

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 1 DECEMBER 1896

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2. If not, will the Minister take the necessary steps to do so at the earliest possible opportunity in the beginning of next session.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS replied—

1. No.

2. The question of constructing this line will be considered in due course.

LOAN BILL.

FIRST READING.

Mr. ANNEAR, as Chairman of Committees, presented a report from the Committee of Ways and Means covering the resolution in connection with the loan proposals for 1896-7.

On the motion of the TREASURER, the resolution was agreed to; a Bill founded thereon was introduced, read a first time, and the second reading made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

SUPPRESSION OF GAMBLING ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

FIRST READING.

On the motion of the ATTORNEY-GENERAL, this Bill, the desirableness of introducing which had been affirmed in committee, was read a first time, and the second reading made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

QUEENSLAND NATIONAL BANK (AGREEMENT) BILL.

SECOND READING.

The TREASURER said: This is a Bill dealing with the agreement entered into by the Government with the Queensland National Bank in pursuance of an Act passed in 1893. We have now arrived at this stage: That we have determined in committee the desirableness of introducing a Bill of this description. I am led to believe that it is the wish of the House, as a whole, that we should deal in a generous spirit with the Queensland National Bank. I believe that to some extent the interests of the colony are identified with that institution—to the amount, at any rate, which the bank owes the colony; and therefore it is a matter of some considerable importance. The occasion for this Bill is simply this: We had a report published from the bank itself in July last, in which the chairman of the board of management of that institution stated that the bank could not see its way to go on and pay for the amount of their indebtedness to ourselves and other depositors at the rate of 4½ per cent., and I think he also intimated that the term of years to which we had agreed to postpone our claims, or our demands, on the bank was somewhat too short. Since then an inquiry, ordered by myself, has been held, the result of which has been in the hands of hon. members for several weeks. It is now our function to decide as to what the terms of that agreement shall be. The agreement, of course, must necessarily be made by the Treasurer, as it is the function of the Executive to make agreements of this nature; to enter into contracts, in fact, of any kind whatever. But it is also the particular function of Parliament to decide the limits within which the Executive may make any agreement or contract of any sort whatever. The intention, therefore, of this Bill is to give the House an opportunity of saying—on the assumption that a fresh agreement is required—the limits to which, in the way of concession, the House will allow the Treasurer, as representing the colony, to go. I would desire, if I am employed in this service—which seems very probable—that those limits should be as directly definite as possible. No man in my position would like to take more responsibility than he can possibly help. There are several considerations to be taken account of which in this matter are very important. First of all, I may

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 1 DECEMBER, 1896.

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

DEFENCE BILL.

On the motion of the PREMIER, it was resolved—

That the House will, at its next sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider the desirableness of introducing a Bill to further amend the Defence Act of 1884.

FEDERAL COUNCIL REFERRING BILL.

FIRST READING.

On the motion of the PREMIER, this Bill was introduced, read a first time, and the second reading made an Order of the Day for Thursday next.

QUESTION.

BOWEN RAILWAY EXTENSION.

Mr. SMITH asked the Secretary for Railways—

1. Will the Government submit the plan, section, and book of reference of the third section of the Bowen Railway for approval during the present session?

remark that as to the amount of money that we have to deal with under this agreement there has been some misconception—I do not mean in this House, but outside the House—as to what this Bill proposes to do. This Bill has nothing whatever to do with the Government current account. That is a matter entirely by itself. It simply deals with the deferred deposits.

Mr. GLASSEY: That is about £2,000,000.

The TREASURER: Yes, a trifle over £2,000,000. You may say in round numbers two millions of money. £160,000 was paid over a short time ago, since the last agreement was made. What we are dealing with now is solely and simply the deferred deposits, the exact amount of which I can tell the House, so that there will be no misapprehension. Under the agreement of 1893 the amount which the bank owes the Government is £1,833,326. At the same time that we passed that Act, however, we also passed another Act dealing with public depositors, allowing the Treasurer to give them relief; in point of fact, to buy up their extended deposits. That has been availed of by divisional boards and other local authorities of that nature to the extent of £160,646. This Bill, therefore, deals with these two amounts. Now, in dealing with the bank, we have to deal in the present instance not with the directors of the bank but with the parties who are interested in the bank like ourselves. The principal parties will be the shareholders in the first instance, and, secondly, the depositors. If the report of the commission is to be taken as final, then it would appear that the shareholders have very little to say in the matter. At the same time, they are in legal possession of the institution; they have to be reckoned with, and it does not follow that because the commission recommend a certain course that the shareholders will adopt that course. I am rather inclined to believe that they will not do so; that a considerable number of them, at any rate, will prefer to meet any liability they have incurred as shareholders and take their risk of getting their money back again from the institution. It must be admitted that such shareholders as hold that opinion must have very great faith in the colony and its progress and the means of this institution to restore to them the money they have invested therein. But I admire them all the same, if such is their opinion—

Mr. DUNSFORD: They do not care about a new set of directors.

The TREASURER: And I sympathise with them in that respect. The other parties with whom we have to deal are the depositors who are in like case with ourselves; who had to take in the year 1893 deferred deposit receipts for the moneys the bank owes them. I have made up a synopsis that I think may interest the House, showing the number of people with whom we have to deal and the amount that they represent in the various parts of the world. I find the state of the case to be this: On the London register there are, in various claims—some extended deposits and some negotiable—but, putting them altogether, because they are all very much in the same category, there are 4,436 persons who have claims against the bank amounting to £2,718,883. I am leaving out the shillings and pence of course. In coming to Australia I find that in Sydney there are sixty-one persons who have claims against the bank amounting to £99,610. At the head office in Brisbane there are 410 depositors with claims amounting to £707,720, which includes £150,645 held by the Government under the Public Depositors Relief Act. But when I come to look at the suburban and country branches I find there are 2,795 persons who have claims amounting to £654,080.

The total that the bank owes therefore is as follows: There are 7,702 depositors with claims against the bank amounting to £4,180,293.

Mr. DUNSFORD: That includes current account depositors?

The TREASURER: That includes all the depositors whose accounts were closed up in 1893. It does not include the present current account depositors. We are not dealing with the present current accounts at all. The Government claim, as I have already explained, is, in Brisbane, £1,228,326, and in London, £605,000, making a total, as I have already mentioned, for which the bank is liable to depositors, including the Government, of £6,013,619, upon which they have paid up to the present 4½ per cent. since 1893. It will be apparent from that that there are a very large number of people, not only in this colony but also in the old country, who are interested as well as we are in this institution; and as some new arrangements are evidently necessary, I do not think it is the duty or function of this Parliament to propose any new arrangement, seeing that we own not more than one-third of the whole deposits. I think it is much more advisable that the Treasurer should be authorised to negotiate with the other parties who are interested, and to receive proposals from them; not to formulate any particular proposal of their own, or what Parliament dictates, but rather to give the Treasurer power to negotiate with them and make the best terms he can in the interests of the colony. The Bill, I admit, is one asking for very large powers, and involves a considerable amount of confidence in the Treasurer and the Government; but as I have said already, if, when we get into committee, the Treasurer's powers can be restricted or defined within any practicable or workable limits, the more that is done the better I shall be pleased. That is the whole matter of this Bill, and if I spoke for an hour I could not say any more about it. The question before the House on the second reading is the principle of the Bill. I think the House has practically agreed that some fresh agreement is necessary, and must be accomplished by some means or other. The principle of this Bill therefore is that a new agreement be authorised, that the Treasurer be authorised to make that agreement, and that that agreement shall be within certain defined lines.

Mr. DAWSON: What is the special urgency for the Bill this session?

The TREASURER: I am surprised at anybody asking a question of that sort—anybody who knows anything about banking. If we proposed for a moment that this bank should be hung up in the position it is in now until next session, we might just as well propose that the thing should be immediately liquidated. It would be far better to do so.

Mr. McDONALD: You stated just now that you ought to take no action until the depositors took action.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: No, no!

Mr. DRAKE: That the proposals should come from them.

The TREASURER: What I say is that it is not my place to make offers to them, but that considering the position of the Government in the matter it is my place to receive offers from them, and if they are such as the Governor in Council approve of the agreement can be made.

Mr. McDONALD: Why legislate in anticipation of getting offers?

The TREASURER: Because we know some offer of the sort must come. People are guided by their own interests, and it is in their own interests for these people to come to some special arrangement with regard to the position of the bank, and it is in their interests as much as in ours

that the bank should be carried on and made, if possible, into a good going concern. If some feasible scheme is not submitted, by which the credit of the bank may be re-established, and the institution made into one for the benefit of the colony, the Treasurer will accept no suggestions of that kind at all. It is not for Parliament to make the suggestions, but for the parties interested in the bank to do so. With regard to the shareholders, I may as well mention that there are 160,000 shares altogether in the bank, of which a little over 40,000 are on the London register; all the others are colonial. I do not give these figures as exact, because I have noticed that in some instances the same names appear both on the colonial and London registers. The colonial register includes those residing in Queensland, some residing in New South Wales, and a great many more residing in Victoria. Still the bulk of the shareholders are Queenslanders, and, roughly speaking, for all practical purposes the list may be taken in this way—that one-fourth of the whole of the shareholders of the bank are merchants or capitalists in the United Kingdom and the other colonies of Australia.

Mr. McDONALD: They are very small capitalists now, some of them.

The TREASURER: It might be that they have not all their fortunes in the bank.

Mr. McDONALD: The Home Secretary says his all is there.

The TREASURER: It does not follow that because they are interested in the bank it involves their all. Those are the circumstances of the case as well as I can present them to the House. I need not refer to the Bill in detail, as there will be another opportunity of doing that. I beg hon. members on the other side clearly to understand that I am in no way an apologist for the bank. It is not the bank I am concerned about at all. First of all, I am concerned for the colony as a whole, and, secondly, for the depositors, because our relationship with the bank is that of a depositor. We are all pretty well agreed, I think, that if any practical scheme of rearrangement can be presented it will be for the benefit of all parties. I hope such may be the case. I have already said that in this Bill I am asking that a vast deal of faith shall be placed in the Treasurer for the time being, who will have to make this agreement, which will involve an immense amount of detail which cannot possibly be incorporated in this Bill. Many things will have to be altered. The articles of association must necessarily be altered, and there are a great many things of that nature to be considered. Of course it will be the duty of the Treasurer in making this agreement to see that those things are done either before the agreement is made or to make them part of the agreement when it is made. However, I would recommend as the best course to see that those matters of detail are arranged before the agreement is actually made.

Mr. GLASSEY: Hear, hear!

The TREASURER: The amount of interest the Treasurer is under the Bill authorised to accept is of course put at a small limit, and the time extended to the bank for repayment is put at a large limit; but those are things we can settle in committee. The same rights are reserved to the Government in case of default—that is to say, that if liquidation should be found to be inevitable we shall have the same rights as we have now. Under these circumstances I commend the Bill to the House. I think it is a Bill which will be found to be in the interests of the whole colony, and without it we run a great risk of having our trade and commerce very seriously interfered with. That I hope will be averted by the House agreeing to authorise the

Treasurer to come to some such arrangement as I have indicated. I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr. GLASSEY: I have to follow the remarks made by the hon. gentleman. With many of them I agree and with some I disagree. With respect to the necessity for the Bill, I share the opinion expressed by the Treasurer. I also agree with the hon. gentleman when he says that the House generally desires to treat the bank in a liberal and a generous spirit. The House so far has shown that spirit, and I believe I am correct in saying that, although there is great room for difference of opinion, that generous spirit will continue to be shown during the discussion upon this Bill. The hon. gentleman says that it is the function of the Treasurer to enter into this agreement. That is so, and I think this Bill, as it now stands, asks that very large powers should be extended to the Treasurer—powers which, in my opinion, are too extensive, and which I hope to see limited when the Bill goes into committee. The Treasurer also very wisely says that while it is desirable to entrust him, as the officer charged with this particular work, to enter into the agreement, it is the function of Parliament to limit as far as it can the terms of the arrangement that he may make. But these are matters that can be more readily and effectually dealt with when we go into committee. I am glad that the hon. gentleman has cleared up the point with respect to the amount of money we are asked to deal with in connection with this Bill. I must confess that when I read the Bill it seemed extremely vague; it does not make the matter as clear as we have a right to expect it should, or nearly so clear as it is made under the original Act of 1893. That Act stipulated the amount of money involved, the payments to be made under an agreement, the length of time over which the payments were to extend, and the time when the payments should begin. The hon. gentleman has mentioned that the amount of money we are called upon to deal with is £2,000,000, which is the sum now locked up in the institution, and which was dealt with under the agreement of 1893. I find that there is no mention made in this Bill as to when the payments shall commence, and I think that is a defect in the Bill. I had hoped that the Treasurer would clear up that matter during his speech, but he has not done so. Section 4 of the original Act of 1893 says—

“The agreement may provide—

- (1) As to the two million pounds sterling, part of the said sums so due and owing by the bank, that repayment shall be made by twelve equal half-yearly instalments, commencing not later than the first day of July, one thousand eight hundred and ninety-nine.”

Then it goes on to deal with the balance over and above the £2,000,000, but that is a matter that does not concern us under this Bill. The Treasurer might very fairly have made provision in this Bill as to when the repayment should begin, and as to what amount he should receive per annum. I hope that matter will be dealt with in committee, and that if the Treasurer is not then prepared to move an amendment in the direction I have indicated he will be able to give substantial reasons for not doing so, or accept an amendment moved by some other member. As I read paragraphs 12 and 14 of the report of the committee of investigation, it would appear that certain persons are to receive payment before the Treasurer receives anything at all. Paragraph 14 says—

“We estimate that, even on the reduced assets, the bank can pay its expenses, 2½ per cent. to its depositors, provide for current banking risks, and yet show an annual surplus of, say, £100,000. This is taking the business as it stands without allowing for improvement

in values or expansion in the volume of trade. The deficit, so far as the creditors are concerned, is £1,250,000, and, under ordinarily favourable circumstances, it should be extinguished within a period of twelve to fourteen years."

Does that mean that other persons and not the Crown are to receive payment within twelve or fourteen years, and that the Crown is not to receive anything until after that time?

The TREASURER: No; it means all depositors, including the Crown.

Mr. GLASSEY: I am glad to know that. The Bill also provides that interest at the rate of not less than 2½ per cent. shall be paid to the Government. Supposing the bank, with its new proprietary—and under, I hope, better and more honest management than it has had hitherto—should get into a prosperous condition, which I am sure we all desire to see it in, and be able to pay more than 2½ per cent., I think the Treasurer and the House generally will agree that the Government should participate to some extent in the advantages that may accrue under such circumstances. But will that be so under this Bill?

The TREASURER: That will depend upon the terms of the agreement.

Mr. GLASSEY: I merely mention this matter, because if the bank becomes flourishing and prosperous the Treasurer should participate to some extent in the improved condition of affairs, and I hope the hon. gentleman will not overlook that point when dealing with the agreement. Parliament might very well make some stipulation upon that point, as it would strengthen the hands of the Treasurer when he comes to enter into the agreement. The 4th clause of the Bill provides for a new company. Does that mean the present proprietary, or a new company formed to take over the business of the bank?

The TREASURER: If the depositors take over the bank they will be a new company.

Mr. GLASSEY: I understood the Treasurer to say that he believed some of the present shareholders would not agree to the new scheme, and in that case I want to know whether he will deal with the present proprietors, and probably with the present directors, or whether he will be armed with authority to deal with the new company.

The TREASURER: We are not compelled to deal with anybody.

Mr. GLASSEY: No; but these are points which I think Parliament has a right to deal with, so that we may understand what we are doing. To be candid, I think it would be unfortunate if the Treasurer should have to deal with the present directors, or with the present proprietary through the agency of the present directors. I think also that Parliament would be very slow indeed in granting the Treasurer authority to deal with the present proprietary unless new directors are elected.

The TREASURER: I think that is inevitable.

Mr. GLASSEY: I am glad to hear it, because I am expressing not only the sentiments of hon. members upon this side but those of hon. members opposite and of the community generally. I do not wish to show the slightest vindictiveness in the matter, but I think it would be unfortunate, or even criminal—not to use a stronger term—to have anything more to do with the present directors. Their conduct in the past has been such as to merit the strongest censure, and probably before this matter ends they will merit something else; but I will not deal with that matter at present. I also wish to know if we are to give the Treasurer authority to enter into a full agreement with a new proprietary without Parliament having, next year, any say as to whether that agreement is acceptable or not? The Bill does not provide for

that. If a new company comes into existence I think it would be a misfortune if Parliament should surrender the whole of its rights and not retain any power to sanction that agreement. Parliament ought to meet early next year in order to ratify any agreement that may be made between the Treasurer and the new proprietary and it will be very lax in its duty if it empowers the Treasurer to enter into any agreement that may be objectionable. Considering that there is now twelve months' time, as far as current accounts are concerned, within which to make arrangements, all that the Treasurer ought to ask is that he shall have a right to make certain terms, and then Parliament should retain its right to say whether those terms are acceptable or not. I am mentioning this during this discussion so that hon. members generally may have an opportunity of elaborating the point more fully, and perhaps throwing out suggestions which may remove some of the objections I hold. With respect of the prior right of the Crown, there is a good deal of dissatisfaction and a great difference of opinion upon that point, even in legal circles. The Treasurer, and even the Attorney-General, assumed in the original agreement that the Crown had a prior right, and I am not prepared to say from a legal standpoint whether it has or not.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The best construction we can put upon the law is the construction put upon it by Parliament. We put that construction upon it in 1893.

Mr. GLASSEY: During my travels round the city of Brisbane I have met with persons who allege that it was all very well for the Government and the Attorney-General to say that Parliament has this right; but so far as they were concerned they said Parliament has no such right, and I have talked to some legal gentlemen on the subject.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Everybody admitted it in 1893—depositors, shareholders, the Supreme Court here, and the courts in England as well.

Mr. GLASSEY: If there be any uncertainty in this matter, it should be cured in the present Bill.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: You could not do it in this Bill.

The TREASURER: The same clauses are in this Bill as are in the Act of 1893.

Mr. GLASSEY: With the object of protecting the rights of the Crown it is essentially necessary that an officer of Parliament should hold office as a director of this institution. I do not mean an officer of the Government, who may be removed by a whim or wish of a political party, but a person appointed by Act of Parliament, the same as the Registrar-General.

The TREASURER: The Auditor-General.

Mr. GLASSEY: There is no man in the House who would be more willing to see the Auditor-General occupying such an important place than myself, and, if the Treasurer would agree to it, I am sure no hon. member would offer any objection to that officer being a director of the bank as long as there are any Government moneys there to be protected, as such moneys ought to be.

The TREASURER: You said the Registrar-General; I suppose you meant the Auditor-General.

Mr. GLASSEY: Yes, I think it was the intention of the committee of investigation, who I suppose will shortly go more fully into its affairs, that the Government should be represented on the board, for in paragraph 16 they say—

"We have no desire to forge an official link between the State and the bank, but pending the completion of fresh arrangements we certainly think that the

Government should be represented on the board. The creditors who have had to accept extended receipts should be represented also."

That was probably intended to refer to the new arrangements we are now dealing with, but I do not altogether agree with the committee that the Government official should only be there temporarily. He should be there as long as the State has any moneys there, because I know no other way by which the interests of the State can be so effectually protected as by having a director enjoying all the privileges of other directors. That would not only satisfy all hon. members but it would be satisfactory to the community generally; and I believe, further, that unless something of the kind is done that confidence, which we all desire to see established, will not be given to this institution. When the Bill gets into committee I shall certainly move an amendment in order to take the sense of the Committee on that question. It may be argued by some hon. members and by some persons outside that there will be too much political connection between the officer in question and the Government. I do not think there would be any such connection. There is no member of this House, and there are few persons in the community who will not agree that the present Auditor-General is in no way influenced by the Government of the day, or by whatever Government may be in power; and if an officer were appointed in the same way as the Auditor-General to perform the duties I have spoken of I am sure this feeling that there would be political connection between him and the Government would soon disappear. Coming back to the question of the position of affairs, I say without any bitterness that the present condition of the bank, as shown by the committee of investigation, reflects very seriously upon the judgment—not to use a stronger term—of the present Treasurer and his colleague who now occupies a seat in another place. They were instructed—and they carried out their instructions—to make as minute an investigation into the affairs of the bank as they could in the limited time at their disposal in 1893. On their recommendation Parliament authorised the Government to enter into certain arrangements. What do we find now, after the lapse of little more than three short years? We were led to believe, by a gentleman holding a foremost position in the councils of his country, supported by a subordinate colleague, that the institution was sound, and we acted on their advice—given, I presume, in all seriousness and earnestness and after due deliberation. Yet in little more than three short years we find that the committee of investigation, after going minutely into the matter, reports that there is a deficiency in connection with the institution of upwards of £3,000,000, or a loss of £1,000,000 a year. Can any hon. member reconcile the statements made in 1893 by the hon. gentleman and his colleague with the deplorable condition which is revealed to us by the committee? They cannot be reconciled. According to the report of the committee there is a loss of nearly £2,500,000, whilst no less a sum than about £750,000 has been written off as bad, and although in 1893 the bank was represented as being sound—

The TREASURER: Will you quote my words?

Mr. GLASSEY: I have quoted them, but I shall quote them again.

The TREASURER: I wish you would. We have had all this before.

Mr. GLASSEY: If the Treasurer will pardon me, I would say that, while I may be inclined to think the Treasurer and his colleague acted hastily in connection with their examination, or probably had not sufficient time at their disposal, I should be sorry to believe that the hon. gentlemen

would knowingly act dishonourably. Surely the hon. gentleman will acquit me of any desire to reflect in a personal manner upon him; but I say hon. members have a right to examine this question minutely. Whether the Treasurer of this country be at fault or not it matters not to me. We have higher duties to perform than mere personal considerations. We have to consider the question of safeguarding the interests of the people of this colony; and I say that the Treasurer, or any other person, no matter what position he may occupy in the State, has no right to act hastily or do anything to in any way mislead Parliament and prevent its coming to a righteous judgment.

The TREASURER: I am asking to be judged by my own words.

Mr. GLASSEY: I shall give the hon. gentleman's own words. On the 23rd of June, 1893, when speaking on the second reading of the Queensland National Bank (Agreement) Bill, the hon. gentleman said—

"With regard to the main question—whether this particular bank is sound or otherwise—I may state that the duty—a duty which I should very much like to have passed over, but it was inevitable in my case—has devolved upon me of making a most minute and searching examination into the affairs of this institution. That I have done, devoting nearly the whole of my time to it since the House adjourned about a fortnight ago. I have given the matter the most thorough and most searching examination. I have had an opportunity of seeing all the securities of the bank"—

"All the securities of the bank," mark you!—not a portion of them—

"and even the confidential books belonging to that institution. I have also had the able assistance of my colleague, the Secretary for Lands, who has had a large experience previously in banking concerns; and the result of our investigation is that I am able to report, as I have already reported to my colleagues, that, in my opinion, in which my colleague, the Secretary for Lands, concurs, the assets of the bank, taken at a fair and reasonable valuation, and assuming any fair method of realisation are more than sufficient to pay the debts of the bank to the Government, as well as to the outside public."

I think that is fairly conclusive.

The TREASURER: What has that to do with the £3,000,000?

Mr. GLASSEY: It has this to do with it—that, viewing the position of the bank then as sound, we find that since then the bank has lost over £3,000,000, or at the rate of £1,000,000 a year.

Mr. McMASTER: Nonsense! It was previous to the examination that the losses were made.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: That amount includes the shareholders' capital.

Mr. GLASSEY: This is what the report of the committee says on the subject—

"Our estimate of the bank's position is that the liabilities exceed the assets by £2,435,423; that is to say, the whole of the paid-up capital amounting to £899,552, the amount at credit of profit and loss account, £46,955, the contingency account of £160,544, the interest suspense account of £75,562 (amounting in all to £1,182,613), have been lost, and that there is still a deficit of £1,252,810."

And that is not the worst. There is not only a dead loss of £2,500,000, but they say in paragraph 8—

The SPEAKER: The hon. member will excuse me, but I do not see what this has got to do with the Bill before the House. It does not seem to me to be at all relevant. I have tried to follow the hon. gentleman, but I cannot see how his argument applies to the Bill.

Mr. GLASSEY: Of course, if it is out of order I cannot refer to the report.

The SPEAKER: The hon. member does not understand me. He can refer to the report where it has any bearing on the Bill, but he

seems to me to be condemning the previous report of Ministers and trying to prove that they were wrong.

Mr. GLASSEY: I am endeavouring, as briefly as I can, to trace the affairs of the bank from the original agreement, and showing that it was hardly possible that the bank could have been sound in 1893.

The SPEAKER: I really cannot see what that has to do with the Bill—whether the bank was sound or not in 1893.

Mr. GLASSEY: I am endeavouring to show that the Treasurer was in error in 1893. I impute nothing dishonourable to the hon. gentleman, but I think we should be very slow, after our past experience, in giving any power which is not restricted within the narrowest possible limits. Otherwise we may have a repetition of what occurred in 1893. In addition to the amount I have mentioned there has been nearly three-quarters of a million of money written off as bad, and the committee say that practically the whole of this loss has arisen out of transactions of old standing. How can the statement that the bank is sound hold good in the face of such a statement as that? Then we have that other matter to deal with: The paragraph in the report which, although it does not say so in so many words, yet implies that there has been something worse than mismanagement. Paragraph 11 says:—

“Up to the 31st December, 1895, interest on many accounts was taken into profit, which should either have been carried to interest suspense account or else not charged at all, and it therefore follows that the profits shown were to some extent fictitious.”

The management, it appears from that, was not only a bungle and a disgrace—it was something worse; and I say, considering the bungs which were made in 1893 and the class of persons we dealt with at that time, we should be exceedingly careful what transactions we enter into with people of that description again. The committee say that the profits were to some extent fictitious; in other words that the balance-sheets were dishonest and dishonourable. This House has a right to consider this matter in the full light of what has passed, and as far as possible safeguard the colony from a repetition of what has taken place. I am quite sure it is the intention of the House to deal with this institution in the most liberal and generous spirit, but while doing that we have other duties to perform, and those are to protect the interests of the public—the general taxpayer. The Secretary for Public Instruction is constantly telling us that society must be safeguarded. So it must, but viewing the report which we have in our hands, and the fact that those connected with this institution have held high and honourable places in the public estimation in years past, it behoves us to protect the public from transactions such as have been forced upon them by those persons. It is our duty as a Parliament to see that not only are the people protected, but we have a right to insist that honest men and more honourable men shall have control of this institution—men in whom trust will be reposed, and men who will uphold the high honour and dignity of the position. Why, if any person had been through the country as I was in 1893 after the crisis and seen the suffering and privation, the sorrow, hardships, and heartburning that took place after the crisis, he must come to the conclusion that the persons who brought that state of things about should not be trusted again by the people to carry out duties for which they have proved themselves utterly unfitted. I will do my best to place this Bill in a more modified and complete form on the statute-book. I will assist the Government so far as I can in making such arrangements as will

enable the bank to carry out its obligations without restricting or hindering the trade and commerce of the country, but I shall reserve to myself the right of making such safeguards as will bring about the changes which I have mentioned, and two above all others—that the accounts of the institution shall be audited at least once every six months by the Auditor-General or officers of his department; and, secondly, that an officer appointed by Parliament shall occupy a permanent place on the directorate of that institution until such time as the money belonging to the State has been repaid, with all the rights and privileges of performing the duties of which I have spoken, so that the country at large through Parliament shall know how that institution is standing, and that the State's funds are properly safeguarded and protected, so as to once again inspire confidence in that institution, and give the people of the country an opportunity of knowing that the Parliament of the day is looking after their interests so far as that can be done in connection with the institution.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I do not quite understand the position the hon. member takes up upon this Bill, because he professes, and I believe he professes that genuinely, to be desirous of seeing a Bill upon these lines generally passed into law, but in the same breath he expresses his intention of moving amendments, and, so far as he can, of insisting upon certain changes in the Bill being made. I have not had an opportunity of seeing his amendments in print, but, so far as I can gather, speaking generally, the outlines the hon. gentleman has given us of his proposed amendments lead me to believe that if they were carried into effect there would be no necessity for the Bill at all, because you might as well shut up the shop. I believe we all want to see this bank carried on if possible. It is not a matter, as the Treasurer pointed out, of dealing with the directors of the bank. I look upon the directors of the bank as practically *functi officio*. They are gone, and the present proprietary is gone. In the face of the committee's report I do not see that they can occupy any other position. The hon. member will pardon me if I recall to his mind the fact that in dealing with this Bill we are not really entering upon an inquisitorial crusade. I know the hon. member disclaimed any idea of doing so, but we are not entering either upon any mission of vindictiveness or revenge, and we should confine ourselves to the work we have immediately in hand. That is a work of construction—not of destruction. I do not believe that anybody would willingly endeavour to destroy this institution.

Mr. McDONALD: You can't destroy it.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The hon. member would, of course, say it has perished through inherent defects. But it has not perished absolutely. It may be a case of suspended animation, but what we are engaged upon now as a Parliament is legislation in the belief that there may be a basis to work upon—the thing underlying all this legislation is that by wise and prudent measures we may still give an institution—not necessarily the present institution, as it may be some other—which has not only our moneys but the moneys of the country and of people in other countries an opportunity of pulling through. I do not see that a great many of the remarks of the hon. member are in any way applicable to the present state of affairs. Of course, one cannot ask hon. members to shut their eyes altogether to the past, or to be silent about it; but if we talked every day in the week on the subject, raking up this matter and that, and charging the Treasurer with defective powers of

vision in 1893, it really cannot help on our present work, which is clearly to discover what we can do in the present state of affairs. None of us here are responsible in the slightest degree for the state of the bank. The responsibility for that may be traced far back beyond the time when most of us were in Parliament or had anything to do with public affairs. The Treasurer has promised that that will be a matter for further investigation, but at present what work are we engaged in? We are asking in this Bill that the Treasurer shall be authorised to treat with some person or persons, with some corporation, as to the future disposition of the moneys of the public that at present happen to be in that particular institution. From an interjection made by the hon. member for Flinders, I think the hon. member did not quite understand what the Treasurer said. The Treasurer did not say that we should not take the initiative. What he said was that Parliament cannot dictate to the other persons interested the terms upon which they shall enter into a fresh agreement.

Mr. McDONALD: He said they should take the first step.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Quite so; and I hold that they should take the first step, but the Government is not in the position of an ordinary individual in this matter. An ordinary individual may say, "Let somebody else take the first step," and then he is in a position to treat with that person after the first step has been taken. The Government must be in a position to treat with them when they do take the first step.

Mr. McDONALD: You do take the first step.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The hon. member will pardon me. That is where I think there is so much that is erroneous in the argument and suggestions of the hon. member for Bundaberg. That hon. member would ask us in this Bill to take a very advanced step, and without knowing the wishes of other persons interested, lay down in this Bill certain cast-iron principles which might preclude all possibility of treating with those persons.

Mr. GLASSEY: They could not possibly disagree to what I have suggested.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I am sure the hon. member made his suggestions with the very best intentions, and many hon. members on both sides and many people in the country may think in the same way—that now once and for all certain principles should be embodied in this Bill which would lay down safe lines for future conduct. But that is absolutely premature when we are taking a mere initiative. As I said before, we are not in the position of a private individual having absolute control over his own affairs, whose "Yea" and "Nay" are simply of his own creation. We, as the Executive, cannot take any step with regard to this without Parliament giving us authority on broad principles to treat with the other persons concerned. The hon. member says, "Why bring in this Bill?" and the senior member for Charters Towers wants to know what is the urgency for this legislation this session. The urgency is this: That people will not move a step unless responsible persons—unless the Executive is armed with some authority to treat with them.

Mr. McDONALD: Is not the Treasurer a responsible person?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The Treasurer is bound by the agreement made under the Act of 1893; without the authority of Parliament he cannot alter one line of that agreement. We are simply tied hand and foot, and have no authority to treat either with the bank, the depositors, the shareholders, or anybody else. We want our hands untied, so that when over-

tures are made to us we may be in a position to some extent to deal with them. As a proof that what I am saying is correct, I may mention this: I believe the contents of the committee's report has been cabled to the other end of the world, and the information is known to shareholders and depositors here, and not one step has been taken by those people. No, they are waiting to see what move the Government will make.

Mr. GLASSEY: Hear, hear! Very proper, too.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I quite agree with the hon. member that it is quite proper, because without the Government making some move it is perfectly idle for them to arrive at any conclusion. I say, then, we should not tie ourselves too strongly under this Act of Parliament so as to preclude those people from coming to treat with us at all. Hon. members will pardon me if I again reiterate the proposition that we are not in the position of ordinary individuals who have the power of treating, changing, amending, or compromising; and if we are to have successful negotiations carried through, all Parliament ought to do is to lay down limits within which the negotiations may be carried on. But if Parliament will insist upon putting the very terms of the agreement into this Bill it may be that those terms would be acceptable to other people, but if they are not the whole of the negotiations will be suspended until Parliament can be called together again and an amending Act passed. And what would be the consequence! The bank would be absolutely shut up in the meantime.

Mr. McDONALD: Does that not apply now? The bank entered into friendly negotiations six months ago.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: With whom?

Mr. McDONALD: With the Government.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I do not know what the friendly negotiations are.

Mr. GLASSEY: He is referring to the chairman's speech at the bank meeting.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It all depends upon the meaning put upon the words "friendly negotiations," but he was certainly not using the phrase in the sense in which I am using it now. I am speaking of negotiations between the Government and the depositors, which are to form the basis of a new agreement altogether. But to come back to the hon. member for Bundaberg. The hon. member calls attention to the fact that certain details are not mentioned in this Bill. I shall refer to only one of them; that is, that there is no mention made as to the time when the repayments are to commence. What would be the use of laying down a cast-iron principle and saying that the repayments must commence on a certain date, when possibly that arrangement might not be suitable to the other persons concerned? Hon. members must get rid of the idea, which I, at least, do not entertain for a moment, that we have to deal with the present proprietary. We may have to deal with them as a matter of form, but this business is not going to be settled in this House or in Queensland. It will have to be settled by the bulk of the English creditors, and we want to be armed with authority so as to be able to deal with those people and enter into an agreement, because if we are not, and have to wait until Parliament meets again, the absolute uncertainty in the minds of depositors at home as to whether the agreement proposed will be sanctioned by Parliament, and the absolute distrust and want of confidence in the minds of current depositors of the bank will be such that we might as well save ourselves all this trouble. Personally I believe that, unless some agreement is entered into within a couple of months, a large portion of the valuable and solid business of the

bank will drift away. The whole object of bringing in this legislation is to preserve the bank as a going concern. The committee of investigation are very emphatic on that point, and this Bill is practically drafted on the lines they recommend. The committee was practically appointed by Parliament, because, although appointed by the Executive, yet their appointment was brought before the House; the *personnel* of the committee was investigated, and certain suggestions were made by Parliament, which were acceded to by the Government. So that practically this committee, consisting of four gentlemen, was appointed by the House. They have done their work, and I believe it has met with almost universal approbation throughout the colony. I believe that the great majority of hon. members are thoroughly in accord with the conclusions at which the committee have arrived, and they recommend that the Government should give generous treatment to the bank. Their recommendation is that a new proprietary should be formed—that the shareholders should march out, and that somebody else who really own the institution should come in. They do not wish the Government to take a share in the management of the institution, but they recommend that generous treatment should be accorded to the proprietary, whoever they may be, and this Bill is brought down on those lines. I think it would be exceedingly unwise if in a Bill of this sort we should dictate to the other persons concerned the only terms upon which they have any chance of coming in. We say nothing about how the bank is to be managed, but simply give the Treasurer power to enter into an agreement fixing the maximum time and the minimum rate of interest. There is only one detail, which although a detail is a matter of considerable importance, with which this Bill deals, and that is the question of the future management of the institution. As the hon. member will know, it enacts that if a new company is formed to take over the bank that company must have its registered office in Brisbane, and its memorandum and articles of association must be approved by the Treasurer. That gives very wide powers to the Treasurer. As the Treasurer said—and you cannot get away from the fact—the Treasurer, whoever he may be, must be invested with these large powers, and within the limits of safety you can put in what limitation you like. Still, you must eventually leave a large proportion of power to the Treasurer for the time being. That is why so much that was said by the hon. member for Bundaberg seems to me to be quite beside this particular question. We are looking to the future. The value of the past is that lessons may be derived from it that may be warnings to us for future conduct; but as far as we are concerned at present I think it would be most unwise for the House to limit the Treasurer's power in a way that is not merely putting a limitation upon him, but is practically restricting the liberty and ideas of the other people who have to deal with this matter. It is a matter that cannot be settled by the House; it will have to be settled elsewhere, and I believe that it will have to be settled quickly, otherwise there is not the slightest necessity for our wasting our time discussing the matter at all. The hon. member opened up a very large question when he said that he would like to see provision made in this Bill for what would practically be Government management of the institution. That would be the outcome of what the hon. member proposed. We cannot, of course, tell what the future may bring forth, or what we may have to do, but I hope that that will never come about. If you have one person on the board

managing on behalf of the Government you will practically restrict it to a State-managed institution. If the State were playing with its own money it would be perfectly right for it to do what it likes, and put up with the consequences, but with the experience of the past in other countries in this connection I do not think anyone should be anxious to see the Government taking part in the management of the institution. But this is merely academic as far as this question is concerned, because it would be a very great blot on the Bill if such an important question as that of the future management of the bank should be absolutely fixed, and it should be indicated in this particular Bill that the Government are practically to have the control of the bank in the future, for that would really be the effect of what the hon. member suggests.

MR. GLASSEY: No; I only suggested that the Government should have one representative on the board.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It would be no use having one member on the board who could be overridden on matters in connection with the bank by the other members. If the Government are to be there at all they must have the controlling power, and take the whole responsibility. But I do not think we are in a position to discuss that at all in this Bill, because this is merely the first move in the game. If we get this Bill through we may be able to enter into negotiations, and if those negotiations are brought to a satisfactory conclusion the public will understand that the bank's position is restored. But it may be necessary for Parliament to be approached again for some further authority that the Treasurer may seek. We cannot forecast what conditions the people at home may require. Therefore it would be very unwise for us to show our hand too much at this the very outset of the game. I believe that we should, as far as possible, stick to the basis laid down in the committee's report. It may be that the report is all wrong, that the committee have painted the thing too black, or in too roseate colours altogether, but that report is what we have got as our basis of action. Upon that we bring in this Bill showing that at any rate the Government are willing to treat the proprietary in a generous way. The Bill says nothing about the future management; but, of course, there is power here, if a new proprietary is formed, by which the Treasurer can insist upon representation on the board. That would be included in the memorandum of agreement and the articles of association; but I would deprecate at this stage of the proceedings any final conclusion by Parliament itself upon that particular point. It is very unfortunate that we should have to deal with people so distant, and whose wishes we do not know. When we put the agreement through in 1893 the wishes of the depositors were well ascertained.

MR. HARDACRE: By negotiation.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: By negotiations between the bank and its depositors in 1893, in which the Government had no part. In 1893, as hon. members will remember, this was not a single instance. A great many other banks reconstructed, and the whole of the reconstructions were upon similar lines, so that it might be reasonably anticipated upon what conditions the depositors would accept deferred payments. We are now dealing with an uncertain state of affairs. The committee who went into the question have practically said that the present proprietary have ceased, equitably, to have any interest in the concern at all, and that the only hope of salvation is that the creditors shall really take over the assets and carry the bank on as a going concern.

They point out that immediate realisation would bring about a considerable loss, but of course we do not know whether the English depositors will be prepared to accept this burden of proprietorship now asked to be put upon them. We are all in the dark about that, but, as I have said, we do not pretend to prognosticate at all. We only wish Parliament to give us authority to enter into an agreement that will not offend against the limitations laid down here. As to the question of future management, that of course will have to be decided hereafter. At present, it is absolutely premature for us to say how the bank shall be managed, but many schemes suggest themselves.

MR. HARDACRE: When shall we have a chance of dealing with them?

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Hon. members must remember that the Government is responsible to Parliament for its actions, and the very fact of that responsibility hanging over its head will make it certain that in any serious step the Government are not likely to do anything contrary to the wishes of a majority in Parliament. Surely the hon. member for Leichhardt would not ask us to come down with a cast-iron rearrangement at present—an agreement that could not be altered in one tittle without another Act of Parliament?

MR. HARDACRE: But you keep on saying that we shall discuss the matter at some future time.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I do not think the present is the time to discuss it. If we do anything injurious to the colony in the meantime, when Parliament meets again we shall probably get our deserts.

MR. HARDACRE: It will then be too late to alter the agreement.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It would be just the same as in regard to other things. The hon. member wants us to enter into an agreement whereby we shall be so shackled that we cannot enter into any agreement at all. The hon. member would put us in that difficult position. The legitimate limits are quite understood, but I certainly do not hold with limitations within them. Parliament should fix the extreme limits—the margin of safety, as I have called it—and let the Government operate within those limits, the Treasurer using the best discretion his lights will allow him to make a bargain satisfactory to the country.

MR. GLASSEY: Surely you cannot say that an examination of the accounts by the Auditor-General once in six months would be objectionable?

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It would not be very valuable unless the Auditor-General reported upon it.

MR. GLASSEY: He could report every six months.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Does any hon. member think that any man who could do so would not clear out of the bank if he knew that his account was going to be submitted even to an officer of Parliament, who might be called upon to report upon the accounts? It would lead to the greatest form of parliamentary tyranny possible. But it is premature to go into that question. The question as to how far the State should interfere in the management of concerns of this sort is a matter of vast interest and great importance, but I do not think it is a matter we should deal with at this stage. At present the House should give the Government power to make the first move, and when that is made no doubt other people will move also. It is unfortunate that this matter should have come on at the end of the session; it would have been much better if these negotiations could have been carried on while the House was sitting, because hon. mem-

bers must understand that nothing will be so great a burden to the Treasurer as having wide powers and responsibility given him. He has no personal interest in the matter, and it would be far safer for him, and take a greater load of responsibility off his shoulders, if he could say, "The House put that upon me, and I wash my hands clean of the whole transaction." We are looking at the matter from a practical point of view, and if at the outset our position is too strongly advanced, it may be that the negotiations will not terminate successfully. As I have said, I do not think there is any advantage to be gained by raking up the past; but the hon. member referred to what took place in 1893, when the Treasurer presented a report to this House, so far as he was able to investigate, upon the affairs of the bank. The hon. member is not right in saying that the Treasurer then reported that the bank was sound, in the way he wishes it to be inferred now. What he then stated was that after investigating the bank's accounts, books, and securities, he arrived at the conclusion that by judicious realisation the bank would be able to pay the Government and the outside public. Those words are very wide, and would still have left a deficit of the amount of the share capital.

MR. DAWSON: Did not he say the bank was solvent?

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I have said the very words he used—that the bank was in a position "by judicious realisation to pay the Government and the outside public."

MR. DRAKE: Mr. Dawes said "perfectly solvent."

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I am dealing with what the Treasurer said in Parliament, because the hon. member for Bundaberg said hon. members were led by that statement to adhere to the agreement. What Mr. Dawes said has nothing to do with it. He was chairman of the directors at home, and I suppose he put his own construction upon the Treasurer's words; but the Treasurer is not to be responsible for the construction Mr. Dawes put upon his words, but only for the words he used himself. Now it has come about that in 1896 the committee of investigation finds that in addition to the share capital being gone, there is a deficit of £1,250,000. The hon. member acquits the Treasurer, I am sure—as all hon. members must—of any intention of misleading the House. The Treasurer gave his honest expression of opinion in 1893, but after a fortnight's investigation, while the committee of investigation only arrived at its conclusions after sitting for two and a-half months. Then we know very well that things have altered tremendously since 1893.

MR. GLASSEY: Hear, hear! For the worse.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: For the worse, no doubt, so far as values are concerned. The value of our products and the value of securities have gone down; and it speaks well for the Treasurer's powers of prognostication that in 1893 he very strongly hinted at the fall in the earning power of money. Since 1893 the earning power of money has greatly gone down. We have only to look at our own stocks and those of other colonies to see that. When the bank agreed to give $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. in 1893 the Treasurer stated that he was of opinion that it was offering too much. If hon. members will refer to his speeches delivered in 1893 they will find that he said he thought it was too high a rate, but as the bank offered it he could not reduce it.

MR. BROWNE: In committee he said he felt confident the bank could pay $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Yes, that they could pay it, but that it was too much all the same. As a matter of fact, the bank could almost pay $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. now, but it would reduce

the margin of safety, and if a bank is only £10 on the wrong side it is practically insolvent. The whole of the banks at that time offered $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., so that there must have been a consensus of opinion among financiers that they could afford to pay $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. But since then we know that they have found that they are not able to pay that rate, and that is the great change which has taken place since 1893. If the agreement of 1893 had provided for $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. instead of $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., the Queensland National Bank would not have needed to come to this House to-day, and the Government need not have come to this House with this Bill.

Mr. GLASSEY: No, no!

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: If the rate had been fixed at $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. instead of $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. the bank would have made a clear profit of £137,000 a year.

Mr. GROOM: How can you reconcile that with the statement of the committee that no dividend should have been declared?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The dividend is a mere fleabite compared with the interest charge.

The SPEAKER: I think the hon. gentleman has been led away by interjections. His remarks are not relevant to the question before the House.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I admit I have been led away from the subject, but the hon. member for Bundaberg animadverted upon the statement made by the Treasurer in 1893, and used that as a basis for saying that the Treasurer should not be trusted in the future. All I can say is that, taking it for all in all—although the Treasurer is my leader, I say without any sense of flattery—that I believe that since Queensland has been Queensland we have never had a wiser, more prudent, or more sagacious Treasurer.

MEMBERS on the Government side: Hear, hear!

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: He may have made mistakes, like other people, but he has managed the financial affairs of this country in a way that has earned praise even from men strongly opposed to him in politics. I believe that if the Treasurer is invested with this power, he will make an agreement to the advantage of the colony. I do not believe he will concede £1 against the interests of this country, unless he is compelled by force of circumstances to do so. Even if the Treasurer were not a man tried as he is in these matters, the House would have to trust the Executive officer of the Government.

Mr. TURLEY: The same thing has been said of all Treasurers.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: If this Treasurer existed in New Zealand we would have the hon. member burning incense at his shrine day and night, but because the Treasurer is the leader of the party opposed to the hon. member for Brisbane South he says "the same thing has been said of all Treasurers." The present Treasurer has dragged the colony out of its financial troubles—a thing which any Treasurer might be proud of. I do not want to be led away by any further interjections. There is no necessity for lengthy speeches. What we want at present is action, not speech. I say that this Bill should be passed; that it should be an earnest to the people at the other end of the world that the Government are carrying out the recommendations of the committee, and that they are prepared to give liberal terms to the people with whom they have to deal. I contend that these terms are liberal, because they reduce the rate of interest to much less than we had to pay when we raised it; and we also propose to extend the time for repayment to twenty-five years beyond the last payment under the present agreement.

Mr. GLASSEY: That term is too long.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: That may be; but I do not think we should "sink the ship for a hap'orth of tar." The hon. member can rest assured that the Treasurer will be quite alive to that when he comes to negotiate. We are going to treat with these people in a generous manner. It is not the bank we have to deal with, and hon. members must understand that thoroughly. These negotiations are to be made with the people in the same hole as ourselves—the other creditors of the bank—and this Bill is a pledge that we are going to treat with them in a spirit of liberality and generosity, and not merely with a view to conserving our own interests. The hon. member for Bundaberg has said something about the Government's preferential claim. I am perfectly prepared to adhere now to the opinion I held in 1893 about the Government's preferential claim. You will hear people croaking about every blessed thing. Those wiseacres who come forward several years afterwards and say, "I tell you so-and-so and so-and-so," why were they not on the scene in 1893? In 1893 the preferential claim of the Government was practically admitted by the construction put upon it by the Parliament of this country. The priority of the Crown was there upheld. It was agreed to by the depositors in the scheme of arrangement, and that scheme of arrangement has been sanctioned by the Supreme Court. I know that some opinions have been expressed on the other side, but so far as judicial judgments are concerned—

Mr. DAWSON: By barristers.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I would rather have the opinion of one judge than the opinions of fifty barristers, and the only judgments that have been delivered on this point are certainly in favour of the Government's prior right. Personally, I do not believe the Crown should have a prior claim. It is only a survival of old barbaric times, and of the old Royal prerogative which the Crown had to practically everything in the country—when the Crown practically owned everything in the country. As we have that right, of course, we can keep it; but hon. members know full well that the exercise of such a prior right would be only a last resource with any civilised Government, and therefore it is unwise to bring this forward and flaunt it in the face of the people we have to treat with under these very delicate circumstances. Whatever may be our position, we cannot alter it now. All that we can do we should have done in 1893, and in 1893 we asserted our priority as plainly as an Act of Parliament could assert it, and we cannot do more now than follow on the same lines. But that, I submit, is all entirely beside the question. We do not anticipate that in the future a time will arise when this prior right will even be thought of being exercised. We want by this Bill to bring about remedial measures by which not only ourselves but the people at home—the creditors who have entrusted their money to the keeping of this bank—may be paid 20s. in the £1. That is what we have to look forward to. If we fail in doing that, it will be a matter of grievous concern to those who have tried to bring about this great work; but even if we fail—and we may fail—there will be some consolation in knowing that we have tried our utmost to bring about a happy result. That is what the Government are endeavouring to do, and I trust that hon. members will rise to the occasion—as I believe they did in the discussion on the preliminary measure with regard to the Queensland National Bank—that they will rise above party considerations, and give the Government the fullest powers, and load it with the fullest sense of responsibility in their negotiations. I have spoken

longer than I intended, but I trust that the temper of the House and the tone of the debate will show that I have not spoken altogether in vain.

Mr. DRAKE: The speech delivered by the Treasurer seemed to me to be very lukewarm in support of this Bill. If the hon. gentleman is really very hot to get this Bill through, he certainly kept his feelings remarkably under control. With a great deal of what he said I thoroughly agree, but there seemed to be an entire want of connection between the arguments in his speech and the provisions of the Bill. The hon. gentleman says he desires that the Bill should be passed, so that he may enter into negotiations more particularly with the English depositors. What is there to prevent him from entering into those negotiations?

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: He wants to enter into an agreement. There is a great difference between negotiations and an agreement.

Mr. DRAKE: The hon. gentleman said he wanted to enter into negotiations and receive proposals. I say he can enter into negotiations and receive proposals without any such authority as is proposed to be given by this Bill.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Is he likely to get them?

Mr. DRAKE: I do not see why he should not get them. There are only two parties who propose to enter into an agreement, and I cannot see any reason why one party should practically bind itself beforehand while the hands of the other party are entirely free. The Attorney-General said this is the first move in the game. I have no doubt it is, and the people of this colony are required by the first move in the game to show their hand. The depositors in England have interests also. Surely it will be to their interest to enter into some negotiations!

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Did they guarantee the current accounts?

Mr. McDONALD: They were not such fools.

Mr. DRAKE: Any person appointed by them would have full power to negotiate, but would have to report to his principals before an agreement was ratified. Why should not the Government of this country be in the same position? Why should they not send a gentleman to negotiate on behalf of the Government; to enter into an agreement provisionally, subject to ratification by Parliament? All that is required is that the Treasurer should know how far the Government and the Parliament would be prepared to go in making concessions. Surely that can be done without passing this Bill and getting authority to bind the Government! It appears to me that this Bill is entirely premature. There is no reason whatever why negotiations should not be carried on, and, after they have resulted in something approaching an agreement, this Parliament could consider whether that agreement was one which it could entertain. We have been told that the negotiations must take several months. Do hon. members remember that when the Bill to guarantee the current accounts was passed we were told that the term must be something approaching twelve months, because it was necessary to secure the accounts during the period when the negotiations were going on. We might assume that the negotiations could not be brought to the point of agreement before Parliament will be sitting again, and supposing they were carried out with unusual expedition, and there was any probability of an agreement being arrived at and ready for ratification, there would be no difficulty whatever in Parliament meeting at a somewhat earlier period than usual next year. There is no rule, as some hon. members seem to imagine, that it is almost impossible for Parliament to meet before May in each year. The

improved means of communication throughout the country are so great that there is nothing to prevent Parliament being summoned in March or April. We met specially in 1893 to pass banking legislation, and in 1892 we met early to deal with special legislation for the purpose of reintroducing black labour. We met in February, and sat for a fortnight. If, therefore, an agreement was ready in February or March, there is no precedent against our meeting to deal with it. The only reason I can see for passing the Bill is this: The Government, for certain reasons, are very anxious that a reconstruction scheme shall be agreed to, and brought into force as quickly as possible. The first move in the game, as the Attorney-General says, is to get this Bill through, authorising the Treasurer to lock up the moneys already locked up for a further period of thirty-five years, and to accept a reduced rate of interest. Then, armed with this Bill, they can send an emissary home to London and say to the persons who represent the depositors there: "Now, this is your chance to agree to this at once or you lose your money; Parliament has been induced to agree to the money of the Queensland Government being locked up for this extended term at the lower rate of interest, and if you like to agree to the same terms then you may eventually get your money back, and you will be getting some interest. If you do not agree to this, then the Queensland Government will come in with their prior right and will practically sweep everything away and you will get nothing." That is what I take to be the game. I want now to say a word about the investigation that we understand is going to be commenced shortly. If the reconstruction scheme is rushed through, and comes into effect before the next session of Parliament, what will be the use of the investigation, and what will be the probability of any result of the investigation being made public? The Home Secretary, in his metaphor of the mountain and the mouse, forecasted that the result would show that everything was as right as it could be.

The HOME SECRETARY: As far as it affected the members of the present Government. That is all I said.

Mr. DANIELS: You were not afraid of that, were you?

Mr. DRAKE: The hon. gentleman objected that a great many persons were desirous of the investigation through a taste for scandal, and I understood him to mean that the result would be to show that there had not been any gross mismanagement in the past.

The HOME SECRETARY: Oh, no! I only referred to the members of the present Government. That is what I said.

Mr. DRAKE: If the result of that investigation should be to show that the management of the bank in the past has been ordinarily respectable, we will say, I think it would be very much better that the result of the inquiry should be made known before the Government start to negotiate as to the terms upon which the bank should be reconstructed. If the management in the past has not been grossly wrong, the people of Queensland I am sure would be more disposed to give what we have heard so much about—generous and kindly treatment, in order to get the bank upon its legs again. If the result of the investigation should be to show that the affairs of the bank are so inherently bad that it is impossible that it shall live, certainly it is better that that should be made known before any fresh arrangements are entered into.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The committee state that they are not so inherently bad, and they recommend this course.

Mr. DRAKE: Yes, but that has been described as an interim report by the Treasurer.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Yes; but upon this subject exclusively.

Mr. DRAKE: I say that any scheme of reconstruction should be based upon the facts disclosed by the investigating committee. What the people of Queensland and the depositors in Great Britain want to know is whether this institution has sufficient elements of soundness and stability in it, that if a reconstruction scheme is accepted by all the parties interested, there will be some chance of the institution living and being a credit and a source of strength to the colony? I will put it both ways: The committee bring up a report that is either favourable or unfavourable. If it is favourable, it certainly will be a very great pity if the reconstruction agreement has been come to before that report comes up, because clearly the parties would all be more disposed to act with generosity to the bank if they knew that the management in the past had been good and sound. If, on the other hand, the report of the committee is very bad, then either it should be known before any fresh agreement is entered into or else it will have been quite useless to have had any investigation at all. I agree entirely with the Home Secretary that an investigation should not be carried out for the purpose of gratifying any taste for scandal, but if holding that view the hon. gentleman agrees that there should be an investigation, it must be because he thinks it will serve some useful purpose; but if the reconstruction scheme is agreed to before the report comes up the investigation will have been useless. Supposing the reconstruction scheme is agreed to, and the investigating committee then come up with a report that the management of the Queensland National Bank in the past has been little better than a den of thieves, what advantage will the investigation be to anybody then?

The HOME SECRETARY: It will probably be a lesson for the future.

Mr. DRAKE: It will be of no advantage whatever. The wrong will have been done and the reconstruction scheme will have been agreed to on certain terms, and the only effect of the revelation then would be to injure the stability of the new institution we should have been so careful in building up. The only conclusion this can lead us to is that the investigation would be stopped immediately the reconstruction scheme is agreed to.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Any of the shareholders have the right to an investigation.

Mr. McDONALD: No. Have you read the articles of association?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Yes, if the Supreme Court authorises it.

Mr. McDONALD: I know forty shareholders who would have it if they could.

The SPEAKER: Order, order!

Mr. DRAKE: The investigation might be stopped in two ways. The Government could say that now that the reconstruction scheme had been agreed to, and the bank was on its legs again, there would be no use in going on with the investigation, and therefore they would stop it. Then, again, I would like to know how the Government could insist upon the investigating committee continuing their investigation after the bank has been reconstructed? The Treasurer was asked the other night what would happen supposing the bank put some legal objection in the way of the investigating committee? And his answer was, "If the bank raises any legal objection, the bank is gone." There was a great piece of bluff! The idea was that if the bank raised a legal objection of the kind the Government would not assist to put the bank upon its

legs. But the power of the Government only lasts until the agreement for reconstruction is agreed to, and when it was agreed to, ratified by Parliament, and sanctioned by the court the bank authorities could snap their fingers at the investigating committee, and, as was done in New Zealand the other day, the manager of the bank could refuse to answer any questions.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Certain questions.

Mr. DRAKE: Very well, certain questions; and the questions he would refuse to answer would of course be the very questions the committee considered it necessary to put. With the institution established again under the reconstruction scheme it would be absolutely impossible for the investigating committee to continue their investigation, even if they desired to do so. They could be stopped just as easily by the Government as they were practically stopped this time. It was in August that they received their letter of instructions to commence an investigation which the Treasurer tells us was meant to involve an investigation into the past management of the bank, but we know that a letter was sent to the committee in October which practically said, "Bring up your report at once." I am satisfied that if the committee were instructed to continue their investigation, and in the meantime a reconstruction scheme was agreed to, the committee would be told that as all parties had agreed to a scheme by which the bank was re-established it would be quite unnecessary for them to continue their investigation any further; and the argument would be used that if they did so they would only be doing harm to the reconstructed institution. The investigation committee have no possible interest or desire to go on with the investigation, and if there is no one to spur them on the investigation will naturally cease. Therefore I can come to no other conclusion than that this Bill is the first step towards preventing that investigation, because if by the help of this Bill they can get the bank reconstructed there will be every possible inducement to stop that investigation, and no inducement whatever to carry it on. If the Government get this Bill passed I do not think they will succeed in getting the English depositors to agree to any reconstruction until there has been an investigation into the past management of the bank. It is true that in 1893 the depositors agreed to a reconstruction scheme without having any more thorough investigation than that which was furnished by the Treasurer and the then Secretary for Lands. But many things have taken place since that time, and I think hon. members will find a somewhat different temper in those same depositors. The year 1893 was the first occasion when they found that the money which they supposed was securely deposited and bearing good interest turned out to be of little value. This is the second occasion; and, as we always find in life, people who have been once bitten are likely to be more careful in future, and having experienced disappointment in 1893 we may be perfectly sure that these depositors will be more exacting in 1896. We know very well that in the early part of 1893 a Minister of the Crown went to England with the view of endeavouring to induce people there to enter into agreements for the construction of railways on the land-grant principle, and that he found a very strong indisposition then on the part of British capitalists to invest their money in Queensland. And I feel perfectly sure, from the fact that this is the second occasion that these British depositors have to be dealt with, and, from the fact that investors showed so much reluctance then to invest money in connection with land-grant railways, that they will be strongly disinclined, if they do not absolutely refuse, to enter into any

agreement until there has been an investigation into the past management of the bank. We are told by the Treasurer that this Bill asks very great powers, and that in passing such a measure we must repose confidence in the Government and in the Treasurer. Of course that is natural, but I presume hon. members will excuse members who sit on this side, and who generally hold views antagonistic to the Government, if they do not feel disposed to place such a great amount of confidence in the Government as members sitting behind them do. The Attorney-General followed up that remark by delivering a panegyric upon the hon. gentleman at the head of the Government, telling us that he is such a splendid Treasurer for getting the colony out of its difficulties. I have heard the hon. gentleman in this House when he has delivered himself of exactly the same exalted opinions with regard to the late Treasurer, Sir Thomas McIlwraith, and have read speeches of his on platforms outside the House to the same effect. Sir Thomas McIlwraith was then the heaven-born financier—the Treasurer for getting the colony out of its difficulties. But we do not hear much about him now. He has now, it seems, to bear upon his shoulders the burden of having been the Treasurer to get the colony into its difficulties, and we are told that we are to fall down and worship the present Treasurer as the splendid financier. But it is too soon to do that. “The proof of the pudding is in the eating of it,” and the colony is not entirely out of its difficulties yet. We are now considering a difficulty; certainly it is the difficulty of a private bank, but it is a bank in which the people of the colony are interested to the extent of about £3,000,000, and to the extent of that sum it may be said that the people of the colony are in difficulty. The Treasurer has not got us out of that yet, and it will be time enough when it is proved that we can get out of the difficulty without any very great loss to praise him for his skill as a Treasurer. But nothing has been done up to the present time towards bringing about that very desirable result, and I do not think there is anything in this Bill that is likely to bring it about. It has been said that it is the intention of the Government to send some emissaries to England for the purpose of negotiating this reconstruction scheme. But I contend that it is not necessary that this Bill should be passed, and it certainly is not necessary that anybody should be sent home, unless there is some particular reason for forcing this thing forward. The people in England no doubt know by cablegram exactly what is going on here. They have great interests to protect, amounting to something like £3,000,000, and there cannot be the slightest doubt that they will be, and are possibly now, meeting with one another and considering what steps they will take to protect their own interests. And if this Parliament does not stir, the people in England who are interested in the bank will take steps for the protection of their interests. Why should that not be allowed to go on? The Government can communicate with the shareholders through their Agent-General; and why should they not find out what is the feeling in England, and then negotiate with the shareholders and depositors, and consider whether it is possible for all parties to agree upon a scheme of reconstruction, and after that call an early session of Parliament to ask its sanction to the scheme? That is the proper course to take. What is the use of this Bill? As has very well been said, you cannot put all the terms of an agreement into an Act of Parliament. But why put in these two items and nothing else—giving the Treasurer power to extend the period for the payment of deposits for thirty-five years, and to reduce the rate of interest to $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. The principle upon which I have been going is

this: Everything that is good should be saved in connection with this institution, and everything that is incurably bad should be allowed to go. The first proposition that presents itself to my mind is this: If this institution has within it the possibility of becoming an honest and well-conducted institution, it should by all reasonable means be saved. Then I say this: That as we have not the gift of seeing into the future, the only way in which we can ascertain that is by examining the history of the institution in the past. That is to be done by a committee that is either now sitting or will shortly be sitting. According to the Treasurer, that committee cannot carry out the work it has undertaken in less than six months, or perhaps more, whereas the Attorney-General says that under the scheme proposed by the Government it is expected that some scheme will be submitted very much earlier than that. If I did not misunderstand him he said it was necessary that something of the kind should be done in a couple of months, in order to save the business of the bank. Therefore, if the investigating committee cannot conclude its labours within six months, and it is proposed to carry out some scheme within a couple of months, it is perfectly clear that the scheme will be carried out before the investigating committee brings up its report. Then I would say that if a reconstruction scheme is agreed to and ratified by Parliament, any further inquiry by the committee into the past management of the bank would not only be useless but mischievous, and for the reasons I have given the investigations would not be carried any further. The conclusion, therefore, that I have come to is that the negotiations with regard to the reconstruction should go on, and the investigations should go on, and that Parliament should be asked to legislate when it is in possession of the report of the investigating committee, but not before. In order to carry out these views, without expressing any opinion with regard to the special terms that are mentioned in the Bill, I beg to move the ordinary amendment as provided for in Standing Order 251, that the word “now” be omitted, and that the words “this day six months” be added to the motion.

The TREASURER: Of course this is a direct challenge to the Government. I have already explained to-night that I am not here as an apologist for the bank, but simply to ask Parliament to do what I believe the House considers the best thing to be done under the circumstances in the interests of the country, independent of the bank altogether. If the hon. member intended to move a motion of this sort I think it would have been courteous on his part to have intimated his intention to me, because it simply means this: That if any agreement is to be made at all, the Government are not to be trusted to make that agreement; in other words, that this House has no confidence in the Government. That is the only interpretation that can be put upon it. The hon. member, contrary, I think, to the opinions of hon. members of this House, wants to make this a party question.

Mr. DRAKE: No.

The TREASURER: What the hon. member's party is I do not know, but that is the effect of the motion he has proposed—to make it a party question. No other question can arise. Is the Government to be trusted to make an agreement, or is it not to be trusted? The hon. member might just as well have moved a want of confidence motion at once. Whether he intended that or not I do not know, because he has never consulted me in the matter. If he were leader of the Opposition I suppose he would

have consulted me, but with the House as it is now constituted I have no one to consult with on the other side.

Mr. FITZGERALD: You do sometimes.

The TREASURER: There is no leader of the Opposition. The hon. member for Enoggera now takes up the position of being leader of that side of the House.

Mr. CROSS: He is not.

The TREASURER: I do not say he is; I say that is the position he takes up, and he now moves a vote of want of confidence in the Government, inasmuch as they bring in a Bill which must necessarily entrust a certain amount of confidence to them, and he immediately moves that the Bill be thrown out. I do not want to argue whether this Government is a good or a bad Government. I stand before the country, and if the country, in obedience to the motion of the hon. member for Enoggera, says that the Government does not possess its confidence, I am quite satisfied. I wish the House to understand that that is the position we are now in.

The Hon. J. R. DICKSON: It is a matter of regret that the hon. member has introduced this motion for deferring the consideration of the measure. I listened very attentively to the hon. member's speech, and he did not seem to me to sufficiently realise the gravity of the present position. The hon. member should recognise that whatever is done in connection with the Queensland National Bank should be done at once; that not a day should be lost in authorising the Government to consider any overtures that may be made with regard to extending the Government deposits on more liberal terms. The hon. member seems to argue that the investigation which is about to take place—and with which I quite concur—should be made before legislation is introduced. He does not realise this fact: That no financial institution can exist unless it maintains unimpaired its public credit. I say distinctly that the discussions which have taken place concerning this institution in the Press and elsewhere during the past five months day by day are tending mortally to wound that institution and prevent its being rehabilitated. We may agree to guarantee accounts, as the Government has done with the best intentions lately—and with which both sides of the House agreed—and I take this opportunity of saying that, notwithstanding the hard expressions used by hon. members sitting on the left, they most generously and spontaneously assisted the Government in passing that guarantee. At the same time, no amount of guarantee will prevent some timid constituent of the bank from being disturbed by the incessant discussion; and although I have no authoritative knowledge on the subject, still I should not be at all surprised if the continued agitation which has been going on has had the effect of causing a certain drainage or leakage of the liquid reserves of the bank, which will continue, despite the Government guarantee, until the bank is reconstructed and placed on a thoroughly sound basis.

The TREASURER: That must be so.

The Hon. J. R. DICKSON: We ought not to shut our eyes to the fact that although we have done what we could to protect the bank there is not only a drainage going on, but that there is also a loss of the bread-and-butter-earning power of the bank going on while time is being allowed to slip by. Therefore I say that instead of investigation-cum-legislation we should first deal with reconstruction, and let investigation go on. I think the hon. member is very unwise in interposing anything like delay.

The TREASURER: He wants to make a party question of it—the Opposition against the whole House.

The Hon. J. R. DICKSON: I do not wish to view the matter in that light. I ask hon. members to be patriotic in the matter, because the liquidation of the institution would be so disastrous to the colony that we should do all we possibly can to prevent it. I am precluded from addressing the House as fully as I should desire; but I may have something further to say when this motion has been disposed of; but in the meantime it is our duty to deal with the Bill without awaiting the results of the investigation. That investigation, whatever it may be, will not produce an additional sovereign. It may disclose errors of administration, and it may also show that the best-laid schemes of financial men are frustrated by depression in the prices of some of our material products, which no human foresight could guard against. That, however, is beside the question at the present moment. I deprecate the postponement of the question, and I trust that the hon. member, after taking counsel with his friends on the other side—who, I believe, are assisting us in the direction of resuscitating the bank as early as possible—will withdraw his motion.

The HOME SECRETARY: I do not see how the House can treat this motion seriously. No one who realises the present position of the colony can believe that any member of this House can ask us to postpone this legislation for six months. The whole burden of the hon. member's speech was that this is premature. Has the hon. member ever contemplated the effect the liquidation of any large institution like the Queensland National Bank would have upon the community? We have had only this afternoon the number of depositors in the country districts having their money locked up in this bank; but does the hon. member realise the effect of realisation on the debtors? We have been talking about being generous and treating the institution kindly, but I have always looked at this question entirely in the interests of the public of this colony. I would not for one moment suggest going to the relief of the bank on account of the relief to be afforded to depositors and creditors alone, although I think the community at large who have been led to put their money in the bank under certain conditions should be considered generously. This question should be considered from the effect it will have upon the general progress of the community. I have said before—though my observations were misconstrued—that the liquidation of such an institution would carry with it financial disaster—aye, ruin—to hundreds of persons in this community. It must necessarily do so. Let hon. members recall the panic that ensued upon the suspension of the bank of Queensland many years ago! And let anyone realise what the effect of liquidation of this bank on this community now will be!

Mr. BROWNE: How long did the panic last?

The HOME SECRETARY: It lasted for such a long time that thousands of people were looking for work, and could not find it until the State came to their assistance. Remember, too, that half of the mortgages to banks in this colony are held by this institution, and that it is as certain as we are sitting here that if Parliament says it will do nothing for six months, liquidation stares the bank in the face. Legislation is necessary now in order to place the Government in exactly the same position as any private individual, and if Parliament says it will not consider any measure of this sort it practically means shelving it for all time. I do not believe that any hon. member opposite has that object in view, or believes that this legislation will in any way stop inquiry. If reconstruction had the effect of protecting the commercial and trade relations of the colony I would welcome it as far more important than any result that

could possibly accrue from further inquiry. But after reconstruction I should endeavour in every possible way to get all the light I could upon the past management of the bank, especially as the bank desires it. Let me put the matter in this way to hon. members: Suppose I send a person to the other end of the town with a couple of thousand sovereigns, and that during his progress he is upset and spills fifty of them, would it be the duty of the man in charge to run after the culprit and come back to me and say, "I have brought back the culprit who spilt the fifty sovereigns, but the remainder are lying in the roadway?" I should sack that man in five minutes for not protecting the remainder. That was his first duty, and then employ a policeman to look up the offender who took the fifty. That is the precise position that we should take up here. We should try and pass some measure of protection, not necessarily this measure as it stands, but we should build up on this Bill an authority which will place the Treasurer in the same position as the creditors of the bank. I did hope the hon. member would have dropped, in connection with so important a measure as this, recrimination over past acts, and have avoided party strife. He does not attempt to say that the Government have in the past shown any desire to stop inquiry. What the Government have done is to try, in the interests of the whole colony, to reconstruct the bank; and while we are doing that we admit that it may be necessary to pursue further inquiry, if only as an object lesson for the future. If there has been anything wrong in connection with the bank, neither the Government nor individual members of the House will be able to stop inquiry. We have heard the summary of the shareholders; there are those among them who are quite willing and able to come forward and see that justice is done, and I am sure that no Government will withhold assistance from those who desire to get justice done. If there is to be reconstruction, it is absolutely necessary to get this legal power. The old company will probably go formally into liquidation; and when a company goes into liquidation every shareholder has the right to invoke the aid of the courts to make the inquiry into every past act of the concern as searching as possible. The courts, moreover, are very jealous regarding the affairs of public companies, and invariably do their best to get at the truth. I have put before hon. members the picture of what I see if this institution goes into liquidation. If it liquidates, the money which would otherwise have been devoted to the development of industry must necessarily be withdrawn. Liquidation means that somebody will be put in possession to realise the assets for the benefit of the creditors, and it necessarily follows that there will be serious depreciation of property, and care will stare us in the face. No doubt eventually the colony will rise out of it all, but those who have been the pioneers of the colony will find themselves impoverished by acts to which they have been no party. I, therefore, in the interests of the whole community, ask hon. members to look ahead. I, for one, will be able to say that I have drawn the picture of what I have seen happen in the past. I know what liquidation of such an institution means, and the House will have a full knowledge of the effect. Those who vote for the amendment will at any rate know that somebody foreboded that abstention from dealing with legislation at the present time means necessarily widespread anxiety to innocent people in this colony.

Mr. JACKSON: I cannot say I like this Bill, because it gives too much power to the Government. On the other hand, I cannot say I like the amendment, and I for one am not prepared

to vote for it. The Labour party on the second reading of this Bill will probably be divided, but I hope when we get into committee they will be reunited so that we may get some provisions inserted which will give more satisfaction to the country than the Bill in its present shape does. I take it that the discussion on the amendment will be practically the same as discussion on the main question. I can hardly see how the two questions can be separated.

The TREASURER: We had better discuss the amendment first.

Mr. JACKSON: If that is the feeling on the other side, I had better postpone what I have to say until the amendment is disposed of, though I do not see how it is possible to deal with the amendment without discussing the Bill itself. It would certainly be a mistake to allow the Bill to go through with the very wide powers the Government are claiming under it, because they are not adopting the report of the committee. If they were adopting the recommendation of the committee I would be willing to support them, as I think the committee's recommendation is a particularly good one. The Government may argue that they are adopting that recommendation, but it is only to a very slight extent, because under the Bill we should have no guarantee that the coming shareholders would not pay themselves more than 2½ per cent. in dividends.

The SPEAKER: I think the hon. member had better confine his remarks at present to the amendment before the House. He can deal with the main question afterwards.

Mr. JACKSON: If that is your ruling, Sir, I shall leave my remarks until we dispose of the amendment. I cannot see my way to support the amendment, and I will vote for the second reading with a view of getting some amendments made in committee. It will facilitate the passing of this Bill with greater unanimity if some member of the Government will tell us whether they are prepared to allow the amendments to be made in committee on the lines indicated by the leader of the Labour party and by myself. The Bill should be framed on the lines of the report of the investigating committee, so that we might know how we stand. At present we do not know what we are doing. The Treasurer is asking power to make practically any agreement he may think fit. We have not even a guarantee that the present proprietary will not continue to carry on the bank. The investigating committee are averse to that, and in favour of an entirely new proprietary, and if their recommendation is adopted there would not be half the opposition to the Bill that there is at the present time.

Mr. CROSS: I cannot help expressing my deep regret that the hon. member for Enoggera should have taken such a course as to propose this amendment. He has held a very prominent place in this House for years, and has had a good experience of the world and of business, and his experience should have prevented him from moving such an amendment. I am not prepared to stultify my action in voting for the guarantee of the current accounts by voting for this amendment. I voted for that in the interests of the people; and with a full sense of the responsibility of my position as a legislator and a citizen of the colony, I consider I would be unworthy of that position if I did anything that would prevent that necessary thing for trade and commerce, the vigorous action of credit in banking. Speaking with a sense of my responsibility here, I say I shall vote against the amendment, because I think it an exceedingly wrong thing to do. Very few persons who have had any experience or reflected seriously upon banking would, in view of the inevitable consequence, have moved such an amendment. Hon. members may think as they like on the question, but I am speaking my

conscientious convictions, and I say that this sort of legislation should have been gone on with months and months ago. I pointed that out only so recently as the 6th or 7th July of this year, and then predicted the present state of things, put my finger upon the cause of it, and suggested remedies. As a member of the House capable of rising above mere partisanship, I am willing to assist to put into life and action the credit and confidence which is at present stagnant, shrunken, and lacking life, and which is so absolutely necessary to a living for the people. The Guarantee Bill was but one link in a chain of actions which must be carried on, and no member who voted for that Bill can vote for the amendment of the hon. member for Enoggera.

Mr. BROWNE: Like the hon. member who has just sat down, I believe that I am here to act in the interests of the colony, and that belief makes me come to just the opposite conclusion to that come to by him. The hon. member says it is incumbent upon those who voted for the Guarantee Bill to vote for this Bill, and one of the reasons why I voted for the Guarantee Bill was because of the cry that was raised of the ruin and desolation that would follow if the current accounts were not guaranteed. I agreed with the Treasurer and with his supporters, who argued that, if the bank closed its doors again on the current depositors without any guarantee, there would be such a panic that we would not be able to legislate properly on the subject now in hand. I voted on that account to secure the current account depositors for the next twelve months, and I cannot now see where the ruin and desolation is to come in. With regard to the remarks made by the Home Secretary, it has been distinctly denied on the other side that there is only one thing to prevent liquidation, and that is that the Government should do something at once. We have been told over and over again that we have been looking at the committee's report in too pessimistic a light, and yet the Home Secretary tells us that if we do not proceed with immediate legislation the bank will be liquidated, and we will have widespread desolation all over the colony.

The HOME SECRETARY: If it is postponed for six months, I said.

Mr. BROWNE: I do not say that the hon. member for Enoggera is right in fixing the term at six months.

Mr. DRAKE: That is the usual course. They could introduce a Bill next session, and in January if they liked.

Mr. BROWNE: In the debate which took place last week I stated that I did not consider that a good case had been made out for the introduction of this Bill, and I am perfectly justified in taking up the position I take up now. The Treasurer said that in moving this amendment the hon. member for Enoggera was making the Bill a party question.

The TREASURER: Yes, that is so. Look at the Standing Orders.

Mr. BROWNE: How can the hon. gentleman say that the hon. member for Enoggera is making it a party question when he knows that the hon. member for Bundaberg is opposed to the amendment, and that members of the Labour party have refused to make it a party question?

The TREASURER: They have no connection, those two.

Mr. BROWNE: Where the party question comes in I cannot see. The Treasurer said that the amendment is practically a vote of want of confidence. Even if it is, I do not think that would scare members on this side from voting for it, considering that a good many of us have on every possible occasion for the last four years been expressing our want of confidence in the Government. At any rate I cannot see any

necessity for introducing this Bill at the present time. The reason that was given for putting the Guarantee Bill through the other week was that we should then have time to consider this matter calmly and quietly, and the amendment now proposed simply says that this Bill shall be read this day six months. It does not say that no other measures shall be introduced during that time, and if this Bill is postponed the shareholders and depositors will have time to consult and say what is their opinion on the subject. The Government will be able in the meantime to send home representatives to ascertain the opinions of the depositors and shareholders in the old country, and then, if there should be any necessity, they can call the House together on an early occasion, as they did in 1893, when the House was summoned even before some members were elected. I do not believe that if the Bill is not passed at once all the widespread desolation which has been spoken about is going to happen, nor do I believe that there is no course between panic legislation like this—for it is nothing else—and the liquidation of the bank. I believe we have time to carefully consider the matter, and that the people of the country would rather see the thing dealt with coolly and quietly than rushed through in this way at the end of the session, when members are anxious to get away to their homes. If the amendment goes to a division I shall certainly vote for it.

Mr. KIDSTON: If anything has been made manifest in our discussion of this Queensland National Bank business it is that so far as this side of the House is concerned it has not been treated from a party standpoint. That may not be quite so true as regards the other side of the Chamber, but it is certainly true of this side, and it was altogether unfair and unwarranted for the Treasurer to twit the hon. member for Enoggera as he did. I do not agree with the amendment, but I think it may fairly be assumed that the hon. member for Enoggera in moving it is just as desirous of doing the wise and good thing for the colony as the Treasurer professes to be. The reason I am not in favour of the amendment is that I believe that a fair consideration of the whole of the report of the committee makes it at least fairly probable that a reconstruction of the bank is possible, and that if such a thing is possible it is the best thing for the colony. I do not care a snuff about the interests of the bank, but it is the business of every gentleman in this Chamber to consider what will most conduce to the interests of the colony, and I believe that a reformation of the bank upon a sound and healthy basis is the best thing that could happen for the colony. I am honestly persuaded that the adoption of this amendment by the House would mean the liquidation of the bank.

Mr. DAWSON: How do you make that out?

Mr. KIDSTON: I make it out in this way: It is absolutely necessary that some fresh arrangement should be made with the bank, and if this House refuses power to the Treasurer to abrogate the old agreement, and enter into negotiations for a fresh agreement, it simply means the closing of the bank. Some hon. members may not think that, and, if so, they can support the amendment; but that is my opinion. As to the Bill itself, I do not believe at all in the details of the agreement submitted to the House, but I think it is our business to assert on the second reading the desirability of making a fresh agreement, and then alter the details of that agreement in committee.

Mr. FOGARTY: I take it that the object of this amendment is that, before we empower the Treasurer to enter into any agreement with the depositors, further information should be forthcoming. I do not for a moment think that it

was the intention of the mover of the amendment to embarrass the bank in any shape or form. I have always spoken of this institution as sympathetically as possible, and shall reiterate what I said last week: That we are not now in a position to enter into any hard-and-fast bargain. The report of the committee is very good so far as it goes, but the whole information is not there, and I should be much mistaken if the home depositors will not insist upon more information being given before they enter into any compact. When the Treasurer made certain statements in this House in 1893, the House accepted those statements; and I am satisfied that the information the hon. gentleman gave was correct, and I am not alone in that opinion. Further investigation has since taken place; and we find that the bank is not in a position to meet its engagements; and therefore I think the committee of inquiry should be reappointed, and when we have a full report of the condition of things it will be quite time enough to give the Treasurer authority to enter into a compact with the depositors, but at this stage it is premature. It is quite possible, if not probable, that the Treasurer at this stage is not thoroughly conversant with the true condition of things. He was not in 1893, and perhaps when the second report is placed in our hands new light will be thrown upon this particular institution, which I hope will produce a good effect. Many people of standing outside, irrespective of politics, demand the fullest investigation, and it should be insisted on. I have every confidence in the Treasurer; I know perfectly well that if he is authorised to enter into an agreement he will jealously guard the interests of the colony so far as the information at his disposal goes. Anyone reading the report will find that they imply that additional daylight should be thrown upon the management in the past, and the sooner that daylight is thrown upon it the better. I recognise the importance of the bank so far as the interests of the colony are concerned, but I do not agree with the illustration given by the Home Secretary of the failure of the Bank of Queensland in 1866. That was only a twopenny-halfpenny affair, and it was not its failure that caused a panic for a short time, but the failure of two railway contractors engaged in the construction of two different lines. The Government gave a little relief, but I am pleased to say that the demand upon them was not very great. Shortly afterwards Gympie was discovered, and then Stanthorpe, so that the demand for labour soon exceeded the supply. I think that if a vote of the electors were taken they would favour additional information being obtained. I would like to have seen the amendment of the hon. member for Enoggera moved in other words, as, for instance, if it had said that no further action should be taken before additional information has been obtained, but I understand the Standing Orders prevent that, and the sooner they are altered the better. It is my intention to vote for the amendment, because I know very well that a majority of my electors think that the powers asked for by the Treasurer are premature. Even some of his best friends have expressed that opinion, and so far as I am concerned this is not a party question at all, but I speak in the interests of the colony as a whole. I hope that the Government will give a promise that no further action will be taken until we have before us the result of the labours of the committee, and I think the Treasurer, in introducing the Bill, should have given an assurance that no further action would be taken until we have had a statement of the position of the bank, in which case we should have the report and the Bill in our hands together. I am anxious to know how we stand. At present there is a con-

siderable amount of haziness about the atmosphere of the Queensland National Bank, and the sooner it is dispelled the better for all concerned.

Mr. DANIELS: I do not intend to give a silent vote upon this amendment, which I intend to support, because I do not think I have heard any reasons why the Bill should be rushed on. The reason why we should not have the Bill at present is that we want additional information. We are asked to give the Treasurer power to make certain agreements, but we do not know what agreements he is likely to make. Go where you will outside, everybody you meet—shareholders, depositors, and the general public—are all of the opinion that we should make no further agreement until we know the exact position of the bank. It is absolutely necessary to know how things stand. We know that this bank has a large amount of our money, and we want to know what surety we have for its safety as well as various other matters. We have been told that if this Bill is not passed the bank is going to close its doors, and we have had a terrible scene pictured to us of what utter desolation and ruin would follow. Well, I fancy that Queensland could stand the shock. There would be just as much money here if the bank did close its doors. Until we get the second report I shall support the amendment, and if hon. members were of my way of thinking they would refuse to pass any legislation until we knew the exact position of the bank.

Mr. HOOLAN: I do not know whether the hon. member for Enoggera had any hopes when he moved his amendment that he would be able to carry it, but the appearance of the Government benches at the present moment should disillusionise him. It would be the safest thing in the world to bet that this amendment will meet the fate of many useful amendments which have been moved in this Chamber and be defeated by a large majority. Although the hon. member is usually serious—a great deal too serious on many occasions—I do not think he is serious in this matter. I daresay he sees no opportunity of introducing any sound legislation, and therefore he is trying to have a nice little lark with the Government. How he is going to reconcile his position with his amendment I do not know. Possibly he may be able to do so, but I fail to see how anyone who supported the Government in their Guarantee Bill, thereby committing himself to the reorganisation of the bank, can either move or support the amendment of the hon. member. I certainly cannot. A great deal of the legislation introduced in this House is not of a serious kind. If the hon. members who introduce it are serious, before it has been introduced many minutes it is turned to jest. This matter of the Queensland National Bank is something beyond a jest, however. I am just as fond of a jest as any man, but I could not find it in my heart to jest at such a serious matter. This is a very grave matter to the whole colony, and after grave consideration I have decided upon my course of conduct, and I shall not flinch from that course under any circumstances. We have given a guarantee with regard to the current accounts, so that the institution may not be rushed by the public, and that time may be gained to further regulate its affairs, and there is no time like the present for regulating its affairs. Everyone has decided that the position of affairs is very serious, and serious business should be done as speedily as possible. I have my own opinion that the depositors and shareholders—the persons directly interested—should be the first to come forward. That was my opinion in 1893. Persons who wilfully neglect their own interests should suffer for it. But there is no possibility of their coming forward, and we on this side

cannot make them come forward, and therefore the Government must move, and it is for us to support the Government if we can. I intend to support them in a non-partisan spirit on behalf of the colony generally, and I do not want to give that support in a half-hearted manner. I like to do anything with my whole heart or not at all. If I am going to oppose anything, I believe in offering strong and determined opposition, and if I am going to support anything I believe in strong and conscientious support. The Government have this matter in their own hands, and I suppose they are going to conduct it honestly. I have no wish to cast any odium upon them in a matter of this kind. It is for them to conduct the negotiations in a manner which will be compatible with the public honour and with their own honour. If they do not do that, I have no power to force them, and their action will tend to their own discredit. I suppose if they do not act properly we shall be strong enough to bear another shock. I believe that we are giving too much power—more power than should be given to any individual, whether he be Treasurer or some other person; but that is beside the question. It is the duty of every hon. member to go right through the business, and lay aside all party spirit. That has been done up to the present juncture in connection with this institution, and it is our duty to do all we can to safeguard the public interests and put the Government in a position to make a good and honest contract with the persons interested in this institution, in which the Government have so much money deposited. If any of that money is to be lost, it must go the way of all flesh and money and be lost, but it is our place to try and save it if we can. We cannot invite the shareholders and depositors to consult with us. We should never do any business at all. Whether the Treasurer is the fittest person to undertake the business on our behalf I am not prepared to say. If I had the power I should pick someone else, and I would pick more than one person. It is too big a power to place in the hands of one person, but I have no power to prevent it, and it is no use caviling in a mean and paltry spirit. The position which I hold is perfectly clear. Whatever discredit is attached to anything connected with this institution belongs to other politicians. If there is to be further discredit it must be attached to those who are responsible for things as they are now. The responsibility does not rest with me in any way. It was only after very mature reflection that we decided to assist the Government, and I trust that we shall be able to adhere to our determination in a true spirit. I intend to do so. I am here to assist the Government in bringing their legislation to a successful issue.

Mr. TURLEY: I intend to support the amendment. We have been told on various occasions that ruin stares everyone in the face if we do not do so-and-so. We were told that in 1893, and I remember an amendment being then brought forward by the senior member for Charters Towers to the effect that an inquiry should take place. It was stated then that the credit of the institution was practically gone, but hon. members on the other side then got up and said, "You simply do not know what you are talking about. If such a thing as an inquiry is held it will ruin the colony." The facts as disclosed now show us that if an inquiry had been held at that time the colony would have been ten times better off, because everyone would have known his exact position. As it is now, we are standing on a thin sheet of ice over a deep sheet of water, and we have to do something to prevent ourselves from falling in again, as we

did in 1893. I do not think that ruin stares us in the face to-day any more than in 1893; but I notice on this occasion, as on others, than when an amendment of an important nature is moved it is not in accord with the opinions of hon. members opposite.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Or your own side.

Mr. TURLEY: Every man is entitled to his own opinions; that is acted upon by hon. members on this side at all events. Even when the Premier has declared that a certain question should not be a party question, have hon. members opposite ever voted against the Government? Is it reasonable to suppose that they all hold the same opinions upon all questions, and yet that is what their actions would lead us to believe. The Treasurer has declared in a manner that I consider paltry, that if this amendment is carried it is a vote of want of confidence in the Government, making it at once a party question. I am sure the hon. member for Enoggera never intended that it should be treated in that way. But the Treasurer makes it a party question so that his followers may say, "We have perfect faith in the Government," even though under other circumstances they might be prepared to support the amendment. It is not necessary that this should be made a party question. We should all exercise a free judgment, and it is a pity that hon. members on the other side are not allowed to be free. It would be far better in the interests of the community if this question were dealt with on its merits. It is better to consider a question like this clear of any coercion or threats such as were introduced by the Home Secretary. The hon. gentleman's speech was intimidation pure and simple when he talked about the ruin of the colony. I deny that this amendment will effect the ruin of the colony, and I believe the facts as pointed out by the Home Secretary are grossly exaggerated. If no power is given to the Government, the other persons interested in the bank will have a free hand, and no pressure can be brought to bear upon them. They will be able to consider this question as shareholders and depositors, and arrive at some conclusion which they will be able to lay before the Government. Then will be the time to consider whether in the interest of the colony the agreement should be ratified. If those persons at a distance are allowed a free hand to draw up their own scheme of reconstruction, the Treasurer will then have something definite to bring before the House, and Parliament will then be better able to express an opinion upon the merits of the scheme than it is at the present time.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: The hon. member says that the result of the Government interference with the Queensland National Bank is that it has had to make arrangements with its creditors, but I think that no less than ten banks had to do the same thing.

Mr. TURLEY: The Government had no occasion to interfere in their case.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: The hon. member always makes party speeches, and though other hon. members opposite may not have made this a party question, the hon. member certainly has done so. I think this the most eminently irrational amendment it would be possible to devise. I could quite understand hon. members saying, "We will not trust the Treasurer, and we will throw out this Bill." I could quite understand them agreeing with the Bill, but how any hon. member having the faintest care for the well-being of the colony can say, "I believe in the Bill, but we will not do anything for six months,"

I do not understand. The hon. member in supporting his amendment argued that we should wait until the depositors, who are in the same boat with ourselves, or the shareholders, or somebody else takes action. We should not wait for them, because, if we, who have a prior claim and can sweep the board, let them understand that we are prepared not to enforce that prior claim at once, we do something to bring about what we have got at heart as well as they—that is, the reconstruction of the bank. When we take that step we indicate that when they make proposals, as they will do, there is some prospect of their proposals being acceded to. But as long as we take up the attitude suggested by the hon. member for Enoggera, those who are interested equally with ourselves, and anxious that the bank should go on, will be precluded from proceeding, because they will consider the position hopeless in the face of the hostile attitude of the Parliament of Queensland.

Mr. DAWSON: Not hostile.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Careless and indifferent attitude at any rate. Hon. members like the hon. member for Bulimba and those who know something of business have dwelt upon the necessity of establishing to some extent the credit of the bank, and every day we neglect to do anything so much business will go away. If we wait for six months before beginning—before we let the people on the other side of the globe understand that we mean to do anything—I say that to pass such a resolution would at once prevent any possibility of the bank being reconstructed. I do not want to argue on the general question as to whether the Bill should be accepted or not, but I point out that the Treasurer pointedly stated that he would be happy to consider amendments in committee. Hon. members are perfectly free to conclude that they do not approve of the Bill, that they will not agree to any fresh agreement, and that it will be better to let the bank go into liquidation; but I cannot understand their supporting a proposal to protract a time of misery which ultimately must end in liquidation. As I am not disposed to speak at length on the amendment, I may say that for once I am happy in being able to agree with the hon. member for Burke.

Mr. DAWSON: I am happy in disagreeing with the Secretary for Public Instruction. The hon. gentleman accuses the hon. member for South Brisbane of party feeling in this matter. The only chance which members of the Labour party have of escaping that charge is that they shall agree with the Government. If they do not, then they speak with party feeling and are unable to rise above party partisanship. I am happy to say that on this occasion I am unable to rise superior to party, in the opinion of the Secretary for Public Instruction. The hon. gentleman distinctly distorted and misrepresented the statement made by the hon. member for South Brisbane. That hon. member stated that on account of the action of the Government in 1893 certain interested persons in England were induced to become depositors in the Queensland National Bank, and we should be careful on this occasion before we lead those unfortunate people into a fresh agreement.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: He could not produce a tittle of proof.

Mr. DAWSON: The hon. member could produce any amount of proof. The hon. member for Toowoomba the other day produced any quantity of convincing proof on the point which has not yet been replied to. I thought the Attorney-General might have dealt with it this afternoon, but the hon. gentleman kept very well clear of it. The statements made by the

hon. member for Toowoomba were unanswerable, and not a member on the other side has ventured to reply to them.

The SPEAKER: I must ask the hon. member not to refer to a previous debate.

Mr. DAWSON: I believe I was breaking the rules, but I was led aside by an interjection from the Ministerial bench. I say the Secretary for Public Instruction did not attempt to meet the statement of the hon. member for South Brisbane. Why did not the hon. gentleman meet honestly the suggestion that we should not again force the unfortunate English depositors into an agreement? Whatever agreement was entered into by any other bank that came to grief at that particular time was absolutely outside the Government of Queensland. There was not a single action taken in this House with regard to any one of the other banks; the agreements which were made by them were purely agreements between the banks and their creditors. But with the Queensland National Bank it was entirely different, because the Government stepped in, and on their action these unfortunate shareholders were induced to enter into that agreement. The other banks have kept their agreement, but this particular bank, that has been fostered by the Queensland Government, has not kept its agreement. The hon. gentleman made one mistake. He got up to twist what was said by the hon. member for South Brisbane, and when he did not succeed—

The SPEAKER: The hon. member has no right to say that an hon. member got up to twist what another hon. member had said.

Mr. DAWSON: I believe I am wrong in saying that. What I should have said is: That after the hon. gentleman got up he succeeded in twisting what was said by the hon. member for South Brisbane. The hon. gentleman then made a statement of his own, and said that because the Government was a creditor in this bank we should not wait for any action to be taken either by the shareholders or the depositors, but that the Government, having a preferential claim, it was their bounden duty to be the first to take action.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: No; that it was advisable.

Mr. DAWSON: The hon. gentleman distinctly said that it was their bounden duty to take action first, but, even admitting that he said that it was advisable that they should take action, I want to know, now that there is a split in the Labour party with regard to the Queensland National Bank, how far the split in the Cabinet extends with regard to the same institution? The Treasurer told us the other evening that it was not the duty of Parliament to be the first to step into the breach, but that we should as far as possible wait until the shareholders and depositors had taken action.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Quite right.

Mr. DAWSON: How could it be quite right two or three nights ago, and all wrong to-night? It appears to me that certain sentiments and opinions are expressed, and certain lines of action laid down, according to the particular exigencies of the moment; that is the reason why we have contradictory statements coming from responsible Ministers of the Crown. I say distinctly that, if it is in the interests of the people of the colony for the Government to take action, they ought to do it without waiting for anyone, but it should be shown that it is in the interest of the people for the Government to take action in the particular direction indicated in this Bill, and no member—neither the Treasurer nor any other member who has stated that he intends to support this Bill—has given one single reason why there is any special

urgency for the Bill to be read a second time to-night. The hon. member for Enoggera gave very good reasons why it is not advisable in the interest of the people of the colony to read the measure a second time to-night. Of course the particular form of the amendment is provided for by the rules of the House, and I take it that the meaning of the hon. member is that the Bill shall not be read a second time this session, but that it shall be postponed till next session. I quite agree with every reason advanced by the hon. member against the second reading of the Bill at the present time, but more particularly with the reason regarding the effect which the passing of this Bill will have on the investigation into the past management of the bank. The Government had to grant to some extent the demand which was made for a further investigation, but if they get this Bill through, which empowers the Treasurer to make any kind of agreement he likes with the bank, binding the colony for thirty-five years to the tail of the Queensland National Bank, immediately that agreement is entered into the bank directory will be entirely independent of this House, and they can stop the inquiry at the very moment they feel themselves independent of this Parliament. It is because I feel that if the Government have the power to transfer to the bank officials the granting or non-granting of a full, fair, clear, and definite investigation into the affairs of the bank we shall never get it, because immediately it becomes dangerous to those who have been connected with the bank in the past the inquiry will be closed. I say it is because of this that I am induced to support the amendment. If the inquiry were stopped by the Treasurer we could have something to say to him in this House, but over the bank we shall have no control. For this reason, if there were no other, I should vote for the amendment, and I think it should be sufficient to induce other members to vote for it.

Mr. McMASTER: I hardly think the hon. member who has just spoken can have read the title of the Bill. He accuses the Treasurer of telling us the other evening that it was not the duty of the Government to step in and take the initiatory step in this business, but that that should be left to the shareholders and depositors. Well, the Treasurer is not taking the initiatory step. He simply asks in this Bill that the House should give him authority to meet the other depositors when they make a move for the purpose of reconstructing the bank, which is a very different thing from that which the hon. member for Charters Towers would lead people to believe. But the hon. member is noted for twisting the statements made by hon. members on this side. I do not know what has come over him this session, but he is evidently determined to twist almost every statement of members on this side of the House. He spoke about the unfortunate shareholders and depositors who were deceived in 1893 because this Parliament made arrangements to assist the bank and carry it on. To my mind they were fortunate and not unfortunate, because the Government stepped in and they received 4½ per cent. The bank has made no default; it has paid its liabilities, but had the Government then insisted upon 2½ per cent., the depositors would have been unfortunate. The arguments used by the hon. member for Charters Towers were extremely weak; he evidently did not know what he was talking about. The Government are not moving in the matter; but are preparing the way, and when the depositors and shareholders have met together, there will be somebody to meet them. I think we have a right to know that there will be somebody to meet the shareholders and the depositors; but there will be nobody unless

we pass this Bill. The hon. member for Toowoomba alluded to the Bank of Queensland as the twopenny-halfpenny affair; but many people felt its failure, and fortunately Gympie broke out, and lifted the colony out of its difficulties. The question now is whether it is fair and reasonable to ask this House to keep the bank going, and prevent it closing its doors? I am sure there is sufficient common sense left in the hon. member for Charters Towers to know that in the interests of the colony it is desirable that the bank should be kept going. All the hon. member wants to do is to get a shot at the Government, but I do not think the House will accept the amendment. I do not pledge myself to vote for the Bill as it is, but leave myself free to deal with it in committee. In the meantime I hope the second reading will be passed.

Mr. BATTERSBY: The question before the House now is not the second reading of the Bill, but the amendment of the hon. member for Enoggera; and when that is disposed of I shall have something to say about the Bill itself. I think it is time we took a division upon the amendment, which I intend to vote against, although I do not like the Bill.

Mr. FITZGERALD: One of the arguments used by hon. members on the other side is that if we delay the bank will bleed to death. But supposing the Bill were carried through all its stages and passed into law to-night, would any hon. member deposit £1,000 in that institution in preference to any other institution? Would it put the slightest confidence in the public? The Bill does not guarantee any accounts; the Government do not come to the assistance of the bank; the Bill simply gives the Treasurer power to make certain agreements at a future date, when the shareholders and depositors have decided the fate of the bank. It has been shown by the Treasurer that a great many of the shareholders and depositors are in England, and it will take a long time for them to meet, because all the evidence and the facts will have to be before them, and until they have had their meeting and decided what they will do, we do not know what will happen, no matter how many Acts of Parliament we pass; so that the argument that by postponing this Bill we are allowing this poor bank to bleed to death cannot be upheld for a moment. The depositors and shareholders cannot meet for several months, even if we pass this Bill *holus-bolus*. The Treasurer has admitted that the depositors should be considered first, and that is the suggestion of the hon. member for Enoggera, who says that we should wait for six months, by which time there will have been a meeting, and it will be time for Parliament to decide what it will do. The Treasurer also stated that it would be a question whether the shareholders would give up all their claims in regard to the bank, and he thought a great many would object; but supposing they keep the bank in their own hands, and do not relinquish their rights, it may turn out that the same old directors who have got the bank into its present position will be the directors for the future, because they have had power enough to keep them in office for many years, and if there is anything for them to fear in regard to the past management of the bank, it will be to their advantage to remain in office, so that when the commissioners wish to question them they will say there is nothing in the Act to compel them to answer. If hon. members were under the impression that the same old directorate who bossed that bank in the past were to remain in their positions, they would not be very friendly to the Bill, because it is the unanimous desire of hon. members and the whole colony that these directors should be cleared out, and a new lot put in; but if this Bill is passed the old ones may remain

there for years, and the Lord only knows what pranks they may play in the meantime. The hon. member for Enoggera does not wish to shelve the Bill altogether, but only to postpone it until further investigations have been made, and we know what the shareholders and depositors are going to do. In the meantime the bank has twelve months' grace. I cannot see that this Bill is going to help it. It will not put the least confidence into anyone's mind if we pass the second reading to-night.

Mr. KERR: I intend to support the amendment, believing that it will be better to delay all legislation regarding this bank until we have the report from the committee. Some hon. members have stated that those who intend to support the amendment have not taken into consideration the desolation and ruin that will follow from allowing this institution to bleed to death. We shall be accused of wishing to see the bank bleed to death, but we have no desire to do anything of the kind. We are quite as much interested in Queensland as any hon. member who will support the Government. I claim to have as much interest in this colony as any man on the other side. My belongings may not be as large as those of hon. members opposite; still all that I have is invested in Queensland, which country I have made my home, and I have its interests and those of its banks as much at heart as any hon. member. I should be unwilling to do anything that would be injurious to the best interests of the colony; but I was opposed to the Bill to guarantee deposits, and I am going to vote for the amendment and against the Bill.

Mr. STEWART: The question we have to determine in connection with this amendment is whether we shall be in any better position six months hence than we are at the present moment. Everyone here must admit that if the bank has to be assisted, and if through it we are to help to maintain the current of trade, the sooner that assistance is rendered the better. In no case is the old adage which says, "He gives twice who gives quickly," truer than in this case. The chief reason advanced by the hon. member for Enoggera why the second reading of the Bill should be delayed for six months was because he was afraid that if the whole of the arrangements were completed a full inquiry into the past management of the bank would not be permitted. If I thought that would be the case I would resist to the utmost the passing of the second reading of the Bill, or the passing of any legislation; but I do not believe that that will be the result. I do not believe that even if a new company got the affairs of the bank into its hands that an inquiry into the past management would be burked. The law of the land will be quite sufficient to enforce a full inquiry where any suspicion of wrongdoing exists. Now, with regard to the position of the bank. Some hon. members who have spoken say that until we get more information we are not in a position to legislate. What further information do we want? What more information can we get? The only information that we want is as to the present condition of the bank—that is, so far as the present Bill is concerned. The matter of an inquiry into the past management is quite a different affair. Now, do we believe the report of the committee appointed, or do we not? If we do believe it, then we have all the information we desire as to the position of the bank. If we do not believe that report, of course we are quite justified in taking up that position. Speaking for myself, when the appointment of that committee was under consideration I expressed the opinion that I would be quite satisfied with any report brought in by a committee of which the Auditor-General was a member. The Auditor-General and the other members of the committee have

brought in their report, and I do not see that I can do other than place the fullest confidence in their report. I care as little about the bank as any man, but I am concerned as to the interests of the colony and the interests of the unfortunate people in Great Britain who were deluded into putting their money into this bank; and the honour of the colony is at stake, and not only the honour of the colony but its money as well as the money of these people in Great Britain. It must be apparent to anyone that if there is any delay in legislation the liquidation of the bank must ensue. We have had it on the authority of some of the best and most skilled financiers in this House that until the affairs of the bank are put on a sound basis, or at least until something definite is done with regard to its affairs, the bank will continue to bleed. It does not require a financier to know that. Anyone knows it. If we are going to do anything, the quicker we do it the better. If we delay legislating for six months the inevitable result will be liquidation, and if liquidation is brought about, what will be the result? The colony will perhaps get 2s. 6d. in the £1, and the depositors in Great Britain may get 2s. 6d. in the £1, perhaps; and a ring of financiers will come in and scoop the pool. We are continually hearing that the business in this colony is drifting into the hands of syndicates. What better opportunity could any syndicate have than if the bank were placed in liquidation? It would be one of the finest opportunities that ever occurred in the history of any country. A ring possessed of capital could buy up every property placed on the market, and by virtue of its large possessions it would boss the colony.

The TREASURER: You are not far wrong.

Mr. STEWART: That is exactly what I would do if I were a financier. Of course, we are not permitted to refer on this amendment to the provisions of the Bill. We can discuss them when the amendment is disposed of, but I cannot see that anything is to be gained by a delay of six months, and I can see that a great deal of loss might accrue. Balancing the two propositions, I can only come to the conclusion that I will be serving the country best by voting against the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Enoggera.

Mr. HARDACRE: It is quite evident there is a great deal of feeling on the amendment and on the Bill. I was one of those who voted for guaranteeing the current accounts, and I therefore cannot be accused of being biased against the bank; but if this amendment means expressing disapproval of the provisions of the Bill I am going to vote for it. I object to the large powers proposed to be given to the Treasurer, and I do not see that any reasons have been given to induce us to confer upon him a fresh trust after the way he misled us in 1893. After deceiving us in that way, I do not see how he dares to come down and ask us to trust him further. He certainly has explained that he did not mean that the bank was solvent, but that it would be able to pay the Government account and other depositors, less the capital account of the shareholders. Yet on the strength of that, knowing the facts as he knew them after the searching investigation of 1893, he asks for authority to enter into a fresh agreement which enables the shareholders to pay dividends out of capital account.

The TREASURER: And pay up £400,000.

Mr. HARDACRE: How do we know that they paid it? It might have been paid on paper, but we have pretty good reason to assume that that was paid by shareholders increasing their overdrafts which formed part of the capital written down. I have no hesitation in saying it is unblushing effrontery for the hon. gentleman

to ask the House to trust him with such large powers after our experience of 1893. I should feel sorry if the carrying of this amendment delayed action being taken, but I do not believe it will. Whether delay occurs or not depends entirely on the Government. The Government can send delegates to confer with the English depositors and the agreement can be ratified by Parliament afterwards. Let us take an example by what was done at the Hobart conference. A provisional agreement was entered into there by the Premiers, and then they came to the different Parliaments to ratify the agreement. This is an analogous case. If the agreement when made is fair and satisfactory, no doubt the House will ratify it, but by withholding the power of making an agreement and compelling the necessity for Parliament to ratify it afterwards, it would make the Government very much more careful what agreement they entered into than if we gave them the power first and Parliament had no power to say "yea" or "nay" afterwards. In the interests of the English depositors I think this Bill should not be passed; there should be a delay until a conference has been held. What are we going to do now? As the Attorney-General says, this is the first move in the game. The English depositors think the Government have some game that they are entering upon—some strategical movement with a purpose which they do not disclose. By passing this Bill we practically say that unless they accept the terms of the Bill they will get no terms at all.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: You want us to extend the Treasurer's powers.

Mr. HARDACRE: I do not want to give him any powers at all beyond the power to confer with the other depositors to see what is best to be done. Just a word with regard to the threat in the statement about liquidation, ruin, and all the rest of it. Who is going to send the bank into liquidation? The Government cannot withdraw their deposits because they are under an agreement. In the same way the English depositors cannot withdraw their deposits, and the overdrafters, who are heavily involved and have to pay interest, cannot withdraw their accounts. The current account depositors will not withdraw for twelve months as they know they are perfectly safe. There is no one to send it into liquidation and the business can go on without this Bill for a considerable time; at all events until there has been plenty of time for a conference between those interested as to what is best to be done. I shall support the amendment.

Mr. GLASSEY: As the Treasurer is in his place I will make a few observations on the amendment.

The TREASURER: Which you know I cannot reply to.

Mr. GLASSEY: So far as I am concerned the hon. gentleman will have full opportunity to reply. He stated that the hon. member in moving this amendment desired to make this a party question.

The TREASURER: Undoubtedly; I know what the practice of Parliament is.

Mr. GLASSEY: The hon. gentleman knows that during the whole of the discussion upon this question, extending now over many days, it has never yet been treated by this side as a party question, and it is not going to be treated in that way now. Hon. members who heard me this afternoon will know that I never intended to support a motion of this kind. I believe that in the interests of the country it is necessary that legislation should take place and should take place quickly. I give my colleagues and companions who disagree with me on this point credit for sincerity in the views they hold, and I expect they will give me credit for sincerity also.

I say that if anything can be done to effect a settlement with this great institution, in the interests of the country the sooner it is done the better. I have no regard for the bank or those immediately associated with it, though I should regret to see any person lose his savings or earnings. I say the more lofty consideration—the interests of the people as a whole—should be our first care. The Treasurer said he had no one with whom he could consult on this side of the House, but he was informed at a very early stage of the session that so far as the conduct of business was concerned a person had been appointed to speak on behalf of an organised party on this side; and much of the delay which has occurred has been in consequence of the attitude of the hon. gentleman himself. Coming to the amendment, I may say I have been connected with the hon. member for Enoggera for, I think, ten years. I believe him to be actuated by the highest motives and to have given this matter serious consideration, but I think he is mistaken. I should regret to vote against him on ordinary occasions. But this is not a question upon which friendship or the side of the House a member sits upon should be considered. The one question now is what is the best course to pursue so far as the commercial interests and wellbeing of the colony are concerned. I believe that generally the course proposed by the Government in this matter is the right one, though I hope to see the Bill amended in committee, and though my action may be questioned and my motives may be impugned and various stories circulated about me, I do not care twopence for that. What I care for is what is best, what is wisest, what is justest, what is truest, and what is most humane to the people; and believing that this is the correct course to pursue, I shall certainly support the second reading of the Bill and vote against the amendment of my hon. friend the member for Enoggera.

The TREASURER: If the House will allow me I should like to say a few words—

The SPEAKER: The hon. member can only do so by leave of the House.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. McDONALD: No; I have been denied the right to speak, and I do not see why the hon. gentleman should speak again.

Mr. CRIBB: There are two points to be considered in connection with this matter. First, is there any urgent need or necessity for a Bill like the present; and, secondly, is this the best form of dealing with the matter, or are the powers contained in the Bill too large to give the Government? The hon. member for Enoggera and some other members seem to consider that there is no urgent necessity for the Bill to pass, but I think their arguments have been completely answered by the hon. member for Bulimba. I should, however, just like to add my testimony as a business man to what the hon. member for Bulimba has said. I can see that the Queensland National Bank is slowly bleeding to death. Every day there is a danger of the good accounts being removed; and if the matter is delayed any length of time, all the best accounts will leave the bank; only those will be left which it is impossible to remove, and I do not think they will be altogether profitable business. The hon. member for Enoggera said that the reconstruction of the bank may prevent further investigation, and also that if the bank is reconstructed there will be no necessity for investigation. I am not going to speak now on the policy of having a further investigation, as I have already expressed my opinion upon that subject, but I would say that the reconstruction of the bank will not in any way do away with the necessity for further investigation. The shareholders and depositors have it in

their power to carry on the investigation if they choose to do so. The shareholders have the appointment of the directors, and if the present directors will not carry out an investigation they can call upon them to resign, or appoint other directors at the next election who will institute an investigation that will give satisfaction to the shareholders. On the other hand, if the depositors are not satisfied with the management of the bank they can insist upon liquidation, and appoint a liquidator who will make all the investigation that is necessary, so that the matter of a further investigation is quite in the hands of the depositors or shareholders at the present time. I may say that while I have every sympathy with the shareholders of the bank, I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that they have practically ceased to have any further interest in the bank, except one of further liability—a liability which I think they will be most anxious to be relieved from. It is not possible for them to do anything towards the reconstruction of the bank, further than to relinquish to the depositors, or whoever may carry on the bank, any further claim they may have on the institution. The hon. member for Mitchell supposes it possible that the directors may not be in favour of a further inquiry, and may find it worth their while to arrange for the introduction of further capital. But I do not think it would be possible for the directors to raise anything like the amount of money they would require to keep the bank afloat. They would require to find capital to the extent of £1,250,000 to cover the present deficit, and I do not think they could raise that sum. It has been asked, Why should we not send some one to England to confer with the depositors before passing this Bill? But how would it be possible for us to send any persons to confer with the depositors in England unless they have power to act? To do that would be simply to delay matters for an indefinite period. If the parties we have to deal with have power to deal, we must also give our representatives power to deal. At the same time I may say that I do not think there will ever be any necessity to send any representatives home; all that is required can be arranged by cable. I should just like to say a word or two with reference to the suggestion that the Government should have a representative on the board of management. I think that the Government, or Parliament, would be very unwise to adopt that suggestion, as it would mean that Parliament would be identified with the management of the bank, and be responsible for all advances made, and all business transacted. All that we want is proper inspection and audit, and to have periodical reports made to the Government to show that the bank is carried on in a proper way.

Question.—That the word proposed to be omitted stand part of the question—put; and the House divided.

In division,

Mr. McDONALD: I challenge the votes of Messrs. Callan, Crombie, Dickson, Lord, McMaster, Stodart, and G. Thorn. Each of these hon. members is a shareholder in the Queensland National Bank, and upon that ground I maintain that they are voting in their own interests. I ask your ruling whether they are or not.

The SPEAKER: The hon. member can take the usual course after the division. Nothing can be done at present.

Division declared:—

AYES, 52.

Sir H. M. Nelson, Messrs. Philp, Foxton, Dalrymple, Byrnes, Tozer, Keogh, Cross, Dickson, G. Thorn, Smith, Smyth, Chataway, Callan, Curtis, Stephenson, Grimes, King, Collins, Bell, Fraser, Finney, Sim, McDonnell, Kidston, McGahan, Bridges, Battersby, Bartholomew,

O'Connell, Corfield, Dibley, Newell, Hoolan, Jackson, Stewart, Stodart, Lissner, Glassey, Oribb, Story, Lord, McMaster, Crombie, McCord, Castling, Tooth, Stephens, Armstrong, Leahy, Hamilton, and Annear.

NOES, 13.

Messrs. Drake, W. Thorn, Hardacre, Dunsford, Kerr, McDonald, Turley, Fitzgerald, Groom, Fogarty, Browne, Dawson, and Daniels.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr. McDONALD: I desire to move that the hon. members, whose names I have read out—

The SPEAKER: The hon. member must state them again.

Mr. McDONALD: I move that the votes of the following members be disallowed, as they are directly pecuniarily interested in the votes they have given:—[The hon. member here repeated the names.] I make this motion under Standing Order 152, which says—

“A member shall not be entitled to vote, either in the House or in a committee, upon any question in which he has a direct pecuniary interest, and the vote of any member so interested shall be disallowed.”

These hon. members are shareholders in the Queensland National Bank, and will benefit by this Bill.

Question put; and the House divided.

The SPEAKER: It is customary for hon. members whose votes are challenged not to vote in the division.

Mr. STODART: I do not happen to be a shareholder, and I have not been for years.

The SPEAKER: The hon. member is not in order in speaking now. He should have intimated the fact before the motion was put.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Several other hon. members make a similar statement.

Mr. McMASTER: I am not a shareholder, and I never was.

Mr. McDONALD: Well, your name appears on the register.

The TREASURER: I think the proper course is to ask every hon. member whose vote is challenged whether he has a direct pecuniary interest in the question or not.

The SPEAKER: The practice of the House of Commons, when an hon. member's vote is challenged and a motion made that it be disallowed, is for the hon. member to rise in his place and make a statement. After that he leaves the House, and the House decides on the statement he has made. I waited for hon. members to make a statement, but no one rose, and I therefore put the motion.

Division declared:—

AYES, 22.

Messrs. Glassey, Dawson, McDonald, Kidston, Kerr, McDonnell, Browne, Turley, W. Thorn, Hardacre, Keogh, Drake, Daniels, King, Dunsford, Sim, Hoolan, Dibley, Cross, Stewart, Fitzgerald, and Jackson.

NOES, 35.

Sir H. M. Nelson, Messrs. Philp, Foxton, Dalrymple, Byrnes, Tozer, McCord, Leahy, Newell, Stephenson, O'Connell, Finney, McMaster, Chataway, Hamilton, Stodart, Fraser, Bell, Bridges, McGahan, Castling, Lissner, Collins, Corfield, Grimes, Smyth, Curtis, Callan, Cribb, Story, Bartholomew, Battersby, Tooth, Stephens, and Annear.

Resolved in the negative.

The SPEAKER: The question now is—That the Bill be now read a second time. Those who are of that opinion say “Aye,” the contrary “No.” I think the “Ayes” have it.

Messrs. BROWNE, DANIELS, and JACKSON, who had risen in their places, said: Mr. Speaker—

MEMBERS on the Opposition side: Several members rose to speak.

The SPEAKER: Not a solitary member addressed me before I had fully put the question.

MEMBERS on the Opposition side: Yes, yes! four.

The SPEAKER: I have given my decision on the voices that the Bill has been read a second time.

Mr. DRAKE: Divide!

The SPEAKER: Does the hon. member call for a division?

Mr. DRAKE: If that is going to be your ruling, I call "Divide."

The SPEAKER: Ring the bell, sergeant. In division.

Mr. KIDSTON said: Mr. Speaker,—Four hon. members rose in their places when you put the question. This is not the way to do business.

The SPEAKER: Does the hon. member raise a point of order?

Mr. KIDSTON: Yes, I do.

The SPEAKER: Will the hon. member state his point of order?

Mr. KIDSTON: Four hon. members rose to speak when you put the question, and you then declared that the "Ayes" had it.

The SPEAKER: I would remind hon. members that under Standing Order 99 when an hon. member desires to speak he rises in his place uncovered, and addresses himself to Mr. Speaker. The hon. member should have raised the point of order at the time. I waited and put the question deliberately, and if hon. members rose they certainly did not address the Chair.

Mr. McDONALD: They said "Mr. Speaker" as loud as they could sing out.

Mr. SIM: I rise to a point of order. Is it in order that the Speaker should rise to put the question when at least a dozen members had not resumed their seats?

The SPEAKER: Order! In division the hon. member must speak sitting.

Mr. DANIELS: When you put the question I was on my feet, but you were looking at the other side of the House. I called "Mr. Speaker" before you put the question.

The SPEAKER: I must remind hon. members that they must address the Chair. I explained that on a previous occasion when the hon. member for Enoggera rose and did not address the Chair.

Mr. HARDAIRE: I distinctly saw two members rise and address you. They rose and said "Mr. Speaker" before you said "The 'Ayes' have it."

The SPEAKER: Hon. members must understand that I have not the slightest wish to hurry this debate. I gave hon. members every opportunity, and the hon. member for Enoggera then called "Divide." There was no point of order raised before the division.

Mr. McDONALD: Yes. There were four hon. members who sang out "Mr. Speaker" at the top of their voices. A number of hon. members on the other side had not resumed their seats, and were talking so loudly that no one could be heard.

The SPEAKER: All I can say is that I waited; I heard no one address me, and I then declared the question, and the hon. member for Enoggera called "Divide."

Mr. GROOM: Before you declared that the "Ayes" had it the hon. member for Kennedy, Mr. Jackson, had risen to his feet and called "Mr. Speaker." The noise on the other side was very great, and as the hon. member's voice is not very loud, probably you did not catch it.

Mr. DRAKE: With regard to my having called "Divide," I did not do so until after you stated that you had already declared the question in favour of the "Ayes."

The SPEAKER: That is so.

Mr. DRAKE: I did that in order to save my right of calling for a division. I point out also that we are not properly in division, because the bar has not been ordered to be put down.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Oh, yes! it has.

The SPEAKER: I ordered the bar to be put down.

Mr. GLASSEY: It is perfectly clear that some error has been made. If an error has been made, why not put the question again? That is an easy way of getting over the difficulty.

The HOME SECRETARY: Why cannot members who wish to speak rise at once?

Mr. McDONALD: They did rise.

The SPEAKER: The House is now in division, and we must get out of division. The question is that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr. McDONALD: They will get it in committee; that's all.

Messrs. GLASSEY and CROSS having risen and crossing to the opposite side of the House,

Mr. DRAKE said: I draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to hon. members changing their places.

The SPEAKER: Hon. members may change their places until the tellers are appointed. That is the object of putting the question when the bar is closed.

Mr. JACKSON: I wish to make a statement. I was on my feet before you declared the question. There was a great noise on the other side of the House. The hon. member for Croydon was also on his feet, and we both distinctly addressed you and called "Mr. Speaker."

The SPEAKER: All that I say is that I regret the hon. member did not speak loud enough for me to hear. I distinctly stated on a previous occasion, when the hon. member for Enoggera rose and did not address me, that it was impossible for me to say who was going to speak unless hon. members addressed the Chair. The Standing Orders distinctly state that it is not sufficient for an hon. member to rise in his place; he must address the Chair.

Mr. KIDSTON: I asked your ruling on a point of order.

The SPEAKER: I have given a ruling.

Mr. McDONALD: I move that your ruling be disagreed to.

The SPEAKER: Order, order! The hon. member is too late.

Mr. McDONALD: I desire to challenge the vote of the Home Secretary, he having stated that he had his all in the Queensland National Bank. Being therefore directly interested, I maintain that his vote should be disallowed.

The SPEAKER: The hon. member can do that when we get out of division.

The HOME SECRETARY: You may save yourself time. I have not the slightest interest.

Mr. DAWSON: What about your speech?

Mr. STEPHENSON: With regard to the question which has been raised as to hon. members on the other side having risen in their places before you finished putting the question, I may say that I was sitting here, and distinctly heard you put the question, and wondered that some hon. members on the other side did not rise to speak. It was not until you had finished the sentence "The 'Ayes' have it" that the hon. member for Kennedy and the hon. member for Croydon and two other members rose to their feet. It was after you had completed putting the question.

Mr. FOGARTY: That is one side of the question. I was looking through the window, and certainly saw the hon. member for Kennedy on his feet addressing the Chair before the question was decided.

Mr. DAWSON: I may say that I was talking to the hon. member for Cook and the hon. member for Ipswich, Mr. Stephenson, at the time you were putting the question, and our attention was only attracted after the protest was made.

Mr. STEPHENSON: That is not so. That is incorrect.

Mr. DAWSON: It is correct.

Mr. HARDAIRE: I distinctly heard them address you before the voices were declared.

Division declared:—

AYES, 44.

Sir H. M. Nelson, Messrs. Foxton, Tozer, Byrnes, Philp, McMaster, Lord, Dalrymple, Dickson, G. Thorn, Collins, Armstrong, Cross, Smyth, Curtis, Callan, Grimes, Leahy, Story, Bell, Fraser, Finney, Bridges, McGahan, Battersby, Lissner, Corfield, Chataway, Hoolan, Newell, Crombie, Stodart, Cribb, Glassey, O'Connell, Castling, Hamilton, Stephenson, McCord, Bartholomew, Tooth, Stephens, Smith, and Annear.

NOES, 21.

Messrs. Keogh, Kerr, McDonald, Dunsford, McDonnell, Dawson, King, Hardacre, Sim, Turley, Fitzgerald, Drake, Groom, Fogarty, W. Thorn, Dibley, Jackson, Kidston, Stewart, Browne, and Daniels.

Resolved in the affirmative.

Mr. McDONALD: I desire to challenge the Home Secretary's vote, he having publicly stated in this House that all he possessed in this world was in the Queensland National Bank.

The HOME SECRETARY: No.

Mr. McDONALD: I can point out what he said from *Hansard*. He said he had his all in the Queensland National Bank, and that being so, I maintain that, under the 152nd Standing Order, the hon. gentleman is pecuniarily interested in that institution. I challenge his vote, and move that it be disallowed.

The HOME SECRETARY: My explanation of the matter is that I never was a shareholder in the Queensland National Bank, and I never said that all the money I had in the world was in that bank. I said that all my available spare cash at that time was in the bank. That is perfectly true, but since that time, which was many months ago, my investments have taken another direction.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Oh! oh!

The HOME SECRETARY: I have not the slightest pecuniary interest in connection with that bank any more than any other member of the public who has got anything to lose.

Question put and negatived.

Mr. McDONALD: I don't want to waste time by calling for a division.

The TREASURER: I move that the commitment of the Bill stand an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

Mr. JACKSON: I want to say a few words with respect to what has just happened in this House.

The SPEAKER: Order! That question is closed. The hon. member cannot renew that now.

Mr. DRAKE: I intend to move an amendment upon the motion. I am going to propose that the word "to-morrow" be omitted with a view of inserting the words "Tuesday next." The reason is that the second reading was passed in a most unusual, and, I think, in an entirely unprecedented manner. During the last three or four years we have had Bills passed through this Chamber in an extraordinary manner, but I never saw anything approaching the way in which this Bill was put through its second reading. I think that a sufficient reason for asking for a longer time for consideration before we go into committee on the Bill.

The TREASURER: For a Bill of seven clauses.

Mr. DRAKE: I do not measure the importance of a thing by its length. In this Bill the hon. gentleman wants to tie up a couple of millions of money for thirty-five years in an institution that is supposed to be rotten.

The TREASURER: The Committee will decide that.

Mr. DRAKE: I am speaking of the importance of the Bill, and it is not unimportant simply because it contains only seven clauses. A great deal of mischief may be done in a Bill of seven clauses. When the division was taken many members on this side desired to address themselves to the second reading, and they had not an opportunity of doing so because the Speaker

did not see them or hear them. The reason he was unable to hear them was because he put the question at a time when a great number of members were moving about the Chamber, and there was a great deal of noise.

The SPEAKER: I think the hon. member is now out of order.

Mr. STEWART: He is telling the truth anyhow.

The SPEAKER: The hon. member is not in order in debating that question, because it is passed and done with, and it is not relevant to the question now before the House. The hon. member knows full well that Supply is always taken on Wednesday, so that practically the motion means Thursday.

Mr. DRAKE: I do not wish to travel outside the Standing Orders. I was simply giving a reason why more time should be given, and that, I think, is quite in order. If I want to find out what the arrangements with regard to the business of the House are likely to be, I may go to the Premier, but I shall certainly not ask the Speaker. I object to the motion that the House go into committee on the Bill to-morrow, because there were members who desired to address you and make second-reading speeches.

The SPEAKER: I rule that that cannot be given as a ground.

Mr. DRAKE: If the House is prepared to accept that ruling I shall not press the matter any further. But I would point out that in a good many cases where we have had to deal with Bills of far less importance than this an interval has been given between the second reading and committee stages. This Bill is of very great importance, and has been rushed through this evening in a most unseemly manner.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member is distinctly out of order in saying any such thing.

Mr. DRAKE: Well, I will put it this way: The time that has been occupied in the second reading of this Bill, from 4 to 10 o'clock, with a short interval—that is, about five hours—is entirely insufficient to discuss a measure of such enormous importance to the colony. As the Bill has gone through its second reading with such unusual expedition—I think I may put it that way without offending—I think it is desirable that some time should be allowed members for consideration before it is dealt with in committee, and I therefore move that the word "to-morrow" be omitted, with the view of inserting "Tuesday next."

Mr. McDONALD: I think the amendment of the hon. member for Enoggera is a very fair one. There are a number of members in the House who, like myself, would like to have a little time to consider this matter, which is of very great importance, and which ought not to be lightly dealt with. It is only fair to those who are not well up in the subject that they should have a day or two to consider their future course with regard to the Bill. There is not the slightest doubt that a large number of members expected that there would be a much longer debate than there has been on the second reading, but unfortunately the debate closed in a very hurried manner, so that they have not had the opportunity of hearing the views of more members whose opinions would probably have assisted them in the consideration of the measure. Certainly the Home Secretary told us that it was necessary to get this legislation through as quickly as possible, but I do not suppose the bank will break before Tuesday next. If the Premier tells us that the bank is in such a rotten and unsound condition that it is likely to close its doors before Tuesday, then I should be prepared to go into committee on the Bill to-morrow, but as that is not the case I should much prefer to postpone the matter till Tuesday.

Mr. BATTERSBY : On Wednesday we have always gone on with Supply, and I would ask the Premier if he intends to go on with this Bill to-morrow or take Supply, as usual? It may save a great deal of discussion if the hon. gentleman will answer that question.

Mr. KIDSTON : I voted against the second reading of the Bill, and I shall vote for the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Enoggera as a protest against hurrying through the business of the House by such sharp practice.

The SPEAKER : Order! The hon. member cannot use an expression of that kind.

Mr. KIDSTON : May I use the expression—

The SPEAKER : Order! The hon. member must withdraw the expression.

Mr. KIDSTON : If it is unparliamentary, I will withdraw it willingly, and I will ask you if it will be in order to say by such smart methods?

The SPEAKER : Order! Certainly not.

Mr. KIDSTON : If that is not in order, I will withdraw it also, and I now ask if it is in order to say that it is undesirable to carry through the business of the House by such speedy methods? I think it was disgraceful that legislation should be rushed through a deliberative Chamber by such methods.

The SPEAKER : Do I understand the hon. member to say that he thinks the action of the House is disgraceful?

Mr. KIDSTON : Yes.

The SPEAKER : Then the hon. member is distinctly out of order, and as he has infringed three times I call upon him to resume his seat.

Mr. McDONALD : I move that the hon. member be further heard.

The SPEAKER : The hon. member cannot move that.

Mr. KIDSTON : I move that I be further heard.

Question—That the hon. member for Rockhampton, Mr. Kidston, be further heard—put; and the House divided :—

AYES, 28.

Messrs. Stewart, Kidston, Fraser, Glassey, Story, Sim, McDonnell, Kerr, Cross, Browne, Curtis, Leahy, Hoolan, Jackson, Fitzgerald, Drake, W. Thorn, Battersby, King, Hardacre, Dibley, Daniels, Groom, Dunsford, Fogarty, Turley, McDonald, and Dawson.

NOES, 33.

Sir H. M. Nelson, Messrs. Tozer, Philp, Dickson, Bell, Byrnes, Dalrymple, Foxton, Lord, Stephens, Armstrong, McCord, Finney, McMaster, Newell, Chataway, Grimes, Tooth, Collins, Lissner, Bridges, Cribb, O'Connell, Smyth, Stodart, Callan, Crombie, Auneur, McGahan, Hamilton, Bartholomew, Stephenson, and Corfield.

Resolved in the negative.

Amendment put.

Mr. BROWNE rose to speak.

The SPEAKER : I think the hon. member seconded the motion.

Mr. DANIELS : I seconded the motion.

Mr. BROWNE : After the remarkable alacrity of the House in passing the second reading of this Bill, I think the request of the hon. member for Enoggera is a very reasonable one. Appeals are very often made to this House to get on with business, but a good deal of business has been done this evening, and the Treasurer might very well be satisfied. We should be allowed one or two days to decide what we are going to do with these widows and orphans, and how we can stop the widespread desolation that is fast coming over the colony. And I may also point out that there are thirteen Bills upon the paper, every one of which we have been told is very urgent, so that it would be a great mistake if we rushed this Bill through, to the detriment of all the others. There is a great deal of work to go on with, and I do not think we will get through some of the other Bills so expeditiously as we have through this.

The SPEAKER : The hon. member's remarks are not relevant to the question.

Mr. BROWNE : I was pointing out this as an argument : that there are a lot of other Bills on the paper of great importance, which, I think, preclude the necessity of going on so quickly with this measure now before us. We have passed the second reading; and hon. members should have a few days to consider what action they will take in committee. A good many members on both sides have hardly made up their minds as to what they are going to do with regard to amendments, and, as we have done good business to-day, I think the Treasurer might rest content.

Mr. GLASSEY : I think the request of the hon. member for Enoggera is a reasonable one. We have sufficient business to go on with to-morrow, and on Thursday evening there is not a great deal of time for considering such an important Bill. If the Bill is postponed till Tuesday we will have time to deal with it, and, therefore, I ask the hon. gentleman to give way. Taking into consideration what has already happened, and the fact that hon. members were prepared to speak on the second reading of the Bill to-night, the least the Government can do is to give hon. members an opportunity of expressing their views more fully next Tuesday.

Mr. CROSS : I would like to ask the Treasurer to consent to postpone the consideration of the Bill for reasons other than those which have been urged, and which are well known to the hon. gentleman. There is plenty of other business to go on with, and I would ask the hon. gentleman to allow the committal to stand over till Tuesday next.

The TREASURER : May I speak again?

The SPEAKER : The hon. member may speak to the amendment.

The TREASURER : I am sorry so much tomfoolery has taken place.

The SPEAKER : Order!

The TREASURER : I will withdraw the word at once. The matter is a very simple one. Every hon. member knows that Wednesday is devoted to Supply. We have never varied that rule during the whole session.

Mr. McDONALD : When a question of urgency arises?

The TREASURER : This is not an urgent Bill. No one ever said that it was. In the ordinary course, Supply will be the principal business to-morrow.

Mr. TURLEY : We did not take Supply last Wednesday. We had the Queensland National Bank Bill one week.

The TREASURER : I think we had Supply last Wednesday. So far as I know, I have carried out that rule during the whole session, and I believe it has been accepted by every hon. member on both sides as a convenient rule. It was moved in the ordinary course that the committal of the Bill stand an Order of the Day for to-morrow, but if hon. members had waited until I was moving the adjournment I would have stated what the business for to-morrow would be, and all this time would not have been wasted. If I had not made any announcement, any hon. member could have asked me. That is the usual course to pursue, but somehow some hon. members appear to have Queensland National Bank on the brain; they appear to think there is nothing else in existence than the Queensland National Bank. I have never said that if the Queensland National Bank went into liquidation there was going to be a universal bursting up. I hope we shall go on with our business in the ordinary way, and that hon. members will allow us to do so. Hon. members opposite have had no occasion to doubt that such would be the case. I made no intimation on the

subject, and I say now that the business will go on in its usual course, and that to-morrow the principal business will be Supply.

Mr. BROWNE: We had Supply last Wednesday.

Mr. HAMILTON: The first reading of this Bill came before the House last Wednesday, so that hon. members have had a week to consider it. Some hon. members now assert that they are not sufficiently seized with the contents of the Bill, and that they want till Tuesday next before considering it in committee; but the same hon. members have also stated that they are perfectly prepared to discuss the Bill to-night. If they are prepared to discuss the important principles of the Bill to-night, surely they do not require till Tuesday to consider mere matters of detail?

Question—That the word proposed to be omitted stand part of the question—put; and the House divided:—

AYES, 37.

Sir H. M. Nelson, Messrs. Byrnes, Philp, Foxton, Tozer, Dalrymple, Grimes, Callan, Smyth, Curtis, Leahy, Story, Lissner, Bell, Fraser, Finney, Collins, Battersby, Bridges, O'Connell, Chataway, Newell, McGahan, Crombie, Tooth, Armstrong, Corfield, Stephenson, Lord, McMaster, Cribb, Stodart, McCord, Bartholomew, Hamilton, Stephens, and Annear

NOES, 23.

Messrs. Dawson, King, Glassey, Cross, Dunsford, Kerr, McDonnell, Hardacre, Sim, Turley, Fitzgerald, Drake, McDonald, Groom, Fogarty, W. Thorn, Dibley, Hoolan, Jackson, Browne, Daniels, Kidston, and Stewart.

Resolved in the affirmative.

Question put and passed.

KABRA TO MOUNT MORGAN RAILWAY.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of a message from the Council approving of the construction of this line.

ADJOURNMENT.

The PREMIER: I move that this House do now adjourn. The business for to-morrow, after the formal business, will be the second reading of the Loan Bill, and after that Supply.

Question put and passed.

The House adjourned at twelve minutes to 11 o'clock.