants the cost of maintaining that fence. At any rate, that was a question that ought not be lost sight of in discussing the matter.

Mr. MIDGLEY said that he had listened with very profound attention to the speeches made on that subject. He felt that if he had two votes he would give one on each side, but having only one he had listened all the more attentively to the discussion in order that he might know how he should give it. He did not always agree with the hon. member for Bundanba, but he thought that his remarks on that subject should have considerable weight. He was ready to believe that the hon. member had seen a good many rabbits, and that he had seen their increase checked in the only way that was really effective. His (Mr. Midgley's) first impression, on considering that vote, was that it was a matter which it would be useful for the country to undertake. But on looking at it as a practical question, the difficulties in the way of carrying it into execution seemed to him to be manifold and the result to be very dubious. There were two objections to the proposal. The first was that they had to prove that it would be an effectual way of keeping out the rabbits. The remembrance that he had of rabbits in the old country was that they could burrow, and did burrow, but perhaps English rabbits were like the English people—a good deal more dogged in their determination than others. He was, however, not sure that a wire fence would keep rabbits out of the colony, and if it was doubtful whether fencing would be effectual, he thought they ought to be very careful in undertaking such a scheme. He would like to know what time it would take for the rabbits to reach the border of the colony.

The PREMIER: That depends on the weather.

Mr. MIDGLEY said it depended on the weather and the seasons. He was under the impression that, even though the fencing might be effectual in checking the encroachment of the rabbits, yet if they had much wet weather, by the time the rabbits reached the border of the colony the fencing would be rusted and decayed. He did not think a fence of that kind would keep out the rabbits. Leaving the country behind them like a desert, they would advance until they came to the fence, and then, in a literal sense, they would get "up a tree." They would soon find some handy tree inclined towards the fence, would run up it, and in their own lively way would hop over the fence laughing all the time at the Premier and the Government officers. If the fence was to be erected, those who would be most immediately benefited by it should bear, at any rate, a portion of its cost. He supposed a good many of the squatters had frontages on the border line. In that case the Government would really be providing for those squatters one of their outside fences. The squatter would thus not only have protection against the rabbits, but would be provided at the Government expense with a fence which ought to be provided at their own cost. He thought they might safely attribute a good deal of the decrease in value of the squattages in the southern colonies to the rabbit pest, but evidently a great deal more to the bad seasons the colonies generally had been having. An hon. member asked, "What about New Zealand?" All he knew about New Zealand was that if he wanted any produce he could not get in Queensland or anywhere else he could obtain plenty of it from that colony, which was a land flowing with milk.

and honey, and full of every kind of material wealth, whilst the produce was so cheap that the prices it was sold for would dismay the Queensland farmers.

Mr. PALMER said no one could have listened to the hon. members for Logan and Warrego without realising that there was very great danger in an invasion of rabbits. The question was, was that danger close at hand? They had a report from Mr. Humphry Davy that there was no immediate danger, and that the rabbits were decreasing towards the border of Queensland. The report also stated that quite lately the nearest approach of the pest was 130 miles distant. Yet they were asked to vote £100,000 straight away for an experimental measure of protection. The hon. member for Fassifern had said the rabbits would climb trees and drop over the fence into Queensland territory. There was another danger the fence would not meet, and that was that in times of flood the creeks and billabongs which the fence would cross would be the means of carrying rabbits by the thousand—carrying an army of them at one fell swoop into Queensland.

The PREMIER: The rivers run south.

Mr. PALMER said he knew the main rivers in the district ran south, but there were scores of tributaries running the other way. He had known floods carry horses, cattle, pigs, and sheep, from twenty to fifty miles. How then could the fence proposed keep rabbits out in times of floods? Again, how far along the border would they have to carry the fence so that it would be effective? And were they to fence not only the southern boundary but also the newly surveyed boundary on the South Australian side? The Government should try the experiment on a small scale first, to see if it would be effective or not. But they asked for £100,000 before doing anything of that kind. Moreover, it was not fair that the whole of the expenditure should be borne by the ratepayers. He represented a district, the larger part of the population of which consisted of the mining community. The miners had been taxed that year to a very large extent, for the purpose of placing the very vote in question on the Estimates. He could not therefore give his vote for such a large sum being entirely spent in an experiment, especially in the face of the many arguments that the fence would not prove a complete obstruction to an invasion of rabbits. The hon. member for Warwick proposed utilising the Defence Force against the rabbits. His idea, probably, was that the volunteers should keep the fence in order. A letter was recently published in the *South Australian Register*, from Professor Watson, of the University, in which he showed very plainly that the introduction of German rabbits would be a most effectual cure for the rabbit pest. Those German rabbits were infected with a curious disease, which proved not only fatal to themselves in a few months, but spread like a contagion through the whole of the rabbits in any district to which it was introduced. The disease—*Sarcptes cuniculi* was, he believed, the classical name for it—was proved to have been fatal to almost all the rabbits in Germany. But he had another point. During the present year a large number of sheep in two different lots, which were suffering from catarrh, were destroyed in Queensland. The community was not called upon to pay for that loss; it was paid, he believed, out of the Sheep Fund. What they had to fear was, that if the whole of the £100,000 was expended it might be spent on a fence that would prove ultimately to be not effectual. They might spend that money and still have the rabbits to contend with. It had been proved

that especially in the eastern parts of Queensland rabbits would not live. They had been turned out in thousands in the Burnett River district and on the islands along the coast, and had all perished. No effort to propagate rabbits in Queensland had as yet been successful. A little more information ought to be given before so large a sum, which miners and others had to contribute, was voted for such a purpose. He himself had had to pay hundreds of pounds in the shape of a marsupial tax when there was not a marsupial within 400 miles of his run.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH: So have I.

Mr. PALMER said he was willing to pay his share if necessary, as a pastoral tenant, of either interest or principal or both in that matter if it was deemed necessary to prevent what had been called a national calamity.

Mr. NORTON said there seemed to be a great deal of confusion on the subject owing to the lack of information, particularly with regard to the manner in which it was proposed to expend the money. Personally, he had not seen much of the rabbit plague, but he had read and heard a great deal about it, and he had been forced to the conclusion that there was a great deal of truth in what had been said respecting it. It was perfectly true, as the hon. member had said, that rabbits had been turned out on the eastern coast of Queensland and New South Wales, and that in many cases they had not propagated; but in many cases they had. A great many years that was done at Campbelltown in New South Wales, with that result; but in later years a gentleman established a warren near Cook's River, not far from Sydney, which he surrounded with a stone wall. For some time the rabbits there increased to a considerable extent, and then they almost entirely disappeared; but they did not die; they spread westward, and were now to be seen on the Paramatta River in very large numbers, and also at Liverpool and Campbelltown, where he had himself seen them. There was also a large number near Burwood, where they had evidently become acclimatised. The reason they did not exist in large numbers in those places was because the country was thickly populated, and the men and boys who went out shooting managed to keep them down. On the eastern coast of Queensland, where rabbits had been introduced, it was a fact that they had died out altogether, or very nearly so. But the experience of the other colonies proved that where they existed in large numbers they did an immense amount of damage. The facts regarding Victoria were well known to all hon. members. In South Australia the Government recently expended £70,000 in an attempt to exterminate rabbits, with the result that the rabbits were just as bad at the end of the year as they were at the commencement.

Mr. DONALDSON: Worse.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH: In what part of South Australia was that?

Mr. NORTON said he did not at present remember. In Tasmania, where rabbits had existed for many years, they were doing so much harm that the Inspector of Stock, in his last report, attributed the decrease in the number of lambs partly to the dry weather and partly to the ravages of rabbits. Of course in most colonies like Tasmania and New Zealand the herbage was more succulent than in Queensland, and rabbits could thrive better upon it. In South Australia he believed the Vermin Act had been, or was about to be, entirely repealed, and the onus of destroying rabbits was cast entirely on the owners of the soil. There was no doubt that the prevention of the incursion of rabbits into the colony was a national question.

Rabbits coming in in large numbers would endanger the interests not only of private individuals, but also of the State. It had been said, with reference to the Land Act last year, that squatters would have to pay the same rent for their runs whether rabbits were there or not, no provision having been made with regard to that eventuality. But the carrying capacity of the runs would have to be considered, and if the carrying capacity was reduced in consequence of the ravages of rabbits there was no doubt the Government would have to submit to a considerable reduction of rent. It was in the farming districts that an incursion of rabbits was most to be dreaded; the scrubs in those districts would offer any amount of shelter to them, and would form breeding grounds from which it would be impossible to dislodge them. On the whole, he felt disposed to assist the Government in passing the vote, in order to put the question to the test. But he did not feel disposed to vote for the whole of the £100,000. No reason had been given why such a large amount was required just now. At the very outside he did not believe the Government could spend more than £30,000 or £40,000 within the next twelve or eighteen months, and before hon. members were asked to pass the vote they ought to be placed in possession of information which would enable them to judge whether the expenditure was likely to be well carried out or not. He had read a great deal about the fencing proposal, and all the reports he had seen in the other colonies were favourable to it. In Victoria and South Australia it had been tried to a large extent, and it seemed to have answered everywhere when tried. He believed the only plan that could be adopted with any safety was to put up a double fence; and it must not be forgotten that when the fence was erected additional expense would have to be incurred in order to keep it in order. If a portion of the fence was broken down it would have to be repaired at once, and the only way that could be done was to appoint persons to have charge of lengths of the line and keep watch in the same manner as boundary riders. One great danger had occurred to him, but he did not think there was much beyond theory in it. In South Australia it was reported that men had been known to carry rabbits away for a distance of thirty miles and turn them loose. That was a thing they might have to contend against. In New South Wales rabbits had been carried great distances, and at Wagga they suddenly appeared, not having been previously seen within forty miles of that place. The explanation given was that the colony had been in a desperate state of depression; thousands of men had been out of work, and many of the farmers who had been obliged to stay on their farms had occupied themselves in exporting rabbit skins. Well, that had been found so profitable that unscrupulous men had carried the rabbits some thirty or forty miles away, in order that the supply might be kept up and a lucrative employment found for their friends. He should like, before committing himself to the vote, to hear something more from the Premier as to the details of the business; that was to say, the cost of the fence or the probable cost of it, and the way it was intended to keep it in a state of repair and have it watched by the appointment of boundary riders. It had been suggested that the fence should be looked after in several ways, and in one letter that appeared in the papers it had been suggested that the country bordering the fence should be let to men who would undertake to see that the rabbits did not get through when breakages occurred. Anyway they ought to have some further details before the vote was finally assented to.

The PREMIER said some hon. members stated they believed in the vote, but that the amount was too large, and that the experiment should be tried on a smaller scale; but it was no use trying it on a smaller scale, and if the whole line was not fenced it was no use fencing at all. That was why a large sum had been placed on the Estimates. It was impossible to say whether £100,000 would be wanted. If it was not wanted it would not be spent; but it had been ascertained that the proper place to start from was Barrington, on the Warrego, and that 400 or 500 miles of fencing would be required. It was very difficult to get any estimate as to the cost of the fencing. If circumstances were favourable it was said that it could be erected for £100 a mile—that was, a single line of fencing—but his impression was that it would cost more. As to a double line, of course that would cost twice as much, but it was not proposed to put up a double line, but special precautions would have to be taken in crossing rivers and roads, and men would have to be employed to watch the fences as the hon. member for Port Curtis had said. It had been suggested that there should be paddocks at those places where the rabbits were likely to get through—that was to say, where the fencing crossed rivers or roads—so that if they did get through they would still find themselves enclosed. As to keeping the fences secure, of course it would be necessary to employ boundary riders to watch them. The Government had considered all those matters and believed that in asking for the sum of £100,000 they were, in effect, asking the colony to commit itself to the policy of fencing the boundary, and they put the amount under the heading of "Special Appropriation" because, if the expenditure was authorised at all, it should be authorised not only during the present financial year, but afterwards; that was to say, if the whole of the amount was not required to be spent by 30th June next, the Government would have a sufficient sum at command to enable them to make complete and efficient arrangements. The Government did not want to spend any money at all; they would be very happy indeed to keep the £100,000 for other purposes, but that was a kind of thing in which immediate action might be necessary, and a vote of Parliament could not at all times be obtained; probably another vote for the purpose of providing for the erection of rabbit-proof fencing could not be obtained for the next twelve months. The Government anticipated that they would want, if not all, at least a very large proportion of the amount on the Estimates. He thought hon. members now quite understood what it was proposed to do. It was proposed to erect a 5-wire fence, with a 4-foot netting strained on it, with from 6 to 9 inches of the netting in the ground, and the net used would be $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch. That was the kind of wire it was intended to put up. They had had the best advice obtainable, and that was the conclusion the Government had come to. The amount now asked for was asked for to raise the question, and that the Committee might say whether that was the proper policy to adopt to keep out the rabbits from the colony. The Government believed that it was, and if hon. members believed so as well, it was of no use putting down a smaller sum on the Estimates.

Mr. SHERIDAN said he did not feel inclined to let the very important question under discussion pass without offering a few remarks, and he might preface them by saying that he always had believed, he now believed, and he dared say would always continue to believe, that the pastoral interest was infinitely the most important in Queensland. Therefore he would be the very last to say one word which would injure that

interest or to support any measure that he thought would not be calculated to advance it in this colony. There were very few who had had more knowledge of the habits and customs of rabbits than he had had. He had been for a great number of years an ardent sportsman, and had seen rabbits in all forms, and had studied their habits particularly in the colony of Queensland. He had turned out rabbits all over the colony, and he had a list of places where he knew of his own knowledge that they had been turned out, and in almost every instance they failed to increase or multiply. They had been turned out in New South Wales at a place called "Five Islands," off Wollongong, where they increased very rapidly for a short time and then as quickly decreased until there was not one left. Rabbits were carefully turned out by Mr. Holt, near Sydney, at a place called the "Warren," which had been alluded to by hon. members. A stone wall was built round the place, and the foundation of that wall was two feet or three feet in the ground. He had been at the place, and had seen the rabbits, and shot them there. But they burrowed under the stone wall and spread about the country—never to any great extent—they never increased so as to cause any alarm to the inhabitants or to be complained of by gardeners or farmers. They were turned out by the Hon. W. H. Walsh at Tingalpa—"silver greys"—and the result was just the same. They gradually decreased until there was not one left. They were turned out by himself at Moreton Island, and he believed the Chairman of Committees of the Upper House was with him. He turned out thirteen full-grown rabbits, and the result was the same as he had described—they disappeared and there was not one left. He turned them out at St. Helena, the present penal station, with a similar result. He had turned them out at Woody Island, where they increased for a little while with wonderful rapidity; but after a few years they began to decrease, and whereas once he could shoot five or six couples in the morning he could now walk a whole day and not see one there. He turned them out at Fraser's Island with a like result, and he knew of their having been turned out at Wamba, in the Burnett district, where they increased rapidly and then as rapidly decreased. They were also turned out at Kilkivan and at Rodd's Bay.

Mr. NORTON : They were not turned out at Rodd's Bay.

Mr. SHERIDAN said they had been turned out at Percy Island, and he had been informed that they had increased quickly and as suddenly died away. He had a book, which was generally taken as a high authority, where there was a short article on rabbits, and as it might be of use he would read a portion of it. The book he referred to was called the "British Cyclopædia of Natural History," edited by one of the highest authorities, Dr. Partington, who said :—

"The rabbit, in a state of nature, is considerably less than the hare; the ears are shorter than the head; the tail is not so long as the thigh; and the whole action and motion of the animal less vigorous and fleet than those of the hare. The general colour in a state of nature is yellowish grey, with reddish on the neck, and brown on the tail, with the throat and belly whitish. The ears are grey, and without any black on the tips. The rabbit is a native of warmer climates than the hare, and it is altogether an animal of different habits. The hare inhabits only where there is cover, at least to some extent, while the rabbit is met with in the open and sandy wastes. The hares never burrow in the ground, but the rabbits always do; and they live in solitude, while the rabbits are generally gregarious. Rabbits have been known from the earliest periods of history, and the first or earliest accounts which we have of them represent them as inhabiting the warm and sandy places of southern climates, especially those near the shores of the sea. We are informed by Pliny that Spain and Greece

were those countries of Europe in which rabbits were first found, and it was related by both him and Varro that an entire town in Spain was overturned by the incredible number of rabbits which lodged under its foundations; and Strabo tells us that the people of the Balearic Islands, apprehensive that their country would be rendered desolate by the vast multiplication of these creatures, sent deputies to Rome, to implore military aid against this novel description of enemies. The Spaniards, in subsequent periods, thinned their numbers by means of ferrets, which they had imported from Africa. It is asserted by Spallanzani that when the crops were wasted in Basiluzzo, one of the Lipari Islands, by an extraordinary increase of rabbits, the inhabitants had recourse to large importations of cats, which in a very short period of time entirely destroyed them. It is supposed that the species was originally confined to Africa, and was afterwards diffused over the warmer and milder parts of Europe and Asia. It has found in its introduction to America a climate more congenial to its constitution, and in consequence has very rapidly multiplied, especially in the more southerly countries of that continent."

The remainder of the article was not of sufficient importance to be quoted then. With regard to the expenditure of £100,000 on an experiment upon the rabbits, he might say that as an individual he had always been totally against it. If he thought in his mind it would be of any service whatsoever he would gladly vote for it, but as he believed it would do no good at all he should record his vote against it. There were rivers and streams of water which would run through the fence, and rabbits could swim through. He had seen them frequently swimming—from choice, not because they were pursued; and the fence would not keep them out unless it was constructed in such a manner that it would prevent them from swimming across. It would have no efficacy whatever. They would go along it until they reached water—and they must have water—and then would swim to the other side. He had no personal interest in the matter; he was not the owner of a horse or a cow; but he merely spoke from a wish to be of some benefit to the country he lived in. The conviction to his mind was that the expenditure of £100,000 at the present time, when it was very much wanted for much more useful purposes, would be a great waste. If that sum were expended in exploring for water and trying to discover the oceans of water which were concealed in the colony, it would be well expended; even £1,000,000 would be well expended in that direction. But to expend it upon a mere experiment, when it was required for more useful purposes, would be mere waste and extravagance.

Mr. ARCHER said that while endeavouring to make up his mind whether he would vote for the motion or not he had acquainted himself as far as possible with the literature on the subject and he had learnt that wherever rabbits appeared in the colonies they almost invariably made the land worthless for any purpose whatever. He could not believe that all the writing on the subject that had appeared in Victoria and New South Wales was utterly false, and he therefore believed that if they could by any means whatever prevent the introduction of rabbits into the colony they would be doing the country good service. On the question whether the Government or those who were the holders of the land should take the burden on themselves of trying to prevent the rabbits from entering, he thought that in the present state of the country it was undoubtedly the duty of the Government, because he looked upon the Government as the landlord. If all the land had been sold and were private property, then the owners would have to prevent the rabbits coming in; but what would be the result to the Government—that was to say, the people of Queensland—if the lands were depreciated by the advent of rabbits? It was for the benefit of the country at large, not of private individuals, that they wished to

prevent that. Whether the whole sum should be voted was a different question. The Government could not possibly expend the whole of the money before the beginning of the next financial year; but as their action must keep pace with the approach of the rabbits he did not see that, so long as they did not expend money unnecessarily, they should be confined to any particular sum, and thus have an excuse for allowing rabbits to enter. The great difficulty the Government would have to contend with was not to prevent rabbits making their way across the fences, but to prevent people from wilfully throwing them over. As the law between the colonies stood it would be very difficult to prevent that. He looked upon the harm that would be done to Queensland, if the rabbits were to arrive, as something which would far more than counterbalance the expenditure it was now proposed to sanction. In the course of a few years the loss per year from the depreciation of rents would be as much as they were asked to vote for the purpose of protecting the southern border. The people of Queensland being the landlords of the country Parliament was bound to protect their interests. Whether the scheme was going to be successful he could not say, but he believed it was the only one which had yet been proposed that had a chance of success, and as such he was going to support it.

Mr. SALKELD said it was admitted that the rabbits were a pest in the colonies where they had obtained a footing, and very likely they would be a great pest if they arrived in this colony. That might be admitted without agreeing with the remarks that had been made with regard to the disastrous effects of the pest in the other colonies. If there was a danger of their invading this colony it must be admitted that it was a national question affecting the whole colony, and they could not expect the holders of the runs immediately adjoining the boundary line to prevent the invasion at their own expense. It would not only be unreasonable; it would be impossible, because they would probably give up the runs rather than bear the expense. But, while admitting all that, he was not prepared to admit several other points. As far as he could see, the proposition would not be a preventive to the rabbit invasion. The hon. member for Blackall had raised a point that had not been referred to before when he spoke of the danger of persons wilfully putting the rabbits inside the borders. If there was any force in the contention of the Government, that it was a duty for the whole colony to undertake, on the same grounds it was the duty of the whole of the Australian colonies to unite and exterminate the whole of the rabbits. It was proposed to erect a fence along several hundred miles of the border between this colony and New South Wales. It was not expected that £100,000 would fence the whole of the boundary; to make the thing complete the fence ought to reach right round from sea to sea. He was not satisfied that they were justified in voting the money. What would be the result supposing they spent that £100,000 and put up a rabbit-proof fence for, say, 400 miles along the border? When the rabbits came to the fence they were told that they would stop there. Then the colony would simply have to maintain that barrier against them for all time. But the owners of the runs on the other side in New South Wales would naturally say that if the fence were not there the rabbits might move right along, and so they might get rid of them. It was a fact that many pests did migrate in that way, and so little was known about the real habits of the rabbits of Australia that it was possible they might leave places where they had been and move ahead. He thought, therefore,

that it was more than possible that there was a danger of what the hon. gentleman indicated—that persons would wilfully put the rabbits inside our borders. There were several other dangers that rendered the scheme so insecure that he did not think it was worth while to incur the expense. There was the natural decay of the fence. They knew that iron would decay when it was placed in the ground. Even if it were galvanised it would decay wherever there was the slightest flaw. Then the colony was subject to storms and hurricanes, which swept down even trees, and would sweep away those fences; a gap would be made and the rabbits would get through by hundreds and thousands. Then the Government would have to catch them all and take them back. If there was good ground for the contention of the Government, that it was a national question affecting the whole colony and that the consolidated revenue should bear the expense of preventing the rabbit invasion, the same argument would hold good that there should be united action by the whole of the colonies to destroy the whole of the rabbits. He would like to know where the expense would end if they passed that vote of £100,000. There would be further expenditure for control; there would be a department for it with a head man and a staff, whose salaries would have to be paid every year. Again, after spending the £100,000 the rabbits might get in, and he hoped the fact of that Parliament admitting that the cost of preventing the incursion of rabbits should be borne by the whole colony—would not lead to claims being set up by any of the holders of the runs for compensation. The Government had admitted the liability of the whole colony to bear the expenses, and they had had claims for compensation set up upon such flimsy pretexts that he would not be surprised to see that on set up as a reason for claiming compensation by run-holders. He would like to know in what time the Government proposed to spend the £100,000. He thought that £50,000 might be quite enough to fence the place where the rabbits were supposed to be now. If £100,000 was required now they would require £500,000 in a few years' time. He should vote for reducing the amount by £50,000 unless the Government could show that the amount set down would be absolutely necessary. £50,000 was a fair thing to make an experiment with at the place where the rabbits were likely to come in. He had great doubts as to the success of the proposed experiment, as there were so many contingencies to look to—breaking down and carrying away of fencing by floods or hurricane. He was almost certain the fence would be no security against the rabbits, and he felt inclined to move that the vote be reduced by £50,000.

The Hon. J. M. MACROSSAN said that if anything was wanted to show that the proposed scheme, if scheme it could be called, was not considered sufficiently it was shown by the Premier himself that afternoon, in introducing the vote, and again in answer to a question by the hon. member for Port Curtis asking for more information. The hon. gentleman actually gave no details whatever; and he (Mr. Macrossan) did not believe the question was ever considered further than that somebody asked that a vote should be put on the Estimates to keep out the rabbit pest. Before they were asked to vote £100,000 hon. gentlemen should be in possession of all the information obtainable. He was quite sure the Premier could have obtained all the information that could be possibly obtained if he put himself to the trouble of doing so.

The PREMIER: If you ask any definite question I will try to answer you.

The Hon. J. M. MACROSSAN said the hon. gentleman could not tell the Committee what the cost per mile of the rabbit-proof fence would be.

The PREMIER: How is that possible?

The Hon. J. M. MACROSSAN said they had been told by several members that evening that the rabbit-proof fences had been used successfully in Victoria; and surely the members who told them that ought to be able to tell them what the cost per mile was there! No hon. member had yet attempted to show that. The Premier said it would cost £100 per mile, but others said it would cost more than that. It seemed to him a very large sum to give for a fence of that description, but, taking it at £100 per mile, they could put up a tremendous amount of fencing for the sum of £100,000, unless they intended to make a double line along the border. At £100 per mile, £100,000 would be sufficient for 1,000 miles of fencing. Surely they did not intend to make an experiment of that kind! Many hon. members, who knew quite as much about rabbits as those who professed to know all about them, believed that the rabbits would not live and thrive in Queensland, and he was rather inclined himself to think that, during a drought such as they had at present, the rabbits would disappear as well as the cattle and sheep.

The PREMIER: Not when it begins to rain.

The Hon. J. M. MACROSSAN said he did not believe the reports cited in the Committee as to the immense amount of damage done by the rabbits; in fact, it would appear that the English language was hardly able to find adjectives to give expression to the terrible damage done in Victoria and other places. He believed those reports were extremely exaggerated. No doubt rabbits did a great deal of harm, and had done harm in Victoria; but still the people of Victoria managed to live through the pest. They were told also that it was a national affair, and that therefore the State should bear the whole of the cost of preventing an invasion of rabbits. He had never heard of a case in that House yet where anyone wished to make a raid upon the Treasury which was not said to be a national affair. The hon. member for Darling Downs, when he proposed that they should buy back the land on the Darling Downs, said it was a national affair. The destruction of the marsupials was a national affair; they were all national affairs; but their being national affairs only existed in the fact that the nation had to pay the cost. He did not think it was at all wise on the part of those gentlemen who spoke so strongly of the necessity for the destruction of the rabbit, to go in so strongly as they had done for the destruction of the dingo. He did not think that the dingo and the rabbit were such friends that they could live side by side in amity. When they altered the Marsupial Act the other day the most strenuous exertions were made to put on a dingo tax, and the exertions were made successfully too. It came, he considered, rather inconsistently from those gentlemen who asked them to impose a heavy tax for the destruction of the dingo, that they should ask them now to impose a still heavier tax on the whole of the people of the colony for the destruction of the rabbit, when that animal was, as they were informed, 130 miles from the border. They were not informed by the Premier at what rate the rabbits were advancing, whether they were advancing at the rate of a mile per week, or a mile per month, or ten miles per week, or ten miles per month. How long would it be before they might be expected to reach the Queensland border? Information of that sort could have been

obtained, as well as information upon the whole of the details of the scheme to carry that preventive effort out. No such information, however, had been given. Even if they passed the vote, and gave the Government power to expend so large a sum as £100,000, he was afraid a large amount of it would be expended uselessly, on account of the Government having so much money in hand. It would be much better—if they were to make an experiment—to make it upon a smaller scale than was proposed by the Government, and they should reduce the vote by considerably more than one-half, as was suggested by the hon. member for Ipswich. If they took the cost per mile at £100, as the Premier had suggested, £25,000 would put up 250 miles of fencing, and he was quite certain that was quite as much as the Government could have fenced effectually, not only before the end of this financial year, but before the end of the next session of Parliament. There would be quite sufficient time for the Government to come down with a well-digested scheme next session and with a Bill to saddle a large proportion of the cost of the destruction of the rabbits on those immediately benefited; and they had a precedent for that in the Marsupials Destruction Act. The marsupial was a great pest—very likely as great a pest in some parts of Queensland as the rabbit had proved to be in any other part of Australia—and yet the squatters were willing enough to pay a portion of the cost of its destruction. Not only that, but, as was pointed out by the hon. member for Burke, squatters who were hundreds of miles away from the places infested by marsupials had also to contribute towards their destruction. That was an answer to the question as to whether they should tax the men on the border for the destruction of the rabbit. If the whole of the pastoral interest was threatened the whole of the pastoral lessees should be taxed and made to pay a fair share of the cost, and the State might subsidise the money raised. In a case of that kind they might fairly be asked to spend some money by way of experiment, but for the Government to ask none of the persons interested to bear any share of the cost was too rash altogether and unfair to the general body of the taxpayers. Had it not been for that sum of £100,000 and the following sum of £50,000 being on the Estimates, there would have been no necessity for increased taxation during the present year; but they were actually taxed in advance, in expectation of spending that money. What great immediate connection had the miners of the different parts of the colony with the destruction of the rabbit? They were told that one interest hung on the other, and that the interest of one was the interest of the other. That was true to a certain extent, but those were mere platitudes which everybody admitted. But that argument was not used on the marsupial question. The miner was not taxed further than the subsidy given by the Government, and that was the only extent to which the agriculturist or the townsman should be called on to assist in the destruction of rabbits. To test the feeling of the Committee, and thinking that £25,000 would be enough—that was, for 250 miles of fencing—to begin with, he would move that £25,000 only be granted, with the hope and expectation that the Government would have wisdom enough to come down with a well-developed scheme next year for the purpose of putting a tax on the shoulders of those more immediately concerned in the matter, and subsidising the amount raised in that way.

The PREMIER said the hon. member asked at what rate the rabbits were advancing per year or per week. He could not tell; nobody could tell; it was impossible to tell; it depended on the weather and a variety of other things.

The colony was threatened with a danger the immediate imminence of which they did not know. They could not tell whether it would come in nine, ten, eleven, or twelve months; but they knew that when it did come it would cause the loss of millions of money. The hon. member proposed to reduce the amount to £25,000; but he (the Premier) had pointed out already that it would be of no use to go into the scheme unless they were prepared to carry it out. It would be of no use to fence in a bit of the border; and unless they affirmed that it was desirable to fence the whole of the country from which the invasion might come, it would be of no use to do it at all. Then the hon. gentleman complained that sufficient details had not been given; but he had given all the details asked for—he could not tell the names of the men who would be employed to put the fence up, or the price per ton of fencing wire; but he had explained exactly what the Government proposed to do, and he was willing now to answer any definite question put to him. What the Government asked the Committee to do was to authorise the expenditure of the capital money required to put up the fence; the maintenance of the fence was a question to be dealt with in future.

Mr. KATES said that nearly six years ago he was told that the rabbits were coming, but they had not come yet. Now they were told that they were 130 miles from the border; but only last week he was told that they had taken a turn westerly, and were not coming at all. He thought the motion ought to be postponed till next session, by which time it was to be hoped the hon. gentleman at the head of the Government would have better information, and would be able to go more into particulars. He was inclined to believe, with the hon. member for Ipswich, that the fencing would be very faulty, because a fence 400 miles long would have to cross gullies and rivers, and in flood-time the rabbits would be carried into the colony without anybody knowing. The Premier was scarcely aware of the expense connected with the fence. He (Mr. Kates) was under the impression that for every 10 miles a hut and a boundary rider at £250 a year would be required. But 400 miles of fencing would be quite insufficient. The southern border was about 700 miles, and the western border about 1,500 miles in length; so that the boundary riders would cost £30,000 a year. It had been said that the agricultural interest also was in danger; but he thought that the farmers were able to take care of themselves in that respect. If they had plenty of boys and girls they would soon destroy the rabbits that came on the farms. In the part of the colony where the fence was to be put up there was a gentleman holding 750,000 acres of land, and that gentleman was better able to afford the cost of a fence than the Queensland Government. He thought it would be better to postpone the motion till next session.

Mr. DONALDSON: And let the rabbits come in the meantime!

Mr. KATES said they were going in another direction.

Mr. DONALDSON: To my knowledge they are within eighty miles of the border.

Mr. WHITE said that in the north of England the people ate the rabbits. The hon. member for Bowen had said that legally rabbits were vermin in England. But, notwithstanding that, they were preserved the same as if there were no game laws in existence. The landlords had a sort of insidious manner of letting their tenants know that they must not meddle with the rabbits, and the tenants dared not touch them. There was at the present time a farmer residing not

fifty miles from Brisbane, whom he visited five years ago in the north of England. He was a young man, very energetic, and paid about £400 for his farm, and he was determined not to pay that rent and allow the rabbits to run over his farm. His manner of dealing with the rabbits was as follows:—Along the border of his land there were dykes, or large mounds of earth on which hedges were planted. The rabbits killed the hedges, and made burrows ten or twelve yards through the mounds, where they could protect themselves. The young farmer to whom he referred cut down those dykes and narrowed them considerably, after which he faced them with stone, and, obtaining some live thorns from a distance, stuck them in on the top, every year putting a fresh thorn hedge across the mounds. That fence was a great improvement. One day, while he was busy working at the fence, his landlord, an aristocrat, a lord—Lord Decies—came along, and with a frown let that young man know that he did not approve of keeping the rabbits off the farm. Lord Decies kept men for the purpose of watching the rabbits, killing them, and sending them to market—he made a large profit out of rabbits. The consequence of his disapproval of the course taken to keep them off the farm was that that young farmer left England. The lord put the screw on him in such a way for making those fences, that the young man left and came to this colony, and was one of the best farmers here at the present time. The granting of the large amount of money which hon. members were asked to vote for the purpose of erecting a fence across the border of the colony would involve the employment of a large number of men to superintend the fences after they were erected. The hon. member for Darling Downs said it would take one man for every ten miles, and probably he was right. If a man was required to superintend twenty miles of fencing he would never be able to make any repairs, and then it would be necessary when the rabbits came up to the fence to have someone to kill them, otherwise they would accumulate there, and the result would be that they would get through by hook or by crook. The hon. member for Logan had told them that the rabbits would be on them in a year. Well, if that was so, it was necessary that they should put on those men at once, and provide them with plenty of dogs and other means, so that they might try to beat back the rabbits, and keep an account of what progress they were making. That would give them some idea of how the pest could be combated without the fence, and they would then learn something—it appeared they could learn nothing at present—as to the progress the rabbits were making towards the colony.

Mr. ANNEN said he did not agree with the system of constructing a hedge, which had been referred to by the hon. member for Stanley. He (Mr. Annen) had been very much amused in listening to the speech of the hon. member for Ipswich, Mr. Salkeld. He thought the hon. member was in the same position as himself—namely, that he knew very little about rabbits; but by the way he spoke one would imagine that if 100,000 rabbits got across the borders in a night they might be driven back in the morning by a few boys to where they came from. Such was not the case. The hon. member for Darling Downs had said one gentleman on the border had a large amount of land and that he should erect a fence himself. He (Mr. Annen) did not think that was a proper position to take up. The question affected the whole colony, and the rabbits would not stop on that gentleman's land, but would march on and carry destruction wherever they went. He was in Sydney a few weeks ago and saw Mr. Inglebert, a squatter in

Victoria, who was, no doubt, known to the hon. member for Warrego. That gentleman informed him that he had had to abandon one of his stations a few months ago on account of the ravages committed by the rabbits, and that there were hundreds of families in Victoria who had been almost driven to a state of ruin by the depredations of that pest. Before Parliament assembled this session the whole Press of the colony was alarmed at the approach of the rabbits towards the Queensland border, and every paper impressed on the representatives of the people that they should do what they could when Parliament met to provide against the great raid with which the colony was threatened. He believed that had the Government come down at that time and asked the Committee for a vote of £500,000 to erect fences with a view of preventing the threatened invasion the money would have been willingly granted. He took it that the Government were not going to spend that money if they did not see any necessity for doing so, but the amount should be voted so that they might at once be able to erect such fencing as might be required to keep out the rabbits. He did not know whether the fences alone would be sufficient. The gentleman to whom he had referred had told him that wherever a tree was out of the perpendicular rabbits would go up it like an opossum, and if that was the case it might be necessary to cut down the trees at a certain distance from the fence in order to prevent them getting into the colony in that way. The member for Cook had stated, and he supposed no hon. member doubted what he said, that in New Zealand ten millions of money had been spent in trying to eradicate the rabbit pest in that colony. The Committee were asked to vote only £100,000 to carry out a measure which he believed was the most effectual known. The Government would no doubt get the best advice they could for carrying out the work, which he considered was a national work, and not a work to benefit a few people. It was a work in which the whole people of the colony were deeply interested. He should vote for the scheme; but he would not say for the £100,000, as he thought that, as the hon. member for Townsville had said, £25,000 for 250 miles of fencing might be a very good start.

Mr. KELLETT said he should be very sorry to see the vote withdrawn. He thought it had been well recognised by a majority of the House, that the necessity had arisen for taking steps to stop the rabbits coming to Queensland. It had to be considered that within the next twelve months the Government would not necessarily spend the £100,000. Still they did not know what necessity might arise by the end of the year, to push on with the work faster than they would have to do at present. It was a work which he thought might be fairly left in the hands of any Government. It might be fairly left to the Government to consider whether it was advisable to spend the whole of the £100,000 during the next twelve months or not. They knew very well what the efforts to exterminate the rabbits in Victoria had cost. Millions of money had been spent there in trying to lessen the evil. Queensland was in this position: that she had a very large extent of boundary, and there was no doubt the rabbits were coming nearer to that boundary every day. He hoped they would stop away for some time yet; but, in any case, he had not the slightest doubt that the Government would not rashly go on with the expenditure of the £100,000. The Government would find out where fencing was necessary, and would go on with the work there; but they should have liberty, if they found it necessary, to spend the whole of the money. He did not, however,

think that would be likely during the next twelve months. They might have to spend half the amount, but the sum of £25,000 proposed by the hon. member for Townsville would be in all probability insufficient. It was no use starting the scheme unless it was the intention to carry it out, as they knew the House was very fickle at times; and if they started with a vote of only £25,000 now, next year some other idea might enter their heads and they might decide that it would be advisable not to go any farther with the scheme. In that case the £25,000 would be lost to the country. Unless they gave the Ministry of the day, whoever they might be, full and sufficient power to go on with the scheme and perfect it by putting up what fencing might be required—to go on with it, too, in a wholesale manner, quickly and with great despatch, they had better knock it on the head altogether. He was satisfied that it would be a national benefit. It was no use saying that because some squatters on the border had a very large extent of country they should pay. The runs under the new Land Act would be so leased that they would be assessed according to the capabilities of the land, and if the rabbits came on the land and ate up the grass there would be no rent receivable, or at all events the squatters would very likely refuse to pay any. On the other hand, if, by erecting a rabbit-proof fence, the Government enabled them to carry a full number of stock, they could not cry out if an extra assessment was put on. It was the opinion and the unanimous wish of the majority of the House last session that something should be done, and that speedily, to prevent the rabbits from crossing the border. From what they could find out, the only thing or the best thing they could do was to fence the border, and it could be discovered what was the most practicable way of doing that effectively. Whether it would be by a double fence or not he was not prepared to say. It might be that at the places of greatest danger double fencing would be required, but a single fence might be put up first, and when the rabbits began to approach in greater numbers it might be doubled. It would be a great pity if they only voted so small a sum as £25,000. If it were the feeling of the Committee that the vote should be only reduced by one-half, then something would be done in the right direction; but he thought they could safely leave the Ministry to expend the whole of the £100,000 if necessary, knowing very well that the Government would not spend it all unless the exigencies of the case required them to do so. Why the rabbits had not advanced towards the border very quickly during the last year or two was probably owing to the dry seasons, but if plenty of rain came before long they would probably travel in the direction of Queensland fifty miles for every one mile they had advanced during the last few years. He hoped, therefore, that the vote would not be altered. The country generally would approve of it, because an influx of rabbits would be very detrimental to the interests of the whole colony.

Mr. SALKELD said the hon. member for Maryborough, Mr. Annear, had accused him of ignorance on the rabbit question. He did not mind that; but he did object to having what he said misrepresented. The hon. member represented him as having said that the rabbits might cross the border during a single night in hundreds of thousands, and would be driven back again in the morning by boys. That was simply absurd. What he did say was that the fence might be broken down during night by a storm, and that the rabbits would in that case get through before the rangers were aware. Of course the rabbits would then spread. But the hon. member had apparently come to the same conclusion that he

(Mr. Salkeld) had arrived at, for he doubted if the fence would be sufficient, and also thought that the £100,000 might be too much to start with. The information to hand was that the rabbits, instead of approaching, were receding from the Queensland border.

Mr. ANNEAR said his remark was that he did not know whether the fence would be effectual or not, but no doubt the Government were in communication with persons who had superior knowledge on the subject. Hon. members must have been as amused as himself when the hon. member for Ipswich talked so innocently about rabbits entering during the night and being sent back by boys in the morning, just as if they would obey orders.

Mr. SALKELD: You misapprehended me altogether.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH said there was a great deal of truth in what the hon. member for Maryborough had stated. The hon. member said that at the commencement of the present session a vote of £500,000 would have been received with a great deal more favour than the present one seemed to be. To say £500,000 would have been voted then was somewhat of an exaggeration, as he did not think the Government would have been authorised to enter on an expenditure of that sort. There was no doubt, however, that a scare was established at that time, and the House would have looked with a great deal more consideration on a vote for fencing out the rabbits than at the present time. The attention of hon. members, however, had been directed to the subject since the session commenced, and he thought they must have had occasion to change their minds in regard to the danger the colony was in at the present time from the rabbit pest. He himself looked on the question as one affecting the general interests of the colony; and as one whose personal interests would be directly affected by a rabbit invasion, and one who, if he thought for a moment that the squatters, of which he was one, were to be saddled with the expenditure, he would say at once that as a body they would go against the proposal and oppose it, the same as he intended to oppose the vote. Some extraordinary statements had been made in order to force the vote through the Committee. The hon. member for Stanley said that £10,000,000 had been spent in Victoria on rabbit extirpation.

Mr. KELLETT: I said nothing of the sort.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH: Some hon. members said that ten millions had been spent in New Zealand, and several millions in Victoria, in the extermination of rabbits. Those were general statements, and he believed that if investigated they would be found to be grossly exaggerated statements. He had read everything he could come across with regard to the rabbit plague, and he had come to the conclusion that at the present time they had not much to fear in Queensland. He was not afraid of a rabbit invasion in the western part of the colony; and he for one would certainly oppose any new taxation being put upon the colony—making a special provision, at a great expense, for a danger which he did not think was very likely to occur. Let anyone read the reports from New South Wales, and he must arise from the perusal of those documents with the conviction that there was a department there very much interested, not in the extermination of rabbits, but in the propagation of rabbits, and then spread the most frightful reports about them. It was a miserable kind of business; one man reported to the department month after month that he had not seen a rabbit in his district, and yet he

himself and his camp cost the country from £50 to £100 a month. No one could read those documents without coming to the conclusion that the same man who wrote those reports knew perfectly well that there was at present a system in New South Wales by which rabbits were actually carried from one district to another, simply for the purpose of making the Government expend money. With regard to Victoria and New Zealand, there were accidental circumstances which had always made the danger greater than it could possibly be in Queensland. Twenty-two years ago he was asked by the Victorian Government to examine and report upon some railway embankments which were in danger of being destroyed by rabbits burrowing in them. The same evil manifested itself in the western district, between Geelong and Warrnambool, but the owners of the land themselves managed to keep the pest within bounds, and the means employed were not very expensive either.

Mr. DONALDSON: What about Robertson's, of Colac?

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH said that case had always been referred to as a typical instance of the harm done by rabbits. He went down to Colac, pretty much with the view of seeing for himself what the facts really were. Robertson's property at Colac consisted of about 30,000 or 40,000 acres of land—he was speaking from memory—and was in a volcanic country, extremely rich with natural grasses and herbs, both summer and winter, and affording any amount of food for rabbits all the year round. The soil was smooth at the top, but underneath there were volcanic blisters with, in many cases, an opening to the outside. Those blisters were real natural warrens in which the rabbits, when they had once got established, bred in millions. The fact was not discovered until the evil had grown to be one of great magnitude—in fact, the estate was almost destroyed before the cause was found out. But when it was discovered that rabbits had actual natural warrens, and unlimited resources in the shape of food and shelter given to them by nature, the owners, as business men, took a very proper course. They engaged a number of masons, and with rubble blocked up the entrance to the whole of those natural warrens, with the consequence that the rabbit pest disappeared at once.

Mr. DONALDSON: But what was the cost?

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH said it might be £12,000 or £15,000, or double that amount, but the question of cost had nothing whatever to do with his argument. The evil disappeared; and now, on Robertson's estate, one gamekeeper, pursuing a leisurely life, could keep down the whole of the rabbits there. That was the position when he was there, and he had no reason to believe that it had since altered. That pointed to this: that without natural facilities of that kind for the increase of rabbits there was not much danger to be feared. But where were there such natural facilities on their south-western boundary? He should like to see rabbits marching up Cooper's Creek, or the Diamantina, or the Paroo, or any other of their rivers! They might be troublesome for a time, but they would be exterminated by the first drought. There was another part of Victoria where the evil became of some magnitude. There was a rush of farmers to a certain district that had not been farmed before. It was thought to be inferior land, being sandy soil and scrub land. At all events it was found to be very good agricultural land for some purposes. However, the rabbits got into the scrub first, and ate the young crops before the farmers had a chance to reap it. But as soon as the farmers discovered

that they determined to get rid of the rabbits, which they did very easily, and at no very excessive cost. Who ever heard any talk about the extermination of rabbits at home? Who ever heard of rabbits doing any harm at home except to the farmers who were not allowed to shoot them? Farmers in the old country never objected to rabbits so long as they were allowed to kill them off whenever they became too numerous; and they could easily do that in Queensland. New Zealand was quite an exceptional country, with a light soil, plenty of shelter and food, and water everywhere. It was a place where rabbits could easily increase because the land was held in enormous tracts; and there was no doubt that the plague had spread nearly all over that colony. But the circumstances were perfectly exceptional there. He had shown that in every one of the cases in which rabbits had proved a pest no facilities existed for their destruction. Let them consider what the scheme actually was. It was proposed to erect a single fence on the boundary line of New South Wales and Queensland, but what good would that do? It would not keep the rabbits out unless a body of rabbit police were maintained to patrol the whole of the infested district. At whose expense was that to be done? The expenses ought not to be borne by the pastoral lessees unless they were consulted in the matter. If they asked for protection themselves there was no reason why they should not have it at their own expense, but they ought not to be saddled with the expense proposed by the Government unless their leave was asked. That it would come to that he had not the slightest doubt, because the colony would protest against a body of rabbit-police being maintained to keep down the rabbits for the sake of one particular class of men. The responsibility would be eventually thrown upon them, and for that reason he protested that they should be called upon to bear an unnecessary expense at the present time. Did the colony actually protect itself from the danger of a rabbit invasion by erecting a fence? He did not think it did. The same body of men who in New South Wales were spreading the rabbits for the purpose of finding employment for themselves and their friends, would be found in Queensland ready to give the rabbits a lift over the fence and bring them miles and miles within the border. Therefore, he did not think the remedy an effectual one at all. Now, with regard to the position of the rabbits at the present time the information was very indefinite, and an expenditure of that kind ought to have been prepared by very substantial statements as to the real facts of the case. They ought to be shown where the rabbits were, and the rate of progress they were making. If anyone examined the reports in New South Wales it would be found that it was doubtful whether the rabbits were making any progress at all, and it would be found that if proper means were taken there would not be very much difficulty in exterminating them. With regard to the reduction of the amount, there was a great deal to be said for the contention of the Premier that if the remedy was to be effectual at all the money ought to be spent at once. But that involved this: that it was quite possible that a great mistake might be made. It was quite possible that a great waste of money might take place, and before the mistake was discovered the money would be gone. By adopting, on the other hand, the amendment of the hon. member for Townsville it amounted to this: that, after all, the Government might be wrong, and after having spent money in erecting a fence along the whole boundary it might be proved that the only danger of invasion existed at the crossings of certain rivers. He did not believe in the system at

all. He thought the money ought to be spent, but not on the meagre information in the possession of the Government. There was time enough before the necessity arose for the expenditure of the money, but if the necessity did arise the Government ought to be in possession of better information than they were at present. That the pastoral lessees would, at the present time, undertake the burden of additional taxation for that purpose he very much doubted, but at the same time he did not know how the responsibility could be shifted from the shoulders of those who would be the greater sufferers from a rabbit invasion.

Mr. STEVENS said he should not have spoken again on the question but for the speech which had just been delivered by the leader of the Opposition, which—probably unintentionally—was a very misleading one. It would have the effect of strengthening the hands of those who were opposed to the vote. It would have no effect upon those who were thoroughly conversant with the subject, but it would mislead a few members who did not know a great deal about the question. The general tone of the hon. member's speech was to the effect that rabbits only increased rapidly under favourable circumstances and that they could easily be got rid of when they were met by intelligent opposition. But the facts of the case were not in accordance with that statement. It would be a very sweeping assertion to make that there were no intelligent men in New Zealand; and yet, when the people in that colony had tried to exterminate the rabbits, the very contrary to the hon. member's statement was proved, and it was shown that something like £10,000,000 of money had been spent in the work. According to the latest statistics, last year £1,700,000 was spent in exterminating rabbits. The hon. gentleman's speech would tend to convince hon. members that wherever rabbits were combated with they disappeared, but such was not the case, and hon. members might have noticed that some few months ago a number of farmers had waited on the Government of Victoria to ask for assistance in exterminating the rabbits. The hon. gentleman was wrong in asserting that rabbits only thrive in soft sandy soil, because the very contrary had been proved to be the case in Victoria, in places where it was all rocky ground; and in one factory something like 100,000 rabbits per month were preserved. When the question was looked at in a dispassionate manner hon. members must be convinced that once the rabbits reached Queensland there would be very little hope of exterminating them. It had been suggested that the erection of a fence would be of little or no good, but that statement of itself was absurd unless hon. members were prepared to suggest some other remedy which had been proved more successful. One hon. gentleman said—possibly in joke, but the question was too serious to be dealt with in a light manner—that a mounted patrol should ride up and down the border and drive the rabbits back. What were they to be armed with? With mops or brooms, or what would the hon. member suggest? The hon. member for Ipswich, Mr. Salkeld, treated the subject in a very light manner, but he (Mr. Stevens) was convinced that unless steps were taken to erect rabbit-proof fencing, many years would not pass before the hon. member would excessively regret the position he had taken up. He trusted hon. gentlemen would treat the subject in a serious manner, and look at the threatened plague not altogether from the squatters' point of view. The squatters would no doubt suffer seriously, and wiping out the vote was striking a direct blow at the squatters of south-western

Queensland, a blow which they would feel keenly. Personally, he was not interested in the matter in one degree. The electorate he represented was in the extreme southern portion of the colony, and many millions of money would be spent and many thousands of people ruined before rabbits threatened that portion of the country. As for his own run, that was in the extreme North, and probably Parliaments in future would awake to the danger of the invasion of rabbits long before they threatened him. He had taken a deep interest in the subject, but if the vote was rejected he would take no further trouble. Possibly that might not be a loss. It might or might not, but he was convinced that if some steps were not taken in the way of protecting the borders of Queensland the country would suffer a loss of millions of money.

Mr. JORDAN said he had had some difficulty in making up his mind on the question. He thought it was a very important matter; and after the hon. member for Logan had quoted at great length on the subject from a number of documents, he was convinced that the hon. member was right in the view he had taken of the question. He had never yet been able to satisfy himself as to whether a rabbit-proof fence would prove an effectual preventive. He had looked at the question and considered the suggestions made by the hon. member for Logan; and considering the enormous extent of the boundary line of Queensland, both south and west—he supposed 1,400 or 1,600 miles—he had very great difficulty in satisfying himself that it was not chimerical. The only certainty about the thing would be the immense cost of it, and not only the cost of constructing it, and the uncertainty of its being effectual, but the cost of its maintenance. He had not understood the hon. member for Darling Downs to treat the matter lightly when he spoke of boundary riders. The hon. member had not attached any idea of a mop when he referred to boundary riders. He thought they were to maintain the fence in proper repair, as it would be constantly liable to accident on account of floods and the falling of trees upon it; and, therefore, he believed that, if they made up their minds to spend £100,000 in fencing, it would not be enough, and that it would need from £300,000 to £500,000 to make it effectual. Then they must face the necessity for a very large annual expenditure to maintain the line; so that, as he said, the only certainty was the great expense of the work. But against that sum they had to put the fact that the rabbits were a frightful pest in the other colonies. Looking at Queensland as a great pastoral colony, they might regard it as a great national question; and, under the circumstances, he thought they would be justified in expending a very large amount of money in the way of a large experiment in that direction. He was quite satisfied that they should place at the disposal of the Government that sum of £100,000 to try that experiment. He wished to detain the Committee for a minute or two with a view of expressing to the Committee his belief that the fence would be very costly, and he very much doubted whether it would be effectual. Though he had that evening listened with great attention to the excellent speech of the hon. member for Mulgrave, he was still satisfied that the hon. member for Logan was right; and he thought the time had come when £100,000 should be placed at the disposal of the Government to try the experiment proposed.

Mr. NORTON said there was one matter he thought very important. The hon. member for Warrego seemed to be under the impression that some hon. members were not willing to approach the subject seriously, but he thought the hon.

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member was mistaken in that respect. He was not going to discuss the matter any more except to say that he believed that if the money was voted as proposed by the Government—that it should be paid from the public revenue without any charge being made on any particular class of the community there would be a great deal of dissatisfaction connected with it. Although it might be a national matter, many would be dissatisfied with it, as they would not realise it. It had been stated by some speakers that a large majority of the people of the colony were very much in favour of it, but that had not been proved—he did not think the people outside understood the question. He admitted himself that he did not know much about it. The question he would like to ask of the Premier was whether, in the event of that vote being carried, he intended at some future time to introduce a measure by which any portion of the community could be compelled to pay the whole or any part of the interest upon that money.

The PREMIER said he could not say exactly what the Government meant to do next year or the year after. If it was necessary to keep up a permanent staff for maintaining the fences in order, it would be a very serious question to consider whether they should be paid out of revenue or out of the funds raised by them for special purposes. He was not prepared at that moment to say what course would be adopted under those circumstances. That was a question to be considered. He was not in a position to say what the Government would do under the circumstances.

Mr. SHERIDAN said he was informed that rabbit-proof wire fencing was being manufactured in Melbourne and Sydney, and he hoped that if that vote passed similar establishments would start in Queensland, so that Queensland might gain the only benefit which he believed they would get from fencing out the rabbits.

Mr. MOREHEAD said that it was another case of Maryborough again. Not only was machinery to be made in Maryborough, but rabbit-proof fencing was to be constructed there, and the material for making those fences.

Question—That £25,000 only be voted—put, and the Committee divided :—

AYES, 20.

Sir T. McIlwraith, Messrs. Groom, Macrossan, Chubb, Brookes, Norton, Foote, White, Buckland, Bailey, Kates, Palmer, McMaster, Salkeld, Smyth, Macfarlane, Aland, Midgley, Higson, and Horwitz.

NOES, 26.

Messrs. Archer, Miles, Dickson, Griffith, Rutledge, Moreton, Jordan, Dutton, Annear, Isambert, Bulcock, Nelson, Jessop, Campbell, Black, Lissner, Stevenson, Lumley Hill, Govett, Wakefield, Morehead, Grimes, Foxton, Kellett, Stevens, and Donaldson.

Question resolved in the negative.

The Hon. J. M. MACROSSAN said that it was very possible that some hon. gentlemen might consider that £25,000 was too little to vote for the initiation of a plan of that description, and perhaps they might think £50,000 would be sufficient; so he would take another division. He would therefore move that £50,000 only be granted.

Amendment put, and the Committee divided :—

AYES, 25.

Sir T. McIlwraith, Messrs. Archer, Chubb, Smyth, Macrossan, Norton, Jessop, Foote, Salkeld, Grimes, Palmer, McMaster, Kates, Buckland, White, Campbell, Aland, Black, Brookes, Groom, Horwitz, Macfarlane, Bailey, Higson, and Midgley.

NOES, 21.

Messrs. Griffith, Miles, Dickson, Dutton, Moreton, Stevenson, Annear, Stevens, Donaldson, Lumley Hill, Foxton, Morehead, Wakefield, Govett, Lissner, Kellett, Jordau, Bulcock, Nelson, Rutledge, and Isambert.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The PREMIER, in moving that a sum of £50,000 be granted for Loans in aid of Establishment of Central Sugar-mills, said that, as the hour was late, he intended to be as brief as possible, in explaining the policy of the Government in proposing that vote for the acceptance of the Committee. Applications had been made to the Government from various parts of the colony for assistance in establishing central sugar-mills. The view the Government took of the sugar industry was that it was of the utmost importance to this colony that that branch of agriculture should be carried on by small farmers. They believed it was possible that that could be done, and they believed that was the true course the future history of the agricultural community in the coast districts of this colony should take. They were perfectly certain it could be done, and that it would be of enormous advantage to the whole community if it were done was beyond all doubt. Just contrast for a moment the future of this colony, with the rich agricultural land settled upon by small farmers cultivating their own property, crushing their cane or manufacturing their other tropical produce at some central mill—a large population such as the land was capable of sustaining—just contrast that with the other picture—the land divided into a few large estates of from 1,000 to 10,000 acres each, worked by aliens, and maintaining, as the late Lord Beaconsfield said, “three sets of people—the labourers who worked on the soil, the men who lived there to superintend them, and the absent landlord, who drew his profits and spent them abroad.” Contrast, he would say, those two states of civilisation—contrast the two conditions of things with regard to the welfare of the colony, and could there be any doubt which of those two alternatives would be the most beneficial? The establishment of small farmers was no doubt attended with some difficulties—some natural, some artificial—or, rather, wilful. That the system could be worked out successfully there was no doubt, because there were some parts of the colony in which an approximation at least had been made to it—where the small farmers growing sugar and crushing at central mills were earning a very satisfactory livelihood, making money and proving themselves very useful citizens of the colony. But there was a great difficulty in establishing that system in some parts of the colony. Under ordinary circumstances he did not think it was the duty of the Government to interfere in such matters; he thought that, ordinarily, the Government should let such things take their own course, but they found this: In the northern portion of the colony particularly, sugar-growing was certainly in a transition state. It was the custom to say that the sugar growers were led to make large investments, and expend large sums of money in developing their estates, on the faith of an Act passed by the Parliament of this colony about twenty-five years ago. He did not believe that. The planters sometimes said they did it on the faith of that Act, and they said they were entitled to expect that they were going to get a continual and unlimited supply of coloured labour. They said if that was not allowed to be continued all those lands would be thrown out of cultivation, the agricultural interest would be destroyed, and grave consequences would ensue. It was quite unnecessary that the agricultural industry should be destroyed—it was quite unnecessary that the land should be thrown out of cultivation. He had no doubt that if central mills were established in those districts, or in one or two of them by way of experiment, it would be shown that sugar could be grown profitably by the occupiers and owners of the land, and could be manufactured profit-

ably; and that when it had been tried in one or two places, the great difficulty, if it were not solved, would at least have advanced a very considerable stage towards solution. That was a matter that looked to the future. A small amount was put down merely for the purpose of assisting in the trial of an experiment which a number of honest, intelligent, struggling men were willing to make. They were willing to stake all they possessed on the success of it. The success of the experiment—if it did succeed—would be of enormous and lasting benefit to the community. He said lasting benefit—it would be a benefit to the community for centuries to come. He was not prepared to say that £50,000 was enough to try the experiment finally, but he said it was a small contribution which Parliament might properly make towards trying an experiment, the success of which would produce almost incalculable advantages. Under the circumstances that existed, which he need not refer to at present in detail, there was little probability of that experiment being tried in some parts of the colony where it might be tried with some advantage. He was quite aware that there were many people who were determined that if they could help it it should not be tried, and that if it was tried it should be proved a failure; they were, in fact, determined that it should be a failure. They regarded the establishment of a yeoman class of farmers, working their own lands, and displacing the absentee landlords, as a thing to be contended against by all the means in their power. He (the Premier) regarded it, on the contrary, as a thing to be contended for by all the means in the power of the Government, and a thing which ought to be supported by every well-wisher of the colony. For those reasons that amount had been placed on the Estimates. It was a small amount; he wished it had been larger.

Mr. MOREHEAD: Why did you not make it larger? You had the power.

The PREMIER: Hon. members would no doubt have read the correspondence that had been placed on the table with reference to the matter. Hon. members were entitled to ask on what basis the Government proposed to advance the money for the purpose of establishing central sugar-mills. It was detailed at some length in the papers laid on the table, but the time at the disposal of the Government for working out the details had been rather limited, and he was not prepared to say that the sketch laid on the table was perfect. He knew that in one part of the colony, at any rate, and he believed in others, there were farmers who were willing to mortgage all they possessed merely for the chance of being able to carry out that system. They knew they could get no assistance from the present owners of the mills, because they did not believe in the system, and would be very sorry indeed to see it successful. In other places he knew that the owners of mills and owners of land would be delighted to assist the scheme, and looked forward as earnestly as he did to that future for the colony. Now, what the Government proposed to do was this: If Parliament authorised the expenditure of the money, the money would be advanced to an incorporated joint-stock company formed for the purpose of establishing and working a central mill. He was not prepared to say at that moment which would be the best kind of mill to adopt, possibly one kind in one place and one in another. It might be desirable to try two or more experiments of that kind. The direct security the Government would take would be a mortgage by the company of its property and machinery to trustees on behalf of the Government, the amount advanced being repayable by

instalments over a period of years on the principle of the Local Works Loans Act. The company itself should consist of the owners of land who were willing and intended to send their cane to the central mill or refinery to be operated upon. They, in their turn, would give security to the company over their property. They would only be allowed to take shares in the company in proportion to the quantity of their land. It was not intended to be a speculative concern, and they would be required to give security to the company for the amount due upon their shares. In order to secure the fair working of the system and the supply of cane, the shareholders, being the customers of the mill, would be required to enter into an agreement similar to that in use by the mill-owners on the Clarence River and at Mackay, which was very similar to the one placed on the table of the House. That would form part of the mortgage, so that—in the event of the company coming to grief, or being unable to keep their agreement with the Government, or the shareholders failing to supply cane to keep the mill going—there would be security for the amount advanced. That would be a second security for the Government. Of course, in a scheme of that kind, where the Government practically provided the whole capital, they should be able to exercise a certain amount of control. If the affairs of the company were managed without any regard to the success of the scheme the Government desired to initiate it might easily be proved to be a failure, and he thought it desirable that the Government should retain a controlling power, and that they could only have by being allowed to nominate a certain number of directors. Ordinarily the Government should not be allowed to interfere with the affairs of the company, but if the security for the money advanced by the Government was being wasted they ought to be allowed to step in, not by exercising the powers of the mortgage and selling the property of the company, and so destroying the work, but by seeing that it was carried on on the principles upon which it was established. A scheme of that kind was embodied in the papers laid before the Committee.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH: Is this your scheme?

The PREMIER said those articles were prepared by a gentleman in town, under his supervision, and were revised by himself. He did not profess to say they were perfectly revised, but the scheme was drawn up under his supervision, and revised by himself so far as his time would allow him to do it. The scheme was that, in addition to the ordinary shareholders of the company being the owners of the land on which the cane was to be grown to be crushed at the mill of the company, there should be a small number—five was the number put down, but it was an arbitrary number of members of the company—who should be holders of shares of the nominal amount of £1, not entitled to receive any dividends, but having certain powers as directors of the company—and that they should be nominated by the Minister in charge of the expenditure of the money, who, it was proposed, should be the Treasurer. In the case of the company going on a wrong track the Treasurer should have the right to step in and control the affairs. He believed that to be the most simple and convenient way of exercising a controlling power. It might be said that a co-operative company of farmers would not be willing to accept a scheme of that sort, but upon that point he had no doubt whatever. He had had interviews with representatives from the farmers at Mackay, and had also received applications from the farmers on

the Burdekin, and they would be willing to accept very much harder terms than that. They were quite honest and *bona fide* in that matter. The representatives of the Mackay farmers assured him that each individual farmer would be prepared to mortgage the whole of his property, and that collectively they would be prepared to mortgage the whole of their properties for the whole amount advanced by the Government. He thought those terms would be too hard, but he thought it was fair to ask that they should each be responsible in proportion to the shares they took in the company. He had given very briefly the nature of the scheme proposed. He was not prepared to say what would be the best machinery to employ; he was not prepared to give an opinion upon a matter of that kind.

Mr. MOREHEAD: You have not got as far as that yet.

The PREMIER said he was not an expert in that matter, and the Government would take the advice of experts before dealing with it. There were other details to be settled, such as the selection of a suitable place—a central place—and also the question as to whether the central sugar-mill should be purely a refinery or a crushing mill as well. Those were matters of detail; but if the Committee thought the advantage to be gained by the establishment of a system of that kind of sufficient value to justify the expenditure of the sum of money asked for by way of loan and on ample security, he would ask them to authorise that vote. He had pointed out the enormous advantages that would accrue to the country by the success of the experiment. If the experiment were successful and they spent £1,000,000 in proving its success they would make a cheap bargain. Whether the experiment they desired to try now proved the correctness of his views, or whether it would be proved by subsequent experiments, he was quite convinced—and he was delighted to see that men in the northern part of the colony were coming round to the same way of thinking—he said he was quite convinced that that would be the future history of that part of the colony; and he believed that in authorising that vote and placing it in the power of Ministers to expend a sum of money for that purpose the Committee would take a very good step to bring about a most desirable result.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said he thought that the eloquent terms in which the Premier depicted the future of Mackay with yeoman sugar-planters and Government central sugar-mills was highly overdrawn; at all events, he did not bring it down to the state of society at Mackay, or anywhere else in the northern districts, at the present time. Did it not strike the hon. gentleman as a remarkable fact that in introducing a scheme of that kind, of which the Government were to become the finders of plant for the yeoman planter, he had never referred to the sugar question at all? What had brought about the present state of things? It had been brought about by the disorganisation of the labour trade, which was to be attributed to the Premier himself. The hon. gentleman undertook to find a remedy for it by cheap German labour, but that had been a failure. The other remedy, it appeared, was to find the sugar plant for central mills in particular districts; but the hon. member must see the confusion of ideas he had got himself into; it was through his action to provide labour for the planters. The planters were always calling out for labour, and the hon. member tried to provide that labour, but the labour he proposed had proved a failure. That labour was not to be got,

and the hon. gentleman himself now admitted that it could not be got. Now they had the remedy before them proposed, but it was a remedy for a disease that did not exist. What the planters asked, and what every man in the North connected with sugar asked for, was labour; but the hon. gentleman proposed to supply them with sugar-mills. There were plenty of sugar-mills at the present time, and the proposal did not meet the question at all. Now came the point which the hon. member had missed all through. He pictured the position of the central mills surrounded by small farmers, and asked whether that would not be a better state of things than plantations with a large amount of alien labour and absentee proprietors? If he put the question in that way, and the farmers could exist, he had not the least hesitation in saying that it would be better; but was that likely to be the result, or was it from his conversation with the planters that the hon. gentleman believed it would take place? Did he not know that he had not got even to the surface of the difficulty, let alone the bottom, and that every one of those men, as soon as they had a central mill, would want labour, and that the same difficulty in regard to labour would then exist to a greater extent than at present—that the great body of the men who had asked him to assist them by means of central mills were in favour of employing black labour whenever they got the chance?

The PREMIER: I do not think anything of the kind.

The HON. SIR T. MCILWRAITH said the position would then be that, having in two ways failed to satisfy the demand for labour, the Government would be at the expense of finding central sugar-mills, at the expense of the white people of the colony, for the purpose of giving employment to the black people in the North. The hon. gentleman had not said a single thing to indicate that one of the stipulations was to be that there was to be no coloured labour employed, not only in the field, but in the mills, and that the whole of the labour was to be white labour. The hon. member never referred to that at all; but if he did not make it an essential condition why should they provide those mills to give employment to black labour when there were plenty of mills already employing black labour? The object of the hon. member ostensibly was to prevent the employment of black labour altogether, but surely he did not think he would put an end to it by the system he proposed, a system which would give greater facilities for its employment. As to the scheme itself, they found a certain number of farmers who, the Premier considered, would be able to make a good living at planting if means were provided by which their cane could be manufactured into sugar. That was possible, but would it be a good thing for the Government? Was it the function of the Government to find plant in cases of that sort? He did not think so, and he could apply every argument used by the Premier to a thousand places between Brisbane and the Maranoa. It would be a splendid thing for the farmers if the Government put up a mill for grinding wheat, and no doubt the farmers would start wheat-growing, which would very likely be successful; but would it be judicious for the Government to expend the money of the people on experiments of that kind? Those were matters for private enterprise. The hon. member said that the system had been tried and proved a success. Where? Never by a Government; but by private enterprise, where men looked after their own interests. The Premier fancied he was going to get Government employes to

look after the interests of the Government the same as a private owner looked after his own interests; but the Committee knew that such a thing was not at all likely. If the principle was good for sugar-growers it was a good deal better for the ordinary farmers of the colony. There was no better way of complicating the black labour question than the scheme proposed. The Government would find the whole of the money, and the proprietors of the land were to be the shareholders, not giving money for their shares, but mortgages over their land. No doubt the bulk of the people in any district either had mortgages over their land already or would have before they were much older. What position would they be in then to take up shares, and having taken up shares and given mortgages to the Government how would they get capital to carry on ordinary operations? The hon. gentleman seemed to think it was a perfectly clear matter, and that all the farmers had to do was to hand over their deeds to the Government and get their shares; but instead of that it was a most complicated matter. Not only that; but the men most deserving of assistance would be the very men to whom assistance could not be extended. Suppose the mills were found to be unprofitable and the system broke down, as it inevitably would, did the hon. gentleman think that any Government would ever sell the land and turn out the men? There was no chance of such a thing happening; and that, at once, was a reply to the argument that a great number of farmers were anxious to go into the scheme. Of course they were, because they knew that, mortgage or no mortgage, they risked nothing. If they got the mill it might possibly be good for them; it would be erected purely at the expense of the Government and without the slightest risk to the farmers. When the hon. member said it would be a grand thing if the system proved a success, even though millions of money were spent upon it, by whom did he mean that the money should be spent? Did he contemplate the Government being the owners of all the mills in the colony? He (Sir T. McIlwraith) hoped to see a more successful state of things. He hoped to see mills established by private capital, and trusted they would never have to depend on money voted by the Government for the establishment of central mills, because that was the most certain way to make the people of the colony a servile population—servile to the Government. The hon. member was taking the best means for making a nation of slaves, and he did not think the taxpayers would approve of such a scheme. It was all very well to make high-flown allusions to what Lord Beaconsfield said about labourer, tenant, and landlord, but that had no application in the colony. He held that the sugar industry stood on a sound basis—if the hon. gentleman would let it alone; and the hon. gentleman had not shown any reason why the Government should interfere and find central mills in certain districts at the expense and risk of the colony, without any expense or risk to the persons who would be benefited. If the scheme would be successful in connection with sugar it would be a far greater success in the farming districts of the colony. The hon. member would have been laughed at if he had proposed to erect flour-mills in different places on the Darling Downs, but that would have been a great deal more feasible, and a great deal more profitable; at all events there would have been far less risk, although everybody would have felt that the Government were undertaking a duty they ought not to undertake. There had been a sort of halo thrown over the matter by the eloquence of the Premier, who tried to persuade the people that

he had at last found a remedy for his oppression of the sugar industry. But the scheme proposed was no remedy. The sugar-growers cried for labour, but the hon. member threw plant at them—he was providing a remedy for a disease which did not exist. That that scheme would be a failure he had not the slightest doubt. He said the other night that he had no doubt some hon. members would vote for it; but he would be very sorry if they did, because he thought sound reasoning should bring them to the conclusion that the Government in putting that vote on the Estimates were undertaking an unprofitable experiment and spending £50,000 on a business into which they ought not to enter.

The PREMIER said he wished to say one word in reply to the hon. member for Mulgrave. The hon. gentleman misunderstood the persons for whose benefit that vote was placed on the Estimates. The scheme was not introduced for the benefit of existing sugar-planters.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH: I did not say existing planters.

The PREMIER said the hon. member stated that the planters were crying for labour and the Government were offering them machinery. The planters who were crying for labour were not the persons for whose benefit the scheme was introduced.

Mr. MOREHEAD said the hon. gentleman had given reasons for passing the vote which he had better have left unsaid. The Committee were asked to consent to a proposal which would put the Government in the position, as it were, of pawnbrokers. The Government were to be, so far as he could understand it, mortgagees of the sugar-planters who were willing to come under the operation of that central sugar-mill system. Assuming that that contention was correct and that the persons mortgaging their property to the State were unable to carry on, would the Government intervene, take possession, and run the central mill on account of the State? There was no doubt that that would be the result of the system advocated by the Premier. Assuming that the central-mill system was a success at Mackay, where he was told it was intended to introduce the system first, he would ask where it would cease? Would the system be extended to Maryborough, Bundaberg, Cairns, the Herbert, and other places that might be mentioned where sugar was grown at the present time? He would also like to know what gigantic machinery would be required to carry out the proposal made by the Government. It would involve such departmental work as would entail enormous cost upon the State. The Government would have to be bankers and go into an enormous system of advances and mortgages. The scheme was so unwieldy that it would be quite unworkable. What would happen in the case of a collapse of any of those persons who received an advance from the Government under that system? The Premier had told them that the Government would be prepared to advance certain sums of money to small farmers who were going in for one of those mills. Would the Government be prepared, should those persons get into difficulties, to foreclose and take possession? Or, in the event of their taking possession, would they be prepared to carry on those small farms or sell them to somebody else? He said that no Government dared accept any one of those three positions. He maintained that the Government would be in a worse position in such a case than they had been in regard to those selectors who, in years passed and in the present year, were unable to pay their rents. The Government dared not touch the farms of which they were the mortgagees. He could not imagine any system

that could be devised by the malign skill of the Premier that would bring so much disaster on the colony as the scheme which he had propounded that evening to the Committee. He thought the hon. gentleman should have been content to have accepted the £50,000 without giving his reasons for asking for the vote. If the State was going—as the hon. gentleman led them to believe by his speech—to carry out the scheme in its entirety they would bring tenfold more disaster upon the colony than if they introduced tens of thousands of coolies. The position was this: that the Government must either exercise undue forbearance, or what one might call improper forbearance, in abrogating the contract entered into between the State and the farmer; or turn the farmer adrift when the sugar market fell, or labour became dear, or the seasons unpropitious. There could be no other interpretation of the joint-stock system enunciated by the Premier. He thought no hon. member could come to any other conclusion than that. How could such a complicated system be worked by the State? It was impossible for it to be properly worked by the State. The Premier knew as well as he (Mr. Morehead) did, and as well as other hon. members did, that the proposal was simply a trap for the sugar-growers. The hon. gentleman was too good a lawyer not to know that it was so surrounded by pits and pitfalls, and impossibilities, as to be utterly unworkable; he had told the Committee a great deal too much. Probably he had taken a note from the book of his colleague, the Minister for Works. The hon. gentleman had said too much and let hon. members into the secret of the way in which he proposed to apply that vote. He (Mr. Morehead) contended that the Committee had no right to be asked to vote that money until they had the system which had been set forth before them in an Act of Parliament. The money ought not to be asked for until the details were given as to how it was to be applied. That vote was on an entirely different footing from the £50,000 which had just been passed for the prevention of the incursion of rabbits. As regarded the rabbit fence, the Premier appeared to be "all at sea." He knew that a certain system or mode of dealing with the rabbits was possibly preferable to another, and he asked the Committee to trust the Government to use their best endeavours in preventing what was looked upon as a possible national disaster. But when it came to the £50,000 for the establishment of central sugar-mills he had evidently got a scheme devised in his head as to how they were to be worked. His proposition in regard to the rabbit fence was indefinite, but his present proposition was a definite one. He had carefully elaborated a scheme under which he was to deal with the £50,000. When he had an elaborate scheme in his mind, and his colleagues—as there was no doubt—were aware of it, why did he not bring in a Bill dealing with the matter? Hon. members should therefore resist the passing of the vote to the utmost until they understood exactly how it was to be employed. He (Mr. Morehead) distinctly objected to and protested against the scheme as propagated that night by the Premier. He distinctly objected to the Government taking possession of mortgages over holdings in which the sugar was to be crushed. He objected altogether to the Government spoon-feeding the sugar industry or any other industry in the colony. If the sugar industry was not able to support itself—as he was sure it was—better let it go. But if interference by the State was to take place, then let the State go further and erect central mills for the grinding of wheat, central sheds for the shearing of sheep, and central

washpools for the washing of sheep. As a paternal Government let them go further afield, and let hon. members bow down and say that the head of the Government should have central mills for everything and let the Premier be everything—the great “I am” managing the whole of the affairs of the colony. Let them also buy him a gigantic steam engine of which he might have full control. The scheme was so absurd and preposterous as set forth by the Premier that he (Mr. Morehead) would do all he could to prevent the passing of the vote. No good would be attained by it. It was simply an interference by the Government in a matter about which they had evidently no knowledge. If they had knowledge and were able to manage the scheme he could then say that the action of the Government was to destroy all self-reliance, all self-respect, and all self-management in the colony.

Mr. BLACK said he thought the question at issue was a matter of great importance, and he could not agree with the hon. member for Balonne, who compared the proposed central sugar-mills to central sheds for shearing sheep and central washpools for washing sheep. No question had ever arisen in the colony as to the proper way of shearing or washing sheep; but a very serious question had arisen in connection with the sugar industry. It was hardly necessary to go in detail into the whole history of the creation and progress of the sugar industry. It was quite sufficient to mention now that notwithstanding the fact that the sugar industry had been carried on for fifteen or seventeen years on a large scale, opinions still varied very much as to the proper mode of carrying it on. At present, he regretted to say, it was an industry pregnant with disaster. A scheme such as that proposed by the Government, if it was carried out on a satisfactory and sound basis, was one which, in the present condition of the industry, was entitled to the favourable consideration of those members who held views different from those he held on the question of the sugar industry generally. He advocated the vote because he wished to see the experiment put fairly to the test. If the experiment was successful—and he was not prepared to say that it would not be successful—the expenditure of the money would be the means of establishing a yeoman population on the Northern sugar lands, and it would, in that case, be money well spent. There would be no waste of money even if the scheme proved unsuccessful. There was no doubt that those farmers who wished to meet the Government half-way in testing a scheme which many hon. members had advocated for some time past—that those farmers, with land already under cultivation, with homesteads erected, and horses, and cattle, and everything in working order, and with the incentive of the assistance they would have from the Government and the prospect of becoming themselves the owners of the mills in the course of time—would spare no effort to make the scheme a success. He regretted the Premier said there were many in the North who did not wish to see the scheme a success, and he differed with the Premier in that view. In the district he represented, which might be considered as the centre of the sugar industry, nothing would give greater satisfaction to the planters than to see the scheme a success. It stood to reason that in the event of the scheme being a success it would lead to an enormous increase in the value of the planters' properties, which were, under present circumstances, somewhat unsaleable. Again, assuming that the scheme did not turn out a success, he maintained that the money spent in the experiment would be well spent, as it would put an end at once and for all to the

difference of opinion which existed as to the description of labour which it was proper to employ in the tropics. On those grounds the experiment should certainly be tried. The farmers in his own district, to which the Premier had referred as being the first who would test the scheme, had in their petition stated their desire to meet the Government half-way in the experiment. He could not do better than read what they had said on the subject in their petition. From his own personal knowledge of those men, and from the condition their farms were in, and the practical knowledge they possessed of sugar cultivation, he knew that they were perfectly sincere in every word contained in their petition. The point in the petition to which he wished to specially refer was as followed:—

“They are also of opinion that farmers can grow and cultivate at a profit small areas of cane without coloured labour of any kind, and larger areas by the aid of white labour, such as you are trying to bring into the colony.”

When they expressed that opinion they were not aware that the Continental labour scheme would fall through; but he assumed that, failing that description of labour, they would be allowed to make use of any labour that could be legally introduced into the colony. In their petition they went on to say:—

“We would respectfully beg to point out to you that the sugar industry in all parts of the colony has been a subject of exceptional legislation—in Queensland, in the matter of early inducements in the low price of land and in the matter of labour; and that regarding the latter we hold that if no greater inducement were offered than the opportunity of proving that coloured labour is not a necessity, we are entitled to this consideration.”

Those were the grounds on which he supported the proposition of the Government. So far from the planters in the North being averse to the experiment, they would hail with the greatest satisfaction the success of the scheme, if for no other reason than that its success would undoubtedly be a benefit to them. The Premier referred to certain persons who persistently set their faces against the settling on the land of a class of yeoman farmers. He (Mr. Black) did not know where those people were to be found, and he could only say that any people who wished to settle a yeoman class on the lands of the colony could find millions of acres yet unoccupied, equally as good as any land at Maryborough, Bundaberg, or Mackay, along the Northern coast. If anyone wished to try the experiment there was ample room in the North to carry it out. It appeared to him that those who had made a success, up to a certain point, of the sugar industry, and under certain conditions, at once became objects of envy on the part of those who had done nothing whatever to promote the progress of the colony. In making that remark he begged especially to refer to the junior member for Brisbane, Mr. Brookes. However, he was quite sure that the proposal to try the experiment would be endorsed by that hon. gentleman. He was not prepared to state the number of millions of acres of tropical agricultural land they had in the North, but he could point out to the Committee the enormous value which that experiment, if successful, would be to the country, and not merely in the direction of sugar-growing—as there were many other pursuits in which small families might be advantageously employed, such as the growth of coffee, of spices, and of other tropical agricultural productions which were especially suitable for small families, inasmuch as they did not require the expensive machinery that was indispensable for sugar-growing. It would be one of the grandest things for the country if the Government could prove, or assist in proving, that European labour could be profitably

employed on the Northern agricultural lands. He had read in the paper that morning that the coffee trade alone of Java was worth £3,000,000 a year to the Dutch Government. There was no earthly reason why their Northern lands, which were equal to anything in Java, should not be developed, and by so doing make Queensland one of the greatest agricultural countries in the world. He must support the vote, for he believed the experiment was really well worth trying. By it an incentive would be offered to those farmers, who were not men of straw, but men who had been struggling for years with more or less success, and who had given proof of their *bona fides* by putting up some of the best homesteads in the midst of some of the finest gardens that he had seen anywhere. He did not think any district in the colony could show a more industrious class than the very yeoman class now settled in the district of Mackay. There they were, but, owing to conditions over which they certainly had no control, they were left with their lands comparatively valueless on their hands. While expressing his willingness to support the vote, he must say that, had the labour question not been interfered with by the present Government, as it had been during the last two years, there would have been no necessity for that application being made to Parliament.

The PREMIER said the Government had not interfered with the labour question during the last two years in any way whatever. They had let the labour question severely alone.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said they all knew what the Government had done with regard to the sugar industry, and the hon. member thought he had answered everything by the assertion he had just made. There was no question that the proposition was one of the remedies—the others having failed—for the destruction that he had helped very considerably to bring on the sugar industry.

The PREMIER: How?

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said that if the Premier desired to discuss the black labour question he should be quite prepared to go into it; but as the hon. member had satisfied himself with making an assertion he had replied to him by making another. The hon. member for Mackay was almost as poetical as the Premier on the subject, but neither of them was very practical. The hon. member for Mackay read a quotation to show that the present proposition was to be a great experiment to prove that sugar could be profitably grown without coloured labour of any kind; and he had followed up that with another quotation from a letter written to the Government, asking for central mills to be established because coloured labour was not a necessity, and that that would prove it. He (Sir T. McIlwraith) wanted to know what was the experiment they were going to try? There was nothing said about coloured labour in the articles of association; either kanakas, or Chinese, or any other coloured race, or Javanese, might be employed at the mill. There was nothing whatever to prevent them. Seeing that the petitioners spoke of the experiment as one intended to show that sugar could be profitably grown without coloured labour, and seeing that the articles of association did not preclude the employment of coloured labour, he wished to know in what way that experiment was to be shown?

The PREMIER said those were only draft articles of association, which he had not yet had time to revise, and no doubt many improvements would suggest themselves; but as the Government would have a controlling influence over the

expenditure the hon. gentleman might rest assured that the central mills would not be worked by Chinese or Javanese.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said the Premier had indicated that the object of the vote was to settle a yeoman population on the sugar lands of the North, and left the impression that all the people connected with the manufacture of sugar at the central mills were to be white. The hon. member for Mackay put that more straight by saying that the object of the petitioners was to show that sugar could be successfully grown without any kind of coloured labour whatever. The Premier now admitted that, under the articles of association which he had drafted, a company could be formed, and that the proprietors might grow their cane entirely by any kind of coloured labour which might be lawfully brought into the colony, and that even the sugar-mill itself, under the authority of the directors, might employ kanakas, Chinese, Javanese, or any other kind of legalised coloured labour. Now, they were saved from that contingency only by what the Premier had said—that it was not the intention of the Government to experiment with Javanese. Was the experiment one to prove that white men could grow sugar with the assistance of the Government, and would the Premier give an assurance that in the articles of association it would be provided that no coloured labour was to be employed either in the growing or manufacture of sugar? If that was not so, and the experiment proved a perfect failure, then the Government might claim that it had been made a failure by the employment of coloured labour, and that if coloured labour had not been employed it would have been a success. There was not one single thing in the articles of association against the employment of Javanese, kanakas, or Chinamen. The whole of the directors might be Chinamen or kanakas. Now, was it not ridiculous for the Government to ask that an experiment of that kind should be tried and £50,000 spent upon it, when it was not known what was intended to be proved by it? Let the Premier tell the Committee plainly what the experiment was intended to prove. If it was intended to prove that sugar-growing might be a success without the employment of coloured labour of any kind, he would not grudge the expenditure of a large amount of money to substantially prove that; but it would be found, he thought, that Government management of a sugar-mill would prove a failure. It would, however, be worth while to prove whether white labour could actually grow sugar successfully. Let hon. gentlemen understand that that was the experiment, and let the Premier tell them distinctly that it would be provided in the articles of association that no Chinamen, Javanese, or kanakas, or any other kind of coloured labour was to be employed in the manufacture of sugar. That was the assurance that was wanted.

The PREMIER said the proper place to put in that stipulation would be in the agreement or mortgage, and he was glad that attention had been called to the matter. That would be a stipulation made by the Government, and one of the conditions embodied in the mortgage. That was the object of the experiment, and the Government wished to try it fairly. He did not mean to say that the mere casual employment of a kanaka—a time-expired boy—to carry a load of bricks would forfeit the mortgage, but the condition would be laid down that no species of coloured labour should be employed. He recognised that omission as a defect in the form of mortgage, and was glad attention had been called to it.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said it was not only a defect in the mortgage, but it was a

defect in the Premier's mind and a defect in his speech. The point had been brought out prominently by the hon. member for Mackay, and the Premier only wanted the vote to pass with as little talk about it as possible. Now, he understood from the Premier that the object of the experiment was to prove that if in Mackay or elsewhere central mills were erected that was to be done on the understanding that no coloured labour should be employed.

The PREMIER: That is the intention, and nothing else.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said that cleared the ground, but the hon. member would have to consider that point carefully, because it would not do to simply provide that in the articles of association; the Government would have to see that no coloured labor was employed. That condition would have to be put in the mortgage so that the Government could foreclose. The Premier had mentioned that it was not probable foreclosure would take place if one kanaka was employed, but the line would have to be drawn somewhere. It would be found that kanakas, Chinese, and Javanese would be employed, and the Government would have to see that they were not, and make the conditions so stringent that they would have the remedy in their own hands. Of course they understood that the Government found the capital and the shareholders found none, but simply found security for the money that was advanced by the Government, and it was provided in the articles of association that the Government had the first claim upon the property. It was also provided that no man who held property under mortgage should be a shareholder, but the man who had his property mortgaged was the very man who wanted the central mills, and what was to be done with him? The hon. gentleman would find that the conditions he had put in the draft agreement would preclude the very men who would require the most assistance from getting any assistance. Then with regard to the foreclosure, did the hon. member think that the Government had any remedy against the men who could not keep their engagements? Did he think that they were likely to foreclose on those farmers when the failure was not theirs but the failure of the Government. If there was any failure it would be the failure of the Government in not making the central mills a success, and what would be the result? They could not foreclose on the farmer, because it was a failure of the Government, and there was not a ghost of a chance of the Government foreclosing. In fact, that was the reason why the people in certain districts had come forward and said they were perfectly willing to try the experiment and give security to the Government for their money. They knew that the Government would never insist upon repayment, because, as he had said, the failure would be theirs.

Mr. KATES said nothing had surprised him more than the speech delivered by the hon. member for Mackay. Year after year that hon. gentleman had stood up and said that it was impossible to carry on sugar-growing without black labour. Now the hon. member said he was willing to support the Government in expending £50,000 to provide central sugar-mills, and have sugar manufactured by white labour. There was no doubt that the hon. the leader of the Government was a very able man—very able in many ways, in drafting bills, in detecting mistakes, and in other matters; but when the hon. gentleman ventured upon commercial lines he was apt to make mistakes. In the present case he (Mr. Kates) believed it was not the function of Government to speculate with the taxpayers' money at

the risk of the taxpayer. The risk was all on the side of the taxpayer whilst there was no benefit derived by him. If the sugar-planters wanted central mills erected the speculation was one that should be entered into by monetary institutions—by banking institutions and money-lenders—and the fact of money-lenders not going into the speculation was a proof, as the American said, "that there were no dollars behind it." It was not long since he introduced a motion for the repurchase of Canning Downs and Westbrook estates. In that proposal there was finality. The Government knew perfectly well how much they would have to pay and how much benefit would be derived by the country by the repurchase; but in the present proposal there was no finality. He knew very well that the hon. member for Cook would come forward also, and ask for £50,000 to establish central mills in Cairns, Port Douglas, or Herberton, and on all those rivers; and he believed that it was a great mistake on the part of the Government to enter into speculations of that kind, and he protested against it on behalf of the taxpayers, and should oppose it. He made up his mind when he first saw the item to do so, and he had no reason to alter his opinion. He hoped hon. members would reject the motion, because it was nothing but a speculation which would end in failure. It had been pointed out, also, that the Government would be the mortgagees; and he would like to know whether they would have the moral courage, in case of failure, to foreclose on the mortgagors? He did not think they would do it. There was an old saying that "if you wish to turn a friend into an enemy just lend him money." He was sure that the hon. member at the head of the Government would make more enemies in the Mackay district than he had at present.

Mr. ANNEAR said that he was surprised at what the hon. member for Darling Downs had said; at the same time he thoroughly believed that the hon. member for Mackay did not believe in the system one iota more than he did. That hon. gentlemen painted a very nice picture of the farmer as he existed at the present time; but he believed the farmer in this colony was in a good position without any State aid. Of all the questions that had come before that Committee during the session there was none to which the term "coddling" would better apply than to the present one, should the motion be passed. The farmers of the colony, and especially sugar-growers, where factories existed at the present time, were fully satisfied, and were doing very well under the present state of affairs. On the Mary River, and on the Burnett River, at Bundaberg, there were refineries which had been started by private enterprise; and many of the farmers on those rivers were doing very well indeed. They did not grumble, but believed they were fairly treated, and were making plenty of money without State aid. The maize-growers in East and West Moreton, and on the Darling Downs, might as well ask the Government to give them a loan as the sugar-growers of Mackay, or any other part of the North. Supposing the motion was carried, there would be twenty applicants next session, because every person was well aware that should the Government give a loan to erect sugar refineries anywhere, they would never foreclose on the persons who obtained the money. He looked on that £50,000 as a gift, and once gone out of the hands of the Government they would know that the money had been paid away, and not one penny would ever be returned. He, and other hon. gentlemen, had been considering the advisability of starting a brick-making factory near Toowoomba. They were going to make bricks by machinery, and they had as much right to go to the Government

and ask for a loan as the sugar-growers had. That had been his doctrine for many years, and it was his doctrine now. He believed it was also the doctrine of the hon. member for Mackay. He did not think that sugar could be successfully grown in Queensland without some kind of cheap labour—black or white. Even if they obtained the countrymen of his hon. friend, Mr. Isambert, from Germany, at the wages they demanded at the present time, there would be no profit. They could not afford to pay the wages demanded by any class of Europeans. He had never gone in for obstruction, and did not intend to do so upon the present occasion, but he would oppose the vote, believing that a greater mistake could not be made. If the Government were going to foster any industry, or make it better by a loan of money from the public Treasury, there would be plenty of applicants. If any person wished to embark, not only in the sugar industry, but in any other, and wanted money, there were sufficient monetary institutions in the colony to go to if he had the necessary security, and get whatever money he wanted to enable him to carry out his operation. That was not the function of the Government at all. Chinese cabinet-makers, or any other tradesmen or storekeepers, had as much right to go to the Government and ask for a loan as any man engaged in the sugar industry. It had been stated that it was merely an experiment to show to the outside world that sugar could be grown at a profit without black labour. If it could be so grown, he was sure there was sufficient enterprise amongst men who had lived in the colony to do it without being fostered by the State.

The PREMIER said he wished to correct an error that the hon. gentleman had fallen into. He seemed to think that that was a thing unheard of. He would point out that it was quite a common thing in other countries. In India the Government did it regularly, and so did the Brazilian Government, and also the English Government, for drainage purposes.

Mr. CHUBB said, that if any one thing had been made more prominent than another during the debate, it was the last matter touched upon by the Premier himself, and referred to by the hon. member for Balonne. It was that in that colony in every case where public funds were dealt with, by way of loan, they were dealt with under the sanction of an Act of Parliament; and if that was considered necessary when they lent money to local public bodies who might be said to have a moral claim to borrow public funds, how much more necessary was it to do so when they dealt with private persons? He denied that the Government had any right to entrust the public funds of the colony—to lend them—to individuals, however beneficial the object might be, upon such terms as the Government themselves might think fit to lay down, with the right of modifying them from time to time as might be considered advisable. The Premier told them that in England the Government lent money to farmers; but that was lent under the authority of Drainage Acts. The public funds were lent to improve farm lands by the authority of statutes. The expenditure was overseen by commissioners, and the parties who borrowed the funds had to comply with the statutory regulations before they got the money. He did not want to impute anything to the Premier, but it would be quite open to the hon. gentleman, if he were so minded, to select the persons to whom he would lend the public funds. He gave the Premier credit for all honesty and uprightness of purpose in dealing with the funds if he got them; but what he said was that the Government might, if

they chose, in order to gain political support in any constituency, grant a loan of the money at their disposal and no one could say them nay. Parliament ought not to give the Government authority to make loans of public money unless they had all the details laid down in an Act of Parliament. A matter had been raised during the debate which had escaped the attention of the Premier—the class of labour that was to be employed in the mills. That showed that the scheme was incomplete. No doubt when the matter came to be fully considered again, when the agreements were drawn up and the mortgages prepared, many other small matters—or large matters—might crop up which would require to be satisfactorily settled. A scheme of that kind was not finite, because if the vote were passed and the money expended, next year they would have claims from all parts of the colony to which they could not in justice say no. They would be committed to an enormous expenditure, over which they would have no control except such as the Government might choose to exercise. He was very anxious to assist sugar-growing by white labour, but it seemed to him that the amount put down was either too much or too little. The deputation of gentlemen who came down from Mackay had done him the honour to ask his support for the scheme. The first question he asked them was how much of that £50,000 they would want in their district, and they said they would want the whole of it. Then he asked how many mills they thought they could put up with it? They said three or four; but he had been told, on good authority, that the money was not enough to put up two decent mills to crush the cane for even a small number of sugar-growers. He had endeavoured to discuss the question entirely apart from politics; but it struck him that when the Premier introduced the motion he used a bitterness of tone and aggressiveness of language towards the Opposition, as if he intended to make it a purely party question. The hon. gentleman said that there were certain people in the colony who were determined not to allow the scheme to succeed if they could help it; and he seemed to be addressing hon. members who were sitting opposite to him. He (Mr. Chubb) did not wish to address himself to the question in a party spirit; he looked upon it as one which required careful discussion and the consideration of every member of the Committee to see if they could give their consent to it. His objection was now more in the nature of a preliminary objection; before they committed themselves to the scheme they should see all the details, and have a Bill introduced in which the scheme was fully laid down. What had been said by some other hon. members applied with great force. The hon. member for Maryborough had said rightly that if they gave assistance to that class of planters every class in the colony would be entitled to demand to be coddled by State aid. The system, he thought, was bad, and certainly its introduction in that state, with the details not finally settled, was premature. For that reason he would be constrained to oppose the motion.

Mr. LUMLEY HILL said that several hon. members—notably the hon. member for Maryborough, Mr. Annear, and the hon. member for Darling Downs, Mr. Kates—expressed their surprise at the support which that measure met with from the hon. member for Mackay; but it did not surprise him the least bit in the world. The hon. member was voting for the money to be granted, purely and plainly for a *reductio ad absurdum*. He (Mr. Lumley Hill) was not sure that money would not be well spent in that way if it were only to convince the people of the colony; but still he would draw the attention of

the Committee to the fact that it was a large sum to throw away, as he felt perfectly sure that it would be thrown away if the Premier adhered to the resolution he had expressed to the Committee—that no alien labour whatever was to be employed. The hon. member for Mackay was striving to attain one object, and to demonstrate to the country that—of which a great majority were already convinced—without the expenditure of that £50,000—that sugar could not be grown without the assistance of some sort of alien labour—some cheap and reliable labour—he did not care whether it was kanaka, or Chinese, or Javanese. If they adhered to the letter of the law, as laid down by the Premier, the thing would be a fiasco, and the £50,000 would have gone for nothing. As for the objection which had been raised by the hon. member for Bowen—that an Act of Parliament would be required—he did not believe that at all. How did they grant the £10,000 to assist the miners, or the £50,000 for the rabbit fence? That last vote had a merit which the present had not; it was a national matter, and affected every class in the community, while this business only applied to one particular class, the class of tropical agriculturists, who had ample opportunity to settle down on any amount of land in the district which he represented. There was any amount of land there occupied by no one—rich scrub land, capable of growing sugar, coffee, all manner of spices, maize, and other products. The land was lying fallow, as it were, and would lie fallow for years to come, unless some recognised system of cheap and reliable labour was introduced. That was the real solution of the difficulty, to allow some kind of labour to be introduced which would not be offensive to the general community. He did not know what it would be, but he knew that until it was done the land would be unproductive, unless the industry was forced into a temporary state of prosperity by State aid, from which it would relapse as soon as the aid was withdrawn and the money spent. There were abundant opportunities for trying that experiment in the district he represented, and claims would come in from that district which would be quite as justifiable as those from Mackay. If the precedent was created he should be very strenuous in advocating the claims that would come in from there. He had not one shilling interest himself in sugar-growing, but he was anxious to see it succeed, because of the prosperity it would bring, and the money it brought into the country, which circulated amongst merchants, storekeepers, wharfingers, wharf-lumpers, foundries and factories, and every class in the community. He had taken some pains to ascertain the financial position of the industry at the present time, and he had had exceptional advantages for ascertaining the cost of an efficient mill. He believed that no mill could be erected capable of doing profitable work at a less cost than about £30,000. He had looked into the question in an unprejudiced way, and he believed that would be the least sum for which an efficient mill could be put up. Working on a small scale involved a great waste of labour, and to put up a mill to serve small farmers the work must be got through rapidly. As in his opinion an efficient mill would cost £30,000, the amount set down would be insufficient to establish two mills capable of doing anything like profitable work. He believed the scheme would result in a total fiasco, and they would simply succeed in proving, as the hon. member for Mackay was anxious to do and what was obvious to anyone who looked thoroughly into the question, that it was impossible to grow sugar in this tropical country without the aid of cheap and reliable labour.

Mr. JORDAN said the hon. member who had just sat down had thrown a doubt upon the sincerity of the opinions expressed by the hon. member for Mackay that night. The hon. member for Darling Downs said he was astonished to hear the hon. member speak as he did, and that the member for Mackay had always maintained in that House that sugar could not be grown in Mackay except by black labour. He (Mr. Jordan) had been in that House for three sessions, and he had known the hon. member for Mackay to speak upon the question many times, and he remembered most distinctly that that hon. member over and over again stated that small proprietary farmers at Mackay were growing sugar profitably, chiefly by their own labour and the labour of their families. What the hon. member had said that night was perfectly consistent with what he had said over and over again. The hon. member for Mackay had said that there were vast tracts in the North that could be profitably cultivated in the growth of sugar, coffee, and other tropical and semi-tropical productions; but he was satisfied that those could not be produced profitably, except by some description of cheap labour. He (Mr. Jordan) thought so too; but he held that the cheapest labour they could have was the labour of the small proprietary farmer assisted by his family. In countries where the land was cheap and labour was dear, farming could only be profitably prosecuted by those who held their own land and did their own work. He was more than pleased to find that the Premier had propounded a scheme at once so simple and intelligent—a scheme that he believed would work admirably—and he was fully confirmed in that conviction by listening to the Premier, and after hearing what had been said by the hon. member for Mackay. That hon. member had said that the planters in that locality were favourable to it, if only on this ground—that by that means they would be able to sell their large estates to a number of small proprietary farmers. If that were the case, they must be satisfied that the scheme was likely to be a success, otherwise they would not believe that the establishment of two or three mills would enable them to sell their large estates to small farmers. He hailed that proposition with the greatest delight, because he believed it would work precisely in the way the hon. member for Mackay said it would work. No. hon. member knew as much about Mackay and planting up there as that hon. member did; and he believed in cheap labour, but not in the sense that the junior member for Maryborough believed in it. He (Mr. Jordan) believed in white labour—the cheapest of all the labour they could have—the labour of men doing their own work on their own land. He was satisfied that if that scheme was carried out there would be a large quantity of land up there, cultivated by farmers themselves. That was what he wanted to see. He did not join with the hon. member for Mackay in the statement he made that the cheap German labour the Government tried to introduce had proved a failure. He had never heard that the Government proposed to introduce cheap German labour. What they had proposed to introduce was reliable labour. It had been asserted again and again that, if private arrangements were made, a sufficient number of the farming classes from Europe and Great Britain would be glad to come out under an indenture for two years at £40 a year with the addition of their rations. That had not proved a failure. They knew that the Germans were not disposed to come, but large numbers of their own countrymen would be willing to come. The description of settlement it was now proposed to assist was to give farmers just

what they were asking for themselves. He understood that the scheme before them was their own scheme—a scheme which they themselves propounded to the Government. They had addressed the Premier, expressing their desire for the establishment of some large mills by the Government, as they themselves had not the means and the large owners were not willing to start mills for the benefit of small growers. They professed their willingness to mortgage all their property to sustain that system, and he (Mr. Jordan) was not afraid that the farmers would not pay. Some years ago he tried sugar-planting, and he employed white labour exclusively. The seasons were severe, and he gave up planting, as it did not suit his purpose. He kept his property, though he did not make any money out of sugar-growing—and nobody lost anything by him—but he made money by cutting up his land into small farms. He sold most of his land, just as the planters of Mackay were expected to sell theirs, to the farmers. That was ten years ago; and not one of the men to whom he sold those farms—he gave them long credit—had failed in paying the interest to the very day. He was satisfied that the small proprietors at Mackay—

Mr. MOREHEAD: I rise to a point of order. Have we anything to do with the business relations of the hon. member for South Brisbane? Have they anything to do with the question before the Committee?

Mr. MIDGLEY: I think it highly objectionable that the hon. member for South Brisbane—a man of his years and experience—should be insulted in this way on account of a passing digression.

Mr. MOREHEAD: Speaking to the point of order, and giving due deference to the member for Fassifern, who is, of course, an old member, and, I suppose, an intelligent one, I think I have a perfect right to call your attention, Mr. Fraser, to the fact that the hon. member for South Brisbane was digressing from the question before the Committee. The contention of the hon. member for Fassifern is that the hon. member for South Brisbane should be allowed to go on because he is an old member and an old man, but that makes the offence all the more rank.

Mr. BROOKES: The hon. member for Balonne—

Mr. MOREHEAD: Order!

Mr. BROOKES: I am speaking to a point of order. The hon. member for Balonne says that the hon. member for South Brisbane is not speaking to the question. It is perfectly scandalous that the hon. member for South Brisbane should be interrupted in this way.

Mr. MOREHEAD: Order!

Mr. BROOKES: He is trying to interrupt me now. I ask your protection, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. MOREHEAD: I ask your ruling, Mr. Fraser, as to whether the junior member for North Brisbane—older than the senior member, as far as years are concerned, but not as far as intelligence is concerned—is in order?

Mr. BROOKES: I only want to point out that the hon. member for South Brisbane is in order, and that the hon. member for Balonne is in disorder.

Mr. MOREHEAD: I must ask—

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Chair!

The CHAIRMAN: It is quite competent for the hon. member for North Brisbane to discuss the point of order. My ruling has been asked as to whether the hon. member for South Brisbane was in order. The question before the Committee includes the question of white labour for sugar-growing.

Mr. MOREHEAD: That is not the question. The question before the Committee is the vote for central sugar-mills.

Mr. BROOKES: Hold your noise!

Mr. MOREHEAD: I think I heard an interjection—"Hold your noise"—from the junior member for North Brisbane. That was evidently addressed to the Chairman, and I point out to you, Mr. Fraser, that it is not in accordance with the system that existed here, at any rate, before the last occasion on which that hon. gentleman became a member. I ask you whether the hon. junior member for North Brisbane was justified in using such language to you, when he asked you to hold your noise?

Mr. ANNEAR: I have been labouring under a mistake, Mr. Fraser. You stated that the question was whether sugar could be made either by black or white labour. I did not take that to be the question at all. I find that I have been addressing myself to the wrong question, if that is the case; I take the question to be whether we shall grant a sum of money to erect central mills in this colony.

Mr. MOREHEAD: Hear, hear!

Mr. JORDAN: The great objection advanced by one of the greatest speakers who addressed the Committee to-night—forcibly and intelligently—

Mr. MOREHEAD: I rise to a point of order, Mr. Fraser. Will you again define to this Committee what is the point under discussion?

The PREMIER: That is no point of order.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Order!

Mr. MOREHEAD: I am not going to be roared down or belowed down. I would like to know from you, Mr. Fraser, what is the point of discussion before the Committee, as you have made one statement which, I am afraid, is not in accordance with the fact?

The CHAIRMAN: The question is "Loans in aid of establishment of central sugar-mills," and, in connection with that, the question of growing sugar by white labour has been introduced.

Mr. STEVENSON: You told us just now, Mr. Fraser, that the question was, growing sugar by white labour.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Chair!

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member for South Brisbane was dealing with the possibility of growing sugar with white labour. I did not say that was the question before the Committee.

Mr. STEVENSON: That is not—

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Chair!

Mr. STEVENSON: Not even the Premier can put me down. I understood you to say that the question was whether sugar could be grown by white labour? I now understand you to say it is not so.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Chair!

The CHAIRMAN: As I stated before, the question is "Loans in aid of establishment of central sugar-mills." In connection with that, members on both sides of the Committee have discussed the question of white labour, and the hon. member for South Brisbane was dealing with that part of the question when he was interrupted.

Mr. STEVENSON: I am satisfied with that.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Order!

The PREMIER: The hon. member, Mr. Jordan, is in possession of the Chair.

Mr. STEVENSON: A point of order has been raised, and any hon. member has a right to discuss it. I say that the hon. member for Maryborough, Mr. Annear, along with myself understood—

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Chair!

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member for South Brisbane is in possession of the Chair.

Mr. STEVENSON: I say that the hon. member—

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Chair!

The PREMIER: The Chairman is on his feet.

The CHAIRMAN: If the hon. member wishes to make an explanation it is competent for him to do so.

Mr. STEVENSON: I wish to explain that I am satisfied with your explanation, Mr. Fraser. You got up at first and said the question was whether sugar could be grown by white labour. The hon. member for Maryborough disagreed with you; and I also say that the question is "Loans in aid of central mills." I am perfectly satisfied.

Mr. BROOKES: Well, sit down, then.

Mr. MOREHEAD: I rise to a point of order. I am not perfectly satisfied. It is evident that you put a wrong issue before the Committee.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Order!

The PREMIER: I rise to a point of order. Will you please maintain your authority, Mr. Fraser? I rise to a point of order.

Mr. MOREHEAD: I am speaking to a point of order.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Chair!

The CHAIRMAN: The Premier rose to a point of order.

Mr. MOREHEAD: I rose to a point of order before the Premier.

The PREMIER: I rose to a point of order. The hon. member interrupted the hon. member for South Brisbane.

Mr. MOREHEAD: I shall insist upon my right, although I am not as important a member of the community as the Premier. I am a member—

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Order! Chair!

Mr. MOREHEAD: I am a member of this House, and I shall insist upon my right to be heard.

Mr. BROOKES: Order! Chair!

Mr. MOREHEAD: The hon. member can yell "Order!"

Mr. BROOKES: All right; I will keep it up all night.

Mr. MOREHEAD: I insist upon my point of order. That has precedence over every other question.

Mr. BROOKES: Order! Chair!

Mr. MOREHEAD: I intend to have the point of order settled.

The CHAIRMAN: What is the point of order?

Mr. MOREHEAD: The point of order is that you have raised a point now which you did not raise on a previous occasion. You put an issue before this Committee which was not before it. I therefore move that you leave the chair and refer the matter to the Speaker.

Question put and negatived.

Mr. JORDAN said he was remarking that the chief objection that had been advanced against the proposal before the Committee was that, if the farmers outran the constable, the Govern-

ment would not dare to foreclose on their mortgages. In speaking on that point, he said there was no danger of that, and was endeavouring to illustrate his contention by showing that as far as his experience went the small farmers in the locality in which he lived had always paid their liabilities to the last penny. He did not think that was out of order. That was a great point raised by the hon. member for Mulgrave. He (Mr. Jordan) was not at all afraid that that would be the result. He believed the scheme would be a perfect success. The hon. member for Mackay had assured the Committee that there was a large number of farmers in the North who would take advantage of the proposal, and that a great many homesteads had been taken up during the last few years around Mackay. He (Mr. Jordan) believed it would lead to the establishment of many great central sugar-mills. In order to compete successfully with other mills it would be necessary to have costly mills. Farmers could not provide those themselves; few persons would lend them the money required for that purpose; but he believed that if a beginning were made in the way proposed in the establishment of central sugar-mills it would result in the settlement in the North of a large number of proprietary farmers. That was the opinion of the hon. member for Mackay. Judging from his speech, the hon. gentleman was assured of the success of the scheme, and no one could doubt that he was sincere when he stated that he believed the planters would be satisfied with the enterprise. But the hon. member went even further, and believed with the Premier that it would be the solution of the great black labour difficulty. He (Mr. Jordan) was satisfied that it would be. If it was, a boon would be conferred upon the colony by the Premier which would be superior to any advantage the colony had derived from the labours of any statesman since the colony began. Unhappily, a system of black labour had grown up in connection with that industry. He did not think it was necessary, but it existed. It was unfortunate that it was so, and it had given rise to immense difficulties; it had disgraced the colony in the eyes of the civilised world, and atrocities had been committed in connection with it which they all regretted. That proposal would result in the establishment of a large system of proprietary farmers in the North, and he had been delighted beyond measure to hear the speech of the hon. member for Mackay. The scheme would not cost the colony a great deal of money; he believed it would not cost the colony anything at all, because all the farmers would pay their loans; and it would, as he had said, probably lead to a solution of the great black labour difficulty.

Mr. MIDGLEY said that the proposal before the Committee introduced an entirely new and, he could not help thinking, objectionable feature into the business of the Government. He was quite satisfied in his own mind that the Government had come to the conclusion, after careful consideration, that that scheme would lead to a gradual solution of the difficulties which were now experienced in connection with sugar-growing. He believed it would be found that in putting it into operation they would create more serious difficulties than were likely to be solved by it. He was not going to be carried away upon that occasion, nor, he trusted, on any other occasion, by the cry of white or black labour. He thought that cry was very apt to blind the judgment and prejudice the minds of hon. members when discussing those matters. He objected to the proposal, because it introduced into their social and business life an element of invidious favouritism. It was proposed to do for the sugar-growers what they

did not propose to do for any other industrial class in the community; and, because it was invidious in that sense, he believed it to be objectionable. If one thing surprised him more than the introduction of that scheme by the Government, it was the speech of the hon. member for Mackay. Of course they knew that he, like the rest of them, sometimes spoke through the House to his constituents. The hon. gentleman knew that in the great day of accounts it was not the few planters he had to depend upon in Mackay for his return, but that he had a much larger constituency. He (Mr. Midgley) was perfectly sure in his own mind that the hon. member for Mackay did not believe the scheme would be a success. He (Mr. Midgley) did not see how it could be a success. The very conditions which—he was going to say had been imposed by the leader of the Opposition—but which had been suggested by the leader of the Opposition, and adopted by the Premier, would inevitably result in failure. The central mills which it was proposed to establish would have to compete with mills which had the advantage, however much hon. members might decry it, of cheap coloured labour, and the Committee was asked to believe that those central mills could successfully do their work and compete with others which had coloured labour in the field, and in some branches of the mill, while the mills of the Government would be entirely deprived of all kinds of coloured labour, and would therefore be placed at a disadvantage and handicapped from the very beginning. He knew perfectly well that the profits from sugar-growing were not so great that anyone engaging in it could afford to be handicapped. The passing of that vote would result in the creation of a new department. He looked with apprehension on the creation of any department that was to have about it anything in the shape of an engineer. This was such a country for engineers that if the vote was carried there would be a chief engineer of the central sugar-mills, a superintending engineer of the central sugar-mills, and an inspecting engineer of the central sugar-mills, and no end of expense on the unremunerative work of Government supervision in connection with those establishments. He would like to have information as to how a number of the men concerned would be able to give mortgages when they would have none to give and nothing they could mortgage. They must expect that land would be taken up in those districts under the new Land Act, and the men so taking up land would have no title-deeds or documents to show, transfer, or mortgage. Those men would therefore be placed at a disadvantage as compared with those who had been able to secure their deeds. But the proposal altogether was a retrograde movement. It was going back to the system of Government fostering and of Government interference in matters that ought to be left to private speculation and enterprise. It was an indication of weakness, and not an indication of strength. It was a going back; not a going forward. It was an indication not of confidence in the resources, enterprise, and industry of the people, but an indication that Parliament apprehended weakness and disaster. The chief objection he had to the proposal was that it gave an opportunity for the introduction of what might at first be a small, but what would ultimately be a large, amount of political influence—of an influence that would not only be brought to bear by the Government of the day on people they might be lending money to, but also on people they might be exacting money from, and an influence of patronism or patronage that would be exercised very detrimentally both at the

beginning and at the end of the chapter. At the time of the last elections it was stated—he was not sure that he had not stated it himself more than once—that the Queensland National Bank was the most dangerous institution in Queensland, and that there were men in connection with the Government who, because they had control of monetary affairs, were a menace and danger to the liberty of many of the electors of the colony. The circumstance that members of the Government had control of financial institutions was frequently deprecated. But here the Government were now establishing a more immediate control over the private affairs of those who might happen to come into their hands. Just fancy the leader of the Opposition coming into power a few years hence and having a lot of those central sugar-mills to deal with! What might they not expect from a man of his character—a man whom they knew would stick at nothing! Fancy the ruinous power he would exercise in regard to those matters! But he (Mr. Midgley) did not believe the scheme was practicable, or that it would in any way prove a solution of the labour difficulty. He had not the measure of boldness of the hon. member for Maryborough in speaking on the subject of labour in the North, but he did not think the difficulty would be solved by the scheme.

Mr. MOREHEAD said that the hon. member for Fassifern had acted in a way unworthy of himself—and that was not saying very much—when he made an attack on the leader of the Opposition, who was then absent from the Chamber.

Mr. MIDGLEY : That was purely in jest!

Mr. MOREHEAD said the difference between the hon. member's seriousness and his jest was not so marked as one could tell the one from the the other. If the hon. member would in future notify to hon. members, either by hanging out a flag or by telling them plainly, when he was to be sarcastic or funny, they would then be able to weigh the words that might fall from him. At the same time he (Mr. Morehead) fully endorsed the sentiments of that hon. member in regard to the question at issue. Every word he had said in that respect was absolutely correct. If the scheme was carried it would not only be a trouble to the existing Ministry but a great evil to the country, and a trouble to any Ministry that might come after. He certainly intended to do all he could to prevent such a vote from being passed. He did not wish in any way to injure the sugar industry, but would like to see it in every way honestly helped by the Government. He did not think, however, that loans in aid of the establishment of central sugar-mills would help at all in the direction the Premier might honestly intend that they should assist. He did not wish to be an obstructionist, at any rate, not at the present period of the session. He therefore did not wish to move a motion, which he would be compelled to do if the Premier did not see his way to withdraw the vote. If the Premier did not withdraw the vote he (Mr. Morehead) and some other members would have to see that it did not pass through at all.

The PREMIER said that of course the hon. member who had just sat down did not hold himself as owing allegiance to any leader in the Committee; he considered himself a free lance. He ought, however, to remember that there was an agreement or understanding between both sides that they should get through with the Estimates that night. Of course it was in the power of the hon. member to prevent that being done and to put both Houses to considerable inconvenience. There was no use appealing to the hon. member's sense of what was fit and right. He (the Premier) would therefore only

call his attention to the fact that he did not apparently consider himself bound by any understanding arrived at by both sides of the Committee.

Mr. MOREHEAD said the Premier could not surely be in earnest in saying that he or any other member was bound to vote for the Estimates as they stood. What was done in respect to the last estimate? On a division it was reduced from £100,000 to £50,000. The Premier said that an agreement had been entered into by both sides of the House. He (Mr. Morehead) denied that there was any agreement between both sides that £50,000 should be voted for central sugar-mills. He and other hon. members were prepared to fight the estimate shilling by shilling, as it covered a scheme the introduction of which would be most disastrous to the colony. There was no knowing where it would end. Why should the sugar industry be bolstered up in that way any more than any other industry in the colony? Why should not the mining industry be bolstered up in the same way? It certainly was an industry that had been more productive than any other within the last few years. Would the Minister for Works say how much it or the pastoral, or the agricultural industry, had been bolstered up by the State? If that question was answered satisfactorily he would cease his opposition and agree with the opinion of the Minister for Works that equal justice had been done to all. Until that was done, however—until fair play was given to all the industries—he would object to anything being done in the direction of bolstering up the sugar industry, which had been already very fairly helped in days gone by, but to which it was now proposed to give an undue advantage over the other industries of the colony.

Mr. BLACK said it was not a question of bolstering up the sugar industry at all. The question at stake was of very much vaster importance than the mere bolstering up of that industry. He maintained, also, that the sugar industry had not been bolstered up in the past. And now they had proposed what he considered to be a most important experiment, which would be the means, if it proved successful, of reconciling two most antagonistic elements in the colony. In order to attain to that result the Government were thoroughly justified in asking the Committee to pass the vote. If the scheme did prove successful it would bring about a revolution in practical agriculture. Whatever his opinions had been in the past he was now convinced that the best thing for the welfare of the colony was that the proposed experiment should be put to a practical test, and no one would be more glad to see that done than the planters in the North themselves. The hon. member for Fassifern seemed to think that those undertaking the experiment would be severely handicapped in the matter of labour—that was, in having to employ white labour—as compared with the labour employed alongside of them. But two points should be taken into consideration in dealing with that question. In the one case there were the Europeans working for themselves and straining every energy to make the experiment a success and to become the owners of the mills. On the other side had to be considered the existing state of the coloured labour market. Under present conditions—indeed, under any conditions—capitalists would not advance money for the erection of central mills, because they held certain views which they considered themselves justified in holding after years of experience. But even were they prepared to advance money for that purpose, the rate of interest would probably be 10 or 12 per cent., per-

haps more; whereas the Government, in carrying out that important experiment, would be able to lend the money on ample security at 5 per cent. That would actually mean in fifteen years the repayment of the purchase money of the loan. Assuming that there might be something in the objection raised by the hon. member for Fassifern about handicapping, the difference between 5 per cent. and 12 per cent. left an ample margin of profit between the two different descriptions of labour. Another objection raised by that hon. member was as to the cost of supervision—that the Government would have to establish an expensive staff in connection with the mill. He had looked carefully through the articles of association, which, he supposed, were only a draft sketched out by the Premier; and he took it that even under them, although the Government would be represented by five nominated shareholders in the association, yet they would have nothing whatever to do, unless necessity should arise for their interference, with the management. He took it that the management was to be left entirely in the hands of the farmers who formed themselves into that co-operative association.

The PREMIER : Hear, hear !

Mr. BLACK : Therefore there was no necessity for an expensive management in connection with the central mill. It had often been suggested that the people at Mackay should cut up their estates and start central mills. He could assure hon. members that the experiment had been tried and had always failed. The only tenants who offered themselves as tenants of the farms were of a description that the planters, he was glad to say, would not accept—Chinamen. Those were the only class who had sufficient money at their disposal to become tenants in connection with the existing estates. One of the most successful attempts at carrying out a purely central mill system in Queensland was at the Marion mill, at Mackay, and only that day he had received letters showing the great success that had attended its operations during the present season. During the last two seasons, he must admit, the results had been unfavourable. The hon. member for Blackall had just asked him if they employed white labour exclusively. They did to a very great extent, but not entirely; they considered that they were justified in taking advantage of any labour that could be legally introduced into the colony. Another reason for asking the Committee to give the proposed project a trial was that they had a class of men who wished to assist the Government in testing that very important question. Had the amount been five times £50,000 it would be well spent if by means of it they could prove that white labour could be profitably employed in tropical agriculture. He had by no means altered his views to which he had always given expression. He had often had to bow to the opinions of the majority of the House, and now he asked those hon. gentlemen who held views which they had so often expressed in opposition to him to come forward, and by their votes assist a number of farmers who were willing to meet them halfway, and put that most important question to a practical issue and test.

Mr. STEVENSON said that as a rule the hon. member for Mackay made very intelligent speeches in the House, but he regretted that he could not say as much for the speech to which the Committee had just listened. Indeed, out of his own mouth he had condemned himself. The hon. member distinctly told them that the project was to be an experiment; how he made it out to be a valuable experiment

he (Mr. Stevenson) was at a loss to know. As the hon. member had put it himself: it was simply shown that the Government were going into a speculation, and how it was their duty to do so he did not know. A more monstrous proposition—a more rotten proposal—he was certain never was submitted to Parliament before; and the Premier knew perfectly well that after crushing out what might have been a most important industry he was now trying to revive it by a thoroughly impracticable proposal. The idea was utterly absurd. At the present time the pastoral interest was at as low an ebb as the sugar industry, and it was just as reasonable for a number of pastoralists to requisition the Government to put up a central wool-shed at a particular corner so that they might take their sheep there and have them shorn, as it was to grant that aid to the sugar industry. One proposal would be quite as just and practicable as the other. In the same way, if water ran short on many of the ruins the pastoral lessees had as much right to come down and ask the Government to find water for them. He said the squatters had just as much right to make that request; and if the vote was granted then there would be no end of demands from other industries. The proposal was the most rotten he had ever heard of, and notwithstanding hon. members were anxious to go to a division, the question was of such importance that those who were opposed to the vote ought to see their way to stop it by whatever means they could.

Mr. ANNEAR said he had asked himself the question whether the millennium had come, and although it had not been answered he supposed it would one day. Both he and the Chairman were good men in their young days and had been taught that at one time the lion would lie down with the lamb, and he thought the time had come that night when they saw the hon. member for South Brisbane (Mr. Jordan) lauding the hon. member for Mackay in the way he had done. The introduction of the motion, if it had done no other good, had brought together those hon. members, and endeared them to one another. Had he been such an able debater and temperate speaker as the hon. member for Fassifern he would have referred to the matter mentioned by him, that if the vote was passed a new department would be created; but he might inform hon. members that lying in his box at the present time were, at least, half-a-dozen letters asking for the billets which would have to be created if the motion passed. Every issue of the *Wide Bay News* that came out contained letters as long as his arm, or as long as the paper would hold, from unsuccessful farmers advocating the establishment of central mills for no other purpose than to find billets for themselves. Well, he was not elected as member for Maryborough to be a billet-seeker for any man. He had never taken that burden upon his shoulders, and he was not going to do it now. He had been told a few minutes ago that he got up for the purpose of advocating the employment of black labour in the growth of sugar, but he had done nothing of the kind. Everybody knew that that was not the question before the Committee. The question was the establishment of central sugar-mills at Mackay by the aid of loans from the Government. Now, he had had a lot to do with the erection of sugar-mills in the colony. The last mill he had had to do with was at Magnolia. He knew the machinery of that mill, and he knew that, although it cost £20,000, it would cost £80,000 for a central mill to carry out the requirements of the farmers at Mackay and to establish a proper system of central mills. He did not think it was the function of the

Government to enter into any such business, and he hoped and felt sure that the Committee would fall in with the sensible views of the hon. member for Fassifern. That hon. gentleman always spoke sensibly, and he had made the most practical speech on the subject that had been made that night. He did not wish to occupy the time of the Committee, but he wished to point out that the Chairman had stated, when the matter was brought before his notice, that the question was whether sugar should be grown by white or black labour. That was not the question at all, but the question, as he had said before, was the establishment of central mills. Many years ago when sugar was in its infancy in Maryborough he was a very anti-kanaka man, but experience had taught him that he had made a mistake, and he did not care whether kanakas or any other class of coloured labour were employed, as sugar-growing could not be successfully carried on without the aid of cheap and reliable labour. His hon. colleague could bear him out when he said that on the Mary River at the present time there were many farmers growing sugar. They employed expired Polynesians, and had got the cheapest labour that it was possible to procure. They grew their cane, and got it crushed at the central mill at Yengarie, and were making a most successful living. The same thing applied to the farmers around Bundaberg, and he failed to see why any particular portion of the colony should be fostered at the expense of the rest of the colony. It had been clearly shown that the sugar industry could be carried on without the aid of the State, and when that was the case, and sugar growers could give ample security, he saw no reason why the Government should come to their assistance. If he could give security—and he wished he was in a position to do so—he could go to any of the financial institutions in Brisbane and get the money he required. When that was the case, why should they interfere with the monetary institutions of the colony? The hon. member for Darling Downs was very much interested in starting a new bank in Brisbane, and was it right that the Government should compete with and crush that institution before it was fairly launched into existence? He recognised the ability of the Premier, but he thought that on the present occasion he and his colleagues had made a mistake. The Premier was sacrificing a great amount of money in occupying the position he did. Had he not been Premier of the colony when the Darra railway accidents occurred, his fees in those cases would have come to £2,400. The present was a question in which every person was interested, apart from party or politics, and it would be a great mistake for the Government of the colony to enter into a speculation, competing with the monetary institutions they had and with the one that the hon. member for Darling Downs and many others were going to launch—the Royal Bank of Queensland. He had many documents by him, and all said—“The Government are going to start those factories, and you, as member for Maryborough, knowing something about the sugar industry, should get us billets.” The hon. member for Cook and other gentlemen representing districts where sugar was grown would be inundated next week with the same kind of applications.

Mr. MOREHEAD said he sincerely hoped that the hon. gentleman was wrong in his last sentence, and that he would make one who would insist upon that sum being thrown out of the Estimates. Where, in the name of common sense, would those loans end—loans from the Government to be secured in a peculiar manner? Why should they stop at the sugar industry? Why should not the mining industry ask for, and receive, loans?

Mr. FOXTON: The mining industry does receive them.

Mr. MOREHEAD said it did not, and the hon. member for Carnarvon ought to know it. Of course he did not know what the hon. gentleman's constituency might receive, as he supported the Government. But outside of the hon. gentleman's constituency that support was not given by the Government. Even if they had gone down 600 feet the loan would be refused. The Government had done all they could to hamper and destroy the sugar industry; and now, when there was an outcry, and they had found, as was predicted by that side of the Committee, that immense damage was being done to the country, the Government proposed that there should be loans in aid of central sugar-mills. Holding the idea he did, that the sugar industry was one of the most material industries of the colony, he distinctly objected to any such amounts being voted by the Committee. It would simply be a vote on account. If it was a definite vote there might be something to be said in favour of it; but very little. It would probably be used as a bribery vote. They had had no explanation from the Premier as to where those central mills were to be erected, except one, which was to be at Mackay, and he was sorry to say that that had apparently secured the consent and advocacy of the hon. member for Mackay. He was prepared to oppose the vote to the bitter end. It was increasing the protection that had already been given to the sugar industry; when he said "protection" of course he referred to the fact that there had been no excise duty charged upon sugar. Great damage had been done to the sugar-planters by the party now in power, and when trouble arose on the labour question, the Government brought in that vote as a sop to that industry. The vote as it stood could have no other meaning. It had not been attempted to be pointed out what the result would be; they were simply asked to vote £50,000 to be wasted, so far as they could judge. He was astonished that the Government should come in and take up the position that, under favourable circumstances, capitalists would take up. He maintained that it was only another bribery vote on the part of the Government, and it was a monstrous and disgraceful proposition. Why should they not ask for a crushing machine to be erected at Mount Morgan, or a loan in aid of a jam factory for the benefit of the colony, or for silos to be made to preserve their stock? It was truly a paternal Government, but paternal only where they saw an injustice had been done and an outcry had been raised. It was only when they were "throttled" as they were now, and as they would be still more "throttled" when the "Forest King" debate came on, that they placed those amounts on the Estimates. They tried to remedy the evil they had done by taxing the people of the colony. The vote was not defined by an Act of Parliament, but they simply thought they would hoodwink the sugar planters and the public by saying they had placed £50,000 on the Estimates for central sugar mills. He felt very glad that the time of the session was limited; he wished he could hope that the time of the Parliament was limited also, and that an opportunity had arrived by which they could go to the country. Then, if the hon. gentleman came back he could get another five years, or, more probably, seven years. He would very much like the question to be tested. He would move that the sum of £50,000 be reduced by the sum of £49,999 19s. 11d. He might tell the hon. the Premier that he intended to persevere in his obstruction, even if he stood alone.

Mr. GRIMES said he did not intend to say much, lest he should be considered to be assisting the hon. member for Balonne in his stonewalling. He had not risen earlier because he had not had an earlier opportunity of seeing the documents laid on the table in connection with the matter. He had been amused by the contradictory views of hon. members with regard to the scheme. One hon. member said it would be a failure, because sugar could not be grown with white labour, but it was well known that the difficulty with the small farmers was not in growing the cane, but in getting it manufactured into sugar afterwards. They had proved that they could grow the cane almost as cheaply as it could be grown on the largest plantations with black labour. They had had instances during the past two or three years where a number of small farmers had joined into a co-operative society and erected a mill, and up till the last season or two those mills had done very well. They had been falling back for one or two reasons. The low price of sugar had made an alteration in the demand for samples, so that even the working man would take nothing but purely white sugar; and consequently only the larger mills with the best machinery could manufacture the sugar that commanded a ready sale. There was a difficulty in getting capitalists to establish central mills, because they could not depend upon getting an adequate and constant supply of cane for a large mill; and, as the business was risky, they would want a large percentage for their money. It would be very different with the Government. Everyone who had his cane crushed at the mill would be supposed to be a shareholder, and therefore would be interested in keeping the mill afloat; and the farmers had also to enter into obligations to grow a certain quantity of cane for the mill. He could not see why the mills should be a failure. If the present depression continued it might endanger the scheme; but there was every reason to anticipate a change in the sugar market, and a slight rise would put it in the power of the small farmers to grow cane at a remunerative price. Some hon. members said the central mills could not pay in competition with the large plantation proprietors, who had cheap and reliable labour; but he considered that when a farmer worked his plantation with members of his own family, or when several brothers joined together to work a plantation, they had cheap and reliable labour enough. The fact of the large plantations being so extensive was one cause why the proprietors were ruined. The capitalists thought that if ten men could grow cane profitably there was no reason why they should not employ 20, or 100, or 500, and get a profit on each one's labour. That looked very well in theory, but in practice it was a failure. So many hands cut down the profits, and they found that while the larger establishments went to the wall the smaller ones could carry on the cultivation and manufacture at a profit. Some hon. members objected to the motion as a proposition to bolster up one industry at the expense of the others; but if the Government saw that the encouragement of the cultivation of sugar would be such a grand thing for the colony—if it would help them to dispose of their lands in a satisfactory way, and also encourage a large population to settle—then the scheme was worth trying. Even if they lost the £50,000 they would have the satisfaction of having tried the central mill system. He did not think it likely that they would lose the £50,000 if the Government were cautious in seeing into whose hands they placed that money, and that it was applied to assist those who were really going into the cultivation of sugar.

by white labour. The advantages the colony would receive from that expenditure of money would be enormous. He could have made other points had time allowed. He intended to support the Government on that vote.

Question—That one penny only be granted—put, and the Committee divided :—

AYES, 17.

Sir T. Mellwraith, Messrs. Archer, Chubb, Nelson, Lumley Hill, Norton, Stevenson, Morehead, Palmer, Kates, Hissner, Annear, Jessop, Midgley, Campbell, Donaldson, and Horwitz.

NOES, 24.

Messrs. Dickson, Griffith, Sheridan, Isambert, Dutton, Miles, Brookes, Aland, Groom, Rutledge, Jordan, White, Buckland, Higson, Wakenfield, Kellett, Smyth, Bailey, Grimes, McMaster, Black, Moreton, Foxton, and Bulcock.

Question resolved in the negative.

Original question put.

Mr. MOREHEAD said he was going to move another amendment, for reasons that would be patent to every member of the Committee. The last division taken showed that there were 17 against 24. Six of the twenty-four who voted against the amendment proposed by himself were Ministers of the Crown, and therefore bound to support the vote. Another hon. member who supported it was supposed to belong to no party, and that was the Speaker. The Minister for Works had protested against the Speaker taking part in a division on a party question; but he did not protest now against the Speaker registering his vote on a question of considerably more importance than that upon which the Minister for Works raised his objection. He therefore moved that the item be reduced by the sum of £49,999 19s. 10d. A Scotchman was supposed to be able to do a great deal with twopence, and he would recommend that its expenditure be entrusted to the junior member for Fortitude Valley.

Mr. ANNEAR said he hoped the Premier would tell the Committee where the £50,000 would be expended. Was Mackay to be the favoured place? Or would a portion be spent at Maryborough, a portion at Bundaberg, a portion at Cairns, a portion at the Herbert River, and so on, in all the places where sugar was grown in the colony? Hon. members were there to do their duty to their constituents, and he wished particularly to do his duty to his constituents. The people on the Mary, who were successful sugar-growers, were anxious to know where the money was to be expended. There were mills on the Mary River; the people of Maryborough were able to make them; and the people of the river were able to pay for them without coming to the State for subsidies. He believed that a new start was about to be given to the sugar industry. They knew very well that the manufacture of sugar from beetroot, if not annihilated, was going in that direction.

Mr. ISAMBERT: No fear!

Mr. ANNEAR said his friend the member for Rosewood ought to know that what he had stated was a fact. The hon. member read the papers more than he (Mr. Annear) did, and could read more languages. No person had ever done him more favour than that hon. member, who wrote him up in his newspaper. His education was limited, and he could only read a few words which appeared very frequently in it—Herr Annear, or Herr von Annear—but he had been told by persons who understood the language that the articles written by the hon. member for Rosewood some time ago were very much in his favour, and he did not wish to detract from the friendship that hon. gentleman had exhibited towards him on the occasion to which

he referred. Coming back to the question, he would ask whether the people of the Mary River were to have a share of the £50,000? They did not want State aid, but if there was to be a general dip—if there was to be a scramble—were they to have a portion of that scramble?

The PREMIER said the sum was put on the Estimates with a view of trying an experiment in the tropical parts of the colony. He was sure that the representatives of agricultural districts, and of towns depending on agriculture in the Southern parts of the colony, would be willing to allow the experiment to be tried in the tropical parts of the colony.

Mr. MOREHEAD said that, as a taxpayer, he distinctly objected, at the present juncture of affairs, to being experimentalised upon to the extent of £50,000; and he was not sure that, if the question were put to the constituents of the hon. member for North Brisbane, they would not object also. Why should the people of Brisbane be taxed to pay the interest on that £50,000? A more absurd proposal had never been brought before that Committee. It was simply an attempt to bolster up an industry which the Premier had done all he could to destroy. That was the position in which the cruel irony of fate had landed the Premier. Of course the hon. gentleman was backed up by his followers; they would back him in anything, no matter what card he might play or what legislation he might introduce; they would drive him in that direction in which the beggar was supposed to be driven when he was put on horseback. No doubt as the years rolled by the hon. gentleman would be made a C.M.G. The hon. gentleman was going to be backed by the Press in the stern stand he had taken in that matter; he had become a pressman, a large shareholder in the *Telegraph*, and would be able to forge thunderbolts, which would be thrown upon them from the hands of Jove and annihilate them. But they had stood the *Telegraph* in the past and would stand it in the future. They had now a pressman at the head of the Government.

Mr. MIDGLEY said he rose to a point of order, which was raised by the hon. member himself that evening. Was he discussing the question before the Committee?

Mr. MOREHEAD: Perhaps the hon. gentleman will allow—

Mr. MIDGLEY: I ask your ruling, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN said the hon. member for Balonne was certainly going outside the question before the Committee.

Mr. MOREHEAD said that perhaps he would be allowed to point out what his argument tended to. The hon. gentleman in charge of that estimate had become connected with the second journal of the colony, and might have the means of putting that matter before the public, whose servants hon. members were, in such a way as it would not be put by any other hon. member of that Committee. He fully intended to have brought his reasoning round to that point, had he not been interrupted by the hon. member for Fassifern. But he not only complained of the Premier being connected with that journal, but also of other members of the Government. Coming now to the question of the central sugar-mills he certainly thought the whole of the arguments advanced by members on both sides of the Committee showed the absurdity and the danger of bringing forward that vote. Where would it stop? He believed the reason it had been brought forward was that the Government were afraid of the hon. member for Mackay, and his scathing eloquence and rhetoric,

and wished to buy him over by that £50,000. The Premier had better give up that vote unless he wanted the session to drag on until February. An extraordinary thing happened hundreds of years ago. The facts were these: A certain man fell among thieves and was left on the roadside robbed and wounded. A good Samaritan, whom they might suppose was the Premier, came by and took up the wounded man, whom they might consider was the sugar-planter, and conducted him to a public-house—if there was such an institution then. The Samaritan very kindly left 2d. with the publican, and leaving a card—the story did not say that it was his own card, so it might have been that of somebody else—said if there was any more bother with the man he would call back and pay. Whether he did call back or not he (Mr. Morehead) did not know. Well, that was a picture of the Premier and the sugar-planter; and they would be carrying out the policy of the former if they now reduced the vote to 2d. He would move the reduction accordingly.

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH said he desired to ask before going to a division, if the Premier would allow the debate to be adjourned until next day. He was quite sure that next day they would return to the discussion with fresh minds and better tempers.

Question—That the vote be reduced to 2d.—put, and the Committee divided:—

AYES, 14.

Sir T. McIlwraith, Messrs. Morehead, Archer, Chubb, Norton, Stevenson, Lissner, Annear, Palmer, Kates, Jessop, Campbell, Donaldson, and Horwitz.

NOES, 24.

Messrs. Griffith, Dickson, Moreton, Sheridan, Dutton, Brookes, Foxton, Rutledge, Jordan, Isambert, White, Buckland, Bulcock, Wakefield, McMaster, Grimes, Kellett, Smyth, Higson, Midgley, Miles, Aland, Bailey, and Black.

Question resolved in the negative.

The COLONIAL TREASURER said that as it was very evident that no further progress was likely to be made that evening in Supply, and in order that the discussion might be carried on in a calmer frame of mind, he would move that the Chairman leave the chair, report progress, and obtain leave to sit again at a later hour of the day.

Question put and passed.

MESSAGES FROM THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

The SPEAKER informed the House that he had received messages from the Legislative Council to the effect that the Council agreed to the amendment proposed by the Legislative Assembly in clause 115 of the Licensing Bill; that the Hon. P. Macpherson and the Hon. A. Raff had been appointed members of the Joint Library Committee in place of the Hon. G. King and the Hon. T. L. Murray-Prior; and returning the South Brisbane Gas and Light Company Bill without amendment.

ADJOURNMENT.

The PREMIER, in moving the adjournment of the House, said that one or two obvious errors had been discovered in the Licensing Bill, which could only be amended on a message from the Governor. On the message being received that would be the first business for to-morrow. It was afterwards proposed to proceed with Supply, and then an opportunity would be given to the hon. member for Fassifern to bring forward his motion with respect to the "Forest King."

The HON. SIR T. McILWRAITH asked whether, in the event of Supply not being finished to-morrow, the Premier would fix Friday or Tuesday for the debate on the "Forest King" case?

The PREMIER said that as soon as Supply was finished he would give the hon. member an opportunity of bringing forward his motion.

Mr. MOREHEAD asked whether the Government intended to proceed with the vote of £50,000 for the establishment of a central sugar-mill at Mackay? If they did, they might reckon upon the House being kept together for at least another fortnight.

Mr. STEVENSON said he hoped the Premier would give some indication as to what the Government intended to do with regard to the subject mentioned by the hon. member for Balonne. If the Government intended to proceed with it in order to block the "Forest King" debate they would find themselves mistaken.

Question put and passed.

The House adjourned at half-past 12 o'clock.