Queensland

Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 1896

Electronic reproduction of original hardcopy

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 6 OCTOBER, 1896.

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

CUSTOMS DUTIES BILL—MERCANTILE AMENDMENT BILL.

ROYAL ASSENT.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of messages from the Governor, intimating that His Excellency had assented to these Bills.

LAND BILL.

SECOND READING—RESUMPTION OF DEBATE.

Mr. BELL: I have been struck during the progress of this debate by the chorus of approval which has heralded the speech delivered by the hon. gentleman in charge of the measure. I have been struck by the desire of hon. members on the other side as remarkably as by hon. members upon this side that this measure should be treated from a non-party point of view. I regard the expression of that desire as a distinct avowal of approval of the measure, for if in the whole history of legislation in Australia there is one subject that has been more inherently a partisan subject than another it is the question of land legislation; and when we find a body of hon. members who are avowedly antagonistic to the Government expressing a desire that a very important proposal of land legislation, which comes from the Government, should be treated from a non-party point of view, it is an incident on which the Government may congratulate themselves, and at which the Secretary for Lands may feel some satisfaction. The hon. member at the head of the other side expressed his disappointment that the Government had not brought this Bill in at an earlier stage of the session. If the Government since the 18th June had been indolent in their legislation, and if we had not been engaged in considering measures of public importance and convenience, there might

have been something in that charge; but when we recollect that since the session opened we have been occupied in discussing business which, if not of the first importance, has at least been of a character that consulted the public convenience, I do not think that charge can fairly be laid at the door of the Treasury bench. In New South Wales, where I believe Parliament has been sitting for quite as long a period as we have, they have not yet introduced their most important land legislation of the session. It was only last week that Mr. Carruthers, their Land Minister, expressed a hope that before many days were over he would be able to present to the House an important measure of land consolidation. Yet that colony is held up to us—and I admit that they often deserve it—as an example in the matter of land legislation. The hon. member for Bundaberg made another charge against the Government. He said that they have done nothing to bring about the closer settlement of the lands of the colony; and he approached the consideration of the Bill biassed by the belief that the gentlemen who are responsible for the introduction of this Bill have not in their past political career done anything to recommend them as the parents of a measure aiming at the closer settlement of our lands. I differ from the hon. member. I think that no body of men who have administered the affairs of this colony have got a better record in that direction than the gentlemen now sitting on the Treasury bench. If we look back over the record of this Government—which may be said to date from 1890, if not from an earlier period—we shall find that they have introduced measures that have absolutely more closely settled the lands. They have not only done that, but, although they are supposed to be a Conservative Government, they have not hesitated to go outside what are considered the orthodox lines of political principles in their earnest desire to settle people upon the land. This Government passed the Co-operative Communities Land Settlement Act, the principles of which, I believe, were not particularly attractive to the men who introduced it; but, at all events, it was a sincere attempt, a novel attempt, and I am sorry to say an unsuccessful attempt, to settle people upon the land. They also passed a much more important and a much more successful measure—the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act. Any man who is at all inclined to criticise the Government impartially must give them the greatest credit for introducing the principle of land purchase into Queensland. I observe that in New South Wales the Land Minister only the other day introduced a Bill which, if not exactly on the same lines, at all events is the same in principle as our Act. In addition to that this Government have passed the Sugar Works Guarantee Act under which the large sugar estates are being split up and converted into a number of smaller farms, and I regard that as an earnest and a successful attempt to settle people on the land. Considering that these three measures have emanated from the Treasury bench, it does not seem to me a fair charge to urge against the Government that they have nothing to recommend them as a body of men who have endeavoured to promote land settlement. I should like to know where in this or in any other of the colonies you will find a body of men who have made more successful endeavours to settle people upon the land. I I know it was quoted triumphantly the other night that Mr. Carruthers, the Land Minister of New South Wales, settled 2,500 farmers upon the lands since his Land Bill of 1894. I was in Sydney when that statement appeared in the Press, and I made some inquiries in a locality where one very often gets some keen criticism of statements in support of Ministerial measures—I went to some members of the Opposition and pointed out to them this article which appeared in the *S. M. Herald.* I was told—whether truthfully or not I do not know, but certainly those who told me believed it to be true—that that article was written by the Minister himself. Instead of being an article criticising in a coldly impartial way the operation of the New South Wales Land Act, it was nothing but an *ex parte* statement proceeding from a remarkably interested source. The hon. member for Bundaberg, in support of his argument that the Government had done nothing towards the closer settlement of people on the lands, quoted the number of acres of land under cultivation in comparison to the population to show the extremely small acreage there was under cultivation. Well, is the mere ratio of acreage to population a test that is worthy the consideration of this House? Is there anything in such an absolutely artificial comparison? I say there is not. To calculate the development of settlement or the progress of the colony by the number of acres under cultivation divided by the population, or *vice versâ*, is an absolutely fallacious test in every way. Do we estimate the work of the session by the number of words which have been uttered during the session? I admit that, if we did, hon. gentlemen opposite would be able to claim that they are very excellent citizens.

Mr. DAWSON: Do you say that they are not excellent citizens?

Mr. BELL: I say some are less excellent than others. But we do no such thing. When we want to estimate the work of a session we look at the statute-book, not at its bulk but at its quality. And if you apply a similar test to what is going on in Queensland in the way of settlement you will find that we come out remarkably well indeed. I apprehend that, if you want to show how this colony is progressing, you do not merely take the acreage and the population; you take the export of home products and compare them with the export of home products of the other colonies. This is the true test to apply if you want to show what wealth our people are producing and what the inhabitants of the colony are getting for their labour. I took the trouble to go into this matter, and what did I find? I found that during 1895 South Australia exported £9 worth per head of her population in home products, New South Wales £12 worth; New Zealand £13 worth; and Queensland £19 worth. Is there an hon. member in this House who will say that is not a fairer test than to take the absolutely artificial and misleading standard of the hon. member for Bundaberg? If we want to know why there is not a greater acreage per head of the population in Queensland under agricultural occupation, the answer is found in the fact that the population find it more profitable to engage in other pursuits; when they find it less profitable to engage in other pursuits and more profitable to engage in agriculture, the land will come under cultivation; and undoubtedly the Government now occupying the Treasury bench will do nothing to hinder that. I was much struck by one remark proceeding from an hon. member on the other side. If not quite so much in this House, at all events in the secluded and irresponsible atmosphere of their own electorates, hon. members opposite are disposed to condemn the pastoral lessees; to pour out the vials of their denunciatory eloquence upon the unfortunate squatters in this country.

Mr. DUNSFORD: Is that true? Can you give an instance?

Mr. BELL: I only hope that when I say it the hon. member will please to assume that I believe it to be true.

Mr. DUNSFORD: We want the facts. We want proof.

Mr. BELL: I was very glad to find that whatever may be said elsewhere, there was at least one experienced hon. member opposite who did not hesitate to bring forward evidence to the contrary. I listened with the greatest pleasure to what fell from the hon. member for Kennedy, who said that the political domination which the squatters have had in past Parliaments in this country has not been turned by them unduly to their own advantage. I believe that to be the case, and I was particularly glad to hear an hon. member on the other side rise superior to party trammels and make an avowal of that kind. We often hear it said that the pastoralists of Queensland have much the better of it in the matter of paying rent as compared with the grazing farmers. I am unable to see that that is the case. There is certainly no analogy between the two classes. What is the pastoral lessee? Say what you like of the individual, but the class will always remain so long as Queensland is in its present undeveloped condition. The pastoral lessee belongs to a class that has absolutely developed Queensland and made our lands worth something as a State asset. They are the men who have gone years and years ahead of the railways; they have put their money into the development of the country and made it accessible; and when, largely through their efforts, civilisation has come into the country, railways have followed, close settlement has taken place, and the Government resumed half of their country under the 1884 Act. Under these circumstances it is surely in keeping with the principles of justice that those pastoral lessees—a class who, under the ordinary condition of things, are a disappearing class—should have the lease of their lands at a lower rental than the men who come after them—the men who find the country opened up, and who have all the conveniences of civilisation. When they come to take up land it is surely fair that they should pay a higher rent to the State than the men who have done all pioneering work. The grazing farmer is a member of the community who has come here to stay. The pastoral lessee is a member of the community who is disappearing; his record lies in the past. As a class it is an excellent record, it is a pioneering record, he has developed the country, and it is only just that that class should have the country at a lower rent than the class who come after them and who have not the same calls upon the State that they have. That is the crucial reason why the pastoral lessee's rent should be lower than that of the grazing farmer, although I can quite understand that for various purposes it may be worth while to get a cheer from an audience when the figures of the pastoral lessee are put on one side and the rent paid by the grazing farmer on the other. But I think there are few men who will refuse to admit, when the case is fairly put before them, that the pastoral lessee is entitled to pay a lower rent than the grazing farmer. To say, as the hon. member for Bundaberg says, that the Government have subsidised a line of steamers really to aid the squatters is surely a statement which carries with it its own refutation. Surely we are passing out of the stage when it is attempted to be shown that there is any antagonism between the interests of the pastoral lessees and of the country? As I have said, so long as Queensland is situated as it is you cannot get away from the pastoral tenant class, and anything which is done to hamper their prosperity must unquestionably react upon the country. The senior member for Drayton and Toowoomba read from a prospectus which has been issued lately in London, in order to show the extreme profits of the pastoral lessees. He stated that the profits were something like £40,000, £45,000, and £50,000 in successive years, and, in reply to an interjection, he said those were "net profits," after paying interest, improvements, and so forth. I do not think the hon. member knew exactly what he was talking about when he made that statement. So far as I know the working of pastoral organisations, what are called "net profits" do not represent what I have no doubt hon. members may believe they do—so many golden sovereigns poured into the lap of the fortunate pastoral lessee. These net profits, so far as my belief goes, although I have not consulted the principals in this case, do not represent sovereigns only. They represent the annual increase of stock, and those increases would certainly go to swell the figures. Therefore hon. members will understand that those net profits are not all cash, and I think it well to make that statement public in *Hansard* in order to refute what the hon. gentleman stated.

Mr. DUNSFORD: The prospectus is not understood then.

Mr. BELL: It certainly would be understood by those who are acquainted with the working of stations.

Mr. SIM: Would the English investor understand it?

Mr. BELL: I do not know what the English investor would understand. However, I generally find the English investor is as keen as anyone else, and when he has a document before him no one in the world can give him points in understanding it. I would also say this: That I think the English investor is in for a very good thing when he invests in that property. I think one weak point in the Bill—and if all I hear is true, the Government are not insensible of the fact—is the proposal which deals with the runs not under the operation of the 1884 Act. No doubt the terms offered to those pastoral lessees are not favourable enough, and, as the hon. member for Bulloo said, they would be ignoring their own interests if they did not hasten to come under the Act of 1884. I hope the Government will be persuaded to make some modification in those proposals, because unquestionably the conditions are not as favourable as they ought to be. One of the most remarkable speeches I have heard during this debate, certainly one of the most vehement, and one of the most intelligent also, emanated from the hon. member for Bulloo. That hon. gentleman expressed very great surprise that no attempt had been made by the Secretary for Lands to classify the lands of the colony; he said that it could be very easily done, and that it was done in the other colonies. The hon. member, who seemed very familiar with his subject, and denounced the Bill with that gusto which is usually evinced when a man is attacking his own friends, said he could classify the lands of the colony in ten minutes. And what did he do? Like the Czar of Russia when building a railway from St. Petersburg to Moscow, and with an air scarcely less autocratic, he drew a series of straight lines on the map.

Mr. LEAHY: No.

Mr. BELL: And then to those straight lines he applied the familiar formula A, B, and C, as being symbolic, I presume, of the extreme simplicity of the whole proceeding. The hon. member said he would devote the space A alongside the trunk lines to the small farmer. The space marked B, which was further away, was to be kept for the exclusive use of the grazing farmer, while the remoter space was to be kept for the pastoral lessee. That was the method by which the hon. member for Bulloo attempted to classify the lands of this colony within the period of ten minutes. I could do as good a classification in one minute if I had

the cheek to try it. A proposal more absurd never emanated from a man so intelligent in the whole record of this Chamber. Apply that classification to the land along our trunk lines of railway. Apply division A to the land between here and Bundaberg, to the land along the Central Railway, and to the land along a great part of the Northern Railway, and where do the small settlers who only are to get into that division come out? I say they would not feel under any obligation to the hon. member for Bulloo for having put them there. The great difficulty is that we cannot get a sufficiently prevailing general type of country to enable us to classify the lands. As the hon. member has said, they do it in New South Wales and in South Australia.

Mr. LEAHY: I did not say in New South Wales; they do not classify the lands in New South Wales.

Mr. BELL: They broadly classify the lands in New South Wales, and the hon. member used words to a similar effect in *Hansard*. Take the eastern division of New South Wales. Although there is a diversity in the nature of that country, there is a greater similarity than you will find in the eastern division—if there was an eastern division—in Queensland. You will get in New South Wales a more generally prevailing similarity in the features of the country, and certainly more identity of climate, than you will find in Queensland, and unquestionably we could not classify in a practical way the lands of this colony. All that we can do in the way of classification is very little indeed, and undoubtedly our wisest course is to arm the Minister in charge of the Lands Department with the most attractive and liberal forms of land settlement, and allow him to apply any one of those forms as seems to him best in the various districts of the colony. But to cut up the colony into various portions, and say that in this portion you shall have only this class of settlement, and in another portion another class of settlement would be an impracticable and certainly an unsuccessful undertaking. To classify the lands on hard-and-fast lines, however beautiful it may look on paper, will never work out in actual practice. The hon. member for Bulloo went on, with a vigour I certainly could not help admiring, to denounce the proposals of the Government in regard to the Land Court. I certainly do not—and perhaps in saying this I am out of sympathy with a number of pastoralists—but I certainly do not share the hon. member's views on that matter. I consider that whatever nervousness there may be in regard to the abolition of the right of appeal, that right is after all a very sentimental right, and one which is very rarely availed of in any practical form. I believe that in doing away with that right we are doing no injustice to the pastoral lessees. I cannot see that the Government are taking any other than a sensible step in substituting a Land Court, as they propose, and doing away with the appeals to the Supreme Court, which certainly was not a particularly satisfactory tribunal. The hon. member for Bulloo found fault pretty markedly with the Secretary for Lands for contending that the Supreme Court, constituted as it was under the 1884 Act, was not an impartial tribunal. I agree with the Secretary for Lands that in the very nature of the case it could not be an impartial tribunal, and in saying that I am not casting any slur upon the men who constituted that tribunal. You cannot determine the question of the partisanship of any tribunal by making a reference to the general character for honesty of the men who compose it. There is nothing inherently dishonest in being a partisan. To be a partisan is only natural, and it is impossible for most men not to believe that the assessors who sat on the bench with the judge in that court of appeal under the Act of 1884 could be other than partisans. I say that, having as great confidence in and admiration for the gentlemen whose names have been mentioned as assessors as any man in this Chamber. Such a court may be an able court and an intelligent court, but in the very nature of things it cannot be an impartial court. I certainly, then, do not think the pastoral lessees are having any wrong or injustice conferred upon them by our taking away the right of appeal. The hon. member for Lockyer seemed to find very great fault with this proposed tribunal because it is to have among its members a lawyer. The hon. member seemed to divide mankind into two classes—the theoretical and the practical. The theoretical were lawyers and the practical were apparently all the rest of mankind. The hon. member said that a lawyer was not fully competent to be a member of such a technical and practical body. I regret that there should exist in the minds of some hon. members the prejudice that lawyers are not practical; as a rule the belief is that they are rather too practical. I do not think it can be seriously contended that because a man is a lawyer he would be out of place upon a body constituted as the Government propose to constitute this Land Court. I believe that, with the right of appeal taken away and the presence of a lawyer as a member of the court, that court will bring a fuller deliberation to bear on the matters that come before them than they would if restricted to their present number and without a lawyer. I know that this condemnation of lawyers is a pretty trite line of argument for hon. members to use, but we have only to look across the border, and there we find that there is a lawyer on their Land Court. We have only to look, too, across the Pacific Ocean to find that in matters not legal the people of America have more often than not elected a lawyer as head of their State, to perform functions which are not in any way legal functions. Now, I desire to make one or two observations upon the proposals which the Government make in this Bill in regard to grazing farms. Probably the most important features of the Act of 1884 were the clauses relating to grazing farms, but so far as I have been able to see and hear, there has been an amount of dummying, during the last two or three years principally, that absolutely threatens the pre-eminence which the squatters a few years ago enjoyed in that respect. We find dummying systematically going on in the large districts of the West. I heard only the other day of a man who already owned a grazing farm being able, through the instrumentality of dummiers, to acquire two or three grazing farms, which he sold before he had had them long for £7,000; and what goes on there on a large scale I have no doubt is going on on a smaller scale in various parts of the colony. It is a matter of far greater importance than the mere putting one man on the land in preference to another. The men who dummy these lands as a rule are speculators—men who hold the land as a depôt for wethers—and in several cases within my own knowledge they have excluded men who if they had been successful in acquiring these farms would have gone upon them, bred sheep upon them, and would in every way have made their homes there, and been desirable settlers. Instead of that many thousands of acres have fallen into the hands of men who have devoted the land to purposes that are not what we wish, and the hon. gentleman has very good grounds for endeavouring to bring about some change in the procedure in regard to grazing-farm selection. I am not with him, however, when he thinks that the system of auction will remedy this

state of things. So far as I can see, the auction system will play into the hands of men with the most money, and I am not prepared to say that the man with most money will be necessarily the best selector. I admit that if we compare the present system with the auction system purely it might be better to have the lesser of two evils—the auction system; but if we go to New South Wales, we shall find that they have a method which we might endeavour to introduce here. In that colony they propose to scrutinise the *bona fides* of all the applicants, and I find Mr. Carruthers saying the following, in introducing the second reading of the Applications for Land Bill on 24th September :—

"In Victoria a system has been in operation for a great number of years past by which, instead of the selection of applicants for land being left to the chances of the ballot, it has been left to the discrimination of the land boards. Instead of gambling their land away with a lottery, the land has been distributed according to some exercise of judgment on the part of people who constitute the tribunal appointed for that purpose. In South Australia the land boards receive the applications for a period of, say, thirty days, and, having investigated them, it makes a choice amongst the applicants, fixes the price, and allots the land. That is the system of discrimination which is in vogue, and is giving a vast amount of satisfaction in South Australia and Victoria. In this colony we have unfortunately had a system which left everything to chance. I propose that some such system as that adopted in the other colonies should be brought into force in this colony."

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: How long have they tried that?

Mr. BELL: They are only introducing it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: They will find the faults by-and-by.

Mr. BELL: I will not deny that there may be faults in it, but I do not know how long it has been in operation in other colonies. So far as it has gone it has worked well enough to meet with the approval of the Secretary for Lands in the adjoining colony, who would not bring in a Bill upon the same lines if he had not good grounds for it. I certainly think the Secretary for Lands might introduce some such principle here. I believe the land agents throughout the colony are a very superior body of men indeed; they would be able to give some information as to the *bona fides* of at least 50 per cent. of the applicants; those whose *bona fides* was suspected would be weeded out, after which the ballot could be resorted to. I know of one district in which it was common report, based upon very good evidence indeed, that a large number of applicants, all of whom could be identified, were not *bonâ fide* applicants at all, and they would have been weeded out if the New South Wales proposed system had been in operation here. In the matter of grazing farm rents I am disposed to think that instead of the Minister having the responsibility of fixing them, the Land Board should have that duty cast upon them for the first period as they have in regard to pastoral leases. It seems to be an arbitrary distinction altogether. There may be some reason for it, but I could never discover it. The same body should fix both rents. I am not with the hon. member when he proposes to revive the pre-emption clauses. No doubt he is under the impression that when these leases expire there will be a danger of the State having to compensate the lessees, but I think we are needlessly apprehensive when we get nervous about a state of things that cannot arise for twenty years, and we have no grounds to assume that when those leases terminate we will not find men throughout the country who will come forward and take them up, with the improvements upon them. I also think that if the holder of a grazing farm is willing to pay the fixed price that the Land Board put upon the land, we will find a number of other people equally prepared to pay the same price. I do not see why we should give one individual a preference over another, and I do not see why the land, if it is to be alienated, should not go by auction. Unquestionably I do not see any necessity for the Government dealing in this Bill with a state of things that cannot arise for twenty years. Even if there was a probability of such a state of things eventuating at an earlier date I could not agree with the way in which the Government propose to deal with it. I am certainly against the principle of pre-emptions as applied to grazing farmers. I think the Secretary for Lands has not received as much credit as he deserves for his proposal in regard to the agricultural farms portion of the Bill. Probably, on the whole, that portion of the Bill has met with the most severe condemnation of any. The hon. member for Lockyer was especially vehement in his criticism. Well, I think the agricultural farmers, as a class, are very fortunate in having an avenue opened to them through which they can get some reduction in their present annual rent; and although it is possible that the condition of paying the balance after twenty years may ultimately prove irksome, yet, were I an agricultural farmer, I would not have the slightest hesitation in agreeing to the proposal of the Bill, as I have no doubt that before the expiration of the twenty years there will be at least a dozen Bills introduced, the majority of which will attempt to minimise in some way the burdens of the agricultural selector. Let him seize what the present offers and leave the rest to fate. I have no doubt that he will have several alternatives before the twenty years are up of modifying his tenure. I observe with some regret—though not with surprise, because I know perfectly well that the Government are not in any way bound to the principle—but I am sorry that we have not put before us some practicable scheme for giving assistance to the farmers through the medium of State loans. In Australia the system has not yet reached the stage of a successful system, but I know that the experiments which have been tried in other colonies have not so far culminated in non-success. Probably it is wiser for us at present to watch what is taking place in the other colonies, but I hope it will not be long before we are asked to consider some responsible proposal for giving the farmers of this colony money at a cheaper rate of interest than they can now obtain it. Only the other day a Royal Commission was appointed to consider the condition of agriculture in Great Britain. It was appointed by a Conservative Government. It was composed of responsible men. I presume many of them were of Conservative type, and I would ask permission to read an extract from their report dealing with the subject of State loans.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That would apply to freeholds.

Mr. BELL: No doubt it would in regard to Great Britain, but the objection here and throughout Australia has been to the principle of State loans. Once you admit the principle the details can be altered to suit the conditions of the country to which the system is to be applied. This is what the Royal Commission said on the subject—

"The conclusion at which we have arrived is, therefore, that at the present time the advance of public money to a limited amount, and on adequate security, for the purpose of agricultural improvements would be of very considerable advantage. The reduction of the rate of interest, of the annual charge for repayment, and of the initial expenses would in many cases place a limited owner having no other capital funds at his disposal in a position to undertake the work necessary for the well-being of all classes connected with the utilisation of his property."

That is a remarkable passage to appear in such a report. It shows what strides are being made in that direction, at all events. Although I do not throw a stone against the Government for the absence of any such proposal in this Bill, because they are not committed to it, the experiments being made in the other colonies should be closely watched. The hon. gentleman also proposes to make some alteration in the system of occupation licenses. The occupation licensee plays a very useful part in occupying our lands—not so much, perhaps, in the far Western country as in many parts of the unsettled districts on the Darling Downs and in the coastal districts. The hon. gentleman is taking a wise step in proposing that the Government shall have power to resume these lands on giving six months' notice instead of twelve as hitherto; but I do not think he is taking a wise step in proposing to prohibit the occupation licensee from putting up improvements. He was not permitted to put up protected improvements up to 1892, but if any hon. member will read the debates which took place on the Land Bill of 1892, he will see that this matter was fully thrashed out, and that it was admitted that under the sanction of the Land Board the wisest course was to allow him to put up improvements for which he would be compensated when the land was ultimately selected. I think we should adhere to the principle of the Act of 1892. The Board will only grant permission to make improvements of a reasonable nature, and will not authorise improvements which will stop settlement, and that are not harmonious with the nature of the land. In my own district I have spoken to several men with reference to this proposal, and they view with surprise and disappointment the prevention of improvements which will enable them to hold occupation country. I hope that the hon. gentleman will reconsider that question. Though I do not suppose the Bill is going to be more permanent than any other Land Act, if it becomes an Act—as I suppose that in succeeding years it will have its satellites of smaller measures, like every other Act which has been passed—and I do not regard it as at least one enthusiastic member on the other side does, as likely to be a land-mark in the history of land legislation, but regard it as a temporary consolidation, and as a temporary halt before we march on again in our progress—still I think the Secretary for Lands has acted wisely in introducing the Bill. As a supporter of the Government, I hope that he will make an earnest attempt to pass it; that it will not be a mere demonstration, trotting the Bill before the House and then trotting it back again. I believe that if the hon. gentleman makes up his mind to put the Bill through he can do it, and I hope that he will be inclined to make the modifications which I and other hon. members have suggested. I hope that if it does go through it will preserve its main features intact, and I for one will be very glad to see it placed on the statute-book.

Mr. KING: Like the hon. member for Dalby, I congratulate the Secretary for Lands upon bringing in this Bill. He deserves credit from the House and the country for tackling such a very large question. His predecessor in the office was a very able man, but I am perfectly satisfied that he was afraid to tackle the question as the hon. gentleman has done. I do not intend to traverse the whole Bill, but to deal with the part of it which most affects the district I represent—that is, Part IV. The hon. members for Balonne, Bulloo, and other hon. members have referred to the difference in the rents paid by the pastoral lessee and the grazing farmer. The hon. member for Dalby says that the pastoral lessee as the pioneer of the country has a prior claim to the grazing farmer. That may be, and I would not object to that claim so long as it is modified to a certain extent, but as compared with the grazing farmer, at present the concession to the pastoral lessee is too large. There are grazing farms in my district for which as high as 3d. per acre is paid, while the pastoral lessee on the same run but on land of better quality, pays only ¼d. per acre. That is a considerable difference—when the grazing farmer pays twelve times as much for his land as the pastoral lessee. I would not object at all if the pastoral lessee got his land at twice that rent, £1 6s. 8d. a square mile, which would be ½d. an acre, and if the other man got his land at ¾d. an acre, which would be £2 a square mile.

Mr. LEAHY: The board fixes one and the Minister the other.

Mr. KING: I know that. In many instances the department is not in possession of the same knowledge of the land as the board is able to get when travelling around, by asking information from the people of the surrounding districts. The hon. member for Balonne went to a great deal of trouble the other night in quoting leaseholders and the prices they paid, but I think he only got up to £2.

Mr. STORY: £2 15s.

Mr. KING: I looked up the *Gazette*, but I could not find them. I found only one at £2 a square mile, or ¾d. an acre. I will refer to one run, Rocky Bank, on Weribone Creek. I have been over that run several times, and some of the communal settlements were fixed upon that land. The available country there is 89⅓ square miles, for which the lessee pays £98 16s. 3d. He has got 62 square miles of unavailable country for which he pays £11 1s. 10d. Altogether he holds 151½ square miles of country, and pays for it £109 18s. 1d., or about 15s. a square mile, which is a little over ¼d. an acre. On the same run a grazing farmer named Thomas holds 6,000 acres, for which he pays £75, equal to 3d. an acre, or £8 a square mile. I am satisfied that the grazing farmer is paying too much, while I do not say that the pastoralist is paying too little. What I say is this, and I have said it before on the floor of this House: If the pastoral lessee is paying a sufficient rent, then most decidedly the grazing farmer is paying far too much when he is paying twelve times as much as the pastoral lessee. It must be remembered also that the grazing farmer has conditions to fulfil which the lessee has not. This Bill provides for a modification in this respect by reducing the minimum for grazing farms to ½d. an acre. What surprises me is the difference between the rents charged to the pastoral lessees and the grazing farmers, because the Land Board, in travelling about the country assessing the rents, is certainly in touch with the department in Brisbane, and that being so I can hardly see how it is that the department in Brisbane is not better able to classify the land held by the grazing farmer, so that he may be called upon to pay a rent that he will be able to pay. If the rents of the grazing farms are not reduced, I am perfectly satisfied that some of the holders will have to throw up their holdings. That will be very detrimental to the country, as it will deter people who might come here from the other colonies or other countries if it has to be said that we cannot keep on the land the people we have already settled on it through harsh conditions of settlement. On this same run there is another man called Whitley who pays 2d. per acre for his land, on which there is dense scrub. How it was that this land was thrown open to this kind of settlement I really do not know. I only suggest this, and I believe there is a certain amount of truth in it: That in the districts outside as a rule a certain number of surveyors are sent out to survey land required for settlement. They in

many instances, send in a report to the commissioner, and on that I take it the commissioner sends in a report to the department that such and such land is good land for such and such a purpose. On the strength of that the department throws it open for settlement. I do not know why this particular land should have been classified as land fit for that class of settlement, because it is not fit. I know there is a rumour that the surveyors are in touch with someone, and there seems to be some reason for the statement, although I do not say it is so; but if the department wishes to deal fairly with the grazing farmers they will get a large amount of settlement. There is another point. The grazing farmer uses his land for the same purpose as the large leaseholder. That is to say, he raises cattle, horses, and sheep upon it. How can he compete with the large landholder in the same market when he has to pay from four to twelve times the amount of rent that the other man pays? The agricultural farmer is in a somewhat similar position, if not worse, than the grazing farmer. The term "agricultural farm" is misleading, because few of those people use their land solely for agricultural purposes. In some instances they pay from 6d. to 9d. an acre for 1,280 acres.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I have not been able to find a 9d. case.

Mr. KING: They pay 6d., at all events. Of course, according to this Bill the rents will go towards the purchasing price, but then it only deals with agricultural farms up to the value of 30s. an acre. There are agricultural farms in my district valued at £2 an acre.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They will get a reduction.

Mr. KING: The Bill does not say so.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Yes, it does not limit it to any sum.

Mr. KING: I understand it to say that lands valued at 30s. an acre will get a reduction. Lands valued at 30s. may be reduced to 20s., those at 20s. to 15s., and those at 15s. to 10s. an acre, but it does not say anything with regard to the land valued at £2.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It does not say anything about the 30s. an acre land either.

Mr. KING: I raised the question last year in reference to the Mitchell lands. On Mitchell Downs there are agricultural farms taken up at £1 to £1 10s. an acre, and alongside the Government have sold land for 10s. an acre. There is an agitation being got up to have the rents reduced, and the Government have themselves to blame for it. Those who took up the land at that price would have been satisfied with their bargain had it not been for the action of the Government, although I am certain it would only be a matter of time for them to give up their holdings. It does not pay a man to raise sheep, cattle, and horses at 6d. an acre rent. This Bill proposes to deal fairly liberally with the agricultural homesteads. It proposes to increase the 160-acre holdings, but I do not think it is definite enough. There are to be three classes of agricultural homesteads at 160, 320, and 640 acres. I presume the first-class at 160 acres would hardly apply to the lands west of the Dividing Range, but only to lands near the metropolis and to sugar lands. The industry of dairying is increasing very much; but suppose a man has a holding of 160 acres with 40 acres under cultivation, that leaves him 120 acres for grazing purposes. We know that the grazing capacity of land in the West is from ten to fifteen or twenty head per square mile. Therefore, the man with 120 acres left for grazing purposes would be able to keep from two to three head of cattle for dairying purposes, which, of course, would be an absurdity. In that country the area should not be less than 640 acres; in fact, my opinion is that it should go up to 1,280 acres. Some hon. members run away with the idea that the agricultural homesteader gets his land for 2s. 6d. an acre.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is all the State gets.

Mr. KING: Strictly speaking that is all he pays the Treasury, but he has very harsh conditions to fulfil with regard to residence, and as he has improvements to the extent of 10s. an acre to make, he thus pays really 12s. 6d. an acre for his land. This is the class of settlement which I believe is going to be the backbone and sinew of the country. It is the settlement which should be encouraged by holding out inducements to people beyond the sea to come here and take up land, and I am perfectly satisfied that if we offer certain concessions, and do not bind people down to 160 acres, or even to 640 acres, but allow them to take up as much as 1,280 acres, in a very few years we should have an increase of settlement. The Secretary for Lands has told us that there are between 10,000,000 and 11,000,000 acres of land at present open for close settlement.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Open for selection, I said.

Mr. KING: That means open for close settlement. If there is that amount of land open for close settlement, and there is still an agitation going on among people who want to get land, what conclusion must we come to? It is that the land which is thrown open is not of the description required by the people, and I am perfectly satisfied that 7,000,000 or 8,000,000 acres of that land are fit only to be dealt with under the scrub clauses of this Bill. To prove my contention that there is a demand for land, I have here a slip from the *Observer*, of the 15th of September last, with reference to the action taken by the Lands Department with regard to recently expired leases in the settled districts. It is stated that on Cressbrook, in the Moreton district, about 2,340 acres were opened to agricultural farm selection on the 5th June, and that it was all selected by twelve selectors. It will be in the recollection of hon. members what a rush there was for the Kilcoy lands, and in this extract it is said that about 5,130 acres were opened there to agricultural farm selection on the 1st September, and that it was all selected by forty-two selectors. The land there is good, and the people are there who want the land. At Grantham about 7,560 acres were opened to selection as three grazing farms and two agricultural farms on the 4th September, and it was all selected. The extract goes on to give the different places where land was thrown open to selection, and the whole area selected since it was thrown open. Yet we have in other parts of the country 10,000,000 or 11,000,000 acres thrown open for selection, which will not be taken up by settlers, and if you go into the outlying districts you will hear complaints from dozens of people to the effect that the Lands Department is lax in throwing open land which has been resumed from the lessee, and which many persons are anxious to select. I hope that when this Bill becomes an Act, as I hope it will, with certain improvements which I believe will be made in it, it will be properly administered. I am not throwing any discredit on any person or on the Government, for I believe they are trying honestly to do the best they can with the lands of the country, but in my opinion it is not a new Bill we want, but proper administration of the land laws we have already on the statute-book. I am perfectly satisfied that it is purely and simply on account of the administration of the

department that more settlement has not taken place. At the same time, I will give the present Minister credit for doing his best to have the Acts enforced, so that people who want land may get it. When certain lands were thrown open in the St. George district a number of intending selectors travelled from the other colonies to select, but on arrival found that the land had been withdrawn from selection. When land was thrown open in the Roma district many persons travelled hundreds of miles to see it, and then went away, because it was not suitable. Yet there is plenty of good land there on the resumed areas of runs in the vicinity of settlement, and there are people who stopped at the village settlement at Wallumbilla to have a look at the land. In all districts we have land commissioners and land agents, but as a rule they are men who know very little about the bush, and a good many of them know nothing about land. I would suggest that in those districts where land is thrown open for close settlement the department should have in readiness men who are paid by the State to take intending selectors to inspect the land that is thrown open.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That would be abused to the fullest possible extent. Every possible complaint would be made by people that they were not shown good land; the same as was done in the case of the village settlements.

Mr. KING: If the thing had been tried and had proved a failure I could understand the hon. gentleman saying that, but it has not been tried. I know that in the district which I represent a stranger, even supposing he was a bushman, would find it difficult to go through a wilderness, as he might have to do in some instances, to get to the good land, and it is not every stranger who would like to try it. If there were a man there well acquainted with the locality who could take intending selectors on to the land thrown open for selection, I am certain that a great deal more land would be taken up. What is the use of the Government bringing in liberal land legislation when there is so much land already waiting for settlement and nobody to take it up? There is something wrong. If the land is no good, how are we going to prove that it is no good? I do not expect the Secretary for Lands to travel about the back country and overhaul the land himself, nor do I expect the commissioner of lands or the land agents to do so; but the only way we can get that land settled is to have men there who know it, and get them to say whether it is good or not. With regard to agricultural homesteaders, this Bill only proposes to deal with them to a certain extent; it stops short where it ought to go on. The Bill allows a selector who has taken up 160 acres to increase his holding, according to the class of land, to 320 or 640 acres; but if he has already acquired the freehold of the land he will not have that privilege. There ought to be some provision in the Bill which will allow such men, being *bonâ fide* holders, to increase their freeholds also at the same price.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: And hold two homesteads?

Mr. KING: This Bill allows other individuals of the same class to extend their holdings, but the man who has reduced his holding to a freehold has not that privilege. That might be easily remedied. Many complaints have been made to me, for some of which I know there is foundation, in regard to the administration of the present laws. One complaint is that if an agricultural homesteader applies for a selection he has to plank down the first year's rent, although it will be three or four months before his application is confirmed. If he lodges his application in April or May, it will be confirmed in August or September; and on the 31st of January or March following he will have to pay another year's rent, which makes two years' rent in twelve months. They will have paid their five annual instalments of 6d. per acre in four years; but they will not have fulfilled their five years' residence condition for some time, and they cannot apply for their deed of grant until then. They then have to pay another year's rent, and if they do not pay it they are fined. Ten per cent. or 15 per cent. is added on to the extra year's rent.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: This Bill proposes to remedy that.

Mr. KING: If that is the case, those who have paid the extra amounts ought to have them refunded. There has been more trouble over this matter than anything else in connection with settlement in my district. This Bill may propose to remedy it, but it is purely a departmental matter, and the Secretary for Lands ought to see that such charges shall not be made in future. Another matter of complaint is this: One selector takes up land and pays the survey fees, another selector takes up land adjoining him, and the latter has to pay survey fees for the line which has been already surveyed and paid for by the first. It is to be hoped that that system will not be allowed to continue, as it would be quite sufficient if the second selector had to refund half to the first selector, who had paid the whole amount. The cost of surveying that line ought to be divided between them. I will not detain the House much longer. I believe the Bill is a good one, but it can be improved by adopting some suggestions that have been made from both sides of the House. I give the Secretary for Lands credit for being sincere and honest in his endeavour to do the best he possibly can, but as head of the department he will have to keep an extra sharp eye upon the administration of the Bill when it is passed. He will have to see that certain things are done which are not now done, and also that other things are not done that are. I shall vote for the second reading.

Mr. O'CONNELL: I believe that this Bill is an honest attempt on the part of the Ministry to settle a very vexed question—that is, how we may best assist the people to take up our Crown lands. I believe the Secretary for Lands will welcome any criticism which may help him to supply any deficiency in the Bill, and that in committee he will, as far as possible, take the advice of hon. members in trying to improve the Bill. I am sure that is the hon. gentleman's wish, and I am sure the House is desirous of making the Bill conduce to the greatest possible extent to the close settlement of the land by the best class of men we can get. A great deal has been said of the Bill not giving much relief to agricultural selectors. I take that point first, because that is the most important form of settlement the coast districts, at any rate, have to deal with. Incidentally I may say that I believe that the Government, in providing that the lately leased halves of runs in the settled districts shall be reserved for close settlement, are meeting the wishes of the districts which are most immediately concerned. In my own district there are large areas of country which will be selected as soon as these lately leased halves are made available for selection. At the same time I think that the tenure which is to be given to the pastoral lessee will not be so much to his disadvantage as has been supposed by some speakers. Under the Act of 1876 a great deal of the runs in the settled districts were held under a six months' notice of resumption, but, so far as I am aware, that did not militate against the pastoral lessee. The result of the present proposal will be that while

the land will be made available for selection, no particular lessee will be specially interfered with, because only such land as is suitable for close settlement will be applied for. Consequently the poorer land will be untouched, and the lessee will get many years' use of the land, and I suppose at a lower rental than he now has to pay. His tenure will in many cases be almost as permanent as if he held under a lease, because in my district there are large areas of land which have been open to selection for years, and remain unselected simply because the land is unsuitable for selection. I cannot see how anyone can contend that the agricultural farmer will receive no relief under the Bill. Hon. members who believe that cannot realise the present conditions under which agricultural farmers take up land. Under the present Act the homestead selector is up to a certain point treated purely as an agricultural farm selector. At the end of five years he has to prove his fulfilment of conditions, and then he may be asked later on to prove his personal residence on the land during the term of five years. To men who do not understand the routine, it seems a great hardship to have to leave their work to attend a land court twice when the whole thing could be done at one time. I am glad to see that the Bill grants much better conditions for the homestead man than he has under the present Act. He may under the scheme of the Bill pay his 2s. 6d. an acre at the end of five years, or he may keep on paying for ten years, so long as he fulfils the conditions of residence. He will be able at the expiration of his five years' residence to get his certificate of fulfilment of conditions both as to improvements and residence. As regards the agricultural farmer, he has to pay under the present Act a rental of 6d., 4d., or 3d. an acre, according to the value placed on the land by the land commissioners in the different districts, aided by the surveyors. The money goes purely as rental. But under this Bill the rent is considered as part of the purchase money, and for the future the agricultural farmer will not only be a lessee but he will be a time-payment man as well, and consequently will be in a decidedly better position. The only point on which I differ with the Secretary for Lands is that I think it will be a great mistake that the rent should be fixed at one-fortieth part of the purchase money. I think it should be one-twentieth. The reason which the hon. gentleman gives—that the expected loss to the Treasury is only on paper—is one which arises from the fact that very few farmers save money. If they are asked at the end of twenty years to pay a lump sum as balance of purchase money, I am afraid very few will have the money.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They will have the option under the Bill of paying the balance or of continuing the lease.

Mr. O'CONNELL: That is the very thing I object to. If they have any option in the matter, the probability is that they will only pay what they are compelled to pay, and so leave themselves with a lump sum to pay in hard cash at the end of their lease, which I am afraid most of them would have to borrow. Many men in my district to whom I have spoken on the subject say that they would prefer to pay the whole of the purchase money in annual instalments instead of having to pay half of it in a lump sum at the expiration of twenty years. As far as my experience goes, it is very seldom that a farmer has £100 or £200 in his pocket, and if he borrows he is at once saddled with the annual interest charge which this Bill proposes to rid him of.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: To do that the rent will have to be double what it is now.

Mr. O'CONNELL: You are giving them twenty years to pay their instalments, and on the minimum purchasing price of 10s. an acre, that would only mean 6d. an acre for twenty years.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Where they are now paying 3d. an acre, you will have to double the annual rent.

Mr. O'CONNELL: He would be in a much better position if at the end of the twenty years he can get his deed. Now the rent does not count as purchase money at all. Of course it is a matter of opinion, but I think that where a man knows that at the end of twenty years the land he holds is to become a freehold he will not mind an extra charge. In framing this Bill the Minister has been right in refusing to introduce a lot of new terms and regulations, but he has followed the old Act too closely in the matter of the occupation of these agricultural farms. I think that at the expiration of five years, whether by one or two lessees, a man proving occupation for that time should be able to get his deed if he wants to pay up. The new proposal is occupation for five years by one tenant, or subsequently by two or more for ten years. I think occupation for five years is proof that the land has been taken up satisfactorily.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It was not in the past for conditional selections.

Mr. O'CONNELL: It is a matter open to debate, but I think proof of occupation for five years should entitle them to their deeds if they wish to obtain them. That is my experience in a district in which I have lived for twenty-four years. There was very little settlement when I went there, and I have watched the settlement that has gone on ever since with great interest. My experience has been that one of the greatest objections which men who have taken up land have to make is the difficulty they have in dealing with it. Very few people can say what their circumstances may be five years hence. They put their money into an investment with which they cannot deal satisfactorily, and all these restrictions necessarily reduce the value of a selection. People then are unwilling to tackle this kind of investment, and we want to be able to say to those who will settle on the land that they will be going in for a very good investment; we should offer them inducements to go in for it, and when they have been on the land for five years we should place no obstacles in their way of getting somebody else to take their place, if after that time for health or business reasons they may themselves desire to leave it. The section providing for the forfeiture of homesteads, grazing and agricultural, upon the insolvency of the selector is one which I can see no benefit in at all. The old 1868 Act made it impossible for a judgment to be allowed against a man's homestead before he acquired a Crown grant. That clause, introduced with the best intentions, was, like the clauses of other Acts, sometimes misused in this way: A man used to run up great big accounts with the stores, and actually get credit for stuff which he afterwards sold himself to provide money for putting up improvements on his homestead, and then just before the expiration of the five years he would file his schedule, get a clean sheet, and then get the deeds for a property which he had actually acquired at the expense of somebody else. I do not give a man any credit for doing such a swindle as that, but I do think that the business people were very much to blame for giving so much credit to men against whose property they knew they had no redress. In New South Wales I believe they have a clause which prevents anybody getting redress so far as the

property of a homesteader is concerned up to a very much larger amount than our present homestead of 160 acres. I believe it would be very much better to have some such provision as that, than the one proposed in this amending Bill, because this gives nobody satisfaction—neither the man who takes up the land nor his creditor. I think it a very great mistake to forfeit the land under these circumstances, because if you do not want to give it to the selector, the creditors might be allowed some benefit from the work the man put into the land. It would be better to let the man stop on the land and try and work out his salvation, and if he was an honest man he would pay his creditors afterwards. To forfeit the lands absolutely on the insolvency of the selector is not beneficial either to the State, the man's creditors, or the man himself. It is making a homeless pauper of the selector and doing his creditors no good. It is often said that it is no matter how liberal a Land Act is it may be spoiled in its administration. Several complaints as to the administration of our Land Acts have been made during this debate, but I do not know that any specific instances have been given. I propose to give one or two instances to show that the administration of the Land Acts, so far as grazing-farm leases are concerned, has not been very satisfactory. The clauses in the present Bill are almost identical as to the manner in which the rents of both pastoral leases and grazing farms are to be assessed —on the carrying capabilities, the fitness for grazing purposes in combination with some minor matters. Some years ago the department used to go out of its way to instruct commissioners to first of all put a purchasing price or capital value on the land. On that some kind of interest charge was calculated, and on that the rental was fixed. It resulted in a fiasco, because very few of the commissioners were game to put a low enough capital value on the land to allow of a reasonable rental being arrived at. With the land assessed at 10s. an acre and a 5 per cent. interest charge calculated, the rent would come to about £16 a square mile. That could not be tolerated, and even with an interest charge of 2½ per cent. it was £8 a square mile, and that was clearly too high. They worked at it until the interest charge went almost to vanishing point, and subsequently, according to the statement of the Secretary for Lands, they have begun to assess grazing farm rents on the advice of the local commissioner and the surveyors who did the surveying in the district. I want to show how this has worked out. This matter has been brought under the notice of different Ministers, and they have all said that they assessed the rents on the very best advice, and you would naturally think that the best advice they could get would be that of the men who assessed the rents of the pastoral leases. But it seems that that is not the case. If it has been the case, one would have been astonished at the result. We have in several instances the actual rent which has been put on the land by the dividing commissioner and which has been subsequently thrown open as grazing farms. In one case we had a run on the borders of New South Wales, known as Thurulgoona, thrown open at £5 6s. 8d. per square mile for grazing-farm selection. I was curious in that case, and watched it when it came on for rehearing before the board. The board had assessed the rent for the second period at £1 14s. The owners appealed to the Land Board for a rehearing, and they revised their own valuation and reduced the rent to £1 11s., a difference of some 3s. There is a case in which the difference in the rent is simply enormous. The board, which the Government employ to be arbitrators between the assessors and the runholders, say that £1 11s. is a fair rental for the country, and the Government subsequently throw it open at £5 6s. 8d. I want to make my position perfectly clear in this matter. I do not in any way blame the pastoral lessee or say what I am saying out of any ill-feeling towards him in doing the best he can for himself. I believe anyone in that position would do exactly the same, and I do not know, considering the difficulties they have to contend with, that the representations they make are not such that any honest man might make; but it is perfectly clear that, for some reason which I have never been able to fathom, the rentals which have been put on the grazing farms have been outside altogether a reasonable difference between what the pastoral lessee says he can pay, what the Land Board says ought to be paid, and, with regard to the Mitchell Downs case, what the Government assessors say is a reasonable rental for good sheep country. A test case went before the Supreme Court and assessors, and Mr. W. F. Gibson, one of the dividing commissioners, says—

> "The valuation he put on was for an average season. When he was there in February the country would carry three times the number of sheep or cattle given in his estimate. The purchased and freehold lands were essentially of the same class of country. Butler's Creek paddock consisted, for the most part, of black soil downs heavily grassed, and of first quality, lightly timbered with box and patches of brigalow. On the western side there was a patch of pine and thick brigalow. It was first-class sheep country. It was naturally well watered by Butler's Creek and the Maranoa. It would carry forty head of cattle to the square mile, and on the ratio six sheep to one beast it would carry 240 sheep. A fair rent would be 1s. 4d. per head, or £2 13s. 4d. per square mile."

That is the sworn evidence of one of the Land Board's experts with regard to the value of first-class sheep country. Of course he was bound, if he leaned one way or the other, to give evidence in favour of the Crown, and he considers £2 13s. 4d. is a reasonable rental for good sheep country. Then the Government said they wanted selectors to take that country up; they were anxious to promote settlement, and in spite of the expert saying the country was only worth £2 13s. 4d., they ask £5 6s. 8d. per square mile for it. I say that such administration must necessarily tend to stop settlement; no matter how liberal the law is, the administration is at ault.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Was the country open to selection at £5 6s. 8d. taken up?

Mr. O'CONNELL: No; Thurulgoona Run was not selected. It was dry, waterless country, but it is in an artesian district, and the lessees had spent a great deal of money in developing it. They claim to be the initiators of artesian boring in Queensland, and that was one of the pleas on which they asked for a rehearing. At this time the leased part of this run was paying £1 6s. 6d. per square mile, so that the board increased the rent by about 4s., and for the resumed half which the Government were throwing open they were paying 9s. 6d. per square mile, and yet the Government offer it to selectors at £5 6s. 8d. per square mile. It seems monstrous that men should be asked to go out to such places, spend a large sum of money, and whilst the Government pretend that they want settlement that they should charge such a high rental. This land was of such a class that apparently a company which had spent £400,000 on the whole station barely paid working expenses, and they felt this increase of rent so much that they went to the trouble of a rehearing. The land was thrown open in the beginning of 1895, and I wrote to the *Courier* at that time not only in regard to rentals but in regard to withdrawals, and that is a question which I also think has been very much abused in the past. Men

are allowed up to almost the last moment to believe that land is going to be thrown open, and then all of a sudden they get news within a few days of the holding of the court that it has been withdrawn, and no satisfactory reasons are given. In one instance a large quantity of land was thrown open on Brenda, and it was then withdrawn almost immediately before the day it was to be open for selection. Of course, I can quite understand that there may be cases in which the interests of the State demand that land shall be withdrawn, but the reasons should be exceptionally good. The only grounds upon which the Minister should be allowed to withdraw land should be reasons of public urgency. The right of withdrawal should be reserved to the Minister, but it should only be very sparingly used. I with some friends put in applications for some land in the Winton district, and only about four days before it was to be thrown open it was withdrawn. I understand from the Minister that the reason was the alteration of a boundary and a surrender of a portion of the grazing farm for a portion of the lease, and in looking at the matter casually that appears to be a very good reason. In that instance it was apparent that what the lessee wanted was to get a watershed which would give him a catchment area, which would be of considerable use to him, whereas, as far as the map showed, the land which he wished to surrender offered no such facilities. I am perfectly satisfied that the parties in acting as they did believed they were not doing anything unfair, but probably owing to the pressure of work the Minister was not able to scrutinise the map and discover that the alteration of the boundary would have the effect I state. But if the hon. gentleman looks into the matter he will find that cutting off the portion which it was proposed to cut off would to a certain extent take away the catchment area.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The commissioner reported in favour of it.

Mr. O'CONNELL: I have a map here, and anyone who wishes can see the plan of the selection. As far as I understand the matter, the area which carries the natural water, which is a creek running through the land, would be cut off by the proposed alteration of boundaries. It looks a perfectly reasonable thing to square off a block of country, but in this instance the squaring off would leave the rest of the country with very much less facilities for storing water than at present. These withdrawals of land thrown open to selection and the very great difference between the rents for grazing farms and the rents paid by pastoral lessees has been the cause of more ill-feeling than anything else in connection with that form of settlement. I hold in my hand several articles from the *St. George Standard* and the *Courier* published at the time land was thrown open for selection in that district in 1895. These articles show that no satisfactory reason has been given why 2d. an acre should be charged for that land, or why the land should have been withdrawn at the last moment. If any satisfactory reason can be given I hope the Minister will give it to the House, as I believe it will be the means of wiping away some misunderstanding which at present exists. With regard to the alteration of the constitution and functions of the Land Board, it may be said that the taking away from the lessees of the right of appeal to the Supreme Court is not doing them any very great injustice. But if once we begin to say that rights which exist can be taken away simply because we should not be doing anybody much harm we shall be introducing the thin end of the wedge, and we do not know where it may end. The present arrangement is a distinct contract between the Crown and the pastoral tenants; and if they insist on their right of appeal to the Supreme Court we should be doing a very great wrong in taking that right away. I was surprised to hear what the Minister said in regard to the unsatisfactory working of the present system. I had no idea that it was working unsatisfactorily, and to the uninitiated the only ground for saying that is that the Government were more or less worsted in the appeals recently made to the Supreme Court. With regard to the argument that the raising of the rents paid by pastoral tenants was necessary, all I can say is that if it was necessary it is a proof that the first assessments were wrong, because no one can deny that the value of all station property has fallen enormously since the rents were first assessed. I find that in 1889-90 the value of a bale of wool was £14 16s., in 1890-91 £11 5s., in 1891-92 £9 15s., in 1892-93 £10 4s., in 1893-94 £9 19s. 6d. I have not the figures for a later date, but I believe that the price obtained this year is considerably less than that obtained in 1889-90. Under those circumstances, to insist upon raising the rents is an absolute injustice, and a thing which no right-thinking body of men would do. The only thing that can be said in favour of the raising of the rents is that the lessees have now greater facilities for getting their produce away than they had formerly, but that would apply only to far-out Western lands, and chiefly to sheep country. With regard to cattle men, they have been continually disappointed, and have continually asked for assistance to open up markets and keep down pests, yet they are asked now to pay a higher rental. If fair play had been meted out to them, their rents should have been reduced instead of increased. With regard to the partisanship of this court, I am of a different opinion to that expressed by many members who have said that it is impossible for the assessors to be anything but partisans. I cannot see why they should be partisans any more than arbitrators, and why we should not get men who are capable, and who will take a fair and square view of the matters brought before them. There is no doubt that in this case men are chosen who are capable, and who will take care for their own interests and status that they do make an assessment which will bring them into disrepute among their fellow men; and I hold that a judge of the Supreme Court would be the last man in the world who would be partial to either side. It may be that judges are not practical men, but they are quite able to discriminate between the evidence given by the parties, and say which side had the weight of evidence in their favour. I know that if I had a matter to go before a tribunal I should be perfectly satisfied to leave it to such a court as far as getting justice is concerned. But what I think is very objectionable, and what I believe a good many of the public consider objectionable, is the heavy cost of going to the Supreme Court. I would like to see it made impossible, as it is in South Australia, for any solicitor or counsel to appear before the court; let everybody plead for themselves, or employ experts who are really capable of assisting the court to arrive at a decision. People should certainly never be put to the expense they are put to in going to the Supreme Court to get redress for what they consider is an injustice. It may seem hard to keep lawyers out of it, but the only way to get out of the difficulty is to exclude them.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It would not make a bit of difference to those men.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: Oh, yes it would.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I can give you some facts.

Mr. O'CONNELL: I will be very glad if the hon. member will do so, but many of these

persons are well able to plead their own cases, and there is no reason why they should be saddled with this expense.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What about the man who cannot do it?

Mr. O'CONNELL: He will be able to employ a layman for very much less than he could employ a lawyer. Of course I do not pretend to say that I am right and everybody else is wrong, but it is the duty of Parliament to reduce these expenses as much as possible. The South Australian Bill is founded upon that principle. There are one or two clauses in regard to grazing farmers that I think are a mistake. One of them gives priority to grazing farmers in the same way that it is given to grazing and agricultural homesteaders. That will in all probability lead to the eyes being picked out of many of the runs. I suggested a similar clause in an Act passed two years ago, but the then Secretary for Lands objected to it, and it did not come before the Committee. In thinking over the matter since I came to the conclusion that the Secretary for Lands was right and I was wrong. I now think that giving priority to grazing farmers will induce men to urge the Minister to throw open certain lands that they wish to secure, and they will be able to obtain them.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is not the proposal in the Bill.

Mr. O'CONNELL: Of course it will be subject to the approval of the Secretary for Lands, who may refuse such applications, and, if he refuse, no action will be taken. But he may take action, and the result will be to deteriorate the value of the land. With the enormous area of land we have to deal with, and the amount of work that has to be done in the office, there will be many cases in which action will be taken in which it would not be if there were more time to consider the circumstances. No doubt it must often be very difficult to know what is the proper course to pursue. It would be very useful if this power could be exercised only in favour of *bonâ fide* selectors, because it would induce them to take up land; but like many other useful powers, it might be very dangerous at times. Another proposal in the Bill is to make it easier to mortgage grazing farms. At the first blush that may seem very desirable, but it may be used for improper purposes, and there will be nothing easier than for a man to say to another, "You take up that selection; I will find the money for the improvements if you mortgage it to me." Of course, the other arrangements would be fixed up quietly, and whenever the mortgagee, who may be the owner of the run, wants the land he will get it. I also disapprove of the proposition to abolish the ballot and adopt the auction system instead, for in many cases it will lead to men paying more rent for their land than they intend to continue to pay, and finally abandon it, getting a couple of years' use of it before it is re-opened for selection again. If a poor man has little chance of getting a selection under the present system, he would have less under the auction system. I would like to see the area of grazing homesteads increased, because I think it would lead to families taking up grazing homesteads in the West and elsewhere. Another matter is this: These grazing homesteads have been confined exclusively to the Western country. So far as I can see, there is no reason why they should not be granted to people on the coast also, because there are many persons who would be willing to take them up, and make a comfortable living out of them. As it is they have to take up grazing farms, and they are denied the right of priority that grazing homesteaders enjoy. These provisions were inserted in the Act, because it was thought they would offer inducements to the shearing population in the West, but I do not know that they have been very successful. The present ten years' residence is penal, and I think the term ought to be reduced, as it is in regard to agricultural homesteads, to five years.

Mr. LEAHY: It is only six months in the year.

Mr. O'CONNELL: He cannot deal with the land for ten years, which is too long a period. I do not wish to detain the House any longer. I hope that in committee the Bill will be made one which the Minister will be proud of and which the House and the country will be satisfied with; and which, also, will lead to the settlement of a large population in such a way as to give the settlers an opportunity of doing well. Revenue should not be the first consideration in this Bill. We want population and should not rackrent the people. If we could be sure that by giving them the land for nothing for the first year or two, and then, by charging them a moderate rental, we would settle a large population, it would pay the State very well in the long run to do so. I do not think the Secretary for Lands should look to the revenue as being of primary importance. He should consider first how he can settle a large and prosperous population, and if he can do that he will deserve better of the country than if he poured thousands of pounds into the Treasury every year.

Mr. KERR: I shall not follow the example of previous speakers and take up time in complimenting the Secretary for Lands. I believe the Bill is an honest attempt on the part of the hon. gentleman to bring in a measure which will prove beneficial, not to one class alone, but to every class in the community. One thing I would like to impress upon the hon. gentleman is that we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that previous Land Acts have been interfered with by their administration, and, however good this measure may be, if it is not properly administered, it will also be a failure. I shall touch briefly upon those parts in the Bill which I consider defective, and shall endeavour to point out in what directions the Bill may be amended so as to aid in bringing about settlement upon the lands—which I take to be the object of the Secretary for Lands and of the Government. The hon. gentleman says that the Bill will increase the revenue, but I do not believe that the aim of our land laws should be to force a large amount of money out of the people who settle upon the soil. Our primary object should be to induce people to go upon the land, and to make a good and sufficient living out of it; and if we find that they are in prosperous circumstances, and making more than a sufficient living, then the State, as landlord, can step in and raise the rent. One of the great objections people who wish to take up land have is that too long a period elapses between the date of application, when they have to pay down a year's rent and the survey fee, before they get their license to occupy the land. I know of an instance in my electorate where a man in a small way near Isisford, after making application and paying his rent and survey fee, received a communication from the Lands Department, upon which he thought that he could go on to the land straight away. He did so. He had been a shearer, and having spare time he determined to make his improvements, but after he had commenced his improvements, and had a few stock on the land, he received a notice from the former lessee of the resumed half of the run that he was trespassing, and he had to remove his stock until he received his license from the Minister. I believe it is necessary under the Act of 1884 for the Lands Department to give notice to the lessee; but the department should give six months' previous notice to the lessee so that

he would know that the lands were going to be thrown open to selection, and then as soon as an application was confirmed a man should be able to go on to the land and make his home there. Many men complain of the delay which takes place in the Lands Department in Brisbane. I remember several agricultural farms being thrown open in the Barcaldine district. All the applications for the land were lodged on the same day; the selectors were all ready to go upon the land and put in wheat, but they found they had no right to do so. One man had a friend at court in Brisbane, who interviewed the Land Board and the Minister, and he got his license; but the other men who had paid their money at the same time had to wait some months before they got their licenses, and they were thereby delayed. Now, if the man who had a friend was able to get his license straight away I do not see why the department could not remove that obstacle in every case. I believe that when the Secretary for Lands becomes thoroughly familiar with the working of his department and has these complaints laid before him he will endeavour to remove the cause of complaint. He will see that it blocks settlement. Many men want to make their improvements, such as fencing, straight away, and if they were allowed to go on to the land at once they would be contented, and it would do away with a lot of worry. This afternoon the hon. member for Dalby endeavoured to point out that hon. members on this side are opposed to the pioneer squatters having any advantage over other settlers. It is all very well for the hon. member to tell us about the pioneer squatters, but there are very few of the pioneer squatters left in the Western portion of the colony. You could easily count the pioneers who went out and developed the country in my own electorate on the fingers of one hand. The runs have passed away from those men into the hands of financial institutions that have no claim upon the people of the country as pioneers. They have no prior claim compared with the people living in the district. You might as well claim priority for the grazing farmer over the grazing homesteader, as the grazing farmer followed the pastoral lessee, and you might then just as well claim priority and special advantages for the grazing homesteader over those who may come after him. The hon. member twitted us that we did not take into consideration the difficulties of those who took up the land in the early days, but the hon. member forgot the advantages which those squatters possessed. They had not to fulfil the conditions which people taking up land now have to fulfil. They got the pick of the country—the natural water, river and creek frontages, and lagoons—while people now taking up land have not those advantages. They also had the advantage of being better able to dispose of their surplus stock than those who coming after them had to take land further out. Yet we have the hon. member for Dalby coming down and asking that they should have further advantages over men who are following the same occupation as themselves, who are raising sheep, cattle, and horses, and have to go into the same markets as the pastoral lessee to dispose of them. They have, too, to do that at a great disadvantage compared with the person who has a large holding, as such a person producing a large quantity of wool, sheep, or cattle is able to make better terms than the small man, who is put to the same expense for droving and freight for a smaller output, and who is at another disadvantage with brokers and commission agents making a higher charge for small than for large parcels. Therefore I say that instead of the lessee being allowed any advantage over the grazing farmer, the grazing farmer should be allowed to take up his country at the same rent as that paid by the lessee. He has to make the same improvements as the lessee, and many of the grazing farmers have taken up dry country which before they took it up did not carry anything like the quantity of stock it carries now. I know of one station in my electorate that is now carrying as many sheep as it ever carried, and there are nearly as many carried now on the grazing farms on the resumed portion of the run. We have it on the word of the Premier in this House that nearly double the number of sheep are now being carried in the Mitchell district as the result of the closer settlement.

The PREMIER: But my word is no good on the other side of the House.

Mr. KERR: It is good enough if you want to use it, and I am reminded that the devil can quote Scripture sometimes.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Have you been quoting it?

Mr. KERR: Yes. Some of us believe that the present lessees are paying a very fair rent for their land, but if they are, the grazing farmer is paying a great deal too much. The hon. member for Toowoomba, Mr. Fogarty, spoke upon this measure, and apparently the hon. member has no grazing farms in his electorate. He says—

"The grazing farmers have to find water and to make more improvements in proportion to the area of their holdings than the large holders, and then they are asked to pay four times as much rent. It is totally unfair; yet up to the present we have heard no complaints from the grazing farmers, nor have they asked for any reduction in their rents."

I do not know where the hon. member has been living all his life. Apparently he has never been out West, and has never travelled in the Central district or gone amongst the grazing farmers. If he had he would know that there is one continual complaint from them that their rent is too high. They point out that by closer settlement they have improved the condition of the land; by putting down bores and making dams they have increased the carrying capacity of the land by nearly two-thirds, and some have increased it more. Therefore they claim that they are improving the property of the country, that their actions ought to be taken into consideration, and that they ought to receive some acknowledgment. They then point out that when the first period expires they are labouring under the fear that their rents will be raised after they have done so much to improve the condition of the land, and what they ask for, and what they have every reason to expect will be granted, is that the Lands Department will take their case into consideration. The hon. member for Balonne pointed out that the squatters in the south-western district were paying a great deal more than the grazing farmers. Now, we have in the electorate of the hon. member one squatter who has a run of 1,687,684 acres, and who pays only £2,512 as rent. At even ½d. an acre his rent would be £3,516. In the same district there are grazing farms to the extent of 1,227,258 acres paying a rental of £8,041, or £5,529 more than this squatter, although they have 360,426 acres less than he has. If the grazing farmers had the same area as the squatter they would pay £10,248 at the rate they are now paying, or £7,716 more than the squatter pays; that is four times as much as the squatter and £180 over. Then we must take into consideration the divisional board rating. It will be well known to the Secretary for Lands that the divisional boards rate not on the value of the land but upon the rent which the tenants pay. The grazing farmers therefore are paying four times as much rates as the squatter although they are occupying similar country. The Minister and department should see the justice

of remembering those facts when the rents are being fixed. The hon. member for Balonne twitted this party with saying that the grazing farmer was paying four times as much rent as the squatter, and he asked us to produce proof of our assertions. Now, in the electorate of the hon. member for Leichhardt there is some land in reference to which I will point out what the grazing farmer and squatter have to pay respectively. For Columbia lease, 27 square miles of available and no unavailable country, the lessee pays for that £1 4s. per square mile. On the grazing right, 28 miles available and 5 unavailable country, or a total of 33 square miles, the rent is at the rate of 12s. per square mile. On Fernlees lease there is 56 miles available and 5 unavailable country, a total of 61 square miles, for which £2 1s. 8d. per square mile is paid. That appears to be very high until we take into consideration that there is a grazing area of 136½ square miles of available and 112 square miles of unavailable country, a total of 248 square miles, for which 12s. a mile is paid, or on an average 6s. 7d. per mile. Those are the leases of which we have heard so much from the hon. member for Balonne which pay a rental so much higher than the grazing farmers are paying. On Ludwig lease, 33 square miles available and 12 unavailable, they pay £1 17s. 6d. per square mile for the available country, or an average of £1 7s. 6d. for the total. We find these holders paying about 10s. per square mile all round. In other words, we have the grazing farmer paying four times as much rent as the squatter in the same district is paying. Under Part III. of the Act of 1884 pastoral tenants have to pay for the right of depasturing on the resumed parts of runs 16s. 2¼d. per square mile, for occupation licenses 12s. 8¾d. per square mile, and for pastoral leases 24s. 6¾d. per square mile. Grazing farmers in the same district pay nearly 1½d. per acre, or about £4 per square mile, and agricultural farmers nearly 4½d. per acre, or £12 per square mile. That is one instance, and hundreds of similar instances could be given if necessary. We were told by the hon. member for Balonne that on Boolaman they paid for every square mile of country they have. The available country on that run is 10,038 square miles, and the unavailable country 195 square miles. If the hon. member had taken the unavailable country into consideration when referring to those large runs he would have seen that the squatter was not paying anything like what was paid by grazing farmers in other parts of the country.

Mr. STORY: I was speaking of Curriwillinghi; there is not an acre of land there that is not paid for.

Mr. KERR: I am not speaking of Curriwillinghi, but of Boolaman; the hon. member referred to that in one portion of his speech. We were reminded the other night by the hon. member of what the pioneer squatters had done for the colony, and he told us that Mr. C. B. Fisher could manage the whole civilised world if it was a sheep run. I have no doubt that that gentleman could also manage the whole of the uncivilised world if it was a sheep run; but this gentleman, of whose experience, qualities, and abilities the hon. member spoke so highly, was not a financial expert, as the records of the public Press showed that he was incapable of managing his own financial affairs. I would like to point out to the Secretary for Lands that what the people want, and what they are asking for, is that the whole of the resumed portions of runs should be thrown open for selection. There are many districts—some in my own electorate—where the people want to select on the resumptions of runs, and make homes for themselves and families on the land, and if they were given the opportunity to get those lands they would put money into circulation, but the resumptions are not thrown open.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Why do they not write to the Lands Department?

Mr. KERR: I have written to the department to have land in the Tambo district thrown open, and was informed that there were no lands in that district which would be thrown open for selection. I can quite conceive that the Secretary for Lands would say that if these resumed lands were thrown open for selection the Crown would lose the revenue that was now received from the lessee; but if you take into consideration that the throwing open of the lands would be the means of settling a large number of people, you will see that what we should lose in land revenue would be gained in Customs and excise duties and other taxes that would be paid by the people taking up the land. Then, again, by the Lands Department allowing expensive improvements to be made on certain portions of resumed areas they have blocked settlement. They have allowed expensive bores to be put down on resumed portions of runs.

Mr. LEAHY: In no case has the board ever agreed to a bore being put down on the resumed portion of a run.

Mr. KERR: I know a case in my own electorate.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Has the Land Board sanctioned it?

Mr. KERR: There is no man who can afford to pay for such expensive improvements when taking up a selection, and whether it was sanctioned by the board or not the bore was put down. I know a case in my electorate where an expensive cattle-yard is erected on a resumed area. We are informed by the local land agents that these lands have expensive improvements upon them, and we are asked if we are prepared to pay for the improvements. When I was looking at a piece of country before the time of rabbit-proof fencing, I found that the squatter had erected a very expensive wire-netting fence to keep out the wallabies, and the cost of that improvement would be very heavy to any person who wanted to take up the land. When we take into consideration that lessees are allowed to make these improvements, and that they make them on the understanding that they were to be protected——

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Are you sure of that?

Mr. KERR: Yes.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You have not told me about the bore—whether there was permission given to put it down.

Mr. KERR: No, I have told you about the bore; but the bore is there, and I know that any poor man cannot take up country near that bore, as he could not afford the expense. I am certain that the lessees who put down bores have not done so without having some understanding that their improvements would be protected.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You might tell me the name.

Mr. KERR: I will give you the name if you want it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I think it ought to be given here. I like straight dealing; I have had enough of suppression of names.

Mr. KERR: There is a bore at Lansdown Station. Those who wish to select on the resumed parts of runs also complain that those lands have been so heavily stocked that the grass is all eaten down; the roots are grubbed up, so that the country takes a long time to recover. I think the Secretary for Lands ought to restrict the number of cattle and horses per square mile

upon the resumed portions of runs. Then again, there is a good deal of subletting going on in regard to these resumed portions. The lessees only pay a small rent, and the Government should prevent these lands being sublet to people whose cattle eat them out. The hon. member for Toowoomba referred to a company, the prospectus of which was recently issued in the old country, and the object of which was to acquire certain large stations in this colony. That hon. member stated the enormous profits which had been made by those stations during the last six years, and pointed out that during that period a very small amount had been paid as rent. Barcaldine Station has been mentioned. That is a very large station; it shears 200,000 sheep every year; the railway station is not more than 12 or 13 miles from the woolshed, and the freight is low. If we take into consideration the amount of freight saved since the time they had to pay from £30 to £40 per ton to Bogantungan, the shorter time the wool takes to get to market, and the amount of interest that must be saved if they are working on borrowed money, we must come to the conclusion that their profits must be very much more than in former days. But have their rents been raised in proportion to what the grazing farmers are paying? They have not been raised in proportion to their profits, and therefore I claim that instead of these large holdings having any larger claim upon the colony than grazing farms or agricultural homesteads, they have nothing of the kind. The men who have been for a number of years paying four times as much rent as they, have the first claim for consideration. Another difficulty is in regard to improvements upon the resumed portions. We all know that a grazing farmer or a grazing homesteader who applies to take up land on the resumed portion of a run has to value the improvements and pay the money into the court with his first year's rent. But the lessee of the run also makes a valuation and lodges his claim, and if they cannot come to terms a Crown lands ranger is sent out to value the improvements, whether dams, fences, or yards.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: But not bores?

Mr. KERR: What the selectors who have gone through the Bill and who have communicated with me and with other hon. members ask is that, if they are dissatisfied with the value placed upon the improvements by the Crown lands ranger, they should be allowed to withdraw their deposit. It is a very one-sided arrangement that when an intending selector has deposited his first year's rent and the survey fee, together with the value of the improvements as estimated by himself, that the valuation of the ranger should be taken, although the man who wishes to take up the land may be far more capable of forming a just estimate of the value of the improvements than the ranger can possibly be. He may be accustomed to fencing and bush work, and yet if he does not accept the valuation of the ranger his deposit will be forfeited. Then, again, under this Bill, in the case of a forfeited selection the incoming tenant has to pay the value of the improvements, which has to be refunded to the selector who forfeited, less 10 per cent. to be retained by the Crown. Taking into consideration the difficulties selectors have to contend with, the many obstacles that are placed in their way, and that many of them are forced by circumstances over which they have no control, after spending all the money they have been able to get together in improving their holdings, and in consequence of bad seasons, to forfeit their selections, why should the Crown step in and retain 10 per cent. of the value of their improvements? Many of them, if they have the means at some future time, would in all probability again settle on the land. Then, again, under the Bill the term of lease is to be reduced. I have received communications from many grazing farmers, homestead lessees, and selectors in my electorate, and their contention is that the original term of the lease—thirty years—should be adhered to. We hear a good deal about the care that a man will take of land if he has the freehold—how a stone will blossom forth as a garden when he has a freehold, and how a garden will become a wilderness if he has only a lease; but these men who are living on the land ask that the original term of the lease should be adhered to, and they are directly opposed to the selling of the land. They believe that the Government will get more out of the land by leasing it than they will if they dispose of it as has been done in the past. Another point in the Bill which has caused a good deal of writing in the papers in regard to the evils which have existed is the proposal to substitute sale by auction for the ballot system. Now there is a chance for a poor man getting a selection if it is balloted for, but I am certain he has no chance at all if the land is wanted by someone with more money than he has. I give the Secretary for Lands credit for endeavouring to alter the system, for I believe that evils exist under the present system. I have received some correspondence from an unsuccessful applicant at Longreach, who, with others, applied for selections that were thrown open there some time in May. He complained of the evils of the system, but I think the hon. member for Dalby pointed out that the Minister for Lands in New South Wales was introducing a clause in a Bill he was bringing before the Parliament there——

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I referred to it myself.

Mr. KERR: Whereby the applicants would be weeded out by officers appointed by the Crown. It is well known that the land agents in the various districts know pretty well who are the people who really want to take up land, and they have also a very good idea of who are "dummies." The whole of the people in the township know who are the "dummies" who are making application. The people who have communicated with me ask—not that the balloting should be done away with, but that marbles should be substituted for the envelopes, and that one of the marbles should have marked upon it in blue the word "approved." Then all the marbles should be put into a box and drawn for. The hon. member for Cook says that the lottery system was gambling. There is a lot of gambling in it, and it is also gambling the other way—by auction. The Secretary for Lands should introduce the system the New South Wales Secretary for Lands is going to introduce, and reduce the number of applicants to a fair and reasonable number of those who he knows are really going to be settlers on the land.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is the trouble.

Mr. KERR: If the hon. gentleman was living in the locality where the lands are balloted for he would have no difficulty in coming to a conclusion as to who were the men who would really settle upon the lands. The hon. member for Mitchell will bear me out that several put in applications who had no intention of settling on the land. One matter I may touch upon is connected with the administration of the department. Several selectors took up land on the Lovatt Downs resumed portion. It will be remembered that those lands were thrown open and then withdrawn from selection. They were then thrown open again, and some of the original applicants made application again and got them. As I

passed through Arrilalah last March I saw one of the applicants, who with his sons had been waiting for four months to get his land surveyed, that he might get his license and go on to the land and make his improvements. When men make application for selections, and pay their money into the Lands Department, the department should recognise that as soon as ever it is possible those men should get their licenses and be allowed to go on to their land and occupy it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Before survey?

Mr. KEOGH: Yes. Why not? We have had it before.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Oh, oh!

Mr. KERR: I am not saying it should be before survey.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I am not laughing at you, but at the hon. member for Rosewood.

Mr. KERR: This man is kept waiting for twelve months, I understand from the hon. member for Mitchell, because the surveyor has wasted his time and allowed the river at Longreach to get up, and then after going round to Arrilalah he found he could not cross the river there. What I am asking is that in such a case, if the departmental surveyor for the district cannot go out, the selector should be allowed to employ a capable private surveyor.

Mr. HARDACRE: The Act allows that.

Mr. KERR: I know it is allowed by the Act, but it is at the option of the Minister.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: And is never refused.

Mr. KERR: The man I refer to has been kept off his land for months, though I believe he had made arrangements for the purchase of sheep.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Why did he not get a surveyor to survey the land?

Mr. KERR: Because he was humbugged by the Government surveyor. I would like to touch upon the matter of the stock routes, as I have not noticed that there has been any alteration made with respect to them by this Bill. These routes have been surveyed through the squatter's run, and as he has to pay rent for the land comprised in the routes, he is unwilling to allow even carriers to camp on any portion of the run other than a camping reserve. They must all travel the regulation six miles a day, and if they are prevented through stress of weather, breakages, or any other cause, they are liable to be prosecuted by the lessee. These stock routes should be resumed right through, and then there could be no objection raised by the squatters, and those travelling stock would not have to go the six miles a day. I am certain that those divisional board members who are acquainted with the difficulties of carriers would not strictly enforce the regulations that they should travel six miles per day. I will not refer to the waterless portions of the runs, because I understand that that matter is to be dealt with in a separate Bill, but there is another part of the Bill which wants amending. I refer to the provision under which a mortgagee can take possession by giving one month's notice. I think the Secretary for Lands will allow that that is rather a short notice. The selectors and grazing farmers ask that that should be amended—that the mortgagee should give three months' notice, and that the land should be advertised in the two local or nearest papers, and put up to auction.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They don't understand their own business.

Mr. KERR: I think they do. They argue that if the mortgagee is allowed to sell to a private person, he will arrange to have some one he can sell to; but that if the land is advertised and put up to auction everything will be above board, and no doubt better prices will be obtained than could be got from private buyers. Under the proposed arrangement the mortgagee might oppress the grazing farmer or homesteader when he knows he is not in a position to pay; whereas if three months' notice were allowed there would be a chance of making some satisfactory arrangements. The Secretary for Lands may say that these proposals would not be for the good of these people, but they have studied the question, and know what they are talking about. Some of them have gone under, and know what it is. The Minister, I think, has never held a grazing farm or homestead and has not gone under, and considering that these suggestions come from grazing farmers they should receive some consideration. I shall not detain the House any longer. I trust when the Bill gets into committee every member of the House will endeavour to make it as good a Bill as possible. There are numbers of people who have been forced off the land, who, if they could get land again on reasonable terms, would settle down and become producers. As the hon. member for Normanby said, if the land is rented out to them at say an advance of 25 per cent. upon the amount paid for the resumed portions of runs, people would flock to settle upon it. I therefore ask that the Minister will give consideration to the representations which have been made, and that we will endeavour to make this a good and workable measure.

Mr. McGAHAN: I congratulate the Minister upon the able manner in which he has dealt with the question. It is a very difficult one, and he deserves credit for what he has done. There are a few clauses to which I would like to refer, and the first is clause 140, dealing with pre-emptions. In my district, which is a closely-settled one, that principle has worked very badly. The old-established men who settled in the colony thirty years ago took up runs in the settled districts, and had a pre-emptive right to purchase so many acres according to the amount of money they expended. The consequence was that they took up the water frontages and all the best land and left the back and poor country to the smaller men. And not only that, but they were encouraged to go in for borrowed money to make the whole of their runs freehold, and in very few instances have I known it to do much good to those who purchased. It passed out of their hands into those of second and third parties, and those people are to-day heavily involved, and will be until such times as they can sell at fictitious values. It would be a great mistake to enact a clause in this Bill which would simply be worked upon the same lines. If a grazing farmer gets 20,000 acres of good land on a thirty years' lease that is a very fair thing. At the end of the term the rent should be reassessed, and then he might be allowed another thirty years at an increased rental if the land is worth more, but such leases should not be granted in a way that would block closer settlement. With regard to clause 89, which says that when there are two or more applicants to select the same land as a grazing farm, or as an unconditional selection, the land shall be offered at auction, I am opposed to that provision. I cannot see how the small man can stand against the moneyed man under such a provision, and I do not see that there is anything unfair in the ballot system. On one occasion in my own electorate there were thirty-eight applicants for a 10-acre block. I myself drew the thirty-fifth ticket, and was the lucky winner, though thirty-four had drawn before me. Can any hon. member say that there was anything unfair in that? If there is any chance for the man with limited means it is the one chance he has in a ballot, because under the auction

system the moneyed man is bound to outbid him. Clause 20 provides for a Land Court, which is to consist of three members, one of whom is to be a barrister. As far as I have heard, the present Land Board, consisting of two members, has worked satisfactorily. Certainly I have heard no complaints against the board. I believe that the present members of that board are competent gentlemen, and as long as they fill their positions honourably and straightforwardly, and satisfy the public, I do not see why we should increase their number by adding another member at the cost of another £1,000. I shall therefore oppose that clause. With regard to the penalty for non-payment of rent, I think it is too heavy. Five per cent. is quite enough in all cases; and wherever hardship has occurred in the way of heavy losses, either to a small selector or a squatter, it should be in the power of the Minister to forego even that penalty. As to the homestead provisions, I think it is ridiculous to ask a man with a 640-acre block in very inferior country, possibly on top of a mountain or stony ridges, to expend £320 on that 640 acres. We shall never get settlement with clauses like that in our Land Act. I would call the Minister's attention to lands in such districts as Pikedale, Glenelg, Warroo, and Bodumba, which are in his electorate, and ask him could any man with 640 acres in such country make a living on it? If you want to put a man in a place where he will starve, give him a 640-acre block in such country. I notice that that most important Act, the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act, is not mentioned in this Bill. I will not discuss that matter, as I am afraid I shall be pulled up if I do. I simply wish to ask the Minister if he will be kind enough, as soon as he gets this Bill through, to bring in a measure to amend that Act so as to give an extension of two years to the selectors. I trust the Minister will get every assistance from both sides of the House to put this Bill through, as I consider it is one of the best Bills that has ever been brought before the House, and if it passes after a slight amendment it will be a great advantage to the colony. I shall endeavour to assist him in every way in my power.

Mr. DIBLEY: The principal speakers upon this Bill have either been champions of the squatters or the champions of the grazing farmers, but very little has been said about the small selector so far. I think the clause providing for the extension of homesteads to 640 acres in the case of inferior land will do very little good. It would be better to increase the area of good land, because it is well known that all our good lands within the margin where cultivation will pay have gone long ago, and we have none that can be taken up in small blocks. Men settling more than thirty miles from a railway station or navigable river should have larger areas of land. In the Wide Bay and Burnett districts there is a great deal of good land more than that distance from a market, that people would take up readily if they could get it in large areas and cheaply. There are several large stations, such as Degilbo, Gigoomgan, and Widgee, and further south, Colinton and Beauaraba.

Mr. SMYTH: What about Kin Kin?

Mr. DIBLEY: That is more suitable for sugar-growing, and I would not advocate that it should be taken up in large areas. Eighty or 100 acres is sufficient for sugar land. I am speaking of country that will cost £10 per acre to clear. In classifying land, not only should it be classed according to its quality, but also according to the cost of clearing it. I went up to Wallumbilla and spent three days riding over it, and I am certain that the man who chose that as agricultural land ought to be hanged. I did not see an acre of good land there, in fact I could have taken all the good land away in my hand. No man who has filled the position of Secretary for Lands in Queensland has such a chance of making a name for himself as the present Secretary for Lands. He has the largest amount of land available, and could always keep a large quantity in the market. There is plenty of good land in the settled districts, but there has been a lot of worthless land open for years, which would be dear as a gift. There is a clause in the Bill which prohibits occupation licensees from fencing, and that is a very useful provision. If those men are allowed to put up fences and other improvements they will block settlement. I have seen plenty of that under the Act of 1868, and settlers have had to pay dearly for fences which were no good to them. They were not actually upon their lines, but they had to pay full value for them. There is no doubt that if these men are allowed to fence they will do it in such a manner as to obstruct selection. I do not know whether the auction system is worse than the ballot system, but they are both bad, and before the Bill gets through committee I hope someone will devise a better scheme.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I have another.

Mr. DIBLEY: I believe the hon. gentleman will try to make the Bill a good one. There are many clauses that will require to be well debated, and I hope every hon. member will assist to make the Bill better than it is at present.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I have listened attentively to the debate so far, and have received a great deal of instruction from it. I must say that the arguments advanced by the hon. member for Bulloo and the hon. member for Normanby were the arguments I intended to raise, and I need not repeat them. The hon. member for Dalby caused me a certain amount of amusement. At the outset he complimented the Government upon the Bill, and raised a cry for mercy on behalf of the squatter. Later on he crossed swords with the hon. member for Bulloo, but afterwards he used the same arguments as that hon. member, which I was delighted to hear. The hon. member for Balonne made the same appeal for mercy on behalf of the squatter, and I would like to know why hon. members complain that we on this side want to see the old pioneer, as they call him, extinguished and ruined. I would ask those hon. members who bring this claptrap against us what authority they have for making those statements? I would also like to ask the hon. member for Dalby, where are these old pioneers? The hon. member knows the Mitchell district well; I think he is interested in it; but I would ask him if there is a single pioneer squatter there? There may be one left who is his own master, and that is my old political opponent, Mr. Cameron, but he is the only one. We on this side would be the first to respect old pioneers, whether squatters or sugar-planters, and if it came to a question of assisting them, we would be as warm in that direction as any other hon. members in the House. It is not so long since the Government asked this House to agree to legislation to protect not the pioneers but the squatting industry, and hon. members on this side assisted them as much as hon. members on the other side in passing that legislation. I would be only too willing to assist any old pioneer if the hon. member can show me one. What did the hon. member ask this House to do? He simply asked us not to raise an outcry against the squatters, but he did not show how the squatter is being injured? He then went on to discuss the Bill, and he found fault with the Secretary for Lands and his Bill right through the piece. As the hon. member has taken up the cudgels for the squatters, I would ask him what complaint he has got

against the Government on that score? Every hon. member will freely admit that under the Act of 1884, as under every previous Act, the pastoral lessee has been well protected, and he is also well protected under this Bill. The rights of the pastoral lessee are in no way repudiated. It is admitted that so far as rent is concerned, the grazing farmer pays, on an average, at least three times as much as the pastoral lessee. There may be individual instances, such as those quoted by the hon. member for Balonne, but even the figures quoted by the hon. member show that the pastoral lessee pays less rent than the grazing farmer in the same district. The pastoral lessee had the right of coming under the Act of 1884, and in return for the resumption of a portion of his run the Crown gave him the other portion at a certain rental; and I contend that this House would not attempt to interfere with his rental except under the Act. I do not know whether the hon. member for Dalby wanted to appeal to our sympathy when he referred to the pioneer squatters, because when we deal with existing tenures we are in reality dealing with the financial institutions that have crushed the life out of the old pioneers, and are crushing the life out of the country. The experience of my family is that one of the pioneers in the sugar-producing districts went to the wall twice, and I think the experience of my hon. friend in connection with the pastoral industry is somewhat similar. Sooner or later, either through having too much land or in having too much money invested, or in consequence of bad seasons, the old pioneers have gone under and have been unable to extricate themselves. Where are the pioneer sugur-planters? They are all gone. Go to the stations and the same thing will be found there. Within thirty miles of Longreach there used to be an old pioneer who had invested £180,000 in his station, and the last I heard of him was that he was out on the opal field mining for opal just the same as any common shearer or digger, while a financial institution holds his station. By assisting the present pastoral lessees we are not assisting the pioneers of the industry at all. I happen to represent a district where there has been great expectation with reference to this Bill. Everyone connected with land matters hoped to see a codification and simplification of the laws, but what do we find? During the last four or five years, I suppose I have had this book containing the Act of 1884 and the amending Acts in my hand every day in the week finding out something new, and I do not think I know half that is in it now. The great hope in the West was that this would be boiled down by one-half, and that it would be put in plain English. There is no great complaint against the principle of our land law, but it is so vague that no person, no matter how learned he may be, really knows what the law is. Instead of codifying and simplifying the law so that any person can read and understand it, the Secretary for Lands wants us to still carry this book about with us, and also another Act on top of it, containing some 250 clauses.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Are you serious?

Mr. FITZGERALD: I am serious. If a pastoral lessee comes to me wanting to know how he stands, I have to go back to the Act of 1884. This does not apply to him at all. The other day a grazing farmer in my district came to me to ask me if this Bill would affect him, as he did not know what Act he would be under. Of course unless he makes an application to come under this Bill he will still be under the Act of 1884, and surely a man who has a thirty years' lease will not come under this Bill and accept a twenty-one years' lease.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: He will get his thirty years' lease just the same. That is provided for. I do not think you have read the Bill.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I have read the Bill. As I have said with reference to the present law, I really do not know half of what is in it, and I do not think any hon. member is "game" to stand up and say that he understands all that there is in it. What is wanted by people who wish to settle on the land is not an amendment of the existing law but a simplification. If the Secretary for Lands will carry his mind back over the discussion that has taken place on this Bill, he will find that every amendment of importance in it has been severely criticised by hon. members on both sides. I do not think he will find one of the big amendments in the Bill which has received any encouragement. The hon. member for Toowoomba led the assault, and all the speakers have denounced the auction clauses, pre-emption clauses, and all the principal amendments suggested. Even the hon. member for Dalby took up the same complaint, and no one has supported the Secretary for Lands in the alterations he has proposed. People would prefer the Act of 1884, with all its intricacies—despite the fact that it is so intricate that a lawyer, after four or five years hard "yacker" at it, can scarcely understand it, people will be satisfied with it if the Minister will only administer it fairly in accordance with the intention of the Act. I know the hon. gentleman is at the head of a very large department, and he cannot see into everything himself. He has to leave a lot to persons under him, and I take this opportunity of telling him to his face that in the Western districts the great complaint is not so much as to the deficiencies in the Act, but as to its administration. There has recently been a great deal of land selection around Longreach, and the Minister must have received piles of letters from that district from people asking for land to be thrown open there. What happens? There is one surveyor told off to survey all the land thrown open in that district. I give the hon. gentleman credit for being quite willing to throw land open to selection, but when application is made for land it is found that the surveyor is busy somewhere else, and people have to wait several months to have land thrown open. Then only small portions are thrown open at a time; that means that those portions are rushed; there are ten, fifteen, and twenty applicants for the same selection, bringing about a boom in land and the clashers the hon. gentleman complains of. These men put in applications knowing that if they succeed they can get the land at once and make £200 or £300 on it. The hon. gentleman could find plenty of evidence that these men would really not settle on the land. Persons with a few pounds in the bank get John Smith, Bill Jones, and anyone else to put in applications for them. They find the money, paying it into the land agent's office by marked cheque, and if their agents or themselves do not happen to draw a winning envelope they know they will get the money back in a few days. Out of fifty applicants there may not be more than ten genuine applicants who desire to settle on the land. That is the result of the working of the present ballot system, but it is due not so much to defects in the system as to insufficiency of land open for selection. The hon. member for Normanby hit the thing very straight when he said that if we want to stop this state of things we must supply the demand. Where fifteen persons are applying for land there should be fifteen or twenty selections thrown open for them, and then there would not be this competition. With reference again to the clashers, the

hon. gentleman will find that in spite of them in the Longreach district in almost every case the ballots were won by *bonâ fide* intending selectors. That is a thing upon which we have been able to congratulate ourselves in Longreach.

Mr. GLASSEY: It has been more by good luck than anything else?

Mr. FITZGERALD: Yes, that is so, but at the same time there is one chance for the *bonâ fide* applicant and the poor man by the ballot system, and I really cannot see where there is any under the auction system. The hon. member for Cambooya put it very straight when he said that the rich man could say to the poor man, "Here, I am going to have that piece of land. You had better take £5 down and get away, or I will run you up to £20 for it." Under that system again the clasher will be there just the same. The land will be run up with the hope of making a profit afterwards from the applicant who really wants it, with the result that he will have to pay a rent that is too high, and he will finally throw it up. This matter should receive serious consideration, and the Act should be left as it is in this respect. I think that when speaking of the clashers the hon. gentleman must have had the Longreach district in his mid.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They are all over the colony.

Mr. FITZGERALD: They were especially noticeable recently there, and if the hon. gentleman had officers there they would have been able to find out who were and who were not genuine applicants. The way the commissioner acts there is to make inquiries and take sworn evidence on the applications of men who do not belong to the district, or who are the relatives of neighbouring station-holders, but the townspeople who are applicants are assumed to be *bonâ fide* applicants, though they are not all *bonâ fide* applicants. The commissioner lets their applications slide as genuine, and makes no inquiries about them. The Minister admits that there is a lot of dummying going on, and he must have some evidence of it before he makes the admission. Much might be done to do away with the clashers if a few penal clauses against dummying were introduced. Why does he not go a little further than he goes at present? Instead of having one commissioner in the district, why does he not have a lot of plain clothes beggars to find out these things? Why does he not introduce stringent clauses to enforce penalties on anyone who dummies? Then, again, instead of having one surveyor in a district, why not have half a dozen and have the whole of the land thrown open? The hon. gentleman laughs. Can he show me any reason why that should not be done? There may be a slight loss at first, but when the land is taken up at 1½d. or 2d. per acre that loss will soon be recouped.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Eleven million acres are waiting to be taken up now.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I have heard that story before, but where is the land? Can he show me in the Mitchell district where any of this land is?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Certainly.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I hope the hon. gentleman will cause the maps to be made a little more public than they are at present. I can bring forward a dozen people who are anxious to take up land round Longreach.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I wish you would bring them to the Lands Office instead of talking about it here.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I have seen numbers of letters written to the department, and have advised people to write to the hon. gentleman asking that land may be thrown open.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What are the names?

Mr. FITZGERALD: Let the hon. gentleman search his own office. There are plenty of them. I am certain the hon. gentleman never takes the trouble to look at all the correspondence that comes into his office.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Let me have the names?

Mr. FITZGERALD: I ask the hon. gentleman to inquire in his office whether applications have not come in from Longreach? He will find that the Longreach Progress Association has asked to have land thrown open.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What land? Leased land?

Mr. FITZGERALD: I ask the hon. gentleman to look over his correspondence and he will find the applications.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I will not trouble about it until you give me the names.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I dare say not; but if the hon. gentleman will look after his business a little more instead of letting the Under Secretary and a lot of Brisbane commission agents boss the office it would be all the better.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You had better come and boss it.

Mr. FITZGERALD: That is one thing I have heard the hon. gentleman has put his foot upon, and I really hope he will have the strength of mind to insist upon bossing his own department. I do not wish to oppose the hon. gentleman, but I can assure him that I know of certain applications which have been made for land to be thrown open in my district, and it has been promised; but the difficulty is that it takes months to perform the promise. I have given the instance of the Longreach Progress Association. It is nearly twelve months since we applied to have Tocal and Western resumptions thrown open. We got a letter promising that it would be done; but, unless the land has been thrown open within the past six weeks, the promise has not been kept. But the reason is not that the hon. gentleman does not want the land thrown open, but because there is only one surveyor in the district; and see how beautifully he does his work! My hon. friend has mentioned Lovatt Downs.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Had we not better get on with the Bill?

Mr. FITZGERALD: I am showing where the real difficulty comes in. No doubt the difficulty is in the administration. Lovatt Downs was proclaimed open about July, 1895. The land was applied for, and several pieces were taken up, but the occupation licenses were only approved of by the Land Board in September, 1896. Of course the land was thrown open before survey. Before it was thrown open Mr. Cottrell, the surveyor, made a preliminary survey, but he took the wrong bearings, and the map was all wrong. Two of the persons concerned refused the pieces of land they were given because they were not the selections they applied for. One man bought sheep, and has been shepherding them for months, and had to pay for grass because he could not get on his selection; yet all the time the lessee was using the grass. I mention these things not to bring discredit upon the Minister, but to urge him to see that such mistakes do not happen again. I mention them to show the hon. gentleman what is taking place behind his back.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: By no means.

Mr. FITZGERALD: Oh! then, the hon. gentleman knows all about it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I do not believe half the complaints I hear.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I know the hon. gentleman is well-intentioned, and I hope he will see that these things do not happen. I wish

now to refer to one matter which I hope the hon. gentleman will take notice of. The Act of 1894, which is really incorporated in this Bill, provides for grazing homesteaders taking up adjoining blocks, and fencing in the whole with one fence —a sort of co-operative arrangement. That is one of the finest principles ever embodied in any Land Act, and whoever is the author deserves great credit for it. Now I would ask the hon. gentleman to see if he cannot go a little further. There has been a great deal of talk about settling shearers, carriers, rouseabouts, and Western workers generally upon the land, but the great complaint has been that they are nomads, without houses or homes; and they have been called "birds of passage" and "dingoes of civilisation." If the Minister is sincere I hope he will settle these people on the land. At present, if certain portions of land are thrown open, and half a dozen shearers apply for contiguous blocks, some outsider may apply for one of those blocks, and if the matter goes to a ballot and he is successful, their plans would be spoilt. The principle here introduced is a good one, and will, I am sure, encourage settlement, as it has done in some cases already. If the hon. gentleman will look at the names of those who have selected land on Mutta Downs he will find that they include some genuine bush workers. But I would like the hon. gentleman to insert a provision giving the Minister for the time being a discretionary power when he throws open certain blocks of country to define who shall be qualified to select. For instance, if he wants shearers to settle let him, on application, throw open blocks which only *bonâ fide* shearers shall be allowed to select, and I am sure the result will be that a lot of men will settle on the land in a very short time. I know that there are a lot of shearers, carriers, and rouseabouts who would be only too glad to select under such conditions. The provision allowing the survey fees to be paid in four or five instalments is a very fair one. However, I rose chiefly to speak about the administration of the Act, and I really hope the hon. gentleman will not take anything I have said as an attempt to hurt his feelings; I simply wished to call his attention to what is being done by the department, and I am certain that he is doing his best to administer the Act a little better than it has been administered in the past.

Mr. SIM: The hon. member for Dalby this afternoon replied to members on this side of the House. He referred to the hon. member for Bulloo, to whose opinions on this question we listen with a great deal of respect, as having the "cheek" to state that he could in ten minutes divide the colony into three practical divisions until a more extended survey was made. The hon. member for Dalby also on a previous occasion referred to the hon. member for Ipswich as having been guilty of "cheek." I congratulate the members on that side on possessing the "cheek" of this House.

The SPEAKER: I think the hon. member is labouring under a misapprehension. If I had heard the hon. member for Dalby accuse the hon. member for Bulloo of "cheek" I should certainly have called him to order, but I do not think it was done.

Mr. BELL: Rising to a point of personal explanation, which I should not have considered it worth while to do had it not been for your intervention, Sir, I may say that what I said was that if I had the cheek I could have made as good a classification of the lands of the colony in one minute as the hon. member for Bulloo undertook to do in ten minutes. The word "cheek" was not applied to the hon. member for Bulloo in the sense stated by the hon. member.

Mr. SIM: I accept the hon. member's explanation. The word "cheek" was, however, used though I do not say in a disrespectful sense, and I was about to state that if I had been guilty of cheek of a similar character I should have risen to attack hon. members on that side in the way the hon. member attacked hon. members on this side. I can only repeat what has been said on this side over and over again—that there is no body of men in this House who have more sympathy with all classes in the community than those who form this faction, called the Labour party. Our principles are that we desire to see the greatest good to the greatest possible number. We desire to encourage no warfare of class against class, but to bring all classes into a mutual relationship with a view to securing equal justice to all, and I should be very sorry, as a member of this House, if I allowed myself at any time, even in the heat of debate, to refer to the class defended by the hon. member for Dalby and others, which class includes some of the dearest and best friends I have in Australia—for some of my dearest and best friends are members of the squatter fraternity—in terms which any hon. member could refer to as in any way denunciatory. I have heard what has been said by the hon. member for Mitchell and the hon. member for Dalby with reference to the pioneer squatters of the country, and I agree that they are deserving of every word of praise that those hon. members have uttered. At the same time I would point out that we have not, from the very beginning of this debate, until the present moment, raised any question of personal feeling between the squatter and the worker, or of any class against another class, but have simply discussed the question of the relationship of figures to persons taking up land under the land laws of the colony. We have endeavoured to point out that even under this Bill, which is admitted to be an improvement on previous measures, if it be carried out in its present entirety, a certain class of small holders of land will be penalised, while others who hold larger areas will be allowed to get off on easier terms than now exist. That is a pure matter of business brought forward by practical men who are especially in sympathy with all smaller holders, and who desire to secure fair terms for the whole colony. The Minister has this evening and on other occasions desired members to give facts, and I shall endeavour to give him a few before I have done. I do not intend to take up much time on this question, which I admit at once is one on which I am not particularly well informed. Our land laws are, as the hon. member for Mitchell and others have pointed out, very complex. I do not think that any member after listening to the speech of the Secretary for Lands can deny that. The hon. gentleman told us that we have had in Queensland within a very limited period of time no fewer than sixty Acts dealing with the lands of the colony. The fact that these Acts have been necessary in such a short period is a proof that they have grown in an incomprehensible manner, and the law has been so inoperative that this flood of land measures has been found necessary. At present we are engaged in codifying and simplifying the land laws, and a great many hon. members, even some upon this side, seem to imagine that these laws are intended to encourage close settlement within the vicinity of the Southern and Central capitals alone, and that the remoter regions of the colony, one of which I represent, have no interest whatever in endeavouring to effect close settlement upon virgin land. There is one point I will bring before the House which was mentioned by the hon. member for Maranoa, and that is that it is a mistake to have hard-and-fast lines defining the different areas which shall be occupied by similar holders, considering the differences in soil and

climate which exist, and in view of the differences in regard to natural surroundings. In Carpentaria, in the extreme North, for example, we have an area of nearly 50,000,000 acres, or over 70,000 square miles, and the Minister knows well that a large portion of that is exceedingly rich land capable of growing nearly everything that can be grown in tropical or temperate climates; but a very small portion of it has been thrown open for selection. During March last I was travelling from Burketown to the Bower Bird, a distance of 240 miles, and I had to pass through one of the most magnificent tracts of country in the whole of Australia. Any hon. member who has been there, or who has read about it, will admit that I am not over-stating the case when I use these words deliberately. It is country not only adapted for the rearing of cattle but for the growth of any amount of fruit and sugar-cane. In fact, during his occupancy of office as Premier the Hon. J. Douglas actually reserved a large area in this vicinity as sugar land. That area consists of rich red and black soil; there are hundreds of thousands of acres of it; and it is perennially watered by one of the greatest streams in the colony—the Gregory River and its offshoots. It is a country in which a large system of irrigation could be carried on by the State, and if thrown open under proper conditions would support thousands of homesteads. But being so remote as it is from all centres of population and subject to difficulties of transit, it is impossible for any man to make a living on 160 acres or even 640 acres. He must of necessity have a much larger area than that, and I wish to emphasise this point, because I think the question raised by the hon. member for Maranoa deserves the consideration of the Minister, and if he will amend the Bill in this direction he will materially improve it. I hold in my hand a letter I received in the North on the 16th April, 1896, the name of the writer of which I will give in confidence to the Minister. The gentleman who wrote this letter is a son of one of the oldest and most respected squatting families in the colony; possibly the hon. member may know him. He is a man who knows the country thoroughly, and is by no means ignorant of our land laws. Speaking of the general working of the present Act, he says—

"First let me say that I am strongly of opinion that a commission should be appointed to thoroughly revise the Act clause by clause. I also think that in certain cases special legislation is necessary to promote the settlement of North Queensland, as laws that may be right and proper in the more settled districts of Southern Queensland may, and do in some instances, bear very hardly upon the pioneers of the Gulf district. It can scarcely be a matter of surprise that we clamour for separation when we find ourselves amenable to a code of laws drawn up by individuals who are as little acquainted with our requirements as they are with the differential calculus."

He goes on to review the existing Act, which this Bill is intended to amend, and with those parts of his letter I will not trouble the House. I come now to a specific case which will show that the charges, I will not say of maladministration, but bad administration, are capable of being substantiated. I really think that those charges brought from time to time by both sides of the House are worthy of consideration by the Minister, and I am of opinion, from the hon. member's manner in introducing this Bill, and also from what I have seen of him in his office, that he will weigh these representations, and give due effect to them, and that we shall have in future a far more liberal administration of the land laws by the officials of the department than we have had in the past. Crying evils such as I will give an instance of ought to be brought to an end, and the sooner the better. When the hon. member for Mitchell said that documents went strangely astray in the Lands Department, the Secretary for Lands seemed to think the hon. member was reflecting upon him; but there were Ministers for Lands before him.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You are mistaken. I did not take it as a reflection upon me, but upon the department.

Mr. SIM: Reflections may be made upon the department, and I will make some now.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They were all *ex parte*.

Mr. SIM: This question is so important that there should be no party feeling——

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I said *e-x-p-a-r-t-e*.

Mr. SIM: The hon. gentleman need not spell the term. I have a little knowledge of Latin. My correspondent says—

"To my mind the Act, and judging by results, the Act of 1876, has proved best so far. It has its defects, but none are irremediable, and it had the merit of simplicity. An Act on similar lines to that of 1876 would, I think, be found to suit the requirements of the North very well."

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is what I propose.

Mr. SIM: I am not finding fault with the Minister, but am bringing to bear upon him the opinions of a qualified supporter of his own Government—a man who knows what he is writing about, because he has lived in the district for years, and has been connected with the squatting industry from his birth. I want the Minister to understand the gravamen of the charge made against his department—

"Turning now to our own district, there is magnificent land for settlement of the kind in question on Spear Creek, the Saxby, Cloncurry, Flinders, Alexandra, Leichhardt, and Gregory Rivers. Of all those, the Gregory River strikes me as being particularly suitable. It is, I think, the finest watercourse in Queensland, running strongly all the year round. In this climate irrigation is absolutely necessary for many kinds of agriculture, and for this the Gregory offers special facilities. The Brook, Barclay River, Black Gully, and Running Creek are all offshoots of this river, the main stream itself emptying into the Nicholson. Eighteen months ago, when in that part of the district, I had numerous applications for selections on the Gregory, and I have little hesitation in saying that, had the country been thrown open, every acre of frontage from Running Creek upwards for a distance of forty miles would have been duly taken up."

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Did those applications reach the department? He says he got the applications; he does not say he sent them on.

Mr. SIM: Wait a bit. He goes on to say—

"I duly represented the matter to the Lands Department, but without effect. A portion of Punjaub run was resumed for selection; but owing to the machinations of the Bank of New South Wales the portion resumed was comparatively worthless for settlement, being liable to inundation by floods, and the land surveyed has, I understand, not been applied for."

They are not likely to apply for it between this time and the crack of doom. At the same time there is plenty of land where this Punjaub run is that is suitable for settlement, that has been settled upon, and settlement has been again blocked, as I will show by an illustration that has come under my personal knowledge and is also detailed by the writer of this letter. A man named Steel had a garden at the divergence of the Brook and Barclay River. For this land he was paying the lessees of the Punjaub run an annual rental of £25.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Was he a Chinaman?

Mr. SIM: He was possibly a Scotchman, like the hon. gentleman. I ought to have mentioned

that he had 1,280 acres in all. Steel applied to have the land resumed and thrown open for selection, but failed. The writer goes on to say—

"And as the lessees of the Punjaub run intimated their intention to raise the rent he left, and his fine garden is now a wilderness."

I may add that when Steel took possession of this land, fifty odd miles from Burketown, he put up a large iron house for his family, and partly fenced the holding. He created a beautiful garden.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Where was his market?

Mr. SIM: That was his business. I suppose it would be at Burketown, where they will greedily purchase every bit of fruit and vegetables they can get. But this man had 1,000 sheep on the 1,280 acres as well, so that he did not depend wholly on his garden. That fine house is now occupied by a blackfellow and his gin. The garden is a wreck, the fencing has gone, and the house is in a disgracefully dilapidated and filthy condition; no white man will occupy it. After going to all this expense and trouble, Steel was blocked by the inspecting manager of the Bank of New South Wales, who said, on passing through, "I will block you in forty-eight hours"; and blocked he was accordingly. That is an example of bad administration which came under my own notice, and which is corroborated by this writer without any knowledge on his part that I was acquainted with the facts. The hon. gentleman asked me to give him some facts——

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I asked you to give me them at the Lands Office, not here.

Mr. SIM: Again and again and again complaints have been made in the Lands Office, and I suppose they are still coming in every day.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Every day, and there is nothing in them when you hear the other side.

Mr. SIM: To continue the letter, the writer proceeds—

"Several applications came in for selections in other places—Donor's Hill, Thornton, Camooweal, etc.—with the same result. In each case the area applied for was from 1,280 to 2,560 acres. The frontage to the Gilbert River, from Crooked Creek on the Georgetown-Croydon road downwards, was resumed two years since, but as far as I know, the land most eagerly inquired after—namely, between Crooked Creek and the Gilbert River crossing—has not yet been offered for selection, probably owing to objections raised by the lessees of Forest Home."

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I know that that is not so.

Mr. SIM: I do not say it is a fact, but it is a remarkable thing that the fertile land halfway between two most important goldfields—which are anxious for all the produce they can get—which might have been taken up two years ago, has not yet been offered for selection. It all shows that the Lands Department is not anxious to secure the settlement of persons desirous of taking up agricultural farms in those districts. Why should not the Government, which stands *in loco parentis* to a certain class of people, anticipate applications from individuals in cases of this kind? They should make it patent to everybody in the district by advertisement in the public Press—as in America—or by various other means that land is open to selection. And they should endeavour to find suitable selectors for that land. In connection with that, I would point out that there are over 400 children attending the State schools at Croydon, and that there are over 4,000 people there engaged in mining and occupations connected with mining. As the Secretary for Railways has said in this House, there is on the Gilbert and Etheridge fields reefing country sufficient, when developed—as it will be some day—to employ 50,000 people. We often hear the cry in this House, "You must support native industries. We must have our iron-works and other industries protected to find employment for the rising generation." Here we have two great goldfields, with little bits of fertile land between on the banks of creeks and rivers, where the population is steadily increasing, and I ask the House if a more striking illustration of the duty of the Lands Office could be given than the one I now give. Those children, who probably range from six to fourteen or fifteen years of age, will require to be provided for. They cannot all go mining, and the people on those fields require the products of agricultural and of grazing farms. For that reason these lands, which were open to selection two years ago, ought to have been so advertised in the mining districts that miners having sons growing up and needing some other occupation than their fathers' would be enabled to settle in that district and cultivate these lands, and drive out the Chinaman. This writer also says—

"There is some demand also for small homesteads on the Smithburn River."

I have given the House and the Minister ample data with regard to fertile lands that are awaiting close settlement, and I sincerely trust that the arguments which have been advanced in friendly criticism of the hon. gentleman's proposals will be duly weighed by him; that the amendments which may be made will make the colony as a whole better informed as to our land laws; that will be so codified and simplified that they will be rendered less incomprehensible than they now are, and that the laws will have the effect of settling people on the land. I do not suppose the second reading will go to a division, but if it does I shall most certainly support the second reading.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS, in reply, said: I should be scarcely doing my duty to this House if I did not avail myself of the privilege which the Standing Orders give me of replying to the remarks which have been made during this lengthy debate by hon. members, because I may be able to clear up a good deal, and so save a good deal of unnecessary discussion in committee. Before proceeding, I would like to express my acknowledgments to hon. members who have, with few exceptions, been good enough to speak in kindly terms of the way in which this Bill has been brought before the House. I thoroughly appreciate the spirit in which these expressions have been delivered, and though possibly, as some hon. member was good enough to suggest, the Bill will not be so altered that I shall not know my own child when it gets out of committee—still I trust that we shall be able to make a strong effort to get it through this session. At all events, I have no doubt that whatever may be its excellences, if it has any at present, that they may be increased by such amendments as may be made in committee. I said, when moving the second reading, that I was perfectly aware that no Bill had ever been drafted which was not capable of amendment. I am more than ever satisfied that this is so now. Of course I was well aware that there were many matters upon which amendment would be desired, and probably be desirable; and although I scarcely think that I shall be able to accede to the desires of all hon. members who have expressed opinions with regard to proposed amendments, still I do believe that a very large number of these suggestions can be adopted without materially injuring the good effect that the Bill will have. While it is fresh in my memory—I am sorry the hon. member for Carpentaria has left—I might say that the hon. member, without the slightest desire to be offensive, but quite the contrary—he only did what many other members

have done—transgressed what might fairly be expected to be a rule with members of this House—that is, bringing forward complaints anonymously in this Assembly for the purpose, apparently, of discrediting the administration of the Lands Department in the eyes of intending selectors. Every night somebody has brought forward anonymous charges against the department, declining to give the names until they have been dragged out of them, and on every occasion I have been able by interjection—for which I ask pardon as being out of order—to show that the hon. member who brought the charge forward had not done me the courtesy to lay it before me in the first instance. When any hon. member, or indeed any member of the community, lays a grievance before me he will find that I shall lend him a ready ear, and if, after I have heard him, I am unable to agree with him, then he is at perfect liberty to ask his representative in Parliament to table a motion dealing with the question in a specific manner.

Mr. HARDACRE: How many hundreds are there which never come to your ear at all?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I am complaining that they do not get to my ear. These letters are read in this House with the apparent intention of discrediting the department in the eyes of the public. This may not be as grievous an offence as it would be to try and discredit the courts of justice, but is very much on the same lines. These statements are, as the Premier says, all *ex parte*, and when I hear the other side I generally find that there is nothing in them; that the people who make them are asking for something which they ought not to have. I say these statements are all *ex parte*. My interjection was misunderstood by the hon. member for Carpentaria, who thought that I had referred to some party motives. The hon. member informed us that he has a knowledge of Latin. Well, I would remind him of a Latin maxim which I have found very useful in my profession, "*Audi alteram partem*"—let him hear the other side before he gives judgment. The hon. member for Mitchell touched upon a question that I really did not think it necessary to deal with in my opening speech, because I certainly thought every hon. member thoroughly understood that what the hon. member has contended for is absolutely impossible. The hon. member says that this Bill does not meet the want about which there has been so much outcry in his part of the country. He wants the present laws swept off the statute-book, and something in simple language put in their place. The hon. member, as a lawyer, ought to know that that is not practicable. If the hon. member for Leichhardt, for instance, had made that remark I should not have been so much surprised. But I was surprised to hear such an observation from a lawyer, for the simple reason that it cannot be done.

Mr. FITZGERALD: Why? I do not see it at all.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: When the hon. member told us that he had been studying the blue-book of the Land Acts for four years, and that he cannot understand it yet, I was not so much surprised at his first statement as I was before.

Mr. HARDACRE: But why drag me into it?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I should not have been so much surprised at the hon. member for Leichhardt making the statement, because he is not a lawyer, and he did attempt it in his codification last year.

Mr. FITZGERALD: That is what I want you to do.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Then the hon. member wants me to do what he will certainly never see me attempt. I shall not attempt anything of that sort.

Mr. FITZGERALD: Why not?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: If the hon. member could give me an instance of where it has been done?

Mr. FITZGERALD: You say the hon. member for Leichhardt did it last year.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: He drafted a Bill. What he attempted to do, and what the hon. member for Mitchell desires should be done, is that we should wipe all these statutes off the book and say that in connection with all contracts under them nobody need refer to them any more, as we are going to pass a new statute which is to take their place with regard to existing contracts.

Mr. FITZGERALD: No, you are asked to codify the existing law.

The SPEAKER: Order, order!

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: If the hon. member persists in his interruptions, I cannot go on at all. I do not wonder at the hon. member feeling sore about it.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I don't a bit.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS Very well, then, keep quiet.

Mr. HARDACRE: Only remember I did not attempt that.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I think the hon. member did, and I have gone through his codification very carefully. The hon. member for Mitchell also says he did. As there is apparently someone under the impression that that sort of thing could be done, I simply desire to show that it could not be done; and that is the reason I did not attempt to do it. There is one other thing in the speech of the hon. member for Mitchell to which I will refer. The hon. member desires to see a preference given to shearers or to certain classes of selectors. Supposing a man claims to be a shearer, who is going to decide whether he is one or not. The hon. member for Cambooya has boasted that he is a shearer; therefore he would be eligible to select in that way. The hon. member ought to see that that sort of thing would be quite impossible. A Minister endeavouring to discriminate between applicants, and decide whether they were shearers or belonged to any other class, would find himself in a very difficult position, and I am quite sure that from the opposite corner of this House he would be assailed as a man who endeavoured to do what he ought not to do.

Mr. FITZGERALD: Try the experiment.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I am not going to try it. The thing is quite impossible.

Mr. MCDONALD: It was tried last year.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: A suggestion was made that got so far as to have a clause drafted, though it is not in the Bill, by which that idea could be put into force with regard to immigrants. This comes in aptly as a reply to certain remarks from the hon. member for Bulimba, who wanted to know whether any provision had been made for settling immigrants upon the land. Though it might not be desirable, it would be perfectly practicable to give immigrants a preference, because there would be no question as to their having arrived by particular ships and from particular countries. These are matters of fact that could be easily decided, but to decide whether a man is a shearer, a bootmaker, or a rouseabout, would be largely a question of opinion, and it is one which I have no desire to take it upon myself to decide. Some hon. members want all the resumptions thrown open. That I do not hesitate to say is perfectly impracticable. I am

sure that nobody desires that all the lands of the colony should be thrown open to selection before survey. We know what that brought about in the past. We know that it led to the peacocking of runs, the picking out of the eyes of the country in such a way as to render the rest of it almost valueless.

Mr. KING: Survey before selection has picked out all the bad pieces.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That again is *ex parte*. I would like to get the particular instances to which the hon. member refers, and then go over them with him with the papers and reports upon them. When land is thrown open there must be a certain amount of laying of it out done, though the theodolite may not have been run over the whole of it. That has cost sometimes much more than the selectors afterwards pay for it, and they have five years within which to pay their survey fees. The better plan—and one that I ask hon. members to assist me in carrying out—is that whenever anyone thinks land on any particular resumption should be thrown open, he should write to the department to ask that it be thrown open. That is often done by people who write that there are large numbers of people who want the land. Sometimes hundreds of pounds are then spent in surveying those lands, and when they are thrown open in some instances not one application is made for them, and in others there is only one. That is the reason why at this moment there is so much land open to selection. People desire to get tit-bits in their own districts. It is no use the hon. member for Normanby saying that the solution of the difficulty with respect to clashers is to throw open more land, and I was surprised to hear such an argument coming from an hon. member of his experience.

Mr. MURRAY: I think it the best argument I could use, and a great deal better than yours.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I point to this fact that almost every acre thrown open to selection has been thrown open at the request of somebody, and still we find that there are 11,000,000 acres of land not yet selected. That indicates as surely as possible that the land which it was desired to select was of a very limited extent. Where ten or a dozen grazing farms have been thrown open, there has perhaps been one applicant. That will indicate to hon. members where the difficulty of throwing open more land comes in.

Mr. MURRAY: In the particular district I referred to every bit of land thrown open is taken up.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I am of course speaking of the whole colony.

Mr. MURRAY: I am speaking of where the clashers prevail.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They prevail all over the colony.

Mr. MURRAY: Not to the same extent.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The hon. gentleman must see that the real reason why there has been so much land thrown open is that people wanted to pick out the eyes, and the rest has been left. I may mention to hon. members that after the passing of the Act of 1884 a large number of grazing farms were thrown open at the maximum rental, and I will take hon. members into my confidence so far as to tell them that I am taking steps to have them withdrawn from selection—I hope they will not think there is anything very dreadful in that—for the purpose of throwing them open at what I conceive to be reasonable rentals. That is another reason why so much country has been open and not taken up at the high price which was put upon it. That leads me to another point which I think the hon. member for Dalby mentioned. He could not understand why the Minister should in the case of grazing farms fix the first rental, and not assess the rental for pastoral leases. The pastoral lessee is already in occupation, and there is no question of throwing the land open for selection. Having elected to come under the Act of 1884 certain things must ensue, one of which is that he continues to be a lessee, and must have his rent assessed by somebody. Now, I think it would be undesirable for the Minister — a political officer—to do that. For that reason we have instituted the board, who step in and assess the rent in a judicial way. In the other case the circumstances are entirely different. The Minister decides upon the rent to be charged, and anybody who thinks it worth while to take up the land at that rental is at liberty to do so. There is no compulsion about it. If it is not selected, if the Minister through his officers has assessed the rent too high—wrongly gauged the value of the land—then it remains unselected. That is the reason for 2,000,000 or 3,000,000 acres not being selected. But, on the other hand, if he happens to have gauged it too low, there will be rush for the land, and there will be the clashers that we desire so much to do away with. It is like a Dutch auction conducted by the Government. We put 2d. an acre on the land, and it hangs fire, and we then must keep on getting lower and lower until we find someone who will take it up. The consequence is that there is a large quantity of land which is unselected.

Mr. MURRAY: Why not leave the Land Board's assessment upon it?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The hon. gentleman suggests that the old rental should be the new rental. Well, it is a different tenure. I do not think it desirable that there should be even a fixed increase upon the pastoral lessee's rental. Hon. members opposite will sympathise with me in this. They at all events think that the pastoral lessees are not paying a sufficient rental. Is that any reason why the grazing farmer should not pay a fair rental? It is a very cheap method of obtaining popularity to ask that the people should have the land for nothing; but we represent the people to whom this land belongs, and every £1 of rent which we forgive a tenant we have to make up by taxation from the people themselves. We are the custodians and trustees of a large public estate, and we ought to see that a fair equivalent is got for it. I do not propose at this stage to deal with the question whether the pastoral lessees are paying too little or too much. I shall deal with that a little later on, but I do say that some of them are not paying enough, and that others are paying possibly a little too much, and the proof of that is that there is an enormous quantity of land outside the schedule of the Act of 1884—that is to say, held under the Pastoral Leases Act of 1869—which has been forfeited and thrown up, and is now paying no rental at all. Hon. members would be astonished to see those areas plotted out upon the map as I know them, and that is a question which will have to be dealt with, possibly not in this Bill, but it will have to be dealt with in the near future, either by means of lowering the rentals or by giving an increased tenure so that someone will take them up and that the State will get some revenue from them.

Mr. LEAHY: Hear, hear!

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Now, with regard to the question of auction. I said myself that that was a debatable question, and it has been debated to some purpose. I admit everything that has been said against auction, but I still hold to my view that there is, if not quite as much, at all events very nearly as much to be said against our present system. I really do not know in my own mind, honestly,

which is the greater evil; but I do think that the proposal which is being made in New South Wales, from which so much is hoped, will not be found one bit more successful in grappling with this question than the two methods which we have tried in this colony. I think it was the hon. member for Mitchell who said that the clashers could be "spotted" in Longreach. But supposing there was an inquiry such as is proposed, a searching inquiry of an inquisitorial nature, what would these dummies and clashers do? They would take very good care, especially if a rich man was concerned, that nobody knew whose dummies they were. There would not be the slightest difficulty in that. A number of utter strangers would appear in the town; they would represent that they were from Victoria or elsewhere. Who was to say they were not? Who is to find out? Unless you employ an army of detectives to follow those people and trace out their private affairs, it would be quite impossible to do so. Presumably they would be quite prepared to tell some fairy tales about themselves, and would be amply prepared in every way, with bogus cash balances, etc., to show their *bona fides*.

Mr. FITZGERALD: You can watch them after they have got the land.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Who is to show that they are not acting in good faith after they have got the land? I will give the hon. member an instance. The other day a lawyer in an inland town was the successful applicant for one of these valuable grazing farms. Who is to show whether he acted *bonâ fide* or not?

Mr. FITZGERALD: Watch him and see.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Would the hon. member like the billet of watching him, or of deciding whether he was *bonâ fide* or not?

Mr. FITZGERALD: You can easily find out whose sheep he has got on the land.

The SPEAKER: I must ask hon. members to give the Secretary for Lands an opportunity to reply without these continued interruptions.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: There is only one way in which you can get out the truth, and that is from the man himself. It is not like trying a case in a court—where you have two parties bringing forward evidence the one against the other, each trying to pull the other to pieces. You can only closely examine the man himself, and if the poor man does not take all the precautions I have mentioned I am quite certain the rich man will, and for that reason I may predict that in two or three years we shall find New South Wales trying some other way to overcome the difficulty. I am more enamoured of a fourth method, which I will give to the House. It is one that I have had in my mind for five or six years, and it is this: That when land is thrown open at a given rental, it should be open to any person putting in an application to select that land to forward with his application a sealed tender offering a higher rent for the land, and if there is more than one applicant for the same land it should go to the one whose tender is the highest. The poor man would have a perfectly fair chance under that method, as it would not be like competition at auction; and I really believe that if hon. members will think the matter over they will see that that method is about as good a solution of the difficulty as can be got. There is no competition as in the case of the auction of one man bidding against another, but each man, in cold blood, before he puts in his application, has to write out what he can afford to pay and what he thinks the land is worth. If the department has offered the land at too low a rental he can tender ½d., or ⅛d., or $\frac{1}{16}$d. more in the case of grazing farms, and I believe that such a scheme would get over a very great deal of the difficulty. There would still be the possibility of two men tendering for the same block of land at the same rent, and in that case they would probably be acting *bonâ fide*, and there would be less objection against their drawing lots, because it is hardly likely that a man would put in clashers against himself. This may not be the best solution of the matter, but it is one deserving of consideration. It is necessary, I think, that I should refer to a portion of the speech delivered by the hon. member for Bulloo. I will say no more about his method of classification, because the hon. member for Dalby has about knocked that kite high.

Mr. LEAHY: You are the only two who think so.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: There are a good many more, because they have said so in the House, though the hon. member may not have heard them. At all events, I would ask any hon. member, as the hon. member for Dalby has already asked, to go along any of our trunk lines, and he will find that half the country is worthless.

Mr. LEAHY: I said so.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: And yet the hon. member would reserve ten miles on either side of the railway for close settlement; from ten to forty miles he would reserve as grazing farms; and the rest to the pastoral lessees. That is the hon. member's method of classification.

Mr. LEAHY: I said nothing of the kind. I said the lands would have to be sub-classified by local knowledge in those divisions. It works splendidly in South Australia.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The hon. member said—

> "Lands within ten miles of the great trunk lines of railway I would call division "A." For thirty or forty miles on either side of lands included in "A" I would classify the land as "B," and all lands outside that I would include in "C." In class A, the lands for ten miles on either side of the main trunk lines of railway—and of other railways if thought necessary—would be for agricultural selectors and small settlers; and lands in the class thirty or forty miles on either side of that would be for grazing farmers and such like; and the outside lands, far away from the railways, where the country would require to be watered, and so on, would be for grazing, and the pastoralist would have an opportunity of settling down on those lands for many years to come."

That is exactly what I said the hon. member stated.

Mr. LEAHY: Yes; but you will find that I said further on that they should be sub-classified by local knowledge.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What is the good of laying down a rule like that when you have to come back after all to our present method in order to classify the land again? At present we take land here and there, and what is good land is treated as such, and the bad and poor land is also treated as such, and thrown open in larger areas. What is the good of the hon. member's A B C classification? The hon. member was not as strictly accurate in his statements as I should like to see him. I think it was Sheridan who said of someone that he was indebted to his memory for his jests and to his imagination for his facts. I did not hear any jest from the hon. member for Bulloo. He was far too much in earnest—too vehement—for jesting; and therefore I may absolve him from the first portion of that statement. But I think I can scarcely give him the same absolution in regard to the second part, unless he has means of information with regard to the records of the Lands Department which I have not at my disposal. Amongst other things, the hon. member said it was the practice of the department to hack and hew the reports of

the commissioners, and to inform them that they must send them in in accordance with the wish of the Minister. Until I interjected the hon. member did not say what Minister, or until I reminded him that it had not been said of any Minister since Mr. Dutton's time. Whether it was correct in regard to Mr. Dutton I do not know. I am not here to defend Mr. Dutton. I am here to defend the department from charges of this kind if they are not correct. So far as I can learn, the facts in this case are that Mr. Dutton, having a special knowledge of the runs in a certain district, was of opinion that full justice had not been done in the report of the commissioner as submitted, and all that he did, knowing that, was to send the report back to the commissioner for review. As for hacking and hewing it, there is no foundation for the statement.

Mr. LEAHY: There is a memo.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: He may have sent it. Mr. Dutton, knowing or believing that a wrong was being done, whether against the country or against a pastoral lessee, would have been failing in his duty if he had not done what he did, and what did the hon. member say in his speech? If he were Minister, what would he do?

Mr. LEAHY: I would fix things up differently.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: He said he would give the commissioners, if they did not do as he wished, a very lively time. He said—

"The commissioner who was sent out my way put 50 per cent. more on the rents there than he put on the rents in the Mitchell district. . . . . If some of those commissioners wait until I am Minister for Lands I will give them a lively time of it. I will make the pastoralists pay equitably."

Would he give them a lively time by hacking and hewing their reports, or would he sack them?

Mr. LEAHY: I would bring in a Bill.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That would not give them a lively time, but it would give us a lively time. The commissioners would not care a dump for his lively time, if it took that form. There was also the case of the commissioner who got a lively time because he would not do something the Minister wished with regard to a run on the Burdekin, and he got sacked for it. Well, that is rather ancient history.

Mr. LEAHY: Tell us about the Gulf commissioner.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I am coming to that. The hon. member said a man was sent out to report upon some country on the Burdekin; the report did not suit the Minister; it was returned to this officer, but he refused to alter it, and got the sack over it. Now, so far as I am able to ascertain, that is not correct.

Mr. LEAHY: Mr. Dutton admitted it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I interjected "Was that recently?" because the inference was that it was said in order to discredit the department.

Mr. LEAHY: Nothing in the Burdekin has been divided in your time.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I know it, but the hon. member was talking, through *Hansard*, to people who do not know it.

Mr. LEAHY: The hon. member does me an injustice.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I am sorry if I do, but the hon. member's tone was not such as to lead me to think so. Then the hon. member went on—

"Mr. LEAHY: No; but there was a case within the last year or two during the last Administration, which occurred in the Gulf country, where a man was sent up to divide a run, and because his report did not suit he was dismissed and another man was sent up to do the work. Will the hon. member deny that?"

My answer was that I had no knowledge of it, but I have that knowledge now, and do deny it. I will give the facts. The whole thing is a "cock-and-bull story." Let us suppose the case of a cock, possibly a lyre bird, but certainly not a bird of paradise. I will say a bird of some kind from the Burdekin, and he meets a bull somewhere, and that bull comes from the Bulloo. This romancing rooster and the bovine blunderer from the Bulloo met somewhere between these localities, and they stopped to have a yarn on the road, and the yarn somehow got into the possession of the hon. member for Bulloo himself.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

Mr. LEAHY: Are these your facts?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I am coming to them presently. These are hypotheses. The facts are these: It all occurred in reference to a run called the Punjaub, of which we have just heard. It was represented by the late member for Carpentaria that there was a demand for selections in that district, and it was thought proper to divide this run to meet that demand. There was no commissioner available, and would not be for some months, who could go so far, but a surveyor named Macdonnell, living in the district, who was not in the employ of the department, was represented as a fit and proper person to do the work. He was instructed to do it; but when his report came down it was of such a character as to indicate clearly on the face of it that he knew nothing about the matter at all, and was not competent to be employed for the purpose. He was only employed for that one particular job. He performed it; he was paid for it; and subsequently a competent commissioner was sent up who assessed it in a different way. Those are the facts. The man was never dismissed from the service.

Mr. LEAHY: He was dismissed from that dividing business.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Nothing of the kind. He was employed to do certain work, and when that was done he went back to his other business, whatever it might be. Probably this is where he gets the sympathy of the hon. member, that, although there was going to be a better tenure his assessment was considerably less than the rental which the pastoral lessee was paying at the time.

Mr. LEAHY: I said nothing about the assessment.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I do, and I suggest for the hon. member's consideration whether that had not something to do with his view of the case.

Mr. LEAHY: I think you bear my statement out.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I leave that to the House to decide. The hon. member says the man was dismissed for it. He was never dismissed. There is a certain class of generous people who are always more ready to give than to take. I appreciate the hon. member's generosity in that respect. The hon. member mentioned a matter which, although not of particular importance itself, has had a good deal of importance attributed to it by some other members. That is, as to which of the pastoral lessees, in the western portions of the two colonies, Queensland and New South Wales, are paying most rent. The hon. member gave one or two instances. I suppose he would not pick out those which least suited his purpose. I have taken the trouble to get prepared a map showing the rents paid along the two sides of the border. Commencing in the far West, I find that Bulloo Downs pays 19s.; over the fence in New South Wales, Thurloo Downs pays £2, which I understand

has been reduced since July last. Coming eastward, Yuleemya, in Queensland, pays 15s., and Waverley Downs, in New South Wales, pays £1 18s. 5d., now reduced to £1 18s. On the Currawinya run they are paying £1 1s. 3d. in Queensland; and on the other side of the border fence, where there are rabbits, they are paying, on Talyeale, £2 13s. 10d. Caiwarro, in Queensland, pays £1 2s. 9d.; on the opposite side of the fence they are paying £2 13s. 4d. At Tinnenburra there are two stations held on the two sides of the border by the same proprietor; they are right opposite one another, merely a fence separating them. In Queensland the rent is £1 1s.; in New South Wales it is £4. Owangowan, in Queensland, pays £1 12s., while £4 10s. 8d. is paid on the other side of the border. Thurulgoona, in Queensland, pays £1 6s. 8d.; Morten Plains, on the other side of the border, pays £3 6s. 8d. Talawanta, in Queensland, pays £2; its opposite neighbour, Toulby, pays £4 16s. Tala, in Queensland, pays £1, second period £1 10s., while the opposite run in New South Wales, Gnomery, pays £8 14s. 6d. Collyben, on the Queensland side—the river is the dividing line here—pays £1 2s., second term £1 10s. 6d., while the holding on the other side, Wirrah, pays £7 9s. 4d., and an adjoining run, Yarrowah, pays £9 1s. 4d. I do not think I need go any further than that.

Mr. LEAHY: Give us the figures for the other side of Bulloo Downs.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: As a matter of fact they are paying nothing on the other side of the Bulloo Downs; nobody will take it up.

Mr. LEAHY: It is all taken up except a little bit in the corner.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: In round figures, in the Western divison of New South Wales, there are 38,980,499 acres under pastoral lease, equal to 60,907 square miles, yielding a total rental of £180,280, which averages £3 19s. per square mile. Now we have nothing near that in any district in Queensland. Then in the Central division there are 18,616,892 acres, equal to 29,088 square miles, yielding a total rent of £198,498, and averaging £6 16s. 5d. per square mile. That should be sufficient to convince anyone that even supposing grazing farmers pay something more in Queensland than the pastoral lessees, comparing them with the pastoral lessees across the border, they are by no means highly rented. It is merely a question as to what is considered a fair return from the public estate.

Mr. KING: Give us the rents paid by grazing farmers on the other side.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: There are no grazing farmers in New South Wales, so that I cannot make a comparison.

Mr. LEAHY: Give us from Bulloo Downs west, on both sides of the border.

The SPEAKER: Order! I must ask hon. members to refrain from interjecting. The Secretary for Lands has an arduous task to perform, and it is only fair that he should be given full opportunity in the limited time at his disposal.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I shall refer to one other matter—that is a matter referred to by the hon. member for Leichhardt. That hon. member, in opening his speech, was good enough to reciprocate some kindly remarks I had made with regard to himself, and he said that he would treat me as generously as I had treated him. I regret that the hon. member did not carry that out.

Mr. HARDACRE: I did.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Apparently the hon. member did, but I have a complaint to make against him. He mentioned the case of two men in the Springsure district, who, he said, had been very harshly treated by the department, and he read anonymous letters, as so many members have done. So far as one could judge from what the hon. member said, these men had received no redress whatever.

Mr. HARDACRE: No.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Not until I dragged it out of the hon. gentleman. I shall read what the hon. gentleman said—

"I have another letter with reference to the same resumption, and this is the reply received from the land commissioner at Rockhampton——

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: To whom is it addressed?

"Mr. HARDACRE: I will give the name to the Minister privately.

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I do not think you should read it unless you give that information.

"Mr. HARDACRE: The name is immaterial, but I intend to give it to the Minister afterwards.

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I think you might bring it to me before you read it in the House."

And I say that, in regard to all these matters. Come to the House if you cannot get satisfaction from me.

"Mr. HARDACRE: This is a letter which I have only just received, but I know other cases in which land was refused.

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It is unfair to the department to read letters of that character without first coming to the Minister for an explanation.

"Mr. HARDACRE: I do not think it is unfair at all, because we know that there are hundreds of cases which never come before the Minister.

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Then, why not bring them before the Minister?

"Mr. HARDACRE: Whether this came before the Minister or not, it is an example of many cases which are refused in this way, and the result is that the applicants go back to shearing or whatever work they are engaged in.

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I do not know what the letter is, but there may be a perfectly good reason for the refusal; you imply that there is not.

"Mr. HARDACRE: What reason could there be to refuse to throw land open to homestead selection on the resumed area of a run?

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: There may be excellent reasons for it.

"Mr. HARDACRE: Anyway I will read the letter for what it is worth—

"'Referring to your letter applying to have 2,560 acres of land on the Comet Downs resumption opened to grazing homestead selection with right of priority under section 22, Crown Lands Act of 1894, you are informed that the Minister for Lands does not deem it expedient to grant the request.'"

The hon. member said he had just received that letter—

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You want to know the reason for that?

"Mr. HARDACRE: I want to know why the land is not thrown open altogether.

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Why don't you come to the department, and I will tell you? I am not prepared with the information now.

"Mr. HARDACRE: I say that refusals of that kind have a great deal to do with preventing people getting on the land, or applying for land. I will give another case in the Springsure district. Two brothers applied for land, and sent a sketch of the land they wanted down to Rockhampton, with the money required by way of deposit. They got a reply informing them that they would have to send a proper sketch on a lithograph map, which they did. That was sent down to Brisbane. From there it was returned to them, with an intimation to the effect that it could not be accepted in Brisbane, that application must be made to the land agent of the district. They then made application to the land agent, and it was sent down to Brisbane, and, after waiting several months, they received a letter stating that—

"'With reference to the request of [such a person] and yourself to have two grazing homesteads of 2,560 acres each on Rainworth run opened to selection, with right of priority of application for the land under section 22 of the Crown Lands Act of 1894, I have the honour, by direction of the Secretary for Public Lands, to inform you it is not deemed expedient to take any action as regards opening the land in question to grazing homestead selection. Your requests are therefore declined, and the deposits paid by you will be refunded on application to the land commissioner at Rockhampton.'

"That is done in hundreds of cases.

"The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You might give the name in that letter.

"Mr. HARDACRE: Afterwards this case was brought before the Minister, and he had grazing homesteads opened for those two persons."

I at once recognised the case then, and I said, "That was Marshall." Fortunately for me I was able to recognise it. It is not reported in *Hansard*, but I asked the hon. member if he had all the correspondence; and he said, "Yes."

Mr. HARDACRE: No; I said I believed I had.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Well the actual facts in connection with that case are these: These two men did apply in that way. They first of all sent their application down without a proper lithograph indicating the exact land they wanted. That went, as the law provides, to the commissioner at Rockhampton. It is necessary, where a man applies for priority, that his application should go to the commissioner, because anyone can understand that there should be only one office to apply to when there is a question of priority, otherwise there might be a question as to which was the prior application. The commissioner returned the application with a request that the man would give further information and send the lithograph. He prepared the lithograph; but, unfortunately, instead of sending the lithograph to the commissioner, he forwarded it to Brisbane, where the whole matter was unknown. It was returned to him with an intimation that he should have sent the letter with the lithograph to the commissioner. He afterwards did that, and, after having been noted as received in due course and in proper order, the commissioner sent it to Brisbane with a report on the application. The commissioner reported that in his opinion the application should not be granted, and gave reasons which certainly appeared perfectly satisfactory, and the application was refused as to the priority. Marshall then wrote to me on the subject. I was very busy at the time, as hon. members can easily understand, and, in order to pay particular attention to it, I left the letter and the other papers on my table in the Lands Office. Unfortunately they must have got mixed up with other papers, and they got into my despatch-box, where they lay for about three weeks before I noticed them. As soon as I saw them, I felt that the delay was due in some measure inadvertently to myself, and then I sent Marshall a telegram to say that under the circumstances I would grant his two applications.

Mr. HARDACRE: You overruled the department.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I did, because I felt that the man was entitled to more than ordinary consideration, because through my inadvertence his letter had been overlooked. I was personally to blame for it, if there was any blame. It is very fortunate for me and for the department that I recognised the case, and mentioned Marshall's name.

Mr. HARDACRE: I did not give the name.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I know the hon. member was not on to give the name, and that is just what I complain about—hon. members coming here and making *ex parte* anonymous statements. What is it to me to have them bring me the name afterwards when they have slandered the department in this House, and the charge has gone forth in *Hansard* to discredit the department with intending selectors? Such a thing would not be done by any patriotic member.

Mr. TURLEY: The same thing is done by the other side when they are asked to give names.

Mr. HARDACRE: I can explain it.

The SPEAKER: Order, order! I wish hon. members to distinctly understand that I have asked that the Secretary for Lands should have a fair hearing without interjection, and now I shall insist upon his having it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I know the hon. member did not give the name; he said the name was immaterial. I say it is fortunate for me and for the department that I recognised the case, and that my interjection of the name got into *Hansard*.

Mr. HARDACRE: I rise to make a personal explanation——

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I shall not give way for a personal explanation. If the hon. member has a point of order to raise——

Mr. HARDACRE: I want to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER: Order, order! The Secretary for Lands is in possession of the Chair.

Mr. HARDACRE: But I desire to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER: The Secretary for Lands is perfectly within his right in refusing to give way to the hon. member.

Mr. HARDACRE: For a personal explanation?

The SPEAKER: The Secretary for Lands is within his right in refusing to give way. Unless he will give way the hon. member cannot make his explanation.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: The hon. member can make his personal explanation after I have finished. I made no personal explanation while the hon. member was speaking. I have a letter here which was entirely unsought by me, as hon. members will see from the context of it. I never met Mr. Marshall to my knowledge in my life. He is unknown to me, but he is a straight man. There is no doubt about that. Of course I had corresponded with him as to his case, and explained the reason for the delay. He writes from Springsure on 24th September to myself—

"In reading *Hansard* I notice that Mr. Hardacre, when the new Land Bill came on, brought up the name of Marshall"——

That is not quite correct, as I brought up the name of Marshall, and the hon. member brought up the case, though he admitted that it was Marshall's case—

"as two brothers that had been hardly dealt with. I take the first opportunity of letting you know that I had no communication whatever with Mr. Hardacre. My cousin, an applicant adjoining my place, enclosed the letter read out by Mr. Hardacre, and asking him to see the Minister"—

"To see the Minister," not to bring it up in this House.

Mr. HARDACRE: Hear, hear! That is quite correct.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: "and see if he could not prevail on him to alter his opinion. A day or two after he wrote we received your wire."

That was the telegram I sent explaining the cause of the delay.

"My cousin at once wired Mr. Hardacre that the matter has been fixed up satisfactorily, and not to move in the matter. And in spite of this for Mr. Hardacre to bring it up in the House, to say the least, is not honourable or straightforward action, but I suppose men like him think differently. In conclusion, I sincerely hope that you will think that Mr. Hardacre's action was none of my doing.

"I am, &c.,

"E. D. MARSHALL."

That is the letter of a man I never saw in my life, but he saw that the department had been maligned by the hon. member for Leichhardt taking advantage of a letter sent him by Marshall's cousin, a letter which he afterwards asked him to suppress and to take no further action. And yet two months after he got that telegram the

hon. member comes along with his cock-and-bull story about malfeasance in the Lands Department. I now again ask the hon. member for Carpentaria to remember the maxim I quoted for him before: *Audi alteram partem.* Marshall continues—

"P.S.—I am pleased to say that the surveyors' camp is now out there, so I am hoping to soon be able to get on to the land. Thanking you much for hurrying the matter on. I trust you will reply to this.—E.D.M."

I did reply to him, and I got his sanction to read his letter to the House. I think that will be found a sufficient explanation of the charges made by the hon. member for Leichhardt. There is one other matter I have to deal with, and then I have done. A great deal has been said about New South Wales. Some hon. members are always very desirous of going away from home to get something excellent. I have studied the land systems of the other colonies——

Mr. LEAHY: Yes; and you quoted the wrong rents.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I got them from an official source.

Mr. LEAHY: Well, I have the latest here, and you were entirely wrong.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: To what extent?

Mr. LEAHY: It is only 19s. for Bulloo Downs in New South Wales, and you said it was £2.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I did not quote Bulloo Downs, in New South Wales.

Mr. LEAHY: I think you did.

The SPEAKER: Order, order!

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I did not.

Mr. LEAHY: I think you will find it in *Hansard.*

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I said Thurloo Downs. In my opinion we have very little to learn from the land legislation of New South Wales. Some hon. members desire to see the system now in vogue in New South Wales of local land boards enforced in this colony. There is a good deal to catch the fancy in that, but I venture to say that when hon. members hear the cost of those local land boards they will think differently. I will give first the total cost of the administration of the Lands Department in Queensland, with a larger territory, though certainly with a smaller population, but so far as selections are concerned we were dealing with approximately a similar area during last year. The Estimates for last year for the Lands Department, including the Land Board, the commissioners, the dividing commissioners, and everyone else, amounted to £28,670. Of that the Land Board cost £3,020, including travelling expenses, and the cost of the district land commissioners, who perform judicial functions, was £3,620, including travelling expenses. That is £6,640 out of the £28,670. I believe myself that, with a slight additional expenditure of £2,000 or £3,000 a year for extra dividing commissioners and appraiser, we could get high-class men who would perform those duties admirably, and we would be able to have two assessors for every one who now assesses the rents. I believe that our present system of commissioners, as opposed to local boards, for assessing purposes might be made to work admirably without the chance of its being cavilled at in any way, and without much extra expense. I did not include in my estimate of £28,000 the amount required for the Surveyor-General's Department. Now, as against that £28,000 spent in Queensland, the Lands Department of New South Wales costs £135,867. Out of that the salaries and expenses of the Central Land Court amount to £7,119, and the local boards, including travelling expenses, cost no less than £53,655. I presume they travel and inspect as our commissioners do.

Mr. LEAHY: No.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Then I do not understand how £19,000 is spent in travelling expenses. Our colony is very much larger than New South Wales, and it would cost very little less to carry out that system here. Are hon. members prepared for such an expenditure? The Central Land Court in New South Wales is formed of three, as it is proposed to form our court, and they act as an appeal court. What is the work of these local boards? The Central Court last year tried something like 320 appeals, and nearly as many references, showing clearly that the decisions of the local courts do not give satisfaction. Now, my proposal is this: So long as we can keep abreast of the work, take the tribunal which is the exact counterpart of the final court of appeal in New South Wales on questions of fact—take that tribunal to the people themselves, and where is the necessity for an appeal from that court on questions of fact any more than there is a necessity for appeal on questions of fact from a similar court in New South Wales? What is the advantage of an appeal unless it is to run up costs? And here let me refer to what the hon. member for Mulgrave said about lawyers increasing the costs. I am credibly informed that in cases where the Crown has employed a barrister, and an agent has appeared on the other side, the agent has received exactly the same fee as the barrister. No stock and station agent in Brisbane will travel 500 or 600 miles, and leave his business in Brisbane, to conduct a land case unless he gets the same fee as a barrister.

Mr. LEAHY: They don't always employ an agent.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: If you do not employ a professional man you give a tremendous advantage to the smart man. Take the hon. member for Bulloo for instance; imagine him appearing against some unfortunate man not as capable and able as himself! I think it very desirable that this change in the judiciary should be consummated in the way described, and I believe our present system can be made as effective as that in vogue in any other colony by the simple expedient of strengthening the staff of dividing and assessing commissioners. I do not know that I have anything more to say. There is no doubt that this is a very large and important question, and not my own ideas or the ideas of any half-dozen men can be said to meet the wishes of the whole community. It is a question upon which there must certainly be a large amount of give and take. On behalf of the Government I have no hesitation in saying that they are prepared to accept a number of amendments, and I should be extremely obliged to hon. members who intend to propose amendments if they would submit them to me, and consult with me beforehand. I believe that will save many hours of discussion. If they can be accepted, well and good; if not, I will be able to give very good reasons for not accepting them. I want to mention one other matter touched upon by the hon. member for Bulloo; that is the question of tenures under Part III. Unquestionably a slight error crept into the Bill there, which I omitted to deal with in my first speech—that is the reduction to ten years. I was misled in this way: It was suggested to me from an independent source that where there had been a renewal under the Act of 1890 it was a fair thing to take five years off the new lease, and immediately before the Bill got into print I submitted

that very point to a number of gentlemen whom I knew to be intimately connected with pastoral pursuits. They had no objection to it. The consequence was that it really got into the Bill without mature consideration, and was left there because it met with the approval of pastoralists.

Mr. LEAHY: Fifteen years is not twenty-one.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: On the question of fifteen or twenty-one years I had this problem to solve: I had to arrive at a period of lease which would not be so long as to make it a strong inducement for the extreme outside pastoralists to come under the Bill, because we do not want them at present. What do we want to be expending money on subdivisions and reassessments away out in the far West, where there is no likelihood of grazing farms being taken up? We only want the schedule extended as the demand arises. I did not want to give such a long period of lease as would make it a strong inducement for those pastoralists to immediately come under this Bill; at the same time I wished to make it long enough to prevent them rushing under the existing Acts before the Bill became law. I thought, after consultation with those who were supposed to know something about the matter, that fifteen years would probably be the happy medium, but after listening to the debate my own personal opinion—I have not consulted my colleagues on the subject—is that the period should be twenty-one years. However, that is a matter which may very fairly be left to the House. But I wish to emphasise this: That hon. members can obtain the information, if they desire it, as to the very large portion of that country of which I am now speaking that is lying idle as far as revenue is concerned, and is absolutely forfeited. It is certainly desirable that that country should be taken up, but whether that should be brought about by reducing the rent or extending the tenure I do not know. At any rate, something will have to be done either this session or as soon after as the matter can be dealt with. The matter is not within the scope of this Bill. Therefore I do not intend to refer to it at greater length. At present they get twenty-one years, and unless they get a tenure of twenty-one years, or unless on the other hand there is no prospect of the extension of the schedule for eight or ten years, there will be a rush of those pastoral tenants coming in under the existing Acts. We have so to solve the problem that there may not be a rush of applications to come under the existing Acts before the commencement of the new Act, and so that there may not be a rush of applications of a similar character to come under the new Act afterwards. I thank hon. members for the hearing they have given me, and apologise for keeping them so late. I sincerely trust that we shall soon get into committee on the Bill, and I would ask hon. members to think over what I said with regard to amendments. I shall be only too glad to consider any amendments suggested, and I am sure that by adopting my suggestion we shall get through the Bill in committee very much sooner than we should do otherwise.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Question put and passed; and committal of the Bill made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

ADJOURNMENT.

The PREMIER: I move that this House do now adjourn.

Mr. HARDACRE: I am sorry to have to express my dissatisfaction with your action, Sir, in reference to a matter which occurred during the debate——

The SPEAKER: The hon. member cannot do that. He cannot raise any question now with regard to my action. The only question he can discuss now is the question of the adjournment of the House.

Mr. HARDACRE: I think it was unfortunate that I was not allowed to justify my action by giving my reasons. The Secretary for Lands——

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member cannot reopen that question on this motion. If the hon. member had anything whatever to say about my action, he should have said it at the time.

Mr. HARDACRE: I wish you would allow me to finish my sentence. I believe that I shall be able to give sufficient reasons for my action.

The SPEAKER: I have called the hon. member to order. The question before the House is that the House do now adjourn.

Mr. HARDACRE: I have something to say before the House adjourns, something which I wish to appear in *Hansard* in the same manner as something that has been said about myself will appear. I was then prevented from replying, and I have a chance of doing so now in the motion for the adjournment of the House. This is my opportunity.

The SPEAKER: I would remind the hon. member that he cannot reopen a discussion on a question that is closed. The only question that he can speak to is as to whether this House should now adjourn.

Mr. HARDACRE: I am trying to show that the House should not adjourn. I object to the House adjourning until I have made a justification of the action for which I have been severely blamed, and which has been termed a dishonourable action in this House.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member cannot do that. The question is that the House do now adjourn.

Question put and passed; and the House adjourned at eighteen minutes past 11 o'clock.