

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates  
[Hansard]

**Legislative Council**

**WEDNESDAY, 2 OCTOBER 1901**

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## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

WEDNESDAY, 2 OCTOBER, 1901.

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

## PAPERS.

The following papers, laid on the table, were ordered to be printed :—

- (1) Report on the Government Printing Office for 1900.
- (2) Report of the Comptroller-General of Prisons for 1900.
- (3) Annual Report of the Department of Public Works for the year 1900-1901.

## SPECIAL SALES OF LAND BILL.

## SECOND READING—RESUMPTION OF DEBATE.

HON. A. C. GREGORY: The question we have to consider is whether there is any probability of this Bill becoming really of any use. The object no doubt is a reasonable one if it could be carried into effect. It is to provide funds from which the Treasury bills now being issued to carry out the services of the present year can be repaid by special sales of land. But when we come to look over the Bill, we find a variety of clauses in it which seem to block the possibility of the requisite revenue being derived from that source. The price placed on the land is too high for land subject to the disabilities and inconveniences of distance from railways and navigable rivers, of which, unfortunately, we have very few. That would not touch it, but the railway question would; and I really think that although the revenue derived from it may go a little way towards the object in view, it will be useless to depend upon the operation of this Bill for any substantial result with regard to the extinction of the debt we are now incurring under the Treasury Bills Act. It is all very well to say that we have immense areas of land which it might be desirable to alienate, but the land which would come under the operation of this Bill is land that certainly is not worth 10s. an acre. Half-a-crown an acre would be as much as anyone could afford to pay for it in order to use it for pastoral purposes. And we must read this Bill in connection with the Bill we recently passed, according to which agricultural land is to include land suitable for dairying purposes. All land, therefore, suitable for dairying purposes would not come under the operations of this Bill because it falls within the category of agricultural land from which butter and cheese could be produced. It is useless to hope to be able to sell land for purely pastoral purposes—that is for grazing stock—upon any elaborate system, such as enclosing it and making it more capable of carrying stock. Then it has been said that if land is sold we should get rid of all the weeds because the people who bought it would take good care to keep their paddocks free of weeds if they had it in fee-simple. No doubt they would try to do so; but the real cause of the spread of weeds and noxious plants is not that to which it has been attributed, but the fact that we have eaten out all the good grasses, leaving nothing but the inferior grasses, and plenty of room for the weeds. What the country wants is rest. In the case of the Noogoora burr, if cattle are kept off the land for two or three years it dies away. It is a fact that has not yet been properly recognised, or has, at all events, been carefully kept in the background, that nine-tenths of the diseases in stock could be got rid of

if it were not that the good herbage has been destroyed, and only the inferior left for the stock. They may be fat, but they are unhealthy. That is a point which ought to be well considered, because it would do much towards enabling us to render our country much more useful than it is. By excessive stocking in good years we have destroyed the whole of the good grasses, and when bad years come there is nothing but ruin and desolation. I do not know that many have taken the trouble to look into this, but if they did they would see matter for most serious consideration, and how necessary it is to take immediate steps to mitigate the evil as far as possible. We complain of droughts and the loss of stock resulting therefrom. But there were droughts before any part of the country was stocked. There was a terrible drought in New South Wales when the whole country was laid waste almost to the top of the Blue Mountains, and all the inland country was a desert. Yet in the face of facts such as that we have stocked up our country to the fullest extent in good years, and we complain of the conditions we now find. I can assure hon. gentlemen that the weeds would cease if the country were not over-stocked. We all remember what a nuisance the thistle was on the Darling Downs. What has become of the thistle now? Owners enclosed their good lands and it very soon died out. The Bathurst burr has also been reduced enormously in consequence of more careful management in which it is likely to grow. It does not grow out in the Western country, because the climate is too dry for it under any condition, but in the better country and in the better climate of the Darling Downs it becomes rampant if you disturb the soil and destroy the other grasses. The other grasses have the power of turning it out when the land is properly used. Perhaps it is unnecessary to go into the merits of this Bill. I do not see any particular harm in it, but I must say I think the Government have not made efficient provision to meet the new debt that has been incurred. We have a really gloomy prospect before us of continuing as an independent State. We shall very soon be in the position of having to ask to be absorbed in the Commonwealth, and that can only be done on such conditions as they may think fit to impose upon us.

\* HON. B. D. MOREHEAD: There appears to me to be an underlying principle of absolute injustice in this Bill. That is to say, the State in years gone by, by means of the Railway Reserves Act, took the pastoral tenant by the throat, and compelled him to buy his land at £1 10s. an acre. They were forced to do it in cases where the right of pre-emption had been exercised, and where, if the unfortunate pastoral tenant did not connect those isolated blocks of 2,560 acres, he was left with the rest of his run struck from under his feet, with only those paddocks remaining to him. To obtain that land the pastoral tenant, as I said, was compelled to pay £1 10s. an acre for it. It is now proposed to sell equally as good land, close by, for 10s. an acre, which seems to be agreed upon as the value of the pastoral lands of the colony. That will be the upset price at which those lands will be submitted at auction. That is absolutely reducing the value of the properties of those people who bought at £1 10s. an acre by no less than £1 per acre. There is no getting away from that fact. I ask, is it honest, is it fair dealing, to reduce the capital value of a man's land, which he was compelled by the State to purchase, by two-thirds? If it is not an act of repudiation it is certainly an act of injustice to those men who, by the Railway Reserves Act, were forced to buy their land. For what they paid £1 10s. another man can now obtain for 10s. If a thing of that kind was done in

private life, would it be considered honest? And yet that most discreditable position the Government have taken up. I go further, and say that a higher rate could be obtained for land than 10s. an acre.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: That is the minimum.

HON. B. D. MOREHEAD: I am perfectly aware that that is the minimum. The hon. gentleman knows as well as I do that the minimum stated in this Bill is the price at which the land will be submitted. Does the hon. gentleman think that a block of 5,120 acres will be put up at a higher price?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: It might fetch more at auction.

HON. B. D. MOREHEAD: I remember that years ago, when these auction sales first took place, there was not a single bid for the land beyond that of the unfortunate lessee who was compelled, to his ruin in many cases, to purchase the land. I say this with a particular knowledge of the position. The lessees, some of them very large companies, were compelled to their ruin to buy the land—they had to do it or worse might befall them. And if this Bill passes it is probable that many others will be ruined. I contend that this measure is a breach of faith with those men who were forced to buy land at £1 10s. an acre, inasmuch as it practically says that the value of pastoral land in this colony is 10s. an acre. Those are the facts which cannot be got over—at least, so far as I can see, they cannot be got over. It is a cruel act of injustice to those men that we should say to-day, after the colony has progressed in the extraordinary way it has done, that pastoral land similar to that for which £1 10s. an acre was extorted from those unfortunate men is worth only 10s. an acre. As far as I can see, this is a matter that will not bear argument. The 8th clause of the Bill shows exactly what will happen in submitting the land for sale at this reduced price. We know perfectly well that these sales will be bogus ones. I do not think there is any member of this Council who has studied this question but knows that they will be bogus sales, and that these blocks of 5,120 acres will fall to the men who have money enough to buy them. Clause 8 says—

All land offered for sale by auction under the provisions of this Act which is not bid for or withdrawn from sale shall for six months be and remain open to purchase by the first applicant at the upset price.

What will happen? The same as has happened in all the other colonies where this auction system has prevailed. We know that if the land is put up in small lots that may lead to the creation of land sharks such as were created in one of the southern colonies. The land sharks in the colony I speak of were five in number. A friend of mine on whose station land was going to be put up for sale by auction told me that he would have to pay to those five men 6d. an acre in excess of upset price. I said, "How do they work it?" He said, "It is worked in this way. These men come to me, and one of them says, 'Will you let me have a section?' I reply, 'Yes, that is all right.' The other four men then come into the swim, and get a section each." The sections are of an area of 640 acres or 320 acres—I forget which, but I think it is 640 acres. At the end of the sale, these blocks having been knocked down to these five individuals, they transfer the land to the station owner at 6d. an acre above the upset price, and they reap the benefit. I had nothing to do at the time, and I asked my friend why I should not go in and share the profit. He said, "There is nothing to prevent you, and there is another sale coming on now." But I replied that out of consideration for him I would not do

it. I can give the Minister in charge of this Bill the name of the gentleman mentioned, and a reference to where he can get all particulars. I am not now telling a story which I heard from somebody else, but am giving information which was furnished to me by a gentleman who was very materially affected in the matter. The facts which I have narrated form one strong objection that I have to the auction system. On the face of it the system seems absolutely fair, but it does not work out honestly and fairly, and it does not serve the purpose which I believe it is honestly intended to serve. I think it is only right that I should bring this matter before the Council, because those facts have come to my knowledge, and they will suggest to hon. gentlemen the desirability of considering whether anything can be done to prevent gross frauds and injustices being committed under this Bill. I do not know how it can be done, but when we get into committee we can thrash the matter out more easily than we can at the present stage. In any case, I felt bound to point out to the Council, and more especially to the Government, the imminent danger in the direction I have indicated.

HON. E. J. STEVENS: I do not think the hon. gentlemen who have spoken this afternoon have made out a good case against the Bill. Neither of them has suggested any better means of raising the money required to liquidate the Treasury bills which have been authorised. It appears to me that the question is whether we should raise money in this way, or by additional taxation, and I think that if the colony were polled to-morrow it would most decidedly pronounce against additional taxation. The Hon. Mr. Gregory, as far as I could gather from his remarks, seemed to wish to prove that the land is not sufficiently good to bring 10s. an acre.

HON. A. C. GREGORY: Yes; that is what I said.

HON. E. J. STEVENS: Even if that were so, that is no reason why we should not attempt to sell the land at 10s. an acre. There can be no harm in passing the necessary legislation to enable the Government to sell the land, even if persons cannot be found to buy it at the specified upset price, but in my opinion, and I have had some experience of the colony, purchasers will be found for the land. There are men who will invest in land at 10s. an acre, feeling sure that in the course of time it will improve very much in value and that they will make money in that way. There are men who prefer to invest their money in land rather than in any other security. With regard to the statement that the cause of the spread of noxious weeds is that the land has been eaten out, that is open to argument. Some years ago this point arose on the late Sir Joshua Peter Bell's station. It was argued between him and some friends, and to prove the correctness of his opinion that the natural grasses would come back if the land was allowed a rest, he had a small piece of ground between the house and the station which had been bare for years fenced off, with the result that at the end of two years the original grasses were growing again. I think that all the country requires is rest, and I believe that those engaged in pastoral pursuits will bear me out in that opinion. With regard to land purchased by runholders in the past at £1 10s. an acre, it should have been pointed out that all those lands were alongside a railway line. Under this Bill no land will be offered for sale within 20 miles of a railway, which makes a very great difference. The Hon. Mr. Morehead said the land was bought at the upset price, and that there was no bidders except those on whose runs the land was situated. Well, if that was the case, there was no necessity for them to bid at all.

Hon. B. D. MOREHEAD: You know different to that.

Hon. E. J. STEVENS: I know that if anyone else bid at the upset price, they could offer 6d. or 1s. an acre more, and secure the land.

[4 p.m.] There was no one to bid for the land except those on whose runs the land was situated, and they considered that the land was worth the money, or they would not have purchased. I think the opinion of the colony will be more in favour of this Bill than of imposing direct taxation.

\* Hon. A. J. CARTER: I think the Hon. Mr. Gregory has furnished the very best argument we could have for selling our lands, and selling them as rapidly as possible, consistent, of course, with their not being ruinously sacrificed. The hon. gentleman has stated that by rest the lands will be brought back to their original state, and that the natural grasses will return. The Hon. Mr. Stevens has also expressed the same opinion. We know that, as a matter of fact, land which is held under lease is not looked after as carefully as land which is held as freehold. As the Minister in charge of the Bill has aptly pointed out, if the land is alienated, that only means a change of tenure, and not a loss of the land as an asset of the State, as a land tax will bring in any revenue that is required, such tax being levied in accordance with the value of the land. At the same time I think there is a more urgent necessity for the sale of land at the present time, and for the sale of as much land as the Government can sell, on account of the exigencies of the Treasury. One cannot but look with a good deal of dismay at the very weak state of the Treasury at the present time. If we refer to the report of the Auditor-General, we shall find that we have in cash at call about £1,307,995, and that there is a further sum of £1,058,833 at fixed deposit. But the interest which this State is bound to pay comes to £1,430,929 a year. Then in the Loan Estimates for the current year we have another £1,197,000. Those two items alone will more than absorb the whole of the money that we have at call and on fixed deposit. We have certainly some suspended accounts amounting to about £1,879,000, but these will only mature gradually, and will not be available in case of any emergency. We must not forget that we have also what is practically money payable at call to the extent of £3,939,787, belonging to the Government Savings Bank, and a matter of £660,000 for Treasury notes, as well as £200,000 odd of general trust account. So far as we are concerned, all these items are practically payable at call, and unless the Treasury take some means to stiffen their balances they will find themselves in an awkward position should they be called on to make heavy disbursements, because at the very moment when we want money most we shall not be able to get it. I am very glad to see that we are floating a new loan of £1,300,000 odd, as that will go some way towards stiffening the Treasury. But I should strongly urge that the sale of land be pushed on with as much vigour as possible, particularly with a view to induce close settlement, because it is really population that brings the revenue and forms the basis of the strength of any country. We have only to look at the returns of taxation in this State, and we shall find that every man, woman, and child pays an average of about £9 10s. 3d. a year to the revenue, so that the more people we can get the better will be our financial position. I do not at all like the idea, if it were possible to avoid it, of using any of the proceeds from these proposed sales of land for the purpose of assisting the revenue. I think it should be used as far as possible in opening up the country; but it is false

policy for us, now that we have a deficiency, to refuse to part with any of our capital for the purpose of liquidating that deficiency. We must get rid of the deficiency, we must pay off the overdraft, and to go on holding the land of the colony and calling it a free asset when really we owe a considerable amount of money which ought to be paid, and paid by the sale of land, is unreasonable. If the proposed upset price is too high it can easily be altered, and reduced to its legitimate value. So far as the utilising of part of the proceeds of the sale of land for revenue purposes is concerned, I certainly have less compunction in doing so in this case, because last year the receipts from our railways were £630,301 short of paying interest on the cost of construction, and as the extension of railways has really made the land valuable, and in many instances given it the only value it now has, I think it is a fair thing to utilise the proceeds of the sale of land to recoup to the consolidated revenue the loss of interest on the railway outlay. The President referred with some satisfaction to the fact that we have retained in our hands the whole of the Treasury bills, with the exception of £1,000 which has been floated. I cannot say that that appeals to me in the same way as it does to the right hon. gentleman. It appears to me that there is rather a weakness in that fact, and that it would have been very much better if as a security and reserve we had floated those loans, even if we had re-invested them in some other legitimate security which would have been a real reserve. It is no additional security to hold our own Treasury bills if we cannot pay our original debt. Therefore, as the object is to strengthen the Treasury and keep us out of harm's way in the event of trouble arising, I am certainly of opinion that it would have been better to have placed those bills on the market. We have been in trouble before. The very fact that we have this sum of £1,800,000 in the suspended banks indicates the danger that we have passed through, and we may be called upon to pass through similar troubles again—we cannot tell—when we may not be in a position to raise money at once to pay our interest, and to preserve our credit that interest must be paid promptly in cash. I am therefore strongly in favour of passing this measure. The Hon. Mr. Stevens referred to the question of further taxation. I presume that means land taxation. But if the land is not sold how can you tax it? So long as the State is so large a landowner the imposition of a land tax would practically amount to nothing. But if we satisfactorily sell our land we then have it in our power to raise an equivalent revenue by imposing a land tax. Of course we know that that must ultimately come, but it can only come after we have got rid of the land. Just now I incidentally happened to take up a book in the library. I opened it under the heading "America," and the first thing that caught my eye was that in the United States there were 626,000,000 acres of farms, with an average cultivation of 42 per cent. In one State it went as high as 92 per cent., and in another as low as 15 per cent. That shows the advantage of parting with the land. The land is looked after with very much greater care, is increased generally in value, and becomes a more profitable asset to the State. Then take the case of our greatest competitor in pastoral produce, the Argentine Republic. They have there an area of 1,400,000 square miles, and every inch of it is alienated. I cannot call to memory any prosperous country where the land is not alienated. I heard a rather peculiar instance in reference to New Zealand, the other day, touching some of the land still remaining in the hands of the natives. This was a particularly good piece of land, and a Maori

residing on it was asked why he did not cultivate it, and he replied, "What is the good? If I cultivated it with potatoes the rest of the tribe would simply sit down and eat it up." There you have practically the position of the State with reference to those grasses. So long as land is leased it is not to the same extent the lessee's interest to look after and maintain the grasses, whereas, if the land was freehold he would cultivate and improve it. When a man can throw up his lease and allow it to revert to the State he is not as careful over it as he would be if it were freehold. I therefore think that for every conceivable reason it is most desirable that we should part with the land, for close settlement, if possible, at as low a price as possible, and as rapidly as possible, and so place ourselves in a really good financial position.

\* HON. G. W. GRAY: When the Hon. Mr. Morehead spoke of the land that was bought at £1 10s. an acre, he forgot to tell the Chamber that wool in those days was bringing 2s. and 2s. 6d. per lb.

HON. B. D. MOREHEAD: No, it was not.

HON. G. W. GRAY: My remembrance is that that was the case.

HON. B. D. MOREHEAD: I assert that it is not in accordance with the fact.

HON. G. W. GRAY: It was at that period that the "squatting kings" of Queensland, as they were called, paid those high prices for the land.

HON. B. D. MOREHEAD: They were forced into doing it.

HON. G. W. GRAY: If the land was sold at auction they were not forced into buying it. They bought at their own free will and by competition, and I have no doubt the majority of the purchasers reaped the benefit and retired.

HON. B. D. MOREHEAD: Will you name one who bought under the Railway Reserves Act?

HON. G. W. GRAY: I could name several on the Darling Downs, but I have no wish to do so. There were others who held on to the land and sold it at a reduced price, and for some of it, just now, as much as £3 and £4 an acre is being obtained. There is no denying the fact that the Government are being asked to purchase some of those lands at as high a figure as £4 and £4 10s. an acre, which were originally purchased at £1 and £1 10s. an acre. The Government of that day were perfectly justified in putting on those prices, and we are justified in putting on our price to suit the present circumstances. The reduced price of wool and the keen competition that exists in pastoral pursuits have produced a very different state of affairs from that which existed when the Railway Reserves Act was passed. To-day 10s. is to the pastoralist a fair price, for at all events some of the land, to fix as a minimum. The more land that is sold, and the closer the settlement created, the more prosperous will the colony become. Why should we continue to keep some 400,000,000 acres of land unsold. The Hon. Mr. Carter referred to the Argentine Republic, where 100,000,000 sheep are depastured, and where every acre is freehold property. But we need not go as far as the Argentine Republic. In Victoria all the land has been alienated, and it is one of the most prosperous colonies in the Australian group. Land which was sold there by the Government at £1 or £1 10s. per acre is now selling at £33 per acre. Here we want money. We have land for sale. Why should we not sell it? There is everything to justify us in parting with some of this land at the present time. With regard to weeds, I scarcely agree with my hon. colleague that it is such a serious business as he represented. There is no doubt that prickly pear is in

many isolated places throughout the colony. That is a very serious thing, and it is the intention of the Government to bring in a measure dealing with it. But it is not quite so serious, I am sure, as my hon. colleague represented it.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: It is more so, and if you had travelled over the country as I have done you would say so.

HON. G. W. GRAY: It is in isolated districts.

THE SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: I saw a stretch of 400 miles covered with it the other day.

HON. G. W. GRAY: With reference to the remark of the Hon. Mr. Gregory that the natural grasses are eaten out, that certainly is not the fact. To-day the trouble is that now we have had the rains the grasses are very abundant, and that we have not got the stock to eat them. You hear that complaint all over the late drought-stricken districts. The Minister for Lands has brought this measure in, and he is very sanguine that the object of it will be accomplished, that it will realise the money required. I forgot to mention that recently some visitors from the south who passed over the Darling Downs were surprised at the low price asked for the land. I feel sanguine that the view taken by the Minister for Lands is the correct one, and that we shall really have no difficulty in realising to the extent required for the purpose.

\* HON. A. NORTON: As far as visitors from the south are concerned, I would not give a snap of the finger for their opinion of the value of our lands. They know nothing about our lands. They pass over the Darling Downs and see the splendid condition it is in. If they went into the south-west corner of the colony at the present time, where there has been rain, they would see, according to letters I have received, herbage a foot high, blue, pink, yellow, violet, and all sorts of colours, where any time during the last six years they would have seen nothing but a bare desert, in which sometimes the creeks ran bank high with rain that had fallen in other districts, running away, without doing any good, into other country quite as barren. The opinion of a casual visitor from the south on such country, seeing it at the present time, must be absolutely valueless. We remember the report of the southern visitors who came to look at the Darling Downs which led to such a rush of settlers to that part of the colony. At first those settlers were very much disappointed. They had rather a trying time, and their first crops to a large extent were lost. Since then there has been a fair rainfall, they have been able to hold on, and they are now in a very good position. But that does not apply to those lands which the Hon. Mr. Morehead spoke about. I sympathise very largely with what the hon. gentleman said about those pastoralists on the Western line being forced—they were forced—to pay £1 10s. an acre for their land. They dared not leave their country when they knew it might be taken from them at any time. The value of their land has now been reduced by two-thirds, and they, who bought at £1 10s. an acre will have to compete with men who buy at 10s. an acre. That is their position, and they deserve our sympathy. But the same thing has occurred over and over again. I have had some experience in the matter. When the Act of 1884 was passed, I had charge of some large properties which cost us, with improvements, 1s. 1d. an acre a year. When that Act was passed, land of equal, if not better, quality, just on the opposite side of the road, was obtained for 1½d. an acre a year. How could we compete with them? It was a similar injustice to that of which the Hon. Mr. Morehead complains. With respect to this price of 10s. an acre, I advocated the sale of land at that price in 1884 when the Bill

was before the other House, and I believe that if we had introduced a Bill then permitting the sale more largely at 10s. an acre, and could have induced persons to buy it at that price, the colony would have been in an infinitely better position than it is to-day. The Minister said it had become necessary to adopt some measure of this kind, because there had been such an immense falling off in the land revenue. To what can we attribute that? The falling off was foretold in 1884. We were not content to let selectors take up land under the 1876 Act and pay 1s. an acre a year until they had paid it off. Then they were taking up land more largely each year than in the preceding year, and the money received went into the consolidated revenue. This system came to an end. It was said by those in favour of the 1884 Act that it would bring in an infinitely larger revenue. I remember one gentleman who held a distinguished position in another place say that he had gone carefully into the matter and that in the second year after the Act was passed we were to receive £1,100,000 of revenue from it. What did we get? Did we get £1,100? I think it was about £1,000 we got the second year. But the friend of many of us, the late Mr. Macrossan, took an opposite view, after a thorough examination of the returns for the ten previous years, and showed why there would be a falling off of revenue from that source. In my opinion, if we had adhered to the old system we should have worked off the land gradually and without any unpleasant shock to the feeling of the community. It would have been gradually becoming freehold, and, instead of the revenue dropping as it did, it would have continued to the present time, and added so largely to the consolidated revenue that we should never have been placed in any difficulty at all, or if that did happen it would only have been of a temporary nature by drought. I was surprised that the Minister in introducing this Bill brought up the question of noxious weeds and noxious animals. What has the Bill to do with them? All the hon. gentleman's argument went to show—I do not know whether he is to be accepted as an authority on the subject—that if some poor fellow spent a few thousands of pounds in buying land under this Bill the Government were not going to assist him by keeping down noxious weeds outside his land, and that by and by he would find that he would have to keep his own land clear at an immense cost. Indeed, as far as I could gather from the argument of the hon. gentleman, the policy of let alone which has been pursued in the past would be followed, and prickly pear and Noogoora burr would be allowed to spread as they liked, and this poor wretch would have to keep his own land clear of the pests at great expense.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: That was not my argument.

HON. A. NORTON: Well, the hon. gentleman argued that these lands should be sold at 10s. an acre—

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: I was arguing in favour of freeholds.

HON. A. NORTON: The hon. gentleman said that prickly pear and Noogoora burr had spread over a large portion of the country, and we know that persons buying land there would have to incur enormous expense in order to keep it clear of the pest. I remember that a few of the first plants of Noogoora which appeared in Brisbane were to be seen under the balcony of this House. The next year there was a little plot of the burr at the ice works. I got a gentleman to go to the mayor, thinking that he would have some influence with the mayor in getting those half-dozen plants removed, but they were on private property, and

they were left there. The next year after that there were plots of the burr all over Brisbane. And in this way these noxious weeds have been allowed to spread. The Government—I am not speaking of the present Government, but of all Governments—have taken no decided action to prevent them spreading. Some six years ago I went to Gayndah, and crossing Baramba Creek, which had then recently had a fresh passing down, I saw millions of plants of the Noogoora burr coming up. There had previously been some plants at the head of the creek, and they had been allowed to spread, with the result that eventually all the flooded country along the creek was swarming with these wretched plants, about 2 inches high. The Hon. Mr. Gray spoke of these noxious weeds being in isolated places only. Let the hon. gentleman go along the Western Railway line, and along the Central Railway, and he will find that in the brigalow scrubs for miles and miles he will not lose sight of the prickly pear, except it is dark. It has spread greatly during the last few years, and will continue to spread, unless some steps are taken to check its growth. The Hon. Mr. Gregory was right to a certain extent when he said that if the grass was eaten out noxious weeds came in its place; but it does not follow that because that is so to some extent these noxious weeds have arisen by reason of the grass having been eaten down. Noxious weeds will grow almost anywhere—they will grow in a scrub or on a rock. If there is good grass, and prickly pear gets into it, it will smother the grass, but the ill properties of the Noogoora burr are shown in another way, for it destroys the wool on the sheep. I did not intend to speak on this subject at all, but it struck me as rather remarkable that the question of noxious weeds should be introduced into the discussion on this Bill, and I thought I should say something on the matter. So far as the principle of the Bill is concerned, I am not at all opposed to it. The one point on which I had intended to ask the Minister a question is contained in the 8th clause. The minimum price at which land is to be sold under this Bill is fixed at 10s. an acre. Land may be put up for sale at a higher price than 10s. an acre, say at 15s. an acre. Under clause 8 if that land is not bid for, or withdrawn from sale for six months, it is to be open to purchase by the first applicant at the upset price. If the land is not taken up during that time I think that is pretty good evidence that it is not worth the price fixed, or that there are not enough people with capital in the country to buy it. Might it not be wise then to give the Government power to reduce the price to 10s. an acre in such a case, or to some figure between the minimum price of 10s. an acre and the price fixed as the upset price? It seems to me that that would be a proper amendment to make in the Bill. A very large area of pastoral land has been sold at auction at 10s. an acre. At one time I believe there was a good deal of blackmailing in connection with these sales, but I do not think there is now; there is too much land sold now to permit of blackmailing to any extent. Only last week I saw an account of the sale of some very large areas in a pastoral district at 10s. an acre, and no competition was offered in any one case, the land being knocked down to the owner of the run at 10s. an acre. We have, therefore, adopted the system of selling land at 10s. an acre; and that being so, can we blame the Government at a time of stress, when they must raise money by some such means or impose fresh taxation, for adopting this method of getting revenue? Certainly the people of the colony cannot afford to pay additional taxation, and under the circumstances I think the Bill is one which should be allowed to pass. Even if the period of its operation were extended for another

five years I should not be disposed to object to the measure, because I do not believe that under any circumstances, however favourable, sufficient money will be raised under the Bill to meet our revenue requirements during the next two years and to leave the Treasury free for the next four or five years afterwards. I therefore think that an amendment extending the operation of the Bill for a period of five years would be an amendment in the right direction.

HON. W. F. TAYLOR: I question very much the wisdom of the policy of selling our lands as quickly as possible, as advocated by some hon. gentlemen. We have many instances where land has increased in value, and we know that as population increases land must increase in value, and that population will increase. We know that land which was sold on the Darling Downs years ago for £1 an acre is worth from £10 to £15 an acre at the present day, and that owners of those lands have done nothing to increase their value. They have simply held on to it, and population has gone there, and the present holders of the land are reaping the benefit of the unearned increment. Why should the State sell land at 10s. an acre which in a few years may be worth from £10 to £15 an acre? Why should the land not be let on long leases, so that the State may benefit by its increase in value? We know that in the old country where the land has got into private hands it has been let on long leases, and the owners have reaped the benefit when those leases have fallen in, though they had done nothing towards improving the value of the land, and simply owned it through an accident of birth. They have come into large fortunes, and those fortunes have been made for them by the persons who occupied the land. Why should not the State reap that benefit in this colony? The Land Act of 1884 was founded on the principle of leasing, and I think it is a perfectly correct principle. But, unfortunately, we are in the position of having a deficit, and probably an increasing deficit, and direct taxation is out of the question, because the people are unable to bear additional taxation. So that it is Hobson's choice, and we have to sell our land to pay our way. Some hon. gentlemen say that we can tax the land, but that we cannot fairly tax it so long as a large portion of the public estate is unalienated. They further argue that the remedy for this is to rush our land into the market and sell it, and then, as the land becomes more valuable, we should be able to tax it. But I would point out that freehold land is pretty well taxed now by local authorities. Those persons who have freehold land which is bringing nothing in know to their sorrow and their cost that this tax is pretty heavy sometimes. Are we to have further taxation of freeholds? I think the proper course for us to pursue is to retain our lands as long as possible, and to lease it on long terms, and I hold that that would answer all the purposes of selling land in fee-simple. This course has been adopted in other countries by private individuals, and has resulted in their acquiring large fortunes. However, we must raise money somehow, and I suppose we must pass this Bill. I am glad to see that it will only remain in force for a number of years, and I hope that by that time a sufficient amount of money will be raised to liquidate the present deficit, and that we shall then be able to adopt the other principle which I have advocated.

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

The committal of the Bill was made an Order of the Day for Tuesday next.

## ABORIGINALS PROTECTION AND RESTRICTION OF THE SALE OF OPIUM BILL.

COMMITTEE.

Clause 1 put and passed.

On clause 2—"Amendment of 61 Vic. No. 17, section 4"—

HON. B. B. MORETON asked if the report of Mr. Meston, the Southern Protector, was published? He asked the question, because the Bill dealt with aboriginals throughout the colony, and they had not yet seen the report of the Southern Protector.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION said he did not think Mr. Meston's report had been placed on the table of the House yet.

HON. B. B. MORETON: It was time that it was in the hands of hon. gentlemen, because the circumstances of the blacks in the Southern portion of the colony were quite different from those of the blacks in the Northern districts.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 3 and 4 put and passed.

On clause 5—"Amendment of 61 Vic. No. 17, s. 13"—

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION said that that and the following clauses raised questions of considerable importance; and, as a desire had been expressed that Dr. Roth, the Northern Protector of Aboriginals, should be called to the bar of the House to be examined on the various matters connected with the Bill, he would move that Dr. Roth be called to the bar of the House and be examined.

HON. A. C. GREGORY said that hon. members on his side were quite in accord with the motion. Dr. Roth would be able to give the Committee as much information as they required on the subject.

HON. W. F. TAYLOR suggested that Mr. Meston, the Southern Protector of Aboriginals, should also be examined at the bar, especially as there had been no report from Mr. Meston as to the blacks in the South.

HON. A. NORTON said that if they had yesterday acceded to the request to refer the Bill to a select committee they could have got all the information required without calling witnesses to the bar of the House. They would have had an opportunity of examining not only Dr. Roth, but as many other witnesses as it was thought desirable to examine. However, if it was deemed desirable to examine Dr. Roth at the bar of the House, he should offer no objection.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION said he thought it was rather too late to call for Mr. Meston. It would mean the postponement of the consideration of the Bill until Mr. Meston could be present. The Bill

was framed in such a manner as to [5 p.m.] meet the requirements of the whole of the State. The condition of the blacks in the South-west was no doubt different from that of those in the North-east, but in the South-western districts they were dying out rapidly. Of course, if the Committee desired they could postpone the consideration of the Bill in order to get Mr. Meston's evidence.

HON. A. H. BARLOW said that what the Hon. Messrs. Norton, Moreton, Webber, Morehead, and Gregory did not know about the blacks was not worth knowing. It did not seem to him that they wanted Mr. Meston's evidence.

HON. A. NORTON: They wanted to ascertain not only what was known to hon. members. He did not know how far Mr. Meston was acquainted with the habits of the blacks, although he had heard a good deal about him, and had heard him speak of them himself. He should like to know the nature of the recommendations, if any, that Mr. Meston had made. If it was

too late to call Mr. Meston, the Bill had been too hurriedly brought in, and it was a slur upon Mr. Meston to allow the Bill to be brought in without his report. If Mr. Meston was worth employing, his report should be worth having.

HON. G. W. GRAY said that as Dr. Roth was in attendance he might be examined now, and then if it was deemed necessary they could take Mr. Meston's evidence on Tuesday.

Question put and passed.

Dr. Roth was introduced, and invited to take a seat at the table.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION suggested that the Committee should proceed with the Bill clause by clause, and said that if any hon. member desired to ask the witness any question in connection with it they would be able to do so.

HON. B. D. MOREHEAD said that was not the ordinary course of procedure in cases of that sort. How could they carry on the debate when there was a stranger in the House?

HON. A. NORTON said it was the practice at select committees that if a discussion took place between the members, the witness was asked to retire. They would be two or three weeks getting through the Bill if the course of procedure suggested by the Secretary for Public Instruction was adopted.

HON. A. H. BARLOW : As a matter of order he submitted that as Dr. Roth was there by permission of the Committee, and was seated within the bar of the House by permission of the Committee, it would be time enough for him to retire when a division took place. When the Mayor of Brisbane was examined, the Committee proceeded with their deliberations, and examined him on different points as they arose.

HON. A. C. GREGORY : As a precedent for the guidance of the Committee he might mention that on one occasion he was called to the bar of the House to give evidence on a Bill. The Committee stopped at one clause, and, though that particular clause was supposed to be the matter under discussion, he was examined on the whole Bill from beginning to end without any reference to the clause before the Committee. He thought that was the correct procedure, and that it would certainly be more convenient than proceeding with the Bill clause by clause, and examining Dr. Roth on each clause as it was discussed, as they had to examine him on the whole scope of the Bill, and not on any particular clause.

HON. P. MACPHERSON could corroborate the Hon. Mr. Gregory's statement as to the practice adopted by the Council. On one occasion a good many years ago he was examined at the bar of the House—he was not even allowed inside the bar or a chair—on a certain private Bill, and was examined as to the whole scope of the Bill. He explained the operation of the various clauses of the measure, and when he had done so he was permitted to retire.

The CHAIRMAN : The witness has by resolution of the Committee been invited to give evidence on the general scope and principles of the Bill, and to afford any information that the Committee might desire to obtain from him. When that information had been obtained it would be the duty of the Committee or himself to request the witness to withdraw, because a witness could not remain there during the deliberations of the Committee or during divisions.

HON. A. H. BARLOW : Not during divisions, but he was inside there by the vote of the Committee—he was technically at the bar, but was inside by special permission.

The CHAIRMAN : Dr. Roth is here now to give any information that hon. gentlemen may desire to obtain from him.

HON. A. NORTON : So far as his recollection went, he had no knowledge of any such pro-

ceeding having been adopted as that now contemplated. The practice was to give notice of the intention to summon a witness to the bar of the House, and not for the witness to be introduced in the middle of a discussion on a particular clause before the Committee. But in the present instance the Council had gone into Committee and passed four clauses of the Bill, and when they got to the 5th clause the Minister proposed that Dr. Roth should be examined. The question before the Committee was that the 5th clause do stand part of the Bill. He therefore asked whether they were to examine the witnesses on each clause as it was put to the Committee, or on the whole Bill. He agreed with the Hon. Mr. Gregory that the practice was to examine a witness on the whole Bill, and was of opinion that the present procedure was out of order.

HON. W. F. TAYLOR thought it would be a great mistake to go through the several clauses of the Bill and ask Dr. Roth's opinion on each clause as it was put before the Committee.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION : The matter had come upon them rather hurriedly, and hon. gentlemen who desired to examine the witness had not had an opportunity of framing their questions. He thought the most desirable thing to do under the circumstances would be to move the Chairman out of the chair, and then between now and Tuesday next hon. gentlemen would have an opportunity of going through the Bill and framing any questions they might desire to put to Dr. Roth. He moved that the Chairman leave the chair, report progress, and ask leave to sit again.

The CHAIRMAN : I would ask Dr. Roth to kindly withdraw before the question is put. Dr. Roth withdrew accordingly.

HON. P. MACPHERSON : Possibly the Minister would telegraph to Mr. Meston in the meantime, as a good many hon. gentlemen would like to hear Mr. Meston on the black question. He had had the pleasure of reading Dr. Roth's report, which was a most interesting one, but he was aware that Mr. Meston was full of aboriginal lore, and was certain that that gentleman would be able to enlighten the Committee very materially.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION said he had no doubt that if hon. gentlemen desired to have the evidence of Mr. Meston, that gentleman could be present on Tuesday next.

Question put and past.

The Council resumed; the CHAIRMAN reported progress, and the Committee obtained leave to sit again on Tuesday next.

The Council adjourned at twenty-one minutes past 5 o'clock.