

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 1897

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER, 1897.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 3 o'clock.

QUESTION.

INFLUX OF JAPANESE.

Mr. BROWNE asked the Acting Premier, without notice—

Has the attention of the Government been called to a Press report of the continued arrival of Japanese in the Northern parts of the colony, without passports, and whether anything has been done to stop them from coming?

The ACTING PREMIER replied—

I have a record of every one that has arrived since we had the discussion in the House: and the numbers are very few at present. Passports of course we ask for them in order to get their number. I had a communication with the Japanese Consul at Townsville in regard to seeing if the Japanese Government would join with this colony in endeavouring to enforce their own legislation to prevent Japanese coming here, but at present the answer is not satisfactory.

LAND BILL.

SECOND READING—RESUMPTION OF DEBATE.

Mr. McCORD: I think anyone who has had anything to do with the lands of the colony, or the Act of 1884, will at once see the necessity for a new Land Bill. Since the passing of that Act various changes have taken place in the colony. Many of our finest lands—perhaps the finest in Australia—were at that time considered to be of little or no value, owing to the want of water. Now there is an ample supply of artesian water, and it is in the power of the Minister to dispose of large areas of first-class lands for the purpose of settlement. When that Act was passed we hardly knew the value of our lands or what they were suitable for. Now we have an Agricultural College from which we can gain a great deal of information on the subject. Science has also shown us the capabilities of our lands; we know the rainfall and the climatic conditions of any particular locality, so that a man can get almost any climate he likes according to the locality he chooses. We know beyond doubt that nearly all tropical plants can be grown well in various parts of the colony; we know also that all the fruits and vegetables and other crops grown in the British Islands can be grown here with profit; therefore I say that the conditions under which this Bill is presented to the House are different from those which existed at the time the 1884 Act was passed. There are already large areas of land available, and there will shortly be a great deal more available for settlement; and I think with our advantages of soil and climate it will be an easy matter to induce people to come here from other countries. And if this Bill is passed in such a form as to encourage people to come and settle here, our population will soon be doubled. At the same time, while we are passing laws to try to encourage people to come here and settle with us, we must bear in mind that we have entered into agreements or contracts with people who are already here; and I maintain that we

must be very careful not to disturb the present holders of land. Everything that we have agreed to give the pastoral lessee or the holder of land under any tenure must be held sacred. We must not make laws now that will take away from them anything that was promised under the Act of 1884. Under that Act we promised certain conditions, and now it is proposed to take away some of those conditions. I say we should be most careful to see that any agreement that has been made is held inviolate. It is due to those who took up land in the early days, and improved them by their energy and industry—to the men who went out West, took up holdings, and afterwards proved for the benefit of the colony that they could get artesian water on those lands—that they should receive every consideration. Those men who took up grazing farms and settled on them are also entitled to every consideration. When making laws which will be an advantage to those who may hereafter come here and settle on the areas we have in hand and use them to the best advantage, we can do that without doing any violence to existing holders. The hon. gentleman who is in charge of this Bill has now a better opportunity for settling people on the land and showing to the world the advantage there is in settling in the colony than has existed previously. I compliment him on bringing in this measure, because it is a great improvement on the Bill which was introduced last session. I hold that now is the time for hon. members to criticise the Bill, so that when it gets into committee hon. members may be acquainted with any objections that may be raised with regard to it, and so that the Minister in charge of it may know the opinions of hon. members on its provisions. I take it that he was thoroughly in earnest in all that he said in introducing the measure; that he has set his heart on making it a thoroughly practical and comprehensive Bill. I have heard it said outside that this Bill, in so far as the provisions with regard to the Land Court are concerned, is unsatisfactory. Numbers of pastoralists and others who have taken up holdings under the old Act feel that under this Bill a large portion of the security they held has been done away with—that instead of having the Supreme Court to appeal to in all matters of dispute they are treated otherwise, and they look upon that—I will not say as repudiation, because that is a very hard word to use, but as a slight breach of the agreement into which they had entered. I hope the hon. gentleman in charge of the Bill will reconsider that matter. In dealing with lands which are not already leased or alienated, the Minister has, of course, a perfect right to make any laws for them that may be considered desirable, but he has no right to break any agreement that has already been made with holders of land. With the vast areas of land he has at his disposal he can satisfy almost any class of men who are desirous of settling on the land—whether on pastoral leases, grazing areas, homestead areas, or agricultural areas; and I hope that when this Bill is passed it will be so complete that we shall get men not only from England and the colder countries but also from other countries. Clause 62 is one to which I have heard a great deal of exception taken. Subsection 4 says that the rent payable for each period of seven years shall be determined by the board, provided that the annual rent for each period after the first shall not be less than the annual rent payable for the last preceding period, and shall not exceed the annual rent payable for that period by more than half the annual rent payable for that period. Now, I submit that it is a bad rule that will not work both ways, and if the board are to have power to increase the

rent by half, we should have confidence enough in them to allow them, if they think necessary, to decrease the rent by the like sum. I know of certain places in this colony where the land is not of the same value that it was ten years ago. I can give as an instance a holding of my own which used to carry a large number of stock, but lately I have actually had to go to the expense of fencing off some twelve or fifteen square miles of it on account of the zamia plant, which rendered the land useless. Is it not hard lines that the board should be given power to increase the rent of the whole of my holding while they cannot reduce it, although a considerable portion of it is of no use to myself or anyone else? I take a great deal of exception to this part of the Bill, and trust that it will be amended so that the board may decrease the rent to the extent of half if they think fit to do so. Subsection 5 says that in determining the rent regard shall be had to the quality and fitness of the land for grazing purposes, and to the number of stock which it may reasonably be expected to carry in average seasons, "after a proper and reasonable expenditure of money in ringbarking and improvements." Now, what does that mean? What is "a reasonable expenditure"? Who would care to improve his holding if he thought that by doing so his rent would be likely to be increased? No man would willingly make improvements upon his holding under these conditions, and I take exception to this part of the Bill also. I agree that regard should be had to the quality and fitness of the land for grazing purposes, and also to the number of stock which it may reasonably be expected to carry in average seasons, but the reference to a reasonable expenditure on improvements should be left out. Who is to judge as to the reasonable expenditure on improvements? It looks to me as if it gave a chance to the lawyers to come in and define the amount, and even then I question whether anyone could say what was a reasonable expenditure. One person might say that the improvements are not worth anything, while another may say they are very valuable. I trust that upon further consideration the Secretary for Lands will see the justice of so amending the Bill that it will not prevent a man from making improvements upon his holding by the fear that he will have to pay a higher rent in consequence. I was glad to hear from the replies given by the hon. gentleman to a deputation that he was in favour of allowing tenants of the Crown to pay their rent half-yearly instead of yearly. Such a provision would be a very great boon to many people, although many others might not take advantage of it. Another matter to which I would direct the attention of the hon. gentleman is the necessity for a reclassification of the land. At present our lands are not sufficiently classified. I know of one case in which a pastoral lessee is paying 1d. per acre for the whole of his holding, while the grazing farmers in the locality are only paying 4d., which is an anomaly which should not occur. I also know of cases in which the poorer class of timbered country is paying a higher rent than country where there is no timber. On some holdings, comprising some of the most favoured lands in Australia, the rent is not so high as it is on much poorer country. Anomalies of that kind ought to be rectified, and the only way that I can see to practically rectify them is to make the commissioner in each district make himself thoroughly familiar with the country and report upon it before it is offered either as a leasehold or otherwise. That is one of our greatest wants. At present one man pays 1½d. for agricultural country while another pays only 1d. for the same class of land, and men paying the higher rents cannot feel so kindly to any

land laws that permit of such anomalies. I mention that matter now so that it may be dealt with in this Bill.

Mr. LEAHY: You are speaking in reference to new settlement.

Mr. McCORD: Yes. I would not advocate either directly or indirectly breaking faith with those who hold land now. I am now speaking of lands that have not yet been dealt with, and which will have to be dealt with under this Bill when it becomes law. A great deal of fault has been found with the Government for appointing the Royal Commission on Land Settlement, but I hold that the Government made no mistake in appointing the commission. We cannot have too much knowledge in dealing with our lands, and anyone who reads some of the evidence taken by the commission, and their report, must be convinced that the commission did good work for the country in showing the capabilities of the land in places which we have not personally visited. I do not agree with all the recommendations made by the commission—the members would need to be angelic, for everyone to agree with everything they say—but I hold that they did good service. We have now arrived at a stage in dealing with the land question when we are able to say to a man, "If you go to that locality you will find it cool; the thermometer is so-and-so, and the rainfall is so much. If you like a tropical climate you can go within the tropics and grow all the luscious fruits of the West Indies; and instead of going to Ceylon and some of these places where English gentlemen I knew years ago went to grow coffee, you can come to Queensland." In paragraph 5 of the commission's report they have come to the conclusion that the conditions of settlement leave ample room for men to obtain a living from the soil. The fact that that is the opinion formed by the commission should have a beneficial effect in settling people on the land. The commission also found that there were abuses on our goldfields reserves. I see that the area of the goldfields reserve in the Rockhampton district is 1,173,000 acres, and that this vast area is occupied by grass pirates, who pay nothing for the use of the land. They merely take out miners' rights, which entitle them to graze over this area. There is nobody in charge of the reserve, and no revenue is derived from it either by the divisional board or the Government. The same thing takes place on the Clermont reserve, which has an area of 1,141,000 acres—or about 1,733 square miles. I hope hon. members will take note of this matter, and see that justice is done, because if I take up a grazing or agricultural farm it is very hard that I should have to pay rent for my land, while other men are allowed to run their herds over a vast area and pay nothing for it.

Mr. BROWNE: There is a law to compel them to pay. Why don't the Government enforce it?

Mr. McCORD: They have no officers in such localities, and they have no machinery.

Mr. KERR: What do you suggest?

Mr. McCORD: I suggest that all goldfields reserves should be placed under the control of the divisional boards, who have officers and the necessary machinery to collect some revenue from these reserves. The divisional boards have to make roads to the goldfields, and they have to attend to the sanitary conditions of the towns, and it is only right that they should derive some revenue from the land. There are so many different classes of land and there are such varieties of soil that it is difficult to make any hard-and-fast rule for dealing with all our lands; but classification is the cure for this. My sympathies are entirely with the poor farmer, who takes up an area of land, as he does in my district, who has to go to

work and root up huge trees. It is heart-breaking work. I do not mean to say that the land is poor after this is done. I believe a friable loam is better for many purposes than the rich soil on the Downs and in other places. Besides, where the roots of these big trees go down, you get air into the soil. I have seen splendid crops grown on such land, but the poor fellow who takes up such land has to spend in labour and money between £2 10s. and £5 an acre before he can make the land suitable for growing anything. In many cases it would pay the Government or landowners to give these men a portion of their holdings free on condition that they clear and make it fit for ploughing. I hope the Secretary for Lands will make it as easy as possible for men to go on to the land. Another point I would like to bring under the hon. gentleman's notice is the necessity of providing facilities for enabling people to get on to the land. It is all very well to say, "Here is a fine area you can go on to," when there are no means of getting on to the land. Proximity to a railway or other means of access to land should be taken into consideration in fixing the value of it. I can give one instance of what I mean: The lands at Nanango, which are within a short distance of Brisbane, and which there are no facilities for getting on to. How can people get on the lands unless there are means of access? The same thing holds good in regard to the Upper Burnett lands. We have land there capable of growing anything, yet we cannot get people on to it because there are no facilities for doing so. Therefore, the one thing the hon. gentleman has to consider is how he is going to get people to settle upon the land. I do not think I need detain the House at any greater length. I have referred to some of the leading features of the Bill, and in committee I hope to make some suggestions for its improvement. I shall do everything in my power to make the measure a comprehensive one, which will settle all classes upon the land. I am sure that with a good land measure there is no reason whatever why we should not double or treble our population within the next ten years. I know that every member of the House is actuated with the one desire to make our land laws as perfect as possible, and I shall give the hon. gentleman my hearty support in accomplishing that object.

Mr. GROOM: In rising to address the House on the second reading of this Bill I must claim the indulgence of hon. members, because I have only just recovered from a severe attack of influenza, and I am not altogether in the best form to speak on a matter of such importance; but as I understand that the Government are anxious that the second reading should be passed and that we shall go into committee on the Bill, I am not willing that it should go there without first expressing my opinions on one or two points in connection with it. In the first place I would like to know from the hon. gentleman in charge of the Bill whether we are to have the fiasco of last year repeated this year. The Bill introduced last year met with a very favourable reception. I think I am justified in saying, after close inquiries, on the Land Commission, that that measure met with the approval of three-fourths of the people of Queensland.

Mr. LEAHY: Not at all.

Mr. GROOM: I am in a position to form as accurate an opinion of public feeling as the hon. gentleman himself. I do not suppose he will arrogate to himself the position of dictator, and say that no one knows anything except himself. I give him credit for holding conscientious views from his own standpoint, and I trust he will give hon. members equal credit for conscientiousness. I speak now from a practical knowledge—from

close intercourse with all classes of settlers—and I say that the Bill introduced last session met with the approval of three-fourths of the people. It was because a section in that House were dissatisfied that the Bill was withdrawn. There are rumours that the same tactics will be resorted to this year to prevent the Bill becoming law. If that is so, the sooner we are made acquainted with the fact the better. I do not want to keep hon. gentlemen here listening to me for an hour if the Bill is to be withdrawn again. I sincerely hope that the course which has been indicated to me—that the Government are anxious to see this Bill pass this session, and in order that that may be done they will postpone the further consideration of the Local Government Bill—is the correct one. If that is so the Government have taken a very wise course, and the country will endorse their action. At present I cannot but think that the suggested alteration of our land laws is of infinitely greater importance to the colony and to settlement than the passage of the Local Government Bill. In considering the Land Bill I think we ought to start with this important fact in view. Unfortunately for Queensland—probably for all the Australian colonies—we are compelled to look to the land as a source of revenue. We are often referred to America, and it has been pointed out how very liberal they have been in the disposal of their land. That is perfectly true, but the American public men and the American Governments that have existed for the last century have never regarded their land as a source of revenue. Their idea has been almost to give it away for the cost of survey. Only recently I was reading President Jackson's message, in which he distinctly informed Congress that so long as they could get the cost of survey, that would satisfy the demands of the State and carry out the legitimate object of government, which was the settlement of people on the lands. Those who are acquainted with the American form of government know that immediately a man takes up land he becomes the victim of the tax collector and has to pay his quota of land tax not only towards the maintenance of the schools but for the general purposes of government. Unfortunately we have to look to the land as a source of revenue, and it seems paradoxical that while we look to it as a source of revenue we should at the same time advocate the settlement of the people on the land, and in order to effect settlement we fix an arbitrary price as the value of the land and an arbitrary sum which the selector shall spend upon improvements. As to the revenue question, the hon. member for Bulloo, in the very able speech which he delivered from his point of view, seemed to argue that the Crown was receiving its fair revenue from the pastoral lands. I must beg to differ from the hon. gentleman. I say that from an intimate knowledge of the country which I had not obtained in times past, and when I spoke somewhat at random from knowledge gained from others. My contention is that the Crown in the past has not received anything like a fair return as pastoral rent; and if we attempt now to organise a system whereby the rent will still further be diminished, then the House will have to do what the Secretary for Lands told the deputation yesterday that the Lands Commission ought to have done—that is, suggest new sources of revenue if land sales in the West are to cease.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I did not say that the Lands Commission ought to have made a suggestion.

Mr. GROOM: I read it so.

Mr. STEWART: Misreported again.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: No, I am not. I am never misreported; the other people say I am.

Mr. GROOM: Looking at the Treasurer's tables I find that the rent of runs in 1895-6 amounted to £340,836, while the amount received from the same source for 1896-7 was £327,130, a diminution of £13,000.

Mr. LEAHY: Look at the map on the wall and see the area of forfeited country. That explains it.

Mr. GROOM: A great deal has been said about that forfeited country; probably a great deal more than was necessary has been made of it.

Mr. LEAHY: It is there.

Mr. GROOM: It is, and I am very sorry to see it there; but, as the hon. member for Carpentaria reminds me, it is being used, and the Crown is receiving no revenue from it. It is estimated that the amount received from rents of runs during 1897-8 will be £330,400, an increase of £3,000 on the revenue from this source for the financial year which has just closed. If further reductions in rents are to take place—and I take it that is the tenor of the remarks of the hon. member for Bulloo—that we must go in for lower rentals for the country.

Mr. LEAHY: For the Western country.

Mr. GROOM: For the Western country, but if the proposal applies there it applies also to other portions of the country. There are portions of the country where in spots the land is magnificent, and a little way off it is as bad as any of the Western country.

Mr. LEAHY: The Western country is not bad—it is the want of rainfall.

Mr. GROOM: The want of rainfall applies equally to the other portions of the country to which I refer, as speaking from memory the rainfall in some of those places is not so large as in the Western country to which the hon. member refers. However, what I was saying was that in considering a Land Bill, however much we may desire to be liberal in offering land on reasonable terms—and no one is a stronger advocate of that than myself—still we cannot dismiss from our consideration the fact that the land is a source of revenue at present, and any attempt to diminish the revenue from this source must result in a proposal for additional taxation. Where is it to come from? From what source? Those are questions which must be considered when it is urged with ability and force—with almost irresistible force—as by the hon. member for Bulloo, that a reduction in rents should take place. We should be extremely careful in dealing with the question, and bear in mind that there are two sides to it. The hon. member for Bulloo, charged with certain duties in this House, has placed before us the views of those he represents, and it is the duty of town members to look to the people's interests on the question and ask if the colony is receiving a fair and reasonable revenue from its lands, or if the grounds made out for a reduction of rents are reasonable. My opinion is that the reductions have gone as far as they can reasonably go—that to go any further in that direction would be a positive calamity.

Mr. LEAHY: I spoke of reductions only in the extreme West and North.

Mr. GROOM: I know the parts to which the hon. gentleman referred, and I have noticed how his remarks have been taken up by the Press in different parts of the colony, and he will excuse me for saying that I am voicing not only my own opinions on the subject, but the opinions of others who have read the hon. gentleman's speech, and the conclusions they have drawn from the arguments he advanced. Of course, dealing with the Bill at this stage, it is not in accordance with parliamentary procedure to refer to the clauses *seriatim*, but to the prin-

ciples of the Bill as shadowed forth by the hon. gentleman who introduced it. The first innovation proposed in the Bill is in the constitution of the Land Court. When the Land Board was incorporated in the Act of 1884 I was not an admirer of it, and I entertained an opinion then on the subject which I had entertained for some years previously. To refresh my memory I have looked up the debates on the Land Act of 1868, introduced by Mr. E. W. Lamb, and on the Act of 1876, to note the points argued by speakers then on some of the clauses introduced in this Bill. I have always been of the opinion—and my opinion is unchanged now—that the establishment of local land boards in various districts of the colony is one of the best solutions of the difficulties of land settlement. When I visited New South Wales with my colleagues on the Land Commission and examined the Under Secretary for Lands there, I ascertained from him how well local land boards had worked in that colony, and his opinion was that their abolition at the present time would be a public calamity. I have seen the working of one of those land boards at Bourke, and I was exceedingly pleased at the way the work was conducted there. I admit that it may be argued forcibly from one point of view, that the establishment of local land boards will lead to a large increase in the cost of administration.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Hear, hear!

Mr. GROOM: But there are other things to be taken into consideration besides the cost of administration. The confidence of the public is worth some little increased cost in administration. There are thirteen local land boards in New South Wales, and the total expenditure amounts to £40,400.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Our whole expenditure is only £70,000, including the Survey Office.

Mr. GROOM: But I am not advocating thirteen land boards, or the appointment of gentlemen in charge of them at high salaries with two assessors for each division of the board's district, as they have in New South Wales. We were informed privately that the constitution of the boards there was under serious consideration with a view possibly to having only one member on each board.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Hear, hear!

Mr. GROOM: If it be possible to establish local land boards in various districts with, as chairman, a trusted public officer who would have the confidence of the Government and of this House, it would be a public advantage. It was the opinion of the authors of the Land Act of 1884, that, owing to the appointment of the Land Board as established under that Act, the rents from pastoral lands in this colony would reach a million sterling. And we know how grievously they have been disappointed. In place of a million of money it has come to something like £330,000. It was the opinion of everyone then that the lands were under-valued, and that the colony sustained injustice in consequence. That is one of the points I wish to emphasise in saying that before we attempt to introduce any amendment which may have the effect of reducing the rents of our pastoral lands, and thus hampering the Government, we should exercise extreme caution. It is evident to me from what I have seen that however anxious the Land Board may be to discharge its functions it has outlived its usefulness, and there is necessity for a change. Does it not appear absurd that two members of the Land Board should take about two or three weeks to investigate the *bona fides* or otherwise of twenty or thirty applicants at Hughenden, and then

come back to Longreach and spend about ten days investigating other claims, and during that time the whole work of the colony in respect to the Land Board was accumulating in their office in Brisbane, and nobody there to deal with it. Further than that, we found many complaints in outlying districts of grazing farmers whose applications were something like eight, ten, twelve, fifteen, or even eighteen months waiting for confirmation. There was one particular case in which two selectors took up 20,000 acres each, and entered into a contract to have a bore put down on the selection at a cost of £4,000, when it occurred to them whether they would be justified in spending the money before they had got a title. They went to the land agent at Winton and asked him to wire to Brisbane to know the cause of the delay; they also put themselves in communication with the member for the district, Mr. Corfield, but they received no answer as to the cause. In sheer despair one of them came and stated the whole case to the commissioners to see whether any redress could be got, and we suggested that he should wire the whole of the circumstances to the Minister for Lands. When we came back to Brisbane and examined the Surveyor-General, we traced the delay to the accumulated work in the Land Board office.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Was there a delay of eighteen months?

MR. GROOM: I think it was eight months. But there was evidence given of delays of six, eight, twelve, and, in one or two cases, eighteen months.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Was not that where the land was open before survey?

MR. GROOM: Yes. Perhaps I should, in justice to the parties, say that in all cases where delays arose in the confirmation papers it was when the land was selected before survey; and hence our recommendation that there should be branch survey offices in various places. Every possible facility should be given to people to get on the land immediately it has been selected, and the selector should be at liberty to take possession directly his application has been confirmed by the local land commissioner. How often were we told by men that before they could enter upon the land they must get the confirmation of the Land Board, and when they went to the lessee and said, "We want permission to put our sheep on the land we have selected," that permission was withheld; in the meantime the whole of the stock of the pastoral lessee was put on the land and the grass eaten off, and when they took possession the grass had all been consumed. If the hon. gentleman can amend such a state of affairs he is going in the right direction, and it should be the duty of this House to help him. I have already said that the Land Board has outlived its usefulness, and that a change is absolutely necessary. What that change should be the commissioners intimated in their report, and the Minister has come down with a measure which in a modified form embodies their recommendation. He amends it by the appointment of a fourth member of the Land Board, who is to be a District Court judge. My opinion is that one member of the Land Board should itinerate the Northern and one the Central districts, and another the Southern district. They should go from place to place.

MR. MURRAY: Should they not reside in the different districts?

MR. GROOM: No doubt there is a good deal to be said on that side of the question; but the evidence of Mr. Houston was that it was the object of the Department of Lands in his colony to bring the board as near as possible to the

selector, so that persons taking up land should not be put to unnecessary delay or expense; and I am of opinion that the itinerancy principle is a sound one. The hon. gentleman may have his three members of the Land Board in the way he suggests, but he has not been quite so clear as I should like in his clause as to what particular functions the individual members of the board are to discharge in the districts where they go.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is clear enough.

MR. GROOM: I am not so sure that it is. I have always strongly resisted, and always will resist what is called "government by regulations." I think this Parliament and this Chamber should decide matters in connection with land administration particularly, and that it should not be left to regulations. The Crown lands regulations in New South Wales number 335 clauses, and those regulations are made under an Act which contains only seventy-five clauses. I refer to that fact, because the duties of the local land boards, as well as the duties of the land appeal court in that colony, are defined in the regulations. In the provision in this Bill relating to the Land Court, it is left somewhat indefinite as to the duties the board have to discharge. I should prefer that this House should define what duties the members of the Land Court shall perform in the different parts of the colony which they visit. Then the appeal court could come in the way the hon. gentleman has set forth. In order that the chairman of the appeal court in New South Wales may be, "like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion," he is paid the handsome salary of £2,000 a year. I observe that the chairman of the Land Court in this colony is not to receive any higher salary than the other members of the court; whether that is a right course to adopt is for hon. members to decide. The hon. member for Bulloo called attention, and I think correctly so, to the anomalous position in which pastoral tenants will be placed who have secured their leases under the Act of 1884. As he pointed out, when the time for the reappraisal of rent arrives they will have to deal with an entirely new board or tribunal, and there is something in his argument on that point which is deserving of consideration when we go into committee. I admit that until I read the hon. member's speech the matter did not strike me with so much force, and he has done right in calling attention to it. With regard to the constitution of the court, when we get into committee perhaps we shall be able to mould it in such a manner as to meet the wishes of the hon. member, and at the same time satisfy what I believe to be the desire of the colony. I believe that the Secretary for Lands is not in favour of local land boards; but still I think there is something in the contention that such boards should be established—not thirteen, as there are in New South Wales; we should not want so many in Queensland.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You would want more with our larger area.

MR. GROOM: Neither the population nor the revenue would warrant that number, but there are certain well-defined districts where I believe that local administration would be attended with the very best results. The hon. member for Burnett called attention this afternoon, and very correctly so, to what has been done in the past with regard to settling people on land said to be agricultural land, but which has been discovered to be utterly unfitted for agriculture. Who the gentlemen were who classified that land as agricultural, and marked out those beautiful agricultural farms, as they were called, no one has been able to discover.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: "Agricultural farms" is a mere name.

Mr. GROOM: I am speaking now of what the hon. member for Burnett said with regard to the need for a proper classification of the land, and I contend that it is in the classification of land for agricultural and grazing purposes where local land administration would come in with good effect. Before passing away from the constitution of the Land Court I may say that the speech delivered by the hon. member for Bulloo the other evening was not in vain, for however much we may differ from him with regard to the reduction of pastoral rents, we must admit that in certain respects he established very good and sound reasons why this House should take seriously into consideration the position of the pastoral lessees under the Act of 1884, who will be required to submit to having their rents reappraised by a new tribunal created in 1897; and I am sure he will have the assistance of hon. members who have devoted their attention to this matter. The Secretary for Lands proposes to adopt a plan with regard to grazing farms which I think will prove a satisfactory one. I know that there are a great many persons who think that 20,000 acres is too large an area for a grazing farm, and I confess that before I entered upon my duties as a member of the Land Commission, I was one of those who held that opinion. But I have come to modify that opinion to a certain extent, for from what I have seen I am perfectly sure that there are certain districts where 20,000 acres are not more than sufficient to enable a man to make a living as a grazing farmer. There are other districts—and, as the hon. member for Burnett pointed out, this is where land classification is necessary—where 5,000 acres would probably be of more value than 40,000 acres in another locality; and there are other places where 10,000 acres would be quite sufficient. Therefore I consider that the Minister has taken a wise course in giving the Governor in Council authority, when declaring grazing farms open to selection, to pay due regard to the knowledge which they have through their officers as to the conditions of the locality with respect to railway communication, to water, to the quality of the land, and so forth, and to define in the proclamation the areas in which the land shall be available for selection. I am not one of those who would mislead the House or the country by saying that grazing farms have been a success in the past. My opinion, based on personal observation and on the evidence of the men themselves, is that the system is very much in an experimental stage yet. There was one man who admitted that he made £2,000 on his selection in one year; but how did he make it? He went to the neighbouring station, bought shorn sheep there, fattened them on his selection, and then sold them to the best advantage, repeating that proceeding until he made £2,000 in the year. Of course he had good country. But there are other men who have gone in for grazing farms, and have been remarkably unsuccessful. Two brothers took up 40,000 acres—20,000 acres each—in the district represented by the hon. member for Bulloo, on the Bulloo resumption. They stated that they took up that land in consequence of the glowing reports they had heard of the success of the pastoral tenants on Bulloo Run, but unfortunately for them they lost everything, and their selections are now, so far as they know, forfeited.

Mr. LEAHY: And they spent a great deal of capital on it.

Mr. GROOM: Yes, I believe they spent between £3,000 and £4,000.

Mr. KERR: Were they practical men?

Mr. GROOM: This young man showed that they were practical, and he said that notwithstanding the disasters which had overtaken him

if the Government would only give him 40,000 acres at a very reduced rental he would make another effort. When a man says that you can consider him the right kind of man to settle on the land. From having met the man and heard his evidence I am sure he was a practical man, and I am sure the commissioners as a body regretted the misfortunes which had overtaken him. The grazing farm system is as yet only in an experimental stage, and perhaps by-and-by as the grazing farmers increase in number there may be such competition among them for stock that they will divide their holdings into paddocks and become breeders themselves. As soon as that takes place it will be seen whether grazing farmers are likely to be a success.

Mr. MURRAY: Most of them are doing that now.

Mr. GROOM: Not most of them. I know that some of them are; but that is the opinion I formed. I believe the system to be a good one. Mr. Dutton knew perfectly well what he was about in 1884 in introducing the grazing farm system in his Land Act, but unfortunately a great many members who were in the House in 1884 did not understand the man and probably had not much knowledge of the country. I notice, however, that a good many of those who opposed the Bill in 1884 are now the holders of grazing farms, so that there can be no doubt that some of those who were opposed to the Bill had their eyes open to the value of the system and took advantage of it. I compliment the Secretary for Lands on the system he has adopted, and I hope that it will be carried out in a broad and liberal spirit. When I say that I mean this:—A selector, I think it was at Emerald, said in his evidence before the commission that out of 20,000 acres in his selection there were only 9,000 acres of good land, and that he would gladly give the remaining 11,000 acres to anyone who would take it; but that man has to pay the same rental for the 11,000 acres of indifferent land that he has to pay for the 9,000 acres of good land. There, again, comes in the necessity for classification. Every grazing farm should be classified by an expert who knows the country.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: For the last twelve months it has been so.

Mr. GROOM: I am very pleased to hear the hon. gentleman say so, but there have been grievous mistakes made in the past. My opinion is that every grazing farm should be examined and reported upon so that the selector will know exactly the class of country he is taking up. I now come to the other class of selectors. The hon. gentleman proposes to have graduated classes of homestead selectors. There is the homestead of 160 acres at £1 an acre, the homestead of 320 acres at 15s. an acre, and the 640 acre homestead at 10s. an acre. I would like the hon. gentleman to modify his opinions in this respect very greatly indeed. The first Act under which homestead selection took place was the Act of 1868.

Mr. KEOGH: There was more land taken up under that Act than under any other.

Mr. GROOM: What the hon. member says is quite true. In the four years between 1868 and 1872 there were 3,547 homestead selections taken up. In 1872 the Hon. J. Malbon Thompson introduced an amending Bill increasing the area to 320 acres, and over 1,500 selectors took advantage of that Act. Some of the very best farmers in my district and in the district of the hon. member for Cunningham took up 320 acres under the Act of 1872, which gave them not only land to cultivate but a grazing area as well. These men are to-day perfectly independent. There are many farmers in my district and in the district of the hon. member for Cambooya—I speak of Greenmount—who are able

to come into town with their cheque-books in their pockets and pay cash, getting a discount for cash. These men are some of the best colonists we have, and they have strapping families as well. What magic is there in 160 acres? Have the times altered so as to make 320 acres an unsuitable area? With the single exception, perhaps, of the Atherton district, the general consensus of opinion of the settlers in every district that the commission visited was that 160 acres was not sufficient for the altered conditions of selectors. In the Atherton district 160 acres would, from the exuberance of growth in the tropics, be of more value than 640 acres in another portion of the colony.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I know men who are making £300 a year off fifty acres.

Mr. GROOM: That is quite possible. I could take the hon. gentleman to one or two men in my district who are making £400 and £500 a year off ten acres, but that is because they go in for intense cultivation, which is not possible in the districts I refer to. For example, one gentleman gave evidence before the commission in Maryborough, on behalf of the Wide Bay Agricultural and Pastoral Association. He was a practical farmer of thirty years' standing, and he was also carrying on the business of a commission agent, and was therefore likely to be acquainted with the condition of the farmers in the district. When he was asked what was their condition, he replied, "Paupers. That is straight, isn't it?" Though such a statement, perhaps, should not be accepted as truth throughout, it was the truth from the point of view of the witness himself. Hundreds of these men have been induced to take up land as agricultural which was only fit for grazing, although it was called agricultural, and their returns from such inferior land have been so small that the holders can do no more than make a bare living. Whatever facilities may be offered to those who are induced to come here by the persuasive eloquence of the agents who are at present in England, we are bound in justice to better the condition of the men who have already taken up land, and we can increase the area which they can hold from 160 to 320 acres, and in inferior country we can even give them 640 acres. That will be a substantial benefit to them. The land will not run away, and the men are there with their families ready to take it up. Why, it is a sight in the Cambooya electorate in the early morning to see forty or fifty carts travelling along the road with their milk cans to the various creameries! That is an industry which is adapted to a large part of this country, and which deserves every encouragement. I have believed for a long time that our farmers have been growing too much horse feed, selling maize at 8d. per bushel and hay at £1 per ton, when if they established butter and cheese factories they would get 4s. per bushel for their maize, and £4 or £5 per ton for their hay. This industry has become one of the great staple industries of Victoria, and we should endeavour to put it on the same footing here, and put our grasses to a profitable use. The hon. gentleman talks about selling land at £1 an acre. I am one of those who believe that the constant alteration of the price of our land has the effect of unsettling people and reducing the value of their securities when they require to borrow. When the Special Sales of Land Act was passed, and the Government were authorised to sell land at 10s. an acre, when others had paid £2 and £3 an acre, it was argued that a blow was struck at the securities of many farmers, and they have not yet recovered from it. I am therefore not anxious that anything should be done which will have the effect of reducing the value of securities, but at the same time I say when you

take into consideration the class of land which is open for selection in the settled districts more particularly—the refuse that has been picked over and over for the last thirty years—no one can say that what is left is of the value which the hon. gentleman proposes to put upon it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Ten shillings is the minimum.

Mr. GROOM: That is for 640 acres.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: No; it need not be so. If a man gets the cream of the country he ought to be satisfied with 160 acres.

Mr. GROOM: Yes, but does he get the cream of the country? Supposing land was open for selection on the Brisbane River at the present time forty acres would be ample.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That would probably be valued at £3.

Mr. GROOM: I want to call attention to the fact that in the evidence taken at Maryborough and Bundaberg it was clearly pointed out that the best of the country has all been selected, and what is now left is all inferior land which no one will take up in 160-acre blocks. The witnesses were asked whether if the Government increased the area they thought the land would be taken up, and the answers were that every bit would be taken up. Even the gentleman who gave the lugubrious account of the 160-acre selectors being paupers admitted that if the area was increased a large additional area would be taken up. I attach importance to this, because the Canadian Government are offering every possible facility, which, perhaps, this colony cannot offer, to induce a steady flow of immigration to the Dominion, and no one can doubt the success of their efforts. There is a continuous flow of immigration to Canada at the rate of 25,000 or 30,000 people per annum, and one can very well estimate the prosperous condition of a country under such circumstances. Sir Wilfred Laurier, in his recent speeches in England, emphasised the fact that he was prepared to give 160 acres to every head of a family. The immigrants have to pay their own passages, it is true, but with the competition amongst the steamship companies the passage is not more than £2 10s. at the very outside, and they have this further advantage: that if things are not so rosy and bright as they have been pictured the people can go back again. It is not so if they come to the Australian colonies. The distance out here is very great, and if we want to attract people to this colony we must offer them special inducements to come here. I admit that our land laws are liberal. One hundred and sixty acres at 2s. 6d. in five years you cannot well improve upon, provided the land is attainable in localities where men can make a living out of it. While on this point I may mention that the hon. gentleman is in favour, I believe, of selectors who have got eighty acres adding to their selections, and making them 160 acres, with the two-mile limitation. Well, what magic is there in two miles?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I do not think I ever said I was wedded to the two miles.

Mr. GROOM: I am glad to hear the hon. gentleman say that. That relieves the provision in the Bill of one grave objection. I do not think that distance ought to be taken into account, provided the land is utilised. Now, there is another recommendation of the commission which has been ignored—namely, that youths of sixteen shall be allowed to select.

Mr. DANIELS: Why not girls?

Mr. GROOM: That is a matter for consideration. All the other colonies have adopted the age of sixteen, and I want to know why Queensland stands out for eighteen? Just let me point out what an absurdity it seems. We have sent

home to England gentlemen to induce immigrants to come to the colony. Take as an illustration a man who comes out here with two sons each over the age of eighteen. They are entitled when they come here to take up 160 acres of land. On the other hand, here is a farmer living in the colony, a man who has assisted to build up Queensland and make it what it is. He has two sons; one may be sixteen and the other seventeen, and they must stand aside and see the two strangers take up homesteads which they cannot take up.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: He might have another twelve years of age.

Mr. GROOM: Make it twelve if you like. This is what I want to refer to: You say to a youth who has attained the age of fourteen years that he must cease attending the State school; that he must go and earn his own living. Give him the two years between fourteen and sixteen to gain experience on his father's farm, and why after that experience should he not be allowed to take up a homestead for himself? I give the hon. gentleman due notice that in committee I shall endeavour to amend that clause by making the age sixteen years, and I hope he will offer no opposition to it. I hope he will agree to get into line with the other colonies, and give the native youths an opportunity to take advantage of facilities for settling on the land. I think they will take advantage of it, and I would twenty thousand times rather see them do so than have them pestering members of Parliament to get them into positions in the Police Force or as porters on the railways.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Surely they do not apply at sixteen to get into the police?

Mr. DANIELS: They apply at sixteen to get into the Railway Department as cleaners and porters.

Mr. GROOM: Anything rather than go on the land. In fact, they cannot get the land.

Mr. LEAHY: They have no funds.

Mr. GROOM: Then their fathers can provide funds for them. I hope this House, while the Bill is going through committee, will make an alteration in that respect—so that it shall no longer be a crime for a father to help his sons to settle on the land.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. GROOM: I think I have had as much experience, in years gone by, of the evils of dummyping as any member of this House, but I do not think it exists to any large extent at the present time. I admit that there is extreme competition for grazing farms at the present time, and that brings me to the next point I desire to notice in the Bill. The hon. gentleman proposes the sealed tender for the ballot. Thirteen witnesses were examined on that point by the commissioners, including Mr. Houston, the Under Secretary for Lands in New South Wales. I admit that the question of sealed tenders was not exactly put before them, but the question of auction as against ballot was, and there was a consensus of opinion against it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is quite another thing.

Mr. GROOM: It was admitted that in New South Wales the question had not been considered, and that while the ballot had been complained of it had been found difficult to suggest anything better.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They had 13,000 applications for 300 farms in New South Wales.

Mr. GROOM: That was at Cowrara. The town was literally besieged by the applicants, who for want of accommodation had to sleep in the streets. Of course, there is a good deal to be said on the question. It may be said that under

the system of sealed tenders the Crown will get a fair rent for the land. On the other hand, there is the danger that the smaller man will always be outbid. That is the fear I have. I recall what one witness, Mr. Armstrong, of Charleville, I think, said on the question. He said that by a sealed tender he might offer 4d. or 5d. per acre for land, because for special reasons he might want to get possession of it, and then when the rent of adjoining selections came to be appraised by the Land Board they would say that so-and-so had paid 5d. per acre for his land, and they would appraise the adjoining land at the same value.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Surely they would be able to discriminate?

Mr. GROOM: I give the statement of a practical selector who has got 15,000 acres of land and does not want any more. He represented an association at Charleville, and those were his words as to the danger which might accrue from the operation of the sealed tender system. The matter is one that will no doubt receive every consideration in committee. The provisions which the hon. gentleman has introduced to put down claspers may or may not be successful. I believe that residence should be a condition. If five years' residence is insisted upon as a condition for grazing farm selection there will not be so many applications in the future as there have been in the past. I do not think the speculator will appear then. I think, too, the hon. gentleman is right in providing that a person who has secured one selection should not be permitted to apply for another within a certain period. When I was at Hughenden I had a list supplied to me of the 132 applicants who there applied for farms at one court, and also a local newspaper report of a meeting held a few hours after the ballot by the disappointed applicants. The remarks made by a Mr. Bell, a Victorian, and one of the disappointed applicants, struck me as being very pertinent. He stated that he was in blissful ignorance of the working of the ballot in Queensland. He had put in one application for a farm with his own money, and he found there were several others who had put in a dozen applications for the same farm. It was understood that Richmond Downs and Cambridge Downs lands were shortly to be thrown open, and he asked what guarantee there was that if he came back from Victoria in three months he would not find the same men again in competition with him at the ballot, and even some who had been successful, but who in the meantime might have parted with their selections and be again applicants for another in competition with him?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That could not be.

Mr. GROOM: When persons have made up their minds to take up land no doubt they will succeed in doing it if they can, but the question for Parliament to decide is whether, when it is proposed to change one tenant for another, the new tenant who gets an advantage in a thirty years' lease, though his rent may be higher, shall not at least show that he is a *bond fide* settler—that he is not holding it merely for the purpose of speculation. I am convinced that in many cases pointed out to me land has been taken up entirely for speculative purposes. At Hughenden, one family that appeared on the list of selections for something like 22,000 acres were greedy enough to be included amongst the 132 applicants for land, but I am glad to say they were not successful. I think they should have been satisfied and let somebody else have a turn. I say that the larger number of people you can get into this colony the better it will be, and the more you can get of the character of Mr. Bell,

who applied for land at Hughenden, the better it will be for the colony. According to the evidence given to us, the applicants included plenty of uncles, cousins, and aunts, just as in New South Wales, not only nephews, but the sweethearts of nephews, were allowed to put in applications.

Mr. CROMBIE: Why not?

Mr. GROOM: Then *bona fide* selectors would be shut out altogether, and it is our duty to protect them and give them every assistance in settling on the land. There is another thing I should like to see in the Bill, but I do not know whether the hon. gentleman would allow it. I would like to see power given to the present holders of 1,280-acre agricultural farms to become grazing farmers. I think the hon. member for Bulloo stated that he had presented a petition on behalf of the hon. member for Warrego from sixty-three selectors, and I understood him to say that those selectors were not dissatisfied with their present tenure. The opinion given by those whom those selectors deputed to come before the commission was that they would prefer to have their selections made grazing farms, as the land was not fit for anything else. Their leader stated that agriculture at Charleville was a failure; that the men who held agricultural farms there obtained a living from being carriers and from agistment, and they thought they might very well come under the grazing clauses of the Act. I do not think there could be much objection to that. Whether the land is suited for agriculture or not is a question I cannot determine; all I can say is that I should be sorry to see any farmers who desire to make a living on their farms placed upon that land.

Mr. CROMBIE: It was gazetted as agricultural land.

Mr. GROOM: That raises the question of classification. That land ought not to have been gazetted as agricultural land, because it is fit for nothing but grazing purposes.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: "Agricultural farm" only means conditional purchase.

Mr. GROOM: I will give the case of one of those holders, and I may say that what applies to Roma applies to Charleville. Here is the owner of a 1,280-acre agricultural farm at Roma who assured the commission that his taxes alone, in addition to his rent, amounted to 1½d. per acre per annum. Asked by the hon. member for Normanby how he made that amount up, he replied—

I have to pay £1. an acre to the divisional board, and the marsupial tax is 2s. 6d. for twenty head of cattle or 100 sheep. If an agricultural farm carried 800 sheep—and that is putting it very high—the tax would be £1. Then the rabbit tax is 6s. per twenty head of cattle or 100 sheep—that is £2. Altogether the taxes come to £7, or about 1½d., and that leaves out the meat and dairy tax and the diseases in stock tax. The cost of taking up 1,280 acres and starting business is £620 at a very low estimate; and if a person has to pay interest on it and pay his rates and taxes as well, it is impossible for him to make a living. In a season like the present every farmer with 1,280 acres will go to the wall unless some relief is given in the new Land Bill.

Then he was asked whether he meant to say that a reduction in the rents would improve the position very much, and he replied—

It would improve it, but it would not go to the root of the thing, because the Crown puts a fictitious value upon the land, and no one would touch our security. I have held my selection now for sixteen years, and I am prepared to take my oath that if I went to the bank I could not get a penny on it. Then the Crown has gone back upon what it has done by reducing the price, rent, and conditions for later selectors, while the high price and rent of the original selectors have been kept up.

There is the unvarnished tale of one of those 1,280-acre men; and if the hon. gentleman can give those men relief in the direction I have intimated, or let them have, as the hon. member for Dalby suggests, 640 acres on one term and

640 acres on another, so as to give them an opportunity of retrieving themselves, he will be acting in accordance with the evidence collected by the commission. And I respectfully ask you, Sir, what was the use of gentleman going to different places taking this evidence and seeing for themselves the method in which the land laws operate and making you and the House acquainted with the result of their investigations if nothing is to be done?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Are those selectors disinterested, do you think?

Mr. GROOM: I would be very sorry to think that they would come before us with untruths on their lips.

Mr. LEAHY: Is any person absolutely disinterested?

Mr. GROOM: These men are no more interested than others who are concerned in land legislation. If I were to say that the speech delivered by the hon. member for Bulloo the other evening, eloquent as it was from his standpoint, was a very interested speech, I should very properly be called to order and be told that I was imputing improper motives to the hon. member; and if you would not impute improper motives to a member in this House in advocating his own opinions, why should you impute improper motives to the witnesses who gave evidence before the commission?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I did not impute improper motives; I simply said they were interested parties.

Mr. GROOM: The Mr. Hoskin to whom I refer was the representative of a great many others; he said he was deputed to represent four or five local bodies who had formed themselves into farming associations.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: All of whom wanted to get relief if they could; to get it whether they deserved it or not.

Mr. GROOM: They requested relief, just the same as some other selectors asked the commissioners to get them relief from the marsupial pest which eats up all the crops they put in the ground. Those selectors asked the commission to see if they could not get the Government to supply them with wire-netting on the same terms as it is supplied to landholders in the rabbit-infested districts. And surely when you find that men are not realising their expectations, if you can give them relief in some way there is no harm in doing that. I do not say that farmers should come here and say, "We have made a bad bargain, and it should be cancelled," or say that they should have relief because they have taken up certain farms in the West, and it has not paid. But at the same time we know that since 1893 there has been a remarkable depreciation in the value of landed property throughout the colony, and as these men have suffered very much it would not be an improper thing to afford them reasonable relief. One witness in the Roma district was asked whether if the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act was extended to his district it would do any good. He replied, "Yes, I think it would." Asked as to the price the land would sell for if purchased by the Government, he said he did not think it would sell for more than £1 10s. per acre. Yet the Government could not buy the land of which the witness spoke for £1 10s. an acre. It was beautiful land; you could not get it for £2 an acre. I mention that incident simply to show the remarkable depreciation which has taken place in the value of property since the crisis of 1893. Those 1,280-acre men, both at Charleville and Roma, as well as in other parts of the colony, are necessarily suffering from that depreciation, and if the hon. gentleman can introduce a clause in this Bill which will enable them to

bring their lands under the grazing farm conditions he will be giving them substantial relief, and I do not think it would cause any serious loss to the colony. At Rockhampton, which is a different district altogether, we had another illustration of the anomalies in connection with agricultural farms. A witness there stated that he was the owner of an agricultural farm for which he was paying 6d. per acre per annum rent, while the rent for a grazing farm which was separated from him by only a road was 1½d. per acre, and his land was not so good as that across the road. Then, as an hon. member reminds me, his divisional board rates would be higher than those paid by the man who was charged only 1½d. per acre rent. Such things are anomalies which should receive our consideration, and we should as far as possible assist those people whom we have invited to settle on the land and who are there now. We should help them in every way we can and endeavour to keep them there. It is as much our duty to keep those people on the land, and thus enable them to give employment to others, as it is to send special emissaries to England to induce strangers to come here, who would probably not be in the colony more than two or three weeks before they would be dissatisfied and go to other places. I shall not detain the House any longer. I promise the Minister my assistance in making, as I know it is his sincere desire to make, this Bill a really good measure that will be serviceable to the colony. If the hon. gentleman is amenable to reason he will accept suggestions from members on both sides of the House who know the requirements of the different districts of the colony, and if he does that I think there is every possibility of making this a very good and a very substantial Bill. We have had a great many Land Bills, and on the introduction of nearly every Land Bill in the early days, such for instance as those of 1860, 1868, 1876, 1884, predictions were made that young men of capital would be induced to come to the colony, and that an era of prosperity was going to ensue from the enormous accession of population on our pastoral and agricultural lands which those measures would induce, but up to the present such has not been the case. It has remained entirely with the bone and sinew of the country, with the pioneers who have made Queensland what she is to-day, to bring about a restoration of the conditions which prevailed in the colony prior to 1893. The observations of the hon. member for Bulloo deserve serious consideration, and the evidence given before the commission by selectors and others in different parts of the colony should also receive every consideration. If we give due weight to these, then with the united wisdom of members on both sides of the House we shall make this Land Bill one that will be a benefit to the colony, and one that will reflect lasting credit on the members of this Chamber.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. KERR: It is not my intention to detain the House long on this question, as I spoke fully on the matter on the second reading of the Bill which was introduced last session. With the hon. member for Drayton and Toowoomba I trust that we are not going to have a repetition of what took place last session, and that this measure will not be withdrawn, as the Land Bill of last year was, owing to pressure, which we were informed by the Press was brought to bear on the Secretary for Lands and the Government.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You know that that has been contradicted by me.

Mr. KERR: It was contradicted by the hon. gentleman certainly, but it was stated by an official paper belonging to the pastoralists that

such was the fact, and it was recorded in the minutes of their annual meeting held at Charleville. The statement has never been contradicted by the Government.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I contradicted it for the Government.

Mr. KERR: I am in accord with the hon. member for Toowoomba in wishing that the Bill will pass this session. It is of importance to the people, and I trust that the Secretary for Public Lands and the leader of the House will take notice of the remarks of the hon. member for Toowoomba and let us have the Land Bill in preference to the Local Authorities Bill. We have heard a great deal on the side of the big man. There are only two or three points that I wish to refer to. One is the system of tendering instead of balloting, or auction. Last session I opposed the auction proposals of the Land Bill, and I am also opposed to the system of sealed tenders. There is to be no maximum fixed under this Bill. Sealed tenders are to be sent in, and it is quite within the power of the man with the most money to make the highest offer for the land. When his application is approved of and he gets possession of the land, he can make his improvements and then throw up the land and ask for a reduction in his rent. If he has influence, that influence will be worked for all it is worth to get a reduction. The Secretary for Public Lands shakes his head, but we cannot close our eyes to the fact that this will be done.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: How can it be done?

Mr. KERR: He will make his improvements straight away, and after holding the land for two, three, or four years, he will ask for a reduction in his rent.

Mr. MURRAY: He will have to forfeit the land.

Mr. KERR: He has fully improved the land, and his improvements are protected to the last penny. He will bring any influence he may have to bear upon the Ministry, and there is a certainty that the matter will be taken into consideration.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Where is the certainty?

Mr. MURRAY: The poor man can compete with him again.

Mr. KERR: I thought the hon. member for Normanby had been a grazing farmer long enough to know that most men can only afford to take their small number of sheep on to their land, and they and their men erect the fences and make the other necessary improvements out of the annual returns. There are very few men with enough capital to take up 10,000 acres, 15,000 acres, or 20,000 acres, and fully improve straight away. The hon. member for Normanby says that the poor man will have another opportunity of competing with the rich man if he throws up the land; but he must not forget that the improvements that the rich man has put on the land are fully protected; and I do not know if the hon. member himself could plank down the amount of money representing the value of the improvements on a fully improved 20,000-acre grazing farm.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: He will only have to pay the value to him as the incoming tenant.

Mr. KERR: We will allow that, but the fences will be newly erected; the tanks or dams, if there are any, will be newly made, and other improvements, such as a woolshed, will all be new, and their value will usually be what they have cost. I have had communication with selectors in various portions of my electorate, and also from selectors in other portions of the colony, and with one accord they oppose the system of sealed tenders.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It will not affect them.

Mr. KERR: It does not affect them at present, because there is no land available at present, but when more land is thrown open during the second period it will affect them. Ultimately, the system of the hon. gentleman resolves itself into the ballot, because the Bill says that in the event of two or more applicants tendering the same amount, priority between the applicants shall be decided by lot. Then why should not the matter be decided in the first place by ballot, and not by tender? I am in accord with the Minister in the matter of priority in making application, but I am strongly of opinion that there ought to be a stipulation that the person who is going to reside on the land continuously for seven years should have the preference. There is no getting away from the fact that there has been a great deal of dummying in connection with grazing farms.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Principally through the ballot.

Mr. KERR: The Secretary for Lands knows very well that there are men who hold high positions who get their cousins and uncles, their aunts and their sisters-in-law to come forward and assist them, and when those persons have been put in the witness-box on their oath they have stated that the money was to be found by others if they were lucky enough to draw the land. That can easily be safeguarded against by giving priority to those who will reside personally on the land; if that provision were made we should not have anything like the number of claspers we have had in the past. We are always talking about encouraging settlement, and the cry used to be, "Go out West, young man." I think the cry now is, "Get a bicycle, young man." The cry of "Go out West and settle on the land" would be all very well if personal residence were a condition, but I am afraid the Minister does not want that. I would like also to impress upon him the necessity of throwing open the land in smaller areas, as was done in the Hughenden district. It has been said that there are certain places where a man cannot make a living off less than 20,000 acres of grazing land, but on the other hand there are many places where a man can make a living off a much smaller area. Persons might be able to afford to take up 5,000, 10,000, or even 15,000 acres where they are not in a position to take up 20,000 acres. I trust the Minister will, so long as he is in his present position, do what he can towards making the land available in smaller areas. I think it was the hon. member for Drayton and Toowoomba who stated that the grazing farms were only in their experimental stage; but I claim that they have passed out of that stage; and that was the purport of the hon. member for Normanby's interjection. I know that the first grazing farm was taken up by a very practical man, and it is not in the experimental stage. The owner has that farm highly improved; the paddocks are subdivided, he has provided water in the various paddocks, and he carries a large number of high class sheep. In the Barcoo electorate and on Nive Downs there are examples which go to prove that grazing farms are not in the experimental stage but have proved themselves a complete success. I would like also to refer to the question raised by the deputation which waited on the Minister yesterday; that is the selling of land in the Central district. The people of the Central district are alive to the fact of what has taken place in the past on the Darling Downs, and they are aware that the Minister proposes to amend the Lands Repurchase Act to enable him to still further extend the principle of buying back land. If in the face of that the Minister and the Government with which he is

connected sell lands in the Central district they will soon be brought face to face with the same difficulty which has been encountered on the Darling Downs, and the taxpayers of the colony will be asked to put their hands into their pockets and find the money to repurchase at a very much higher rate land which is now being sold at 10s. an acre. We have 10,000 acres of land thrown open on Bimerah, and as far as my knowledge goes we have nothing to show how close the railway will go to it. We have been told that the line is to go across the Thomson, and if so, it will be within a few miles of this land. We have, therefore, the Government throwing open land which may be close to railway communication, and on the other hand protesting that they desire to see close settlement. The people of the Central district are smarting under what they conceive to be a wrong and injustice. We have the experience of Wellshot, which is leased to a large company, and on which hundreds of families might be settled if it were only available. While you have a station like that, with only five miles to take wool to the railway, there are others that have to go fifty, sixty, 100, and 200 miles to a railway. The people of the Central district are getting full up of these sales of land.

Mr. LEAHY: The Minister is opposed to them, too.

Mr. KERR: I am very glad the hon. gentleman has drawn my attention to the fact, but what we want is that the Minister shall bring his influence to bear upon the Ministry with which he is connected. We have the Treasurer at present asking the Secretary for Lands to raise £75,000 per annum from the sale of land, and we say that that is a wrong policy altogether. It was the intention of the Central members to have moved an amendment on the motion for the second reading of the Bill, but we consider that would not be the proper course to adopt, because we believe the Bill is a good one, and if we can get it passed with certain amendments it will be a better law than the one we have at present. We believe it will be the means of settling people on the land and doing some good. We have no desire to wreck the Bill on the second reading, but I inform the Minister that it is the intention of the Central members to bring down an amendment in committee, and we will appeal to members on both sides to help us to do away with this selling of the lands of the colony. Some of the clauses of the Bill are felt to be stiff, and ought not to be in. In clause 142 a restriction is placed on "the servant of any such lessee preventing him selecting a grazing farm on any portion of his employer's run." Some members have taken objection to that, and have not been able to see why there should be such a restriction. They must be very unsophisticated if they do not know that a man expects a full return for the wages he pays his servant. I do not employ a man who does not give me a full return for the wages I pay him, and other members of the House are not more generous than I am. To think that the servant of the lessee should be allowed to take up land on his employers' run when we have the experience of the past to show that they took up selections as dummies, and when the conditions of selection had been fulfilled they handed over the property to their employers and they passed away. I consider the restrictions in this Bill very much needed; they do not even go as far as I should like to see them go, but I suppose, like the old woman, we must be thankful for small mercies. We heard a great deal from the hon. member for Toowoomba about the Lands Commission, but it is not my intention to deal fully with the Lands Commission here as we will have a better opportunity when we come to deal with the vote for

their salaries and expenses. But I must say that the commission caused a good deal of dissatisfaction by the manner in which they rushed through districts.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member is not in order in discussing the action of the Lands Commission on the second reading of this Bill.

Mr. KERR: I am going to show now what I have said applies to this Bill, because I contend that the commission would have got valuable information in connection with taking up the lands in certain places, and I think I am in order in referring to that. They passed through Tambo—where there is an important land office, and I understand that the land agent there had no knowledge of their coming. I will allow that the chairman of the commission sent a wire to myself, but I was not at home at the time and the wire was not opened. There were a number of persons there who would like to have given evidence as to the manner of taking up land and the land required for selection. There was a special commissioner sent out there, but I shall touch upon his visit when we come to the Estimates. It was pointed out to that travelling commissioner what lands were required to be thrown open, the manner in which they should be thrown open, and the conditions under which they should be selected. Therefore I say that when no notice is taken of the recommendations of persons living in the locality they speak about they naturally come to the conclusion that the Lands Department does not wish to make any alteration or to meet them in the way they would like to be met.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What lands were those?

Mr. KERR: Lands on Minnie Downs, and the commissioner reported also that he was asked to have lands thrown open on Lands-downe.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member's remarks are not at all relevant to the question before the House.

Mr. KERR: I shall not pursue that further. I hope this Bill is not going to be merely political fireworks. The people are anxiously looking for it, but hon. members are beginning to think that we are not going to get the Land Bill, the Local Authorities Bill, or any other Bill this session. We want at least the Minister to give some assurance that this Bill will be carried through this session, because there are people who will want to make suggestions to their members, and they are hanging back. The Bill brought in last session was shelved, and they do not know whether it will be the same with the Bill brought in this session.

Mr. STUMM: I can endorse what the hon. member who has just spoken said as to the anxiety of settlers that this Bill should pass. There is hardly a week passes that I am not asked in my district by settlers whether it is likely to become law. I wish to make a few remarks on the question of mining rights as dealt with by this measure. Last session several members pointed out that mining rights were not sufficiently protected. The Bill now before us is an exact transcript of last year's measure in that respect. I hope that does not mean that the Minister is not prepared to accept amendments dealing with that important question. I hold that it is absolutely necessary, when we settle the conditions under which the public estate is alienated, that we should guard against the creation of fresh vested interests which may block the passing of a Mining on Private Property Bill. There is not a mining constituency in the colony that has not demanded it, and the Royal Commission on mining has recommended such a Bill. The best way we can facilitate the

passing of such a measure is by providing, at all events with respect to any land that may be alienated hereafter, that not only the royal metals, gold and silver, but also coal, copper, and opals should be reserved, and that there should be the right of access to search for and work those minerals on payment of fair compensation for actual damage done. This Bill provides that those two reservations shall be made in all leases issued under it, but the moment a Crown grant is issued the reservation is cut down to the royal metals, and is silent as to the right of access to search. I think it would be a very great mistake to deal with such an important question in that incomplete way. The great difficulty New South Wales and Victoria had in passing a Mining on Private Property Bill was over the question of the right of access with the conditions under which it should be granted, and we should avoid similar troubles by laying down the basis of further legislation and making the settlement of the question in the future comparatively easy. I have no wish to pit mining against any other industry, but I say with the utmost confidence that no one can deny that mining has been of the greatest value to Queensland in attracting a class of highly valuable settlers, in opening up and developing tracts of country that would possibly to this day but for mining have remained unknown or sparsely settled, and in providing employment at good wages for large numbers of people. Beneficial as it has been in the past, I am glad to say its present prospects warrant us in believing that it will be of still greater value in the future; and consequently I contend that it would be worse than folly if we permitted the alienation of the public estate under conditions which may operate as a check hereafter to the extension of the mining industry. I would also remind the Minister that the question of the reservation of mining rights assumes additional importance from the fact that the runs in the settled district, the leases of which have expired or are about to expire, are contiguous to goldfields and mineral districts. That is the case, at all events, in the Wide Bay, Burnett, and Port Curtis districts. Those lands may not contain mineral wealth, but the possibilities are that they do, and it is best to be on the safe side and see that mining rights are clearly and definitely protected. I must also point out that the Bill is defective in another respect. It does not make it clear that mining for gold and other minerals may be carried on on reserves. In my district there must be at least 100 square miles of country practically locked up from mining because they are proclaimed timber reserves. So much for the mining question. With regard to the homestead clauses of the measure, I am glad to see the Minister has made them even more liberal than in the measure of last year, and I believe a judicious application of those clauses to the settled districts will give an immense impetus to close settlement. The defect in last year's Bill was that too large an expenditure was insisted upon on improvements in the larger areas. In this year's measure the provision is that an expenditure of £80 on improvements, whatever may be the size of the homestead, will be sufficient. And I hold that is a step in the right direction, because there is nothing gained by insisting on the selector making improvements for which he has no profitable use. The purchasing price is to be 2s. 6d. per acre, and he is to have ten years to pay; but at the end of five years he can make the land freehold on paying up the balance of the purchase money and showing that he has fulfilled the residential and improvement conditions. I question whether any other British colony offers land on easier terms. Canada has

been mentioned; but it is not clear to me that the Canadian terms are easier; and we know that Canada insists on strict cultivation conditions, which would not work in Queensland. I think it would be an act of justice, as was pointed out by the senior member for Toowoomba, that the homestead selectors under the Acts of 1876 and 1884, many of whom are the pioneers of the districts in which they are settled, should be enabled to share in the benefit of these clauses to a larger extent than the Bill allows. They are to have the privilege of selecting or acquiring a homestead contiguous to their original selection, but the area must not exceed 160 acres. In many cases, probably in most cases, there is no contiguous land available for selection; and to make this privilege of any value you should allow these men to select within a radius of ten or fifteen miles, and let them go up to 320 acres. The clause which will enable holders of existing agricultural farms to secure a reduction in the price and in the rent under certain conditions will, I believe, afford relief to a considerable number of men, and taken in conjunction with the provisions with regard to new farms and homesteads will make this a most valuable measure. There are other provisions in the Bill which I think might be improved. For instance, I can readily understand that it is desirable that people should have the privilege of appointing agents to represent them in any matter that may come before the Land Court, but I certainly do not think it is advisable that members of Parliament should be allowed to act in that capacity. Then Crown lands rangers, as well as land commissioners, land agents, and surveyors should be debarred from securing any interest in land that is thrown open for selection in their district, for the simple reason that they probably know more of the country than even the selector. I agree with the hon. member for Drayton and Toowoomba that it is advisable that the age at which a person may select should be brought down to sixteen years as recommended by the Land Commission, or, failing that, that provision should be made to enable the head of a family to select land for his children while they are at school, so as to keep the family together. As to the right of priority given in clause 94 that ought not to be allowed to be exercised in respect of any expired lease until the lapse of twelve months after the expiry of the lease, otherwise the pastoral lessee, who has the best knowledge of the country, would have an immense advantage over ordinary people. As the clause now stands, if he puts in an application to select the land, and it is thrown open, his application will have priority; and, according to my lights, that is a dangerous provision, because it gives the pastoral lessees the first pick as against the general public. Then the value of improvements up to the value of £20 might very well be determined by the land commissioner, so that in such cases people should not be compelled to wait until the Land Court came round. The mortgage clause should be supplemented by a provision to the effect that no mortgaged selection shall be forfeited for non-payment of rent until notice has been given to the mortgagee, and the clause with respect to timber and digging licenses should apply to land held under occupation license, because that is the tenure under which most of the runs in the settled districts may be held. This brings me to the question as to how the leases in the settled districts should be dealt with. It has been suggested that the pastoral lessees should be given a lease for five or ten years of such parts of their runs as the Land Court are of opinion are not likely to be required for the purposes of close settlement. It has also been suggested that the lessees should be allowed priority of selection to the extent of 20,000 acres. Neither of those sug-

gestions strikes me as satisfactory. To give a prior right of selection would be to give the pastoral runholder the right to pick out the very eyes of the country and block settlement. Then, as to the other suggestion, I do not think it is possible for any board to anticipate what the requirements of selection will be in the coastal districts for the next five or ten years. It was thought that it could be done under the Act of 1884, when leases for ten years were given to the holders of runs under the Pastoral Leases Act of 1876 for the half of their runs, and what was the result? Why, long before the ten years expired it was found that those lands which were locked up were required for the purposes of settlement. I attribute the demand for the repurchase of land on the Darling Downs in some degree to the fact that the lands in the coast districts were not available to selectors. I admit that these runholders, as old colonists, are entitled to consideration; and that you cannot expect a man to carry on a pastoral business with any degree of confidence on a yearly tenure. But we must not allow our feelings of sympathy to blind us to public requirements and induce us to lock up land. If we give these lessees an extension of lease for any portion of their land it should be on the condition under which they held their runs prior to the passing of the Act of 1884, that is under the Pastoral Leases Act of 1876. Under that Act the Crown had the right to resume any portion of the run that they thought was needed for the purposes of settlement, and the only allowance the lessee could claim was a remission of rent equal to double of that he had paid for the land. I do not know that I have much more to say, except just to make the remark that, with other speakers, I hope the Government will leave no stone unturned to have this measure passed into law this session. I firmly believe that the provisions dealing with homesteads, agricultural farms, and grazing farms will be the means of giving a great impetus to land settlement, and if in addition to that we can get rid of the fantastic socialistic idea that a population of 470,000 people, a big percentage of whom are children, is sufficient to open up, to settle, and to develop a colony like this, with its 428,000,000 acres of land, and can make up our minds to resume immigration, I believe we shall before long enter once more on the road to prosperity, and bring about a condition of things similar to that we enjoyed in the palmy days of the colony.

Mr. BOLES: The hon. member for Gympie struck a chord with which I have great sympathy when he spoke of the rights of miners to go upon land in search of minerals. Many of the privileges formerly enjoyed by this industry have been taken away, and I hope some effort will be made in committee to place those engaged in mining in a better position. That industry laid the foundation of the progress of the colony, and is still one of the most important factors in our prosperity, and it is therefore entitled to the greatest consideration. Judging by the way the industry has been treated, it would almost appear as if it had not been represented here at all. We have had several important speeches delivered on this Bill, but none more able than that delivered this afternoon by the hon. member for Toowoomba, although in some respects I do not agree with him. Land legislation is always most contentious, but at the same time it is of the utmost importance in its effect on the welfare of the colony. It claims the attention of hon. members who desire to see the settlement of our waste public lands. In the past the object of our land legislation has been the obtaining of revenue, which has been more studied than how to settle people on the land.

Mr. LEAHY: It is being done still

Mr. BOLES: I think that it is, I feel convinced that with a liberal measure and up-to-date administration we would get over a great deal of our trouble, and enter upon a period of prosperity. It would do away with the suicidal policy which has been adopted in the past of sending lecturers to the old country to induce people to come out and settle on our lands. I am of the same opinion as other hon. members—that until we get a steady flow of immigration of people who will take part in our mining operations, or will settle on the land, true prosperity will not be obtained. I believe there are hundreds of colonists with a large amount of experience in the other colonies—especially New South Wales and Victoria, where they are suffering from the effects of an obnoxious land tax—who would be most willing to come to Queensland, but the conditions here are altogether uncertain. In the first place the land laws are most imperfectly understood, and if there is one thing more than another that our Governments are famous for it is for bringing in a Land Bill every year. Every Secretary for Lands has his own views on the subject. The hon. gentleman who holds that position at the present time has been hatching this Bill for a considerable time, and he has had the advantage of the assistance of a commission—a commission which it has been stated was bribed. Although I am certainly not against this Bill, and am prepared to accept it, as it is better than nothing, I would like to see it go much further. I believe a radical change is absolutely necessary, and I also believe that if it was made much more liberal quite as much revenue would be derivable from it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What would you like to see?

Mr. BOLES: I would like to see more liberal terms. The hon. gentleman has reduced the price of agricultural land to 10s., but I would like to see it reduced as low as 7s. 6d. an acre. It does not follow that because the minimum was fixed at 7s. 6d. that that would be the amount fixed in every case. The hon. gentleman knows as well as I do that there is a very large area which is classed as unavailable, and for which people will not pay a high price. In the settled districts there are large areas where land would be taken up at a lower price—at the price that it really is worth. If the Bill becomes law, if you go to the hon. gentleman and tell him that land is not worth more than 7s. 6d. an acre, he may say he agrees with you, but he cannot go below 10s.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I can go down to 4d.

Mr. BOLES: What—for agricultural farms?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Grazing farms.

Mr. BOLES: I am speaking of what is called agricultural land, but which is not agricultural land at all. It is simply that by name, and the hon. gentleman knows a lot of it is not even second-class pastoral.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: If agricultural land is not worth 10s. an acre, it is not worth anything at all.

Mr. BOLES: This land is bringing in nothing at all, and it is not likely to. If it is leased as grazing farms it is quite possible some persons might take it up at a very low rental. I do not think from the hon. gentleman's second-reading speech that we can expect anything very great in the shape of advancement of the colony under this Bill. In the matter of administration I am certain the same difficulties will arise as we have now, and I would be just as well pleased to see the Bill knocked out in the hope of seeing a better measure brought in next year. In the matter of administration I see that Brisbane is, as it always has been, the centre of operations,

and no attention has been paid to the suggestion often made to have independent boards in each of the different districts. It is the old question again—Queensland for the South, and the South for Brisbane. Half the present evils are brought about by the administration of the law, and that will go on until we have decentralised administration. The hon. gentleman in his second-reading speech made reference to the Bill brought in two years ago by his predecessor. He said there was a considerable amount of opposition shown to that Bill because it was then proposed to extend the leases in the settled districts for another ten years, but he supposed that the principal objection had been removed by the fact that Colinton and some other run had been thrown open to selection. Therefore he presumed there would be no opposition to the remaining portion of the settled districts being re-leased for an extended period of ten years. I would ask the hon. gentleman where does he expect close settlement to take place if he renews these leases? If he does not get settlement in the settled districts, which have water carriage and railway facilities, where does he expect to get it? He said he knew that these lands would not be required for another ten years. I would ask how he knows that? Looking at the list I notice that in the settled districts we have something like 12,793 square miles of country, giving an average rental of £1 5s. 6d. per mile, and yielding £20,033 to the revenue. I may point out that even if those runs were thrown open as grazing farms, to say nothing of agricultural selection, they would yield 3d. per acre or £8 per square mile, and a great deal more revenue would be obtained than the Government now get. The hon. gentleman says he sees no harm in renewing these leases for another ten years, and yet he expects settlement to progress. The whole thing resolves itself into a question of administration, which we frequently see commented upon in the public Press. Here is an extract taken from the *Bundaberg Star*, a paper which usually supports the Government's actions, and it was copied into the *Courier* a few days ago—

The land commissioner, Mr. R. Morrisby, is in receipt of a letter from the Under Secretary of his department, advising that his recommendations that the Kolan land should be thrown open had been accepted, and instructions been issued for the land to be surveyed in 160-acre blocks, and, as soon as the surveyor had completed this, it would be thrown open to conditional and unconditional selection.

Things move at less than a snail's pace in the land office. For years this agitation for throwing open the runs in the settled districts has been going on, and the present moment there is not one actually open for selection.

In consequence of these continual delays and weary waitings, people who would settle here have to go elsewhere. There is need for some electricity in these lands officers.

Possibly that is what you might term a scandalous fact.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It is not a fact, scandalous or otherwise.

Mr. BOLES: I know that men came from the south six months ago to select on one run. They interviewed me and asked me when the land would be thrown open. I telegraphed to the department and got a very prompt reply, saying that everything was being attended to, and that the land would be thrown open shortly. These men have been waiting for six months, and it was only on Saturday week that these areas were available. The lease expired over twelve months ago and the lands have been surveyed considerably over nine months, and I suppose these people will still have to wait another month or six weeks before they can get a chance to take up the land. That is only one instance of delay of which there are many. I contend

that if the hon. gentleman wants to see settlement he will have to throw the settled districts open as soon as possible. I do not, of course, wish to see the State lose anything in the shape of revenue or to hamper the lessees in any way, but I distinctly desire to see the country settled.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Show me where there is any demand, and I will guarantee that the land will be thrown open.

MR. BOLES: I know that is the general answer that is given. You can go to the Lands Office and ask when certain land is to be thrown open and they will show you that there are so many thousand acres open already, and it seems to me that people have to take the land that is available whether it is good or bad. Then the question of price comes in. The hon. gentleman may ask 15s. or more, but he cannot take less than 10s. But, assuming that the land is not worth 10s. an acre, is it to lie idle? Three-fourths of the land in the settled districts is unavailable, and is bringing in no rental at all.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is not correct; very far from it.

MR. BOLES: I am not very far out. I got my facts from the report.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Which report?

MR. BOLES: I am speaking of the report for 1895-6, and not for this year at all, but there must be very little difference since then.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Will you quote from it?

MR. BOLES: I have not got the report here now. The hon. gentleman will admit that there is a very large quantity of land in the settled districts that is yielding no rent at all.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: No, I do not.

MR. BOLES: Not of the leased lands? Not that there is a large quantity yielding no rent at all?

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: To say that it is three-fourths is utterly absurd. I challenge you to produce the proofs. That is the straight way to put it.

MR. BOLES: I know there is a very large quantity. We will see about it in committee. There are one or two other points to which I might refer, but of course the Bill has got to be gone over again in committee, and I do not think these second-reading speeches upon it are of much use.

MR. CORFIELD: The senior member for Toowoomba referred in the very able speech he made this afternoon to a case in my district in which great delay was caused through selectors not having their occupation licenses confirmed. I can corroborate in a great measure what he said. These gentlemen applied for their selections in the early part of 1896, and one of them came to me in the early part of 1897 and mentioned the matter to me. I said I should be going down to Brisbane shortly and if he could leave it until then I would inquire into it. He said he would, but in the meantime the Lands Commission came by and he gave evidence before them. When I came to Brisbane I applied to the Land Board and they said that the delay was caused through there not being sufficient provisions made for roads in the selections. I know these gentlemen intended putting down a bore, and they have suffered great loss through the delay. They had plenty of water on the run at the time to have gone on with the work, but in the meantime the water has dried off it and they have had in a large measure to sell off their stock. With regard to the Bill, I agree with the hon. member for Bulloo that lessees, whether pastoralists or grazing farmers, being compelled to refer to a body different to that which held office at the time they made their applications

appears to be a piece of retrospective legislation that is not in accordance with justice. They might receive better terms from the new board, but it is hardly probable that such a board is going to reverse the decisions of one of its members. I do not see either why this should be the final appeal court when there is a higher court in the country. Neither do I see the necessity for the appointment of a legal member. To my mind the land laws are simply a question as to how the highest rent can be obtained, and this can be learnt not from the study of questions of law so much as by the opinions of experts. I fail to see what special qualifications a District Court judge possesses for this purpose. We now have the Supreme Court for appeals at law, and what more is required? I am pleased to see that the Minister proposes a larger area for the homestead selectors, but I would be glad if he would allow the price, as under the present Act, to stand at 2s. 6d. per acre, with personal residence of seven years instead of five years. At the same time, I do not think that temporary absence to obtain employment, with the permission of those who can examine into the *bona fides* of the selector in other ways, should be regarded as a breach of the law. To me it seems that both the legislator and the administrator have constantly tried to squeeze the maximum of revenue with the minimum of consideration for the lessee, whether grazing farmer or squatter. I must admit that some revenue should be derived from the land, but not such as will block settlement. When we compare Queensland with the State of Kansas, as referred to by Professor Shelton in his evidence before the Lands Commission, it is not clearly explained why that State should have quadrupled its population in twenty years, while Queensland has not doubled its population in the same time in spite of immigration and natural increase.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is easily explained.

MR. CORFIELD: Its proximity to a populous country may account for the increase of population in Kansas in a great measure, but in my opinion it is due very materially to the very liberal land laws of the State, which have encouraged settlement and the increase of population. The question of unavailable country is a very important matter, and unless the surveyor is able to interlock such country with country of a superior character, nobody will pay rent for it; it will consequently be a sort of "no man's land," and a nuisance to the State as well as to the lessees. With the exception of the hon. member for Lookyer, not a single member of the commission has gone outside the schedule area, and we have not been told how the far Western country with its extremely small rainfall is to be dealt with, or whether an Act dealing with scrub lands on the coast can be made to apply to the open downs in the far West. It is not a small matter, because the country referred to is of very great extent. Although it is comparatively unsettled now, it needs some attention. I know that the lessees of that country complain very bitterly that they were not given an opportunity of placing their position before the Lands Commission. I have here a letter emanating from a meeting of pastoralists in that far Western country asking me to bring the matter under the notice of the Government. The letter is addressed to me from Monkira, and bears the date 2nd September, 1897, and I do not think I can do better than read it to the House—

SIR,—The undersigned, representing twenty-eight pastoral runs in the Gregory North and South districts, urgently wish you to request the Government that before passing the Land Act before Parliament, that some capable persons be sent to Birdsville, Bedourie, Monkira, and Diamantina Lakes, to inspect, take

evidence, and report on its capabilities and value, this portion of the country requiring special legislation from the following facts, namely—

That the country is in its natural features, rainfall, and carrying capabilities altogether different from other portions of Queensland.

That this has been brought under the notice of the Government from time to time and altogether ignored.

The late Royal Commission appointed to report on the pastoral runs of the West, did not pass over any part of the country in question, and the passing of the Land Bill before the House, should it include the country out here, will perpetrate an injustice to the pioneers of the country who are already suffering from the dire effects of drought after drought.

One of the peculiarities of the country being its low rainfall. Every year since 1891 has been characterised by drought, there being only two moderate years rainfall, but being below the average of previous years.

The runs have only carried a small quantity of stock in comparison to the country over which the commission travelled and reported on. To bring this country under its provisions would be ruinous to the lessees. I would, therefore, suggest that you will urge on the Government the necessity of appointing one or two thoroughly capable persons, who would take evidence as well as inspect the country, and report to the Government before it is included in the proposed legislation. Seeing that the late commission did not come within 200 miles of the district in question, and not one of the lessees were requested to give evidence—in fact, had no opportunity of doing so, I think this request is only reasonable.

I am, &c.,

GEO. L. DEBNEY.

Chairman of the meeting of representatives of the following stations:—

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Currawilla | 15. Cluny |
| 2. Morney Plains | 16. Diamantina Lakes |
| 3. Mooraberrie | 17. Davenport Downs |
| 4. Waverney | 18. Springvale |
| 5. Eulbertie | 19. Daroo |
| 6. Palparara | 20. Coorabulka |
| 7. Sandringham | 21. The Bluff |
| 8. Mungerebar | 22. Durrie |
| 9. Breadalbane | 23. Haddon Downs |
| 10. Mooroooboola | 24. St. Albans |
| 11. Kalliduwarry | 25. Wyerod |
| 12. Dubbo Downs | 26. Monkira |
| 13. Annandale | 27. Arrabury |
| 14. Roseberth | 28. Mount Leonard. |

The above runs represented about 241,000 head of cattle on 1st January, 1897, but at the present time a large deduction must be made for losses by drought, which, in some cases, amount to 50 per cent., and daily increasing.

G.L.D.

I trust that the hon. gentleman in charge of the Bill, if he cannot see his way to do anything in that matter now, will send someone out during the recess, and next year bring in a Bill to amend the Act of 1869.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I also have a little document here which contains a great deal of information supplied by a selectors' association originally formed in Longreach, but as the Royal Commission had the opportunity of examining a great many of them personally I will not read the document, which is really a protest against many of the clauses in the Bill. The great complaint is that the Minister in drafting the Bill has not sufficiently considered the suggestions made by the commission. With regard to the constitution of the proposed Land Court, the intention of the framer of the Bill seems to have been to make it a judicial court. The Land Board under the Act of 1884 is partly ministerial and partly judicial. When the Secretary for Lands was opening the debate I interjected something in reference to this matter, and the hon. gentleman took me up very promptly about saying something I would not dare to say outside. We are not here to watch the libel laws, and take care not to say anything that would come under them if said outside; and when I say anything in this House I say it as the representative of a district, and not as an individual—libel law or no libel law. I argue that under the Act of 1884 the Land Board is not sufficiently a separate body to make it really an impartial tribunal:

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and in many instances, though the board may have said one thing, the Minister can simply say "No."

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is absolutely incorrect.

Mr. FITZGERALD: The Minister can interfere with the decision of the Land Board.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Only when he is called in on a case of disagreement.

Mr. FITZGERALD : That is one case ; and there is a clause left in this Bill which provides that after the Land Court has heard a case the Minister can step in and make them have a rehearing.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: But he cannot say what their decision is to be.

Mr. FITZGERALD: But the court have already given their decision on the evidence, and the Minister orders them to rehear it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS : Do you call that twisting them round his finger?

Mr. FITZGERALD: The Minister can do a great deal towards twisting them round his finger. It seems rather anomalous that the Minister for Lands, who occupies a political position—and that is where the trouble comes in—should be in a position to order the Land Court, which is a judicial tribunal, to rehear a case after having given their decision on the evidence. What does it mean? "I am not satisfied with your decision, otherwise I would not have sent you to rehear it." I contend that if the hon. gentleman wants to make his Bill complete and have a properly judicial tribunal, he should abolish the system of rehearing. Let the Land Court hear the question first, and then if either of the parties is not satisfied with their decision let him go to the appeal court that is created under this Bill. Why should the Minister interfere at all? The hon. gentleman must admit that he has people coming to him in his office continually and trying to pull him one way or the other, and as he cannot avoid mixing up with those people who are in the middle of the strife of life, he must more or less listen to complaints. It is on those complaints that he may order a rehearing of a case, and he is given the power to order a judicial body to take that action. Such a power was consistent with the old Act, because the Land Board was not a judicial body, but a sort of shandy-gaff. I hope that provision will be altered in this Bill. With reference to the argument of some hon. members that an appeal on questions of fact to the Supreme Court should not be done away with, I contend that the Minister is perfectly correct in not allowing an appeal to the Supreme Court except on questions of law, because as the Land Court will travel round and examine witnesses they will naturally have a far better understanding of the facts than the Supreme Court could have. In legal matters generally the Supreme Court, though they have their court of appeal, will not interfere with the findings of a jury unless they are against the weight of evidence, and that really comes back to the question of law. With respect to the matter which called forth my interjection when the Minister was moving the second reading of the Bill, I mentioned the Evesham case, which I believe occurred before the hon. gentleman held a portfolio. The land there was thrown open for selection before survey in one big block, a proceeding which is authorised by the 44th section of the Act. It was applied for by certain people, who all came from the same office. Their applications were afterwards withdrawn, and applications were then put in by another bunch of applicants, who, according to all local knowledge, were interested in the station itself, and they got the land. Then, after the land was applied for and conditionally granted, the question was

raised, possibly by the hon. gentleman himself, that the throwing open of the land to selection before survey had not received the approval or confirmation as required by the 44th section of the Act, which says that such a thing may be done subject to the approval of the Land Board. The Land Board then came along, and after the land had been practically selected, ratified a wrongful act. There is nothing in the Land Act which gives them the power to ratify a wrongful act, but they did it, and that land was selected in the way I have mentioned, though there were twenty or thirty people who would have rushed the land if they had had the chance. There is one instance where the Minister has evidently come into conflict with the Land Board.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I thought your argument was that they were in collusion with the Minister, and that the Minister could do what he liked with the Land Board.

MR. FITZGERALD: I am arguing that under the old Act the Land Board was not in such a position that it could really be an impartial body, because by the Act the board was so bound down to the Minister that it could not get away from his opinions and desires. With regard to securing the *bona fides* of applicants, the hon. gentleman stated that the present system of ballot would not, and could not, possibly prevent dummying. I have some resolutions here passed by experienced men, some of whom were political opponents of mine, which condemn the new proposal of the Minister, and express a preference for the ballot system. It is stated that—

The feeling of the meeting was decidedly averse to the tendersystem being introduced. Paragraph 23 of the commissioners' report reads, "Your commissioners disapprove of the auction and tender systems, and recommend the retention of the ballot."

On the motion of Messrs. McMASTER and PETERS, the meeting expressed its approval of the commissioners' views.

That is an expression of opinion by experienced men, and will naturally have more weight than my own opinion on the subject. As to the argument that dummying cannot be stopped by the ballot system, I submit that it can. The hon. gentleman no doubt had in his mind a great many instances which occur all over the colony where there is really rank dummying or clashing. But I would point out that means may be adopted for finding out the *bona fides* of applicants in such cases. For instance, if I had a list of the names of the applicants who applied for the land which was thrown open at Longreach on the 3rd of March, or if any townsman in Longreach were shown that list he could at once put his finger on the names of the persons who we all felt were not *bona fide* applicants, but whose application money was placed there by somebody else, and who if they drew the selections would have passed them on to somebody else. If a sort of plain-clothes bailiff or detective were sent up to obtain that information he could easily have got it, but the commissioner had not the time to go hunting round for it, and making inquiries into the *bona fides* of every applicant. Moreover, he had afterwards to sit on the bench and take evidence, and though he might have a suspicion as to the *bona fides* of an applicant, he could not act on that suspicion, but must be guided by the evidence which he had before him in black and white.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: You have used the strongest argument against the ballot which has been used yet.

MR. FITZGERALD: I am glad to bring forward a strong argument, because the more strong arguments that are advanced the more it will elucidate the matter. But I would ask the hon. gentleman how he can say that? He complains

that the ballot system is bad because at different times, when land has been thrown open, people have got it who were not *bona fide* entitled to it, and he asks how that can be stopped. One means by which the hon. gentleman could stop a great deal of it would be making more careful inquiries regarding the applicants. How do the police act when they are working up a case? Or how does any Government official act with regard to any complaint which is made to him? Anything that requires secrecy is not proclaimed to all the world, but inquiries are made and evidence is obtained. In the case to which I have referred there was no attempt to make inquiries regarding the applicants, and then, because a lot of people were successful in their applications who should not have been allowed to apply, the hon. gentleman says that the system is wrong. It is not the system that is wrong, but simply a little attention is wanted on the part of the hon. gentleman and his officers. There is another thing that wants attention, and that is the grievance in connection with the recent appeals from the decisions of the land commissioners and also from the decisions of the Land Board. A Land Act should be so simple and so complete that anyone wanting to take up land would be able to find out everything necessary for his purposes from the Act itself. People want to know in these times of a great rush after land whether a father is allowed to find money for his son. They want a definition of dummying.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: There is nothing about dummying in the Bill.

MR. FITZGERALD: I am just mentioning what people are complaining of. If the hon. gentleman would bring in a few more definitions and sections laying down what constitutes dummying, he would do a great service to the country. For instance, it has been said that if a man puts sheep on another man's selection, *prima facie* that selection must be taken to belong to the owner of the sheep. That is one definition of dummying, but people require further definition, and it would not be very hard to add a few definitions and clauses showing how far a man can go. I quite agree with the hon. gentleman that the decision given the other day in the Supreme Court is not binding in regard to every other case under appeal at the present time. Of course the law is always the same, but every case depends upon the facts connected with it. But here is a question which everyone is talking about, and regarding which many people are blaming the Government. They want to know whether they cannot give their sons who have worked for them for years money enough to give them a start in life. They want to know if that is to be called dummying.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: No. No one has ever contended that it should be.

MR. FITZGERALD: We will admit that no one has ever contended that it should be considered dummying, but there is the decision of the Supreme Court the other day. There are people who do not know the law on the point, and it would not be difficult for the hon. gentleman to add a few clauses to the Bill making it perfectly clear what people can do and what they cannot do. Then it has been a question of late as to whether a man cannot transfer, or make a valid agreement to transfer, before he gets his lease. That is a doubtful question, and these things should be put in black and white in the Bill so that these doubts would be removed. We want a few clauses following the precedents given by the Act of 1884, of which the Secretary for Lands was a supporter—at any rate he was a supporter of the party which brought it in, and he can congratulate himself upon the fact. I would ask

him if he has not altered his political views with reference to the question of the alienation of land since 1884? Some hon. members said that the principle of selling land was brought in in the Act of 1884, but the Secretary for Lands will bear me out that the sale of country lands was introduced in the amending Act of 1886 or that of 1889, and that the Act of 1884 did not allow it at all.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Quite correct.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I appeal to the hon. gentleman as an old Liberal to revert to the principle of the Act of 1884, and he will find the country is with him. At the meeting to which I have already referred a resolution was passed protesting against the sale of country lands. It is all very well for the Acting Premier to say that he believes in the sale of land because it brings in revenue. If a private individual saves money and invests it in land or in something substantial, and sells again at a satisfactory price, and three or four months afterwards all his money is gone he will regret his action. The argument with regard to the sale of land is that the price obtained is equal to a rent of 6d. an acre. It may be true that a larger return is got directly from the land than if it were rented, but indirectly the State loses by the transaction, because when the land is rented there is a larger traffic on the railways from the increased settlement. Of course the great object of the Government should be to settle people on the land, and not have them roaming about. A complaint is made that some of my constituents are nomads, and therefore not worthy of having a voice in the government of the country, and yet the Government go on selling land and give them no opportunity of settling down. And look at the way in which they sell it! A little block here, there, and everywhere, and these small blocks are all bought up by the lessees of the stations. The lessees know very well that these lands will never be worth 10s. per acre to them, and they therefore must have some motive in buying the blocks up. It is very easy to see that the purchase of these blocks gives them command over a much greater area of country.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is not so on Bimerah.

Mr. FITZGERALD: It is so on Rockwood. Look at the land already bought there along the creek! If they buy up 10,000 acres, that may give command over an additional 50,000 acres. I have entered my protest against these sales of land, and in committee I hope we may be able to have the matter remedied. I hope hon. members will endeavour to carry out the recommendation of the Royal Commission in this respect. There is one thing I mentioned last year in speaking on the Land Bill; that is, in reference to grazing homesteads. I do not think the hon. gentleman has ever been very much in favour of these small grazing homesteads, because he argues that the class of people for whom it is stated they were really intended do not get the advantage from them that they should. I can point to one instance where the Grazing Homestead Act of 1894 has led to *bonâ fide* settlement of the best class; that is at Forest Grove. That land was thrown open in 1895, and there was no rush for it on the part of the townspeople. There were no speculators who applied for it, and the land remained there for anyone to take up. Two shearers came along and took up two adjoining blocks; later on two other men took up two blocks between them; then two other families came and altogether I think there are about eight or ten *bonâ fide* settlers. These men have done the whole of their own fencing and all other necessary improvements; they have put sheep on the land, and the settle-

ment is a thoroughly thriving one. Of course they cannot make big fortunes out of 2,560 acres, but if the hon. gentleman wants to see a little real settlement he will find it there. Now, in the case of the Wellshot land, it was rushed. There were a great many applicants, and some of the townspeople took up lots which they have since had to forfeit, but by rushing the land they prevented shearers and carriers and other *bonâ fide* settlers from acquiring it. One block was thrown up by one of the townsmen and afterwards was taken up by a shearer, who is a *bonâ fide* settler and is making it his home. Really then if the Act was properly administered, these townsmen, for whom it was never intended, would not be able to prevent those who really want to settle from acquiring the land. The undesirable class, if I may call them so, would have been shifted away and room made for those for whom the Act was passed. One man took up two blocks in the names of his daughters in 1895, and from that time to this nobody has lived on them. I drew the attention of the commissioner to the fact, but he said he could do nothing. The reason I drew attention to it was that alongside of these selections there was a *bonâ fide* working man's selection, and when he was away from home a lot of sheep belonging to the other family I mention came in and eat up all his grass. When he returned he impounded the sheep, but that did not give him his grass back again. That man, I claim, was not protected as he should have been in the administration of the Act; he should not be made to suffer because his neighbours are not compelled to carry out the conditions of the Act.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What difference would it have made if those girls had lived on their selections? The sheep would have trespassed just the same. I do not know anything about the case.

Mr. FITZGERALD: If there was somebody residing there the chances of sheep trespassing would be very much less.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Greater, I should think.

Mr. FITZGERALD: That means that the selectors the hon. gentleman so much wants to see on the land are really dishonest. I do not think so. I think that with somebody residing there and somebody to look after the place the chances would be less.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Why do you not bring it before me at the office?

Mr. FITZGERALD: My reason for bringing forward the matter is not to make a complaint publicly against the department, but when on the second reading of this Bill the hon. gentleman seemed to say that the grazing homestead system was not a success, I bring forward these instances to show that it is not because the principle is bad but because it is not properly carried out. Another reason for bringing them forward is that I hope the hon. gentleman will think better of it and provide, as in the 1894 Act, for small grazing homesteads.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is provided for still. The Bill does not say that a selector cannot have 2,560 acres.

Mr. FITZGERALD: It only mentions the big selector. It deals with the matter in a general way, when, as the hon. gentleman knows, in the Act of 1894 there is special provision for small grazing homesteads with a maximum rental of 4d. an acre. There is nothing in the hon. gentleman's Bill to that effect.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: No, that is a different matter altogether; it is a question of rent.

Mr. FITZGERALD: That is where the small man, the fencer, and the carrier would come in. Where they could get for 4d. an acre land that is

worth 2d. an acre they would probably settle on it, but they cannot afford to pay 2d. an acre. With reference to priority in applications the Selectors' Association strongly object to that also, and I hope in committee that question will be satisfactorily settled. We are all pretty well decided that some Land Bill should be passed, and I hope the Secretary for Lands and his colleagues are sincere in trying to have this Bill passed. If they are I feel sure the House will give them every assistance in passing it. There are, of course, a great many matters in it to which I shall object in committee, and I hope it will there be so modified as to come very much nearer the suggestions made by the Lands Commission.

Mr. MURRAY: It is not my intention to speak at any great length on this important question, considering as I do that very little additional light can be thrown upon it. Last session it was fully discussed on the second reading of a similar Bill to this, and members had an opportunity of expressing their views on land legislation generally. Since that time a great deal of additional information has been secured, though probably the result may not be very great. The land commissioners in their travels examined no less than 161 witnesses, and almost every one of them was asked the one most pertinent question as to whether they had any suggestions to make whereby in their opinion the land laws could be improved. Hon. members have got their answers to the questions before them, and I believe it will be admitted that no really valuable or practical suggestion was made by any one of those witnesses. There was nothing startling, novel, or new suggested, and I apprehend from that that really nothing very novel could be suggested. I give the hon. gentleman who has introduced this Bill full credit for a desire to pass as liberal and comprehensive a Land Bill as it is in his power to do. I give the House the credit also of being imbued with a desire to pass one of the most liberal and comprehensive land laws that Queensland has ever had. The only difficulty in the way is that each of us views the question from his own individual standpoint, and hence we will have complexities of opinion in connection with any system of land legislation we are likely to have. There is one aspect of the question which I should like to draw attention to when we hear so much talk about the necessity and desirability of what is called close settlement. Hon. members, in considering this question, should never lose sight of the conditions prevailing in Queensland, and which to my mind practically preclude the possibility of close settlement. We have an enormous area of country, some 640,000 square miles of territory, with a population of 450,000, and I hold that close settlement is totally impracticable in Queensland under existing conditions.

Mr. TURLEY: You do not believe in close settlement.

Mr. MURRAY: I do believe in as close settlement as circumstances will allow, but to my mind the conditions existing in Queensland at the present time preclude what would in other countries be called close settlement. I hold it to be the bounden duty of this Parliament in dealing with the land laws of the country to look that question straight in the face, that the land laws framed may be suitable to the conditions prevailing in the country. I am of opinion that three-fourths or even four-fifths of the territory we possess is practically pastoral country; and for pastoral purposes I consider that 20,000 acres as a grazing farm would be close settlement under present conditions—20,000 acres of really good pastoral

land. Speaking of this aspect of the question, I contend that it is its quality and carrying capacity that should determine the area of country which a selector should be allowed to take up. I hold that in the interests of the country a selector should be given a sufficient area of country to return himself and his family a reasonable living, and a fair return for the labour expended upon it. I believe that for pastoral purposes 20,000 acres of really good land is quite little enough. Even then it should be in proximity to railways or centres of population, for I have always held that as you go further back, away from railway communication and centres of population, the area should increase and the rent diminish. That is a principle which should be constantly kept in view by the gentleman administering the land laws of this country. In travelling as a commissioner through the greater part of Queensland these facts were very forcibly impressed upon me, and I may say that with respect to country that I believe to be fairly good, but situated in the south-western districts of Queensland, and particularly about Thargomindah and Hungerford, a person desiring to go in for sheep-farming, or to take up a selection there for pastoral purposes, should not be limited to anything like 20,000 acres. I believe that if there is any possibility of a man settling on country like that as a pastoralist, he must have at least 60,000 acres to enable him to live, because we have it in evidence that it will take from ten to fifteen acres to carry a sheep.

Mr. KROGH: It depends on the rainfall.

Mr. MURRAY: It depends on various conditions. It is the conditions we have to deal with that determine the class of settlement. I believe the commission did good work, notwithstanding all that has been said against their work. They took the evidence of people settled in different parts of the colony, from Hungerford in the South to Atherton in the North; and if they had done nothing more than collect that evidence and place it in the hands of hon. members engaged in framing a Land Bill like this, their work would have been of considerable value. Previous to the commission going out, it was generally held by the people of Queensland that the land laws were about as bad as they could possibly be. Almost every witness was asked, "Is there any means by which you think the land laws could be very much improved?" and the answer was invariably "No;" so that this Bill can only be a slight improvement on the present law. But in many respects I do not regard it as so liberal as the existing law. This Bill proposes to create a new Land Court consisting of three members, one presiding in the Southern, one in the Central, and one in the Northern district, each carrying on all the business in his particular district. I wondered when the hon. member, Mr. Groom, was speaking so eulogistically on the condition of affairs in New South Wales, where there are local land boards, that he did not advocate their establishment here. That was one of the points on which I could not agree with my colleagues. I was anxious that branches of the Lands and Survey Department should be established in the Central and Northern districts, presided over by the members of the Land Board, and that in case of an appeal the whole board should meet in the locality where the appeal arose. I would also have preferred to have seen the members of the court resident in their respective districts. The conditions in the different districts vary so much that a commissioner going from Southern to Northern Queensland to settle a matter under the Act would find himself a little bit astray. I hope the Minister will see the necessity of establishing permanent branches

of the Lands Department in Central and Northern Queensland, just as branches of the Supreme Court are established there already. And if it is necessary to have a judge presiding over the Land Court there is no necessity for appointing a District Court judge, because the work could be done by the local Supreme Court judge. There is one particular in which I think a mistake has been made in the Bill. It says that the Land Court in assessing rents shall have power to increase but not to reduce. If any authority is to have power to assess rents, it is as necessary to have power to reduce as to increase. More particularly will that be evident when the first term of the grazing farms falls in. Many of them are rated at almost 3d. an acre, and alongside these farms the pastoral lessee is holding land for about 3d. per acre. The Land Court will be called upon to reassess these grazing farm rents in the near future, if not immediately, and unless they have the power to reduce rents as well as increase them these inequalities will remain.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They will remain under the present Act. This Bill will not interfere with their rights.

Mr. MURRAY: I understand that under this Bill the Land Court will not have the power to reduce rents.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is new business.

Mr. MURRAY: I assume that when the Land Court come to reassess these grazing farms in conjunction with pastoral holdings in any particular district there will be something like equality of rates charged. I see no difference in the character of the country; the land in each case is held for the common purpose of pasture, and that being so the rents of the two classes of holdings should be brought much nearer to each other than they are at present. The average rent paid by the pastoral tenants all over the colony is £1 11s. per square mile, while the average rent paid by grazing farmers for the very same class of country used for the very same purposes is about £4 6s. per square mile. That is an inequality for which I can see no justification. One thing that impressed itself upon almost every member of the Land Commission in travelling through the country was that large tracts of country were set aside and called agricultural areas, within which every person taking up land had to pay what was called the agricultural price, that is up to 3d. and 6d. per acre. I should advise the hon. gentleman in charge of the Bill to abolish the term "agricultural area" altogether.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I have done so; it is not in the Bill at all.

Mr. MURRAY: Then that will do away with all the difficulty in the matter, because I hold that even in the very best district we have got in the colony, if it is of any extent at all, you cannot class all the land as agricultural. Every selection should be valued and classified separately, and it would be a good thing for the department to appoint a special officer for that purpose. I believe that the equitable administration of the land laws as we have them at present depends more upon a thoroughly practical valuation and classification of the lands than anything else, and I hope that special attention will be given to this matter when considering the Bill in committee. For a long time I held the idea that this classification could be done in districts, that we might class the coastal districts as agricultural, and those further back as pastoral, but I find that that is totally impracticable, because the good and inferior land are so much mixed up with each other. Every selection should have its own value, and if a thoroughly practical valuation and classification

were made by a competent officer, we should have fewer complaints on this head in the future than we have had in the past.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is done systematically now.

Mr. MURRAY: I am not aware of it. There are some hon. members who think that 20,000 acres is a very large area for a grazing farm, and who desire to limit every person who wishes to utilise the land for such a purpose to 10,000 or 15,000 acres. I look upon it as a species of unfairness that a man engaged in any industry should have a limit set to his enterprise in this fashion. There is no other walk in life in which the law steps in and puts a limit to a man's enterprise. A merchant may monopolise the whole trade of a town, and no limit is put on his enterprise, but when a man goes on to the land the law steps in and says, "Up to a certain point you may go, but no further." I do not believe in setting up hard-and-fast lines in that way. I believe that an enterprising man who desires to do a little more than his neighbour should have an opportunity of doing so. Now, I come to another contentious part of the Bill, that is to the part where it is proposed to impose the condition of personal residence—to give priority to the applicant who promises to reside upon his selection. I hold that it will be practically impossible to impose the condition of personal residence. The Bill proposes that a man shall be bound for five years to reside personally on his selection. A man may genuinely intend to reside on his selection when he takes possession of the land, but if he is overtaken by disaster in the form of drought or anything of that kind, and he is compelled to borrow, he will not be able to do so, and he will have no other choice but to forfeit his land. Some hon. members seem to attach very great value to personal residence, but I do not. I believe that selections can be worked as advantageously for the State under occupation by a bailiff as under occupation by the selector himself. I know many selections that are being occupied by a bailiff now, and there is more money spent on them and more people living on them than there would be if the owners resided on them personally. There is really no virtue whatever in the cry of personal residence. Moreover, I think the object of this House in passing a new land law should be to do away with those restrictive and obnoxious conditions that have hampered the enterprise of selectors from time immemorial. The more liberty a man has in going on the land the better he will work it. To bind him down by hard-and-fast lines, and say, "You shall not be allowed to go away from that land unless you have a written certificate from a certain officer," is really penalising the man, and I hope that view of the question will be taken by hon. members. I intend to oppose the proposal with regard to personal residence, and also the provision which gives priority to the applicant who promises to live personally on his land. In such cases it would only be a promise, and promises are easily made. In their desire to get possession of land each and all would say they were prepared to live on the land, and the provision could easily be evaded, and would result in nothing but no end of false declarations.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What about forfeiture?

Mr. MURRAY: There is not the slightest fear of forfeiture. I hope the hon. gentleman will see the desirability of abolishing it, because it will be productive of no good to the country, while it will at the same time be productive of a great deal of harm to persons who desire to take up land. Another proposal in the Bill is to reduce the tenure of grazing farms from thirty

years to fourteen, twenty-one, and twenty-eight years. I hold that that is a retrograde movement. A thirty years' lease is little enough in a country like this where we are so anxious to secure settlement, and where we have so much land to settle and so few people to settle upon it. There is no danger whatever in giving a thirty years' lease. I understand the reason given for reducing the term of lease to fourteen and twenty-one years is that the land may be required for closer settlement. If there is anything in the contention that the land will be required for closer settlement, the remedy is not to reduce the term of lease but to reduce the area. Give a man a lease which will encourage him to make substantial improvements and use his land to his own advantage and with advantage to the State. Where is the man with any practical knowledge of land settlement who would begin to improve new country with only a fourteen years' lease?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I know plenty who would.

Mr. MURRAY: He would not have his improvements completed in fourteen years. I have held a grazing farm for seven years, and my improvements are not half completed yet. You will check enterprise and the development of the country by attempting to force fourteen years' leases on the people. New South Wales gives a perpetual lease. Contrast that with a fourteen years' lease. I hope that the thirty years' lease will be retained, as it is little enough in a country like this. Another troublesome aspect of the question of land settlement is that of balloting for selections. I am quite aware that the present system has led to *bonâ fide* men having great difficulty in getting land, but after thinking the whole matter over impartially I must admit that, generally speaking, the ballot is the best system that can be adopted, provided there is careful investigation.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: It has failed everywhere.

Mr. MURRAY: They retain it in New South Wales.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They are doing their best to get rid of it.

Mr. MURRAY: That must be very recently, because when the commission was in Sydney I asked the Under Secretary for Lands if they had any other system, and he said "No, we stick to the ballot."

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: They attempted to pass a Bill last session.

Mr. STORY: They had nothing better offered, but we have.

Mr. MURRAY: Does the hon. member mean to say that in New South Wales they could not discover a thing like this? What nonsense!

Mr. LEAHY: I think the sealed tender system is the best.

Mr. STORY: It will go through flying.

Mr. MURRAY: I do not think it will. It will lead to numberless complications, and will shove the poor man to one side. An important question that requires to be carefully considered at present is what is to be done with the leases in the settled districts which have expired. A great deal of the district I represent is in the settled district; the leases have expired, and the greater part of the land is very inferior. I thoroughly support the idea that when the Land Board has reported upon a particular run and, in their opinion, the land will not be required for close settlement, no great harm will be done by giving it to the present lessee for a certain term of lease. There are very large areas in the coastal districts in the neighbourhood I speak of which are not suitable for close settlement, and it is desirable to give them to the present holders on lease for a short time. Another point which I wish to call attention to

is the enormous area of land in particular districts held under the Goldfields Reserves Act. In the Rockhampton district it is a matter to which I have frequently called attention, and there is hardly ever a mail comes in that I do not receive applications from people who desire to settle upon some of these lands, but the Mines Department will not allow it. There are almost millions of acres there.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: One-tenth of the colony is either goldfields reserves or mineral leases.

Mr. MURRAY: I hope the hon. gentleman will deal with this matter in some way. I see no reason why these lands should not be held as grazing farms or under some form of lease, and subject to miners going upon them in search of gold, just the same as on pastoral leases. At present those leases are under no legal occupation, but they are covered with stock belonging to people who contribute nothing to the revenue, and who are competing unfairly with people who have to pay both rent and divisional board rates. I have no intention of delaying the House any longer. Like other hon. members, when the Bill gets into committee I have a whole volume of suggestions from my constituents to bring in, so that my constituents will have the opportunity of knowing that their suggestions have been submitted and probably rejected.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: If everybody does that, we shall not finish this year.

Mr. LEAHY: What do you propose doing with the forfeited country in the western district?

Mr. MURRAY: That is a very important question. I would propose throwing it open at a very low rental.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: What minimum?

Mr. LEAHY: That would depend on the length of lease.

Mr. MURRAY: There would be no harm in giving a fifty years' lease on the western border, because, though out there the land is not of such an inferior character, it is subject to excessive droughts, and it is also very remote from anything like railway communication, so that the cost of getting their products to market is something astounding. Moreover, a very great part of it is threatened with the rabbit invasion, which is another difficulty. Looking at it in that light, even if the land is let at a nominal rent, it would be very much better for the country. I can only hope that this debate will close to-night, and that we will get the Bill into committee. I believe all hon. members are imbued with a desire to frame a suitable and equitable land law. Of course we cannot all agree, because we view land legislation from our own individual standpoints, but however much we differ in regard to detail we all desire to frame the most suitable land laws, and those which will do most good to the colony.

Mr. BELL: The hon. member for Port Curtis made a remark a few hours ago which seemed to me very true. He said that on the second reading of a Land Bill a great deal of time was wasted, and he would reserve any energy he was going to expend upon the Bill until it got into committee. That, which sounds rather like a truism, is a remark which I appreciate. We have not seen a greater exhibition of waste of time in this House than has taken place on the second reading of this Bill.

Mr. SIM: Are you adding to the waste?

Mr. BELL: When the hon. member talks about waste of time, he should remember that "those who live in glass houses should not throw stones." If the hon. member had waited he would have heard me explain why I got on my legs this evening; because as a member of the Land Commission it seems to me proper that I

should rise and refute some arguments which have been used, if the hon. member will forgive me for doing so.

Mr. SIM: You were reflecting upon an absent member; the hon. member for Port Curtis.

Mr. BELL: I really cannot understand the hon. member. I was referring in commendatory terms to the hon. member; I remarked that what he said was perfectly true. The details of criticism I am going to make upon this measure I shall reserve for the committee stage. That is the crisis of the Bill—the period of its existence when the most practical work can be done; and what I intend to say now will certainly be brief, and will deal generally with some broad references. It has been the custom in Queensland apparently, during every eight or ten years, to bring in a land measure which, if it is not absolutely a radical change, is at all events a pretty liberal recasting of the existing law; and the hon. gentleman, in bringing in this Bill, has only been following the example of those who have gone before him. This measure, unlike any of those which have been brought in previously, has accompanying it a document which is really an inquiry carried on by a body of men of whom I shall say this: That whatever their personal merits or demerits, they endeavoured to carry out their duty energetically and unselfishly, and certainly they have placed before members a document of which I may say there is no other document in existence which contains so much practical and first-hand evidence regarding the conditions of land settlement in Queensland. If hon. members do not choose to take advantage of that document, if on the other hand they examine it more or less cursorily, getting up and deriding it, and casting contumely on those who compiled it, the fault does not rest with the compilers, and we challenge those who can find fault with and refute its contents. The Secretary for Lands made a reference to it which I think was not quite correct. He said to a certain extent—I think he intended to convey to a considerable extent—the evidence comprised within that document was the evidence of grievance-mongers.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I don't think I used that expression.

Mr. BELL: Those who had a personal grievance against the department. On that point I wish to say that we, as a commission, were very careful as to the way in which we sifted out our witnesses. On two or three occasions we had men before us who obviously were animated by some personal grievance against the department, but they were entirely exceptional, and we made a point of only obtaining those witnesses whose evidence we knew was expressive of the general feeling of the class to which they belonged. That is why I venture to lay stress on the value of the document—that it is compiled from the evidence of practical men, men who were not singing their own song or trumpeting their own grievances. Now, an hon. member who, I will give him credit—it is not a great compliment—of having made the severest attack upon this Bill during its second reading—a deliverance I was unfortunate enough not to hear—the hon. member for Bulloo, asked this House what demand there was for this Bill—whether the country had asked for it, or whether it was not really, I presume he meant, an irresponsible ebullition on the part of the Lands Department? I find it difficult to believe that any hon. member who is not unacquainted with the conditions of this colony could get up in cold blood and ask that question. If any hon. member goes into the coastal or interior districts he will find that there is a vociferous demand for a Land Bill—not a land

measure which will absolutely recast the whole of the land law conditions of the colony, for on that point the commission established the fact that generally speaking the land laws gave satisfaction, but for a measure which will bring about needed reforms in the present legislation. Those of us who remember the general disappointment which was expressed on the withdrawal of the Land Bill last year know full well that such a demand exists, and we know that if anything happens to this Bill there will be a greater disappointment prevalent in the country. I was glad, therefore, to hear the hon. gentleman at present at the head of the Government intimate by means of an interjection that the Government intend to put this Bill through. No Government can afford to bring in a crucial measure like a Land Bill two sessions running only to see it withdrawn. It has been charged that this Bill has in fact almost studiously and contemptuously avoided any reference to the recommendations of the commission. I give that a denial. I say that in the Bill placed before us most of the principles laid down by the commission, for example, in regard to extending the area of the homesteaders—that class who on the coast is the most important type of settler we have got. That settler has been demanding an increase of his area, and the judgment of any man who can be looked upon as impartial and competent to form an opinion will be that in his case the hon. gentleman in this measure has pretty well followed the views the Land Commission has given him.

Mr. DANIELS: They have been given in this House over and over again.

Mr. BELL: I suppose that the hon. member is hinting that he has himself in previous sessions offered observations and criticisms on the point. No doubt he has, and no doubt they were very valuable ones, but unfortunately he is in the position of many others of us—his has been “a voice crying in the wilderness.” It is the penalty of obscurity, and doubtless the time will come when the hon. member will get up and make utterances which will be immediately followed by the legislation which should deservedly wait upon them. I hope that the hon. member, Mr. Turley, who in a truculent and triumphant tone of voice said that the Lands Commissioners' report had been disregarded, will do me the honour of listening to me while I point out where the Land Bill has followed the commissioners' report. I say that in respect to the homestead selection form of settlement—the most important existing on the eastern seaboard, and for a considerable distance inland, and as far North as Cooktown—the Bill adopts very largely the recommendations contained in the report. Then in connection with grazing farm settlement—which, with the homestead, form the two most valuable methods for settling people on the land we have in operation to-day—whether by fortuitous circumstance or deliberate adoption—this Bill contains under the grazing farm provisions most of the suggestions which the Land Commission made, whether in regard to the most important point of compulsory residence—the Minister has not gone in that matter as far as I wished he would go, or as far as I shall certainly propose in committee that he shall go, but he has gone a considerable distance and has made an important and valuable change in the system of grazing farm settlement in proposing that priority shall be given to residence—whether it be in the matter of increasing the area in certain districts, or in altering the tenure under certain conditions, or in the other important matter of the alteration in the constitution of the Land Board, the hon. gentleman has largely followed the advice we offered in the Land Commission's

report. As regards the residue of the recommendations we made, they are departmental and administrative, many of which the hon. gentleman will admit he is disposed to adopt.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Hear, hear!

MR. BELL: If you stand face to face with the connection that exists between the Land Commission's report and this Bill—whether fortuitous or deliberate—I say the connection exists, and no man in this House who is able to divest himself of personal or party bias will deny that when a Land Bill comes up backed up by a document such as that report it has at all events received some stability and some recommendation. In regard to the commission itself as you, Sir, have more than once suggested to other speakers, I should not go into the discussion on it now, but when it is being discussed I hope I shall be able to offer some observations upon any criticisms which may be directed against it whether those criticisms are delivered with all the recklessness of party bias or with all the bitterness of disappointed personal ambition. For the present the report speaks for itself, and it finds a satisfactory reflex in this Bill. I shall have several amendments to propose when we get into committee, and I shall reserve the observations I may have to make in detail upon them until then. All I can say is that the more I look at the Land Bill the more I, as a member of the Royal Commission, see there was nothing in the action we took to make us ashamed of ourselves.

MR. SIM: The hon. member for Dalby is remarkable for his culture and courtesy, at the same time he always, to my mind, appears to adopt an air of conscious superiority which leads him at times to address humbler members of the House in the, to use a familiar French expression, *de-haut en-bas* style. An hon. member has referred to the waste of time, and were it on a question of mineral leases, or leases on goldfields, I might have something to say that would be worth listening to, but I know comparatively little of this question, and I have listened with exceeding pleasure and profit to the hon. member for Dalby and the hon. member for Toowoomba on the subject. The hon. member for Dalby sings psalms of praise to the Lands Commission, though I have not heard one member of the House attack the commission. It has now rested from its labours, and no doubt its works will follow it; and it is suggested by the hon. member for Dalby that they are to be found in this Bill. I point out, however, that the commission have forgotten one part of the colony in the extreme North and North-west. That part will have to pay its share of taxation and its share of the bill which the commission has presented, though that commission proceeded only so far North as Atherton and has forgotten the existence of other portions of the colony as fertile and as capable of settlement as any lands within the boundaries of the Australian continent. I make no complaint about this. I have pointed out to the Secretary for Lands this neglect on the part of the Royal Commission in regard to the lands on the Gulf and in the Flinders districts, and he has promised me that that matter shall be rectified by the appointment of some responsible officer to report upon that country. I am perfectly satisfied with that promise, and shall raise no grievance in regard to the omission of the Royal Commission. But there is one thing I should like to point out, taking my cue from the hon. member for Dalby, who said that his was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. That is my position so far as my electorate is concerned; but I may add to the quotation and ask the Government to "prepare the way." I would ask them to devise some means of settling upon these

magnificent lands some of the population which is now coming into this colony, not only from the sister colonies but from the old world also. As I have said before, it is to some extent necessary that steps should be taken by the Government to place the resources of this portion of the colony before the world, because such country as that in the vicinity of the Gregory River will raise anything that can be found in any other part of Australia. But the whole of that territory supports, comparatively speaking, scarcely a hoof; there is no settlement or attempt to promote it. I sincerely trust that as this Bill is not drawn upon lines that will tend to settle that country, hon. members will assist me in committee to endeavour to make some slight alterations which will have the effect I wish. I believe I shall be in order in referring to the fact that there is no provision in the Bill for assisting those who may settle on the Northern lands in the matter of obtaining artesian water or providing a supply by means of irrigation. I think the Minister has promised that a Bill will be introduced having for its object the promotion of these works in these and other districts. But I notice that provision is made in this Bill for dealing with scrub lands, which may be obtained at a peppercorn rent for twenty years, and I think that when men go to the extreme Northern parts of the colony, subject themselves to the unpleasantness of a tropical life, and take up waterless lands, some concessions should be made to them also. There are areas of country there which are capable of carrying millions of sheep which are not used at all now, owing to their waterless condition, and that is a matter that the Lands Department should take into consideration. It should not be left in the hands of the Hydraulic Department. If the Secretary for Lands carries out the promise he has made he will earn the gratitude of the people in the far North. This Bill is a measure that the whole House is interested in, and it should not be made a contentious matter. When it gets into committee I shall endeavour to promote its passage in as speedy and as efficient a manner as I can.

MR. W. THORN: I do not wish to delay the passage of the Bill, but would like to congratulate the hon. member for Toowoomba upon the able and eloquent speech he made. It has given me the greatest pleasure to listen to him and other members of the commission, and I was also glad to hear the Secretary for Lands sanctioning a few of their observations. I am not going to fight for the large landholders in the unsettled districts, who have champions enough on the other side, but I think this Land Bill is a step in the right direction, and, to use the words of the Secretary for Lands, I hope it will not have to be introduced a third time. To my mind the land is the whole and sole wealth of the colony. The land we shall always have, but we do not know when we are going to get the gold. I should first like to refer to the system of tendering that is proposed to be adopted. I strongly object to that, although I know that the Minister imagines that he will obtain a larger revenue by that means, because I think that there will be a terrible lot of corruption about it. A man cannot be both a buyer and a seller. No doubt our present system has been abused, and I will give the Secretary for Lands credit for having tried to stop the abuses; but he now proposes to introduce a system which will not give the poor man a chance to get an acre of land in the colony. I can quote an instance in which a man who applied for a piece of land managed to get the priority, but had the principle of sealed tender been in force, the holder of the occupation license would have got the land,

although he would have had to pay double for it. It was stated, I think by the hon. member for Burnett, that the large runholders in the West were paying more for their land than the grazing farmer; but I totally deny that. The large landholders are paying £2 10s. a square mile; the grazing farmer pays £3 15s. a square mile. I am pleased to notice in the Royal Commission report that they are in favour of reducing the age at which youths can select land, and I would allow the ladies of the colony to do likewise. When the Minister was moving the second reading he talked about letting people have scrub areas on clearing conditions, and I interjected that it would cost £3 or £4 to clear. The hon. gentleman interjected that I was not up to the time and that people from Victoria or elsewhere would clear that scrub at a great deal less.

Mr. LEAHY : What kind of scrub?

Mr. W. THORN : That is where the point comes in. You could not clear land of brigalow and make it fit to cultivate for less than £3 an acre; and even then it would not be fit for anything. In my electorate and in the electorate of the Secretary for Lands, I believe, there is a noxious weed that will be one of the greatest plagues the colony ever saw, and that is the prickly-pear. I have noticed during the last seventeen years that it is becoming a curse to Queensland. The hon. gentleman said that "If the hon. member and his constituents discover a cheap method of exterminating prickly-pear they will have a chance of taking advantage of this provision." I say it is the province of the Government to do that; it is not for any private individual to do it without being paid, especially if it is on Crown lands. In the electorate of Aubigny within the last six months the hon. gentleman has had the expired lease of Emu Creek thrown open, and between 14,000 and 15,000 acres have been selected. The whole of the available country fit for agricultural purposes has been taken up; and the remainder, between 15,000 and 20,000 acres, is still lying idle. What are the Government going to do with that? They will have to reduce the price or the land will lie there years and years without returning anything to the revenue. This land is fifty or sixty miles from Toowoomba and without any railway or roads. Last year there was a sum of £800 on the Estimates for opening roads in farming centres. This year that vote—

The SPEAKER : Order! The hon. member is now wandering from the question.

Mr. W. THORN : I would like to see a part of the revenue derived from this land, especially in farming centres, placed to the credit of divisional boards on the differential principle, to make roads to these farming centres. I am not going to detain the House longer. I hope that when we get into committee we shall turn out a measure on a basis fair to everybody, and that it will be regarded as a good land law for many a day to come. I shall support the second reading.

Mr. FOGARTY : I must commence by tendering my congratulations to the Secretary for Lands on the able, lucid, and exhaustive speech in which he moved the second reading. On the face of it the Bill is a liberal measure; but on examining it I do not see any liberality about increasing the area of inferior land which a man may require and not increasing the area of good land a man may hold. If the area of good land were increased it would give a great impetus to permanent settlement, just as my colleague pointed out that the Act of 1872 was the means of settling on the Downs a class of people who are very prosperous by increasing the area of the holdings from 160 to 320 acres. I trust, therefore, that the Minister will see his way to increase the acreage of good land, and not confine the privilege to second or third-class land. It is

true that different Acts are consolidated in this measure; but I think it would have been much better to have divided the measure into two different Bills. I am opposed to the tender system provided for in the Bill, because it will be the means of depriving the poor selector of the ghost of a chance of securing a valuable piece of land, though he would be more likely than the man of means to turn it to its proper use. I hope that that proposal will be eliminated from the Bill, as it is not in the direction of assisting *bond fide* settlement, but quite the reverse. I think that local land boards should be established in different parts of the colony, as it is utterly impossible for the members of the present Land Board to visit the various centres. If a judicious selection were made of persons residing in different neighbourhoods to act on local land boards, such a system would be found to work better than the one proposed in the Bill. The effort here made to deal with scrub lands is a very laudable one, but I do not think the provisions are sufficiently liberal. I know that it is proposed that only a peppercorn rent shall be charged for such lands, but I would advocate giving them away in fee-simple on the condition that they are cleared of scrub and brush, and that a certain area is cultivated within a specified time. By that means we should probably get those lands cleared, and the value of our public estate would be increased, whereas now the scrub is extending every year to the detriment of our estates. A good deal of friction has occurred between the Lands Department and various selectors in connection with the delay that has taken place in granting applications for land. The reason very often assigned by the department for that delay is that they are short of surveyors and are not able to meet the demands made upon them. I contend that before land is thrown open for selection it should be surveyed. If that were done, no delay need take place. I would further advocate that lithographs, showing the roads through lands thrown open to selection, should be submitted to the local authority in the district, and that the same thing should be done in connection with the lands sold under the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act. I know that surveyors employed by the Government have caused considerable expense to local authorities by the manner in which roads have been surveyed, and this has been particularly the case in connection with land in the neighbourhood of Westbrook. I am quite in accord with those members who advocate the reduction of the age at which a person may select from eighteen to sixteen years, and I think the maidens of the colony should have an opportunity of acquiring land. The sooner the reduction in age is effected the better for the colony. There is nothing new in the proposal. It is the law in the mother colony, in Victoria, and in other portions of Australia, and we might very well follow their example. I notice that the Minister intends to place the grazing homestead selector in exactly the same position as the grazing farmer as far as rental and area are concerned. I understood that when the special Act was passed making provision for grazing homesteads, it was for the expressed purpose of settling the floating population on the land, and that for that reason the extremely small rental of 3d. per acre was charged. But if those who select to the extent of 2,560 acres are placed on the same footing as the grazing farmer it is quite possible, and even probable, that the 3d. per acre rent will be increased to 2d. per acre, which is a very considerable increase. For that reason I do not think the grazing homesteader and the grazing farmer should be placed on the same footing. I notice that it is not proposed in this Bill to repeal the Special Sales of Land Act. I think

it should be repealed. We are parting with our estate at considerably less than its value, and if we continue that practice we shall in the course of time find ourselves in the position with respect to other parts of the colony that we are in to-day, where it has been found necessary to repurchase land for settlement. The people in those places will make as forcible demand for the repurchase of the lands that are now being sold as the people are now doing for the repurchase of land on the Darling Downs. We should therefore be very careful in disposing of our large public estate. I observe that it is not proposed to extend the time within which grazing homesteaders and grazing farmers are required to fence. At present they have to fence within three years, and that time might very well be extended. If a man's capital is limited, and he is not compelled to fence within three years, he will be able to use his money in the purchase of stock, the return from which in four, five, or six years would enable him to fence. I am thoroughly in accord with those who advocate that residence should be compulsory. The Minister makes a certain concession in this direction by providing that those who reside continuously on the land shall have priority, but that does not go far enough. Residence should be compulsory; that is the only way of getting permanent settlement. One member of the Land Commission stated that no reduction should take place in the tenure of grazing farms. Twenty-five years' tenure is ample in a young country like this, where the changes are so great and so sudden, and if any amendment is moved in the direction of limiting the period to that term I shall gladly support it. The great evil in connection with all our Land Acts is that they have not provided for a proper classification of the land, and we should endeavour to remove that evil. If land is fit for agricultural settlement and within easy access of a market, then by all means place a reasonable price on it; but if it is only fit for grazing, reduce the price. I hope the Minister will insist that in future all lands shall be properly classified. It may be a fad of mine, but I have no hesitation in saying that the Secretary for Lands is not sufficiently liberal in the amount allowed for ring-barking. I received a letter this afternoon from an ex-member of this House, in which he complains of the small amount that is allowed—namely, 2s. 6d. an acre.

The SPEAKER: Order! It is out of place to discuss that question now. The hon. member can do so in committee.

Mr. FOGARTY: With regard to compensation for improvements, it is possible that the holder of first-class land may improve it so highly that it would not pay anyone to take it over at the termination of his lease, and I therefore think that a lessee should receive no compensation for any improvements above a certain value. It is true there is an enormous area of land open for selection at the present time, but it is not good land. If anything like fair land is thrown open the demand considerably exceeds the supply, and hence the number of people who apply for particular blocks. If more good land was thrown open, we would not have this great rush for special blocks, the Government would derive an increased territorial revenue, and at the same time there would be an increased amount of settlement. I was pleased to find from the speech of the hon. member for Dalby that the Government have accepted a number of the valuable suggestions made by the Lands Commission. I believe that the commission did its work ably and well, and I am sorry that the whole of its recommendations were not accepted by the Secretary for Lands. A matter which the Secretary for Lands mentioned in his

second-reading speech was the renewal of the expired leases. I am totally opposed to any renewal. I would prefer to see 100 people settled on a tract of land than have it held by one person. These leases should be thrown open for close settlement, and I trust the House will not agree to any renewals. Even if there is no immediate demand for the land, a demand will arise, and the land will be available, which it would not be if it was locked up for a number of years. I have expressed my views as briefly as I possibly could, and I reserve to myself the right to give expression to any opinions I may hold in committee, or to support any valuable suggestion, no matter from which side of the House it may emanate. I shall certainly vote for the second reading of the Bill, if a division is called for.

Mr. BATTERSBY: The hon. member said a great deal, but he said nothing after all but this one thing—that the Bill ought to be cut in two. I would suggest that it should be cut in four, so as to deal separately with the squatters, with the grazing farmers, with the agricultural farmers, and with the agricultural homesteaders. The hon. gentleman in charge of the Bill would do well to accept this suggestion, because by the time the Bill gets through committee he will not recognise it as the same Bill. All four classes of settlers ought to be fairly dealt with. If we do not want close settlement in the outside districts in the meantime, by all means encourage those who go out there to pay rent instead of using the grass without paying for it. In the next place, those who take up grazing farms go into the centre of a squatter's run, pick out the eyes of it, and the rest of it is left alone. It would be far better to deal with them individually and let the squatter go round them. Then after that you get what the hon. member for Toowoomba would call agricultural homesteaders. I know something about them. The squatters I know nothing about, and I do not want to know anything about them. I have never been amongst them, and I do not want to go amongst them. But there is a clause in the present Act which says that a man can select 160 acres at 2s. 6d. an acre. It was forced through this House in 1884. I shall chance being called to order for referring to the matter, but the House was told that if it would not agree to the Bill it would not get the £10,000,000 loan. Then a condition was attached that if homestead selectors did not pay up in the five years allowed they could have two years more, but that they must pay 3s. 6d. an acre—or 6d. an acre per annum additional. As soon as the Bill gets into committee, I shall do my best to do away with this robbery which has been going on ever since 1884. If you give a man the option of taking up land at 2s. 6d. an acre, and then give him two years more to pay in, you have no right to charge him 6d. an acre for each of those two years. I say that is robbery. Then with regard to our coastal lands. There is no doubt they are very valuable, but they are very costly to clear. You, Mr. Speaker, know that of the district which you represent, and it is the same in my district. I am going to ask hon. members when we come to deal with these coastal lands, to assist me in getting a reasonable and fair price put upon them. I promise those who are dealing with the squatters and with the grazing farmers my assistance if I think what they have to say is right. The hon. member for Bulloo wants to know what about clashing? Well, I refer him to the case which has recently been decided in the Supreme Court, in which the board was upset. Another case is coming on on the 27th, and I am perfectly satisfied it will be upset again.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member has no right to comment upon a case coming before the law courts.

Mr. BATTERSBY: Blakely's case has been upset, and I am perfectly satisfied that every one of the Colinton cases will be upset. I hope before this Bill gets out of committee something will be done to permanently decide who can put in applications and who cannot. I am not prepared to vote for allowing persons of the age of fifteen to take up land, believing that the age of eighteen is quite early enough. We do not give the franchise to any person until he is twenty-one years of age, and if we allow him to take up land at eighteen we do a fair thing. I am prepared to vote for every man and every married woman being allowed to take up land. I am also prepared to tell the Land Board that they are not going to play their tricks with the Colinton or any other land. The best thing the board can do is to reinstate all those who have been deprived of their land, and save the expense of going to law. If you go to the Lands Office the Secretary for Lands tells you that these are technical points and that you must consult a lawyer. He is a lawyer and wants to help his brother lawyers, but why should the community be robbed? Is not one case enough? They put a lawyer on the Land Board so that he could help his brother lawyers.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member is not now dealing with the question before the House. I must ask him to confine his remarks to the Bill.

Mr. BATTERSBY: I hope I shall get the assistance of hon. members in carrying some amendments which I shall suggest, and I shall be prepared to assist those who bring forward amendments which will improve the Bill.

Mr. KEOGH: I think it would have been much better if this debate had closed earlier in the evening. We have had some excellent speeches from the hon. members for Toowoomba, Dalby, and Bulloo. Their criticism was adequate, fluent, and expressive, and the debate might well have been terminated where they left off. The hon. member for Normanby has referred to the amount of close settlement in his district, and has stated that in some parts of the country it requires fifteen acres to feed a sheep. I have had some little experience of sheep-farming, and I must say that I do not know of any land on the Barcoo or down the Flinders that would take fifteen acres to feed a sheep. The hon. member's close settlement would never do in this colony, and I hope we shall never see what he advocates. I should like to see some provision inserted in this Bill to enable lengthsmen and those employed on our railway lines to take up land to the extent of 160 or 320 acres, or even the maximum amount of 640 acres. In those cases the conditions should be relaxed; if the men fenced the land and put up their houses they should not be compelled to live on the selections. Those men are very useful colonists, and we should encourage them to make some provision whereby employment could be found on these selections for their children. I certainly am not in favour of the auction system, but I think the tender system could be so altered that there would be a maximum and minimum of, say, 3d. and 1½d. per acre. Supposing there are several tenderers at the same amount I would let the decision go by ballot. That would be far more satisfactory than the system proposed. With regard to the maximum area, I consider 20,000 acres is too much anywhere near settled districts. I think 10,000 acres is sufficient. It has been shown by some hon. members that there are parts of the colony, particularly in the Western country, where

20,000 acres would not be enough, but there are plenty of places within the settled areas where land can be taken up in smaller blocks with advantage. If we give our lands away in this manner it will be taken up in such large quantities that by-and-by we shall have to return to the same old game of repurchasing those lands at a high figure. I am opposed to the repurchase of land in any case when the State has any amount of available land unalienated, which I should like to see thrown open for settlement. With regard to the age at which land can be selected, I should like to see it reduced from eighteen to sixteen years, and I would give girls the same privilege as boys of that age. I do not see why we should draw the line at boys; and it would be a great inducement to the young men to settle on the land instead of bothering members and other persons of influence to get them into the Police Force or other positions in the Civil Service. Canada was mentioned by the senior member for Toowoomba as a country holding out special inducements to intending immigrants. Both there and in the United States the moment a man lands he gets 160 acres free, and is tied over the first year of his settlement, if he happens not to have sufficient means of his own. I should be glad to see something of that kind introduced here; we should not then have long to complain of our sparse population. The people who were induced to come out by Dr. O'Quinn and others, under the land-order system, were some of the best men and women who ever came to the colony. Many of them settled on the soil, and the failures were a very small minority. I should like to see a similar inducement again held out. But before we do that it is desirable to make a special effort to induce the young men and women already in the colony to remain on the land. When the Bill gets into committee there are many things which I and many other members will give the Minister a helping hand to carry through; and, with a few amendments which have been indicated, it may be made into a good workable measure.

Mr. GRIMES: I beg to move the adjournment of the debate.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I was in hopes that the debate would be concluded to-night, and, as I understand no division is to be called for, I see no reason why it should not be. Even if a division is to be called for, we might arrange to take it to-morrow in a full House.

Mr. McDONALD: There are half-a-dozen members who want to speak on the Bill.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I understand there are only two on the other side and two on this, and I imagine, after the long discussion we have had, there cannot be much more to be said on the question. I am quite willing to waive my right of reply. I ask that the motion for adjournment be withdrawn.

Mr. GLASSEY: I think it is a very reasonable hour to adjourn. There will be nothing gained by closing the debate to-night. The hon. gentleman ought to be thoroughly satisfied with the tone of the discussion, and I hope he will not press his objection to the adjournment.

Mr. HAMILTON: It appears to me ridiculous to adjourn at this hour. We are only doing six hours' work four days a week, and if we are to adjourn at 10 o'clock every evening we will get to the end of this session about this time next year.

Mr. BATTERSBY: This House has been sitting now since the 16th June, and we have not done three hours' work. I am prepared to go to the second reading of this Bill if it takes until to-morrow morning.

Mr. LEAHY: I hope the Minister will see his way to grant the adjournment. I do not care personally, but no one can say that the Bill has met with hostile opposition. The hon. member who has moved the adjournment of the debate is a typical farmer, and a representative of farmers, and we are all anxious to hear his views on the question, and if the adjournment is lost he will have lost his opportunity to speak at all on the adjournment. When four or five members desire to speak and the leader of the other side supports the adjournment it is a reasonable thing to grant it. We have some experience that work done after a certain hour is always done badly, and I would like to hear what the Minister himself has to say in explanation of some things that are in the Bill. We ought to hear that before we get into committee, when discussion will be confined to a particular clause. There has never been a Bill of so sweeping a character, and of the magnitude of this Bill, which has gone through any Assembly in the time, or with so little hostile criticism as this Bill has been subjected to, and it is only a reasonable thing to adjourn the debate.

Mr. BELL: It seems to me that the hon. gentleman's reason for the adjournment of the debate should really tell the other way. I should say that this has been one of the most dead and alive debates on a land measure that anyone who has had any experience of the Queensland Parliament can recall to his recollection. Earlier in the evening I asked the intention of the Government in regard to the adjournment of the debate, and the hon. gentleman in charge of the Bill told me that they expected it to end to-night, and I said that from inquiries others as well as myself had made I thought it would close at an early hour. And it will be remembered that the last time the Bill was before the House it was a toss of a coin that the debate would come to an end then. I should like to hear the hon. member for Oxley, but I regret that he did not get up earlier in the evening. I wish to say that this rose-leaf method of legislation is not going to be very long-lived, and considering that we are paid £300 a year for attending to the business of the country we are carrying on our duties in a very luxurious fashion. As to no good work being done after 10 o'clock, surely we remember that in the House of Commons they used to begin to do work after 10 o'clock. We must make up our minds to sit later, and considering what we are paid I think it is not an unreasonable obligation to impose upon us.

The ACTING PREMIER: There is another remedy besides sitting late, and that is curtailing one's observations. We know that, as a matter of fact, with Bills of this kind we have second-reading speeches on almost every clause in committee. I know from long experience that whatever is said here to-night will be repeated half-a-dozen times in committee. We have been four days at this stage, which is intended to deal only with the vital principles of the Bill. Of course there is no question of forcing a Land Bill through the House. Any Government that attempted that would find a reaction set in in committee. I would ask those hon. members who desire to finish the debate to-night to continue until a quarter to 11 o'clock, and if by that time there are still many hon. members who wish to speak there will be nothing for it but to adjourn the debate.

Mr. GRIMES: With the permission of the House, I will withdraw my motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. GRIMES: I have forfeited my right to speak by moving the adjournment of the debate, but with the permission of the House I should like to make a few observations.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. GRIMES: Although this debate has been a rather long one I do not think it has been time wasted; as the question does not appear to be made a party one, debate now may save time later on. In comparing this Bill with that introduced last session I was struck with the very little difference there appears to be between the two, because I had expected that more of the suggestions made by the Royal Commission would have been accepted by the Secretary for Lands. Although the hon. member for Dalby, who was a member of the commission, laboured hard to show that some of their suggestions have been incorporated in the Bill, I think it will be found that beyond the suggestion relating to the Land Court, very few of them have been adopted. In fact the Secretary for Lands gave as his reason why more had not been accepted that really the Royal Commission had thrown very little light upon the subject.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I wish you would quote me correctly.

Mr. GRIMES: I should be very sorry to misquote the hon. member, but I find from *Hansard* that he said—

Although I am bound to say that, so far as the information at the disposal of the department is concerned, the commission did not throw very much light upon the subject.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Those words do not bear out your statement at all.

Mr. GRIMES: I think they do. At all events it is a fact that very few of the suggestions made by the commission are incorporated in the Bill, and no doubt that has been a serious disappointment to those gentlemen who had seats upon that commission, and it has been disappointing to others, myself amongst the number. However, the disappointment in this respect has been in some measure made up by the appreciation of the Act of 1884 shown by the witnesses who were examined. That Act has often been abused by hon. members, but I have always looked upon it as the best Land Act we have passed since the foundation of the colony, in the interests of the *bonâ fide* selector and agriculturist. I am pleased to observe that the Secretary for Lands has abandoned his idea of providing for the pre-emption of freeholds in connection with grazing farms, which would have led to abuse in the same way as the pre-emptive right of the pastoral lessees of the Crown did. Had that right been allowed, no doubt the best portions of the leaseholds would have been selected, and the rest would have been rendered less valuable.

The SPEAKER: Order! A discussion upon that subject is entirely foreign to the Bill.

Mr. GRIMES: I do not desire to trespass, but the Secretary for Lands compared this Bill with the Bill introduced last year. We have also had placed in our hands a document showing the differences between the two, and this subject is referred to in it. I am very pleased that the idea has been abandoned. The great difference between this Bill and that of 1896 appears to be in regard to the constitution of the Land Court. We are now to have a court composed of three individuals, and for some purposes in the administration of the Act, one member may sit as a court with an appeal to the other two sitting with a District Court judge. It appears to me that this is very little removed from the first hearing before the one member of the court, and I do not think it will work very satisfactorily. We have only two other members of the court sitting in the Appeal Court with the District Court judge, and we know very well that in affairs of this kind there is always a leaning towards the decision that has been given by one who is a colleague, and most likely the two other members of the court will overrule the

District Court judge, and in most cases the result will be that the decision of the Land Court will be upheld. I would rather see an appeal court formed of one member of the Land Court and two District Court judges. I agree with the clause providing that the priority of applications for land is to be decided by tender. We have seen the abuses of the ballot system and the objections to the auction system; and I think the tender system is an improvement on any system that has been hitherto adopted, because people will quietly sit down and calculate what they are prepared to offer for the land. The hon. member for Barcoo said that land would be tendered for at a high rate and afterwards forfeited, and eventually acquired at a low rate by the person who had forfeited it. But if the hon. member had read the Bill he would have found that the 120th clause prevents the individual who had forfeited it from becoming the possessor for at least five years; so that there is no danger. I am in favour of shortening the leases of grazing areas. The hon. member for Normanby has referred to what he calls close settlement—granting 60,000 acres as a lease for thirty years, or even a longer term. I anticipate that before twenty years have expired we shall see that those lands now under leasehold will be required for much closer settlement than the hon. member ever expects to see. We look forward to the time when those large grazing areas of 20,000 acres will be cut up into dairy farms with four or five times the number of settlers; and with the view of holding those lands for still closer occupation, I think it would be advisable to reduce the tenure of the leases to twenty years, and in some places near railway lines to even a shorter term. I think there is a great improvement in the way intending selectors may put in their applications. One reason why intending selectors have given up the idea of selecting is because of the defects and the delay occasioned in dealing with their applications. In this case the applicant need not be on the spot at the time, but can leave his application at the office or send it by post. I agree with some of the remarks made by hon. members with reference to the delay in the acceptance of applications. It seems to me monstrous that after a person's application has been accepted he should not be able to get his land for six or eight months. That is why intending settlers from the other colonies, after going to the expense of coming here and staying here in hotels and boarding-houses, have become disgusted and gone back again. I have met with intending selectors of this character in the southern colonies; and I think it is highly important that there should be as little delay as possible in determining applications and also in granting occupation licenses. I think we shall have to be careful in dealing with the scrub leases. I approve of the scrub leases; still, I think we must exercise caution. We must remember that after the land has been cleared and burned off the roots of the trees shoot up again, and in a few years the scrub will be as bad as ever. I do not approve of keeping those leases always leases; I think an opportunity should be given to the selector to make them freehold after a certain time. That will be the only way to induce the leaseholders to permanently clear the land and keep it free from the shoots that will be sure to spring up in a few years. I may mention that in some of the mallee scrubs leased in the southern colonies this is found to be the case after a length of time: When the land has been pretty well worked for wheat it is forfeited, and in a short time the land is full of scrub and vermin again. If a person had a chance of making that land freehold there would be something to bind him to the land, and

he would take care not to let the scrub grow again. Of course when they have only a short lease, as was unfortunately the case in the mallee scrub, where the lease was for ten years, there is no inducement to keep down the undergrowth. I am sure that under these scrub leases a deal of land will be taken up and sown with artificial grasses. I mentioned on a previous occasion that the land about Kiama, in the Illawarra district, was scrub land which was dealt with in the manner proposed in this Bill. I am sure some of our scrub lands when taken up under these provisions will become valuable pasture lands and some of the best dairying lands we have in the colony.

Mr. KERR: We have not the rainfall.

Mr. GRIMES: I admit that the rainfall is not quite so much in some districts as it is at Kiama, where they have thirty-eight inches in the year; but there are other districts where it is quite equal to that at Kiama.

Mr. KERR: Yes, but they do not get it very regularly.

Mr. GRIMES: I am aware that it is not evenly distributed throughout the year, but in many of the scrubs between Roma and Brisbane there is quite sufficient rainfall to keep the grass good. One or two members have urged that the price charged for the lands of the colony is far too high, and that it ought to be reduced. The hon. member for Lockyer referred to that, and he advocated the system now in vogue in the other colonies of granting money on loan from the savings bank to help selectors who had paid a high price for their land over their difficulties. I would point out that the reduction in the value of land in the first instance, and the allowing of such enormous areas to be taken up by single individuals, has been the cause to a very great extent of the high price of land in Victoria. Those lands were taken up originally at a very small figure for speculative purposes, and they are now being resold to farmers at a very high price, in some cases as high as £30 and £40 per acre, and if we adopted the advice of the hon. member—who spoke more in the interest of the grazier than as a farmer's representative—we should have the same thing occurring in Queensland to a greater extent than it has done in the past. The necessity for buying back land on the Darling Downs is the result of that land being obtained at a cheap rate in the early days, probably by means of the cheap land-orders that were then being sold by immigrants. I suppose the lands for which the Government have paid from £1 10s. to £2 per acre did not cost the original selectors more than 4s. or 5s. an acre—that is, taking the land-orders at the rate paid for them in those days. Some members have stated that the pastoral rents are too high in some cases. I think that in other cases they are very much too low, and I quite agree that there is a necessity for a classification of all lands. We have been referred to the red marks on the map hanging in this Chamber as showing the area of forfeited land that is unoccupied. It is very possible that the rent of the lands comprised within those lines has been too high, especially considering that there is a danger of a rabbit incursion in the districts where they are situated. Very likely the fact that they are in rabbit-infested country, or in country threatened by the rabbit invasion, has been the cause of the forfeiture of the land. The shortness of the tenure may also have something to do with its being at present unoccupied. I have no objection to the rents of such lands being reduced, but I hold that for the greater part of the land held by pastoral tenants we are not getting as much for the grass rents as we ought to do. One

pastoral tenant examined by the Land Commission gave the number of stock that he could rear on 640 acres of land, and stated that he was raising one bullock on twenty-eight acres. I should take that to be a pretty fair average for fairly good pastoral country, and as that man was paying for the resumed portion of his run under occupation license £1 3s. 4d. per square mile, the Crown was only getting 5s. for the grass that reared a bullock to five years of age. That certainly is not so much as the Crown ought to get, and according to his evidence he had been in the habit of getting £3 12s. 6d. a head for his bullocks. Of course the amount of risk and the expense he has to incur in running his station has to be considered, but still there is a very wide margin; yet that man complained that his rent was too high, and said that if it was reduced to 10s. per square mile that would be a fair thing. If it was reduced to 10s. per square mile, then the cost of raising a bullock would not be more than 2s. 6d. I cannot see that there is any claim for a reduction in a case of that sort, but where a Crown tenant is under such disabilities as he may be in the far Western portions of the colony, which are liable to the incursion of rabbits, it would be better to reduce the rent than to have the land thrown up. It has been mentioned by some hon. members that this land is already occupied, although no rent is being paid for it. Well, if men are running their stock on land to which they have no right, are they not liable for trespass?

Mr. KERR: There are no fences to keep them out.

Mr. GRIMES: I take it that as these lands were occupied at one time there must be some boundary fences.

Mr. LEAHY: There are no boundary fences.

Mr. GRIMES: However, I quite agree that all lands should be so classified that as far as possible we may get the true value of the property, whether it is leasehold or freehold. There might be a great deal more information given to intending selectors than is provided by our Lands Office. I am not aware whether the Royal Commission got any evidence on that point in New South Wales, but we might very well take a leaf out of the book of that colony with reference to this matter. At the various post offices and railway stations in New South Wales I noticed that when land was thrown open for occupation or sale the fullest description was given. They gave the nature of the soil and the nature of the subsoil. They also gave the rainfall and the temperature of the district. They have records of the temperature of all the districts in the colony, so that they are able to give this information at once. This would be very useful information to intending selectors, and, if the land was intended to be used for agricultural purposes, they might go one step further, seeing we have two agricultural chemists here, and give an analysis of the soil. I have just mentioned the two or three points to which I wished particularly to refer, and of course we shall have an opportunity of bringing out these points more fully in committee. I am in favour of the second reading of the Bill, and by judicious amendments it may be made a good workable and useful Act.

Mr. KIDSTON: I beg to move the adjournment of the debate.

Question put and passed.

On the motion of the SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS, the resumption of the debate was made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

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